

# VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #26

2007



In the last issue of the Email Newsletter we announced that **Robert C. Marzen Jr.** was elected to the VWOA Board of Directors, so let us get to know a little about Bob Marzen, as he is your representative.

Bob has been an active part of Amateur Radio as K3PWR, since 1960.

He served in the United States Coast Guard, 1965-1969

Attended the Coast Guard Radio School at Groton, CT.

Served aboard The QUEEN of the FLEET USCGC Storis, Kodiak, AK, as SNRM-RM2 (Bob reminds us that the USCGC Storis was DE-comm on February 8, 2007).

Served at the Coast Guard Radio Station, NMY, E. Moriches, LI in 1968

Served aboard the USCGC Spencer, in both the North Atlantic & Vietnam, as RM2 and then RM1 during 1968-69

A graduate of Penn State University and Spring Garden College, with a BS degree in Electronics and post Grad. Courses in Business

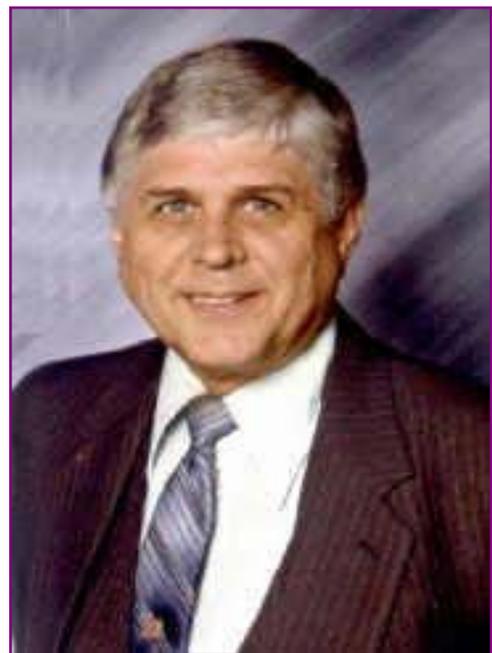
Administration at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

Bob did a four year stint at Jerrold Electronics Corp., as an Applications Engineer.

He went to work at Marzen Hardware, Inc. (est. 1896), Jim Thorpe, PA in 1977 and is the President.

He is known throughout VWOA as the Email distributor of Coast Guard and Military related News to the **Undisclosed-Recipient**, (WHOEVER that might be) and a very welcomed communicator in VWOA.

We wish him well in his service to the Members of VWOA.



**Robert C. Marzen Jr. K3PWR**



## Life at Sea by Herbert Holzberg PhD

CONTINUING ON WITH THE STORY FROM VWOA  
NEWSLETTER EMAIL ISSUE #25

One of my joyous experiences was seeing the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. You talk about being hot; those areas are like living in a Sauna! You must remember that air conditioning had not yet arrived on a Liberty Ship in 1945. We did have a fan pushing hot air around. However, it became about 115 degrees (130 degrees in the engine room), twenty-four hours a day for five days. It certainly proved that the Red Sea and Suez Canal were two of the hottest places in the world. I can remember sitting in the Radio Room in just my under shorts with only a towel soaked in ice water around my neck. The only problem was that the towel became completely dry in ten-minutes. I wore out a path toward the ice machine during my entire shift. Also, we had to give up the comforts of sleeping in our comfortable bunk and retreat to the outside hard deck to survive. The traversing of the Suez Canal, however, was an unforgettable passage and well worth all the discomfort generated by our shipboard conditions. We picked up a French Pilot to help guide our ship through the Suez Canal. The Canal itself offers some hazardous conditions to the uninitiated. At one point I was convinced that the heat of the area had been too much for me to handle. We received a CW message (Morse code),

VWOA Director Herbert Holzberg PhD



Radio Officer Herbert Holzberg

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which didn't make any sense at all to me until I realized that the message was in French.

I knew that my two-year exposure to the French language would come in handy one day! If I had done my homework more carefully at Herman Ridder Jr. High School in the Bronx, I might have even understood the text.

We did reach Bari, Italy eventually, right after the war ended, and the town was still struggling to survive. Food was scarce in many quarters of the city. That problem provided a line of towns' people always looking for anything that could be spared from our ship. Also, I remember that light bulbs were a scarce commodity in Bari. The longshoremen on ship unloading our coal kept taking our 115 volt light bulbs home. They never quite understood why they always popped when they stuck them into their 220 volt electricity.

Our next destination was the larger city of Naples. Later on upon docking in Naples, we were at the pier alongside a large U.S. Aircraft Carrier. About this time, the Army was making plans to return our soldiers to the States with seniority determining who would be the earliest arrivals home. We also received the great news that our cargo back to the states would be identical to the 2000 lb bombs we brought to Calcutta. As the U.S. Army decided that it was too dangerous to load our ship while the Aircraft Carrier was taking on passengers, we managed to spend 6 weeks in Naples. The city itself was not very inviting as cleanliness was not one of its

virtues. However, it was a fun place for us and the pasta was quite good in many restaurants.

On the return to the States, the Naval Gun Officer aboard our ship decided to fire off some of our ammunition with our forty caliber machine guns. We had an eleven man gun crew instead of the twenty-two normally assigned to a Liberty Ship. Unfortunately, we had quite a scare as one of the guns jammed creating a dangerous explosive situation. The Naval Gun Officer, I might add was a ninety-day wonder having owned a department store in New England before enlisting in the Navy. He also was a much disliked fellow aboard ship primarily because of his personality, but that's another story. He did however, have the courage to confront the jammed gun and remedy the dangerous situation that existed. Just another day at sea!

Several weeks later, we returned to the East Coast to unload our bombs at the Navy Depot in Earle, New Jersey. Unfortunately, they did not have space for us and we dropped the hook (anchor), off Cape May while we waited six-weeks for an unloading berth to open up. It really was a six-week vacation but we were anxious to hit dry land so we didn't appreciate the rest as much as we should have under normal circumstances. It took three weeks to unload our cargo with modern equipment when we reached Earle. It had only taken five days in Calcutta with the ships winches to assist, so much for our Unions!

I did make another trip on the David S. Terry, a Liberty ship, when we returned from

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Italy. The war was over and I decided to stay on the ship as Chief Radio Operator. The Captain was a pleasant Norwegian gentleman and it was a pleasure to have him aboard. The vessel sailed out of New York harbor around 12 midnight heading out to various ports in Italy delivering grain so badly needed there. Sometime around 0900, (9AM) the next morning, a stranger walked into the Radio Room. I was on duty standing my watch when he requested to borrow a screwdriver.

He was dressed in Khaki and I assumed that he was one of the engine crew. Somehow, my experience over the years with various crews taught me that they usually neglected to return my borrowed tools. Thus, I told the stranger that he must return my tools lent to him in the shortest possible time. He assured me that he would most certainly comply with my request. I still wondered who he was and was sorry that I had not asked him. When noon arrived and I walked into the Officers Dining Room for lunch, I noticed that this same fellow who had borrowed my screwdriver was sitting at the Captain's table. I quickly asked the third mate who he was and found out that he was the new Captain and that the former Captain of our ship had been replaced just prior to sailing. That certainly was a great way to start off a new voyage. However, to my surprise, the Master never referred to that initial meeting and we became good friends the rest of the trip.

One of those unbelievable happenings also took place during this same excursion. At

the same time we took on a new Captain, we also took on a new Purser. For those of my readers who wonder what a Purser actually does aboard ship it is mostly administrative activities. He is the Pharmacist Mate (medical man) for the crew while at sea. It doesn't really matter where the ship is heading, you can bet that at least twenty five per cent of the crew have been there before and know every gin mill on the waterfront along with other "highly classified information." This usually covers the female population in these same highly regarded establishments. Of course, discussions covering these topical areas do take place during the course of the voyage usually without any repercussions. However, this was not to be the case on this fateful journey. The new Purser seemed very annoyed when he heard the crew discussing their previous successes in Genoa and invariably quoted from the scriptures to discipline these men for their outlandish language. After a few days of hearing these bible quotations, it became apparent to the men that we had aboard a "holly roller," and they did their best not to offend him with their intimate conversations. In other words, the conversations ended quickly whenever this sainted Purser strolled in the area;

After three weeks of this hush-hush, we did arrive in Genoa, Italy for five days to unload our cargo of grain. The Second Officer induced our new Purser to take a shore leave with him and promptly pushed him into one of those waterfront dives to sample some liquid

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refreshment. They spent a few hours there and sometime during his day of relaxation, the second mate introduced him to a young lady who seemed extra friendly. We know she was exceptionally sociable because the second mate had experienced her warmth on as previous visit along with half of the crew. The purser became completely enamored with this newly found female and spent the rest of his five days with her never to return to our ship during our entire stay in port.

When we finished unloading, we prepared to sail and our newly indoctrinated Purser returned just in the nick of time. His female acquaintance was on the dock-waving goodbye as we left the breakwaters and entered the sea. On the return passage to New York, the entire crew including the “Old Man” was waiting for our novice seaman to continue his interpretation of the bible. He never opened his mouth! He did however, express his love for this lady of the night and did swear that as soon as we reached the States, he would grab the first plane back to Genoa and marry the girl! I wouldn’t believe this story except that I was there when it all transpired. Unfortunately, I can’t tell you whether this love starved civilian ever followed though and married the girl. However, as we signed off and left the ship, the old timers aboard had seen similar togetherness in foreign ports and were betting that it never would happen!

After a few weeks ashore, I became itchy to return to sea. That seemed to be a

condition that many seamen experienced after a long time at sea. I did belong to the Radio Officers Union (ROU), in New York City and registered for another ship. They told me that they had a list of Radio Officers before me but would phone when my time came. After three more weeks of waiting by the phone, I decided to visit the ROU office and noticed to my dismay that the ten fellows hanging around the office had first selection of any ship that was available before any phone calls went out to the waiting list at home. The second day I was offered the SS William A. Dobson, another Liberty Ship heading to Italy for a three-month journey. It was exciting as I would be sailing as the lone Radio Officer on board and would assume all of the responsibilities. I soon realized that the Captain of this ship would not become my, or any of the crews favorite master. It seemed that he never passed up a bottle of booze that he didn’t need. On a U.S. Merchant ship, a case of liquor is always placed on board before leaving a U.S. port for “medicinal purposes.” We always have first aid supplies aboard and sometimes a purser who possesses rudimentary knowledge of medicine to aid any of the forty merchant mariners on ship. Somehow, the case of liquor refreshment usually ends up in the Captain’s cabin and miraculously evaporates over the length of the voyage. On this particular passage, he would not give or sell any of this magic potent to the Chief engineer; this already established him as a non-conformist to the officers aboard.

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The vessel was anchored in New York harbor and headed first for Philadelphia to pick up a cargo of grain. The movement of the ship from New York City to Philadelphia does not require a Radio officer to stand his watch as we move on inland waters. Thus, to my surprise, a constant knocking on my door at 0500 (5 AM), ordering me to stand my watch in the Radio Room was most unusual. On ship, however, the Captain (Master) is in the same category as “God” so I did not indicate my annoyance at his request. On the other hand, this extra assignment is in the Union Contract as overtime. This notice to the Captain was quickly submitted and rejected by him almost instantaneously. You can see immediately that he was becoming a favorite of mine. One other point I should mention, he never appeared completely sober during the entire voyage.

A particular concern of mine, when I entered the Radio Room for the first time was the daily log that the Radio Operator keeps while on duty. I noticed that the last 6 Radio Operators had a problem with the transmitting equipment aboard this ship. However, shore side technicians had been aboard the ship while in port and all the equipment had been sanctioned by them as satisfactory. I verified this of course my first day at sea, but still was not completely relaxed about the past history of this equipment. At sea, during peacetime, normal procedure is to check out the transmitting equipment every day to be ready in case of emergencies. Somewhere in the Atlantic about the tenth day out, I noticed that

my transmitter meters had serious fluctuations that were varying all over the meter scale. After studying the problem further, I determined that the newly inserted commutator in the motor-generator set had to be removed and cut down on a lathe to “season” it for a proper fit. I nonchalantly asked the Captain for permission to send a cablegram to the RCA Service Company in Gibraltar, our first stop. He was quite emphatic about the cost of such a transmission and told me that he would phone the company when he went ashore. It shocked me that he was such a “penny pincher”, but the Captain is the “almighty” and his word is law.

We finally did arrive in Gibraltar and he proceeded ashore, although I reminded him of the critical problem looming with the Radio Room equipment, his only concern was securing additional liquor aboard for him. Thus, no phone call was ever placed to secure help for the equipment problem that I was experiencing. I did have few spare brushes to remedy the problem temporarily, but still needed outside assistance for the safety of the ship. Although I called the unsafe situation to his attention several times, he still would not let me send a cablegram to our next port to secure the service needed.

The same Captain was not cooperative with other officers and crew members causing a state of unhappiness to prevail aboard our vessel. When we delivered our grain cargo to Italy and started our journey back to the States, another interesting development took

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place. At 0200 (2 AM), I was awakened by the abandon ship bell signal. After regaining my composure, I ran into the Radio Room, turned on the equipment and prepared to send an SOS. After not hearing any sound for a few minutes, my mind started to envision a scary situation. Perhaps, I was the only one left on the ship. I quietly walked in the direction of the Captains Quarters when I stopped dead in my tracks. Standing there was every man on the ship with the exception of those on duty. As I walked into his cabin, the Captain spoke, "I want the S.O.B. who wrote this foul note to come forward". I soon surmised that someone in the crew had written a nasty note to our master and left it on his desk. The scene was scary, out of a detective novel with complete and uncomfortable silence filling the cabin. After five minutes without a volunteer, the first mate convinced the Captain that whoever wrote that diatribe was certainly not going to volunteer. We finally were dismissed after the "Old Man" insisted that he was going to turn this note over to the Coast Guard when we docked so that they could check for finger prints. I was very curious the next day to see how the Captain entered this abandon ship drill at 0200 in the ship's log. A simple entry the next day in the log placed it at 1400 (2PM) as a fire drill.

We never did get my equipment repaired on this trip and while returning to the States, I paid for that dearly. One night while the ship was 500 miles east of Bermuda, the Captain entered my Radio Room and told me

that we had a very sick Purser aboard. He requested me to radio for medical advice. I wrote down all of the symptoms of our sick Purser. He had 103.2 degree temperature, couldn't swallow and breathing became difficult. I used the shipboard emergency signal XXX XXX XXX sent out in Morse code with my plea for assistance from any medical source available. Very quickly, I received a reply from Radio station VCE in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The doctor at their medical facilities diagnosed the problem as a Quincy Abscess. Also, I received a reply from a ships doctor in our vicinity. I looked up the Ships call letters, GBTT, and found the ship replying was the magnificent "Queen Mary." In both cases, the doctors agreed and prescribed treatment. The unfortunate experience of this emergency was that my main transmitter was no longer operational. Thus, I had to shift to my emergency batteries instead of the Motor Generator and operated on 50 watts of power instead of 200 watts. Every message sent from my ship had to be relayed through a third party as my signal was not strong enough to reach the medical people directly.

The very next day, the Captain made his appearance early in the morning and told me that the Purser's condition was getting worse. He asked me to contact the Coast Guard station in Bermuda and have them take our sick fellow off our ship. This turned out to be the reason I lost most of my hair. I had to contact another ship in the area and have it forward all of my messages to the Coast

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Guard. The Coast Guard came back and asked me to contact all of the merchant ships in my vicinity and jot down their latitude and longitude so that the Coast Guard airplane would know exactly where we were located. I now found myself on five different frequencies talking to that many ships at one time with each message being relayed because of my low power emergency transmitter. The Seaplane finally left Bermuda and I also had contact with him on another channel in the high frequency band. It was Thanksgiving Day at sea but no one thought of bringing me a turkey dinner. I doubt that I would have had the chance to enjoy it anyway. About an hour later, the aircraft was heard overhead and the pilot asked one of our officers to send out a blinker signal to make sure we were the right ship. Although all ship officers are trained to use the blinker light, none of them knew how to use it. I then had to leave the radio room and run up to the top deck and signal the plane to land. Although the plane landed in relatively calm waters, the seaplane still bobbed up and down continuously as a life boat was lowered from our ship and volunteers took to the oars. After ten minutes the boat reached the plane and with some difficulty, the Purser was lifted onto waiting hands in the door that brought him aboard. The engines were gunned and the plane moved away gracefully taking off from the water with the help of the two jets in the aircraft wings.

The seaplane was airborne and out of sight as I hurried down to the radio room to

clean up the mess that had taken place over the last impossible twenty-four hours. No sooner had I reached my destination than the Captain entered my portals. Thinking he might have some praise for my formidable effort, I sat back to enjoy his remarks. His only comment however, was most disappointing. He growled, "Contact the home office in New York and have them take the Purser off the payroll." I never forgave him for his immediate action and hoped I would find some way to get even!

While we were destined for Galveston, Texas, we needed "bunkers" (fuel), and had to stop off at Miami to obtain same. When I requested permission to send a cablegram to the company's home office to advise them of our change in plans, he was negative about sending the cablegram. Yes, he was still negative until we received a blistering cablegram from the New York office chiding him for not advising them of our intentions.

Finally, I had a chance to pay him back for all of the aggravation he had caused me during our cruise. As we were nearing Miami one afternoon, still out of port about twenty-four hours, he came in to send an ETA (estimated time of arrival) to the ships agent in Miami. At that point, the Agent has to secure a berth, engage tugs and arrange for the required bunkers. The Captain was not drunk as he entered my radio room, but he wasn't completely sober either. Anyway, he handed me his ETA stating in his semi-stupor, an arrival of forty eight-hours rather than the

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twenty four-hour schedule we were following. Normally, I would have called that to his attention, but he was such a thorn to me that whole trip that it was sent exactly as written. Hours later, when he was in a more rational thought process, he came back to the radio room and sheepishly told me that he made a little mistake. “No problem,” I said, “I’ll just send another one.” I don’t know if the reader can possibly judge the significance of the Master of the ship being twenty four-hours off on his ETA. It can quickly make for unemployment at the home office. His new message was sent rapidly as I realized that the devil finally got his due! About that time, he lowered his voice and told me that he couldn’t depend upon his bridge officers for navigation and that I was the only one aboard that he could trust! I might add that the Chief Mate, as well as the second and third mates aboard our ship was most competent with their navigation skills. As a Radio Officer, my skills at navigation were non-existent.

As we approached the tip of Florida, on our approach to the Gulf of Mexico, I was relaxing on deck one evening watching the lights in the far distance. The Captain suddenly appeared making one of his rounds on ship and approached me. I could see that he had something to say although the words didn’t come easy. “Sparks,” he said, (all radiomen are called Sparks), I’m a very nervous old man”. You see, I’ve been torpedoed twice.” In his own unpolished way, he was sort of apologizing for his erratic behavior and his

need to imbibe on the hard stuff. He concluded by telling me that he didn’t care about the rest of the crew but wanted me to stay on with him for another trip! I was sort of flabbergasted to hear that request. I couldn’t wait to get on another ship away from this frugal Captain who wouldn’t let me handle my responsibilities properly. However, I decided to play it safe and tell him that I really hadn’t made up my mind yet but would give his request some consideration.

Normally, when a ship arrives in port, about twenty five per cent of the crew leaves the vessel for various reasons. At that time, most merchant ships carried about forty crew members. On this ship, thirty-nine of the crew had already deserted. It was at this time that I walked into his cabin and told the “old man”, that I was leaving, also. He took my resignation very badly but signed my FCC (Federal Communication Commission) license acknowledging my satisfactory service on his ship and away I ran! I must add one other comment to conclude this episode. The shipping company sent down a new Chief Mate to take the place of the one leaving the ship. After getting a run down on the Captain, he decided that he could do without this ship very easily. While I have no proof, I am fairly certain that the Captain had his final voyage with that shipping line and was sent off to seek greener pastures!

**END OF SUBMISSION**

**Life at Sea by Herbert Holzberg PhD**

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## WVOA MEMBER NEWS

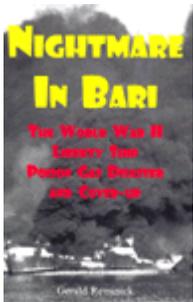
We at WVOA want to thank you for your favorable responses to your WVOA Email Newsletter.

We can only continue this form of Celebrating the Past if all of our WVOA Members make known some of their personal special events that contributed to their career in Wireless.

We want to hear from YOU. Dig into your memories and share them with the rest of your WVOA Members.

## WENDELL'S NEWS CORNER

Wendell Benson recommends:



On December 2, 1943 about fifty ships lay waiting to unload in Bari, Italy. Suddenly the German Luftwaffe thundered out of the sky. In twenty minutes, the raid became the worst bombing of Allied troops since Pearl Harbor. Seventeen Allied ships were destroyed and thousands were killed. A Liberty ship carrying mustard gas exploded, raining death into the

air and waters of Bari. Yet, to this day, few know of the disaster. This is the complete story.

## NIGHTMARE IN BARI

The World War II Liberty Ship Poison Gas Disaster and Cover-up

by Gerald Reminick

- Soft cover, 288 pp.
- ISBN 1-889901-21-0
- Price: \$21.95

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Many of you have visited this site before, but if you haven't, you may enjoy it.

[www.thebattery.org/battery/monuments.html#top](http://www.thebattery.org/battery/monuments.html#top)

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Visit:

<http://www.sailwx.info>

This site has many interesting links. If you know the name of a ship which is currently sailing, it may give you its current position. It also gives the radio callsigns of active shipping. It will give you the weather observation from a ship.

## WENDELL BENSON ...73s