



"Wavescan" is a weekly program for long distance radio hobbyists produced by **Dr. Adrian M. Peterson**, Coordinator of International Relations for Adventist World Radio. AWR carries the program over many of its stations (including shortwave). Adrian Peterson is a highly regarded DXer and radio historian, and often includes features on radio history in his program.

**Wavescan**, November 15, 2009

### **The Bermuda Story - Ship Broadcasting**

On two previous occasions, we have presented information about the radio scene on the island of Bermuda, in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of North America. On this occasion, we continue in our Bermuda series and we tell the story of radio broadcasting from passenger liners that have been associated with Bermuda.

It is the story of three passenger liners, all built in islandic Europe. These ships were named: Empress of Britain, Monarch of Bermuda, and Queen of Bermuda, and each ship was noted on air back in the 1930s with radio program broadcasting.

The **Empress of Britain** was launched by the Brown Shipyard at Clydebank in Scotland on June 11, 1930. This large passenger ship, owned and operated by Canadian Pacific, replaced an older ship with the same name. At the time, it was described as a very modern passenger liner, designed for winter cruising, and with a radio receiver in each cabin.

It was touted as the world's most economical fuel consumer per horsepower hour, burning 356 tons of fuel oil each day. It was so large that it had a clearance of just seven and a half inches on each side as it traversed through the lock system in the Panama Canal.

The Empress of Britain plied the Atlantic on numerous voyages, and occasionally out in the Pacific. On one occasion, this ship crossed the Atlantic, from Halifax Nova Scotia in Canada to Southampton in England with just forty passengers on board. However, these passengers were King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain, together with their royal entourage.

On September 8, 1939, the Empress of Britain arrived at Quebec at the end of a quick voyage across the Atlantic. It was commandeered for navy service, painted with camouflage paint, and used as a troop carrier back to Europe.

On what became its last voyage, it was attacked off the coast of Ireland by a German long range bomber on October 26 in the following year, 1940. Next day, it was attacked by a German submarine, and early in the morning of the third day, it sank upside down in 500 ft of water.

Our second ship in this feature presentation was the **Monarch of Bermuda**, and it was built at the Vickers Armstrong shipyards in England for passenger service between New York and Bermuda, a voyage of just forty hours each way.

Three years later, the Monarch of Bermuda received accolades for the rescue of passengers and crew from another passenger ship that was on fire off the coast of New Jersey, the Morro Castle. Towards the end of the year 1939, this ship was also requisitioned for navy service and it was in use as a troop carrier across the Atlantic. In 1946, it resumed its peace time role and it carried war brides from Europe to Canada.

During the following year, the Monarch of Bermuda was gutted by fire while it was undergoing re-fitting for further passenger service. The burned out shell was moved to Southampton where it was rebuilt and renamed New Australia. This ship made its first voyage to Australia, filled with English migrants in August 1950.

Subsequently, this ship was involved in a collision in Torres Strait, north of Australia. It was then bought by a Greek company, modernized, and renamed Arkadia for use as a cruise ship. However, eight years later, it was sold for scrap in Spain.

Our third passenger liner in this feature was the **Queen of Bermuda**, and this ship was also built at the Vickers Armstrong shipyards in England and launched one year later again after the previous ship. It was taken into passenger service in the Atlantic.

In August 1939, the Queen of Bermuda was requisitioned by the British navy, converted into a merchant cruiser, and taken into service in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In 1961, the ship was completely rebuilt for passenger service, but five years later it was withdrawn from service, taken to Scotland, and scrapped.

Now, what about the matter of radio broadcasting from these three notable passenger liners? The Empress of Britain was described in the 1930s as the most active ship broadcaster during that era. It was on the air with music programs mainly, under the British callsign GMBJ. Program broadcasts from the Empress of Britain GMBJ were relayed off air by NBC in the United States, as well as by national networks in Canada, England, and Australia. This ship was often heard in radio contact with the marine radio station in Bermuda, and sometimes with spontaneous radio broadcasts for whoever might be listening.

The Monarch of Bermuda was often heard in contact with Bermuda Radio and New York Radio during the 1930s, and it was noted also with occasional spontaneous radio broadcasts and with relays to local mediumwave stations in the United States. This ship operated under several consecutive callsigns, such as the English registered GTSD, and the Canadian registered VTSX and VQJM.

Likewise, the Queen of Bermuda was also often heard by North American DXers in communication traffic with Bermuda Radio and New York Radio. This ship was also noted occasionally with program broadcasts, and it was on the air under two consecutive Canadian callsigns, VPTG and VQJP.

And what about QSL cards acknowledging the reception of radio broadcasts from these three passenger liners? We have never seen any, although it is possible that they do exist

somewhere. Maybe some of these exotic QSL cards, if they do exist, will turn up one day in some old QSL collection in North America, or perhaps even in England.

**Wavescan**, February 14, 2010

## **The Story of the Good Ship Seth Parker**

The story of the sailing ship **Seth Parker** is filled with indecision, controversy, adventure and perhaps even intrigue. In addition, the Seth Parker also provides us with a remarkable glimpse of early radio history during its developing era way back some eighty years ago. There is also an interesting sequel to the story of radio broadcasting on the good ship Seth Parker. It all happened this way.

In the year 1918, a small sailing ship, less than two hundred feet long and weighing only 867 tons, was built in Portland, Oregon for use in hauling lumber along the west coast of North America. It was named the Georgette.

Thirty years later, the young radio entertainer, Phillips Lord, purchased the Georgette, installed a diesel engine, refurbished the vessel luxuriously, and installed a decorative radio station in its decks, all for a total outlay of nearly a quarter of a million dollars. This ship in its new condition was renamed Seth Parker in honor of the main character played by Phillips Lord himself on an NBC network radio drama.

In addition, the Frigidaire company in the United States installed state of the art refrigeration and air conditioning on the vessel, and they supported the project with their advertising. They also printed an attractive advertising booklet in color, giving details about the Seth Parker and its intended round the world voyage.

As part of the publicity campaign associated with the sailing of the Seth Parker, arrangements were made in advance to post attractive envelopes from various exotic ports of call in several different countries. The sale of these envelopes would of course provide additional funding for the entire project.

It was on November 20, 1933, that the Seth Parker set sail from New York Harbor with twenty seven people on board; crew, staff, and radio personnel. In fact, NBC provided a 1 kW shortwave transmitter valued at \$12,000 and the engineer to operate it, so that radio broadcasts on shortwave could be fed to the NBC radio network in the United States. The broadcast transmitter was licensed with the callsign KNRA, and an additional low power experimental transmitter on the Seth Parker was licensed as W10XG.

Beginning at Portland Maine, the Seth Parker called in at several ports on the American east coast, and the first known radio broadcast at the beginning of this venture took place on February 13, 1934, at Wilmington, Delaware. Special shortwave broadcasts were made each Tuesday evening from progressive locations down the coast, and out in the Bahamas, and also from Haiti in the Caribbean.

However, controversy had already entered the scene at this stage and NBC ended their contract with Phillips Lord. The reasons for this move are unstated, but rumor would suggest that many unsavory and scandalous events were said to be taking place on board the Seth Parker. NBC in New York even made moves to send staff down to Jamaica to remove their radio station from the ship.

New network broadcasting arrangements were made, and the ship moved on, down to the Panama Canal, and out into the Pacific. A shortwave broadcast was made from the Galapagos Islands; and the final known shortwave broadcast from the Seth Parker was made in February 1935 when it was some three hundred miles from Tahiti.

It was at this stage that additional controversy entered the picture. The Seth Parker supposedly encountered two storms in the Pacific, off the coast of Tahiti, badly damaging the vessel. In fact transmitter KNRA was on the air with an urgent SOS message in April 1935 that was picked up by the maritime station WCC at Chatham in Massachusetts. Chatham Radio forwarded the information onwards to the Pacific and the British Royal Navy was asked to assist.

The Royal Navy vessel, HMAS Australia, was diverted to pick up all nine people now aboard the Seth Parker, but the Australia stated that they had encountered no storms in the area. The Seth Parker was then towed by a tug boat, the Ontario, and brought into Pago Pago harbor in American Samoa.

Soon afterwards, the Seth Parker was sold for use in tuna fishing; and ultimately, it was towed to its resting place in an artificial lagoon near Kane'Āōhe Bay on the island of Oahu in Hawaii where it was scuttled in shallow water. At this location, the ship became a tourist attraction where it finally decayed and was demolished.

During its more than a year of spasmodic radio broadcasting, station KNRA on board the Seth Parker in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was logged by multitudes of international radio monitors located in North America and the South Pacific. It is true, these radio broadcasts were intended for relay on the NBC mediumwave network throughout the United States.

However, these relay broadcasts were also heard direct, off air shortwave, from many exotic seaboard locations. Several different shortwave channels were in use, and the corresponding land based stations heard in two way contact with KNRA were the RCA communication facilities located at Rocky Point on Long Island, Bolinas in California, and Kahuku in Hawaii. Additionally, KNRA was also heard on occasions in contact with station LSX in Argentina.

Back in the Seth Parker era, QSL cards, generic in nature, were issued by NBC from their radio building in New York City. These cards are these days a quiet reminder of the short but hectic era of radio broadcasting aboard the now notorious schooner, the Seth Parker.

Oh, and by the way, before we forget. The shortwave transmitter KNRA on board the Seth Parker was rescued by NBC personnel before the ship was sold, and it was integrated with other electronic equipment from another historic shortwave transmitter for use in radio broadcasts in the Pacific and Europe.

Wavescan, May 16, 2010

## Radio Broadcasting from Japanese Ships

It was back three quarters of a century ago that three luxury passenger liners were built at two different shipyards in Japan. These three ships joined NYK, the Nippon Yusen Kaisha Company for passenger service across the Pacific between Asia and the United States.

These three ships were all built around the same time, during the years 1929 and 1930. They all served in the luxury tourist trade in the Pacific, and occasionally beyond. All three were requisitioned into the Japanese navy in 1941, they each served as troop carriers in the Pacific, they participated in high profile diplomatic exchange events, they served as carriers for prisoners of war, and each of these ships carried new wireless equipment. In the tragic events during the middle of last century, all three ships were sunk by torpedo action from prowling submarines.

The **Asama Maru** was launched in 1929 from the Mitsubishi Shipyards at Nagasaki as a super quality luxury passenger liner specifically for Pacific passenger traffic between Japan and the United States. On several occasions, this ship carried noted political leaders attending important meetings in different parts of the world.

In 1933, Matsuoka Yosuke, the Japanese delegate to the League of Nations meeting in Geneva, Switzerland returned across the Pacific on the Asama Maru. As they were nearing Yokohama Harbor, Matsuoka was invited to make a radio broadcast to the nation of Japan from the ship. This broadcast was picked up by NHK Japan and relayed live on mediumwave throughout the nation. When the ship berthed at Yokohama Harbor, the NHK representative from station JOAK in Tokyo met the League of Nations delegate for another radio interview.

Two years later, this same Asama Maru was berthed at San Francisco in California and an important luncheon was staged aboard by the local Junior Chamber of Commerce. One of the prominent mediumwave stations in San Francisco, station KJBS with 500 watts on 1070 kHz, arranged for a live broadcast of the event.

A landline carried the proceedings from the berthed ship to the radio station. The date for this auspicious occasion was July 31, 1935, and the purpose for the broadcast from the Asama Maru was to publicize the events associated with the upcoming Harbor Day, the sixth such event at San Francisco.

The sister ship **Chichibu Maru** was built and launched at the Yokohama Shipyards in 1930 and the international radio callsign for this ship was JFZC. In 1936, this ship was noted in communication with K6XO at the RCA shortwave station located at Kahuku on the northern tip of the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

In the year 1938, the Chichibu Maru was listed among several passenger vessels that were noted as presenting occasional radio broadcast programs. As the custom was in those days, occasional broadcasts were presented from the ship, for a pick-up relay of programming by

nearby land based mediumwave stations, and sometimes simply for direct reception by any shortwave listener who happened to tune in.

The third NYK sister ship, the **Tatsuta Maru**, was launched at the Mitsubishi Shipyards in Nagasaki in 1930, and its allotted callsign was JFYC. It would appear that the ships under the flag of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha company shared similar callsigns, with the J standing for Japan, the F for the company, the final letter C perhaps standing for the word company or commercial, and the third letter in the four letter sequence identifying the particular ship.

During the year 1940, conflict was active in continental Europe, and tensions were growing in the Pacific. It so happened that there were several mediumwave stations on the air in Shanghai in China that were operated by parties representing many different countries.

The American station XMHA was on the air with three transmitters on both mediumwave and shortwave and its programming was heard far and wide. Station listings from that era show that XMHA was on the air mediumwave with 500 watts on 600 kHz and 100 watts on 1100 kHz, and on shortwave with 1 kW on 11980 kHz.

According to Time magazine, and other news reports also, the Japanese government in Tokyo ordered all passenger ships and navy vessels to jam the broadcasts from station XMHA when their ship was in the vicinity of Shanghai. Contemporary monitoring reports state that the jamming signals sounded like a loud squeal.

Shipping schedules show that the one year old Katori class light cruiser, Kashima, was in Shanghai Harbor for a state visit right at the time when the jamming signals were noted. It is quite probable that the jamming signals at that particular time actually emanated from the radio equipment aboard the Japanese navy vessel, the Kashima.

There are no known QSLs for any of the broadcasts from any of the Japanese ships during the 1930s and the early 1940s.

**Wavescan**, July 11, 2010

## **Early Ship QSLs**

In this feature on early ship QSLs, we begin first with some very old color postcards associated with wireless transmissions in the early days. Our three oldest cards in this style all show the same picture, an artistic rendition of a humor scene. Two ships out on the ocean are talking to each other in Morse Code, and one fish underwater nearby says to another: What are they talking about?

The oldest of these cards is postmarked on December 4 in the ancient year 1902. The second card is postmarked two years later, and the third card is not postmarked at all. It seems that these cards were all printed in the year 1902, and they could apparently lay claim to being the oldest wireless cards in the world.

A wireless card dated in August in the year 1910 is just on 100 years old. This card is printed in the German language and script, and it carries the Captain's arrival message when the ship Blucher arrived at Gudvangen Fjord in Norway.

Another early wireless card shows a large passenger ship communicating a Christmas message to a land station. Quite coincidentally, this postcard is postmarked December 24, 1914, which is the date of the remarkable Christmas truce on the front lines during World War I.

However, we are also holding several QSL card issued for wireless and radio transmissions from transmitters aboard ships at sea; passenger liners, cargo vessels, and navy ships. The oldest of these cards is postmarked May 21, 1924, and it verifies the reception of a spark wireless transmission from a 1 kW transmitter on board the vessel Ka-lmi-Loa. At the time, the **Kaimiloa** was at anchor off New Caledonia in the South Pacific.

Another QSL card, dated in the year 1925, is actually a reception report on a QSL card, and it reports the reception of an amateur QSO from 7RY in the United States. At the time, the **USS Wyoming** was in the Pacific, near Hawaii, and the callsign of the transmitter on board this navy vessel was NWQ. This QSL is actually double sized and it is printed on paper rather than on card.

Then too, we hold a QSL card from station NRRL on board another navy vessel, the **USS Seattle**, at the time when the Great White Fleet was steaming towards the Australian waters.

We go back to the Kaimiloa, and its interesting story. In the year 1924, business man Medford Kellum formed what he called the Kaimiloa Expedition in association with the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. The purpose of this expedition was to scientifically study peoples and islands in various areas of the exotic South Pacific. The name Kaimiloa means, in the Hawaiian language, distant traveler.

Originally, this schooner carried a spark wireless transmitter licensed with the callsign KFUH and rated at 1 kW. However, during the first phase of its tour in the South Pacific, the operator had difficulty in making adequate wireless contact with the United States.

The owner, Medford Kellum gave approval for the installation of a valve, or tube, transmitter and so the Kaimiloa was taken back to Honolulu to receive the new equipment which was installed in May 1925. The transmitter was actually a double unit made up of two transmitters rated at 250 watts.

Soon afterwards, the Kaimiloa resumed its exploratory tour in the South Pacific, calling at several different island groups. Several QSL cards were issued from station KFUH, and posted in Suva, Fiji. It is probable that several news items from the expedition were passed on at times to the news world via station KFUH, and perhaps, even some voiced commentaries.

The claim to fame on the part of the Kaimiloa was that the electronic transmitter placed aboard was, it is stated, the very first occasion in the history of radio in which a valve, or tube, transmitter was installed on board a ship.

**Wavescan**, August 8, 2010

## **Deception on the High Seas**

In our previous feature item here in this edition of Wavescan, we made mention of a 40 kW PWI transmitter that was installed in an army camp towards the south of England in the early part of the year 1944. A major purpose for this station was to broadcast fake radio transmissions that would suggest that the coming invasion of continental Europe would take place at Calais in France, or perhaps even considerably further north in Norway.

Interestingly, radio transmitters aboard several ships in different parts of the world have been used in the same way, to broadcast fake radio messages. For example back in the year 1942, historical records tell us, two American navy vessels roamed the Coral Sea in the South Pacific broadcasting fake radio messages. This was to give the impression that a large fleet of navy vessels were in the area, and not up near Midway Island, which in reality, is where they were at the time. The documents tell us that the two ships involved with these fake radio broadcasts were a light cruiser and a seaplane tender.

Two years later, in the earlier part of the year 1944, the British Royal Navy performed a similar spate of deception in the South Pacific. As events were coming towards an end in continental Europe, the Royal Navy sent their first contingent of personnel to Australia to begin organization for a larger presence.

Later in the same year, Radio Australia began the relay of BBC programming dedicated to Royal Navy personnel in the South Pacific, of which there were very few at the time. These broadcasts were on the air from station VLC, the new RCA 50 kW transmitter that had just been installed at Shepparton in Victoria. Soon afterwards a Royal Navy vessel roamed the South Pacific broadcasting fake radio messages, giving the impression that there was a large fleet of British ships in the area, even though they had not yet arrived.

The relay of the BBC program directed to the supposedly large British fleet in the South Pacific ended in mid 1945. However, Radio Australia carried on with a similar program produced in Sydney by Lieutenant Eric Morely and this was on the air until the end of the same year, 1945.

The final broadcasts from the British fleet in the South Pacific took place around the Christmas-New Year Season, 1945-1946. Three ships were noted by international radio monitors in New Zealand and Australia, with the broadcast of radio programming from their shortwave transmitters. Two ships used code names, and these were **Radio Romance** on 11010 kHz and **Schooldame** on two channels, 12630 and 18150 kHz. The British navy vessel, **Grenville**, was also noted on two channels, 12640 and 14400 kHz, with a relay from the Sydney commercial station 2KY.

Wavescan, August 14, 2011

## The Voice of America - Shipboard Radio Stations - Ship No. 1: The Story of the USS Texas

It is quite well known in the radio world that the Voice of America was on the air from the radio ship Courier ([www.offshore-radio.de/fleet/courier.htm](http://www.offshore-radio.de/fleet/courier.htm)) while it was anchored in the harbor at the island of Rhodes in the eastern Mediterranean. However, it is not quite so well known that VOA was on the air in earlier times from many other radio ships; in fact over the years VOA has been involved with a dozen or more different radio ships all told.

On this occasion, we trace the story of the very first involvement on the part of the Voice of America in radio broadcasting from a ship, the navy vessel Texas 2 ([www.offshore-radio.de/fleet/texas.htm](http://www.offshore-radio.de/fleet/texas.htm)). In this new mini-series, we will investigate the story of each VOA radio ship in chronological order, and we plan to present the information approximately every second week here in Wavescan. Today, this is the story about VOA ship No. 1, the **USS Texas**.

The massive warship, the USS Texas, was launched at Newport News in Virginia way back in the year 1912. It was close to 600 feet long, and more than 100 feet wide. The total weight of this ship was 34,000 tons.

The USS Texas achieved two moments of fame in its illustrious career spanning 36 years. In the year 1919, it was the first American battleship to launch experimental aircraft at sea; and in 1942, it acted as the first seaborne radio station associated with the Voice of America. This ship was decommissioned just six years later, in 1948.

These days, the Texas lies at anchor in the Jacinto State Park, near Houston in the state of Texas, where it is now a historic museum piece and a popular tourist attraction. Many postcards from the days of its former glory are still available from postcard dealers nationwide.

On October 1, 1942, a detachment of 20 signal corps personnel was formed at Camp Pickett in Virginia as the 1st Broadcast Station Operating Detachment. Their assigned purpose was to procure equipment, and train and prepare for the operation of a radio broadcasting station on board a United States navy vessel.

Loading days for the Texas, and all of the flotilla of ships associated with Operation Torch, the American invasion of North Africa, began in earnest at several major ports on the eastern seaboard of the United States on October 22, 1942. Among the multitudinous items of cargo loaded onto the Texas was a 5 kW mediumwave transmitter that had been secured from Jersey City, and a power generator that was previously in use at a cotton mill in South Carolina.

For the purpose of broadcasting to the people in coastal areas of Morocco in North Africa, the 5 kW mediumwave transmitter was tuned to the frequency 601 kHz, the same channel that was in use on shore at Radio Maroc, Rabat. It is presumed that some form of test

broadcasts were radiated in advance to ensure that the transmitter would function correctly at the time of the coming invasion.

Historic documents tell us that the first broadcast from the "Voice of Freedom" on board the Texas was made around 4:30 am local time on November 8, 1942. At the time, the Texas was stationed in the Mediterranean off the coast of Rabat in Morocco, and the first channel for this epic broadcast was the 601 kHz, the same as the mediumwave station ashore in Rabat.

On board the Texas were additional radio personnel from the Voice of America and the American OWI department. Programming for this first broadcast was in French and English, and it consisted of recorded messages, off-air relays from shortwave stations located in the United States and England, and local announcements.

The recorded speeches were broadcast in the French language by President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower. This first message was presented in French by an American diplomat, Col. Julius Holmes, pretending to be General Eisenhower, though the president's message was delivered in almost perfect French by President Roosevelt himself.

The programming on the air from the Texas, in both French and English under the title the "Voice of Freedom", was compiled from three main sources; pre-recorded speeches, local announcements and information presented live on board ship, and shortwave relays from VOA in the United States and England, and also the BBC London. Due to attempts at jamming by Radio Maroc, the "Voice of Freedom" changed channel a couple of times.

Supportive additional broadcasts in French and English were beamed into this area of North Africa on shortwave from the United States and England. VOA programming was broadcast direct from shortwave transmitters in Atlantic coastal areas of the United States, and also on relay via BBC transmitters in England. Additional BBC programming was also beamed into the area from their own homeland transmitter sites.

In the early afternoon, the battleship Texas was ordered to approach the shore and to fire at targets on the land. The first big gun salvo from the Texas damaged its intended targets on the land, and it also instantly damaged the mediumwave transmitter, due to the heavy noise from the massive explosions, and the jarring and shuddering caused by the recoil from the huge guns.

During the early part of the following year, 1943, the damaged 5 kW mediumwave transmitter aboard the Texas was removed, rebuilt, and installed at Constantine in Algeria where it was in use with AFRS programming on 650 kHz. During the following year, this historic radio transmitter was again moved, though still in Algeria. The new location was at Oran, and programming was still with AFRS, the American Armed Forces Radio Service.

Thus, the first seaborne relay station, which was operated by Signals Corps personnel as well as by VOA and OWI personnel, was on the air for somewhere around ten hours. It would seem that no QSLs were ever issued for these broadcasts, and the only people who heard this station were those who were in the area at the time.

**Wavescan**, August 28, 2011

## **The Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - VOA Ship No. 2: The Story of the Historic KSL Transmitter in Salt Lake City, Pt. 1**

On this occasion here in Wavescan, we return to the story of Shipboard Relay Stations as used by VOA, the Voice of America, and there have been more than a dozen of them in use in different ways over the years. Today, it is the story of an old mediumwave transmitter that was formerly on the air at the high powered mediumwave station, KSL in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In a previous program, we presented the story of Utah on shortwave, and we gave the details of the 1939 unsuccessful attempt by KSL to transfer the low powered shortwave station W9XAA in Chicago to Salt Lake City with an increase in power.

We also mentioned the fact that the owners of station KSL also took over the Boston shortwave station WRUL and changed the callsign to WNYW, and this facility was later taken over by Family Radio as WYFR.

Then too, we presented the information regarding the commercial shortwave station that was launched in Salt Lake City as KUSW, which was then taken over by the Trinity Broadcasting Network as KTBN, and then sold to the Caribbean Beacon on Anguilla where it was absorbed into their technical structure.

OK, so now we tell the story of the mediumwave station KSL in Salt Lake City Utah, and in particular, the interesting information regarding specifically one of their high powered transmitters. The story begins in this way.

It was back in the year 1920, that a license was granted to the newspaper, Deseret News, for the installation of an experimental broadcasting station with the call letters KZN. On May 26, 1922, the new station KZN was inaugurated, with 500 watts on 833 kHz, and it is now recognized as the first radio broadcasting station in Salt Lake City. The studio was inside the Deseret News building, and the 8 wire inverted L antenna system was supported on the roof of the building by two masts 40 ft. tall.

Two years later, station KZN was sold to John Copes, who changed the call to KFPT and the broadcast channel to 1120 kHz, though the original transmitter was still in use.

However, one year later again, the station was sold to the Salt Lake Tribune, and the station was moved to the North West Temple Street Building. The modified radio broadcasting facility now had a 1 kW transmitter, a 6 wire cage antenna on top of the building, a new channel, 900 kHz, and a new callsign, the now familiar KSL. This callsign was previously in use by a communication station in Alaska.

In 1929, a new transmitter facility was constructed 8 miles west of Salt Lake City, and a new 5 kW transmitter was installed there with a vertical 3 wire fan antenna system.

However, three years later again, that is in October 1932, another new site was commissioned at Saltair, some six miles further out than the 5 kW location; that is, a total of some 14 miles west of Salt Lake City itself. A new high powered 50 kW transmitter was installed at this new location with a T type antenna system.

The new 50 kW transmitter installed at Saltair on this occasion was a Western Electric model 7A. This transmitter was a direct copy of the WE 7A that was installed at station WLW, near Cincinnati, Ohio just four years earlier. Station KSL also took out a set of new radio studios in Salt Lake City around this same era.

However, give another 8 years, and KSL built a new transmitter building on the same property at Saltair, and they procured another 50 kW transmitter from the same manufacturer, Western Electric. This new transmitter was identified as a model WE 407A, with the WE standing for Western Electric and the designation 407A standing for the model number 7A, in the year 1940.

The transmitter building at this stage was the attractive art deco style building pictured in color, and in black and white, on some of their earlier QSL cards. The antenna system at this stage was the unique diamond shaped Blaw-Knox tower standing 455 feet tall. Now, it was at this stage, that the old WE 7A from 1932 was removed from service.

The attractive art deco transmitter building was demolished in 1986, after a new utilitarian transmitter building, the 3rd at this location, was erected on the same property, a little higher up the low hill. This new building contains a set of newer 50 kW transmitters, a pair of Nautels.

Actually, international radio monitors in New Zealand and Australia tell us that station KSL is one of the easiest mediumwave stations in the United States to hear in the South Pacific. Numerous QSL collections in both countries hold valid QSL cards from KSL.

Now, let us remember, the original 50 kW Western Electric 7A that was on the air with KSL for a period of 8 years, from October 1932 until it was removed from service in the year 1940. This transmitter was taken over by OWI, the Office of War Information in the United States, for use as a propaganda radio station, and it was installed on board a ship destined for service in European waters during World War II.

**Wavescan**, September 11, 2011

## **The Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - VOA Ship No. 2: The Mystery Story of the Radio Ship Phoenix**

The story of the radio broadcastings ship, **Phoenix**, has always been wrapped in mystery ever since its inauguration more than half a century ago. The ship was fitted out as a radio broadcasting ship and it was in use in the Pacific at the latter end of World War II with broadcasts aimed at Asian rim countries, and in particular, Japan.

But where did the ship come from? And what happened to it afterwards? And what about international monitoring reports while it was on the air? In answer to all of these questions, a lengthy and intense spate of research has produced some interesting and unexpected information. That is the opening story in *Wavescan* today; *The Mystery Story of the Radio Ship Phoenix*, the 2nd ship broadcasting station that was on the air with programming on behalf of VOA, the Voice of America.

Let's go back to the beginning, and we discover that the ship itself was not named the Phoenix; its real name was Triton Maris. The name Phoenix indicated the wartime project under which the purpose of the ship was developed, and it was never the name of the ship.

To make the matter more confusing, there was an American battleship in the Pacific during the same era and this was named the USS Phoenix. The official designation for the navy vessel was CL46, but this ship was never in use as a relay station for VOA programming.

Old shipping documents show that the Triton Maris was an Italian ship, not Greek as was mistakenly suggested for the Phoenix on previous occasions. It was constructed in the year 1898 as a dry bulk carrier, a cargo ship. It was nearly 250 feet long and 35 feet wide with an empty weight of 2300 tons.

The ship, Triton Maris, was taken over by the American army, and then granted to OWI, the American Office of War Information for modification as a radio broadcasting ship, we would suggest during the year 1943. Originally, this ship was intended for use as a floating radio station for deployment in European waters, quite similar to the usage of the American battle ship, USS Texas, a few months earlier, off the Mediterranean coast of Morocco in Africa.

A 50 kW mediumwave transmitter, a Western Electric Model 7A, was obtained from the well known broadcasting station, KSL in Salt Lake City Utah. This 8 year old transmitter was installed in the ship Triton Maris, probably at some port along the California coastline.

However, there was a delay in the deployment of this radio broadcasting ship, brought about because the navy was apprehensive that this slow moving vessel could become a liability in any active theatre of war. In view of the fact that the ship was finally not making its way towards Europe, General Douglas MacArthur ordered its deployment in the Pacific. Maybe they made some test broadcasts before leaving the sheltered waters of the United States.

The ship Triton Maris was temporarily moved to Hawaiian waters, probably at Pearl Harbor, and it was inaugurated as a radio broadcasting station on December 25, 1944. The nearby landbased shortwave station KRHO was inaugurated on the same date, and both stations were on the air with a relay of VOA programming from the new California shortwave station KWID. At this stage, the mediumwave transmitter aboard the Triton Maris was on the air under the callsign KRHO.

At the end of February, in the New Year 1945, the Triton Maris was moved to the coastal waters off the recently liberated island of Saipan. The first broadcast from this new location, as monitored in New Zealand, was on March 4, and the callsign at this stage remained KRHO. Programming was again taken off air from shortwave KRHO.

However, in June the transmitter was removed from the ship Triton Maris and re-installed at Tanapag on Saipan Island. At this stage, a new callsign was employed for this now landbased mediumwave relay station, the now familiar KSAI.

Mediumwave radio station KSAI was located on Saipan in a set of quonset huts, which was also the location of the AFRS mediumwave station WXLD. KSAI was on the air on Saipan until the middle of the year 1946, when, according to some reports, it was simply abandoned.

However, that is not the case. VOA documents indicate that the transmitter was instead removed from Saipan and re-installed in the Philippines at Malolos, on the site of an early VOA relay station north of Manila. This transmitter was inaugurated at its new location as VOA Manila A on March 7, 1948. By now, the old Western Electric 7A transmitter, still rated at 50 kW, was noted on 920 kHz with programming directed towards Asia.

Over a period of time, the mediumwave transmitter, while still aboard the Triton Maris, was heard in Australia, New Zealand and the United States on many different channels, in an attempt to avoid Japanese jamming. The original channel in Hawaiian waters was 1000 kHz, though there were often quick moves to other channels, such as 1010, 860 and 960 kHz. When the station was installed on land at Tanapag on Saipan Island, usually only one constant channel was in use, 1010 kHz, though in July 1945, tests were made on two other channels, 1280 and 850 kHz.

Programming for mediumwave KRHO-KSAI was usually in parallel with shortwave KRHO in Hawaii, though there were occasions when local programming was produced on the island of Saipan in the Japanese language. At times the local AFRS 1 kW mediumwave station on Saipan, WXLD, was also in parallel with the programming from the 50 kW KSAI, with the signals from both stations beamed towards Japan.

During the year 1945, there were at least two navy reviews regarding the effectiveness of the OWI broadcasts from the Triton Maris, and these documents are lodged in the Eisenhower Library in Abilene Kansas.

So, that is the story of the Italian cargo vessel, the Triton Maris, that was transformed into a radio broadcasting ship for use under Project Phoenix, and that was heard from the end of 1944 till the middle of 1946 with a very strong signal in many countries around the Pacific Rim.

The Rest of the Story: The VOA Triton Maris

As the well known Paul Harvey would sometimes say: And now the rest of the story. What happened to the ship Triton Maris after it was no longer in use as a radio broadcasting station? This is what happened.

The Italian crew returned to their homes in Italy, the remaining electronics were removed, and the ship was put on sale in the United States in February 1946. No one bought the old ship, so in April 1947, it was returned to its original owners in Italy.

What about the mighty 50 kW Western Electric mediumwave transmitter? Originally from KSL Salt Lake City, as mentioned by Shanon Hunniwell in the American radio magazine,

Popular Communications, it was deployed aboard the Triton Maris in the Pacific, reinstalled on the island of Saipan, and later transferred to Malolos in the Philippines, its fourth location.

Around the middle of the 1960s, the Philippine Broadcasting service upgraded the electronics at their recently acquired station at Malolos and removed old obsolete equipment from service. Apparently, the venerable 50 kW mediumwave WE7A was simply removed at that time, demolished, and sold for scrap.

And the Tanapag location on Saipan? The old VOA location is now the site for the Tanapag Elementary School.

And QSL cards? Yes, numerous VOA cards in two different styles were issued from Honolulu and San Francisco for the mediumwave broadcasts under the callsigns KRHO and KSAI. And during the earlier part of that broadcast era, the programming was actually on the air from a radio broadcasting ship, though most listeners were not aware of it, the now historic but obscure Triton Maris.

**Wavescan**, September 25, 2011

### **The Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - VOA Ship No. 3: The Apache - The American Ship with its Australian Cargo**

In our continuing series of topics on the story of radio broadcasting from ships by VOA, the Voice of America, we come to ship number 3, the American vessel "**Apache**". This is the story.

The "Apache" was constructed at Reeder Shipyards in Baltimore, Maryland in the United States and it was launched in 1891 as the "Galveston". It was 185 ft. long and 29 ft. wide, with an empty weight of 708 tons. It was a slow ship, with top speed at just 10 knots.

The ship "Galveston" saw many different forms of duty during its service of a little more than half a century. It served in the Spanish-American War of 1900; it was taken over by the governor of Texas for relief work after the hurricane at coastal Galveston in the same year; and in 1904, the name was changed to "Apache" when it was taken over by the United States Revenue Service. This ship saw wartime service during World War I, and it was rebuilt in the United States in 1941.

In May 1944, it just happened that the ship Apache was in Sydney Harbour, Australia, undergoing modification and refitting for service in the Pacific during World War II. An American serviceman by the name of Sanford Terry was in Australia at the time and he had received army orders to acquire a suitable ship and set it up as a radio broadcasting station. After inspecting two other ships, his decision fell upon the Apache, and modification began almost immediately for use as a radio broadcasting ship.

Two transmitters were obtained, both rated at 10 kW. Two International Harvester power generators at 50 kW each were obtained from American army stores in Australia and installed aboard.

The shortwave transmitter, manufactured by AWA in Sydney for use in wireless telegraphy, was in storage in Brisbane, Queensland at the time, though it is not known for what purpose nor for what location this shortwave telegraph transmitter had been constructed. It was perhaps intended for use in army communications in Morse Code. The shortwave telegraph transmitter was modified for voice usage; for use in program broadcasting and the relay of news broadcasts to the United States.

At this stage, the mediumwave transmitter was nearing completion in a factory operated by Transmissions Equipment Ltd. in Richmond, an outer suburb of Melbourne in Australia, and it is known that it was intended for installation by the PMG Department for use as an ABC mediumwave radio broadcasting station.

This mediumwave transmitter was designed for use on the channel 880 kHz, but the intended location for installation is not stated, nor is it revealed in available ABC and PMG documents from that era. There never has been an ABC station in Australia on the channel 880 kHz, and the power level of 10 kW during that era would indicate a major facility, perhaps even in a state capital city.

The original planning date for completion of the ship and its entire cargo was October 15, 1944. However, due to progressive developments up north in the Pacific, General MacArthur shortened the departure date and required the ship to depart Sydney on September 27. In haste, everything was completed on time, though the two transmitters were not yet ready to make preliminary test broadcasts.

Traveling alone along the east coast of Australia, the Apache arrived on schedule at the edge of Humboldt Bay on the northern coast of New Guinea, on October 11. However, at this stage, the Apache broke down and it had to be towed into the bay area at Hollandia, where repairs were quickly carried out.

For the first time, test broadcasts were made from the two transmitters. Just before noon on Friday October 13, 1944, power was applied successfully to the mediumwave transmitter. This unit was then powered down, and then power was successfully applied to the shortwave transmitter. Next in this sequence, power was applied to both transmitters simultaneously, and then there was a loud pop, and the system closed down automatically.

Following the quick replacement of a blown large capacitor, the system was again activated, and voice contact was made on shortwave with San Francisco. Radio silence was imposed at 3:00 pm on all ships in the flotilla that was bound for the Philippines that afternoon. The Apache went silent now for a whole week.

A total of some 600 ships set sail from several ports along the north coast of New Guinea for the 1400 mile journey of silence towards Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. The Apache was just two hours behind the lead ships.

At 9:00 am on Friday, October 20, 1944, the Apache arrived at Leyte Gulf, and there was already action on shore. Radio silence officially ended at 10:00 am on that day, so the engineering staff began to implement the procedure to activate the shortwave transmitter half an hour earlier, at 9:30 am.

Right on time at 10:00 am, the shortwave transmitter was used for voice communication with the USS Nashville in waters nearby, and with Hollandia in New Guinea, and with Honolulu in Hawaii.

Next day, the Apache began a series of radio broadcasts beamed to all of the Philippines under the title, "Voice of Freedom" on the shortwave channel, 7795 kHz. Soon afterwards, additional relay broadcasts from VOA the Voice of America, and from AFRS, the Armed Forces Radio Service, were included in the daily program schedule.

Two days after arrival, on October 22, 1944, the Apache relayed to the world the famous "I Have Returned" speech from General MacArthur who was ashore at the time, speaking into a microphone in a mobile radio vehicle.

In addition, the shortwave transmitter was also in use for the forwarding of voice reports to the United States and Australia. Initially these reports were forwarded to Hollandia, and then to the American army station at Hemmant near Brisbane, though later these reports were beamed directly to KKR at the RCA receiver station near San Francisco in California.

New Year's Day 1945 was slated as the last day for onward forwarding of live news reports from the Apache to the United States, though on some additional occasions the ship was called on to carry press releases beamed back home. When Press Wireless in the Philippines was re-activated, news reports to the United States were carried from this land based station.

In March, the broadcast of the American program, "Philippine Hour" was transferred from the "Australia Calling" transmitter VLC in Shepparton Australia and it was then on relay via the shortwave transmitter WVLC on board the Apache. The American callsign, WVLC had a double application. WV callsigns indicated American army; and WVLC was reminiscent of the Australian shortwave callsign VLC, which had previously carried American programming at the request of General MacArthur.

In March 1945, the Apache moved to Manila Harbor, and a long wire antenna was suspended between two damaged buildings close to the waterfront. Station WVLC mediumwave, with 10 kW on 880 kHz, was on the air for just a few weeks with local programming and announcements for MetroManila. A crane accidentally tore down the long wire antenna, and that ended the only occasion in which the mediumwave transmitter was on the air with program broadcasting.

In the middle of October 1945, another American radio ship, the Spindle Eye, arrived in Tokyo Bay and this ship took over the broadcast and communication services formerly carried by the Apache, though the Apache was monitored in Australia and New Zealand occasionally after that date.

The Apache finally moved over to Japan and she ended her days quite unceremoniously as a leisure craft in Tokyo Bay. She disappeared from the scene of action sometime after mid year 1946. We can only presume that the two transmitters, just a little over a year old, were removed and taken into use, perhaps in the Philippines, but probably in Japan.

On the QSL scene, a half dozen or more letters were received in those days by listeners in the United States, New Zealand and Australia, verifying the transmissions from the Australian shortwave transmitter WVLC aboard the American radio ship Apache. It was on the air for almost exactly one year.

**Wavescan**, October 30, 2011

### **The Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - VOA Ship No. 4: The Spindle Eye, Another American Radio Ship in the Pacific**

In our continuing series of topics on shipboard radio stations used as relay stations for programming from the Voice of America, we come to ship number 4, the **USS Spindle Eye**. Plans for this new radio ship were developed during the year 1944 and it was intended for use during the projected invasion of Japan.

This new radio ship was laid down in the Kaiser shipyards at Richmond, near San Francisco in California, and it was launched with the unassuming name Spindle Eye on May 25, 1945. The ship was nearly 340 feet long and 50 feet wide, with a total empty weight of four thousand tons.

Originally, the Spindle Eye was constructed for use as an army cargo ship, but it was taken over and quickly fitted out at the Todd shipyards in Seattle, Washington with a bevy of electronic equipment. Aboard this ship were two radio studios, six shortwave transmitters, eight antennas, and 112 typewriters. Four of the shortwave transmitters were 3 kW units made by Wilcox, and the broadcast quality transmitter at 7.5 kW was made by RCA at their Camden Factory in New Jersey.

The first series of test broadcasts from the Spindle Eye were made at the dockside shipyards in Seattle from the 7.5 kW RCA transmitter during the first half of the month of September 1945. Then, on September 19, after just 64 days of fitting out, the ship moved out across the Pacific, bound for Japan.

The Spindle Eye arrived in Tokyo Harbor on October 15, and it took over the radio services previously carried by WVLC aboard the Apache which was still in the Philippines at the time. The Spindle Eye was inspected by General MacArthur, after which it made a test tour in the waters of China and Korea. It was reported that the electronics aboard the Spindle Eye were working well.

On return to Japan just before Christmas, the Spindle Eye under the transferred callsign WVLC, began a series of broadcasts on behalf of the Voice of America and the American Armed Forces Radio Service. In addition, news dispatches from the 1946 legal trials in Tokyo were relayed from the Spindle Eye to the United States for nationwide rebroadcast.

During the month of July 1946, the Americans conducted two atomic tests in the Pacific. One was an overwater explosion with the code name Able, and the other was an underwater explosion with the code name Baker. These atomic explosions were conducted in the Marshall Islands, at Bikini Atoll, and the overall code name for the twin explosions was Operation Crossroads.

Extensive plans were made for live radio coverage of the first detonation which took place on July 1, 1946. Ships, airplanes and land vehicles were staged at strategic locations on the Marshall Islands and in nearby waters. A total of 150 radio transmitters and 300 receivers were in use for the co-ordination of the atomic detonation and for the broadcast of live news reports. One of the major news reporters for the occasion was Oliver Read who was editor of the American radio journal, Radio News at that time, and he published three large articles in his magazine.

The quite new Spindle Eye was given the task of co-ordinating all of the news transmissions from Operation Crossroads, including voice broadcasts, press dispatches and radio photos. For this purpose, the Spindle Eye was located off the coast of Kwajalein Island and the callsign WVLC was replaced by the navy callsign NIGF. The broadcasts from NIGF were beamed to RCA Bolinas and Press Wireless Los Angeles for onward relay.

On Able-Day July 1, program broadcasts from NIGF Spindle Eye began at 3:30 am local time with live news reports to NBC and CBS in the United States. At 9:00 am, the atom bomb was dropped over Bikini Atoll from the air force B29 plane identified with the large tail marker "B". At this stage, two voice transmitters on the Spindle Eye were on the air in parallel with all of the live news reports, the 7.5 kW RCA and a 2.5 kW Wilcox. Subsequently the Wilcox was diverted for the transmission of news photos which were received at the army station WTJ in Hawaii and relayed onward to the army station in San Francisco WVY.

All of the various live news reports were broadcast by the Spindle Eye for relay by the radio networks in the United States. In addition, the Voice of America also carried these same reports world wide through their large network of shortwave and mediumwave stations.

However, in spite of the elaborate plans for extensive live news coverage from the atomic test areas, there were times when the voice relays were inferior and difficult to understand. This was due to the fact that the shortwave transmitters aboard the several ships in the area were quite low in output power.

Thus, when the underwater test, Baker, were conducted 3-1/2 weeks later, the radio ship Spindle Eye was located at Honolulu, as a relay point between the atomic test sites in the Marshall Islands and the American mainland. On July 25 for the underwater explosion, Spindle Eye NIGF received the shortwave reports from Bikini and relayed this programing on to RCA Bolinas and Press Wireless Los Angeles for further distribution.

After the twin atomic tests, the Spindle Eye returned to the Pacific coast of the United States and the usage of the transmitter as WVLC-NIGF came to an end at the end of the year 1946. This radio ship was intended for use in a planned invasion of Japan, but the war came to an end before the ship arrived on the scene.

The Spindle Eye was in use on occasions as WVLC for the broadcast of VOA programming, and for the relay of news reports; and it was in use as NIGF for the relay of programming to the Voice of America for inclusion in live broadcasts.

One year later, the Spindle Eye was renamed the Sgt. Curtis F. Shoup and it was in use in the Pacific as a helicopter freighter. After that spate of service came to an end, the ship was then transferred to the Mediterranean for oceanographic studies. The ship known as Spindle Eye and Sgt. Curtis F. Shoup was finally sold for scrap on May 9, 1973.

It is known that a few QSL letters were issued for the WVLC-NIGF broadcasts, and the Voice of America also issued their regular QSLs confirming the relay of the atomic tests at Bikini Atoll. In addition, special QSL cards were printed to honor the Atomic Tests and these showed an artistic version of the sinking of a ship.

**Wavescan**, November 27, 2011

## **Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - Three More American Radio Ships in the Pacific**

On this occasion here in Wavescan, we present the story of three more ships in the Pacific that were on the air with VOA programming, and they were all associated with Operation Crossroads, the twin atomic detonations at Bikini Atoll in July 1946. All three ships were American navy vessels, and all three were of quite recent construction at the time.

The first of these three ships is the **USS "Appalachian"** which was launched at Kearny New Jersey on January 29, 1943. This United States navy vessel saw service in the Pacific, and in 1946 it was appointed in charge of media coverage for the twin atomic explosions at Bikini Atoll.

At the time of the Able Test, the atomic detonation above Bikini Atoll on July 1, the "Appalachian" was stationed in the open sea at a safe distance from the blast area. At this stage, the "Appalachian" was using five different shortwave channels, though each was on the air with what is considered to be a quite low power output. The callsign for this ship was NCLG.

However, because of the difficult shortwave coverage from NCLG at the time of the first test explosion, the Able Test on July 1, this ship was sent back to Honolulu where new higher powered transmitters were installed. Thus, when the second detonation, B Test, took place three weeks later on July 25, the "Appalachian" was now on the air with two transmitters at 600 watts and one at 350 watts, though still considered to be inadequate for reliable relay coverage. To compensate for this problem, the "Spindle Eye" NIGF was stationed at Honolulu on the day of the second detonation as a relay point between NCLG "Appalachian" at Bikini and the United States mainland.

Just one year after these atomic tests, the "Appalachian" was decommissioned, and twelve years later again, it was sold for scrap.

The second ship in today's program is the **USS "Mount McKinley"**, a navy vessel that was launched from Wilmington North Carolina on September 27, 1943. Originally named the "Cyclone", it was renamed "Mount McKinley" exactly three months later.

This navy transport ship also saw service in the Pacific, and in 1946, she operated as a flagship in the Marshall Islands for Operation Crossroads. A 350 watt transmitter with the callsign NICO was on the air with live voice broadcasts giving the progressive information about the atomic explosions at Bikini Atoll; in the air on July 1 and underwater on July 25. In addition, NICO was heard on another occasion with the broadcast of a live church service.

At the end of an illustrious career spanning 34 years during which she saw service in several different world areas, the "Mount McKinley" was sold for scrap in 1976.

The third ship in our story today is the **USS "Panamint"**, which was launched at Wilmington, North Carolina on November 9, 1943, as the "Northern Light". Early in the New Year 1944, the "Northern Light" was acquired by the navy, converted at the Hoboken yards in New Jersey for use as a general communications vessel, and renamed the USS "Panamint". This ship also saw active service in the Pacific.

In 1946, the "Panamint" was ordered to the Marshall Islands where she served as the floating headquarters for congressional, scientific and United Nations observers, several of whom made radio broadcasts from the ship as part of the media coverage for the atomic events. This ship was on the air under the callsign NXHC.

On the day of the second atomic test, the underwater Baker test on July 25, the details of the actual explosion were broadcast live by Cleve Roberts over transmitter NXHC aboard the USS "Panamint". This live description was listed as part of the pool broadcast that was carried by all of the involved media, including the Voice of America.

During the next year 1947, the "Panamint" was decommissioned from navy usage, and she was sold for scrap fourteen years later.

During the two atomic test detonations at Bikini Atoll, July 1 and 25, 1946, many ships were involved in the broadcast arrangements for radio coverage and relay. However, according to Arthur Cushen, the highly esteemed international radio monitor in New Zealand, the broadcasts from four of these ships were considered to be direct broadcasts of the events on these two days, as well as the relaying of programming for further broadcast throughout the world, including the Voice of America.

These four ships, as noted in our program today, and also in our program a couple of weeks back, were:

|                    |      |                       |
|--------------------|------|-----------------------|
| USS Spindle Eye    | NIGF | 7.5 kW & 3 kW         |
| USS Appalachian    | NCLG | 350 watts & 600 watts |
| USS Mount McKinley | NICO | 50 watts              |
| USS Panamint       | NXHC | Low power             |

In addition, the "Spindle Eye" also relayed VOA programming on a few occasions, and the "Mount McKinley" was noted with the broadcast of a church service. The shortwave transmissions from all four ships were heard in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, with the Bikini broadcasts on the two detonation dates, as well as with preparatory test broadcasts beforehand.

A few listeners in these same three countries, USA, New Zealand and Australia, received QSL letters in acknowledgement of their reception reports; and in addition, many listeners received a regular QSL card showing an artistic rendition of islands in the Pacific and a ship sinking nearby.

Thus far, in this progressive series of programs featuring shipboard relay stations on the air with VOA programming, we have presented the story of seven different radio ships, including the three mentioned in today's program. When we present the next episode of VOA ship broadcasting, we plan to tell the story of ship number 8, the well known coast guard cutter "Courier", that was anchored off the coast of the island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean. That will be next month some time.

**Wavescan**, January 8, 2012

## **Voice of America: Shipboard Relay Stations - 8: This Time in the Mediterranean - The Vagabond A "Courier"**

The most famous of all of the ships that carried a relay of programming on behalf of the Voice of America was the good ship "Courier"; but it did not begin its life story in this way. This is what happened.

The ship that became the "Courier" was laid down in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on the edge of the Great Lakes during the year 1945. The original name given in advance was "Doddridge," though by the time it was launched later that same year, the name was "Coastal Messenger."

During the late 1940s, the "Coastal messenger" was taken into commercial service along the coasts of South America. At one stage, the ship ran aground off the coast of Venezuela, and soon afterwards, it was mothballed into the reserve fleet.

Then came the year 1950, and plans were introduced for the development of a whole fleet of radio ships to act as full time relay stations for the Voice of America. The "Doddridge-Coastal Messenger" was taken over by the American government, retrofitted with all sorts of new equipment, and renamed the "Courier." The original intent for the location of this new ship was off the coast of the Korean peninsula.

The "Courier" was commissioned as a radio ship at Hoboken on the edge of New Jersey on February 15, 1952 under the official designation WAGR; with the W indicating Coast Guard, A indicating a working ship, G indicating a large ship, and R indicating radio. The callsign for the ship's maritime communication radio equipment was NFKW.

In the waterways of Washington, DC on March 4, President Truman came aboard and officially dedicated the ship for its new era of service. The "Courier" then left for a six week shakedown cruise into the Caribbean, with ports of call along the coasts of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Mexico.

For a period of three weeks, the "Courier" was on the air with test broadcasts under the callsign KUX2AJ during its stay in the Panama Canal Zone. The ship was also stationed in the Central American area for a series of political broadcasts to Guatemala.

The "Courier" returned to the United States and was taken to New York where loading began in preparation for service off the coast of Korea. However, at this stage, a new location was designated, and orders were given diverting her to serve in the eastern waters of the Mediterranean. So, on July 17, the "Courier" set sail for the island of Rhodes, with ports of call en route at Tangier in North Africa, Naples in Italy, and Piraeus in Greece.

The "Courier" arrived at the harbor on the north coast of the island of Rhodes on August 22, 1952, though she was quickly moved to the coast of Turkey due to a threatened submarine attack. However, this proved to be a false threat, and the ship soon returned to the nearby island of Rhodes.

Broadcasting as a Voice of America relay station began on September 7, 1952. The ship carried three radio broadcasting transmitters; one RCA mediumwave unit at 150 kW, and two Collins shortwave transmitters at 35 kW. There was also a 3 kW marine transmitter for coastal communications.

Electrical power was generated by 3 diesel generators, each rated at 50 kW, and five huge balloons were available to produce lift for the mediumwave antenna. The program feed from the VOA studios in Washington, DC was shortwaved via the VOA relay station in Tangier, North Africa, with a receiver station on board the "Courier" itself. Subsequently, a receiver station was installed on the island of Rhodes with a microwave relay to the ship.

The usage of the balloons to raise the mediumwave antenna proved to be too cumbersome and largely unsuccessful, so during the following year, the "Courier" was first taken to Malta for repairs, and then to Saloniki in Greece where new antenna systems were fitted. According to the Australian magazine, Radio & Hobbies, the "Courier" was on the air from Saloniki for two or even three extended periods of time.

The broadcasts from the "Courier," on both shortwave and mediumwave, though intended primarily for the Middle Eastern areas, were nevertheless heard in widely distant locations. Many international radio monitors in Europe, the Americas, Asia and the South Pacific were successful in hearing these broadcasts in several Middle Eastern languages and they were rewarded with the regular VOA QSL cards from Washington, DC showing a large white star on a blue background. In addition, QSL cards were also issued from the "Courier" itself, and these depicted an artistic rendition of the ship with a large balloon tethered to the deck. These QSL cards were postmarked at the official Post Office on board the "Courier."

There were occasions when the "Courier" left the sheltered harbor at Rhodes. For example, a significant religious leader asked the ship to take him on a visit to another island. With

approval from the United States, the short voyage was made, and the "Courier" was still on the air at its new temporary location with its regular programming.

Towards the end of its twelve year stay in the Eastern Mediterranean, the ship was taken to the shipyards near Athens in Greece in preparation for the final return journey across the Atlantic. Even while the "Courier" was suspended in the air above the dry dock, the regular broadcasting schedule was maintained; the electronics were safely grounded with a thick cable attached to the dock.

All of the electronic equipment was ultimately off loaded and donated to the Greek government, and the ship then set sail for the United States, with ports of call at Naples in Italy, Barcelona in Spain, and the Azores Islands off the coast of Africa. The arrival date on the Atlantic Coast of the United States was August 13, 1964.

Two years later, the "Courier" was taken into service again by the Coast Guard, this time as a training ship. In 1972, she was retired, and three years later again, she was unceremoniously scrapped.

The "Courier," at the end of its illustrious tenure as a unique radio broadcasting ship, was now gone; but it was replaced by a landbased station on the island of Rhodes. However, that's another story for another time.