

## **At war's end**

At war's end, when I returned to Vancouver after 5 years overseas with the army, I wrote my 2nd class certificate with Jim Kitchin as my examiner, with whom I was to work in later years.

I immediately went job hunting but found that, with the cutbacks, radio operators were a glut on the market. I nearly took a job on the SS Amier which was being fitted out as a China coaster. They were more interested in my army experience in small arms training and wanted me to train the deck officers in the use of a Thompson sub-marine gun to fight off pirates. Caution prevailed and I turned down the job. As it turned out, on her way to Asia, she broke down in the north Pacific and had to be towed back to Vancouver. She was eventually scrapped.

Finally, with my veteran's preference plus a war wound pension, my application with the civil service got top priority. Len Crowe hired me as a relief operator and sent me north to Digby Island with orders to report for assignment to its Officer in-Charge, Stave Mellor.

Mellor initially assigned me as relief operator on the CGS Alberni, a lighthouse tender and a pitiful excuse for a ship. She had originally been a coal tender on the Great Lakes, had been purchased during the war by the Department and sent around through the Panama Canal to Prince Rupert. En route, the crew jumped ship at New York. At Panama they put guards aboard while going through the canal to prevent a repeat performance. After one trip. on her I appreciated what they must have experienced since she was the worst sailing vessel I have ever been on.

I was shocked with the radio equipment - it belonged in a museum. After years in the military, using the latest state of the art equipment, I had some initial concern that it would even work, but I prevailed. However, another concern arose. The radio shack was directly over the boilers which made it a real sweat box. I used to sit out on the open deck with the speaker turned up and, when a call was heard, I would dash in, pick up the message and then get back out on deck. I was not the least sorry to leave the vessel a couple of weeks later.

Shortly after, I was assigned to the one man radio beacon/weather station on Langara Island located on the Alaska border at the north end of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Again the equipment belonged in a museum, but it had been updated by George Gilbert's modification for crystal control.

This was a drastic change in lifestyle for my wife Joan, a war bride brought up in London and used to the modern conveniences of life. She suddenly found herself on an island with only one other family, no electric power and a hand pump for water.

Fortunately, she took to it like a duck to water and even became an expert on the end of a crosscut saw when we cut firewood.

When I left the island after a year, I met Bruce Restall and R.A. (Bob) Cole on board the ship. Restall was giving Cole a tour of the stations along the coast. Cole had just been appointed Divisional Engineer following the retirement of L.W. Stephenson.

Cole was a graduate of the University of New Brunswick and had served as a junior officer in the navy on a corvette in the North Atlantic.



R.A. Cole

After the war he worked at odd jobs and was employed as a clam digger in the Queen Charlottes when his father, a Commissioner in the Civil Service Commission, arranged this appointment for him. This was one of his father's last acts before retiring to Victoria. I remember a few years later going to see Cole at his parents' home and finding the Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent there.

My next assignment in 1947 was to Victoria at the Gordonhead station, VAK, under Jim Daniel. The staff members were Frank Arnaud, Jack Shaw and Charlie Blacklock. I replaced Don Mitchell who had been promoted to a Radio Inspector position in Victoria. Jim Daniel, finding out I did not know the American Morse code, put me on graveyard shift until I learned it.

While on shift at about 01:30 AM on August 13, 1947, a distress call was broadcast by the *SS Diamond Knot* who had been rammed by the *Fenn Victory* off Race Rocks in fog. The *Fenn Victory* suffered very little damage. Being the closest coast station, I took control of the distress and alerted the standby salvage vessel *Sudbury* who set sail immediately for Race Rocks.

When the *Sudbury* arrived at the scene, the Captain of the stricken vessel refused assistance saying that the vessel's owners had dispatched a tug from Seattle and wanted her towed there. Despite a warning from the skipper of the *Sudbury* that she would never make it, her Captain stuck to his orders. Finally, at about 09:30 AM, the Seattle tug took her in tow but, as predicted, she had barely reached U.S. waters off Port Angeles when she sank.

It was an unfortunate decision made by the ship's owners. The *Sudbury*, at that time, was the largest and most powerful salvage tug on the west coast of North America, and with her powerful water pumps could undoubtedly have kept the vessel afloat and towed her to the nearby Esquimalt Dockyard. The *Diamond Knot* had been carrying 150,000 cases of tinned salmon, making it the largest insurance claim at that time. The claim was finally settled when 200,000 tins were salvaged by sucking them up with a vacuum hose.

I soon became proficient in the Morse telegraph code and went on the regular swing shift. Soon after, I passed my "*Barrier Exam*" which was given by Don Mitchell and later successfully passed my examination for a first class certificate. My examiner this time was Eric Turner who later opened the Kelowna office in 1950.

In 1948, the service took over the Spring Island Loran station that had been established by the US Coast Guard during WWII. This required hiring additional operators, among them Ernie Coe who later became a Radio Inspector in Kelowna. R.H.M. Lobb was the technician in charge of this station.

At about the same time, a new radiobeacon station was built at Amphitrite Point, near Ucluelet, with Barclay Stuart in charge. This site later became a major Canadian Coast Guard station.

In 1947 or 1948, Reg Woodman, a radio operator at Digby Island and an epileptic, was drowned in nearby Dodds Cove when he suffered an attack and fell face down in a few feet of water.



Herb Holt

In 1949 I was reassigned to Digby Island and moved into one half of the duplex dwelling. Stave Mellor was officer-in-charge but shortly after was moved to Alert Bay.

Herbert Holt took over temporarily from Mellor until Brian Harrison came north a few months later.

Other staff members were Armour Pyke, who had given me my amateur exam pre-war; Jack Leeming, who later became a radio inspector in Victoria; Bill Johnston, who later held a series of radio inspector appointments, culminating as District Manager, Victoria; and Les Tickner.

In the late 40's, a lighthouse radiotelephone service was established on 1792 kHz. For the first time many of these stations, which had formerly only had contact with the outside world via their quarterly supply vessel, now had daily communication with the nearest coast station.

Later, in the 60's, this service was replaced by the B.C. Telephone Co., which contracted to provide a VHF radio telephone service to all west coast lighthouses.

In 1950, the first monitoring installation was made in a back room at the Pt. Grey station.. State of the art General Radio precision measurement equipment together with an RCA AR88LF receiver were supplied from Ottawa.

An Ottawa technician made the installation with assistance from Sid Woods from

our Radio Workshop. Initially, monitoring was restricted to below 30 MHz but VHF capability was added later.



Read

Vern Read was appointed as the monitoring operator and this service was only open weekdays except when special assignments were required.

In 1950, the radiobeacon station at Cape St. James, VAM, located on the extreme southern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, suddenly became a vital link in the Korean war airlift. I was sent out as officer-in-charge to establish a continuous radiobeacon and an hourly weather reporting service. The staff was increased to four operators and accommodation provided for two married families and two bachelors. The \$50 a month isolation pay was a strong incentive since that was good money at the time.

In 1959, Jim Condon, one of the bachelor operators, fell and hit his forehead on the edge of a 45 gallon steel drum, fracturing his skull. After getting medical advice via radiophone from Dr. Derby of the Bella Bella Mission Hospital, I sent a message to the Superintendent, Andy Gray, who arranged for an R.C.A.F. rescue plane to pick up Condon the next morning.

Unfortunately, due to the sea conditions at the time, the Cansoe aircraft could only land in the nearest sheltered cove 6 or 8 miles away. Mr. Diggins, the lighthouse keeper, and I had to take Condon in the station's 14-foot open boat to meet the plane.

We had to buck fairly heavy seas and tide all the way and, while the journey probably only took 3 to 4 hours, it seemed more like 12. It was fortunate that we took lots of gas because we had to refill the outboard motor several times. We finally got Condon aboard the plane which took off immediately for Vancouver, and we headed back.

The return trip was even worse since the tide had changed and the wind was increasing in intensity. I do not know how long it took but it seemed to take forever - we were soaked to the bone.

On arrival, I jumped ashore and slipped on some seaweed. Before I could regain my feet, a wave dragged me back into the cold north Pacific. Fortunately, Mr. Diggins had sense enough not to come to my rescue or I might have been crushed between the boat and the rocks. He instead pulled out clear and let me swim to him. When I finally made it ashore the ladies met us with hot coffee well laced with rum. I soon got into a hot tub for a good soak but shivered for ~ays afterwards.

Condon arrived in Vancouver and was immediately rushed to hospital for an

emergency operation. It was successful but he was off his feet for a period. I ran into him in 1987 and he still bears the scar. Currently he is an operator at the Canadian Coast Guard station, VAK, located at Sooke.

Cape St. James is much like Triangle Island: wide open to the same stormy Queen Charlotte Sound and experiencing the same wild winds. Like Triangle, it is rocky with a cover of tundra grass. The buildings were heavily braced with cables over the roofs anchoring them to the bedrock. When we arrived, the island was plagued with rats. Fortunately, our Labrador dog, Suzy, became a superb rat catcher and every morning we would find a dozen or so rats laid out on our doorstep. By the time we left the station two years later, rats were very scarce.

When I left Cape St. James I was appointed back to Gordonhead, VAK, but on arrival in Victoria my orders were changed. I became a radio technician in the Radio Workshop with Bruce Restall as my new boss.

Staff in the workshop at that time included Bruce Restall as officer-in-charge, Sid Woods, Dick Lobb, Neil McTavish and myself as Radio Technicians, Ted Whitehead as Construction Foreman and Bill Fleming as the Rigger.

Later on, Neil McTavish left to become officer-in-charge at Bull Harbour and a year later replaced Eric Turner as Radio Inspector at Kelowna. When Neil left the radio workshop, he was replaced by Frank Arnaud who later left to become officer-in-charge at Digby Island and was replaced by "Bim" Bayliss.

In 1951, the Department acquired three WWII frigates. Two of them, the Stonetown and the St. Catherines, were converted into weatherships for assignment to ocean station POPPA. This required recruiting additional radio operators to supply each vessel with 16 operators and one operator-in-charge. This same year Jack Bowerman retired and was replaced by Andy Gray. One of Gray's first acts was to move his divisional headquarters from Victoria to Vancouver. Sid Jones replaced Gray as officer-in-charge at Point Grey.

In the late 40's, the National Research Council had installed a radar on the 1st Narrows Bridge in Vancouver as an aid to marine navigation in this narrow congested waterway.

The Council had also installed a low power single channel radiophone on 1630 kHz to communicate with passing vessels. By 1953, the need for a better radiophone with 1630, 2182, 2318 and 2366 kHz capability became urgent. At that time, Basil Irvine in Vancouver looked after the equipment on the bridge. He brought the matter to the attention of Jim Kitchin who, in the absence of Andy Gray, arranged for Roy Powell to install one of his Norpack units.

A week or so later I arrived in town to install some equipment on the CGS Alexander McKenzie. I was summoned into Andy Gray's office where I was instructed to investigate complaints by the signal staff about this new piece of equipment. I was horrified with what I found. I had heard rumours about Norpack equipment but could hardly believe what I found. With authority from Gray, I stopped payment and instructed Powell to get his equipment off the bridge. I then went to the local Marconi office where I met Duncan Black for the first time and bought a suitable replacement set which Black then installed after making some minor modifications.

Shortly after this, Andy Gray retired and Bob Cole became the new Divisional Superintendent.

In 1954, the world's first microwave controlled fog alarm was developed by the National Research Council. It was installed on Holland Rock and controlled from the Barret Rock lighthouse at the entrance of Prince Rupert Harbour. The following year a similar installation was made on Lookout Island at the entrance of Kyuquot Harbour and was controlled from the Spring Island Loran station. During the latter installation, and while ashore, a storm came up and we were stranded there for about 36 hours without food or blankets.

The microwave equipment performed exceptionally well but the mechanical controllers which operated the gas engines, the air compressors and the fog alarm itself were fraught with problems. The systems were finally abandoned after a few years of costly troublesome service.

In 1953, a new radiobeacon station was built on McInnis Island at the entrance to Millbank Sound which was to serve as a navigation aid for the bauxite ore ships going into Kitimat. Dave McLeod was the station operator who assisted with the equipment installation.

McLeod had graduated from Sprott Shaw School in Vancouver in the depression years. At the time, he was unable to find employment, so he went to Britain and signed up with the British Marconi Co. and sailed on various British merchant ships as a radio operator. During WWII he was twice on ships that were torpedoed. The last time he spent a couple of weeks in a lifeboat before being picked up and taken to Halifax.

While recuperating there in hospital, he fell in love with and married his Acadian French nurse, Adeline. He then swallowed the anchor and returned to Vancouver with his bride and became an instructor at Sprott Shaw. When the school closed in the 50's, he joined the Department and was sent out to Langara Island. A year later he was assigned to McInnis Island. ~n the early 60's, he became a Radio Inspector in Vancouver. In the early 70's, he had to take early retirement on medical grounds and died shortly after of a massive heart attack.

In 1954, a site selection tour was conducted for a new monitoring station location. After a tour of Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, it was determined that the best site would be in the agricultural area near Ladner which had extremely good ground conductivity and a very low noise level. The station was finally built in this area in 1957 on land rented from the Canadian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation. It was staffed with Vern Read as officer-in-charge and four monitoring operators.

In, or around 1955, Duncan Black was hired as the new Divisional Engineer. Black had originally taught school in Saskatchewan and in WWII had become an engineer with the Marconi Co. in Montreal on its wartime production program. At war's end, he transferred to their Vancouver office as a sales engineer.

In 1956, the saga of the West Coast Radio Service came to an end when, on a Canada wide basis, the marine radio and the aviation services were amalgamated into the Telecommunications Branch which had two divisions, Telecommunications Operations and Radio Regulations. In this region the Operations Division was headed up by O.H. Quealey and Radio Regulations by Bob Cole.

One final item in the story of this service. In 1956, Miss Marjory V. Haynes retired after 35 years service. She had joined the service in 1921 as a young clerk typist under E.J. Haughton and had spent her entire career in the Victoria office. Shortly after her retirement, she and Jack Bowerman were married after a courtship which had lasted many years.

The wheel made a full circle from marine to combination with air service and back to marine under the Coast Guard. In the 70's, the old marine stations were separated from the air service to become a part of the newly created Coast Guard.

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*Note:*

*Hopefully, Larry's story from 1989 onward will eventually be available .*

*Laval D.*