

# VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #71

Francis T. Cassidy Editor

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This VWOA Editor first heard from Herbert R. Perkins in Email Newsletter #29 in 2007 when he commented on the following published item:



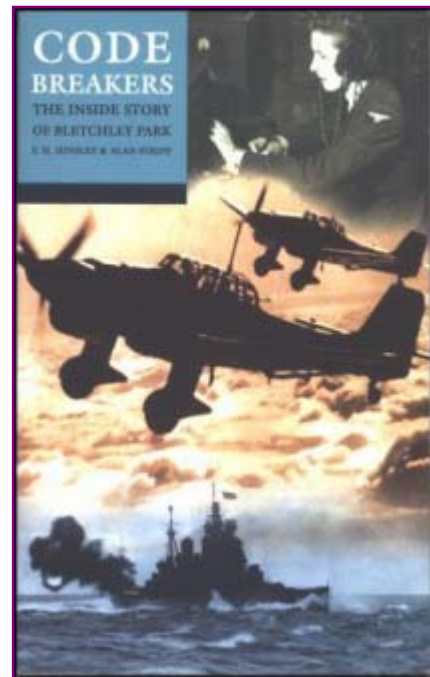
Herbert R. Perkins WA2JRV

Douglas Stivison, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Web Master of the VWOA Web Site and VWOA Historian mentions an interesting Book that can be purchased On Line from Amazon. It deals with a wealth of information on World War Codes and the price of \$12.71 is reasonable these days.

The book provides many details about the code breakers working at Bletchley Park cracking the ENIGMA code.

Much more important, one of the covers of the Book has **VWOA Veteran Member Diana Mackay Eigen**.

For those of you outside the VWOA NY, NJ and PA area, (she was a REGULAR ATTENDEE at all our VWOA functions), she was a radio operator for the Royal Air Force throughout all of WW2. She is NOT credited in the photo or the book,



but we all knew and recognized the photo of her. Look closely at the top right hand corner of the bookcover, you'll see VWOA Veteran Member Diana Mackay Eigen.

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Follow the URL link below; then click on **SEARCH INSIDE** and take the On Line Tour of the Book.

**URL LINK:**

**Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park**  
**F. H. Hinsley, Alan Stripp**

Herbert R. Perkins comments were interesting and he wrote an article which was published in VWOA Newsletter #29 in 2007, pages 4 to 8 on his visit to Bletchley Park. Visit the Email Newsletter on the VWOA Web Site at URL:

<http://www.vwoa.org/OnlinePubs.htm>

Replying to my requests for VWOA articles in Email Newsletter #70 in 2013, Herb sent me the following:

*"While I am unsure you will find the attached article of interest to the members I thought I would at least pass it along for review and consideration. If nothing else it makes for a good read.*

*While we are all sailors, not many of us have sailed small boats and fewer still have made single handed blue water voyages. John Riley W6GPQ, was never a Radioman but we both sold marine radios to international customers. He was an active Ham (W6GPQ) who would only use CW and almost always operated with low power. Although he never tried for any DX awards, judging from the pile of QSL cards I inherited, I suspect he would have qualified.*

*If the story is of interest please feel free to publish it and if it does not fit, then no problem."*

Best regards,  
Herb Perkins WA2JRV  
Dallas

### **Introduction side bar:**

There are many of us who consider making a blue water voyage but somehow, we never seem to get out to real blue water. As we have all been told on many occasions, just get out there and do it. However, starting a voyage, either single handed or with a crew remains a non-trivial undertaking that requires good planning, a skill set that will allow for equipment failures and an emergency preparedness plan in the event of some catastrophic event that will jeopardize our safety. Today we have GPS, solar and wind generators, big batteries and autopilots to make our voyage safer and more comfortable. However, when you go back to 1951, sailing single handed on a small yacht was much different.

Most small boats of that era did not have a radio and if they did, you had to be a trained radio operator as there was no such thing as auto tuning or even a transceiver. The receiver and the transmitter were separate. Each had a separate operational methodology and voice was only used near land. On the ocean, the primary way to send and receive was by Morris Code (CW) and if you were in distress and did not have a radio, the only way to notify anyone was by using a flare gun. Clearly, it was not trivial to attempt a single handed voyage.

My friend of over 20 years, John Riley (W6GPQ), made two long passages in his life. The first was a single handed voyage to Hawaii in 1951, which is the subject of the article that follows, and the second was his retirement transatlantic cruise to the

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Rivera. John was a man of uncommon self confidence and self reliance, a trait he attributed to two events in his life. The first was the upbringing by his parents who encouraged him to think, explore and to experience. The second came from the confidence he found after completing his first voyage from California to Hawaii as a single handed sailor.

John, who was a radar officer in the Navy during WW II, had done some sailing as a young man and would later author several article on celestial navigation. However, he never completed the documentation for either of his blue water voyages. During his life we often discussed both voyages, and while he did make numerous notes about each, he never wrote down the whole story. Upon his death from pancreatic cancer I inherited his notes and his log books.

John was a highly proficient celestial navigator and took an active interest in any technological advancements in the area of navigation right up to his death. While John loved to play with a GPS, he felt that any real sailor must understand celestial navigation as any electronic instrument could fail while at sea.

The story of his voyage to Hawaii starts in Seattle, Washington after he purchased the Little Bit, a Tahiti Ketch. He and two crew members sailed the Little Bit down to San Francisco. His log, like most things about John, contained detailed information about this yacht, his crew, and the events along the way. It was typically interlaced with humor like his comment about breaking in his new yachting cap at the start of his voyage, frequent comments about the meals both underway and in port and repairs made to his stove and running lights.

John purchased the boat in Seattle from the original owner and builder. The wooden design was a popular among amateur boat builders at the time because it could be built in the back yard and was suitable for worldwide voyaging. Numerous articles were written about the Tahiti Ketch and a quick

search of the WEB will show that there are many stories of people sailing them around the world.

In later years John would reflect that the Little Bit was by far his favorite boat of those he eventually owned and sailed. When we would walk the docks, either at his home in Naples, Florida or his home in Cannes, France, he would always make comments about the Little Bit and would search out any vessel that reminded him of her. A discussion would follow about her sailing characteristics, safety and a reflection on how she got him to Hawaii.



**John Riley (W6GPQ)**

The account of his voyage that follows was done using a series of short pieces he had written, his original log book and material he wrote that I found on his computer hard drive after his death. The original log book makes for fascinating reading as it contains so many comments about life on a sail boat in the 1950's. His story is presented, using his notes and his log with some additional comments from me for clarification. Several sections of the story were completed after Little Bit was back in San Francisco as he noted in his log that events happened quickly when he arrived in Hawaii. I never knew what eventually happened to the Little Bit except that he sold her because of his assignment from the USA to Europe. He often said he sold her with "deep regret", when he moved to Europe with RCA.

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## John's story starts in May of 1951:

The day was near at hand when I would shove off on my first ocean voyage in a small yacht. It was to be a completely single handed voyage to Hawaii and it was to be the realization of a fourteen years' dream. It was also the culmination of six months of intense planning as I knew I would have to consider every aspect of my survival and comfort.



John – at the helm as Little Bit came in from Seattle

I had done a great deal of research to determine the ideal boat and as anyone who has crossed an ocean knows, there is no such thing as the same boat that appeals to everyone. For me, the ideal boat for such a single handed venture, at least in my opinion, is a Tahiti Ketch<sup>1</sup> (*original design of John Hanna*). She should have a doghouse from which she can be conned in foul weather and this should be in addition to a conventional tiller. She should have two suits of sails made from at least ten ounce duck. The larger or 470 square foot Tahiti ketch plan should be utilized to take advantage of light airs that would sometimes be encountered. A reliable marine engine, such as the Gray marine fifty horse- power engine should drive a nineteen inch propeller through a three to one reduction gear. Fresh water capacity should be at least seventy two gallons.



At anchor in San Francisco with John in the stern.  
Photograph taken by his father

Of course the preceding description is an exact fit to my wonderful boat The Little Bit. She is a thirty foot double ender, huskily constructed and ideal for the voyage I intended.



I spent a good many winter nights making lists of the items of equipment which should be aboard and as a result Little Bit was fully found for extended cruising.<sup>2</sup> She already had an oil burning stove and I added a two burner kerosene Coleman. Electric cabin lights I supplemented with two gimbaled oil lamps. Running lights were class two Perko oil/electric<sup>3</sup> and the anchor light was a Perko Senior oil only type. Little Bit also had an electric anchor light at the mizzen truck. I brought a barometer aboard which had just been calibrated by the Hydrographic Office, a traditional wrist watch, an Elgin aircraft twenty- one jewel navigation watch, Minerva stop watch, two marine sextants, Excelsior taffrail log, a complete set of international signal

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<sup>1</sup> The original boat was built in the northwest near Seattle.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the equipment John had was available as military surplus from world war two and was very inexpensive.

<sup>3</sup> The photograph is of a reproduction pair of lights



flags and pennants, a Very pistol and parachute flares, Van Karner emergency flare kit, emergency signal mirrors, semaphore flags, a blinker signal light, radar corner reflector, pelorus, astronomical compass, four inch spare or telltale compass, six by thirty binoculars, deep sea fishing tackle, two man rubber lifeboat, twenty fathom lead line, sea anchor, battle lantern, twenty-four hour ship's clock, large library of nautical books and Hydrographic Office publications, including H.O. 214, and a boatswain's locker with ditty bag, rope, spare blocks, marline, and a new air-foam mattress.

### Communications – radios:



Being an amateur radio operator by hobby and a broadcast sales engineer by profession, I was more interested in the electronic equipment than

would otherwise be the case. I carried a Gibson Girl emergency 500 kilocycle transmitter<sup>4</sup> and box kite, a small Dane radio compass, a Hallicrafter S-39 receiver<sup>5</sup> of the communications type with self contained batteries good for 200 hours. My main transmitter was a fifty watt phone or CW (Morris

<sup>4</sup> The Gibson Girl was originally designed as a self powered (built in hand crank generator) emergency lifeboat transmitter that would send out an SOS on 500Khz – this was the international distress frequency in use at that time. It also had the ability, using a built in CW key, to send on other emergency frequencies used by aircraft. No receiver was provided. Thousands of these were produced for the war effort and they were available as war surplus after the war.

<sup>5</sup> In the early 1950's the S 39 was available as a war surplus item as they had been produced in quantity for the Army. John purchased his from a surplus store.

Code) Harvey Wells TBS-50 Band- master powered by a heavy duty war surplus vibrator power supply unit. The vibrator type was chosen because it is simple to repair at sea. (at the time he had a choice of a dynamotor or a vibrator supply – The vibrator type was later used in automobile radios and the dynamotor type was used in military radios until a solid state, transistor supply, was developed) My two six volt storage batteries could be put in series or parallel. Transmitting crystals were carried for coastal harbor telephone stations at San Francisco and Honolulu, high seas service crystals for working with the San Francisco AT&T station. The high frequency distress crystal for operation on



8,280 kilocycles was carried. On this frequency a low powered transmitter may be heard many thousands of miles and the frequency is guarded by the

Coast Guard ocean station vessels among others. I also had some amateur (Ham Radio) band crystals. While my transmitter would tune to all amateur bands from eighty to two and a half meters, the only bands we are normally permitted to use on the high seas are useless in the summer months. Of course anything is permitted in case of emergency.

*NOTE: In 1951 there were no transceivers except for the military and no Marine VHF radios. It was very unusual for a small boat to have a radio on it at all as you had to have training in their operation. The receiver and transmitter equipment John used were connected together by him as there was no such thing as a commercial radio set up for a small boat.*

*In addition there was no device that would tune or change the frequency on a transmitter as we do today with a modern transceiver. Each frequency you wanted to transmit on (ship to shore or ship to*

ship) had to have a crystal that would set the frequency of the transmitter. The transmitter had to be manually tuned as there was no such thing as automatic tuning.

### Medical:

My seagoing medicine chest was contained in two wooden boxes about four by twelve by fifteen inches and was originally based on a doctor's article published in one of the boating magazines. I added several items after consultations with the professor of pharmacology of one of the leading medical schools, one of which was a new wonder drug effective against any of the fever sicknesses. A friend who has retired from medical practice presented me with a basic set of surgical instruments and together we performed a major operation on a length of salami so that I might learn the principles of local anesthesia and sterile operating techniques. The operation was a success but the salami died.

My medical library consisted of the 498 page volume *The Ship's Medicine Chest and First Aid at Sea* published by the United States Public Health Service, War Shipping Administration.<sup>6</sup> The book is written in layman's language and has explicit instructions for the treatment of about every likely and many unlikely illnesses, such as childbirth. Instructions were given which would have enabled me to establish contact with shore stations capable of giving expert medical advice. If all proved of no avail, the last chapter dealt with the correct procedure for burial at sea. Of course here the single hander must show exceptional ingenuity.

### Planning:

While planning the trip I contacted several yachtsmen in Honolulu to let them know of my plans and inquire about the possibility of finding a competent crew to sail *Little Bit* back to San Francisco. Due to the necessity of making a living (my transfer to Europe with RCA), I found I could



not afford to take the time required to sail both ways and so I planned to return by air. The island yachtsmen did not think it would be hard to find a crew.<sup>7</sup>

### Departure:

Late in the afternoon of the day before departure I left the office and gathered up some final supplies, then stopped by the house to change into long handled underwear and yacht denims. It was necessary to clear the Sausalito Yacht Harbor channel at high water or risk going aground so I motored to an area somewhat closer to the Golden Gate and dropped anchor in five fathoms. I would say my final goodby's, top off the tanks and shove off the first thing in the morning, thus taking advantage of the ebbing tidal current which would reach maximum strength at 9:16 a.m.

I felt somewhat strange since this was actually the first time I had ever taken *Little Bit* out alone. My passage to Honolulu was to be my first adventure under sail since I was a boy in college thirteen years before. This may sound foolhardy to some but I did not consider it to be. Now that I have completed the voyage, I am more than ever convinced of it and am ready to defend the point of view. I would be awkward and rusty at first but what of it? I was confident it would all come back to me.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.usmm.net/medicine.html>

<sup>7</sup> A crew was never found and after 10 months of trying John's father and two crew sailed the *Little Bit* back to San Francisco

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While at anchor during the first night I got little sleep. The wind came up fresh to strong and until it abated at dawn I spent much of the time making tracks between my bunk and the companionway standing anchor watch. I was in good holding ground and there was no trouble.

Soon after sunrise a small gathering of relatives formed on the fuel dock and I came alongside as planned. Some of them looked and acted as if they expected this to be the last time they would see me alive. Their attitude began to affect me and I must confess that apprehension was contagious and it made me a little edgy. Tins of cookies were handed down, lines cast off and Little Bit rumbled off to catch the ebbing tide.

It is my misfortune to suffer from seasickness during the first two or three days of a sea trip if the weather is, rough. I took a drarnamine pill and confidently hoped this time would be different. But no, the small craft, warning was flying and as I stood out to sea. Through the Golden Gate I felt the full force of a fresh to strong westerly. I do not know when I have ever been in such steep seas. With the wind strong and in direct opposition to the tide, which was ebbing at maximum strength, Little Bit was almost battered to a standstill by each sea. Even with her fifty horsepower engine turning up maximum cruising revolutions she labored slowly to the crest of each wave and executed a jackknife dive into the trough. The sliding hatch pumped back and forth continuously and the ship's bell sounded without letup.

At one point the engine faltered and stopped. I set the mizzen quickly and scrambled out on the bowsprit to take the gaskets off the jib. One instant I was twelve feet in the air and the next in water up to my knees, so steep was the sea. Once hove-to I started the engine again and under power and sail forged slowly ahead, close hauled on a starboard tack, largely because of the ebbing current I think. Several times I was thrown off my feet and once I landed on top of the doghouse. My sun glasses fell off and were trampled to bits before I could pick

them up. I was sick, dramamine to the contrary notwithstanding. Here was adventure's seamy side.

As I passed the lightship I streamed the log. Forlorn, subdued, seasick, I drooped over the wheel, dreading night's onslaught. At dusk I was well offshore and clear of tidal effects but the sea remained rough. Here I secured the engine for the duration of the cruise and drove wooden spiles in the exhaust ports to prevent any possible entry of salt water. With Little Bit trimmed on a southwest course I re-stowed the knee deep accumulation of gear in the cabin and hit the sack. During the night the wind held strong from west northwest and I frequently pulled myself through the violently pitching cabin to the companionway to look for dangers and check the deck compass. Once when I peered out into the darkness I was shocked to find no trace of the lightship astern, which I had been



using as an indication that I was still holding course. To my horror I appeared to be in a heavy surf which I could hear booming all around me. Not a quarter mile distant I could see a black jagged outline which I took to be a cliff. Before I could leap on deck I realized that the surf was nothing but a spectacularly phosphorescent effect made manifest by the extensive gray-bearding of the sea in a

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freshening wind. The specter rock strewn shore revealed itself to be a low black storm cloud. The anchor light had blown out and the self illuminating crests around me gained emphasis by the increased darkness. The lightship had dropped below the horizon amazingly fast and only after gazing for some time did I make out a faint glow from it. Little Bit was brisk and giddy, almost jumping from crest to crest and making her best speed. There is nothing slow about a Tahiti ketch when she is reaching.

It was morning of the third day out of San Francisco when I regained my sea legs. Like magic I was transformed. The resurgence of normal health sent me scampering in enthusiasm all over the ship to take sights on the sun, trim sail, cook and so forth. I found, however, that virtual starvation during those three lost days, which I vaguely remember as having spent being tumbled around in a concrete mixer, had made me weak. I was unable to hoist the main properly and had to give up. My strength returned rapidly. During this interval of seasickness I was merely a passenger who struggled weakly about to peer at the telltale or deck compass and curse the anchor light which would not stay lit. Little Bit made 300 miles on course with no help from me whatsoever. My taffrail log had disappeared during the second night in the rough seas, its lashings chafed through.

On the night of the third day the foul weather grew fouler. I was content to switch on my electric anchor light (to hell 'with the oil one) and climb into my warm down filled sleeping bag with a hot water bottle. A high bunk board and air-foam mattress added to my comfort. In the flickering yellow light of the gimbaled oil lamps I enjoyed Arthur Fiedler on radio station KNBC as he conducted the Boston Pops Orchestra. The log reads, "Judging from the sounds on deck Little Bit had rather a hard night, considerable luffing, howling wind. Occasional seas would hit like battering rams, a definite solid feel, not like you would expect from water, then they would churn all over the deck, some coming down the hatch." I was feeling great but in a to-hell-with-it mood and stayed in my bunk all night. The shore

was far away and I had nothing much to fear. Later I learned that the southern California coast had been swept by a gale about this time and that trees were uprooted and various other damage reported.

The next day was a glorious one for cruising. I ate heartily and stood only a navigators watch while I was regaining my strength. At noon there was a large dark brown circle around the sun. The old barnacle backs used to say:

*Never a circle to the moon  
Should send your tops'ls down  
But when it is around the sun  
With all the masts it must be done*

I did not do it with any masts and nothing happened. I followed a course which was very close to that recommended for sailing craft on the June Pilot Chart for the North Pacific, making quite a bit of southing on the first leg of the voyage with the hope of entering the trade winds without passing through the North Pacific high pressure cell. As I continued along this track one day followed another in easy succession, Little Bit sailing herself with virtually no assistance from me. As the days wore on the wind steadily hauled around to the north until in thirty-three degrees one minute north latitude it became fitful and variable from approximately due north. My passenger days were over. Little Bit 'Could not hold course unaided with the wind abaft the beam. She had taken good care of me while I was seasick. It was my turn now.

There was no wind whatsoever when I arose on the seventh morning out but the sea was still quite rough. The slatting and banging of all three booms was agonizing even when sheeted in. I wished fervently I had boom crotches or gallows for them. A block in the mainsheet tackle let go and another in the jib sheet. The parts fell on deck so they were readily reassembled, but the main boom went on a dangerous rampage momentarily. For two days I was driven deeper and deeper into the region of calms by ever shortening puffs of wind. Finally the wind stopped altogether. This was the beginning of



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a prolonged and unseasonable calm that was to last five or six days, ending gradually with puffs of ever increasing duration until on the thirteenth day I considered myself in the northeast trade winds.

The first day of the calm I sent my only radio message, contacting a station near San Francisco, 600 nautical miles away. I had discovered my engine was dead, due to a defective head gasket and could not recharge the batteries. I passed the word home that this would be my only radio message of the trip, that I would save my battery for emergency (I also had to use it for the electric anchor light when in the steamer lanes since the oil light was a complete failure).

After several days of calm the seas became completely flat and oily in appearance. My poorest day's run was estimated at three and one-half miles, due mostly to drift. To while away the time I took sight after sight of the sun, moon, Venus and the principal stars. Shooting the sun from a perch atop the steady doghouse was like navigating from the bridge of a battleship. My position was the only thing of which I could be sure. I at least wanted to be sure of that. My time between sights was spent tapping on the barometer hopefully (already abnormally high, it kept rising, never failing). I also

read Bowditch on horse latitude weather and the calms of Cancer. The Hawaiian Coast Pilot concurred with Bowditch but in most respects the weather did not follow the predictions of either authority. Other activities consisted of reading Emerson's Essay on Self Reliance, timing apple cores with a stop watch as they floated from bow to stern and converting this time to tenths of knots, writing copious notes in the log, and the preparation of some of the most exemplary canned dinners of the trip. I thought of having a swim once, but then thought again. There might be a shark lurking under the hull with homicidal inclinations. Why provide a Roman holiday for the sharks? In the rubber boat I paddled off to take a look at Little Bit standing forlornly with all sail set, "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." Thoughts of Coleridge's Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner kept coming to mind along with those of the legendary Sargasso Sea. A fleeting breeze rippled the surface, the long tow rope snapped taut and held. Avast Little Bit! United we stand, divided we fall. I clicked the shutter of my Leica. Back aboard I lay on my bunk. It is a strange feeling to leave one's boat as I had done. I felt I had put my head in a lion's mouth and taken it out. There was no motion and no sound. Silence reigned supreme. Little Bit might have been tied up at her slip in Sausalito.

By way of compensation, sunsets had a spectacular semi. tropical splendor and were always a study in black and gold. During the daytime the horizon was frequently ringed by dense black low lying cumulonimbus clouds piled one on another. The nights were particularly beautiful and the silence lent enchantment to the scene. The moon rose lemon yellow and looked bigger than I had ever seen it. After twilight the brighter stars could be seen reflected on the surface of the sea while Venus shone like a beacon in the sky and made a shimmering pathway across the tranquil water.



Taken from the rubber raft while

On the tenth night I nearly broke radio silence when the Richfield reporter announced that an S.O.S. from an unidentified ship in the Pacific had been heard on 8,280 kilocycles by the Coast Guard in Long Beach, California. I carried a crystal for that frequency and my friends knew it. They would be concerned but I elected to conserve my battery against the chance that I might need it desperately later in the voyage. I listened for the S.O.S. but could hear nothing on 8,280 kilocycles.

On May 27, the fifteenth day out, Little Bit was struck by a rather severe squall. The whistled in the rigging all night but she was steadier in a seaway than usual. Later the wind increased until it was a moderate gale or better and I had great difficulty, in preventing her from broaching in the high following seas which came boiling down on me from random directions.

On May 30 I picked up a North Pacific gale warning from KPH in Bolinas, California, using my radio direction finder. I got the longitude of the center but missed the latitude due to a quick pitch which sent me over backward with the direction finder on top of me. I found, however, that I could hear the static of the gale center quite easily and took a bearing on it with the direction finder. I was able to fix the position of the center on the chart and judged the gale would probably miss me unless it changed its direction of movement. I was very fortunate and the gale did pass to the north of me.

Once I was into the northeast trade winds the weather was wonderful. I had emerged into a new world of warmth and with the improved weather my optimism returned. The seas were indigo and the sky filled with little white cumulus clouds that looked like cotton balls skipping along close to the sea. Generally the wind was either too light, typically force two or a little on the fresh side, force four or five. When I wanted to make southing the wind was just right to make westing. When I wanted to make westing the wind was just right for making southing. So it was that I lingered uneasily in or near the steamer tracks for a number of days.



Once when I was in the cabin working up a navigation problem it got dark before I realized it. When I plotted the sight I had just taken it was right in the middle of the main Los Angeles to Honolulu shipping lane. I suddenly realized that there were no lights burning topside so I went to have a look around and light up. To my surprise and dismay not more than three miles away was a freighter, so I showed my flashlight and quickly went below for the anchor light. The first three times I scrambled on deck with the thing it blew out. I finally dropped it, grabbed up the Van Karner flare kit (in case collision was imminent) and switched on the electric mast headlight. The ship passed ahead of me and I doubt they ever saw me. I spent the entire next day sailing due south and did not venture into the shipping lanes again.

My main problem in the trades was carrying sail at night. I finally learned to shorten down to jib only with which I made good about twenty miles each night, more or less on course. Whenever I tried to carry more sail I found I had to tolerate accidental jibes about once an hour all night or else keep the wind broad on the beam and make too much nothing.

The trade wind is not as steady as some seem to think. It will change direction a point or two quite suddenly, which resulted in a freak accident one day which gave me a good laugh even while it was happening. I had been sitting on deck near the doghouse wheel looking off to starboard. A sudden

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wind shift gybed the main boom my way quite suddenly. I heard it coming and barely had time to turn my head when the mainsheet tackle struck me in the face (not the block but the lines). My head jammed in the tackle with lines on each side of my neck. The boom was all for carrying me by the neck about fifteen feet out over the sea but I caught the lifeline by one hand and both knees and hung on while the rope burned my neck. This did teach me to be eternally vigilant. I was dragging a line astern for just such an emergency but it became blood red with a coating of lichen or plankton and rather slippery to hold.

In the trades I found it pleasant on deck at night. I soon fell into a daily routine, arising about six o'clock and sailing until 10 p.m., sixteen hours. As I came closer to the islands, or sometimes to make up for a bad day's run, I often sailed continuously for eighteen hours. Then minutes seemed quarter hours. At noon I required about five minutes for lunch, which sometimes I took to the wheel to eat. When I left the wheel for more than about seven seconds Little Bit would either gybe or round to and luff like thunder. I generally needed about ten minutes to obtain a meridian altitude sight and determine latitude. At 4 p.m. I shot the sun again for a line of position and next carried the noon latitude forward for a fix which was then entered in the log. Generally it took twenty to twenty five minutes to do this work. I also hove to while eating dinner at about sunset. The filling of the hungry oil fonts (why I did not give up I'll never know) took place while dinner was heating. About 10 p.m. normally the main and mizzen were in gaskets and the anchor light hopefully set. I then turned in to listen to the radio.

My method of navigation was H.O. 214, which is quite simple. Actually a sun line can be worked and checked in less than ten minutes with some practice. I kept the gimbaled chronometer watch and aircraft navigation watch wound and logged their errors daily at the time of the afternoon sight but seldom used them. I tuned in WWVH Honolulu for time signals. When taking a sight I would start my stop

watch, met the next time signal and subtract the stop watch reading. My time was thus always precise. Most log entries were made the first thing in the morning.

While I have tremendous admiration for the ketch rig I must admit that it is not efficient for downwind running. I regret that I did not have time to rig running staysails similar to those used by Marin Marie. When running before the wind the main is blanketed by the mizzen and in any wind at all she carries a weather helm, yaws on course and is prone to gybe. When the mizzen is dropped she balances much better but the main blankets the jib which must be sheeted in to keep it from slatting. Wung out, the jib might be unhandy for the lone man I believe. This is how I sailed a good part of the time but I also found I could do just as well by dropping the main and running under jib and mizzen. I was making seventy to eighty miles a day, on rare occasions nearly a hundred.

The sea birds especially interested me. There was the omnipresent albatross or gooney, the largest of sea birds. With a gun one could live on them and it might be better than fishing tackle for emergency use. As I entered the trade winds I began to see little black stormy petrels (mother Carey's Chickens). Sailors once thought they were the spirits of dead seamen and some that they foretold the approach of a storm, hence the name. White tropic birds were seen from time to time all through the trades. Their tails are elongated and shaped like a marlin spike so they have been dubbed the bosun bird. A few hundred miles from Hawaii I started to encounter large brown and white petrels. Just offshore (seventy miles) I found hundreds of terns and one large black buzzard of a frigate bird that sometimes swooped down to make the others disgorge their fish. He also came to grips with surface fish now and then that were too much for him. Small fish frequently could be seen swimming, for hours or days in the shadow of the boat. I could have speared a dinner at any time. A school of a hundred or so large brilliantly colored dolphins swam in the water around Little Bit. As far as I could see on one

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occasion when I hove-to. Of course flying fish flew aboard from time to time, some no longer than an inch.

On the thirtieth (30<sup>th</sup>) day I calculated that I should make land fall the following morning as the island of Hawaii would be about seventy miles on the port bow. Bright and early I was on deck but the clouds at first obscured the entire horizon. There were great numbers of terns darting around the boat. Soon a hole opened in the clouds and I peered expectantly through my binoculars. My heart pounded with excitement. Land ho! This was no doubt the greatest thrill of my life. There on the distant horizon was the dark crisp unmistakable form of a volcanic peak. I took a vertical angle shot on it with the sextant and the distance-off tables gave seventy miles, which was as it should be. I did not sight Maui all day because of poor visibility although a number of times I was fooled by clouds that looked like land. That night I slept only an hour at a time, making frequent trips on deck to peer over the bow. At one in the morning I came up to find a lighthouse flashing dead ahead. Pauwela light according to its characteristics. It sent a chill up my spine and I hove-to for the rest of the night.

On the thirty-third morning I arose determined to finish the voyage without further sleep. In my enthusiasm to get going I failed to make a careful inspection for chafe. Also I set up the throat halliard a little too smartly and it two blocked, having broken the lashing (weakened by chafe) that held the throat of the main to the eye under the gaff jaws. The main was scandalized and would neither come down nor go up. It drew like a spinnaker and was taking me toward an ugly lee shore in a force five wind. I set the sea anchor and spent two hours hove-to, under mizzen only, trying to get the main down but the sea was too rough to go aloft. I finally solved the dilemma by pulling the sail out to the end of the gaff and putting it in stops. I then set the jib and mizzen, retrieved the sea anchor and stood offshore.

In this manner I rounded Diamond Head the following afternoon. If I had remained at sea longer

I would have made repairs when moderate seas afforded the opportunity, but I was anxious to get in. Though I disliked making port with a crippled main I hated even more the thought of postponing my arrival. I expected to find yachts, sampans, picket boats, naval and miscellaneous craft near Honolulu but not a boat of any kind was out. I was dumfounded. Near Diamond Head light I set the flag hoist-"My engines are disabled, I require a boat to tow me to berth." I cruised back and forth at the edge of the reef in front of Waikiki and waited and I knew then why no boats were out. I had never seen such a surf except in newsreels. I learned later that it was the highest in twenty-eight years (since a Japanese earthquake). The waves on the beach were estimated at thirty feet and there was a solid line of breakers where the channel through the reef to Kewalo Yacht Basin should be. The fragrance of pineapple drifted out to me and I could see people walking along the beach from time to time. Dreams of a hot shower and a big feast with friends that night tortured me. At length it began to grow dark and the wind abated until I hardly had steerage way, so I decided to stand out to sea, heave-to, establish radio contact and come back the next morning. At that moment a small Coast Guard boat caught my eye. It was getting dark fast then, but a line was passed and half an hour later Little Bit was tied up at the Coast Guard pier in the main harbor. Kewalo had been out of the question because of the freak surf and the picket boat had not even been sure of being able to get me into the main harbor. My thirty-four day voyage was ended.







I had not slept longer than one hour at a time in four days and there was no opportunity to catch up in Honolulu, such was the hospitality. I had the hot shower but as for the feast, I was unable to eat it when it was spread before me. I had become accustomed to small meals. My stomach had shrunk. Two days later I boarded a United Airlines plane and was home in San Francisco nine hours and ten minutes later.

### **Epilog:**

Little Bit ended up in Hawaii for much longer than I expected. It was over 10 months before I finally gave up on finding a crew to bring her back. In the end my father with a crew of two had a delightful return voyage.

### **Lessons learned:**

The single handed voyage with all of its hardships had done wonders for me. - I arrived in Honolulu in top notch physical condition although a little sleepy. My loss of weight by the scales was only five pounds but my waist measure had decreased a good three inches. The palms of my hands felt as tough as rawhide. Although I sometimes had sung on watch to pass the time and to keep my voice from failing, it sounded strange for a few days. I wish I could say I was bronzed by the sun but I wasn't. I do not tan. At least I kept well covered so that I did not burn. Early in the voyage my hands began to peel at the palm and this continued until I arrived in Honolulu.

At first I attributed it to a dietary deficiency but later came to the conclusion that frequent immersion in salt water was the cause. During the trip I opened the big medicine chest on only two occasions, once to get an iodine swab for a split toe and once when the companionway door blew shut on my finger, both extremely minor accidents.

I was satisfied with the provisioning of the boat and do not think I made any obvious mistakes there. A typical dinner under way was prepared with a minimum of effort and practically no time out from sailing. A half bucket of sea water went on the stove to boil. A can of meat such as enchilada was tossed in as well as a can of spinach, peas or corn. I also put two eggs in the same bucket to boil hard for breakfast and lunch the next day. From time to time I added a can of soup to the dinner menu. These cans were opened one at a time by an opener that took the top completely out of them. Dinner always was eaten off the top step of the companionway ladder (directly out of the can). When I had one foot planted on each side of the ladder I was darned hard to throw. The hot can was held in one padded gloved hand, leaving the other hand free for eating or grabbing, whichever seemed most necessary and desirable at the moment. As each can was emptied it was an easy matter to decide what, to do with it. Next the spoon was swished in the same bucket of hot sea water and the dishes were done. I always finished off with delicious canned brown bread such as is served with Boston baked beans. It will always be the first thing on my stores inventory. Dessert consisted of a small can of fruit such as apricots or pears and a small can of fruit juice, usually tomato or grapefruit. Breakfast started with a one-a-day type vitamin pill and a can of fresh fruit juice. When sail was hoisted, and I settled down for my sixteen to eighteen hour watch I broke out last night's hard boiled egg and ate it with an apple, an orange and some cookies. Again no dishwashing was necessary. Lunch was the same as breakfast with a Spam sandwich or peanut butter sandwich sometimes added. I always looked, forward to a Hershey bar at four o'clock. Not one of my five dozen eggs spoiled or broke. Each egg had been

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dipped for five seconds in boiling water before my departure. If I do not spell out my fresh water consumption the reader will think it a misprint. During the entire thirty-four day trip I consumed only three and one-half gallons of water. I measured it out, a half gallon at a time, and kept account in my log. I had taken a lot of canned fruit juice for daily consumption and to guarantee liquid ration if my water tank sprang a leak. This system worked so well that I sometimes went several days without being thirsty. Fresh fruit and the moisture in canned fruits and vegetables also contributed liquid. The potatoes and lemons my father put aboard in Seattle (which I kept for an experiment) were spoiled after forty-one days aboard. His margarine, however, was in good condition at the end of the voyage after it had been aboard sixty-two days. The Seattle onions lasted only slightly longer than the potatoes. Apples and oranges put aboard in San Francisco were stowed in a crate on deck and were fresh when I finished the last on the day of arrival.

The oil anchor light was an absolute curse. It refused to stay lighted when hoisted in the rigging in even a moderate sea. Lashed to the top of the doghouse it fared a little better but could not be depended upon in a force four or five wind. It always went out in a blow. The running lights were only slightly better. Both were an abomination to service. I dreaded the task of filling fonts with kerosene. The kerosene can, font, funnel and wick require more hands than the single hander can spare and on the violently gyrating deck each had its own way of following the dictates of gravity. Most of the kerosene went on the deck and was soaked up by the seat of my pants. I definitely will have electric lights for everything topside next time, although the gimbaled cabin lamps gave good service. The pressure kerosene stoves also were a great disappointment. The pre-heater jet was so fine that it was forever becoming clogged. This probably is an efficient stove for most yachts but the blue water sailor's stove must be able to survive being drowned in everything from salt water to tomato soup. Butane might have been a better choice. My main and jib were laced to their booms with cotton

rope. The grommets in the sail frequently chafed through the line and made immediate repair necessary. My main and gaff outhauls were cotton rope and both of these also chafed through. The mizzen outhaul was manila and showed no sign of chafe. I lost my taffrail log due to incredibly rapid chafe of cotton rope. Next time there will be no cotton rope on my boat. Three of my commercial blocks failed due to the pin retaining plate coming loose. This could be prevented by fitting a stronger plate and fastening it securely in place with screws. I quickly regretted that my jib and mizzen halliards were smaller in diameter than the main throat and peak halliards, principally because the smaller lines cut into my hands but also because the factor of safety was threatened more by chafe. 'When the sea was rough and the wind died, the slatting of the jib, mizzen and main booms was agonizing to behold and hear. These should all be fitted with crotches or gallows.

### **What happened to John?**

John went on to work in Europe for RCA, and while in Paris he married a White Russian Princess named Assia. There was, at the time, a large demand for RCA televisions and radio transmitters in post war Europe, so John was quite successful. However, like all good things, the market started to wane and eventually he returned to the USA where he went to work for RF Communications (now part of Harris, Corp). This is where John and I met. We were both hams and both loved boats and were both in international sales. He, the oldest international salesman and I, the youngest. We both traveled the world selling radio equipment and often commented that we were very fortunate to have a job that someone paid us to do the stuff we simply loved doing.

John, purchased his last boat, Dolphin, in Florida, sailed it to Rochester, New York and lived on it year round. Rochester, is not the most pleasant place in the winter but John lived on his boat regardless. When he finally retired from Harris, he sailed, at age 67, with a 68 year old crew man, to

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France on the Dolphin. John lived in France so he could once again see Assia. His time in France continued for several years and finally he sold that boat to a South African who took it back to South Africa. His comment was that it was simply too difficult to put up with the French regulations and problems in the harbor that he just had to leave. John returned to the USA and lived with me in Florida for some time before purchasing a house of his own.

When RCA transferred John back to the USA John and Assia divorced but never lost touch with each other. When John sailed back to France they saw each other daily but at that time did not remarried. After her returned to the USA Assia would fly over for a one to two month visit and after several visits, they remarried. As a married couple, Assia and John maintained homes in Cannes France and Naples Florida until Assia died of cancer. Unfortunately two years later John also succumbed to cancer.



John onboard Dolphin  
Taken just before he sailed for France from  
Rochester

Author Herbert R. Perkins WA2JRV

We at the VWOA Newsletter would like to hear from you and try to pass along to the rest of the VWOA stories of events that you have experienced and that you feel the rest of the membership would enjoy hearing about.

Send us a picture or two and we will try to include it in one of our Email Newsletters.

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