

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT

*Radio and the Flood of '48*

~~~~ 2022 Edition ~~~~



Cover Title: The title and cover layout were inspired by the short-lived newspaper *The Voice of Vanport* whose motto was "News of Vanport – By Vanporters – For Vanporters."

Cover Photo: One of the several ham radio stations set up at the Red Cross Portland headquarters during the disaster. A WRL Globe Trotter transmitter is paired with a Hammarlund HQ-129-X receiver. The exhausted expressions tell the story of the long hours served by volunteers during the emergency.

(Photo courtesy of Portland Red Cross Archives).

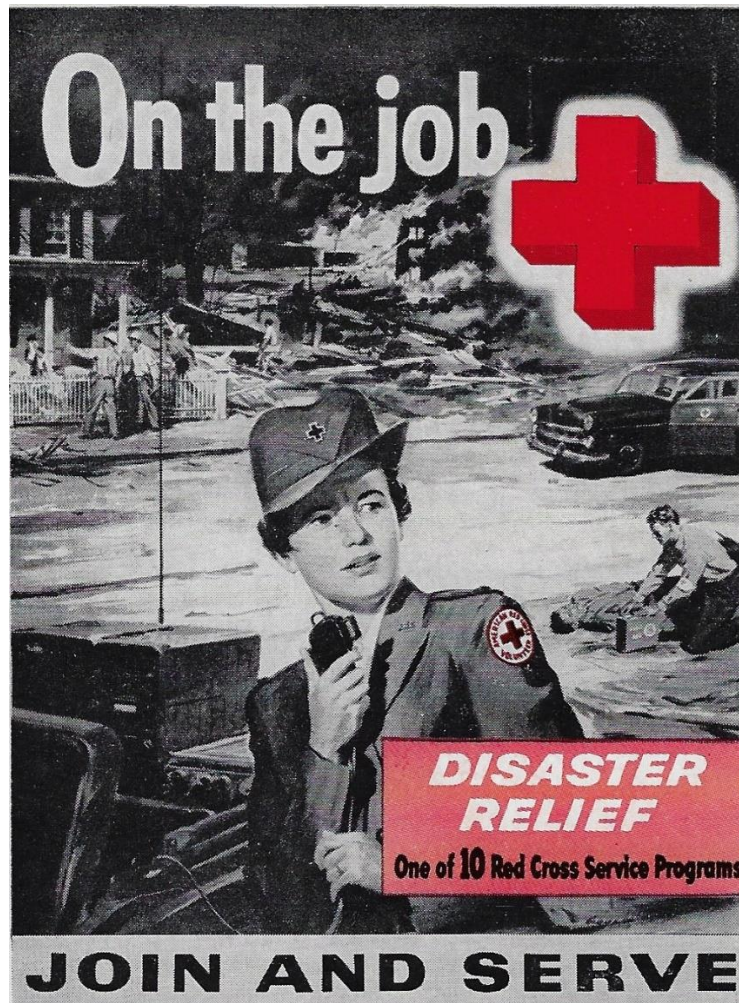
Page Opposite: Red Cross Recruiting postcard, 1956 Campaign

# **The Voices of Vanport Radio and the Flood of '48**

2022 Edition

By

Dan Howard



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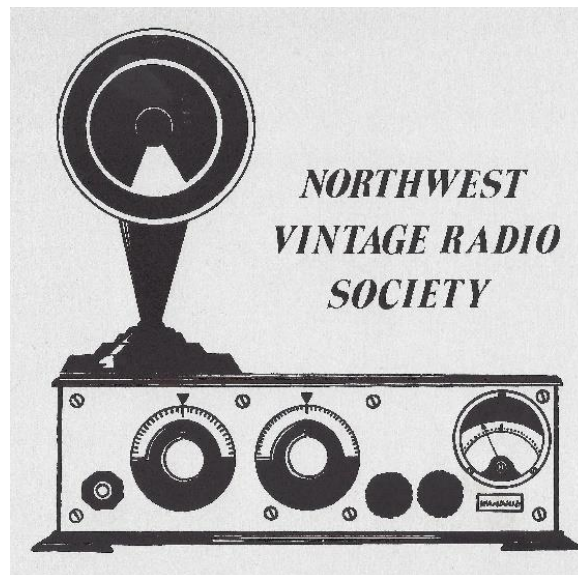
By Dan Howard

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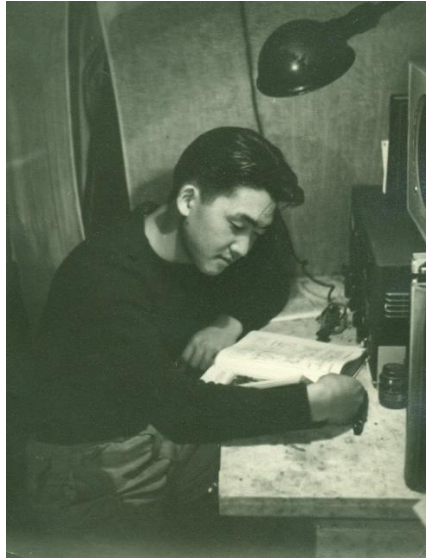


# Voices of Vanport

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*Joe Naemura W7GXA 1941*

## **Dedication**

The Voices of Vanport is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joe Naemura, W7CG, W7GXA. Members of the Naemura Family were among the many Portlanders who lost their Vanport homes on Memorial Day, 1948.

## **Introduction**

To the surprise of many, radio, as a leading communication medium in its day, played a seemingly out-sized part in the 1948 flood event. Through these pages I'll share the results of my research into two important questions:

1. How did the 1948 flood impact commercial and amateur radio stations?
2. What roles did commercial and amateur radio stations play in providing warning, informing the community, and coordinating aid during the emergency?

It's important to acknowledge the toll that the 1948 flood took on property and lives throughout the Columbia River Basin. And it's also important to acknowledge the issues of inequity surrounding the Vanport Community. Now, almost seventy-five years later, the thought of the Vanport flood still invokes feelings of sadness, loss, and frustration.

Much has already been written about the flood. By recounting a few weeks of the region's 100-year radio history, and giving ear to the Voices of Vanport, we hope to add a previously untold piece to the mosaic.

Many people freely helped with this project and the 2022 update. Please refer to the list of acknowledgements at the end of the story.

Dan Howard 2022

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 1 – Origins of Vanport***

On the Preceding Page: Aerial view of the completed Vanport housing project ca. 1943. OHS negative #68762, Album 326, File 1689 (Courtesy Oregon Historical Society)



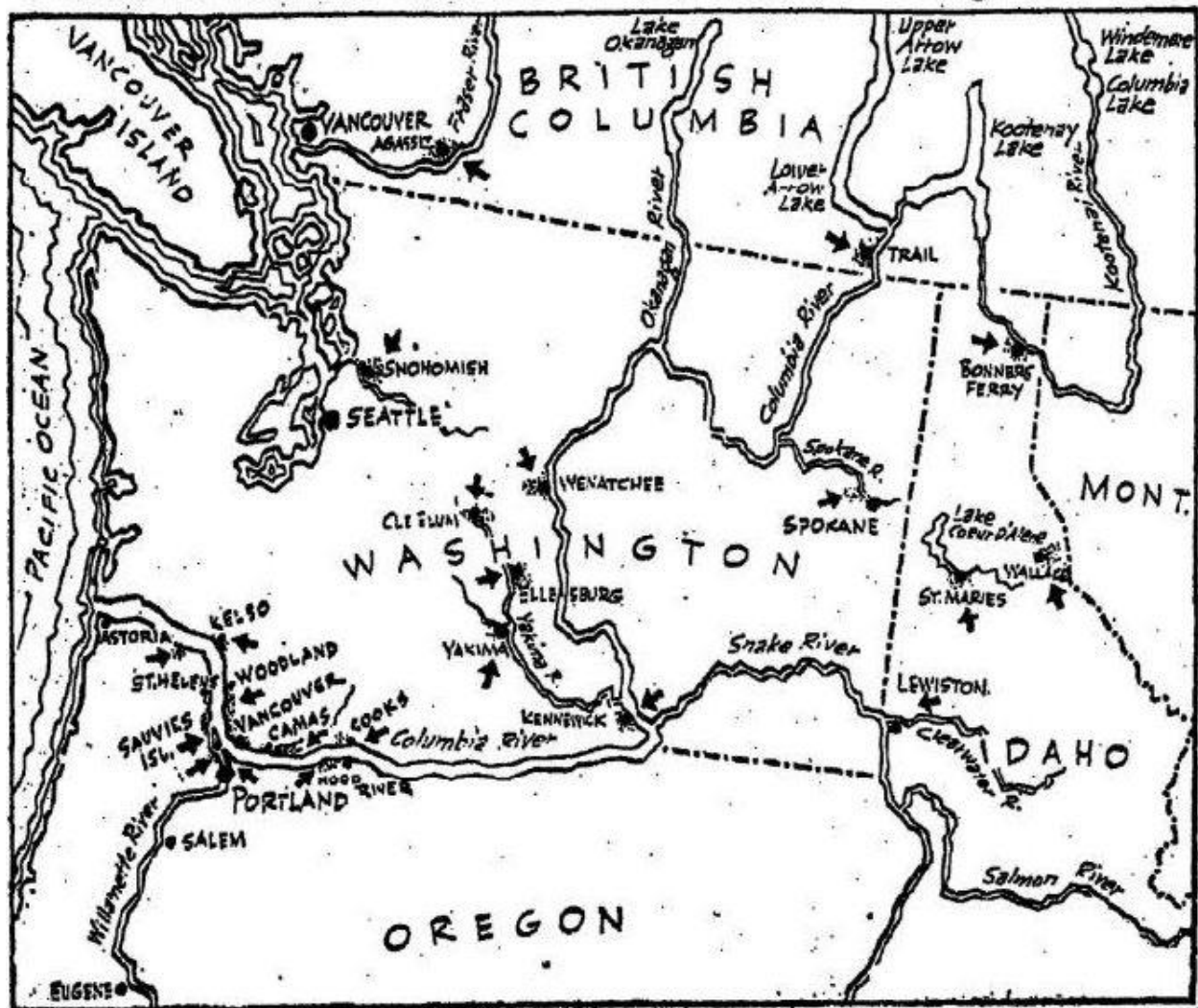


Figure 1-1 "Where Northwest's Floods are Wreaking Havoc." Arrows indicate where damage has been caused by flooding and where future damage is expected as the Columbia continues to rise. (The Oregonian 5/29/48)

## The 1948 Flood

The Columbia River drainage basin accepts water from British Columbia and most of the northwestern United States (Figure 1-1).

In May-June 1948, the perfect combination of precipitation and snowmelt drove many of the Columbia's tributaries into flood stage simultaneously. In turn, the Columbia River was outside of its banks for weeks on end as the surplus water worked its way down to the Pacific Ocean. Communities from British Columbia to

Astoria, Oregon, were under flood watch and many suffered significant losses.

For many Portlanders, the most familiar part of the 1948 Flood occurred on Sunday May 30, 1948, when the Vanport community in North Portland was suddenly flooded. In a matter of hours, a city with schools, grocery stores, a post office, and homes for thousands was rendered uninhabitable by flood waters that reached 15' deep.

So, what were the origins of Vanport and what made it poised for destruction?

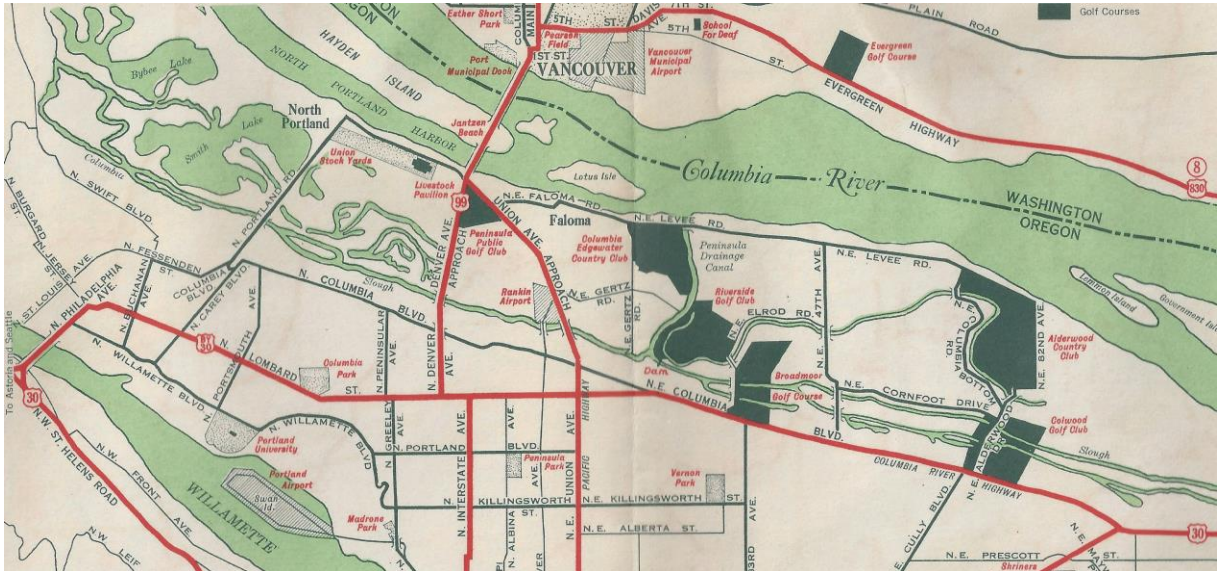


Figure 1-2 A 1936 gas station map of North Portland shows the network of lakes, streams, and sloughs that ran through the future sites of Vanport, Delta Park, and the Portland-Columbia airport.

## "8400 Acres of Overflow Land Reclaimed"<sup>1</sup>

The Columbia River emerges from its narrow gorge just east of Portland.

Between Troutdale and the confluence with the Willamette at Kelly Point, the Columbia broadens and is bordered to the south by a verdant flood plain. A complex of creeks and sloughs drains the Southshore area from east to west.

The Columbia Slough borders the flood plain to the south. The Oregon Slough separates the flood plain from Hayden Island to the north.

Until the early 1900's the flood plain functioned naturally as it always had; absorbing frequent spring and winter overflows.

<sup>1</sup> The headline "8400 Acres of Overflow Land Reclaimed" topped a 1922 *Engineering World*

article proclaiming the progress of drainage districts in achieving their goals.



Figure 1-3 The Columbia Slough ca. 1900

Between 1907 and 1909 railroad lines were laid across the flood plain to link Portland with Vancouver, Washington. The Spokane, Portland & Seattle (SP&S) line ran straight across on a raised sandy “fill”<sup>2</sup> about a mile west of the current location of Interstate 5. The Union Pacific track<sup>3</sup> curved in from the southeast and a switchman’s shelter was erected where the lines joined midway across.

Although not designed as a flood control structure, the SP&S railroad fill comprised the first artificial barrier to floodwaters in the Southshore drainage.<sup>4</sup>

In the following years, publicly owned drainage districts were formed to control flooding and to dewater portions of the Southshore flood plain so that the land could be converted from grazing and

farm uses to industrial and commercial purposes.

The area west of the railroad fill (the Smith and Bybee Lakes area) was not diked.<sup>5</sup>

### **Peninsula Drainage District No. 1**

From the railroad fill east to the Denver Ave fill<sup>6</sup>, Peninsula Drainage District No. 1 “Pen 1” built additional levies and other infrastructure to control flooding in the area where Vanport would eventually be built. The northerly 1000’ of Pen 1<sup>7</sup> was a little higher than the rest. The stockyards and the livestock exchange were located here. Most of the rest of the 951-acres in Pen 1 was used for agriculture.

### **Peninsula Drainage District No. 2**

Peninsula Drainage District No. 2 “Pen 2” managed the Delta Park Area.

### **Multnomah County Drainage Dist**

Multnomah County Drainage District “MCDD” created infrastructure to control flooding in the areas that would become the Portland Airport and Airbase, farms and industrial areas east to Fairview.

In 1922, headlines announced that 8,400 of “overflow” had been reclaimed.

<sup>2</sup> A temporary work trestle was built first. Then, sandy material removed from the St. Johns cut was dumped over the tracks to create an earthen berm to carry the tracks. Clark pg. 352.

<sup>3</sup> The Union Pacific’s trestle was covered over with sandy material from the Peninsula tunnel project. Clark pg. 352.

<sup>4</sup> In 1933, Multnomah County built the Portland Road fill immediately west, and parallel to, the railroad fill. In essence, the two fills form one

structure. Clark pg. 354. For this story, they will be jointly referred to as the railroad fill.

<sup>5</sup> Large portions would eventually be filled, however. A portion south of Smith and Bybee Lakes became the St. John’s landfill. And, to the north and west, fill materials were deposited to create high ground for the Rivergate Industrial Area and the marine terminals.

<sup>6</sup> The fill under Denver Avenue was built by Multnomah County in 1915-1916. Clark pg. 350.

<sup>7</sup> Along Swift Blvd (now Marine Drive).



## Building the Community of Vanport

Most of the land in Pen 1 continued to be farmed through the 1920's and 1930's. One of the first non-agricultural uses was when KGW created a radio transmitter site in the northeast corner of the lowlands in the early 1930's. They were joined on their 90-acre site by sister-station KEX in 1935.

A 1930's survey of the Pen 1 drainage area noted deficiencies in the levies.<sup>8</sup> Private contractors worked to improve the levies from plans prepared by The Corps of Engineers.

When the improvements were completed in September, 1941, control of the levies was turned back over to Pen 1.<sup>9</sup>

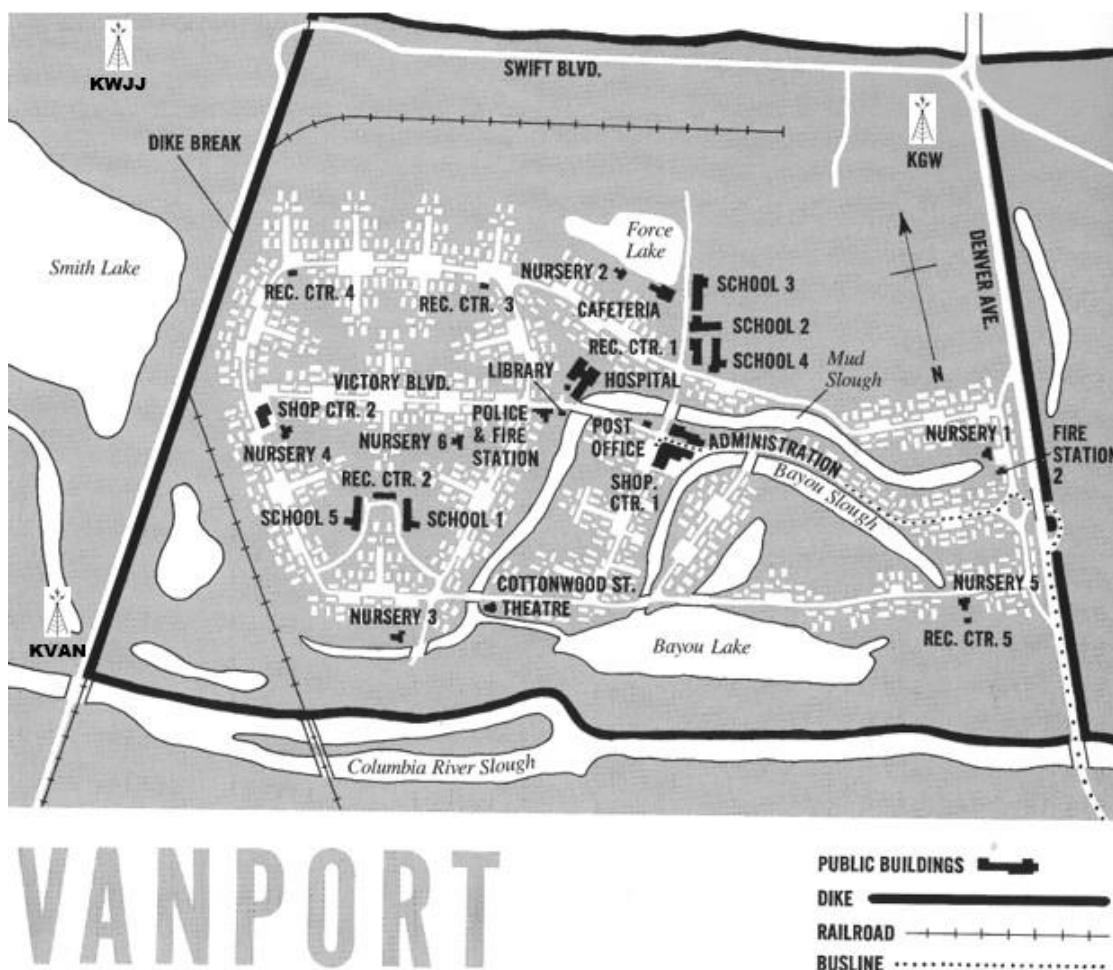


Figure 1-4 Vanport community map from Manly Maben's book Vanport enhanced to show the locations of the three area radio stations.

<sup>8</sup> The survey did not address the privately-owned railroad fill that formed the de facto westerly dike.

<sup>9</sup> Clark pg. 350

By the summer of 1942, Henry Kaiser's Portland-area shipyards were employing about 46,000 people building ships for the war effort. As contracts for more ships were let, Kaiser expected to expand its yards and double its employment with most of the new workers coming to Portland from other parts of the country. However, the Portland housing stock was already overtaxed. In July, Kaiser proposed construction of 10,000 additional dwelling units (4,000 in Vancouver, and 6,000 in Portland) to accommodate the influx of workers.

Within Pen 1, 647 acres of lowlands were available for potential development, and the land was ideally located between Kaiser's three Vancouver and Portland shipyards. Though the land was low and had a long history of flooding, the recently improved levies provided some assurance safety.

The Federal Government acquired the land through condemnation and construction began on Vanport, a federal housing project. Site preparation began at Vanport in 1942. The first dwelling units became available in mid-December and the project was substantially completed in August 1943.

The task of creating a city, complete with services and utilities, in just a few months, during wartime was a staggering undertaking requiring the efforts of 7,000 men and women over the course of the project. Prefabrication and production line techniques were used to expedite the project.

The finished city consisted of 703 apartment buildings and 17 multiple dwelling units comprising 9,942 dwellings.

Services included 181 service annexes, 45 special public and service buildings, an administrative center, a US Post Office, five grade schools, six nursery schools, a sheriff's office, three fire stations, five social buildings, a library, a movie theatre, a 130-bed hospital, ten ice houses, service stations, and grocery stores.<sup>10</sup>

From the perspective of some who lived there, "[t]he buildings were quickly and cheaply built. With the exception of a few single-story buildings at the east end of the city, all of the apartment buildings were constructed using an identical design. On the first floor, there were six two-bedroom apartments with single-bedroom apartments located on each end of the ground floor.

---

<sup>10</sup> Celebration pg. 9



**The NEW VANPORT**  
NORTH COTTONWOOD AND NORTH LAKE GA 3027

**Grand Opening TONIGHT!**

We Are Proud to Present the Program  
Commemorating the Completion of  
VANPORT CITY

We Cordially Invite You to Attend the  
**BIG OUTDOOR CELEBRATION**  
TONIGHT AT 8 O'CLOCK  
and to Remain for the Screen  
Program. All Proceeds of the Theatre  
Will Be Donated to Vanport Hospital

Entertainment by  
**The RADIO STARS of KGW**

**ABE BERCOVITZ AND HIS KGW ORCHESTRA**  
Homer Welch-Neva Clark-Ron Salt-Glenn Shelley  
Johnny Harrell-Ralph Hamilton-Patsy Bauman

**ON THE SCREEN!**  
ERROL FLYNN  
ANN SHERIDAN  
**"EDGE OF DARKNESS"**

**And**

ALAN LADD  
HELEN WALKER  
MARIE McDONALD  
**"LUCKY JORDAN"**

Figure 1-5 Advertisement for the August 12th Vanport grand opening celebration (Oregonian 8/12/43)

Access to the apartments was via a stairwell situated between every two apartments. Four of these apartment buildings were connected to a central plant that provided heat, hot water, and electricity. Storage space for each apartment building was also located in that building, as well as a laundry facility with four wringer washing machines."<sup>11</sup>

Only people employed in defense industries were allowed to apply for housing in Vanport.<sup>12</sup>

Upon arrival in Vanport, most families were assigned to a cramped two-

bedroom apartment. "Large families were assigned adjoining two-bedroom apartments on the second floor in the same stairwell with a passage through the wall so the two apartments could function as one."<sup>13</sup>

"There was no insulation in the outer walls of the building and no sound-proofing material between the inner walls, only plasterboard nailed to the studding separated the rooms. Thus, we could hear loud conversations or radios in other apartments quite easily."<sup>14</sup>



*Figure 1-6 Relaxing in a Vanport apartment (The Bo's'n's Whistle 11/26/1942)*

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<sup>11</sup> Skovgaard

<sup>12</sup> Clark pg. 365

<sup>13</sup> Skovgaard

<sup>14</sup> Skovgaard

## Vanport After the War

As the end of World War II neared, fewer new ships were needed. Demand for Vanport housing fell off as defense jobs went away and workers left. As more workers left, remaining residents "in the western part of Vanport were relocated to apartments in the center or eastern end of the project, or they were encouraged to find housing outside of Vanport."<sup>15</sup>

Housing at Vanport had always been intended to be temporary. From time-to-time, particularly after the surrender of Japan, some of the housing was declared surplus. "October [1945] saw the destruction of 1,204 dwelling units west of Lake Street. Twenty-four 14-unit buildings went to Los Angeles for veteran's housing. Others went to Bremerton, to Corvallis, and to Eugene."<sup>16</sup> By May, 1948, 240 buildings, containing approximately 4,000 dwelling units had been removed."<sup>17</sup> "All of the housing at Vanport west of Meadows Avenue and most of the housing between Meadows Avenue and Lake Street had been removed."<sup>18</sup>

Veterans returning to Portland with families absorbed much of the remaining housing at Vanport. Policies were changed to permit veterans to rent the apartments formerly reserved for defense workers. "Early 1946 was the transition of Vanport from the nation's largest community of war workers to a city of veterans. Establishment of

Vanport Center College by the state board of higher education completed the metamorphosis."<sup>19</sup>

## A Quick Time Out

Before flood waters entered Vanport at the end of May, floods had already hit several communities in Central Washington and the Willamette River was backing up into Portland's downtown and beyond.

Part 2 has the stories of some Washington communities that were impacted as the flood moved down the Columbia. Part 3 looks at impacts on greater Portland and talks about the disaster planning. We'll pick up the Vanport story in Part 4.



*Figure 1-7 KXL-sponsored dance at Vanport Community Building featuring Byron "Arkie" Benedict and his Jolly Cowboys (Vanport Tribune 4/29/48) (Courtesy PSU Archives)*

<sup>15</sup> Skovgaard

<sup>16</sup> Old Man River

<sup>17</sup> Clark pg. 359

<sup>18</sup> Clark pg. 359

<sup>19</sup> Old Man River

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 2 – Flooding in Central  
Washington***

On the Preceding Page: "Grand Coulee Dam sees record flows" (J Boyd Ellis, Arlington, Washington)





*Figure 2-1 KPQ's transmitter building goes "rafting." (Wenatchee World photo)*

## KPQ Wenatchee Goes "Maritime Mobile"

The KPQ transmitter site, once known as the "KPQ Ranch," is a flat grassy patch on the westerly shore of the Columbia just downstream from the confluence with the Wenatchee River.

As the 1948 flood surge moved down the Columbia, and water rose inch-by-inch, KPQ station engineers, aided by a team of house movers, jacked the transmitter building several feet off its foundation. Then, six huge war-surplus rubber assault pontoons were inserted under the building. Amazingly, when water overtopped the building's foundation, the 30-ton building simply floated.

KPQ was "on the air!" And maritime mobile! (or as close to it as they would ever want to be). The building was off of its foundation for six weeks, at times floating in as much as 13 feet of water.

Though the building floated, the coaxial cable feedlines to the transmitting towers were lost early. "To keep the station in operation, Chief Engineer George Frese climbed one of the towers in the middle of the night, in a howling gale, to hang a shunt feed wire. He literally swam around the transmitter building with a pair of pliers in his teeth."<sup>20</sup> Throughout the emergency, power and phone lines to the building were maintained, keeping KPQ on the air.

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<sup>20</sup> The Oscillator pg. 20

Operators commuted to and from the transmitter building in rowboats and worked wearing rubber life jackets.

As you might expect, the radio raft with the transmitter building did not prove to be especially seaworthy. A wing of the L-shaped building was used to store some heavy equipment and thousands of 78 rpm records. Lacking the support of a rigid foundation, the old building timbers soon began to sag and the raft developed a significant list.

Announcer Bob Richardson was on duty when a crack began to open between the storage wing and the main building. While he was reading an ad live on the air, a key beam broke and the building tipped, spilling records into the flood water. Rather than the planned announcement, listeners heard Bob scream "...the beam broke – we're sinking!" This news, of course, brought folks from all over the area to watch the building flounder.

Additional KPQ staff quickly arrived and began using rafts and boats to ferry what they could to dry land and restore trim to the structure. Though they removed most of the equipment from the storage wing, the building continued to list badly. In a last-ditch effort to save the transmitter and keep the station on the air, the engineers used saws and axes to cut the storage wing free from the main building. Once freed, the storage wing quickly sank, carrying thousands of records to the bottom with it. To everyone's relief the remaining structure righted itself and the transmitter remained afloat until the water eventually receded.

Compare the two photos of KPQ's radio raft. Figure 2-2 shows the building intact. Figure 2-1 was taken after the storage wing sank. Note the empty rafts to the right of the building and the hole in the siding.



*Figure 2-2 KPQ's transmitter building before the storage wing broke off and sank." (The Oscillator)*



### **KPQ's Contributions**

KPQ's broadcasts are credited with saving at least one Wenatchee Valley town during the flood.

Late one night a frantic telephone call came into the station from Cashmere, 12 miles northwest. The Wenatchee River was washing away a dike and more workers were needed. KPQ broadcasted the plea and soon 400 volunteers were on site.

Cashmere's stock of sandbags was quickly exhausted. 8,000 bags were available in Wenatchee, but there were no trucks to haul them. Another radio plea brought trucks of all sizes to the Centennial flour mill to load and haul the sand to Cashmere. The dike held and the town was saved.

### **KPQ History**

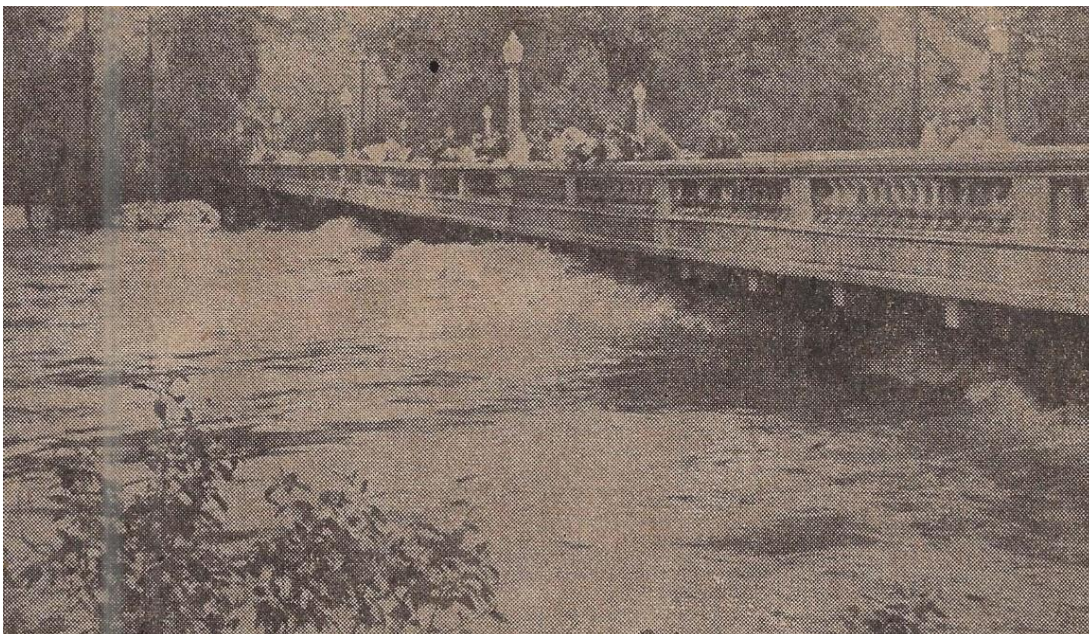
KPQ was first licensed in Seattle with the call letters KGCL on September 3, 1926. In 1928, the station's call sign was changed to KPQ.

After a series of ownership and frequency changes, the station was moved from Seattle to Wenatchee.

KPQ began broadcasting on 1210 AM from the Cascadian Hotel in Wenatchee on December 28, 1929. The first transmitting antenna was a wire run out of an eighth-floor window to the roof of an adjacent garage.

In 1937, KPQ leased their current transmitting site along the Columbia River and built a 180-foot tower. An old, small grocery store building was moved in to house the transmitter. The inaugural broadcast from the new site took place on June 27, 1937.

On April 1, 1942, KPQ moved to its present frequency of 560 AM. The old 180-foot tower was replaced with two 300-foot towers and power was increased to 1,000 watts.



*Figure 2-3 Bridge over the Wenatchee River at Cashmere (The Oregonian 5/30/48)*

## A Second Cup of Coffee with Jerry Isenhart<sup>21</sup>

Jerry Isenhart was just a youngster when Wenatchee flooded. Nonetheless, the events at KPQ lead to his career in communication and a lifetime spent in radio broadcasting and community service. With a nod to Jerry's "Second Cup of Coffee" radio interview program, here is his story.



*Figure 2-4 Jerry Isenhart, the new owner of KOZI in March, 1970.*

### How did you get interested with radio?

My dad, Don Isenhart, was close friends with Jim Wallace of KPQ. In 1948, the KPQ studios were located at the foot of 2nd Street in a long narrow building. My dad was operating Isenhart Furniture nearby at 2nd and Wenatchee Ave. So, Dad and Jim spent more than one evening sharing stories and talking

shop and I was often my father's shadow.

In 1957, when I was 13, I became a licensed ham radio operator (K7ABJ) along with my dad and brother (ABH and ABI). Eventually my career in commercial broadcasting drew me away from ham radio (although I have allowed our local ham club free use of our mountain top buildings etc. for 2 meter repeaters).



*Figure 2-5 1950's-vintage neon KPQ sign (Courtesy Christin P - TheNorthwestPast)*

### What was your first job in broadcasting?

While a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student at Wenatchee Valley College, I turned out for football and suffered a concussion. I was so disappointed as I had trained hard to

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<sup>21</sup> The title, "A Second Cup of Coffee," was chosen to pay tribute to an hour-long public interest radio show that aired on KOZI. The live program featured guests from the Chelan community and had an open line for people to call and pose questions. Jerry Isenhart recalled, "We were the new kids in town...so we could ask anything." (From Our Heritage).

make the team. So, I went to KPQ and offered to go with their sportscaster as his engineer just so I could be part of the team.

KPQ hired me and put me on as a board operator on Friday nights, Saturday afternoons and all-day Sunday. I lived at the station as a "button pusher" (they were fully automated).

One of my tasks was to start the station's big diesel generator in the KPQ building on Mission St. I was to start it up and let it run for 15 minutes every week."



*Figure 2-6 The 5<sup>th</sup> St railroad underpass is impassable, May 1948.  
(Courtesy BigBendRailroadHistory)*

### **What do you recall about KPQ and the flood of 1948?**

I remember riding with my dad down 5th Street to the railroad overpass where we had to stop because of the high water. The same thing happened at the foot of Orondo Avenue.

I heard Jim Wallace Sr talk from time to time about the role that KPQ played in the 1948 flood – and the generator at the studio in 1963 was a carry-over of what he had learned. The entire region,

from Pasco and Yakima to the Canadian border, listened to KPQ during the flood of '48.

My dad also shared stories about KPQ's role in 1948.

Many years later, as the owner of KOZI AM 1230 in Chelan, I got to know George Frese (Consulting Engineer) who had been involved in keeping KPQ on the air during the flood in '48.

George shared stories of keeping the AM transmitter on the air during the flood. Somehow, I think Don Peltz was also involved in some of the '48 activities.

As I recall they kept the transmitter building floating by attaching government surplus rafts to it.

I always assumed that my dad, who served in the Navy in WWII as a Surplus Disposal officer, knew exactly where to call to get those rafts to Wenatchee — and that my dad had something to do with them.

I recall from the few times I was in the transmitter building many years later, the transmitter was pretty much a Jim Wallace / George Frese fabrication with transformers, capacitors, and tuning coils etc. all exposed! Later Jim gave up on that transmitter, I'm sure, but he had kept the station on the air for 20 years or more because of his technical skills.

### **Tell us about your experiences at Washington State University**

I transferred to Pullman in the fall of 1965 with plans to pursue a degree in



Electrical Engineering. But after meeting Robert Mott, Chairman of the Dept of Communications, my plans changed I graduated 2 years later with a BA in Communications.

At WSU, I became a very active member of the closely-knit group of students who have since become known as the "Mott Squad." I joined Sigma Delta Chi<sup>22</sup> and was Vice President of the Pullman chapter of Alpha Epsilon Rho.<sup>23</sup>

As Vice President of Alpha Epsilon Rho, I was the Master of Ceremonies of the 1967 Murrow Awards Banquet.

My education at WSU included news assignments to cover Pullman City Hall and news events at Colfax and Moscow, Idaho.

While attending classes at WSU, I was also working for three commercial radio stations in the Palouse, and KPQ when I returned to Wenatchee for holidays and vacations.

I was the host of KWSU AM's morning show, the "Coffee Pot Parade," and the host of the Noon News, as well.

In my senior year I was appointed station manager of KUGR, the campus carrier station.



*Figure 2-7 WSC alumnus Edward R Murrow returning to speak in 1942.*

*Murrow enrolled at WSC in 1926 and participated in one of the very few radio broadcasting courses offered at the time. His 35-year career with CBS radio and television included broadcasting from Europe during World War 2. He flew on 25 Allied combat missions, providing reports from the planes. His offices in London were bombed-out three different times during the Blitz. Throughout it all, Murrow maintained his trademark sparse and grave delivery and his calm demeanor. He is credited with having an unparalleled influence in broadcast journalism.*

*In his memory, WSU presents Murrow Awards to outstanding journalists. (Courtesy Washington State University – was.ude/125/courage)*

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<sup>22</sup> Sigma Delta Chi is an honorary journalism fraternity

<sup>23</sup> Alpha Epsilon Rho is a scholastic honor society recognizing academic achievement among students in the field of electronic media.

## How did you come to own your own radio station?

After graduating from WSU, I joined Bellingham-based broadcast automation leader IGM (International Good Music) as a field engineer and traveled the United States installing and training organizations on the implementation of broadcast automation equipment in stations big and small. I think of my time at IGM as "paid graduate school." While there I made friends with many owners, general managers, sales managers, program directors, and chief engineers, at some of the biggest and best broadcast companies across the nation.

In 1969, the owner of the KOZI AM (Chelan) station approached me about buying the station. The seller said he had followed my achievements at WSU (as publicized by the WSU Student Hometown News Service), and believed that my education and professional skills would make me a successful owner.

I was just 25 years old when I became the owner and general manager of North Central Broadcasting Co and KOZI Radio. I built a radio station, modeled in many ways, after my vision of KPQ.

[Over the course of his 30 years in commercial broadcasting, Jerry expanded his company to include KOZI FM, acquired KULE AM-FM in Ephrata, and built KOHO-FM in Leavenworth.]



*Figure 2-7 KOZI's "Helicopter Santa" calling on homes in the community of Manson, WA December 1983 (Courtesy YouTube)*

## **It seems like your successful career in radio was accompanied by no small amount of service to your community.**

Yes, for 30 years KOZI made our mark by covering the news of the region. The impact that KPQ's treatment of the flood of 1948 and their subsequent role for the next 15 years, must have penetrated my mind.

In 1994, KOZI played precisely the same role for the massive forest fires that ravaged North Central Washington. KOZI broadcasted 24 hours-a-day for nearly two weeks advising listeners in the region of the minute-by-minute status of the worst firestorm to invade the region in decades. All scheduled advertisements during the period were set aside and, with the consent of understanding sponsors, credits were issued for later use.

After moving to Chelan, I joined various civic groups to get to know the community. Eventually I was elected to the school board, became a two-term Chelan City Councilman, and served a term as Mayor.

Margin from a side business selling Icom radios, afforded us a phenomenal mobile news unit for KOZI. All of my broadcast employees carried handheld radios and had 25-watt mobiles in their cars. We also provided radios with the KOZI new frequency for the county sheriff's and city police vehicles, school busses, rural delivery mail carriers, and the passenger boat that travels on Lake Chelan. When there was news in our area, we had it on the air instantly. Our listeners loved it!

### **The WSU Hall of Fame**

For his contributions to journalism and the community, in 2019, Jerry Isenhardt was honored with the Hall of Fame Achievement Award from the Edward R

Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University.



Data and images for Jerry Isenhardt's "interview" were blended together from:

- Isenhardt, Jerry emails spring 2022
- Isenhardt, Jerry phone interview spring 2022
- Murrow.wsu.edu/jerry-isenhardt/
  - Remembering Manson's 1983 Helicopter Santa – Chelan Cams
- Woods, Rufus "Jerry Isenhardt has Historic KOZI Recordings He Wants to Make Public"  
<https://artofcommunityncw.com/2021/10/21/jerry-isenhardt-wants-to-make-public-historical-kozi-recordings/> October 30, 2021.



*Figure 2-8 Jerry Isenhardt at KOZI*

## Three Cities & Three Rivers – Tri-Cities

Washington's "Tri-Cities" (Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco) cluster on either side of the Columbia River about where it turns west and heads for the Pacific. The Yakima River flows into the Columbia from the northwest between Richland and Kennewick. Just south of Pasco, the Snake River flows in from the east.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1948, the Columbia, which had been threatening to flood for two weeks, rose a foot. About the same time the Yakima River, swollen by a cloud burst, became a raging torrent. Overnight, authorities ordered people living along the rivers to leave their homes and by the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> most had.

"Authorities reported their work seriously hampered by a large amount of telephoning, much believed to be

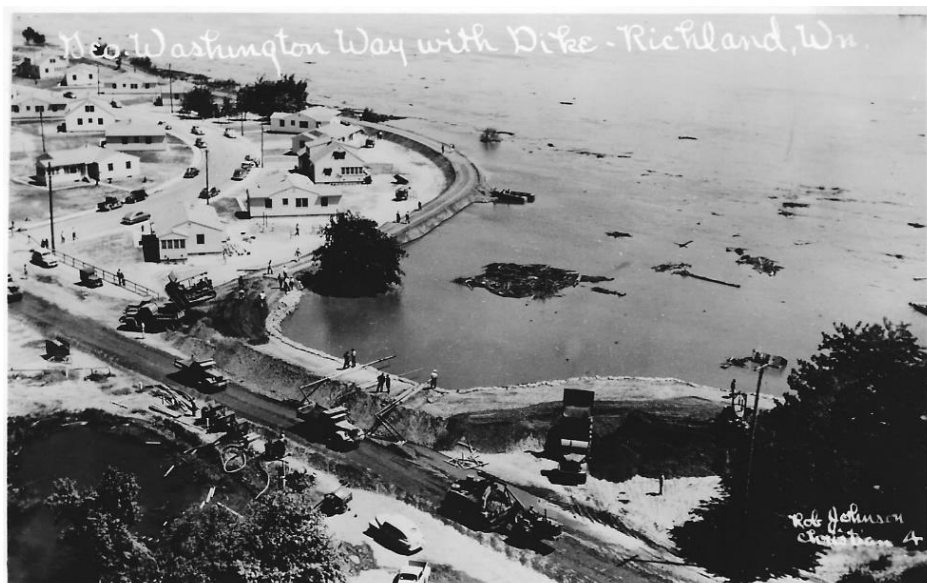
unnecessary, going on between the three towns."<sup>24</sup>

### **KPKW Pasco**

KPKW Pasco (1340 AM), a 250-watt station, was the only commercial broadcaster in the Tri-Cities at the time. The station broadcasted flood warnings and also provided an announcer who toured the area in KPKW's sound truck broadcasting the warning through powerful speakers.

### **Richland**

In Richland, workers worked around the clock to build a dike around the downtown area. The 12 foot tall dike, dubbed "The Miracle Mile," protected the hospital district and residential areas and saved the sewer plant from contamination.



*Figure 2-9 Building the Richland dike.*

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<sup>24</sup> Tri-Cities Herald 5/27/48



Throughout the flood emergency, area hams volunteered time and talents to serve the community. Several of these vignettes are from the pages of the Washington Amateur Radio Traffic System "WARTS" website.

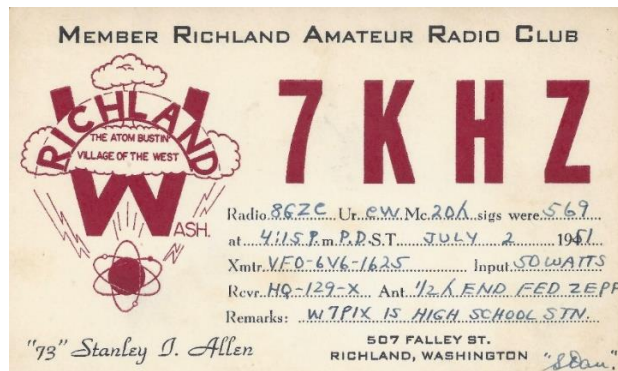


Figure 2-10 Richland ARC QSL card 1951

## Becoming WARTS

After World War II, hams began to regain permissions to get on the air. After serving as a flying radio operator during the war, Harry Lewis settled in Richland and began getting on the air.

Harry Lewis served as Chief of Communications for the Security Department of the Atomic Energy Commission, operators of the nearby Hanford facility. While in Richland, he met and married Mary Smith, a native of Kennewick. Harry, and other local hams were members of the newly formed Richland Amateur Radio Club.

In December, 1947, members of the Richland Amateur Radio Club and other

northwest hams formed "WARTS." The group maintained a daily schedule on 80 meters (phone) for the purpose promoting fraternity, conveying radio messages ("traffic") and responding to emergency situations.

The club first aspired to sign up 25 members; but the group grew to over 50 in just a few months.

## Radio River Watch

Engineer Harry A. Kramer, had a long-standing hobby of carefully studying the behavior of local rivers and had previously worked in flood control in Indiana.

In 1948, while employed at Hanford Works power division, he was assigned to plot the water levels in the Columbia and Yakima Rivers and forecast possible flooding.

As waters began rising that spring, he was especially alarmed about the potential for flooding. He reasoned that getting data on water levels at various upstream stations would be key to accurately forecasting the potential risk to the Tri-Cities and Hanford.<sup>25</sup>

Mr. Kramer contacted Tom Nelson, W7QGN, and Harry Lewis, W7JWJ, with a request to obtain river level information from hams living along the Columbia. Each evening the emergency

<sup>25</sup> Although the idea of an amateur accurately forecasting flood levels on the Columbia seemed far-fetched to me, amateur river-level forecasting was apparently a common hobby. According to Mable Howell Dudley "Before the dams, the old timers could come within inches

of predicting the flood height for that year. Many wagers were made on it. They would keep track of snow depths, weather forecasts and the flood water levels in such rivers as the Fraser in Canada, the Snake, and others that feed into the Columbia..."

"Columbia Basin Net" convened to exchange information by radio.

In April, 1948, Kramer gave the Atomic Energy Commission and General Electric his prediction of a 1948 crest at 352 feet (24 feet above normal). As the spring wore on Kramer continued honing his forecasts, sometimes hourly. Meanwhile Richland's flood committee acted upon Kramer's predictions and built new dikes and broadened and raised others

In June, the Columbia River rose to 351.7 feet as Kramer had predicted. Because of the accuracy of his work an estimated 3,500 homes were saved, the sanitary and water systems were spared, and production at Hanford was not impacted.

For his forecasting, General Electric recognized Harry Kramer with the Charles A Coffin award.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, he was named "Tri-Citian" of the year and the Harry Kramer Center in Richland was named for him. The "Hero of the 1948 Flood" died in Richland in 1974.

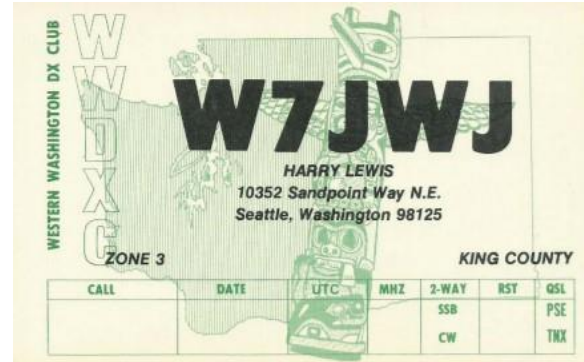


Figure 2-11 Harry Lewis QSL card  
(Courtesy W8JYZ)

### Handling Traffic – Harry Lewis's Story<sup>27</sup>

"The series of floods began at the junction of the Yakima and Columbia Rivers...." "At the time I was employed by the Atomic Energy Commission and stationed at the Richland Airport...."

As the crest reached Richland, Harry had the opportunity to fly a small plane out of the airport on an inspection tour. "Between Richland and the mighty Columbia stood a million-dollar dike built in just three days by the Army Corps of Engineers. Standing every few hundred feet along the dike was an amateur radio volunteer, most from the Richland radio club and most members of WARTS." At the Richland "Y" where the Yakima enters the Columbia stood a little red barn with only the weathervane on the roof protruding from the surface.

"For the next three days following the peak flooding, I operated ham radio from a military tent stationed on a high bank of the Columbia. 1,500 messages were originated, and all signed by military or civilian officials."

<sup>26</sup> "A Baptism by Water"

<sup>27</sup> All quotes from Harry Lewis's account of the Columbia River Flood.



*Figure 2-12 Mary Lewis QSL card (Courtesy W8JYZ)*

## **Special Delivery – Mary & Diana Lewis<sup>28</sup>**

In June 1948, Mary Lewis (future W7QGP) was expecting the couple's first child.

Although she had plans to deliver at Kadlec Hospital in Richland, the roads were impassable because of the flooding; the main street of Kennewick was under three feet of water.

"Sirens screamed as a National Guard truck with police escort pulled up to the loading bay of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital." "Attendants believing the

sirens heralded arrival of an emergency case, rushed out. They looked in the back of the truck and searched high and low for the patient. Confusion reigned."

Mary, who had already walked into the hospital under her own power, was surprised to learn later, that she was the cause of the kerfuffle. "She had merely obtained a ride in the truck in order to get to Pasco to have a baby." On the morning of June 11<sup>th</sup>, Diana Lewis (future K7ETY) was born.

<sup>28</sup> All quotes from "Warts is Recognized."



## WARTS Volunteers

WARTS founder Rylie (Lewis F Rylie), W7CKT, said that the club was on the air for five days, day and night, during the 1948 Columbia flood.<sup>29</sup>

WARTS set up an emergency station at the National Guard headquarters in Kennewick. Harry Lewis recalled visiting the station and meeting Sam Davenport, W7BIW, of Pasco, for the first time.

"Sam was fast asleep on an army cot in front of an improvised station, earphones on his head, cord wrapped around his neck, and a beard that had been growing for a week."



Figure 2-13 W7BIW "Sam the Ham"  
(Courtesy W8JYZ)

"We handled traffic for the US Dept of Engineers in Washington and Oregon. Our organized participation in the Vanport Disaster undoubtedly improved the 'ham' image in the eyes of the citizens and at the same time baptized our new net in the sea of emergency communications."<sup>30</sup>

## The Washington Stations

In addition to other volunteers, Sam Davenport recalled the following Washington amateurs participating in emergency communications during the 1948 flood:

|       |                            |                   |
|-------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| W7AAH | Eddie B Pacot              | Kennewick         |
| W7AQJ | Eldred W "Ed" Start        | Vancouver         |
| W7BIW | Sam A Davenport            | Pasco             |
| W7BUW | John Richard "Dick" Borton | Yakima            |
| W7BWC | William L "Bill" Burris    | Pinehurst         |
| W7BX  | Floyd Taylor               | Richland          |
| W7CKT | Lewis F "Rylie" Rylie      | Bainbridge Island |
| W7CUD | Bryant E "Skip" Page       | Richland          |
| W7EDU | Kenneth A House            | Dayton            |
| W7EGR | Stanley L "Stan" Archer    | Coulee Dam        |
| W7ENR | Bryon Ashenbrenner         | Hoquiam           |
| W7EPS | Virgil W "Virg" Treadwell  | Yakima            |
| W7FLE | Clarence V Hall            | North Bend        |
| W7GNR | Maurice L "Morrie" Monson  | Bellingham        |
| W7IQO | Patrick A Price            | Burton            |
| W7IYK | Walter P Greenwood         | Coulee Dam        |
| W7JWJ | Harry W Lewis              | Richland          |
| W7KIX | Marvin M McCartney         | Richland          |

<sup>29</sup> W7CKT letter 2/10/1949

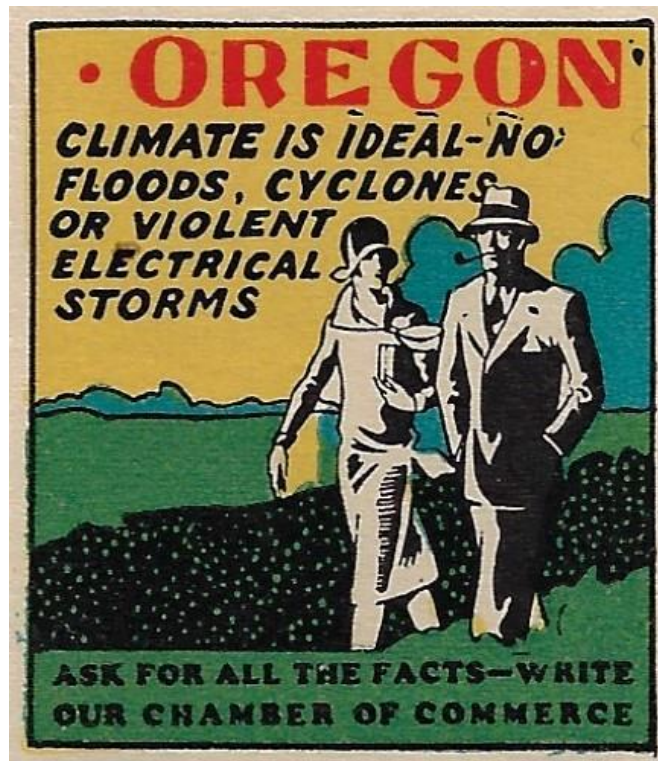
<sup>30</sup> Rylie W7CKT

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 3 – The Flood Reaches Portland***

On the Preceding Page: When the Morrison Bridge was completed in 1887, it was Portland's first bridge over the Willamette River. That bridge was replaced in 1905 with the "swing span" bridge shown on the precededding page. The circa May 26, 1948 photo shows the river level nearly reaching the deck of the low-slung bridge. The movable span was left in the open position to accommodate river traffic and to pass debris. In 1958, the swing span bridge was replaced with the current Morrison Bridge which is a double-leaf Chicago-type bascule bridge. (Source Multnomah County).



*Figure 3-1 Oregon Chamber of Commerce promotional poster stamp ca. 1929*

In this section, you will meet Al & Mary Davis and look at the communications planning that took place as the flood threatened Portland. Then, we'll look at three Portland-area broadcasters that were flooded-out prior to the Vanport disaster.

### **The Flood Reaches Portland**

Just north of Portland, the Willamette River converges with the Columbia and together they flow the last 100 miles to the Pacific Ocean at Astoria. In bad times, as many of us have witnessed, when the Columbia reaches flood stage, there is no place for the Willamette's water to go, so it floods too.

### **Flooding Along the Willamette**

In 1948, the factors that caused the Columbia River to flood did not impact the Willamette River directly. However, as the Columbia reached flood stage in May, water backed up in the lower Willamette.

Efforts were focused on keeping water out of downtown Portland and away from the industrial area on the lower east side. By late May, water levels were high enough to require modifications to the operation of the Hawthorne, Steel, and Morrison bridges.

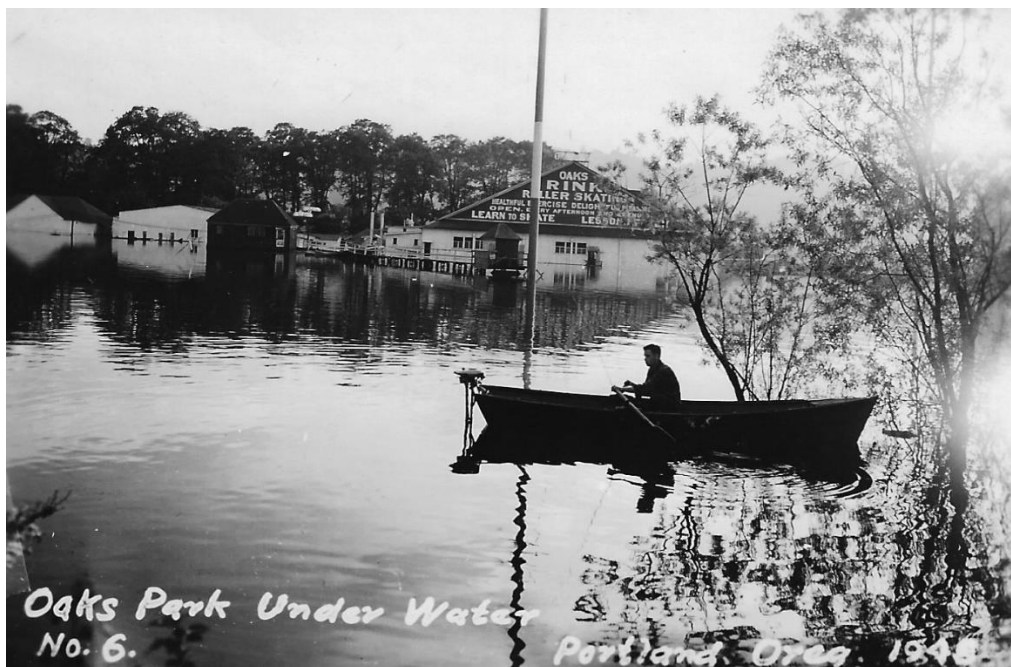
Further upstream The Oaks Park in Sellwood was flooded as was part of Milwaukie.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Columbia Crews pg. 1



*Figure 3-2 A City of Portland crew sandbags the seawall just upstream from the Steel bridge. Erected in 1912, the Steel Bridge is the only double-deck bridge with independent lifts in the world. In this view, water has almost reached the lower (railroad) deck. The upper deck, carrying automobiles and electric streetcars, is well beyond the reach of the water.*



*Figure 3-3 Paddling through Oaks Park with the KWJJ tower in the background.*



### **Flooding Along the Columbia**

In the 1940's, the flood control dikes began at Vanport and went east. To the west, the Rivergate area which is a bustling industrial and transportation hub today was just an extension of the South Shore flood plain. With a couple of exceptions, the Smith and Bybee Lake Wetlands and surrounding areas were mostly in a natural state at this time. In 1936 the St. Johns Landfill was opened along Swift<sup>32</sup> Blvd and was beginning to fill an area along the southerly edge of the wetlands. And some development was beginning along Suttle Rd on a natural rise just northwest of Vanport.

The water level in the wetlands kept pace as the Columbia and Willamette rose and began putting pressure on the SP&S railroad fill on the west edge of Vanport. Though drainage district engineers had reservations about the stability of the fill, they were precluded from doing much, if anything, about it by the fact of its private ownership. So, instead they focused efforts on weak points in other parts of the flood control system.

The dikes running from the Vanport area east to the Sandy River in Troutdale received special attention as the Columbia surged. A failure at Vanport, at the airport, or in the residential areas in between could be devastating. Dikes along the Columbia Slough to the south also received scrutiny. Sandbags were used to block or reinforce the many road and culvert penetrations through the dikes.



*Figure 3-4 Water covers Front Ave and the railroad yard at Union Station*



*Figure 3-5 A tugboat sailing by the downtown seawall at eye-level makes a startling scene.*



*Figure 3-6 On Portland's east side, streets in the industrial area were filled with flood water.*

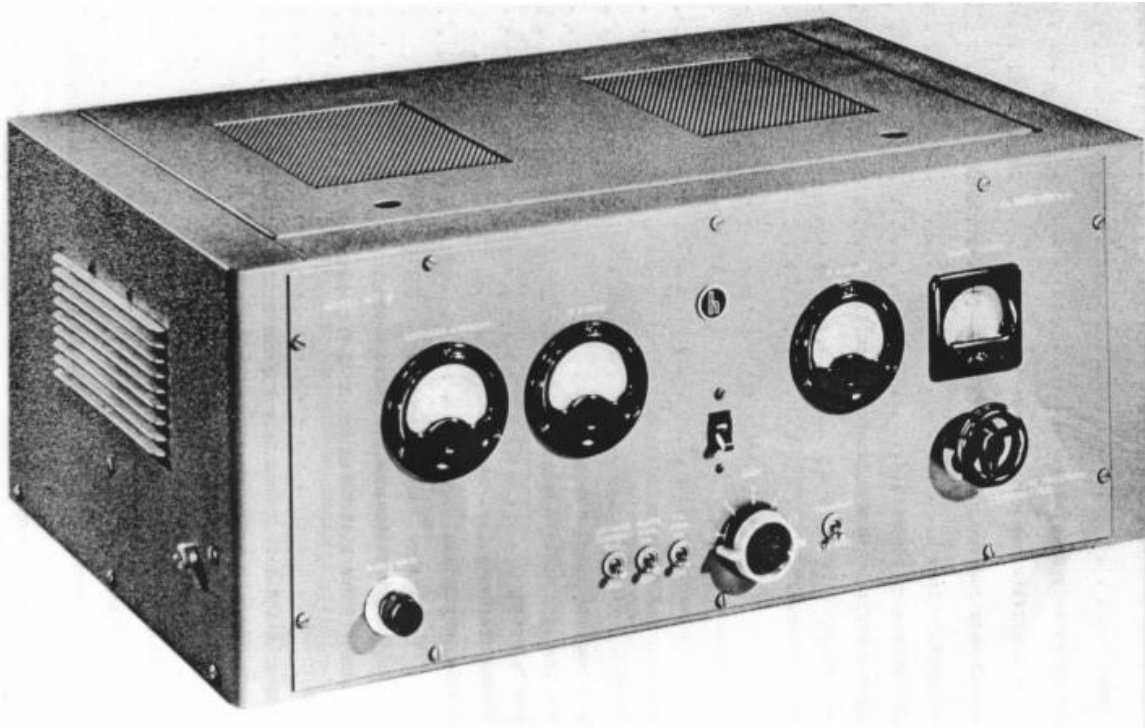
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<sup>32</sup> Now N Columbia Blvd.

## Emergency Planning

Though officials expressed confidence in the dikes right up to the time of the breach, flood-watching and contingency planning had been going on for weeks.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, Emergency Coordinator Al Davis, W7DIS, acting on information received from Portland officials, alerted the local ARRL Emergency Corps members and briefed them on what their jobs would be "just in case."



*Figure 3-7 Hallicrafters HT-9 transmitter, 75 W AM, 100 W CW, 80-40-20-10 Meters*

## W7WJ/7 Red Cross Control

"Disaster plans were discussed, laid, and action started on relief work in the Portland area, with the ARRL Emergency Corps "AEC" being provided a radio room in the Red Cross disaster headquarters building at SW 15<sup>th</sup> and Alder Street.

An HT-9 transmitter and suitable receivers, antennas, etc. were quickly installed to establish a net control

station for the 28 mc group using the call W7WJ/7<sup>33</sup>."

On Wednesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, Red Cross Disaster Committee met to discuss contingency plans. Of special concern was the region's ability to provide emergency housing and services for the 18,500 Vanport residents.

Following the meeting, relevant subcommittees including information, communications and radio were alerted

<sup>33</sup> The temporary Red Cross station was controlled by Hal McCracken, W7WJ.

<sup>34</sup> Clark pg. 371

and requested to be ready for mobilization. "Wednesday evening, amateur radio operators associated with the Red Cross were alerted and requested to have their mobile units ready for operation."<sup>35</sup>

Modes of communication in the disaster area included:<sup>36</sup>

- 2-meter (144 mc) AM (voice) point-to-point
- 10-meter (28 mc) AM mobile and fixed point relay
- 75-meter (3.5 mc) "phone" (voice) fixed point, portable, and mobile
- 75-meter "CW" (Morse code)

"Work was chiefly by voice in the Portland area with CW being used for long haul traffic into and from the area."<sup>37</sup>

"On [Thursday May] 27<sup>th</sup>, the Portland Red Cross disaster committee met with the AEC planning committee and representatives of the local clubs<sup>38</sup> in order to perfect plans."<sup>39</sup>

"Point-to-point service on 144 mc was established between many strategic points on the premise that telephone facilities would either be jammed or wiped out completely if any areas became inundated."<sup>40</sup>

The headquarters station included net control for the twenty-five amateur radio operators who began using cars equipped with 28 mc mobile radios to assist Red Cross observers, survey parties, and dike watch."<sup>41</sup>

"Amateurs accompanying staff from the Pen 1 and Pen 2 drainage districts provided ongoing status reports to Red Cross headquarters."<sup>42</sup>

"Point to point service from disaster headquarters to the County Sheriff's office, Coast Guard, and 75-phone and 80 CW liaison stations were established on 2 meters."<sup>43</sup> At times messages were relayed by a mobile station atop Rocky Butte just south of the Portland airport.

"In the evening of Friday May 28<sup>th</sup>, all of the Disaster Sub-Committees and all of the Volunteer Services were put on a 24 hour basis, all posts being staffed [and] the radio stations were in full operation at Chapter House...."<sup>44</sup>

"A radio station was opened alongside the Multnomah County Sheriff radio dispatcher which proved to be a most important contact. A request to set up a station alongside the City Police Radio was declined."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Clark pg. 371

<sup>36</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg. 35

<sup>37</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg. 35

<sup>38</sup> Members of both the Portland Amateur Radio Club and the Vancouver Amateur Radio Club assisted with communications in the Portland area. Both clubs are featured later in the story.

<sup>39</sup> QRR pg. 38

<sup>40</sup> QRR pg. 39.

<sup>41</sup> Clark pg. 372

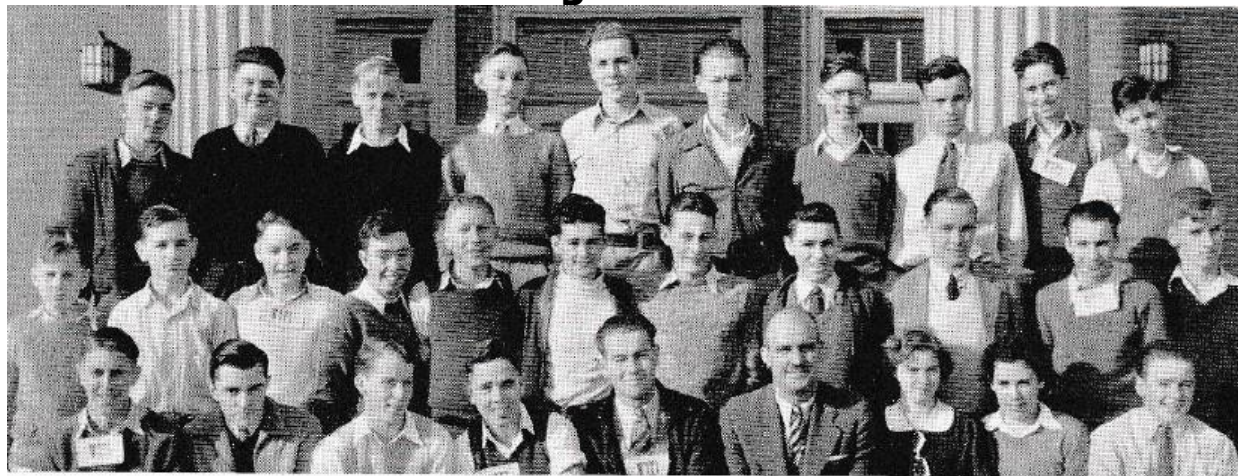
<sup>42</sup> Clark pg. 372

<sup>43</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg. 35

<sup>44</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg. 7

<sup>45</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg. 7

## De Forest Club of Grant High School – W7FI



*Figure 3-8 The De Forest Club of Grant High School, W7FI ca. 1933. The De Forest Club was open to all with an interest in radio, licensed or not. In this yearbook photo several licensed members proudly have their QSL cards pinned to their shirts. We believe that the club's sponsor, Thomas G. Schuele, W7DXL, is pictured in the front row. U.S. Grant High School (Portland, OR) Yearbook "Memoirs" January 1934 (Courtesy Genealogical Forum of Oregon).*

## Al Davis W7DIS and Mary Davis W7ENU

As the flood approached Portland, Allen N "Al" Davis, W7DIS, was front and center as the ARRL's Emergency Coordinator.

As the "EC" Al had roles in:

- planning
- volunteer coordination
- liaison work

Additionally, he actively participated in day-to-day radio operations.

Likewise, Mary Davis (ne Bailey), W7ENU, was busy helping with emergency communications and handled radio traffic.

And, at the time of the emergency, the Davis's were already busy with jobs and raising a young family.

Al and Mary were raised in Portland and attended Grant High School. In the 1930's, the "De Forest Club of Grant High School," W7FI, operated a small ham station in the school's gym. While at Grant, Al was licensed at W7DIS, and Mary was licensed as W7ENU.

After his 1935 graduation, Al spent the summer a fire lookout, working at Lookout Mountain in the Columbia (Gifford Pinchot) National Forest.

Typical of hams that worked as lookouts, Al helped pass the time by working other amateurs. Though he was only operating with a couple of watts, the 5,000' elevation at the lookout tower helped get his signal out.



That fall, both Al and Mary moved down to Corvallis and attended Oregon State College.

During February 1937, severe rain, snow, and windstorms cut off all wire service between Eugene and the Coos Bay area. For about a week, the towns near Coos Bay relied on amateur radio as their only means of communication with the Willamette Valley. W7EZL, in Corvallis, was a key station in the 3.5 mc traffic network, and both Al and Mary served as relief operators.<sup>46</sup>

Al and Mary were married in 1937 while still at OSC. In the summer of 1940, they announced plans to move to Nome, Alaska where Al took a Signal Corps job.

Because of the move to the Territory of Alaska, the Davis's Oregon call signs were changed from W7DIS and W7ENU to K7DIS and K7ENU.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 3-9 K7DIS (Courtesy HamGallery.com)

The Arctic Amateur Radio Club was formed in September 1940, and Al partnered with them as State Net Control, handling traffic until amateur privileges were suspended.

The Davis's were stationed at Marks Army Airfield in Nome where Al worked for the Alaska Communication System (ACS) as an operator and technician. Mary handled amateur traffic, operating K7ENU. As part of the Army Amateur Radio Service in Alaska, her station also served as an aircraft early warning station.<sup>48</sup> After amateur privileges were suspended at the start of the war, Mary handled traffic for the Civil Aviation Administration.

After three and a half years in Nome, Al was sent to the Aleutian Islands. After the armistice, he was one of the first twenty men discharged, returning to Oregon in late 1945.<sup>49</sup> Al ultimately achieved the rank of Technician Grade 3 (equivalent to Staff Sergeant).

Other details of Al and Mary's volunteer work during Vanport emergency are recounted in the main story. Their report to the ARRL "QRR...the Dike is Broken" was a key resource in our efforts to document the role of hams during the emergency.

Needless to say, the Davis's remained active in emergency communications during the years following the 1948 flood.

They are buried at Willamette National Cemetery; Mary having passed in 1989 and Al in 2001.

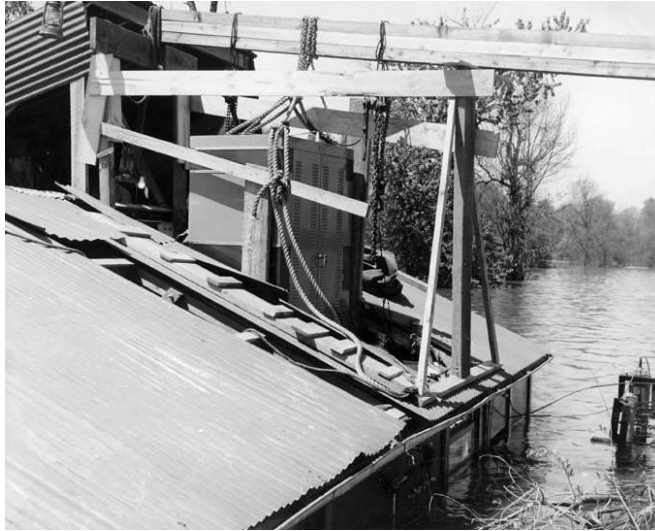
<sup>46</sup> QST 4/37 pg. 57

<sup>47</sup> Alaska used "K" call signs until after World War II when the now-familiar KL call signs began being issued.

<sup>48</sup> CQ-YL pg. 82

<sup>49</sup> QST 1/46 pg. 78





*Figure 3-10 KVAN's brand new Raytheon RA-1000 1KW AM transmitter resting on scaffolding. The photo only shows the top of the transmitter. It is 84" tall, 48" wide, 34" deep and weighs 2,450 pounds. (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*

## **KVAN – Providing Outstanding Service While Out Standing on the Roof**

### **KVAN Background**

KVAN's transmitter site, just west of N Portland Road, placed it *outside* the protection of the dikes surrounding Vanport.

As the Columbia's water level increased in mid-May 1948, the water level in the Smith and Bybee Lake wetlands matched pace. Even before water banked up against the low Portland Road dike, the KVAN site was overflowing with flood water.

Just eight months before the flood, KVAN (910 am) relocated its transmitter to Smith Lake from Fruit Valley Road in Vancouver, Washington.<sup>50</sup> The Smith Lake installation featured a new

Raytheon RA-1000 transmitter putting out 1,000 watts through two steel lattice towers.

### **Rising to the Occasion**

As water rose in Smith Lake, KVAN engineers determined that the best way to protect their brand-new \$50,000 investment (and stay on the air) was to "raise the roof!"

After a hole was cut in the transmitter building roof, chain hoists were used to lift the broadcast equipment onto scaffolding - right through the roof. Then, thousands of pounds of sand were poured into the transmitter building to keep it upright and on its footings.

<sup>50</sup> Would staying in Vancouver have spared KVAN from the flooding? Maybe not! As shown in the section on Vancouver, portions of the

West Vancouver Fruit Valley neighborhood were also submerged by the 1948 flood.



*Figure 3-11 Station Manager Fred Chitty, Assistant Engineer Lee Cabe and Announcer F.C. Hosking broadcasting from the roof of the KVAN transmitter building.  
(The Oregonian 6/5/48) (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*

A temporary shelter for the transmitter engineers was created on the building roof from wood, tarps, and corrugated metal. Broadcasting resumed just as soon as equipment was moved and reconnected.

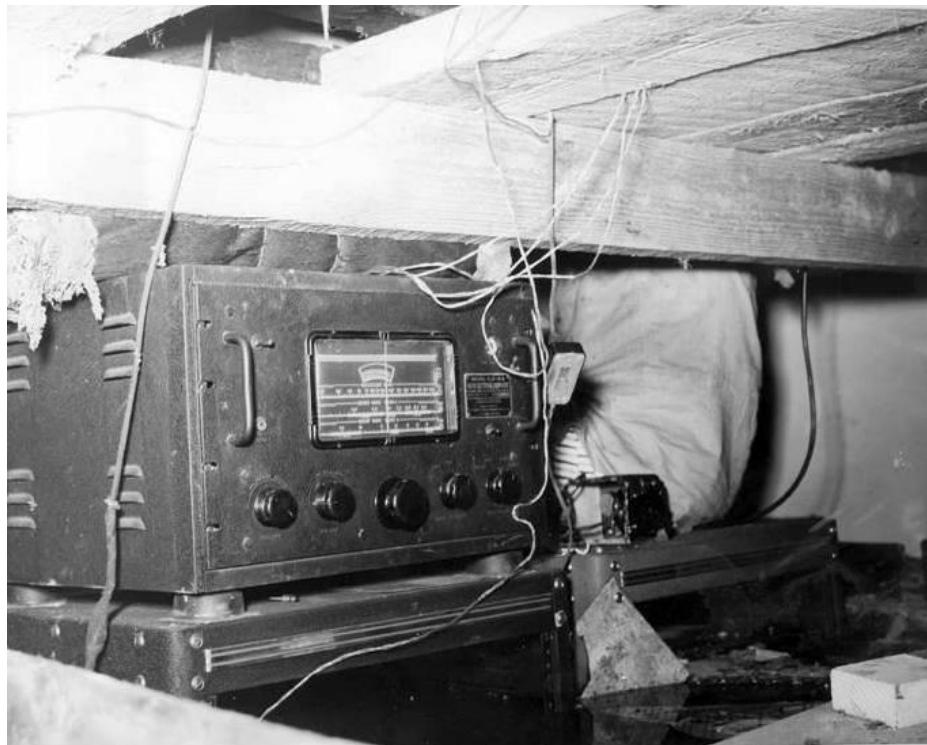
Lines from the studios in Vancouver were severed during the flood. So, a seaplane was used to bring records, bulletins and news to the transmitter site and broadcasts originated from there. Water eventually rose to eight feet deep in the transmitter building

necessitating brief outages while power was shut off to move equipment. And one of the two towers became inoperative during the flood.

To the disappointment of Portland baseball fans, KVAN's premier of "Lucky Beavers" baseball, scheduled for Saturday night, May 29<sup>th</sup>, was spoiled. However, KVAN remained on the air throughout the emergency – the only Vanport-area station that managed to do so from their original site.



*Figure 3-12 KVAN Assistant Engineer Lee Cabe (with transcription disc), Announcer F.C. Hosking (seated), and Station Manager Fred Chitty (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*



*Figure 3-13 Water has risen to within inches of a war surplus EH Scott SLR-12 receiver, probably the station monitor. (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*



*Figure 3-14 The KVAN transmitter building with water up to the eaves. The transmitter protrudes through a hole on the far side of the building, and the makeshift "studio" is perched on the close side. Note the surplus balsa raft in the foreground. (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*

### **KVAN Honored**

KVAN was lauded in local and national press for doing an outstanding job of assisting in flood rescue work by transmitting calls for help and supplies.

For days following the dike break, the station broadcasted the names and temporary addresses of survivors who were trying to locate members of their families.



In June 1948, Washington Governor Wallgren wrote:

"If anything further is needed to prove the value of radio, I believe the disastrous flood in central and southern Washington and the need it brought for instantaneous communications and directions to the affected civilian populace further emphasizes the tremendous value of radio in our modern day. Your state government and myself as governor, deeply appreciate the extra effort you, as a station owner and manager, made to keep the affected citizenry informed...."<sup>51</sup>

Even after the water went back down, recovery and restoration of the KVAN transmitter site took well-over a month.

In 1959, KVAN was sold and became KISN. The Smith Lake site continued to have water problems as documented by DJ Pat Pattee's photos from the Christmas 1964 flood.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in 1966, the transmitter was moved to NE 158<sup>th</sup> Avenue in east Portland.<sup>53</sup>

Today, KVAN's former Smith Lake site is home to the KBMS transmitter. Although the KBMS building is hidden down a gated and winding gravel driveway, its trio of towers is very visible from Portland Road just before you cross the Columbia Slough.

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<sup>51</sup> Broadcasting 6/4/48 pg. 25  
<sup>52</sup>

<https://www.positivespin.us/Pat%20Pattee.htm>

<sup>53</sup> KISN's new site was also in the Columbia Southshore flood plain and was likely swamped during the Vanport emergency. However, it has

a better recent track record. As part of Portland's emergency well field, the 158<sup>th</sup> Avenue site is still being protected by dikes. Efforts are being made to restore lands around Smith and Bybee Lakes to natural flood plains.



*Figure 3-15 The Oaks Park midway is awash as the Willamette River escapes its banks in Sellwood.  
(Akroyd Photography)*

## KPDQ – Flooding at The Oaks

### KPDQ

In 1948, two radio stations, KWJJ and KPDQ, had transmitter sites at the Oaks Amusement Park.

John W Davis founded KJXD in 1946. On July 18, the FCC issued a construction permit for a 250-watt station on 800 kc on July 18, 1946. On December 18, 1946, their callsign was changed from KJXD to KPDQ and their permitted power was increased to 1 KW.

KPDQ began broadcasting from Oaks Park on June 30, 1947. Their studio, transmitter, and 260-foot tower were located at the southerly end of the park (KWJJ's towers were at the north end).

By the last week of May 1948, flood waters had reached Oaks Park. The park was closed to visitors and employees were desperately sandbagging the park's large wooden skating rink floor in a failed effort to preserve it. The Saturday May 29<sup>th</sup> Oregonian carried a photo of the park already under several feet of water.



*Figure 3-16 KPDQ station at the south end of Oaks Park June 1948. Oaks Park Way is submerged. The Portland Traction Company's Oregon City line runs along the right side of the photo. (City of Portland image a1999-004-1121)*

## Getting Back on the Air

"Before water got to it, the KPDQ transmitter was dismantled and hauled out even as water mired the wheels of the truck."<sup>54</sup>

Because of the flooding at The Oaks, the station applied to the FCC for temporary authority to broadcast from a backup location. FCC granted the station permission to broadcast with 250-watts of power from the home of the station's chief engineer Rod

Johnson.<sup>55</sup> Mr. Johnson lived at 3115 NE 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the Alameda Ridge in northeast Portland.

"Within 48 hours KPDQ was back on the air. With the transmitter in the garage, antenna across the street, control room in a bedroom and studio in the living room, service was again resumed."<sup>56</sup>

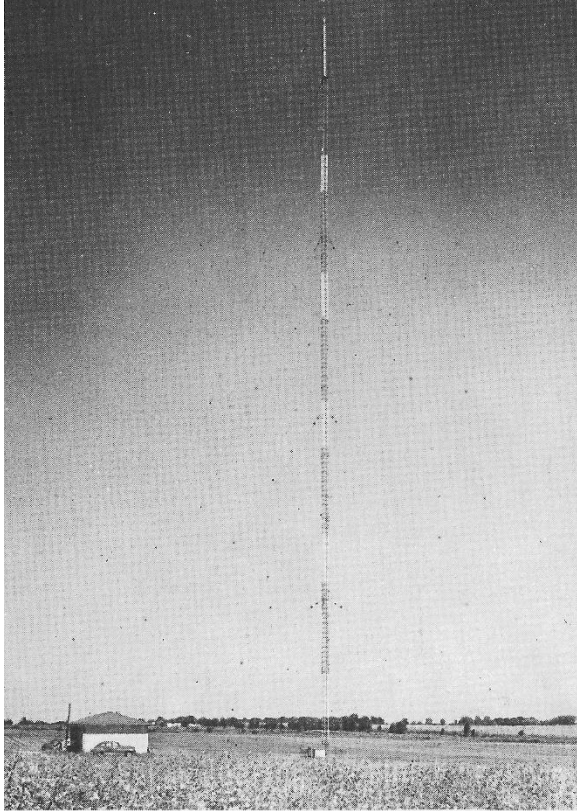
KPDQ's site at Oaks Park remained submerged for 30 days. Despite operating at reduced power, from temporary facilities, with an improvised

<sup>54</sup> Broadcasting 6/7/48

<sup>55</sup> Later, Rod and Betty Johnson owned KWJJ.

<sup>56</sup> Broadcasting 6/7/48

antenna, KPDQ was cited, along with other Portland broadcasters for rendering stellar services during the emergency.



*Figure 3-17 KPDQ's station at The Oaks*





*Figure 3-18 Wilbur Jerman using a raft to survey the damage to the KWJJ transmitter at Smith Lake.  
(Courtesy Ron Kramer)*

## KWJJ

### KFWV

The origins of KWJJ date back to 1925 when Wilbur Jerman went on the air from his Mt Tabor home with five-watt KFWV. Soon, he'd built a new 50-watt transmitter. The station's studio was set up in his living room and the transmitter was located in a second floor bedroom.

When money got tight, and Mr. Jerman was concerned that debt-collectors might seize the station, he quietly moved it to his father-in-law's farm on

Portland's outskirts. At the time it was feasible to move a station (and move it back) with little expectation of consequences from regulators.

### KWJJ

KFWV officially became KWJJ on June 24, 1927.<sup>57</sup> The new callsign honored owner Wilbur J Jerman's initials. The stations studios were located in downtown Portland, but the transmitter remained Jerman's home on Mount Tabor until the mid-1930's.

<sup>57</sup> US Radio Stations as of June 30, 1927

On October 25, 1935, KWJJ applied to build a new station at Oaks Park.<sup>58</sup> As shown below, the transmitter building at the Oaks was built on pilings several

feet tall. Likewise, the transmission lines to the two towers were carried on wooden trestles.



*Figure 3-19 KWJJ transmitter building and towers at Oaks Park ca. 1940. Note the trestles carrying the transmission lines out to the towers.*

*(Photo from the Wilbur Jerman Estate, Courtesy of Ron Kramer)*

## **Smith Lake**

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1947, KWJJ applied to move its transmitter and increase power from 1 kw to 10 kw<sup>59</sup> and their application was approved May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Between April 5<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>, 1948, KWJJ moved into its new 24-acre transmitter

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<sup>58</sup> Broadcasting 11/01/35

<sup>59</sup> Broadcasting 2/10/47

site at 4350 N Suttle Rd.<sup>60</sup> The new site was on the north shore of Smith Lake, less than a mile west of Vanport.

At Smith Lake, KWJJ used a new Westinghouse 10-HV-1 transmitter and two towers to broadcast 10 kw (directional) during the daytime hours.<sup>61</sup> However, they continued to use the Oaks Park site for nighttime broadcasting (1 kw non-directional) pending approval to increase nighttime power to 10 kw.

Like the KVAN site, KWJJ's Smith Lake site was outside the protection of the Pen 1 Drainage District dikes. So, as the Columbia River rose in May 1948, their new transmitter was soon threatened.

Meanwhile, the rising Columbia was also causing the Willamette River to rise, inundating KWJJ's old site at Oaks Park. By the end of the month, the Smith Lake site was off the air. The transmitter building at Smith Lake was half-full of water, and Wilbur Jerman had to resort to visiting by raft.



*Figure 3-30 Oaks Park June 1948. Water surrounds the KWJJ building (center).  
(Courtesy Oregonlive.Com).*

<sup>60</sup> Craig Adams email

<sup>61</sup> ibid

## **Back to The Oaks**

Fortunately, when the KWJJ decided to locate at Oaks Park, Mr. Jerman's team had the foresight to erect the transmitter building, tuning shacks, and towers on tall pilings. As shown in the photos, transmission lines to the towers were held high on wooden trestles. So, when the plant at Smith Lake went off the air, KWJJ was able to move back to Oaks Park and resume day and night operations despite the flooding. Though engineers had to come and go to the station by boat, KWJJ stayed on the air.

## **Emergency Broadcasts**

During the Vanport emergency, "KWJJ turned its broadcast services over to the use of relief agencies...All commercial broadcasts were dropped."<sup>62</sup>

"Of the non-network stations, KWJJ and KVAN did the best job of assisting in rescue work by transmitting calls for help and supplies.

Manager Bill Richardson, of KWJJ, and his staff worked night and day for three days broadcasting names and temporary addresses of survivors who were trying to locate their children or other members of their families."<sup>63</sup>

## **After the Emergency**

KWJJ was able to make repairs at Smith Lake and resume operating 10kw full time at the end of July.<sup>64</sup>

Once the station was again operational, plans were made for a longer-term solution to the flood threat. During December, 1948, the station began doing early signoffs at 11:00 pm which afforded construction crews a few hours each night to work on raising the plant higher above the flood plain.

Despite KWJJ's hasty retreat to the Oaks Park site, the plant there had actually been on the market since the move to Smith Lake. On June 10, 1948, the FCC granted an application for KBKO (1290 kc) to use KWJJ's old plant.

Flood waters at Oaks Park weren't gone for about a month. Remodeling began following KWJJ's return to Smith Lake in July and the KBKO began commercial operation on January 10, 1949. In November 1952, the station became KLIQ.

KWJJ's problems at Smith Lake did not end in 1948. In the Columbus Day Storm (October 1962), KWJJ lost one of its towers and part of its transmitter building due to wind and rain. They were able to continue broadcasting with one tower until repairs were made.

KWJJ finally abandoned Smith Lake in 1966 and began broadcasting from a site in East Portland.

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<sup>62</sup> Broadcasting 6/748

<sup>63</sup> Billboard 6/12/48

<sup>64</sup> Pioneer Mikes pg. 398



# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 4 – Memorial Day 1948***

On the Preceding Page: Cars and trucks jam the ramp to Denver Avenue - the only road out of Vanport. In the background the three towers at KGW are still standing

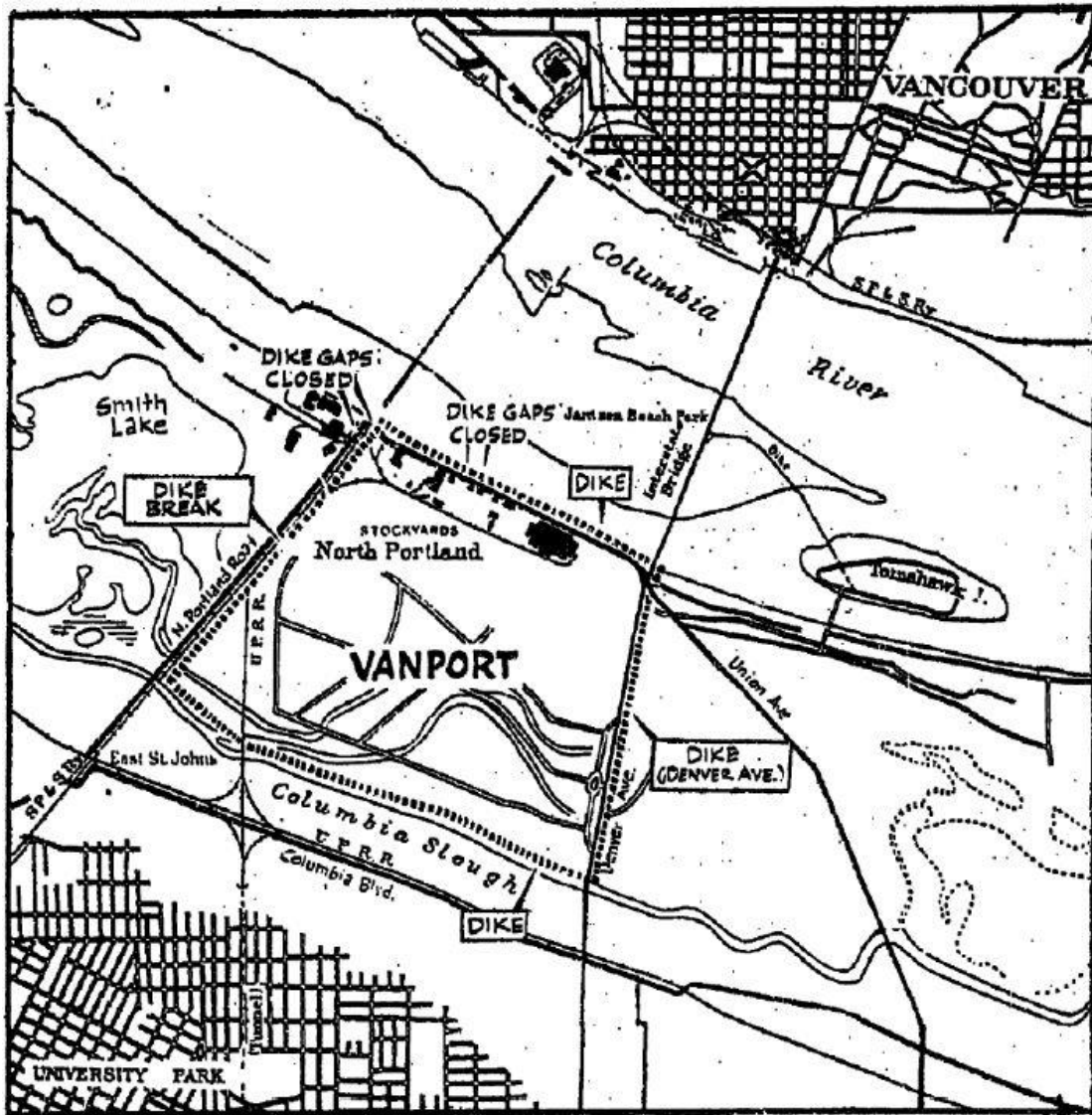


Figure 4-1 Map of Vanport showing the dikes and breach point (The Oregonian 5/31/48)

### **"The River has Taken More Than the Lowlands"**

*"I suppose that everyone in the Northwest finds himself unable to keep his mind on his work. The flood keeps slipping silently into one's thinking. I have seen people stop what they were doing, without being aware of stopping, and look straight ahead without seeing.*

*The river has taken more than the lowlands.*

*Monday afternoon, the day after the river broke, my wife and I had planned to play golf, but it was a no go. Instead, we decided to gather some extra clothes, and we took them down to the church. Then we came home and listened to the radio until the middle of the night.*

*What can be said at a time like this?" Del Milne<sup>65</sup>*

<sup>65</sup> Looking in the Rose Bowl

As we pick up the Vanport story here:

- We'll look at the roles of hams in sounding the alarm
- We'll share some stories from folks that lost homes in the flood.
- And we'll look at the stories of the two "Vanport" radio stations, KGW and KEX.

## The Flood Alert

Portland radio stations broadcast a flood alert on Saturday night May 29th. In an abundance of caution, "...some residents moved their belongings into attics and upper floors. Few imagined the possible extent to which water levels would rise."<sup>66</sup>

Some might have done more or evacuated completely. However, options were limited for families that relied solely on public transportation. Others were out of town for the holiday weekend. And some simply had no other options available.

Appeals were made by radio and the press for all who had moved to register with the Red Cross.



*Figure 4-2 "Fleeing Vanport" (Author's Collection)*

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<sup>66</sup> Wikiwand.com/en/Vanport, Oregon





Figure 4-3 Breached railroad fill photographed on Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1948. (ACME Telephoto.)

### The Breach

*"As I walked up to the switching station, I noticed two men standing on the station platform, leaning against the railing and looking out over the flooded scene in front of them. I must admit it was frightening to look out over all that water, which was flooding much of the land and buildings around Smith Lake, especially on the north end where a lumber company, a radio station [KWJJ], and other businesses were located. All of the buildings at the south end of the lake [KVAN] were now underwater.... By now, the lake had risen sharply and had completely covered the road near the Columbia River. The river, the lake, and the Kenton [Columbia] Slough were now one large body of water...." Dale Skovgaard<sup>67</sup>*

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<sup>67</sup> Skovgaard

## **Sunday May 30th**

"Sunday morning, May 30<sup>th</sup> dawned – Memorial Day<sup>68</sup>. In Vanport, telephone exchanges were jammed with the calls of anxious residents trying to make arrangements for friends or trucking firms to move their belongings out of the area ... just-in-case."<sup>69</sup>

"In spite of printed reassurances by the governing authorities which had been delivered to every home in Vanport that very morning, many of Vanport's citizens knew that the swollen waters of the Columbia were at that moment fifteen feet above the elevation of the highest point in Vanport."<sup>70</sup>

## **W7DHX – Don Smith**

"It was under these conditions that Don Smith, W7DHX, first drove his mobile into the threatened community itself to offer his services to authorities.

The 'Red Cross Disaster Car' card, which had been issued to all the mobile amateurs, attracted a large number of desperate citizens seeking help.

Though the dike had not yet broken, Don found himself in the middle of a pitiful cluster of panicky people pleading, crying, and sobbing for assistance ... a woman with a bedridden

80-year-old mother and without the money to get a taxi ride from the threatened area ...a person with three blind people to care for and no means of summoning assistance...a man with three children with measles whom no one would carry to safety."<sup>71</sup>

"Don did what he could and then returned to his home. Shortly after his arrival there the sheriff's office sent word requesting his assistance and, after a conference with the captain-in-charge<sup>72</sup> and the Vanport Housing Authority, Don went to back work.

As they were readying a place in the sheriff's office for Don to set up his equipment, another of the countless stream of reports that the dike had broken came in to the desk sergeant.

For several days the authorities had been faithfully checking each such report only to find it the result of exaggeration and excitement. Because the already-overworked sheriff's cars were at the time out investigating previous reports, the desk sergeant asked Don to jump into his car and check on the latest report...."<sup>73</sup>

## **"QRR...The Dike is Broken"<sup>74</sup>**

As Don arrived on the scene of the rumored breach, he was just in time to

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<sup>68</sup> Prior to 1971, Memorial (or Remembrance) Day was observed on May 30<sup>th</sup> on whatever day it fell (in this case a Sunday).

<sup>69</sup> QRR pg. 106.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

<sup>72</sup> In May, 1948, the Captain Mearl C Tillman was in charge of the Vanport precinct. Twenty-

two deputies were assigned to the precinct, and they shared three or four cars with two-way radios and three motorcycles. Clark pg. 370.

<sup>73</sup> QRR pg. 106.

<sup>74</sup> At one time the code "QRR" was the land-based equivalent of sending SOS.

see another portion of the railroad fill wash away.

Don's flash message "QRR, QRR, QRR - W7WJ FROM W7DHX - THE DIKE IS BROKEN AND WATER IS POURING INTO VANPORT! SEND ALL AVAILABLE HELP. PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE" went out on the AEC 28 mc mobile net.<sup>75</sup>

While awaiting acknowledgement of his report, and before he could swing his car around, the flood had risen to the level of Don's running boards.

Shouts of eyewitnesses alerted the operator of the Vanport warning siren and the wail of the alarm soon filled the city's streets with people.<sup>76</sup> And about a minute later the first row of homes was hit by water.

Because the homes had already been removed from the west end of Vanport, the distance from the breach to the nearest dwelling was over 1,850 feet.<sup>77</sup>

"The first wave ...spread out flatly and people ran from the houses to find the water ankle deep. Another widening break in the dike released a fresh outburst of water which flowed quickly over the first and rolled through the city at the three-foot level. Successive breaks raised the waves to about six feet in ten minutes, according to evacuees." Showers of spray flew into the air as the waves hit structures.

"The water first filled the sloughs and drainage systems"<sup>78</sup> which absorbed

some of the shock. The water advanced eastward across Vanport at walking pace. Even so, "witnesses to the flooding of Vanport estimate the time...to fill the Vanport area as between 45 and 75 minutes."<sup>79</sup>

### **Another Radio Report**

"Two Multnomah County deputy sheriffs, Ed Grohs and Mel Farmer, were on patrol at N Victory and Meadow Ave about 150 yards from...the northwest corner of the housing project and saw the angry water as it broke through the dike between the Swift and Co. plant and the Columbia Hall of the Vanport Extension Center. They immediately radioed the report to the Vanport sheriff's office. Grohs said, "the ground seemed to tremble and melt. There was a sudden wave of swollen mud and then a torrent that frothed with debris and waves.' Grohs and Farmer drove down N Force Ave, warning residents as they went, then stopped to direct traffic as frantic people tried to drive out. It was about an hour before the full force of the water swept down Victory Blvd and Broadacre, its full force hitting Vanport College, and swirled into the low cloverleaf intersection, trapping evacuees."<sup>80</sup>

### **The Evacuation**

Sheriff's deputies immediately began to "circulate through Vanport operating their sirens and giving the alarm. Three engines of the Vanport Fire Department

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<sup>75</sup> QRR pg. 38.

<sup>76</sup> 18,500

<sup>77</sup> Clark pg. 359

<sup>78</sup> Clark pg. 374

<sup>79</sup> ibid

<sup>80</sup> Northwest Magazine 5/21/78 pg. 9.

also circulated through Vanport with their sirens operating.”<sup>81</sup>

“The Housing Authority of Portland had previously arranged to have a sound truck stationed at the Vanport

administration building in Vanport. As soon as word of the breach was received, the sound truck was dispatched to give warning and provide evacuation instructions....”<sup>82</sup>



*Figure 4-4 Emergency Coordinator Al Davis (standing) scans listings on the IBM Personnel File, in search of more operating personnel. At the table, Bruce Stokes, W7EXQ, Elizabeth Mohr, and Larry Grace scan Call Books and telephone directories for operator listings. Clifford Olson, W7ICA, is at the microphone of the 144 mc intercom radio reporting the relief operator schedule for the coming day. (QST 9/48) (Courtesy ARRL)*

### **Activating the Amateur Network**

After the breach, the AEC 28 mc net enabled the Red Cross headquarters to contact relief-survey parties at remote points in the flood area. “The mobile units also served the Army Engineers and other relief officials with speedy communications direct to disaster

headquarters concerning food, supplies, and personnel.”<sup>83</sup>

“At the same time, the (30-member) gang on 3.941 mc were lined up to serve the Coast Guard, Army Engineers and any other groups which might call for service along the Columbia from

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<sup>81</sup> Clark pg. 373

<sup>82</sup> ibid

<sup>83</sup> QRR pg. 39.



Pendleton through Astoria and Klipsan Beach, WA.”<sup>84</sup>

“On 3.540 mc, Robert Brown, W7VT, was requested to become master control for the Portland-area CW operations, handling bulletins, traffic, routing, etc.”<sup>85</sup>

“With the break in the dike, W7GCZ, Dean Elder, along with many others, went on a 24-hour schedule. The disaster was now going full blast. The tempo of events increased in a dizzying crescendo as each minute grew into days. Old timers...young squirts...wives...YLs...stray military personnel...ex hams...ex-commercial operators...perfect strangers all – suddenly swung into action together, rolling up their sleeves and plunging into a race against time. New stations to be set up...more circuits needed...more operators needed to man them.”<sup>86</sup>

Jim Larsen, W7DZL, was in charge of the Red Cross headquarters amateur radio team which included:

- Dave Barr - W7KOF
- Don Smith - W7DHX
- Bill Lucas - W7AEF
- Clarence Wood – W7KER
- Hal McCracken - W7WJ.<sup>87</sup>

Representatives of established 80-meter traffic nets in Oregon, Washington, and California called in on 3540 kc at frequent intervals, reporting traffic, and moving to an alternate frequency with one of the Portland traffic men to clear

traffic as directed by W7VT. In this way the emergency channel, 3540 kc, was kept cleared for traffic of the highest priority. Constant contact with the W6OT, the Oakland Radio Club, at the Oakland Red Cross chapter was maintained.”<sup>88</sup>

On the second floor of the Red Cross headquarters Sunday night, a radio communications system kept messages flowing to all parts of the Vanport disaster area. Al Davis said, “On a visit to Red Cross disaster chairman Edward Valentine’s office, I counted 120 messages from network operators. Glancing through some of the air reports I noted such fragments of information as: ‘Leak in dike at such and such a place’; ‘Dike’s just burst a block away’; ‘Boats needed for fireman at \_\_\_\_.’”<sup>89</sup>

## **A Second Station**

On Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, “when the first impact of the Vanport traffic load lightened somewhat, a second radio center was established at the Army Engineer district headquarters. Dual 144 mc intercom positions were installed there to tie the new center into the existing nets. The Emergency Coordinator, Al Davis, transferred his headquarters there from the Red Cross Offices.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> QRR pg. 39.

<sup>85</sup> ibid

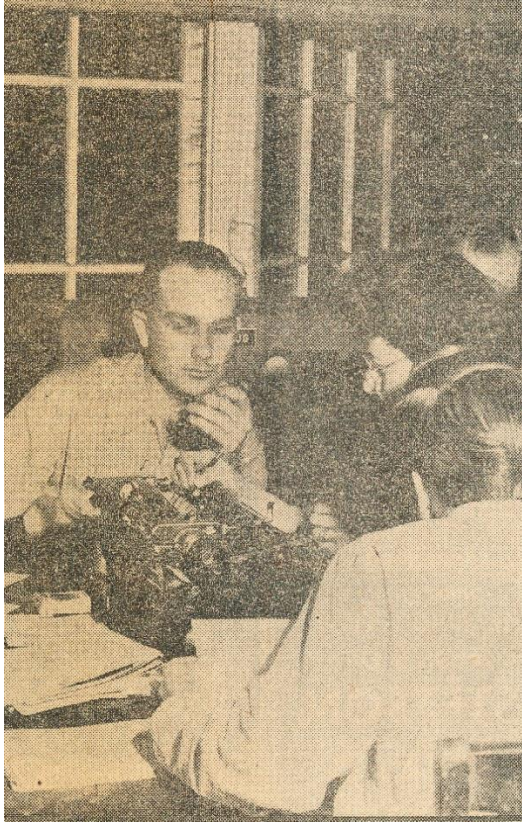
<sup>86</sup> QRR pg. 106

<sup>87</sup> Radio Plays Role pg. 9

<sup>88</sup> QRR pg. 39.

<sup>89</sup> Radio Amateurs Helpful

<sup>90</sup> QRR pg. 106



*Figure 4-5 Hams in action at Red Cross Portland headquarters (The Oregon Journal 5/31/48)*

## **"We had no Warning"**

The flooding at Vanport is a story of misery and loss – plain and simple. The typical evacuee's story sadly goes something like, "We had no warning – we barely escaped with the clothes on our backs."

In part 4 we'll hear stories from a few who experienced the flooding at Vanport.

We also get to meet several of the hams who were living in Vanport at the time of the flood.

Part 4 concludes with dramatic story of the loss of KGW's radio station and KEX's close call.



## ***The Vandals***

"It was Memorial Day, 1948, and my friend and I were walking along the railroad tracks on the way home from fishing for catfish in the Columbia Slough. While we walked, we threw rocks at the insulators on the power poles. When the poles started falling over on themselves and water started rushing over the tracks, we thought we had caused it. We were so scared, we ran home and confessed to my dad."<sup>91</sup>



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<sup>91</sup> A Story Behind the Vanport Flood

## ***Running Boards***

"We were the last ones out of our immediate neighborhood. As we turned from the parking lot into the street, the muddy swirling water was a few feet away. I remember a policeman yelling at us to hurry. And I have a vivid picture of a Pepsi-Cola truck rolling toward the flood, with two men lustily letting it be known that they had room for persons and baggage. They did have room. More room than my driver.

But I preferred to stay with my own brood. And so I balanced myself on the running board of the Dodge sedan – auto designers of a few years ago turned out models better suited to the demands of such moments as these than the streamlined chariots of today – meanwhile keeping my knee pressed against the one large suitcase for which there was not room anywhere else."<sup>92</sup>



*Figure 4-6 Escaping Vanport with clothes and not much more. May 30, 1948.*

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<sup>92</sup> Vanport Disaster pg. 81

### ***The Teacup***

My grandfather served in the South Pacific where he contracted yellow fever and dengue fever. Following his discharge, my grandparents and mother found an apartment in Vanport. When they evacuated, they left in their car with the clothes they were wearing.

After the water receded, they were allowed to return to their apartment to see if anything was salvageable. Nothing was.

Finally, they spotted an unbroken teacup and saucer pinned to the floor by the leg of the dining table. They took it home and kept it as a reminder.<sup>93</sup>



*Figure 4-7 The Teacup*



<sup>93</sup> Anon.

<sup>94</sup> Water Water Everywhere

<sup>95</sup> Flood of '48 wiped out Vanport 70 years ago

### ***The Refrigerator***

Vanport apartments typically came furnished with a small two-burner stove and a tiny oven. Most families made do with the undercounter two-shelf icebox that held a twenty-five-pound block of ice that had to be replaced every third day. Some did a little better.

"My uncle, not believing the false assurances voiced over the radio, had rented a pickup truck and piled his family, a few belongings, and the home-alone children from next door, into the truck. Before he drove away, he decided that he could not leave the new refrigerator behind.

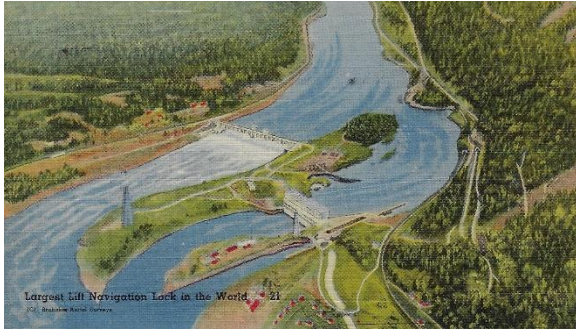
He managed to clunk it down the staircase, out the door and up into the back of the truck. Uncle Art drove off the traffic-jammed road and across fields to escape the water. Everyone survived and the refrigerator had a decades-long life in its new home..."<sup>94</sup>



### ***Another Refrigerator***

"Fire Captain Robert O. English couldn't believe what he was seeing. 'I ran back outside and saw Fire Station No 3 floating down the street, the water pouring in, people running and screaming. I then looked up the street and saw the second wall of water coming down and whole units, buildings floating toward me...I was knocked down by a refrigerator that was floating by in the swift current.'"<sup>95</sup>





*Figure 4-8 Bonneville Dam and the Cascade Navigation Locks. The Eagle Creek area is upstream from the dam on the right (Oregon) side.*

### ***Some Picnic***

The weekend of Memorial Day started with Saturday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of May dawning bright and beautiful. Mother announced that our family would be joining that of George and Ardella Boos with their three children going to Eagle Creek Park, about thirty-five miles east of Portland on US Highway 30 near Bonneville Dam. We would be enjoying hot-dogs, Mother's wonderful potato salad and other goodies prepared by Ardella.

On arrival at Eagle Creek Park about midday, we discovered that George had brought along his fishing boat, a sixteen-foot rowboat with a five horsepower motor. The plan was to get a good look at the high water in the nearby Columbia River.

All nine of us piled into that little boat and coasted down Eagle Creek into the swollen Columbia River, which quickly grabbed our boat and sent us hurtling toward an uncertain plight. The river was covered for several hundred feet from the dam easterly with all manner of debris, especially logs and brush.

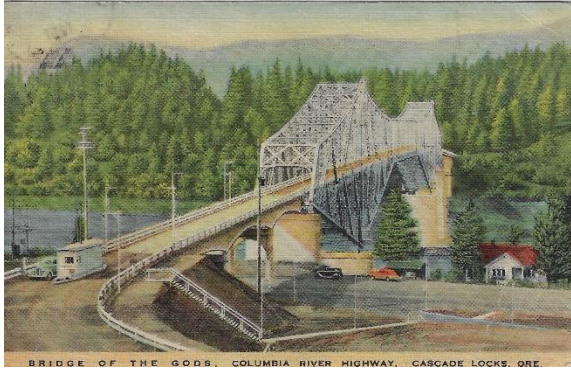
Five children ranging from about six to twelve years of age, two ladies who had second thoughts about the wisdom of this adventure, and two men who knew that this was not going to end well were doing a lot of praying.

That little motor certainly was not up to the task but with copious quantities of adrenaline flowing, George and my father, rowed with all their might. With God's intervention, they were able to pull that little rowboat with its cargo into shore, up the creek, and back to the picnic site. That picnic was not to be forgotten.

On Sunday we were all home except my father, who had to operate his Signal Oil service station downtown at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Ankeny St.

Early in the afternoon, we were called by our longtime friends and neighbors, Harry and Ruth McMullen, inviting our family to accompany them to look at the high water near Vanport (the dike hadn't yet broken.)

Because Dad was at work (and we were all still a bit shaken from the previous day's adventure), Mother declined the invitation. The McMullens stopped by our home (we lived on NE Lombard St just off of Union Ave) and then drove over to Vancouver. About this time the dike failed, and the authorities closed the Interstate Bridge to all but emergency traffic.



*Figure 4-9 Looking north at the Bridge of the Gods. In addition to highway traffic, the bridge serves as a link for hikers of the Pacific Coast Trail.*

In order to return home, the McMullens had to drive 40 miles east to the Bridge of the Gods at Cascade Locks, thence back to Portland via Hwy 30.

My father was unable to return home at the end of his shift due to all the traffic in North Portland (including the streets in our neighborhood). Instead, he parked several blocks away and walked home.



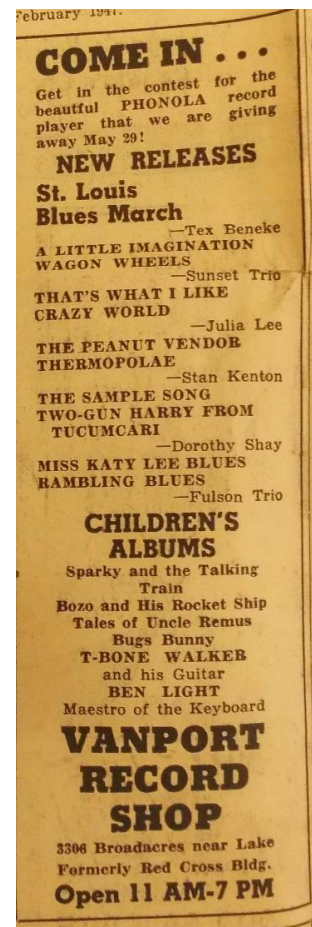
### ***The Record Shop***

On Sunday afternoon, Felix Baranovich was working at his Vanport Record Shop which was located at the west end of Lake St (the part of the project nearest the railroad fill).

Nervous about a possible evacuation, Baranovich was keeping watch from a window when, from about a quarter of a mile away, he saw water spilling over the dike like a waterfall. After seeing a portion of the dike fall, he started running through the streets, shouting warnings as loud as he could.

"After the alarm became general, and I was exhausted from running, I went back to my shop to try and get out part of the stock in the truck. Soon my assistant and I realized that this was worse than we believed. Life, not property, was the question. It was nearly a mile to the only exit on Denver Avenue through a maelstrom of panicked humanity. Some clutched a few possessions, some children, and some a dog or cat."

We helped those we could onto our truck which was never more than 50 or 100 feet ahead of the oncoming muddy waves.<sup>96</sup>



*Figure 4-10 (Vanport Tribune 4/29/48)*

<sup>96</sup> History.columbian.com/flood-of-1948-3/

## ***Izumi Oyama***



*Figure 4-11 Izumi Oyama*

One hundred and four families totaling 300 persons of Japanese ancestry were displaced when floodwaters inundated Vanport.<sup>97</sup>

Izumi Oyama, 47, and her husband Iwao had been Portland residents since emigrating in the 1930's. They settled in Vanport with their daughter and son following their return from internment in 1946.

On Sunday May 30th, Mrs. Oyama decided to forego making plans for Memorial Day and instead chose to have a quiet day alone at home in their apartment.

Her daughter, Minnie, was at her job as a nurse's trainee at Portland's

Providence Hospital. Mr. Oyama, an Issei leader, was in Portland working at the weekly Japanese newspaper he published and edited "The Oregon Nippo." The couple's son Albert was a student at the University of Oregon and was away at school.

Upon hearing news of the Vanport disaster on the radio at work, Mr. Oyama, called Minnie who rushed to the scene in her car. By the time she arrived, Vanport was completely flooded, and it was impossible to get home.

By mid-June, hopes of finding the bodies of Mrs. Oyama and a Japanese photographer, Sado Mizuno, were given up as a lost cause. Ultimately the two were counted among the dead in the official report of Vanport casualties.

Collections were taken in the community to provide aide to the displaced families. Many were hosted by other Japanese families in the area. Until they could find suitable housing, some families found shelter at the Japanese Methodist Church<sup>98</sup> and the Nichiren Buddhist Temple, just as they did in the earliest days of their return to Portland from the concentration camps.<sup>99</sup>



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<sup>97</sup> "NW Times 6/5/48

<sup>98</sup> Now renamed the Epworth United Methodist Church. The church ceased meeting from 1942 to 1945 while most congregants were living in Jerome, Idaho at the Minidoka Relocation Center.

<sup>99</sup> In 1942, the Nichiren Buddhist Temple provided space to securely store member's belongings; people being sent to the

concentration camps were only allowed to bring what they could carry. The City of Portland rented the Temple to use as a gym with the stipulation that the member's personal belongings would not be harmed. In 1959, the church was razed to build the Memorial Coliseum. Groundbreaking at the current location on SE Yamhill took place on March 22, 1959.



### ***True Friends***

The evening before the flood occurred, we were visiting friends and we heard a radio alert to the effect that flooding was imminent. We did not own a vehicle and were dependent on public transportation.

Our friends drove to our house on NE 47<sup>th</sup> and moved some of our furnishings to the attic. A few items were transported back to their one-bedroom home and we took up residence in their garage.<sup>100</sup>



### ***A Few Clothes and a Radio***

"Heroics were legion as the flood struck. People jumped into the water to aid strangers. Many dropped armloads of personal possessions to help others. Children were tied together to prevent straying.

One small boy was seen trudging along clutching only an air gun. One woman, dazed, pulled a child's wagon, loaded with a few clothes and a radio. A child sat atop the radio."<sup>101</sup>



*Figure 4-12 – Vanport Refugees (Acme Telephoto)*

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<sup>100</sup> Rootsweb.com

<sup>101</sup> Heroism



## ***The Deputy***

I was in Vanport when the first three-foot wave of water whirled down the streets.

I whipped my motorcycle down the project's winding curves, the siren full open and shouted to everybody I could see to run for his life.

Other deputies and I picked up kids from the street – every kid we could find – and thrust them into cars with orders to the drivers to get the hell out of there.

That first wave of water hit Denver Avenue fill in 12 to 15 minutes; within 30 minutes the entire project was filled with water on which floated debris from the wreckage of apartments....

We had to fight with some people to get them out and in a few cases, we actually had to draw our guns to back up orders which would save lives.

Some of the people were sitting in their kitchens drinking beer. They thought that it was a joke about the dike breaking. They looked out into the street but couldn't see the water because of the curves in the streets.

When the water did come around, a lot of them had wasted most of the time we were able to give them to save their lives.

Lyle Cocking  
Multnomah County Deputy Sheriff<sup>102</sup>



*Figure 4-13 "Contemplation" (author's collection)*

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<sup>102</sup> Deputies pg. 17

## The Vanport Hams

A search of Radio Amateur Call Books yielded this list of a dozen hams with home addresses in Vanport at the time of the flood:

|                      |                              |             |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| William O Eden       | 10508 N Island Ave           | W7HWC       |
| Robert W Evenson     | 10707 N Force Ave            | W7LDF       |
| Robert W Glaze       | 1902 N Victory Blvd          | W7AFL       |
| Everett J Gottschalk | 11206 N Lake Ave             | W7DZY       |
| Gerald S Kraxberger  | 11007 N Lake Ave             | W7JSO       |
| Joe Naemura          | 10316 N Force Ave            | W7GXA, W7CG |
| Delbert L Shampine   | 2204 N Victory Blvd          | W7KPK       |
| Albert L Smith       | 9901 N Denver Ct             | W7LGV       |
| George E Wann        | 3606 N Victory Blvd          | W7JXN       |
| George A Wise        | 2602 N Broadacre St          | W7GBW, W7MB |
| Howard F Wright      | 3510 N Cottonwood St Apt 713 | W7KQY       |
| William H Young      | 2708 N Broadacre St Apt 3655 | W7DCJ       |

Here are some stories of the Vanport Hams.

### William Young W7DCJ

William Young, W7DCJ, was hosting a Sunday dinner party at his Vanport apartment when the dike broke.

Since Mr. Young and one of his guests were blind, the rising flood water and surrounding chaos made finding a path to safety especially challenging.

Wendell Williams, W7HVX, helped the Young family and their guests escape in knee-deep water.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> QRR pg. 36



Figure 4-14 Joe Naemura's QSL card ca. 1950.

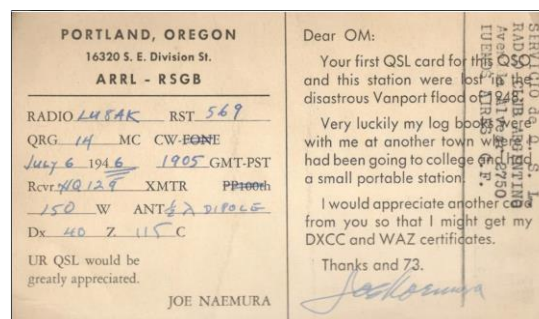


Figure 4-15 Reverse side of Joe's QSL.  
Note the special message regarding Vanport.

## Dr. Joe Naemura W7GXA (W7CG)

Joe Naemura was born in Gresham, attended Pleasant Valley Grade School and Gresham High School.

As a youngster he developed a love for baseball, playing on leagues in east county. And he was a life-long Mariners fan, seldom missing a chance to watch or listen to a game.

Joe got his first ham license, W7GXA, before the war and also served commercially as a ship's radio officer.

After being interned with their family at Minidoka in Hunt, Idaho, Joe and his brother Roy volunteered for military service. Roy was killed in Italy as part of the highly-decorated 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. Joe was diagnosed with tuberculosis and spent time convalescing at the Veteran's Hospital in Walla Walla.

After returning from internment, Joe's family found housing at Vanport, one of the only options open to Japanese Oregonians at the time.

Joe's mother, Seki, was at home on Memorial Day, 1948. With just moments to evacuate, she placed Roy's posthumously-awarded Silver Star and Purple Heart medals and his coffin flag in the family's bag from the internment camp and climbed over the dike.

When the flood struck, Joe was away attending school at Oregon State College working on his medical degree.

Despite his family's losses, Joe got on the air with his low-power station at school and assisted with emergency radio traffic for which he was recognized in QST magazine.

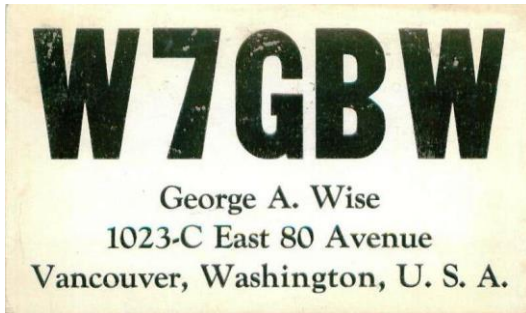


Figure 4-16 George Wise QSL – 1949  
(Courtesy W5RG)



Figure 4-17 Helen Wise QSL – 1958  
(Courtesy K8CX)

## George and Helen Wise W7GBW (W7MB) & W7RVM

George Wise was born in Portland in 1920. He served in the US Army during World War 2 and joined the Merchant Marines after the war, serving in both the Atlantic and Pacific. George and his wife Helen lived in Vanport at the time of the flood.

Like his friend and Vanport neighbor, Joe Naemura, George Wise resumed chasing DX as soon as he could get back on the air. By the time that the flood hit Vanport, George had already received QSL cards back from over 100 countries. This was fortuitous because, in late May, George's QSL cards were at the ARRL offices in Newington, Connecticut, being verified for his DXCC award. Thus, unlike Joe's Naemura's QSL cards, George's were spared from the flood.

As shown by the address on George's 1949 QSL (Figure 4-16), the Wise family may have been among those who found temporary housing at one of Vancouver's housing projects following the flood.

George and Helen eventually settled in southeast Portland and he worked in marine electronics.

In 1955, George became a charter member of the Willamette Valley DX Club. His prowess for working foreign amateurs was legend. He was the first ham recognized for talking with amateurs in 100 countries on 5 different amateur bands ("5 Band DXCC" #1). He was the first ham from the northwest acknowledged for talking to 100 countries on 160 meters (similar to the am broadcast band). And, by getting QSLs from every recognized country in the world, George held top ranking on the DX "honor roll" for many years. George passed in 1996 at the age of 76.

Helen Wise was licensed as W7RVM in the 1950's and her QSL card is shown above (Figure 4-17). The fabulous cartooning on Helen's card was done by W7ESJ, "Connie" Conyngham. Connie was another Portland ham involved with Vanport. The "Junior Ops" shown running amok in the ham shack likely represent the couple's children George, William, and Eileen.





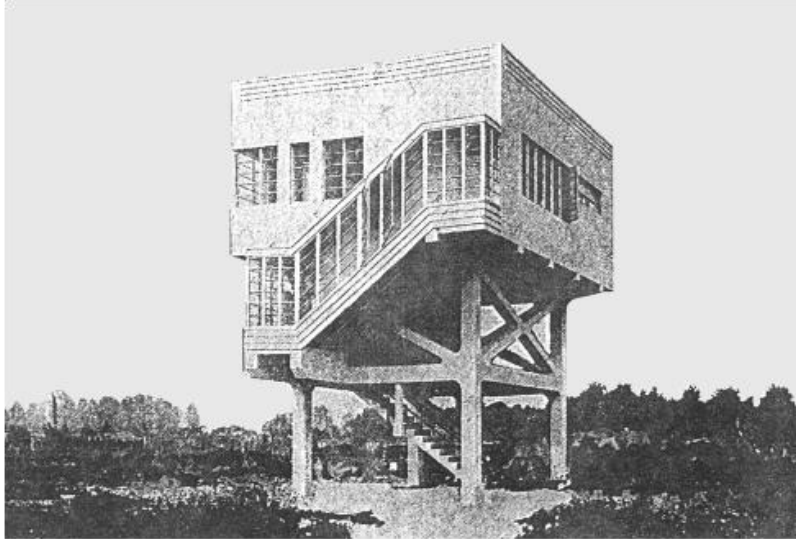
*Figure 4-18 KGW's Western Electric Model 1-B AM transmitter (date unknown). KGW installed this 1 kw transmitter at their downtown station in 1926 and moved it to Vanport in 1931.  
(Oregonian files from KGW AINW report)*

## **KGW**

KGW moved its Western Electric transmitter and towers from downtown Portland to land off of N Denver Avenue August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931. The 90-acre site, just northeast of the future site of Vanport, gave KGW room for future expansion. And, the high water table at the site provided a substantial performance gain. At Denver, the 300' steel lattice

towers from downtown were again used to support a flat top antenna.

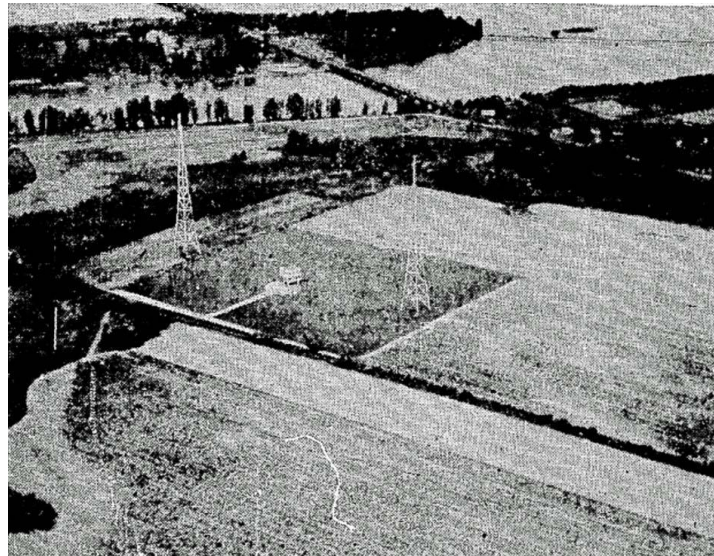
A few months later, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1932, KGW marked ten years in the business with a celebratory "KGW 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program" that was heard over the NBC Orange and Gold networks.



*Figure 4-19 The original appearance of the KGW transmitter building at Denver Avenue.  
(The Oregonian 8/2/31 from KGW AINW report).*

The transmitter building at the Denver Avenue site was designed for KGW by Claussen and Claussen in a Moderne design. As such, the structure featured numerous steel-framed glass windows and a smooth stucco finish over a base of reinforced concrete and structural clay tile. The top floor was the main

transmitting facility. The lower floor contained a small fuel room. And the base was purposely left open. 22'-high reinforced concrete pilings supported the upper floors with the intention of protecting the transmitter rooms and offices from flooding. The building reached a 32' overall height.



*Figure 4-20 View of the KGW site in April 1934. The Oregon Slough and Hayden Island run across the top and Denver Avenue and the Interstate Bridge cross the upper right corner. The twin 300' towers dominate the site. In a few years, the surrounding fields will become Vanport.  
(The Oregonian 4/8/34)*

## "The World's Largest Toothpick"

When KEX went on the air Christmas Day 1926, their studios were downtown in the Terminal Sales Building. The KEX transmitter was near the corner of Buckley Avenue and East Glisan Street (today's 122<sup>nd</sup> and Glisan).

When the Oregonian purchased KEX in 1933, arrangements were made to move their studios to the Oregonian Building.

KEX's old transmitter and towers were left at their East Portland location, and a new transmitter and tower were erected at KGW's Denver Avenue site.

Rather than using another flattop antenna, a unique vertical antenna was hung from a 300' tall spar affectionately dubbed as "The World's Largest Toothpick."

Three trees, each over 100' long were floated to Portland where they were milled and painted. Five coats of a special non-metallic white paint coated each piece.<sup>104</sup>

The finished mast sections were returned to the river and floated to a spot near the Interstate Bridge where they were hauled out and taken to the Denver site.

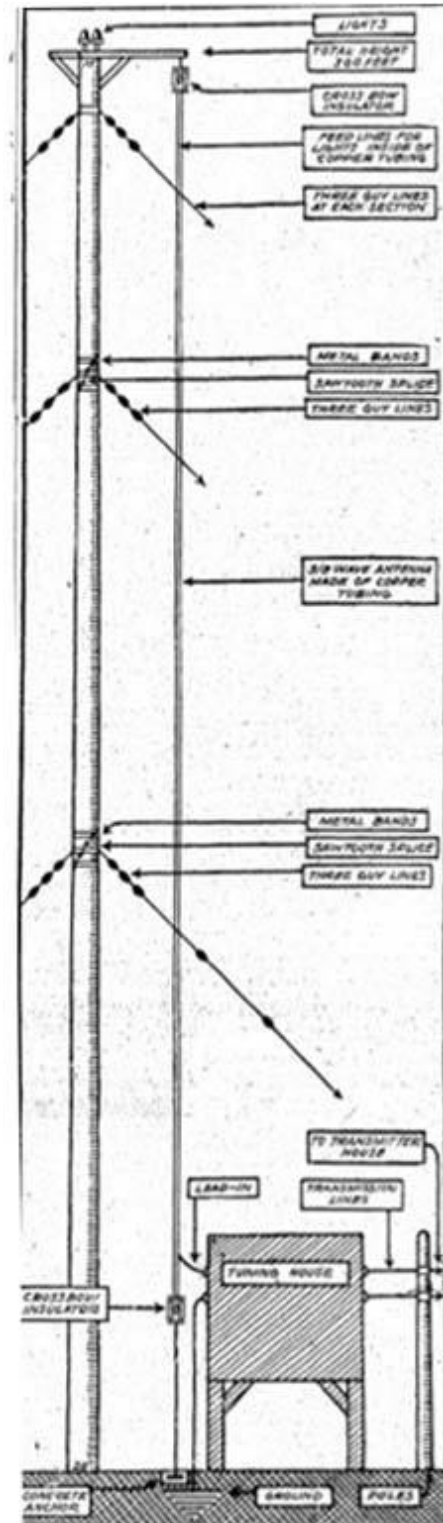
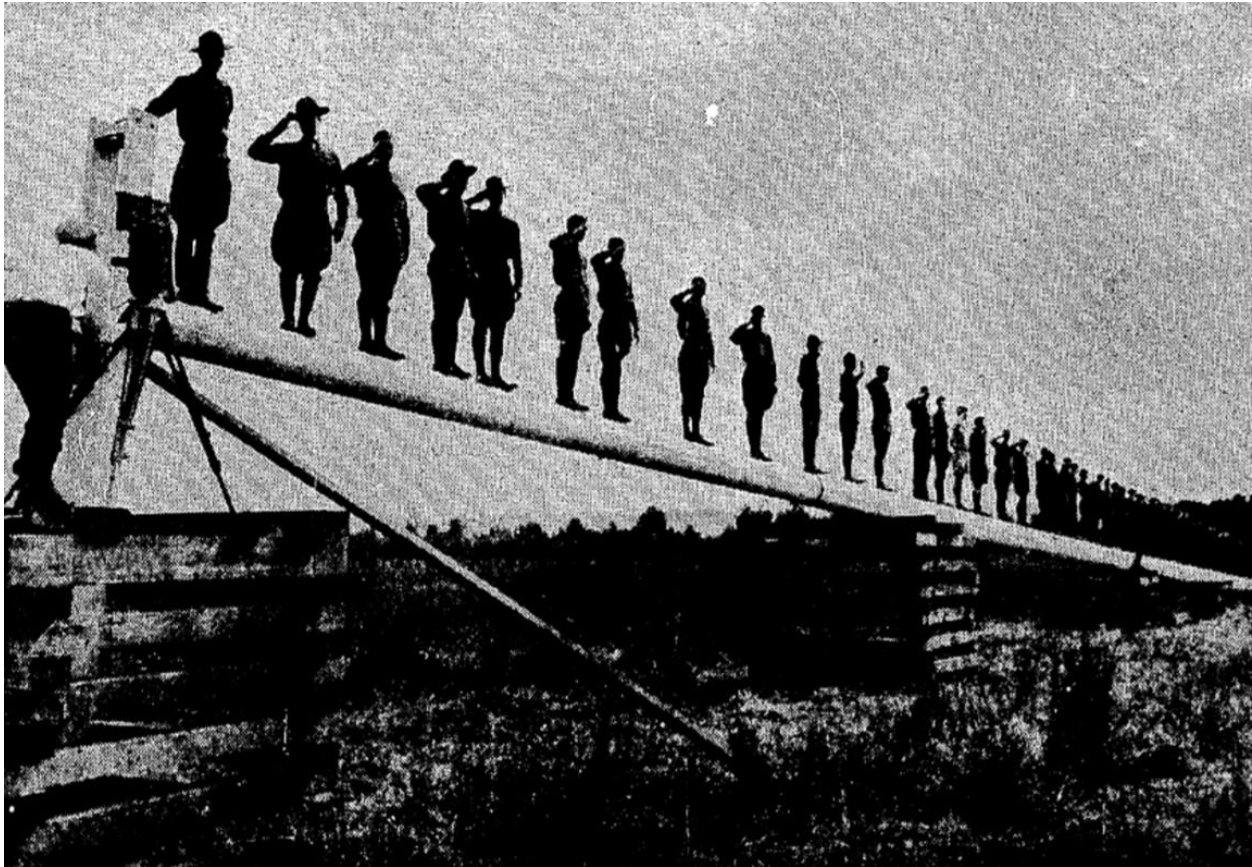


Figure 4-21 KEX tower diagram

<sup>104</sup> Eventually wide contrasting bands of orange paint were added to enhance visibility for aircraft.



*(The Oregonian 4/29/34)*



*Figure 4-22 85 Boy Scouts from "Radio Troop 99" pose on KEX's tower while Universal Newsreel films. (The Oregonian 5/27/34)*

The novelty of such a tall wooden radio mast was not lost on the media. Universal Newsreel cameras filmed 150 Boy Scouts standing and marching on the mast. Among them were members of radio "troop 99, attached to KEX, the only official radio Boy Scout troop in the country."<sup>105</sup>

Famed radio announcer Graham MacNamee narrated the "talkie" which was screened locally at the Broadway and Music Box theaters and then distributed nationwide. The press touted the KEX tower as the tallest wooden structure in the US.

Local papers published enthusiastic predictions from representatives of local lumber mills who proclaimed that this project spelled the beginning of the end for steel radio masts.<sup>106</sup>

KEX's choice of a vertical radiator was also novel for the time; most broadcasters still favored flattops. However, KEX was not the first to go vertical - WLW had already christened its 800' steel monopole in Cincinnati OH.

The first section of KEX's spar was sunk in an oil-filled 10' deep concrete well and secured with guy wires. Then, the

<sup>105</sup> The Oregonian 5/19/34 pg. 1

<sup>106</sup> Moyes 5/3/34



other sections were put up using a gin pole. The radiator was a 1" copper pipe that was held about 6' away from the spar by insulators and an outrigger (see Figure 4-21).

The aircraft lights at the top of tower were powered by lines running inside the radiator.

The arrival of KEX required remodeling and expanding the KGW transmitter building. The top floor was expanded to about twice its original size to accommodate KEX's new 5 kw transmitter. KGW upgraded to a new 5 kw transmitter at the same time.



*Figure 4-23 East view of the KGW transmitter building in 1934 with the KEX wooden mast in the background. Note that the top floor has been significantly expanded. The lower portion of the building was enclosed in 1949 when the facility was rebuilt. This created a ground-floor garage space and an apartment on the second floor.*

*(Oregon Historical Society Negative # 26903 - from KGW AINW report)*



*Figure 4-24 Base of KGW's new 625' tower with one of the 300' towers in the background.  
(The Oregonian 8/15/37)*

On August 14, 1937, KGW upgraded from its flattop antenna system and began using a new 625' Truscon tower, the "West Tower."

Twenty-miles of copper ribbon were buried in the swampy-soil to create a ground plane for the half-wave vertical radiator.

The tower itself was on a 60' deep foundation, supported by an 18" base insulator and numerous guy wires, and topped by a 1000-watt aviation beacon.

On December 25, 1941, the "East Tower," a second 625' Truscon vertical radiator was erected and nighttime power was increased to 5,000 watts.

KGW's old 300' steel towers were pulled down and scrapped in November 1937.



*Figure 4-25 KGW-KEX towers viewed from the Denver Avenue southbound exit from Vanport. Ca. 1947. (Oregon Historical Society negative OrHi 37471)*

## **The Vanport Celebration**

On the evening of August 12, 1942, a crowd of nearly 6,000 gathered at the Vanport movie theatre for the Vanport grand opening ceremonies (see page 12).

KGW broadcast the ceremonies with Homer Welch, KGW's program director, acting as master of ceremonies. Abe Bercovitz conducted members of KGW's station orchestra in performing specially arranged musical tributes to Vanport. He was joined by: Neva Clark, soprano; Johnny Harell, baritone; Ron Salt,

comedian; Glenn Shelly, pianist; Patsy Bauman, popular singer; Ralph Hamilton, accordionist; and Pat Smith, tenor.<sup>107</sup>

## **Duopoly**

In 1944, The Oregonian sold KEX due to the FCC's duopoly rules. However, their transmitter remained at KGW's Vanport site until a new site in Clackamas was ready.

KEX moved to Clackamas in April 1948, avoiding the flooding at Vanport by a matter of a weeks.

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<sup>107</sup> Celebration pg. 9





Figure 4-26 Vanport May 30, 1948. The lone surviving KGW tower stands in the upper righthand corner. Lands east of Denver Avenue (bottom left) are not yet under water.

## The Flood

KGW's Denver Avenue transmitter site was located at the farthest point from the breach in the railroad fill. So, when the fill broke through on May 30<sup>th</sup>, it took the flood waters nearly an hour to reach the station.

After seeing the water approaching from a station window, transmitter operator Clyde Bruyn shut down KGW at 5:20 pm and made his way downstairs. By the time he was headed out of the site, water was swirling around the wheels of his car.

*"...I saw the KGW tower suddenly fold up just like a jackknife, except there was also an accompanying spurt of blue flame."<sup>108</sup>*

After reaching higher ground, Mr. Bruyn stopped and watched the action. Flood waters were picking up and carrying along large chunks of debris. Soon an apartment building crashed into one of

the 22' pilings supporting the transmitter building.<sup>109</sup> Then, at 5:51<sup>110</sup>, a building struck one of the guy wires supporting the East Tower, causing it to crumple into the flood. KEX's 300' wooden tower went next.

Eventually, only the top few feet of the transmitter building remained above the flood, with water waist deep in the equipment rooms. All of the transmitting equipment was destroyed and only the West Tower remained.

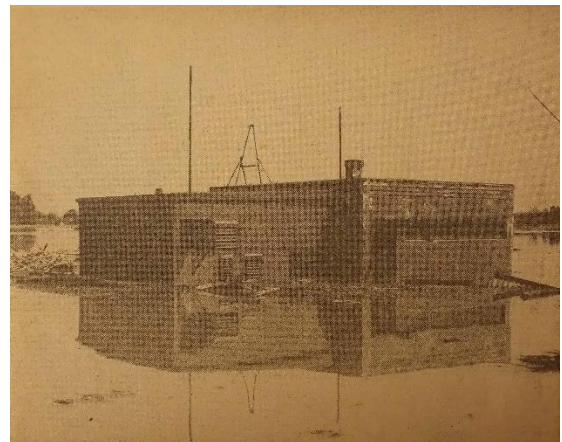


Figure 4-27 KGW transmitter building  
(The Oregonian 6/1/48)

<sup>108</sup> Vanport Disaster in Retrospect pg. 7

<sup>109</sup> Behind the Mike pg. 18

<sup>110</sup> Vanport pg. 108



### **Moving to Mount Scott**

Within hours after the Vanport site went off the air, The Journal's KALE offered KGW the use of an auxiliary transmitter at their not-yet-opened Mt. Scott site.

"Chief Engineer Harold Singleton, technical supervisor Earl Peterson and technicians Art Bean and Daniel Wilhoit worked all night adjusting the equipment to KGW's frequency and making minor repairs."<sup>111</sup> KGW was back on the air within about 14 hours.

"By 4:30 Monday morning KGW was feeding the news of the Vanport tragedy to NBC (they made eight network news releases) and by 7:30 am, the station was back on the air, using the KALE facilities, with flood warnings, disaster news and relief pleas, with free time available to all disaster agencies."<sup>112</sup>

KGW operated from KALE's Mt. Scott location from May 31<sup>st</sup> until June 26<sup>th</sup>.

In the meantime, they took delivery of a new General Electric transmitter and installed it at their recently opened Healy Heights location<sup>113</sup> where it joined their FM plant.<sup>114</sup>

The site at Vanport remained under water for several weeks and it would be almost a year before it was rebuilt.

### **Rodgers Jenkins – W7HSZ<sup>115</sup>**

Rodgers Jenkins first exposure to radio came during the early 1930's at his father Byron's radio store at the corner of SW 2<sup>nd</sup> and Morrison in downtown

Portland. During the lean depression years, hams building their own stations were regular customers for used tubes and parts, often salvaged from obsolete trade-ins.

By the time Mr. Jenkins began attending Benson High School, ham radio was his main hobby. After graduation, he worked at KGW's Denver Avenue transmitter site doing monitoring and maintenance.

During World War II, the Navy sent Mr. Jenkins to Hawaii where he spent two years at Pearl Harbor repairing electronics on ships of all sizes.

Following the war, he resumed working at KGW's Vanport transmitter. And, after the flood waters subsided, he took part in clearing out the mud and water that had filled the transmitting building.

After leaving KGW, Rodgers Jenkins was an early Tektronix hire, working at their original location at 7<sup>th</sup> and Southeast Hawthorne.



*Figure 4-28 Rodgers Jenkins at Tektronix  
(Courtesy George Kirkwood)*

<sup>111</sup> KGW, Portland's Pioneer Station pg. 5

<sup>112</sup> KGW, Portland's Pioneer Station pg. 5

<sup>113</sup> 4545 SW Council Crest Dr.

<sup>114</sup> Behind the Mike 6/25/48 pg. 18

<sup>115</sup> Biographical material on Rodgers Jenkins from "Rodgers Marine Electronics Celebrates 40 Years of Service" by Tim Jenkins.

In 1958, he turned an interest in electronic organs into a new business, Rodgers Organs. Rodgers Organs sold home, church, and theater organs, including a special deluxe model for Portland's Veterans Memorial Coliseum when it was built in 1960.

After selling Rodgers Organs, he founded Rodgers Marine Electronics, catering to the needs of area boaters.

### **The Raytheon Transmitter**

In 1949 KGW completed the restoration of its Denver Avenue site. A \$1 million upgrade to its plant included a new 5,000-watt Raytheon transmitter and a new Fisher guyed radiator to replace the east tower that was destroyed in the flood.

In the early 1950's an RCA Model BTA-5-F transmitter was installed, and in 1979 a Continental Model 315-R1 transmitter was added<sup>116</sup>.

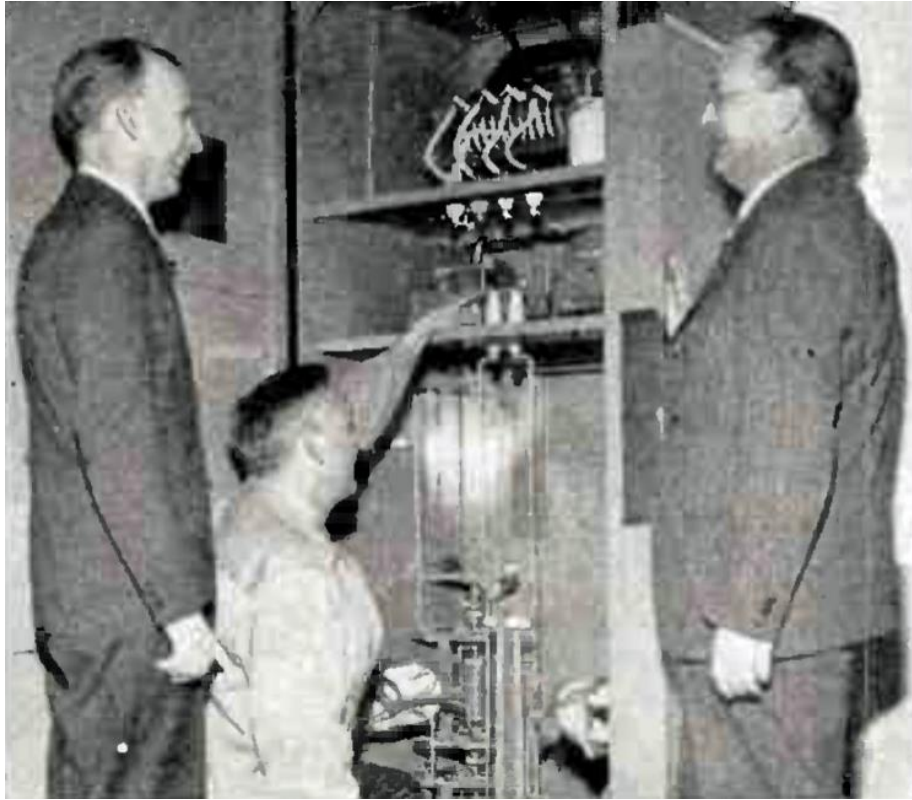


*Figure 4-29 Components of the new Raytheon transmitter being hoisted through a third-story window. (Broadcasting 4/11/49)*

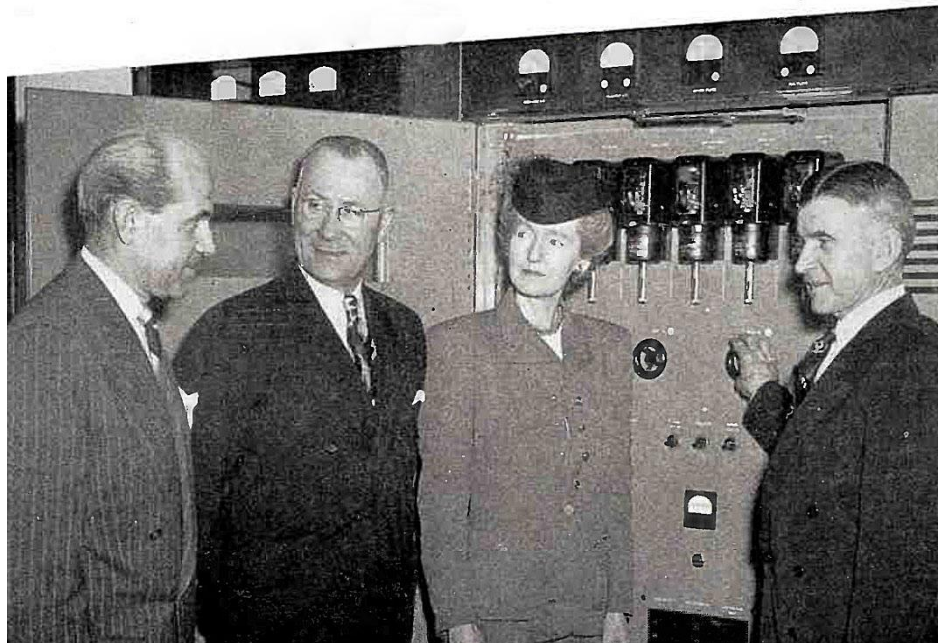
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<sup>116</sup> The Raytheon transmitter remained in place until the building was vacated when the property was sold. The Continental was also

removed at that time. The RCA equipment was abandoned in place.



*Figure 4-30 KGW transmitter techs examine the new phasing unit. (L to R) Arthur Bean, joined KGW in 1931, Clyde Bruyn, 1933, and Clarence Carlquist, 1925. Clyde Bruyn was on duty when the flood hit. (Broadcasting 4/11/49)*



*Figure 4-31 Inaugurating KGW's new Raytheon transmitter. (Left to Right) KGW manager H. Quenton Cox, MJ Frey general manager of the Oregonian, Portland Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee and Oregon Governor Douglas McKay (Broadcasting 4/11/49)*



*Figure 4-32 Picture of the RCA Model BTA-5F transmitter taken during the 2004 historical survey of the transmitter building. (KGW AINW Report)*

### **Closing the Denver Avenue Site**

In May, 1999, the Port of Portland purchased KGW's 90.5 acre Denver Avenue<sup>117</sup> site.

Expansion plans at Portland International Airport called for filling wetlands. So, in exchange, plans were made to remove the infrastructure at the KGW transmitter site, replace invasive plants with natives, and to create a wetlands habitat.

In December, 2000, the two KGW towers were taken down and the copper wires forming the ground planes were dug out and removed.

The transmitter building and site access roads were left intact for another five years. During this period, the transmitter building was listed on Portland's Historic Resource inventory as a Rank III<sup>118</sup> resource and was recommended for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the building was razed anyway in 2005.

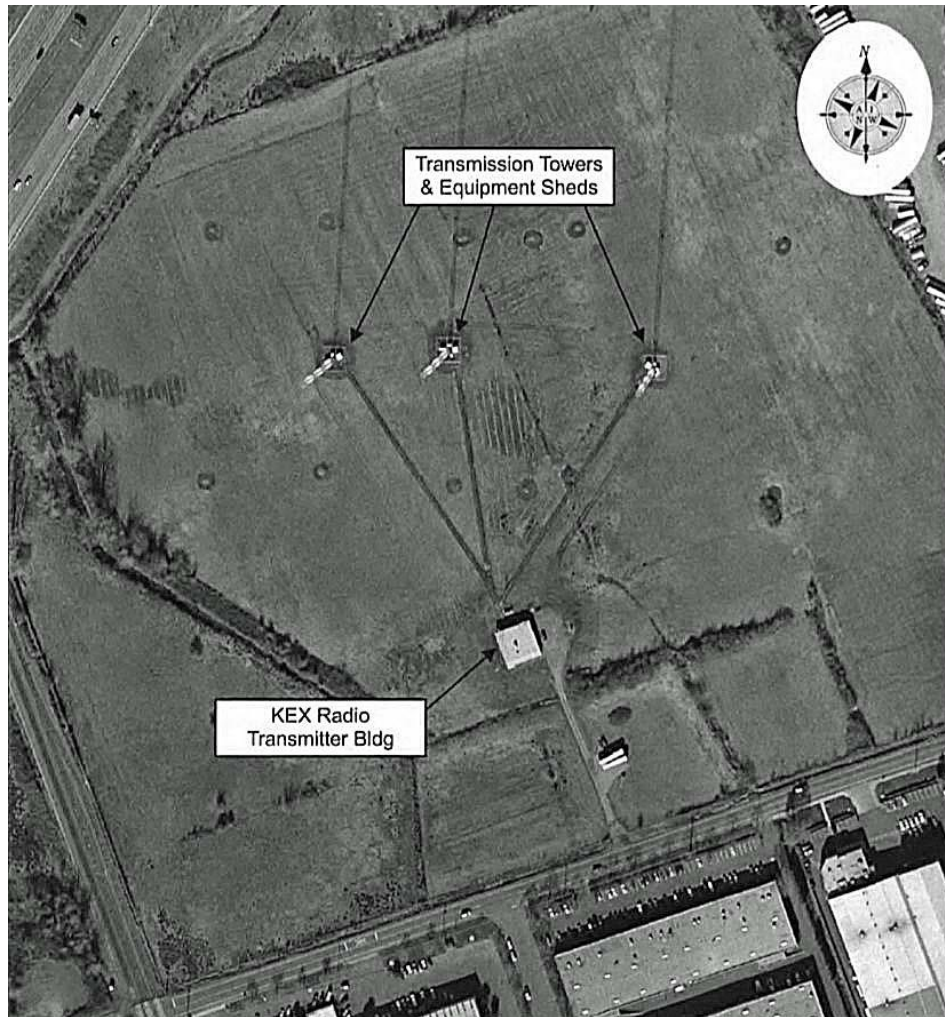
After KGW vacated the site, the building interior was significantly vandalized and the structure showed the effects of flood damage. Removing the transmitter building cleared the way for full implementation of a Wetland Mitigation Plan, creating a wetlands where the KGW Denver Avenue transmitter site had been.

<sup>117</sup> The Denver Avenue site was eventually given a "real" address, 10000 N Expo Road. Its gated access road lead south from Expo Road near the

southeast entrance to the Portland Expo Center parking lot.

<sup>118</sup> Rank III history resources are inventoried but are not afforded protection.





*Figure 4-33 Aerial photo of the 46-acre KEX site near Clackamas (ODOT 2008)*

## KEX's Close Call

On August 25, 1933, NBC sold KEX to The Oregonian which already owned KGW. In 1935 the KEX transmitter was moved to KGW's Vanport location where they used a separate 300' tower.<sup>119</sup>

On December 28, 1944, because of the FCC's duopoly ruling, The Oregonian sold KEX to Westinghouse. While Westinghouse prepared a new transmitter site for KEX, they continued

transmitting from KGW's Vanport location.

Finally, on April 8, 1948, KEX moved to 9415 SE Lawnfield Rd, near Clackamas, OR. The new transmitter site featured a Westinghouse 50-HG transmitter and three 455' Blaw-Knox center-guyed vertical radiators. Power increased from 5kw at Vanport to 50kw day-and-night at Lawnfield, making KEX Oregon's only 50,000-watt station.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> See the KGW article for more history.

<sup>120</sup> KE7GGV.tripod.com



*Figure 4-34 Blaw-Knox 455' center-guyed towers erected in 1948. (ODOT 2008)*

KEX's timely move out of Vanport, just seven weeks before the flood, spared them from any flood damage. However, their former 300' wooden tower was felled on May 30<sup>th</sup> when a floating apartment building drifted into KGW's site.

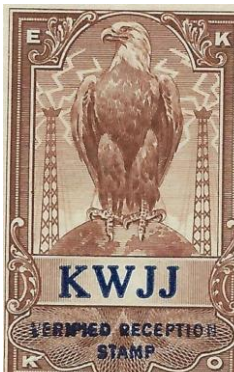
Like other Portland broadcasters, KEX was lauded in the press for their work

during the 1948 flood. "KEX was credited with giving the first news of the Vanport dike break. When Producer Ken Finley, who lived at Vanport near the dike, heard the first rush of water he looked out, grabbed the phone, and notified the KEX newsroom. The warning was promptly aired, in fact so promptly that the Vanport Sheriff's office denied the flash!"<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Broadcasting 6/07/48

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 5 – The Response***

On the Preceding Page: EKKO radio reception confirmation stamps (various sources)





*Figure 5-1 Flood survivors spend the night at the Portland American Legion Hall (ACME Telephoto)*

Before, during, and after the flood at Vanport, commercial broadcasters and the rest of community did everything they could to help. Part 4 focuses on the response to the disaster in the immediate aftermath of the flood.

"Warnings of disaster were flashed to the community when the danger became apparent. Appeals were broadcast for rescue workers, trucks, and other facilities."<sup>122</sup>

"Radio appeals for food and clothing brought thousands of persons to Portland grade schools, the Red Cross and Salvation Army headquarters...."<sup>123</sup>

"Stations quickly rounded up all available personnel. Special events crews were assembled. Skeleton

holiday staffs were filled up and sent out with tape and wire recording equipment and generators. News from the stricken area was given top priority, with scheduled programs abandoned. Bulletins from the Red Cross and rescue authorities were broadcast."<sup>124</sup>

"Loyal staffs worked around the clock – often three or four times - with little thought of personal danger or sacrifice involved."<sup>125</sup>

Initial efforts following the flood were aimed at rescue and recovery. Soon the focus shifted to providing basics to those that left Vanport with little or nothing.

<sup>122</sup> Flood Role

<sup>123</sup> Food, Clothing Given pg. 3

<sup>124</sup> Flood Role

<sup>125</sup> ibid



*Figure 5-2 Margarette Sheely and her five children pass time in their temporary home - a classroom at Whitaker School. Red Cross cots and a donated bed replace the gas range, furniture, and other belongings lost at Vanport. On a card table, a 1939 Majestic Model 62A radio brings music and news. (Alan deLay photo) (Courtesy Oregon Journal)*

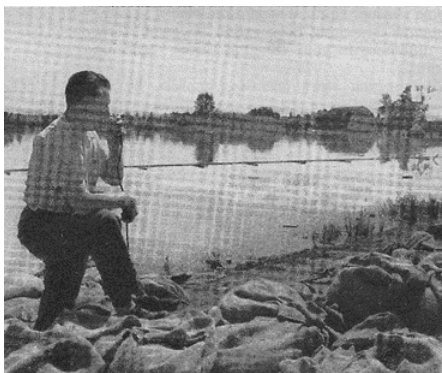
Many families were split up during the evacuation. The Red Cross began registering the displaced people and local radio stations began broadcasting names and locations of survivors to reassure concerned friends and family to help reunite people that had been separated. "There were 700 names on the list. But, through a broadcast of the names the list was cut in half by refugees who had heard their names mentioned among the missing."<sup>126</sup>

The role of hams shifted following the initial flooding. Some continued providing communications at the former

Vanport site. Others assisted with rescue and cleanup efforts and kept watch on the dikes that were still standing. Still others handled message traffic in and out of the region helping reunite families and responding to inquiries from concerned loved ones from across the country.

In the next section we'll meet three more hams who helped out at Vanport. Then, we'll look at the efforts of three more local broadcasters. Finally, we'll talk about the recovery efforts and President Truman's visit.

<sup>126</sup> Broadcasting 6/14/48 pg. 25



*Figure 5-3 Bill Lucas, W7AEF, radioing-in a status report on the flooding.  
(QST 9/48 Courtesy ARRL)*

### **W7AEF - Bill Lucas**

Local hams may remember Bill Lucas, W7AEF, from the days when he owned Portland Radio in downtown Portland. Bill was the designated "ten-meter supervisor" for the Vanport emergency.

Even as Don Smith's (W7DHF) message that the dike had broken went out to the Red Cross headquarters, Bill was operating mobile from the streets of Vanport. The district dike superintendent was riding along that afternoon directing operations with a portable public address system.

Upon hearing W7DHF's message, the dike superintendent exclaimed "Let's go" and they raced to the center of Vanport where they met W7ASF, Stan Rand. They drove together, bumper-to-bumper, toward the west side of Vanport, seeking to determine the extent of the dike break-through.



*Figure 5-4 Stan Rand, W7ASF, demonstrating his portable radiophone.  
(Courtesy Popular Science 8/35)*

Suddenly, the superintendent saw the approaching water and shouted, "Quick, turn around! There'll be fifteen feet of water here in nothing flat."<sup>127</sup> Reversing course, the convoy made its way to a high point along Denver Avenue from which the superintendent was able to resume directing operations with the continuing help of Stan and Bill.

### **W7ASF – Stan Rand**

In the 1930's Stan Rand was a member of Hood River's Crag Rats mountain rescue team. In the image above, he's shown demonstrating a portable "radiophone" transceiver of his own design. The complete unit, including batteries weighed only 28 pounds making it practical to take on rescue missions. The Crag Rats' base station in Hood River was KIJY, and their portable unit was KIJZ. Both were licensed for 100 watts on 2.728 mc.

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<sup>127</sup> QST 9/48 pg. 38.





*Figure 5-5 Chuck Austin, W7LBV  
(Salem High "Viking" 1949)*

### **W7LBV – Chuck Austin**

During the week following the loss of Vanport, 16-year old ham Charles E "Chuck" Austin was surprised to be called out of his classes at Salem High School.

In 1946, Chuck joined the Salem High Radio & Electronics Club, W7BPN. Using the club's Hallicrafters S-20R receiver and code practice records, Chuck learned Morse code while he studied theory for his license. Although he passed the theory on his first try, it took a second Greyhound bus ride to the Portland FCC office to pass the code. Chuck received his first ticket April 11, 1947. Soon, he joined the Oregon Emergency Net and began handling traffic.

Prior to his retirement, the club's faculty advisor was "Rosie" Roseman, W7DZT. Later, Carl R Lindstrom, W7KHV, the school's electronics shop teacher was the trustee. The club's call changed from W7BPN to W7LWU around 1948.

It was Mr. Lindstrom that came to get Chuck out of class that day with news that ham operators were urgently needed to help with the flood emergency in Portland.

After getting permission from his parents, Chuck and Mr. Lindstrom drove to the home of W7IJJ, Donald Johnston at 154<sup>th</sup> and SE Stark St in Portland. In Chuck's words "It was the most beautiful station I'd ever seen." With a mix of commercial and home brew equipment, including a 1 KW amplifier, and a dipole mounted on high poles, W7IJJ had a plenty-strong signal.

Even after the community of Vanport was lost on May 30<sup>th</sup>, hams remained on duty, day and night, coordinating relief efforts, handling communications in and out of the area, and keeping watch along the dikes up and down the river.

Stations operating low-power on 80 meters had little problem being heard during the day. However, at night, as long-distance propagation improved, interference from stations outside the region became a real problem. Sleeping days, Chuck's job was to monitor the emergency calling frequency during the overnight hours and, when necessary, ask the non-emergency stations to move to other frequencies ("QSY").

As reported in QST magazine, Chuck and W7FNZ, Milton "Tiny" Marsh, also provided a "much needed link with the Oregon Traffic Network,"<sup>128</sup> a CW net.

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<sup>128</sup> QST 9/48 pg. 39



After several days of operating, Chuck returned to Salem, although by then school had let out for the summer. Chuck continued participating with the Oregon Emergency Network for another year or two after high school.

Today, Chuck lives in retirement in Salem although he has never retired from amateur radio.

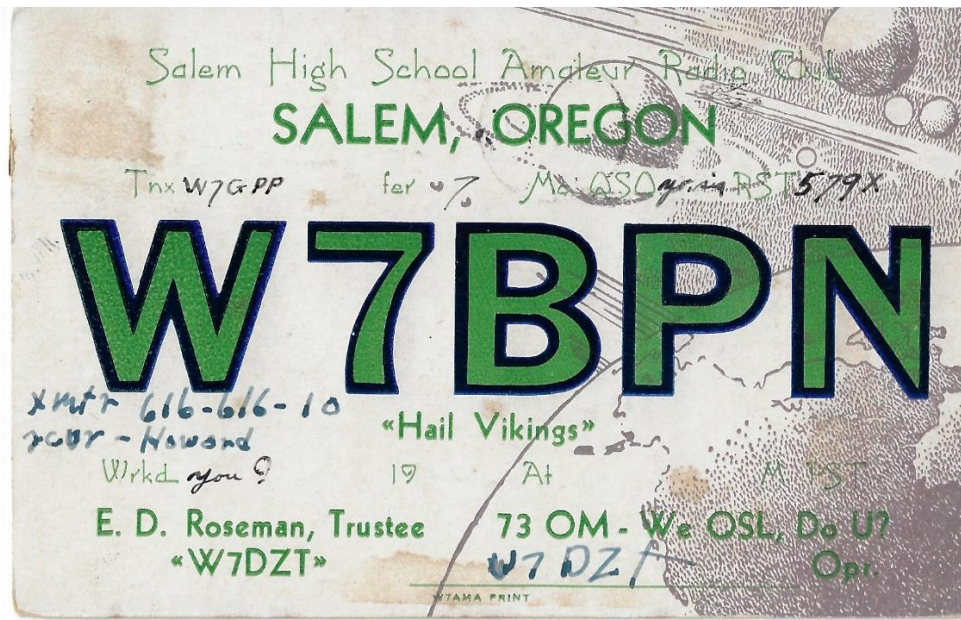


Figure 5-6 1940 QSL card from Salem High School's radio club, W7BPN. The station was being operated by the club's faculty advisor, "Rosie" Roseman W7DZT.

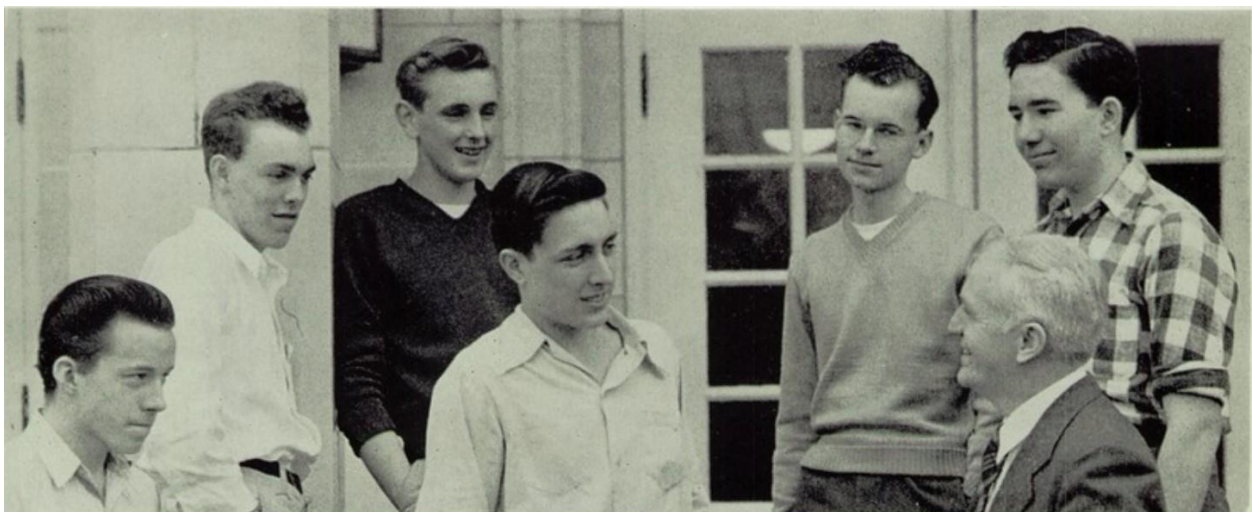


Figure 5-7 The Salem High School Amateur Radio Club in 1948. President – Chuck Austin W7LBV, Secretary-Ronald Busey, Treasurer-Ted Roake. Advisor-Mr. George Birrell. "Transmitting from room 28 will be station W7LWU, known also to radio hams as "Love William Union" or "Long-Winded Uncle." The club's call was changed from W7BPN to W7LWU about 1948. (Salem High School Viking Yearbook 1948)



*Figure 2-8 Members of the Portland Amateur Radio Club pose with their radios ca. 1948*

## **The Portland Amateur Radio Club**

PARC, the Portland Amateur Radio Club, was formed in 1941 and became an ARRL-affiliated club on January 8, 1947. After World War 2, the Club's callsign was W7KYC. Their current callsign is W7LT in honor of Johnny Peal (SK). The club is still active today supporting repeaters, providing ham training and testing, operating field day and emergency operations, and performing community service in addition to promoting fraternity among hams.

Though early club records are not available, the following PARC members are known to have operated during the 1948 Vanport emergency:

|       |                  |                        |
|-------|------------------|------------------------|
| W7ADH | Lee Campbell     | Portland               |
| W7AEF | Bill Lucas       | Portland               |
| W7AMQ | Gale Sells       | Portland               |
| W7ESJ | Connie Conyngham | Portland               |
| W7EXQ | Bruce Stokes     | Portland               |
| W7FNS | Virgil W Cohen   | Portland               |
| W7HJU | Ed Lamb          | Beaverton              |
| W7HTS | Paul Sloan       | Portland (life member) |
| W7HVX | Red Williams     | Portland               |
| W7IE  | Bob Wright       | Portland               |
| W7JAZ | Bill Gleason     | Portland               |

|      |                  |          |
|------|------------------|----------|
| W7LI | Thurlow Wauchope | Portland |
| W7LT | Johnny Peal      | Portland |
| W7MB | George Wise      | Portland |

Most likely there were many others, as well, and the list will be augmented as more information becomes available.

**Official Station of the 1988 ARRL National Convention**

# W7KYC

Callsign of the Portland Amateur Radio Club

**P.O. Box 25088  
Portland, Oregon 97225  
Multnomah County**

**73 in 88!**

*Ref. Dat.*  
*RA7YKR*

|                        |                         |                       |                       |     |         |                                                                                  |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Radio:<br><b>N7HMB</b> | Date:<br><b>9-11-88</b> | UTC:<br><b>12:15p</b> | MHz:<br><b>147.04</b> | 2x: | Ur RST: | QSL:<br><input type="checkbox"/> PSE<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TNX! |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Figure 5-9 The 1988 ARRL National Convention was held at Jantzen Beach, near the former site of Vanport. This is a QSL card from the Portland Amateur Radio Club's convention station.





*Figure 5-10 CS Jackson, KALE's general manager, pilots The Oregon Journal's Bell 47B "Newsroom Dragonfly" in 1947. Sadly, Mr. Jackson was killed in a crash in December 1947. The Journal soon had a new "dragonfly" and used it extensively during the flooding. (The Newsroom Dragonfly)*

## KALE / KPOJ

### A Little History

KALE's transmitter site on Eastview Drive, had a sweeping view of the 1948 flood, from Troutdale almost to the airport. The location, atop Mount Scott southeast of Portland, was never in danger of flooding. But KALE was thoroughly involved in the Vanport Emergency, nonetheless.

From September 1932 until March 1946, The Oregon Journal newspaper,

Portland's evening daily, owned two AM stations, KOIN and KALE (1300 KC).

In March 1946, The Journal sold KOIN to the Marshall Fields Department Store which was expanding into media at the time.

Despite the fact that the two stations were no longer under joint ownership, they continued to share a common site at 5516 SW Barnes Road (Sylvan Hill).



## Expansion

Even as The Journal newspaper expanded into AM broadcasting in the 1930's, in the 1940's the company aspired to expand into FM broadcasting and television. Following World War II, work began on the Mount Scott site. On June 6, 1948, just a week after the dike broke at Vanport, KALE went live with AM and FM at the Mount Scott site under their new call letters KPOJ and KPOJ-FM.



## Thomas "Tom" James

Tom James, a NWVRS charter member<sup>129</sup> and past president, was hired by KALE in 1944 as their equipment engineer. Tom stayed with KALE/KPOJ until 1969.

Tom was born in Riverside, Washington, in 1911. He and his wife Dorothy joined the NWVRS in 1975 after seeing an article in *The Oregonian* and being invited by Pete Young.

Dorothy was active in the NWVRS Power Supply (women's auxiliary) and also served as a board member of Oregon City's Buena Vista Club, which ensured our access the Buena Vista Club House where we held meetings for our first 15 years.

Readers of the NWVRS *Call Letter* from the 1970's and early 1980's will surely

remember Tom's regular column "Atomospherica" that featured his old radio-themed poetry.

As an example of Tom's ingenuity and sense of humor, a shelf near the door to his workshop held a horn speaker that played permanently. The secret? Tom built a tiny crystal set tuned to one of the local stations and placed it in the horn speaker's base. The only external evidence was a single antenna wire.

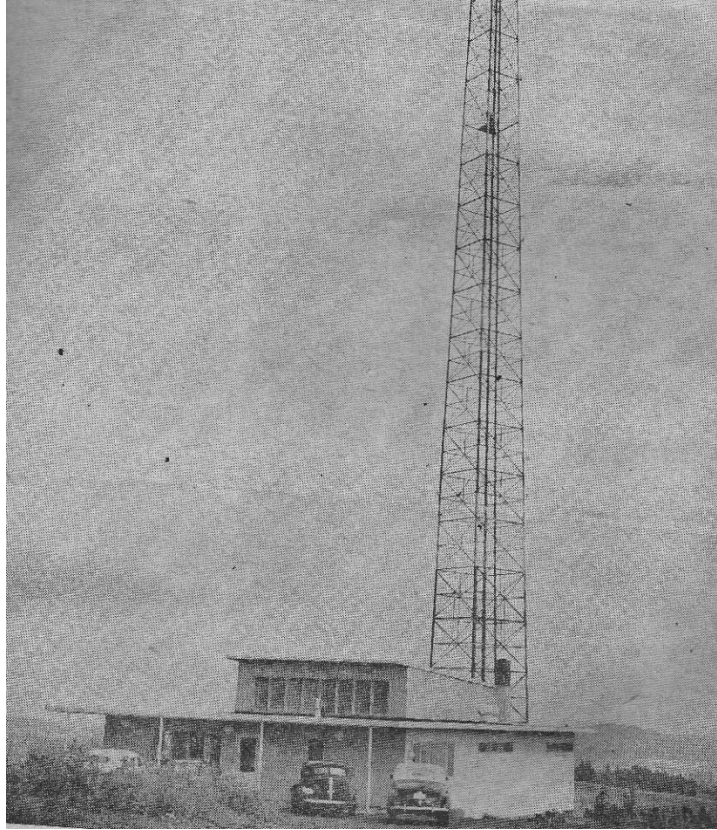
Tom James, known by many as "our friendliest member," died in 1984.



Figure 5-11 Tom James, KPOJ Equipment Engineer, 1948 (*Meet the KPOJ Staff*)

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<sup>129</sup> NWVRS members who joined during the Society's first year are considered charter members.



*Figure 5-12 KPOJ AM/FM transmitter site on Mount Scott in 1958 (Ours Ahead)*

### **May - June 1948**

KGW (620 AM) belonged to The Oregonian, Portland's other daily newspaper. Despite the competition between the papers, when flooding put KGW's transmitter out of commission on the afternoon of May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948, The Journal's KALE made a spare transmitter<sup>130</sup> available to them at their yet-unopened Mount Scott site.<sup>131</sup>

"Working all night, the KGW staff headed by Chief Engineer Harold

Singleton had the station on the air by 7:30 the next morning."<sup>132</sup> Thanks to KALE, KGW was only off the air for about fourteen hours.

Meanwhile, KALE went on 24-hour duty from its Sylvan site with news bulletins and flood information. At the station's urging, "the Portland Grocers Association made food available to refugees and bakeries reopened and worked all night to supply bread and bakery products to the homeless."<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> We believe that the spare transmitter KGW used may have been KALE's 500-watt Hallock & Watson transmitter, made here in Portland ca. 1930. KALE had been keeping it as a spare and brought it with them to Mount Scott. Along with many of the station's other historical artifacts,

the Hallock & Watson transmitter was lost when the KPOJ transmitter building burned in March 1986.

<sup>131</sup> The Oregonian 6/1/48

<sup>132</sup> Broadcast 6/7/48

<sup>133</sup> *ibid*



*Figure 5-13 KALE's Lou Gillette (left) interviews a Vanport survivor (courtesy Ron Kramer)*

In addition to passing along official reports and bulletins, KALE deployed staff to flood locations to gather first-hand news. Joe Stein, KALE's pilot-reporter used the station's new helicopter to report news on the flooding and to give the Journal's photographers an aerial platform from which to document the disaster. KALE flew Dick Wesson, their overnight DJ, down to survey the damage caused when the dike broke at Woodland.

Famed newsman Lou Gillette (Figure 5-13) surveyed the flooded Portland

Meadows racetrack and interviewed survivors. In keeping with the technology of the time, Lou's report was delivered to the station on a wire recording.<sup>134</sup>

In the mid-June, KPOJ capped-off its flood reporting with "a one-hour documentary on the past, present, and future of the Columbia Basin flood, using wire recorder, shortwave, eyewitness accounts and interviews with supervisory authorities."<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Broadcast 6/7/48

<sup>135</sup> Broadcaster 6/14/48





*Figure 5-14 KOIN transmitter 11/32. (NWVRS archives)*

## **KOIN**

From September 1932 until March 1946, The Oregon Journal newspaper, Portland's evening daily, owned two AM stations, KOIN (940 KC) and KALE.

The stations shared a transmitter site at 5516 SW Barnes Rd atop Portland's west hills (Figure 5-14).



KOIN moved from 940 to 970 KC on March 29, 1941 due to the NARBA (North American Region Broadcast Agreement) Treaty Allocations.<sup>136</sup>

In March 1946, because of duopoly concerns, The Journal sold KOIN (5kw, daytime-only) to the Marshall Fields Department Store which was expanding into media at the time.

Even though KOIN and KALE were no longer under joint ownership, they continued to share the Sylvan site until KALE moved to Mount Scott in June 1948.

During the Vanport emergency, KOIN served as a liaison between the American Red Cross and the other Portland broadcasters. In this role, KOIN studios had a direct line into Red Cross headquarters; they received and relayed news bulletins out to the other stations, lessening the burden on the Red Cross.

Additionally, KOIN's staff met with the other agencies responding to the emergency to facilitate the exchange of information. One of KOIN's liaison staff was news reporter George Wann, a Vanport resident, who lost everything in the flood.

KOIN fed ten shows to the CBS network, helping cover the disaster for listeners nation-wide.

When KOIN staffers were covering Vanport activities on June 2nd, a helicopter crashed almost in their laps. Coast Guard Lt Bill Williams was taking Life Magazine photographer Johnny Flores on an inspection trip over the flood area. While at an altitude of about 500' over the inundated Portland Meadows, the engine failed on their Sikorsky helicopter.

"I fought every inch of the way to get to dry land. We were about to make a normal (dead engine) landing when suddenly the motor started again and something gave way. I was hit on the head and the next thing I knew we were sitting on the ground with wreckage all around us."<sup>137</sup> "

The impact broke off the main rotors and snapped off the tail boom. Williams and Florea were catapulted forward and broke the plexiglass cockpit bubble with their heads."<sup>138</sup>

The wreckage landed in a garlic patch just 50 feet south of the flood-swollen Columbia Slough. The KOIN news staff quickly loaded their station wagon and drove to the crash scene just off of Columbia Blvd.

After the wounds of the smiling but badly shaken men were tended to, interviews were recorded. Tape was rushed back to the KOIN studios and broadcast within an hour of the crash."<sup>139</sup>

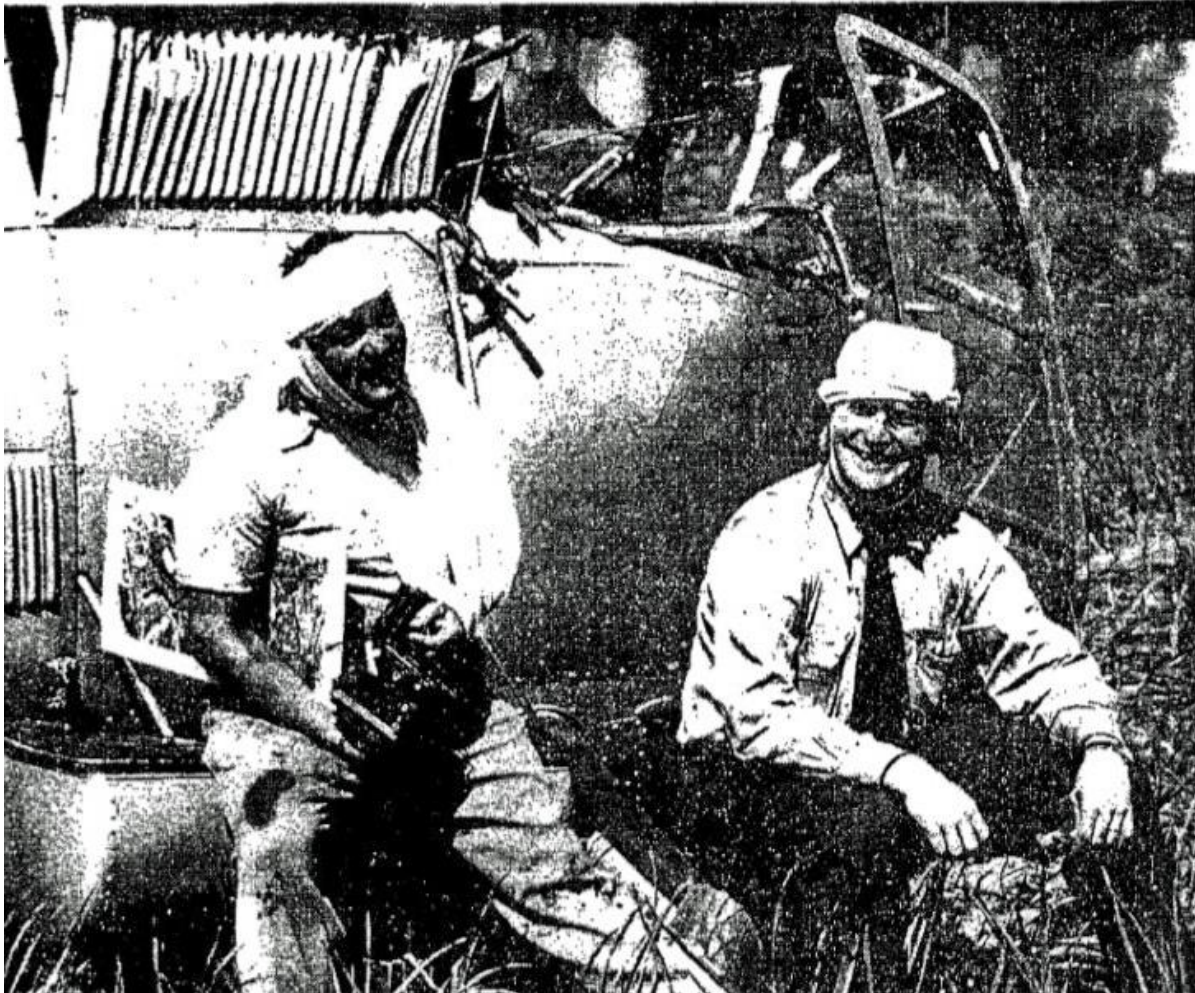
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<sup>136</sup> Broadcasting 9/15/40

<sup>137</sup> Oregonian 6/03/48

<sup>138</sup> *ibid*

<sup>139</sup> Broadcast 6/14/48 pg. 64



*Figure 5-15 Their heads are bandaged, but Life Magazine photographer Johnny Florea and Coast Guard Lt Bill Williams still muster smiles as they sit among the wreckage of their helicopter.  
(The Oregonian 6/3/48)*



*Figure 5-16 KXL transmitter and tower at the Town of Harmony (Courtesy Ron Kramer)*

## KXL

At the time of the 1948 flooding, KXL was broadcasting 10kw (daytime only) from the "Town of Harmony," property that became part of the Clackamas Town Center shopping center campus in the 1970's.

In order to better serve the community during the flood, KXL petitioned the FCC by telegram for authority to broadcast twenty-four hours a day, asserting that thousands of lives and millions in property were imperiled (Figure 5-17).

The FCC agreed and KXL began broadcasting around the clock on Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. They continued broadcasting 24-hour emergency information through Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

KXL carried 576 bulletins in the first 48 hours after the Vanport dike broke. "KXL kept the entire XL network – many of whose stations are in the flood area – supplied with advance information on nearing flood crests."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Broadcasting 6/14/48

"As a follow-up of the disaster, KXL wired all Senators and Congressmen from Oregon and Washington [in support of] aid that the federal government might be expected to give to rehabilitate the 18,000 citizens of Vanport and surrounding territory along the Columbia."<sup>141</sup>

It seems very fitting then, that KXL was one of two stations selected to cover President Truman's June 11<sup>th</sup> Portland speech in which he promised \$10 million in immediate aid for flood victims.

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.</p> | <h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN<br/>UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">JOSEPH L. EGAN<br/>PRESIDENT</p> | <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">SYMBOLS</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">DL = Day Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NL = Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">LC = Deferred Cable</td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NLT = Cable Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">Ship Radiogram</td></tr> </table> | DL = Day Letter | NL = Night Letter | LC = Deferred Cable | NLT = Cable Night Letter | Ship Radiogram |
| DL = Day Letter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |
| NL = Night Letter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |
| LC = Deferred Cable                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |
| NLT = Cable Night Letter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |
| Ship Radiogram                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                 |                   |                     |                          |                |

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

ORPHEUM BLDG PORTLAND ORG

81PD      PORTLAND ORG MAY 31 1948      1258P

FEDERAL COMMUNICATION COMMISSION  
WASH DC

IN VIEW OF FLOOD DISASTER AND IMPENDING FLOOD PERIL DUE TO WATER WHICH  
IS STILL RAISING IN THE COLUMBIA AND WILLAMETTE RIVERS WE REQUEST  
PERMISSION TO BROADCAST 24 HOURS DAILY PENDING END OF EMERGENCY YOUR  
URGENT AND PROMPT CONSIDERATION IS REQUESTED THOUSANDS OF LIVES ARE  
PERILED PLUS MILLIONS IN PROPERTY DAMAGE EVERY EFFORT IS BEING MADE  
TO ACCOMMODATE RED CROSS STATE POLICE CITY POLICE AND ARMED FORCES

DIRECTING PEOPLE IN PERILOUS AREAS. OUR FACILITIES ARE AT THE  
DISPOSAL OF THESE AGENCIES

KXL BROADCASTERS  
H S JACKSON

*Figure 5-17 Telegram from KXL to FCC requesting permission to go to twenty-four-hour broadcasting for duration of Vanport emergency. (Courtesy Ron Kramer)*

<sup>141</sup> Broadcasting 6/14/48





*Figure 5-18 Soldiers and Volunteers use a DUKW to search through Vanport.*

## Recovery and Repairs

The former site of Vanport was now a swirling lake full of dirt, debris, drifting buildings, and belongings. The National Guard activated four amphibious DUKWs.

The DUKWs, numerous Coast Guard boats, and fair number of private craft searched through the flood waters in search of survivors.

Survivors were found clinging to debris, sitting on the roofs of buildings, and calling for help from second-story windows.

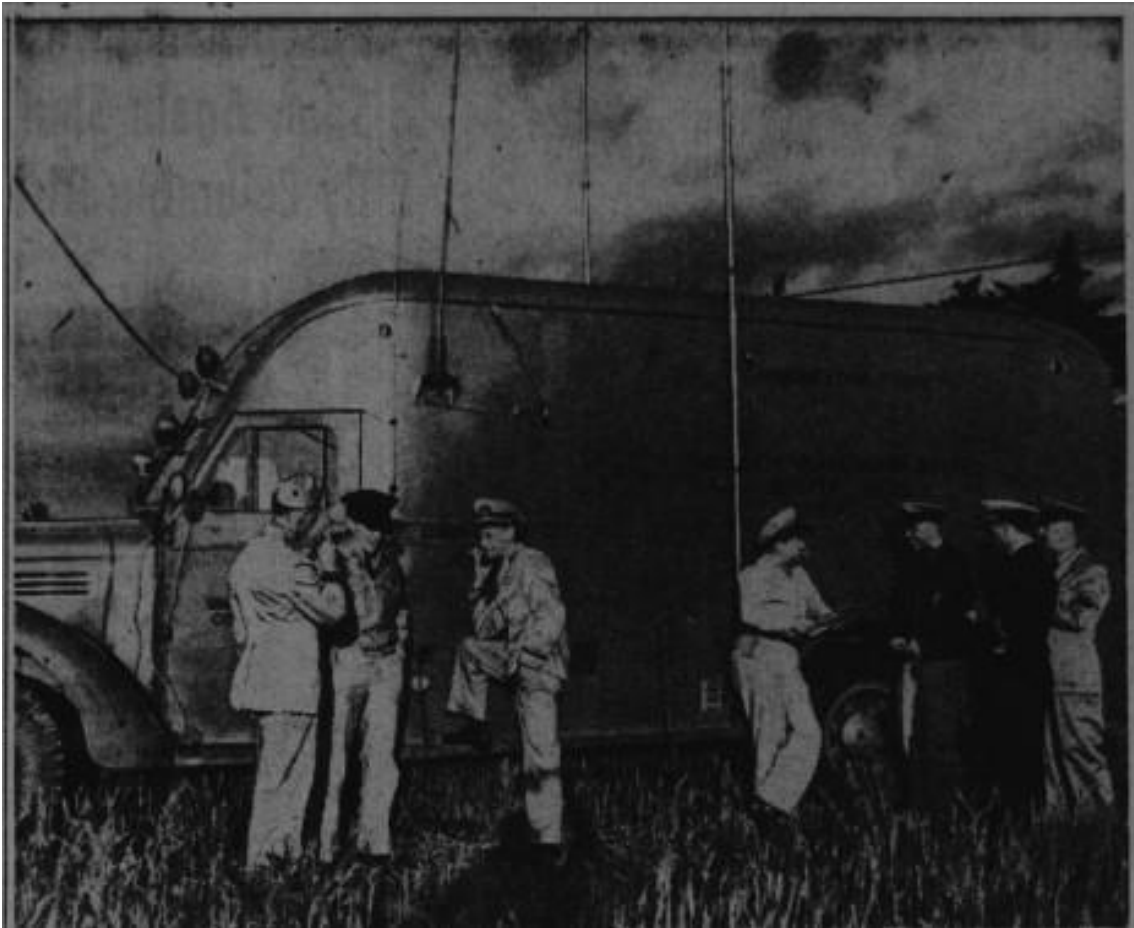
**The Army** arrived Sunday night, deploying over 1,600 soldiers throughout the flood area from Troutdale to Clatskanie, bringing with them additional DUKWs from Fort Lewis. Likewise, the **Oregon National Guard** deployed 700 soldiers, mostly from the Portland area to sandbag dikes, provide security, and search the flooded areas.

**The Air Force** delivered all kinds of supplies including radio jeeps from Fort Lewis near Tacoma, Washington and sandbags from Sacramento, California. Soldiers at Fairfield-Suisun (Travis) air base sent a planeload of dresses, shirts, baby clothes and other items.

Forty members of the **U.S. Coast Guard**, reinforced by ninety auxiliary members, participated in waterfront patrols. "Headquarters were opened at McCuddy's Columbia Marina, on NE Marine Dr. A 38-foot picket boat, a surf boat, and a sound truck were ordered to Portland from the Point Adams lifesaving station...."<sup>142</sup> In addition, six radio-equipped private yachts from the Portland area were commissioned to stand by as Coast Guard cutters with Coast Guard auxiliary crews.<sup>143</sup> Eight

motor surf boats were brought from Oregon coastal stations, and four communications trucks, a plane, and helicopter were brought from Seattle.<sup>144</sup>

In a particularly memorable mission, "one auxiliary Coast Guard crew removed a couple by chopping a hole through the thin wall of a house that had tilted at an angle, sealing all the doors and windows."<sup>145</sup>



*Figure 5-19 One of the Coast Guard communications trucks deployed to the disaster area. Radios in the truck keep the team in direct communication with Washington DC, the 13<sup>th</sup> Coast Guard district headquarters in Seattle, and radio equipped boats and jeeps in the flood area. Chief Radioman, C E Christman, USCG, second from left, is in charge of operations. (The Oregon Journal 6/6/48).*

<sup>142</sup> Columbia River Flood Tragedy pg. A3691

<sup>143</sup> *ibid*

<sup>144</sup> Valiant Efforts pg. 21

<sup>145</sup> Heroism pg. 12



*Figure 5-20 In early June, the Air Force flew hundreds of thousands of sandbags from Stockton, CA to Portland. Just a few days later, flooding closed the Portland airbase and airport. The cargo plane is a Curtiss C-46 Commando. (Acme Telephoto)*





*Figure 5-21 Members of the Oregon CAP pose with their heavy radio truck, a 1941 Chevrolet 1-1/2 ton panel truck. Antennas dot the roof. CAP members are demonstrating EE-8 field telephones and BC-611 Handie-Talkies. Staff Sgt Ethyle Kremers is seated behind the desk.  
(Akroyd photo) (Courtesy Historic Photo Archive)*

**The Oregon Civil Air Patrol "CAP,"** provided radio communications, first aid, and search and rescue efforts on the ground and from the air.

"A 24-man crew working under the American Red Cross was already en route to the Faloma area when the dike burst and was diverted to Vanport...."<sup>146</sup>

"When Denver Avenue went out [on the following day]...the communications unit in addition to maintaining radio communications helped evacuate the Portland Meadows racetrack and continued to provide first aid."<sup>147</sup>

"CAP planes volunteered to patrol the dikes in the Portland area and provided communications and supplies to isolated towns like Kalama and Woodland where planes, using the isolated highway for an airport, ferried in food and medical supplies."<sup>148</sup>

Ethyle Kremer's service record documents flying 10 airborne sorties in six days between May 27<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Radio Warning Network pg. 12

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Valliant Efforts pg. 21

<sup>149</sup> Request for Personnel Actions





*Figure 5-22 A 1939 Taylorcraft BL-95 observation plane wings over the flooding in North Portland. The security of the dikes remained a concern until the Columbia River receded several weeks after the initial breach. The CAP continued to search for victims as the water went down behind the dikes.  
(Akroyd Photo) (Courtesy Historic Photo Archive)*

### **Civil Air Patrol**

In the 1930's, aviators from World War I envisioned organizing America's civilian aviators for national defense. By late 1941, various start-up programs were formerly merged and the Civil Air Patrol opened its doors on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Public announcement of the CAP and national recruiting commenced on December 8<sup>th</sup>.



*Figure 5-23 Oregon Civil Air Patrol Roundel*

During World War II, the CAP performed missions including courier service, missing aircraft searches, disaster relief, forest patrols, etc. Armed CAP aircraft at coastal patrol bases from Maine to the Mexican border successfully thwarted submarine attacks and safeguarded shipping lanes.

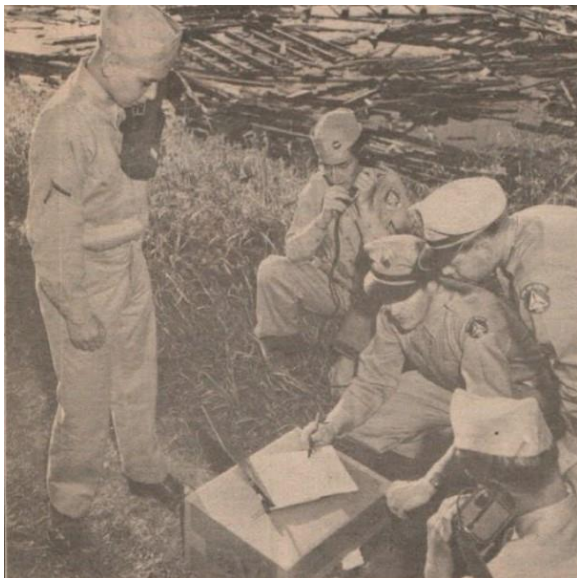
"CAP's wartime record ensured its postwar future. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946, President Truman signed Public Law 79-476, incorporating the organization. Following the creation of the U.S. Air Force as a separate branch of the armed services, President Truman signed Public Law 80-557, establishing CAP as the Air Force's civilian auxiliary on May 26, 1948."<sup>150151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Gocivlairpatrol.com

<sup>151</sup> Coincidentally, just two days before the Vanport disaster

Becoming an official auxiliary of the Air Force brought important benefits to the CAP. The Air Force was now allowed to "supply the CAP directly with all equipment, supplies and materials required to accomplish their missions, as well as to expedite training of air cadets."<sup>152</sup> These supplies included gasoline for CAP planes on all search and rescue missions.

After World War II the Oregon Wing shrank from 15 units to only 3 functional units by the middle of 1947 due to natural postwar let-down. However, the CAP experienced substantial growth in 1948 and 1949.



*Figure 5-24 Oregon Wing members set up a communication station at Vanport. (Capt. Tom Traver photo) (CAP News 6/79)*

"One of the most potent factors in starting an upward cycle was the establishment of the CAP radio net."<sup>153</sup>



*Figure 5-25 Col Willoughby G Dye commander of the Oregon Wing of the CAP (CAP 1960 report)*

During 1948, the Oregon Wing, under the command of Lt Col. Willoughby G Dye, got its first radio station on the air. By September, 14 stations were in the net." The Portland Squadron grew from 6 senior (adult) members and 20 active cadets in June 1947 to 89 senior and 109 cadet members by December, 1948.<sup>154</sup>

The CAP's national radio network was built-out during 1948 to serve as a secondary communications network in case of national emergency. The network proved its value during various national disasters, including the 1948 flood. To make it functional, "hundreds of radio units throughout the country tackled the problem of setting up the network using surplus military radio equipment, in most cases, with an enthusiasm the soon started cadet classes humming with potential ham operators."<sup>155</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Radar Warning pg. 12

<sup>153</sup> Oregon Wing pg. 10

<sup>154</sup> *ibid*

<sup>155</sup> Oregon Wing pg. 7

## Ethyle Kremers-O'Neil



*Figure 5-26 CAP Master Sergeant Ethyle Kremers receives the Distinguished Service Award from Capt. Billie R Wise USAF (left) and Lt Col. Les Austin, Oregon Wing commander. (6/9/49)*

Fourteen-year-old Ethyle Kremers was amongst the first of her peers at Portland's Jefferson High School to join the Civil Air Patrol. The U.S. had just entered World War 2 and she was determined to do her part. The Cadet rapidly rose through the ranks and had achieved the rank of Master Sergeant when the photo above was taken in 1949.

The CAP arrived at the Vanport site just as the dike broke. Instead of working to evacuate Faloma as originally planned, the cadets were sent to Vanport and assisted the refugees there. Sgt Kremers is credited with saving a 15-month-old baby and assisting four other children to escape. The CAP recognized her heroism with its

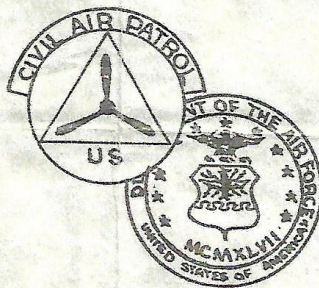
Distinguished Service Award for Heroism, the highest award available in CAP.

In 1949, Ethyle joined the Air Force and served as a lab technician during the Korean Conflict. After four year she left the service at the rank of Airman First Class.

Ethyle rejoined the CAP in 1976 and enjoyed another 30 years of service which included commanding the Oregon City Squadron. She loved teaching cadets about Search and Rescue, Aerospace Education, and Cadet Leadership. Lt. Colonel Ethyle O'neil received her Lifetime Service Award on May 14, 2005.



# CIVIL AIR PATROL



## Distinguished Service Award

Know all men by these presents that

Master Sergeant Ethyle E. Kremers

is hereby awarded the Distinguished  
Service Award for exceptional meritorious  
service in a duty of great responsibility  
during the period 27 May 1948 to 1 June 1948.

Done at National Headquarters this 4th  
day of October 1949.

LUCAS V. BEAU  
MAJOR GENERAL, USAF  
NATIONAL COMMANDER

Figure 5-27 Certificate accompanying Master Sergeant Ethyle Kremers Distinguished Service Award  
(Courtesy Kremers-O'Neil Family)



## **BC-611 (SCR-536) Handie-Talkie**

"At the request of the Sheriff's office I had the State Patrol office radio their Tacoma office to procure from National Guard Headquarters six SCR 536's and relay them to the highway patrol cars to use as quickly as possible. They cooperated to the fullest and had the sets here by 1600 hours and they were put to immediate use."<sup>156</sup>

The BC-611 Handie-Talkie was used throughout World War II for short-range communication. Up and down the Columbia River, teams responding to the 1948 flooding emergency utilized the BC-611.

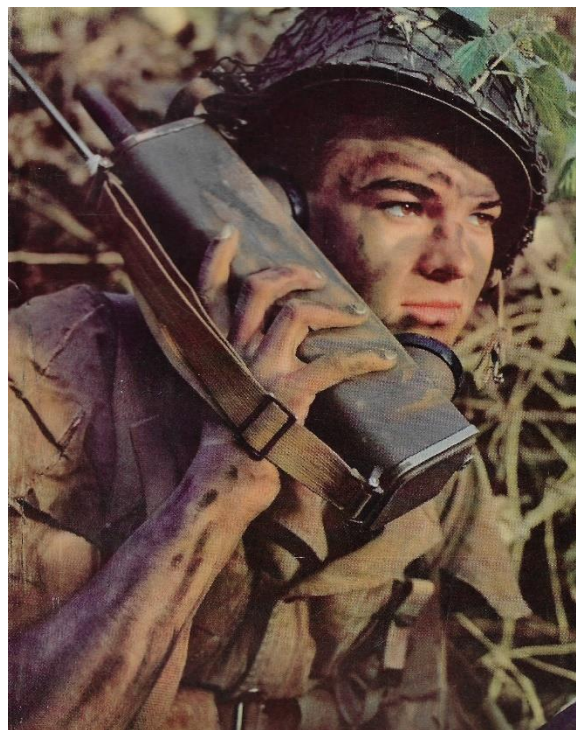
The BC-611 Handie-Talkie was developed at the start of World War II by Galvin Manufacturing (Motorola). Over 100,000 were produced by several companies under several contracts.

The radios operated in the 3.5-6 mc military band and were AM (voice mode). They were simple to use (pulling out the antenna turned the radio on). They were single-channel only so there was no tuning – just "push to talk." Using five tubes meant that the batteries were good for about one day's use. With only .027 watts out, range was limited to about a mile over land and three miles over water which minimized interference and prevented eaves dropping or triangulation by the enemy. However, at Vanport, they would have not been good for much

more than just communicating from one side of the disaster area to the other.

Radios brought by responding units would most likely have been preset to their own assigned channels, preventing their BC-611s from communicating with other units. Matching up the frequencies meant first, having the correct crystals available, and then turning the radios over to a tech to change out four parts and retune the sets.

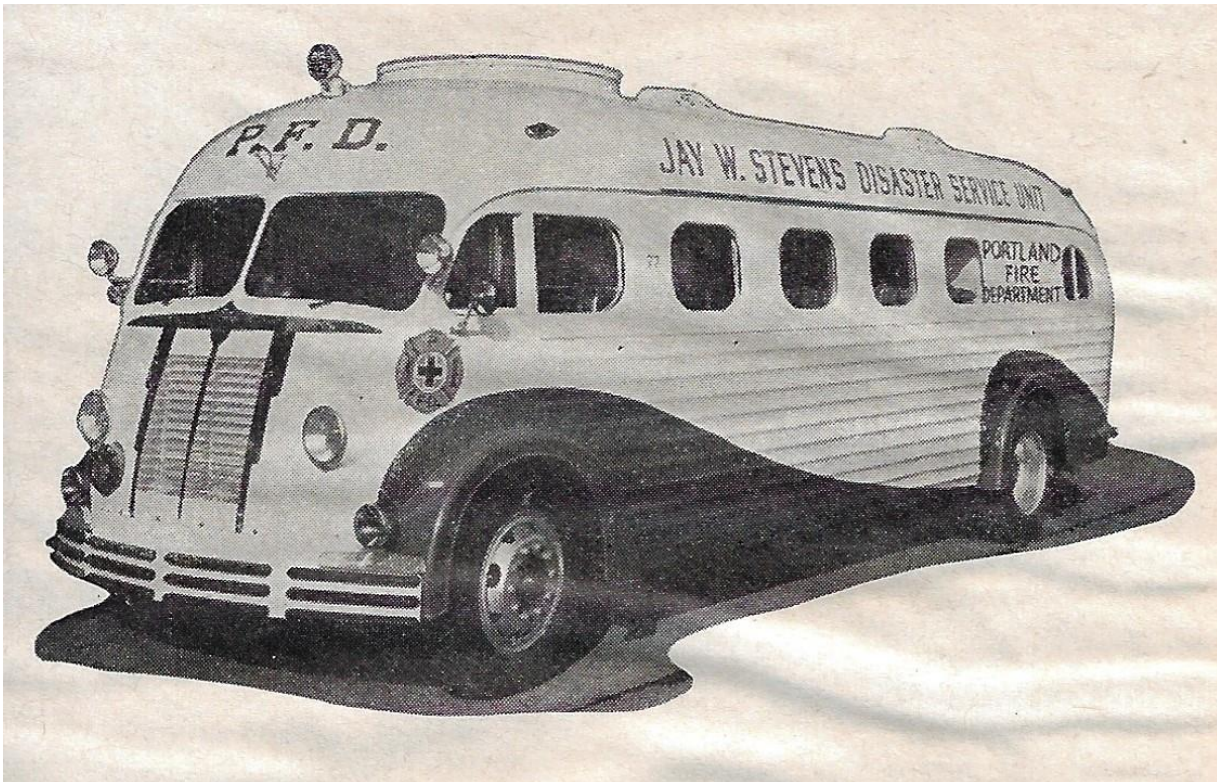
Even so, the BC-611 Handie-Talkies saw plenty of use during the 1948 emergency.



*Figure 5-28 BC-611 (Radio News 2/44)*

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<sup>156</sup> Washington Nat'l Guard Pamphlet pg. 11.



*Figure 5-29 The Jay W Stevens Disaster Service Unit (Portland Fire Bureau)*

### **The Portland Fire Department**

deployed the unique "Jay W Stevens Disaster Service Unit" to Vanport to support rescue and recovery efforts and coordinate communications among firefighters. It's generators and portable lights would have been invaluable during the night rescue operations.

The Unit was designed in 1939 by a team from the Bureau and built at the Kenworth plant in Seattle. It was 29' feet long, staffed by a team of six specially-trained fire fighters and was equipped with "every type of tool, device, and machine that...might be of use...."<sup>157</sup>

Combining the features of many of today's specialized rescue vehicles, the Unit carried generators, lights, all types

of communications equipment, medical supplies, ropes, welding equipment, even film photography equipment. "It had portable power plants capable of floodlighting a village or restoring lighting in a building, ...radio sending and receiving sets installed in gas and smoke helmets," etc. etc..<sup>158</sup>

Jay W Stevens, for whom the Unit was named, was a famed Portland firefighter who rose to prominence in the Bureau through outstanding work in the early 1900's. He went on to rise to the highest levels of regional, and then national, firefighting agencies.

In addition to its regular mission, the Unit is remembered for representing the Bureau as a fixture of the Portland Rose Parade for decades.

<sup>157</sup> JW Stevens Dedication Pamphlet

<sup>158</sup> ibid





*Figure 5-30 Dispatcher Desks at the Portland Police Bureau (left) and the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office ca. 1951. (Mather Photos)*

Though Vanport was outside the city limits and under the jurisdiction of the Multnomah County Sheriff, **the Portland Police** played an active role in the response and recovery. Portland Police Chief James Fleming pointed out several specific contributions.

"About 70 men of the detective division are on the front lines of the flood, stationed in two-way radio cars on the dikes providing communications for the military and other agencies on the front lines."<sup>159</sup>

The Portland Police radio division "handled 2,275 logged radio calls in the

first 7 ½ hours after the river smashed into Vanport."<sup>160</sup>

"A dozen officers who lived in Vanport lost everything when they turned to help others escape. So did thirteen city firemen. Patrolman Jim Sergeant, spent two days on continuous flood duty in charge of two Sea Scout power lifeboats in the Vanport lake area."<sup>161</sup>

"Sheriff Martin Pratt [assigned] his full 88 men into the flood area. They have worked continuously ever since. A trailer house has now been provided on the flood front where they can snatch a few hours of rest..."<sup>162</sup>



<sup>159</sup> Valiant Efforts pg. 21

<sup>160</sup> *ibid*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid*

<sup>162</sup> *ibid*



*Figure 5-31 Temple Ehmsen  
(Benson Polytechnic Highschool 1925 yearbook)*

### **Temple V Ehmsen, W7VS**

Temple Ehmsen, W7VS, was born in Seattle in 1903. At the time of the 1948 emergency, he was chief of Radio Communications at the Portland Police Bureau. As such, he took an active role in police communications during the disaster.

Just days after seeing the Fire Bureau's Jay W Stevens Disaster Service Unit in action at Vanport, Mr. Ehmsen wrote the City Council seeking funding for a similar unit for the Police. "The manifold emergency uses are obvious. I cannot see where it would duplicate the fire bureau's disaster work because the police have a separate communications network and disaster problems peculiar to their organization. Further, in an emergency such as this flood, both units would be required."<sup>163</sup><sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Police See Need of Disaster Car

<sup>164</sup> Although today the police have specialized incident response vehicles of the type that Temple Ehmsen lobbied for, I've been unable to

In addition to his work at the City, and his amateur activities, Temple Ehmsen was very active in commercial broadcasting in the Portland area. "Mr. Ehmsen helped build KFIF (later KBPS) at Benson Polytechnic Highschool when that station signed on in 1923."<sup>165</sup>

When Charles Austin built the Police Bureau's first radio station, KGPP, he was assisted by Temple Ehmsen. KGPP's first transmitter was constructed by Portland's Hallock & Watson and still exists.

In 1944, Mr. Ehmsen filed for an experimental FM station, W7XTE. "The FCC issue a construction permit on October 30, 1944 but the station was likely never built – perhaps because of Ehmsen's mid-1944 call to active U.S. Naval duty. The W7XTE license was cancelled in 1945."<sup>166</sup>

In the late 1940's Mr. Ehmsen was part of a partnership that founded KGON (AM) in Jennings Lodge, Oregon. "KGON was founded by Clackamas Broadcasters, whose president was Dr. John H Fitzgerald. He was joined in the venture by Roy Jarman, owner of Jarman's Buick and Chevrolet dealership,..."<sup>167</sup> with Temple Ehmsen as KGON's chief engineer. Though they requested 1490 kc, the frequency was amended to 1230 due to interference concerns with KOCO in Salem. The station was built at a cost of \$50,000

determine whether or not the police received such a unit in reply to his plea.

<sup>165</sup> Kramer pg. 234

<sup>166</sup> Kramer pg. 203

<sup>167</sup> Kramer pg. 224



with studios located at the corner of Jennings Avenue and SE McLoughlin Blvd (Hwy 99E). The station signed on July 4, 1947. Temple remained the station's chief engineer until 1949.

Finally, Mr. Ehmsen was also apparently a vintage radio fancier. In 1951, he entered a KGW-sponsored contest

where the public was invited to enter old radios ranging from crystal sets to battery sets and consoles from the 1920's. Sets were judged on age, condition, performance, etc. Temple's entry garnered him a new 1952 radio!<sup>168</sup>



*Figure 5-32 Utility workers install temporary lights for keeping tabs on the dike near Troutdale. Three rings of sandbags help stop a "sand boil" on the dike's edge from turning into a breach. (The Oregon Journal 6/6/48) (ACME Telephoto)*

Throughout the flooded area, telephone lines, power lines, and other utilities had been damaged and needed to be restored, or at least capped-off.

Because of all of the water and mud, in various places mine detectors were used to locate water main cut-offs and pipeline breaks.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Kramer pg. 198

<sup>169</sup> 1948 National Guard Annual Report

## Harold Maiken

Before filling in the gap in the Denver Avenue fill and patching the road, the army engineers and federal housing authority hired Harold Maiken, a professional diver, to thoroughly search the area.

Mr. Maiken reported finding auto parts, hundreds of household appliances, many dishes, and great amount of clothing, but no victims.

Mr. Maiken theorized that houses passing through the narrow gap broke up and shed their contents in the channel.



*Figure 5-33 Telephone linemen work near flooded Vanport to re-establish telephone communications. (ACME Telephoto)*

## Telephones

In March 1947, the telephone company installed the "TYler" manual telephone exchange in the Vanport Administration building. Residents placed calls by lifting the receiver off-the-hook and giving the desired number to an

operator, who placed the call for them. Before TYler, Vanport numbers were served by a patchwork of exchanges including GARfield, MURdock, TRinity, TUXedo, UNiversity, and WEBster exchanges.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Voice of Vanport pg. 2



*"I picked up TYler 0860 at 4:15 and a man yelled, 'The dikes have broken....'"*  
*Peggy Benjamin, Vanport telephone operator.*

"The switchboard lights were heavy at 11:00 am when I came on duty, May 30, and they stayed heavy. About 2:30 the supervisor in charge was notified by the Housing Authority to be prepared to notify the Vanport people, if the warning signal sounded."<sup>171</sup>

When Vanport flooded two-hours later, seven of the nine TYler telephone operators lost their homes.

The TYler operators and other employees at the exchange were among the last to leave, remaining at their posts as long as they were allowed. "Over and over they gave out warnings for Vanport residents to leave their homes. The power had been turned off, but the warnings were continued until the switchboard went dead."<sup>172</sup> "Finally we ran out and at the time we could see the water coming down the slough in high waves..."<sup>173</sup> "One operator ran to her nearby home for her two small children, and with them caught the last bus to get out of the flooding area."<sup>174</sup>



*Figure 5-34 They put others first. Seated (L to R) Operators Neva Jones, Eva Hardegger, Bernice Marx, Carol Hunter, Peggy Benjamin. Standing: Chief Operator Abina Pendergast, Esther Lacy, Arloah Blair, Switchman Harold Tambling, Edna Kelly, Evening Chief Operator Jennie Schon. (Pacific Telephone Magazine)*

<sup>171</sup> Peggy Benjamin's Story pg. 3

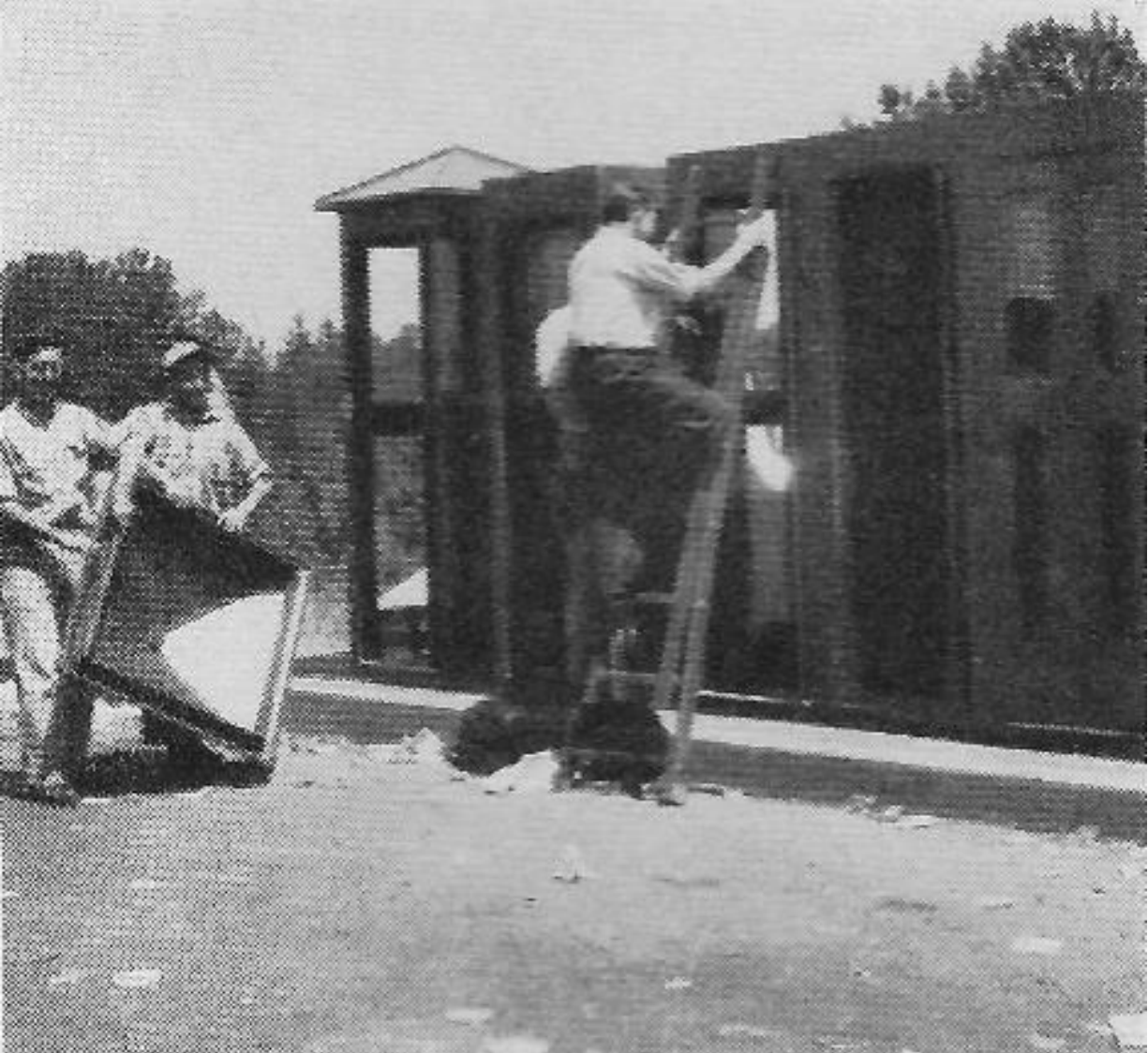
<sup>172</sup> River on Rampage pg. 2

<sup>173</sup> Peggy Benjamin's Story pg. 3

<sup>174</sup> River on Rampage pg. 2

Mobile telephone cars were brought to the site immediately after the flood for use by relief workers and law enforcement. Emergency telephones

were established at key points. And six telephone booths were set up on Denver Avenue.



*Figure 5-35 Building telephone booths on the Denver Avenue fill. Six booths were set up overlooking flooded Vanport to serve relief workers, law enforcement, and reporters. (Pacific Telephone Magazine)*

When the Denver Avenue fill failed on Monday night, it carried away two crucial cables, cutting off telephone service between Washington and

Oregon. Early on Tuesday, 100 of the more than 600 circuits had been re-established.





*Figure 5-36 Senior Repairman Vic Turnbull crouches in the stern of an army DUKW "Duck" as duplex telephone wire is pulled across the Denver Avenue gap. (Pacific Telephone Magazine)*

An Army DUKW laid the first duplex wire across the Denver Avenue gap and larger emergency cables were laid down from a barge. A diver inspecting the cables quickly determined that they had never reached the bottom and would be vulnerable to being cut by debris or snagged by boats. A 30-ton pile driver

on a barge was summoned, driving pilings so that the cables could be lifted out of the debris-filled water and cross the 600-foot wide Denver Avenue gap on poles. Emergency repairs were completed on June 8<sup>th</sup>.



*Figure 5-37 Laying emergency cables by-barge. (Pacific Telephone Magazine)*

Vanport's manual Tyler telephone exchange was never re-established. Vanport numbers were already scheduled to cut-over to Portland's new TWinoaks exchange on July 31<sup>st</sup> and given dial-service. Of the 1,750 lines on the Tyler exchange, 1,170 were submerged with Vanport. Those outside the flooded areas and were cutover to TWinoaks within 48 hours by Western Electric crews working around-the-clock.

## Towing Houses

During the weeks it took for the flood waters to subside, moving and securing large floating debris became a priority; both to get it out of the way of reconstruction and to keep it from drifting and causing damage as had happened at KGW.



*Figure 5-38 Towing floating homes in Delta Park 6/5/48. (ACME Telephoto)*

## The Toll on Transportation

On Sunday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, just a week after the Memorial Day flood, the Oregonian<sup>175</sup> ran a story summarizing the condition of transportation in the Portland area. At the time of the story, the flood was subsiding slightly, and conditions were improving. However, a new crest was expected Tuesday or Wednesday.

Progress was being made on restoring the 625-foot long gap in the **Union**

**Avenue fill** and the project was on schedule according to A.G. Skelton, highway department engineer. By noon on Saturday June 5, a total of 25,000 cubic yards of boulders, rocks, and sand had been dumped into the Union Avenue gap and the 630-foot long Denver Avenue gap.

The Union Avenue fill will be completed first and may be ready to travel by the end of the week. After the fill is finished, it must be topped with a leveling course and two inches of

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<sup>175</sup> Smith Lake Trestle Nears Completion pg. 18

pavement. The job will only be temporary because of expected settling in the fill.

**Boat traffic** was severely restricted on the Oregon Slough and on the main channel of the Columbia near Portland to prevent further erosion, or over-topping, of the beleaguered dikes.

The Oneonta Tunnel on **US 30**<sup>176</sup> near Multnomah Falls was again endangered as the Columbia River rose. Overland Greyhound bus passengers headed east from Portland through the gorge were rebooked on the Union Pacific and travelled by train to Pendleton where they resumed their journey by bus. The short trip from Portland to Vancouver by Hwy 99 over the Interstate Bridge was cut off by failure of the Union and Denver Avenue fills. Traffic destined for points east of Vancouver was routed east to the Bridge of the Gods toll span at Cascade Locks. Traffic volume over the bridge peaked at about 200 cars per day.

Highway traffic headed north from Portland to points north of Kelso was routed over Hwy 30 west to the Kelso-Longview Bridge. Further to the west Hwy 30 was closed at Clatskanie.

Portland's **air carriers** were shifted to other regional airports. United Air Lines, Northwest Airlines, and Western Airlines used McNary field in Salem. West Coast Air Lines was using McMinnville airport.

**The train route to Seattle** faced new trouble when a bridge over Coweeman River south of Kelso was declared unsafe for traffic. The rail line at Kalama had been under water for several days and was closed until the water receded enough to permit inspection. Portland-Seattle train connections are maintained with difficulty. Passengers are shuttle between Portland and Kelso by bus and the three trains operating daily between Seattle and Kelso are turned around at Centralia and backed 40 miles to Kelso.

In the Longview-Kelso area, flood waters weakened the bridge over the Cowlitz River and **freight trains** were being run into Longview by way of the Cowlitz & Columbia railway bridge north of Kelso. Shipments of livestock were generally banned because the Portland stockyards, adjacent to Vanport, were closed by flooding. Because of the closure at Kalama, the Northern Pacific was detouring trains into regions north of Portland via the Oregon Trunk via Wishram and Pasco. Of course, it was still impossible to reach Woodland, Ridgefield, and Kalama.

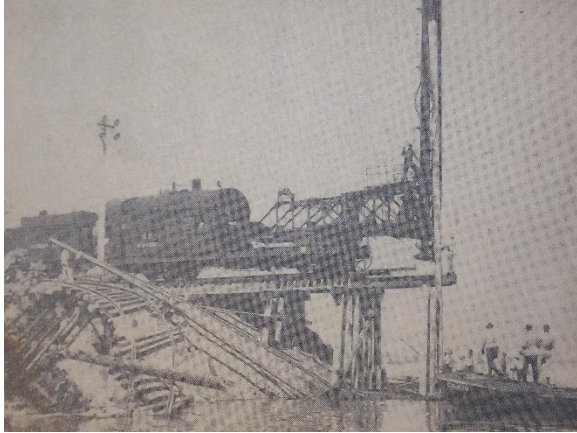
The Southern Pacific was operating normal schedules southward from Brooklyn Yards in southeast Portland.

The Union Pacific was operating normal schedules into a temporary station at N Russell ST and Interstate Ave (Albina Yards).

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<sup>176</sup> Yes, US 30 was still the only route through the Gorge on the Oregon side. Interstate 84 was still years in the offing.





*Figure 5-39 A Southern Pacific steam crane with a pile driver rebuilds the washed-out trestle. Three pile drivers and hundreds of workers collaborated to bridge the gap in just a week. (The Oregonian)*

## Restoring Train Service

On Sunday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, just a week after the tragedy, the SP&S reopened the rail line between Portland and Vancouver. The gap in the fill that had allowed flood waters into Vanport was bridged by a new wooden trestle.<sup>177</sup> A single track was laid on the new deck "over which will pass SP&S trains between Portland and Spokane, Great Northern and Northern Pacific transcontinental trains, and joint train service of N.P., G.N., and Union Pacific between Portland and Seattle."<sup>178</sup>

The trestle has since been covered with soil, just like the previous fill. And there still is no actual dike protecting the west side of Pen 1.

## Closing the Ham Net

"The week following June 6<sup>th</sup>, when the need for ham facilities tapered downward, was one of consolidation and standby, with equipment installations remaining intact in case of further use, and men getting much needed rest and going back to jobs from which they had been absent."<sup>179</sup>

"On Wednesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, almost three weeks after the start of the operation, the dismantling of the amateur nets was begun. The job could finally be classified as completed, with all agencies assisted heaping high praise upon the emergency work of the amateurs. Among those served were the Coast Guard, Army, Navy, National Guard, Red Cross, U.S. Engineers, Sheriff's Office, Civil Air Patrol, State Police, public utilities, and others. Upwards of 10,000 messages were handled...in the Portland area alone."<sup>180</sup>

Part of the legacy of the organizational efforts for the ham response to Vanport was the creation of the Oregon Emergency Net (OEN).<sup>181</sup>

"Amateur radio assisted in every way it could, handling communications, patrolling the river, and working closely with police, military and service organizations, when the "break-through" occurred. For eight days emergency operations continued, twenty-four hours a day. During the first three days no traffic was handled except high priority

<sup>177</sup> Trestle Spans Break pg. 11

<sup>178</sup> Smith Lake Trestle Nears Completion pg. 18

<sup>179</sup> Preliminary Disaster Committee Report pg.

36

<sup>180</sup> QRR pg. 108.

<sup>181</sup> The Oregon Netter 9/2008 pg. 3

emergency, rescue, medical and housing. The greatest share of these operations were handled on ten meters on such frequencies as were quickly available to most operators.”<sup>182</sup>

After the first three days, Portland amateurs began working through the tremendous backlog of health and welfare traffic that had accumulated. Amateurs “...found themselves deluged by the amount of traffic waiting to be moved into and out of the area. Phone stations picked any frequency in the 75 meter phone band that seemed clear and announced that they were ready for incoming messages. Much of their outgoing traffic was very difficult to move due to scattered operations and insufficient and uncertain statewide coverage.

The emergency operations had clearly demonstrated the need for an organized statewide amateur emergency communications network and the subject of forming such a network was taken up by a committee of Portland amateurs, headed by the ARRL Emergency Coordinator of Multnomah County (Al Davis, W7DIS).<sup>183</sup> This led to the establishment of permanent 80-meter traffic handling networks running both CW and phone.

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<sup>182</sup> OEN – Its History pg. 4.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid*



*Figure 5-40 The Independence President Truman's DC-6 at McNary Field 6/11/48.  
(Willamette Heritage.org image 2007.001.2095)*

## The Truman Visit

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1948, President Harry S. Truman visited Portland during a whirlwind tour of the West Coast. The President's DC-6, dubbed "The Independence," could not land in Portland because of the flooding. So, after flying over sites along the Columbia, the plane landed at McNary field in Salem. The President travelled

from Salem up Hwy 99-E (no I-5 yet), arriving at Portland's Civic Auditorium.

At 1:00 pm the President's speech<sup>184</sup> was broadcasted over KGW and KXL.<sup>185</sup><sup>186</sup> Loudspeakers were placed on the auditorium steps so that those arriving too late to get seats could hear the speech.

<sup>184</sup> Read the full text in Appendix 2

<sup>185</sup> Pioneer Mikes pg. 397

<sup>186</sup> Reportedly, the speech was *not* carried by the national networks.  
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus>





*Figure 5-41 President Truman signs the \$10 million aid bill for flood victims during his Portland visit.  
(AP Wire Photo)*

The President's speech was followed by a conference with federal, state, local, and Red Cross officials on flood conditions. A few minutes later, there was a signing ceremony where the

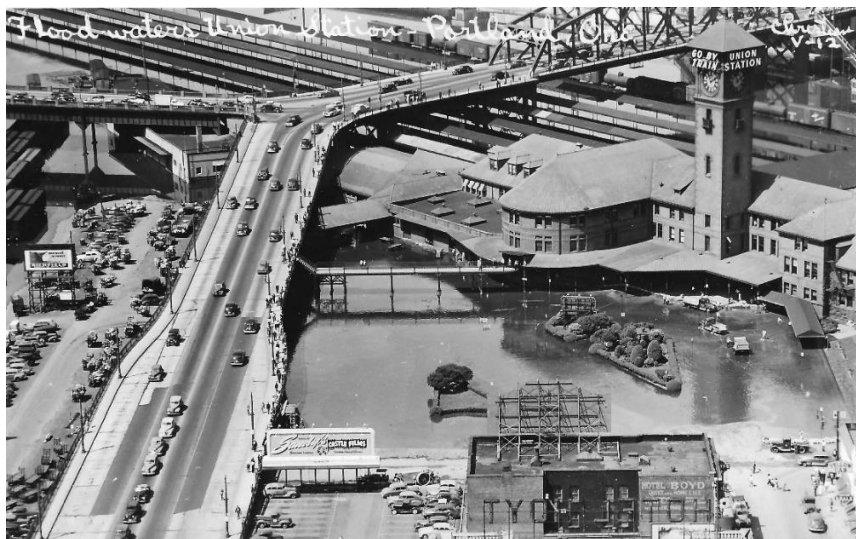
President approved a promised emergency Joint Resolution of Congress, appropriating \$10 million in immediate aid for flood victims.



*Figure 5-42 General Philip Fleming describes the damage at Vanport for President Truman. To the right stands Julius Krug, Secretary of the Interior and Col. TD Weaver, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (AP Wire Photo)*

Before leaving Portland, the President's entourage drove out to see the damage at Vanport. Though the initial flooding had wiped-out Vanport almost two-weeks earlier, the flood had yet to begin receding and the scene was still quite sobering.

Rather than returning to Salem by motorcade, the President boarded a train at southeast Portland's Brooklyn Yard as flooding still had downtown's Union Station closed during the President's visit.



*Figure 5-43 Flooding at Union Station in northwest Portland, 6/48*

**DOWN**

**go prices on  
VANPORT  
BUILDINGS**

Government insists on speedy, immediate action! So we must slash prices even lower! Buy a complete 2-story (14 Apt.) building as low as \$695! Lumber is dry, seasoned, Grade No. 1 and better!

**UP** goes your new home, chicken house or barn in the spring... at Tremendous Savings on building materials!

**AS LITTLE AS \$25.00 DOWN**

**Buys a Vanport Building**

ALSO! Already dismantled building materials drastically reduced! Buy whatever you need... lumber, plywood, doors, windows, electrical fixtures, etc.

**VANPORT WRECKING CO.**  
Sales Office on Vanport Site, Portland  
Phone TR 8880 or TR 8881  
OPEN DAILY 8 A.M. to 5:30 P.M.

Also... plumbing, pipe in all sizes, toilets, wash basins, fixtures... at sacrifice prices...

Figure 5-44 1949 Vanport Wrecking Co ad.  
(The Beaverton Enterprise)

## A Few More Words About Vanport

Once the initial recovery at Vanport was over, concern turned to looting. Deputy sheriffs patrolled and guarded Vanport from June 5<sup>th</sup> (when the State Police turned it over to them) until September or October 1948.<sup>187</sup>

"Arrangements were made...by which former residents of Vanport could go into the area to search for their property. A pass system was established...and no person without a pass was allowed to enter the Vanport area."<sup>188</sup>

In about a year's time, the site that once was home to 40,000 people had been cleaned out and reduced to foundations and roads.

Despite the tragedy that had occurred there, it did not take long for street racers to realize that the miles of abandoned pavement suited their needs just fine. "Outlaw" races soon began occurring on the flat roads of old Vanport. By the 1960's, the Portland International Raceway had been built on the easterly part of the site.

In 1971, the Heron Lakes Golf Course was dedicated on the westerly part of the site.

<sup>187</sup> Clark pg. 371

<sup>188</sup> *ibid*



## The Vanport College Amateur Radio Club – W7NXP



*Figure 5-45 Vanport College campus at the former Oregon Shipyard ca. 1949  
(Courtesy Portland State University Special Collections)*



*Figure 5-46 The Vanport Extension Center, a two-year college, was established in Vanport in 1946 to serve returning veterans. Following the flood, Vanport College was reopened in office buildings at Kaiser's former Oregon Shipyard in North Portland. There is no record of an organized college ham club prior to the move to Oregon Shipyard. However, the Radio Amateur Callbook lists the Vanport College Amateur Radio Club, call sign W7NXP, from 1950 thru 1954. The trustees were Wayne L Gilbert (1950), and Robert D Hunsucker Jr (1951-1954). In this photo, a student is operating a National NC-183 receiver with matching speaker. The rack-mounted transmitter appears to be shop-built with some commercial components.  
(Photo Courtesy of Portland State University Special Collections)*



## Beyond Vanport



*Figure 5-47 Vacant Vanport, July 1949. The only remaining structures appear to be water towers and the central steam buildings that heated each cluster of apartments. (Ackroyd Photography)*

The story of the 1948 flood does not end with the terrible events of Memorial Day or the Portland radio stations that were wiped out by the flood.

In the days following, the flood continued to break down dikes and inundated Delta Park, the new Portland-Columbia airport, and miles of eastern Multnomah County.

As the flood surge continued down the Columbia River, Oregon and Washington communities all the way to the Pacific Coast were impacted. And each of those communities had “radio heroes” of its own.

In the following sections, we’ll look at those impacts, east and west.

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



## ***Part 6 – Delta Park***

On the Preceding Page: "The flooding moves east from Vanport." In the view shown on the previous page, Vanport and Delta Park are flooded and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue canal is holding the flood back from the Portland Airport.





*Figure 6-1 Looking south over Denver Avenue on May 31st. The ramps on the lower left lead to the underpass where crews are fighting to keep Vanport flood waters from flowing into Delta Park. (Oregon Historical Society photo ORHI 24149)*

## Delta Park

### Denver Avenue (US Hwy 99W)

After the railroad fill to the west of Vanport breached on May 30th, Vanport filled with water to a depth of about 13 feet. The fill under Denver Avenue on the easterly edge of Vanport was next in line to feel the pressure.

The Denver Avenue fill was constructed by Multnomah County in 1916 at the expense of the Interstate Bridge Commission (IBC) as a southerly approach to the Interstate Bridge. A suction dredge pumped sand from the Oregon Slough to the site of the fill. The IBC transferred control over the fill

to Multnomah County on January 1, 1929, who transferred it to the State Highway Commission on March 26, 1937.

During the construction of Vanport in 1942, workers tunneled through the fill and created an underpass to accommodate the ramps from northbound Denver Avenue. This gave Vanport access to the nearby Jantzen Beach amusement park, the Interstate Bridge, and the Vancouver Shipyards. It also compromised the fill's effectiveness as a dike. To compensate, the Army Corps of Engineers surrounded the cloverleaf on the easterly side of Denver

Avenue with a ring dike to reestablish the dike's integrity.

Evacuees from Vanport fled to Denver Avenue, often on foot because of the jam of cars on the exit ramp. Soon relief workers and spectators added to the congestion.

As water rose against the Denver Avenue fill, a culvert south of the underpass began allowing water to flow into Delta Park. "More than 50 men

labored unceasingly filling sandbags and throwing them in. They [even] threw in bales of straw. A DUKW tried to force debris into the leak which appeared to be undermining the highway. Eventually floodwaters caused the failure of the culvert and significant erosion of the dike. Traffic on Denver Avenue was stopped shortly after midnight. When daylight came and no progress had been made toward plugging the leak, a call went out for steel matting."<sup>189</sup>



*Figure 6-2 Water boils against the Vanport-side of the Denver Avenue fill at the site of a failed culvert. Workers are using a bulldozer to push rock and surplus aircraft landing strip mats into the gap in an effort to prevent a breach. (ACME Telephoto)*

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<sup>189</sup> Oregonian 6/01/48 pg. 11





*Figure 6-3 Flooding at Delta park and Vanport. To the right, the Interstate Bridge and the flood-swollen Oregon Slough. Near the top, the broken railroad fill. In the center, Vanport. Denver Avenue crosses the middle of the photo, joining Union Avenue at the south end of the Interstate Bridge.*

"At 5:30 a.m. the effort to plug the leak was abandoned. Thirty minutes later the first lane of the concrete pavement was gone. The concrete partially plugged the hole and the flow of water dropped to possibly one fourth of its previous volume. At 7:30 a truckload of steel matting arrived."<sup>190</sup> Then the focus shifted to securing the ring dike at the underpass.

Concerned that the ring dike would not hold, a crew of 100 workers, led by Gordon Black, labored all day Monday to shore it up.

By nightfall on Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, crews thought that ring dike had been sufficiently reinforced. At 9:15, Black

saw water starting to stream from the easterly side of the dike and ordered workers to run for safety. Within a matter of minutes, the stream turned into a torrent as large sections of the Denver Avenue fill blew out.

"As they watched, the current dragged one of Vanport's multiple-dwelling units toward the underpass trestle. The house snapped off a tree and rammed into the trestle underpinnings, grinding them to splinters. Then the house poked its way over the debris and tumbled over a 15-foot waterfall, turning end-for-end and smashing into matchwood."<sup>191</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Oregonian 6/1/48 pg. 11

<sup>191</sup> Portland OR Dike Break Flood

While crews worked to reinforce Denver Avenue, others “had been working on the Union Avenue fill, preparing sandbags to stop the culverts under the fill the moment the Denver Avenue fill gave way.”<sup>192</sup>

Just an hour after Denver Avenue failed, water reached Union Avenue, causing the road to buckle and sag.

When Multnomah County Sherriff Martin Pratt closed Union Avenue to traffic, the last connection to the Interstate Bridge and Vancouver, Washington, was closed.

## Union Avenue (US Hwy 99E)

Union Avenue<sup>193</sup> joined Denver Avenue<sup>194</sup> just south of the Interstate Bridge, creating the triangle-shaped Delta Park, with the levy along the Columbia Slough forming the bottom of the triangle.

Like Denver Avenue, Union Avenue was built atop a fill of river dredgings in 1916. Also, like Denver Avenue, the sandy fill under Union Avenue was perforated with road underpasses and culverts.

Multnomah County transferred the road to the State Highway Commission and it became part of Hwy 99E.



*Figure 6-4 Cows from a flooded dairy farm rest atop the dike along Schmeer Road. Today this stretch is topped with a multipurpose pass that serves as an inspection road and a path along the Columbia Slough for sightseers.*

<sup>192</sup> The Oregonian 6/1/48 pg. 11

<sup>193</sup> Union Avenue has since been renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

<sup>194</sup> Denver Avenue was once known as Derby Avenue. Some portions of Denver mentioned in this story no longer exist due to the construction of Interstate 5.





*Figure 6-5 Looking west across Union Avenue at the Flooded Amphi-Theatre drive-in 6/1/48.  
(ACME Telephoto)*

As Delta Park filled with flood water, The Portland Speedway motor racing track was submerged as were the grounds of the Portland Meadows horse racing track.

The drive-in "Amphi-Theatre," whose sign promised they'd be open "rain or shine," was also swamped.

500 thoroughbreds were relocated to the stables at the state fairgrounds in Salem. Stranded owners and their families were lodged in the 4-H dormitories. Other horses were moved barns at the racetrack in Gresham.

## G.I. Joe's

Long-time Portlanders will remember the chain of G.I. Joe's sporting goods stores.

During World War 2, Capt. Ed Orkney piloted B-24 Liberators in the South Pacific as part of the Jolly Rogers Bomb Group. After returning to the Northwest and starting a family, Mr. Orkney began selling war surplus supplies.

Following the war, demand for sporting goods like tents, cots, and sleeping bags far outstripped new production and everyone bought surplus army gear.

Ed and his partners located their first G.I. Joe's store in surplus Army hospital tents in Delta Park. At the time, their competition was mostly located in downtown Portland. The suburban location placed them outside of the Portland city limits and nearer potential customer bases in Vanport and Vancouver, Washington. The store was

located at 8950 N Vancouver Ave between the Columbia Slough and the intersection of Union Ave and Vancouver Ave.

The hospital tents were quick to put up and were a far cheaper shelter than a bricks-and-mortar location. However, the canvas tents were no match for thieves with knives and they soon began upgrading to wooden walls.

G.I. Joe's opened in early 1948 and continued in business at Delta Park even after being flooded at the end of May. The flood was not a total loss for the store; The Red Cross purchased G.I. Joe's entire stock of sleeping bags, cots, and other merchandise as they prepared to help flood victims.

Janna Orkney's book, Growing Up with G.I. Joe's was the source for much of this information and is great history of an iconic Northwest store.



*Figure 6-6 The southeast corner of Delta Park during the 1948 flood. In the foreground, high water fills the low ground west of Vancouver Ave, leaving the two-story Matheny and Bacon building with only the upper floor windows and roof showing. Across the street, G.I. Joe's cluster of hospital tents sits on higher ground (left of center). In the top left corner, Union Ave crosses into Delta Park on a fill and bridges the Columbia Slough. The grass-covered levy marks the northly edge of the Columbia Slough. Vancouver Way follows the levy under Union Ave into the East Columbia neighborhood. Note the "wigwam"-style wood waste burner in the upper right corner. Once a common sight at Oregon mills, only a handful still exist. (Akroyd Photo) (Courtesy Historic Photo Archive)*



*Figure 6-7 In the foreground, the Union Avenue fill has been overtopped.  
The Amphi-Theatre drive-in screen stands just south of the breach.  
To the left of center, the bleachers at the Portland Speedway rise out of the flood.*

Between midnight and 1:00 am on June 1st, the Union Avenue fill was reported breached in two places; a culvert failed near the drive-in and a second breach occurred near the intersection of Union and Denver Avenues.

Overnight, water continued rushing east toward the Peninsula Drainage Canal dike near 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Although flood waters did not recede for weeks, crews had the Union Avenue fill repaired and ready for traffic in about two weeks.<sup>195</sup>



*Figure 6-8 Repairing the Union Avenue fill. (The Oregonian)*

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<sup>195</sup> Oregonian 6/11/48 pg. 1



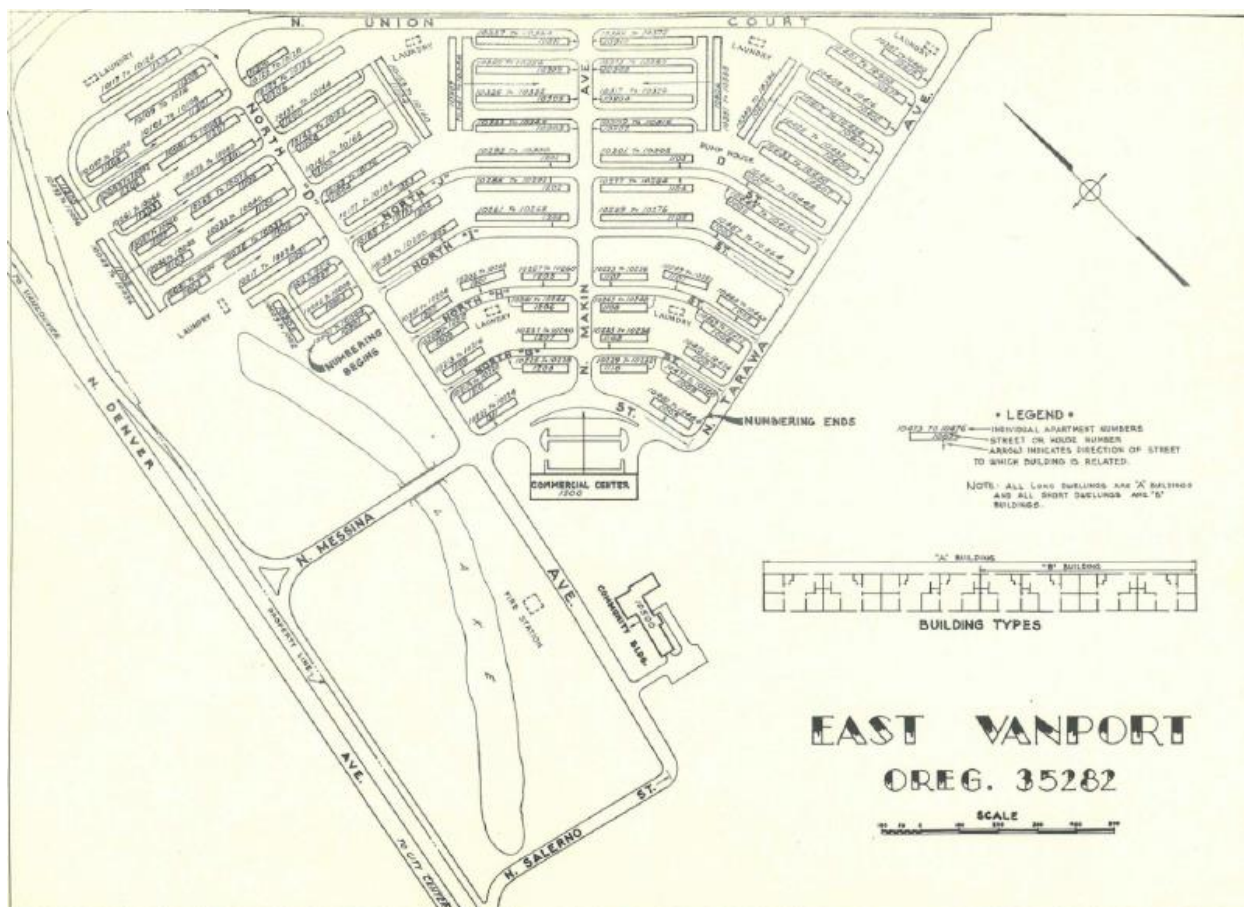


Figure 6-9 Map of East Vanport (City of Portland Archives A2001-025)

## East Vanport

Author's note: Most stories of Vanport don't mention the lesser-known and short-lived community of East Vanport. I found it interesting and wanted to include it in the interest of completeness.

The intersection of N Denver Ave and N Union Ave lies just south of the Interstate Bridge and forms the tip of the triangle known as Delta Park.

The Federal Government purchased the most northerly 100 acres of Delta Park to build the East Vanport Housing

Project. The project was separated from Kaiser's Vanport by the Denver Avenue fill.

East Vanport was built in 1943 and consisted of 484 housing units, mostly rowhouses. Far smaller than Vanport, East Vanport had its own fire station, laundries, a public library, community halls, and a commercial facility. But, it lacked amenities such as a movie theater and post office that Vanport had. Although the map does not show an elementary school, Hershel Parker recalls walking as a fourth grader from his East Vanport home to a neighborhood school.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Hershel Parke email.





*Figure 6-10 East Vanport housing  
(City of Portland Archives)*

As shown on the site plan, the rowhouses in East Vanport were smaller than the apartments that were built in Vanport. When the development was closed at the end of World War 2, many of the houses were relocated to lots throughout the Portland area.<sup>197</sup> The site was completely closed and vacant shortly after the war.

In his blog post "An Okie Tries to Get an Education,"<sup>198</sup> Hershel Parker shared some memories of life in East Vanport as a child. "In 1942 we were among the tens of thousands of white hillbillies and Southern blacks hauled on special Kaiser trains' to work in shipyards and live in Henry J. Kaiser's instant city, Vanport."<sup>199</sup> "In 1944 and 1945 we were in the new adjunct East Vanport, separated from the Columbia River by a dirt dike."<sup>200</sup>

"In Vanport and East Vanport the older children all dropped out of school and jobs. Orpha Lee worked in a shipyard. Everett was a waiter in a big Portland restaurant (where he served Alan Ladd once and brought home an autograph). Wilburn, at 14, was assistant manager

of a grocery store in Portland. I was on my own with a small radio, a growing collection of Wonder Woman comics, money for movies, and absolutely unsupervised at least 90% of the time."<sup>201</sup>

"At nine, a month or two after FDR's death, I was put to work, riding out on the back of a flatbed truck to pick strawberries and other crops."<sup>202</sup> "We got out of Oregon almost three years before the...flood that wiped out Kaiser's whole hastily thrown up metropolis."<sup>203</sup>

Had East Vanport still been standing in 1948, it would have been inundated on the night of May 31st, along with the rest of the Peninsula Drainage District No. 2 when the Denver Avenue fill failed.

In 1950, the Portland city council purchased the vacant East Vanport (100 acres) from the Federal Government for \$40,000. A parks levy was passed in May, 1950 with the goal of developing the East Vanport site among others.

Ultimately, about 85 acres were developed into today's very popular East Delta Park. Amenities include seven softball fields, nine soccer fields, a football field, a volleyball court, a concessions facility, and a street-tree arboretum.

<sup>197</sup> Brunker, Dave

<sup>198</sup> Fragmentsfromawritingdesk.blogspot.com

<sup>199</sup> An Okie Tries to Get an Education

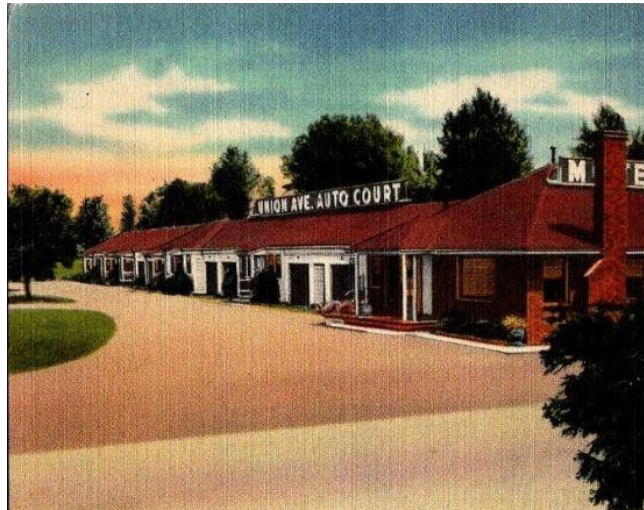
<sup>200</sup> *ibid*

<sup>201</sup> *ibid*

<sup>202</sup> *ibid*

<sup>203</sup> *ibid*

Three vastly different views of the Union Ave Auto Court, just east of the Union Ave fill.



*Figure 6-11 Union Ave Auto Court from a tourist postcard.*



*Figure 6-12 View of the Auto Court in early June, 1948 with only rooftops showing above the debris-filled flood. (Disaster in God's World)*



Figure 6-13 After the waters have gone back down. A lot of the debris has already been picked up. The bungalows are off their footings. Note the water lines on the shingles. Doors and windows are open for mucking out and drying out. (Courtesy Doug Magedanz)

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 7 – The Airport and Points East***



On the Preceding Page: June 2, 1948. US Army Engineers lay a sandbag dike as water from the rising Columbia River seeps into the parking area of the Reynolds Metal Company plant in Troutdale.

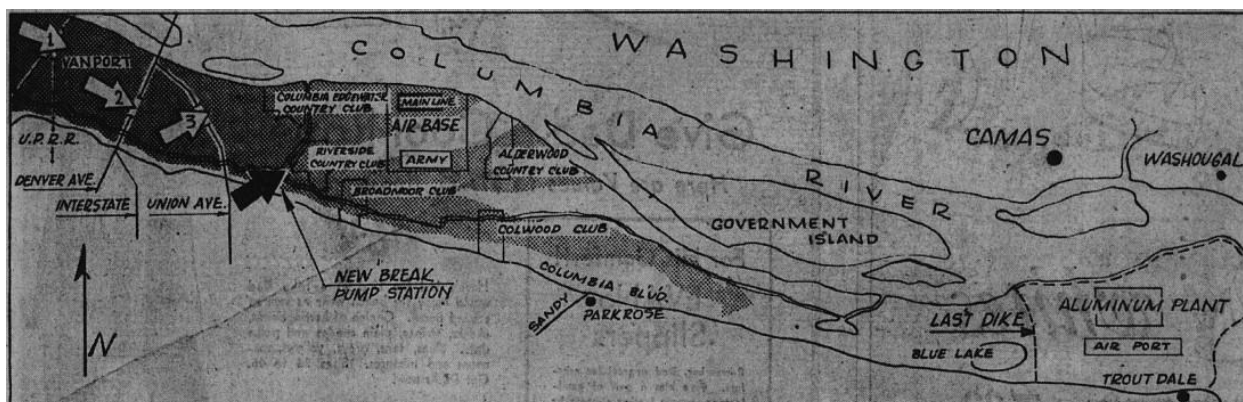


Figure 7-1 The Flood Marches East. The Map shows (solid black arrow) where floodwaters broke through the drainage slough at the pumping plant near 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave. Following the breach, water flowed east over golf courses, homes, farms and the Portland airport. By June 11<sup>th</sup>, all shaded areas were covered and water was still flowing east. East of Blue Lake one last cross dike protects the multi-million Reynolds Aluminum plant in Troutdale. Arrow 1 shows the location of the break in the railroad fill. Arrow 2 points to the breach at Denver Ave. Arrow 3 shows where Union Ave broke. (The Oregon Journal 6/11/48).

"The City of Portland undertook to provide clean fresh water from the Columbia River to flush waste from the Columbia Slough by dredging a canal between the river and slough in 1919. This provided the required water and also a minor navigation channel for 27 years. Then, in 1946 a permit was obtained to build a levee of sand at the Columbia River end of the canal and install two 48-inch pipes to pass flushing water. These pipes soon clogged with sand and became unusable during the 1948 flood, and were never reopened."<sup>204</sup>

When designing the Peninsula Drainage Canal, engineers were constrained by the relative water levels in the Columbia River and the Slough, a mile way. A slope had to be maintained in order for water to flow through naturally without

pumping. Consequently, to maintain a steady grade, the canal wasn't so much "dug" as "built," being bordered on both sides by substantial berms.

As shown at the start part 6 (page 133), the berms lining the Peninsula Drainage Canal provided a temporary barrier to the eastward movement of the flood. When the photo was taken on June 1st, Columbia Edgewater Country Club on the westerly side of the canal (center right) was inundated but Riverside Golf and Country Club (bottom center) was still dry.

The reprieve lasted only about 10 days. But, it bought precious time for the Portland Airbase and Portland Columbia Airport to prepare.

<sup>204</sup> Columbia Slough pg. 10



*Figure 7-2 The junction of the Peninsula Drainage Canal and the Columbia Slough. Water has broken through the canal walls and is racing east toward the airport. (AP Wire Photo 6/12/48).*



*Figure 7-3 After breaching the Peninsula Drainage Canal flood waters are rapidly filling the area from 33rd Drive to 47th Avenue. At this time, 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue was the airport's westerly boundary and main access road. Note the runways and terminal building in the upper right corner.*



## The Portland Airbase

As dike after dike broke, staff at the Portland Air Guard Base initiated plans to get their assets out of harm's way.

Sergeant Jack Klein, returning home on an off-duty Sunday afternoon, received a message to call the base. "When I called, Capt. Gemmel informed me that the [Vanport] west dike had just breached, and I need to report as soon as I could...and to wear a sidearm if I had one."<sup>205</sup>

Sgt. Klein arrived at the squadron headquarters where he was greeted by

the commander, Maj. Cladius G Farrow, and a small group of officers and non-commissioned officers. They began loading up files, typewriters, and other equipment and hauling everything to another unit member's home near the base.

This small team of about ten men worked all night and into the morning. "They removed weapons from the vault and secured...most of the equipment at the Colwood Golf Course on the corner of Alderwood Road and Columbia Boulevard."<sup>206</sup>



*Figure 7-4 K7FAN QSL card with a P-51 Mustang.*

*In 1948, the Portland Airbase had 25 of these lightning-fast fighters.*

*K7F callsigns were issued around 1950 to Air Force stations in the Northwest. K7FAN was Roy Howard at Gowen Field, Idaho. K7FAJ was Ralph R E'Del at the Portland Airbase.*

All capable Air National Guard aircraft<sup>207</sup> were flown to the Salem Municipal (McNary) Field.

Air Force Reserve aircraft were flown to McChord AFB outside of Tacoma, Washington. Planes that could not fly

were towed up Alderwood Road and secured at the Colwood parking lot.

"Eventually Klein would have 30 young airmen under his watch, all issued carbine rifles to keep order and protect the government property at Colwood...."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Hugel pg 1

<sup>206</sup> ibid

<sup>207</sup> The Oregon Air National Guard's planes included 25 F-51 Mustang fighters, 3 A-26 attack

bombers, a C-47 cargo plane, and a dozen lighter aircraft.

<sup>208</sup> Hugel pg 1



*Figure 7-5 View from the Portland Airbase Control Tower. Note the wire antennas in the foreground. (Courtesy Oregon Air National Guard)*

On Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the airmen...moved into the gymnasium at Kennedy School at NE 33<sup>rd</sup> and Killingsworth. Lumber was laid down to protect the gym's maple floors and steel lockers and other equipment were moved in creating a temporary orderly room. Like other Portland Schools,

classes at Kennedy School were cancelled for the year following the Memorial Day flood. Sixty-five Portland elementary schools, including Kennedy, Whitaker<sup>209</sup>, and Woodlawn were converted into temporary shelters for displaced Vanport residents.<sup>210</sup>



*Figure 7-6 The flooding destroyed a two-year investment at the airbase and was followed by months of repairs and restoration. (Courtesy Oregon Air National Guard)*

<sup>209</sup> See the Sheely family's story on page 91.

<sup>210</sup> Floods of May-June 1948 pg. 10



*Figure 7-7 Looking east over the airport and airbase in 1960. The airbase facilities are shown to the right of the main runway. 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue runs along the airport's west boundary. The large square shows the extent of the original runways. In 1953, the airport was expanded east through the former Alderwood Golf Course. (City of Portland image A2001-059.145)*

## **The Portland-Columbia Airport**

Portland's first commercial airport was dedicated in 1927 at Swan Island. By 1935, the Port of Portland had determined that a larger airport would be required and there was no room to expand at Swan Island. 700 acres were purchased at the airport's current location in northeast Portland and over 1,000 WPA workers helped with construction.

New dikes were erected to help protect the airport from flooding. And over 4 million cubic yards of fill were brought in to raise and level the site.

When the airport was opened October 13, 1940, it was called "Portland-Columbia Airport" to distinguish it from Swan Island.

The Army Air Corps used the new airport throughout World War II.





*Figure 7-8 Flooded tarmac and hangars at the Portland Airbase. (Courtesy Oregon Air National Guard)*

Like the Portland Air Base, the airport was put out of service as the waters from Vanport worked their way east in mid-June.

On Sunday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, the airport was closed because of the threat of flooding. On Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, evacuation of the field was ordered by the Army Corps of Engineers. "The army, the airlines, the national guard, and half a dozen aircraft operators awoke that morning to the blare of radios and the glare of headlines telling the story of the city that was Vanport, the worst disaster in Oregon's recent history. They didn't want to be next. Before noon they had moved out of Portland-Columbia airport – planes, pilots, and personnel."<sup>211</sup> Commercial traffic at the airport was rerouted to Salem

As soon as the air traffic subsided, Civil Aeronautics Authority staff began dismantling the airport's instrument landing system and radio equipment. The airport weather station was also dismantled.<sup>212</sup>

To accommodate the additional traffic, Salem's control tower, which had been out of service since the end of the war, was reactivated with radio equipment brought from Portland. The Salem post office abruptly became the distribution point for much of the Northwest's air mail when planes were diverted from Portland.

After the flood breached the Union Avenue fill, only the berms bordering the Peninsula Drainage Canal protected the airport. On June 11<sup>th</sup><sup>213</sup> the canal walls broke at a point near a pump

<sup>211</sup> Oregonian 6/27/48

<sup>212</sup> Oregonian 5/31/48

<sup>213</sup> Flood of May-June 1948 pg. 12

station. Water flowed through covering an additional 10,000 acres and flooding the airbase and the airport. At the crest, flood water stood 8 to 10 feet deep in the passenger terminal and offices.

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, three of the four large air carriers that had moved to Salem (Western Air Lines, Northwest, and West Coast) moved to the hastily-upgraded Troutdale Airport east of Portland. This left only United Air Lines at Salem. Commercial traffic did not return to the Portland-Columbia Airport until mid-September.

### **The Flooding Peaks in East County**

After passing the airport, flood waters continued moving eastward, following

the sloughs to their origins near Fairview Lake. At peak flooding, water covered much of the lowlands between US Hwy 30 (Sandy Road) and Marine Drive from Parkrose nearly to Fairview.

"There was no widespread destruction of buildings as had happened at Vanport. The water rose slowly and current was not perceptible after the peak was reached."<sup>214</sup>

"My parents, living in Parkrose had to evacuate...their home at 105<sup>th</sup> and Simpson. I have a photo of them in a rowboat looking into a window of the house a few days later. The water was still above the windowsill and had been up to the ceiling of their house. My grandmother lived just down the street and never went back."<sup>215</sup>



*Figure 7-9 Parkrose-area homes are still partially under water in this photo taken June 21<sup>st</sup> from the Goodyear blimp*

<sup>214</sup> Flood of May-June 1948 pg. 12

<sup>215</sup> Anon Freepages.Rootsweb.com





*Figure 7-10 Flood waters surge over 138th Avenue on their march to East County. Soon after this photo was taken the entire area was inundated. In the center, water is streaming where Costco stands today. Most of the agricultural area shown has since been converted to various commercial and industrial uses. In the early 1960's the "142nd Avenue" cross-dike was built just east of 138th, dividing the drainage district in half and providing protection against another district-wide flood. (AP Wire Photo)*

Waters eventually approached Blue Lake, about twelve miles east of Vanport. However, the flood began receding before it reached the natural dike on which Campbell Road was built.

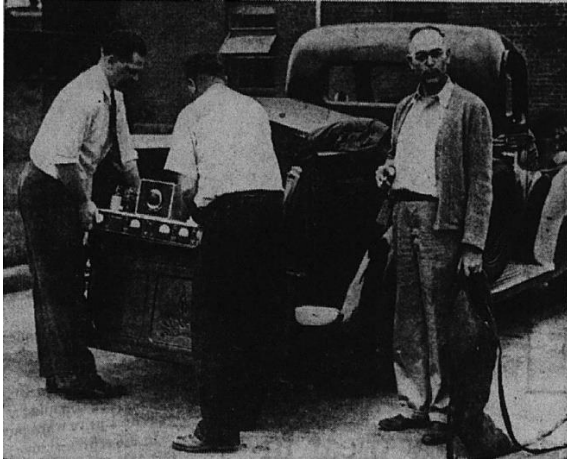
Today Campbell Road is variously known as "NE 223<sup>rd</sup> Ave" and also "Blue Lake Rd." As the flood crept east, the road was buttressed with sandbags as a precaution to prevent water from reaching the Troutdale airport and the Reynolds Aluminum plant.

Flooding did not significantly subside for about two weeks. All the lowlands east of Delta Park and north of the Columbia Slough were submerged for 28 days.

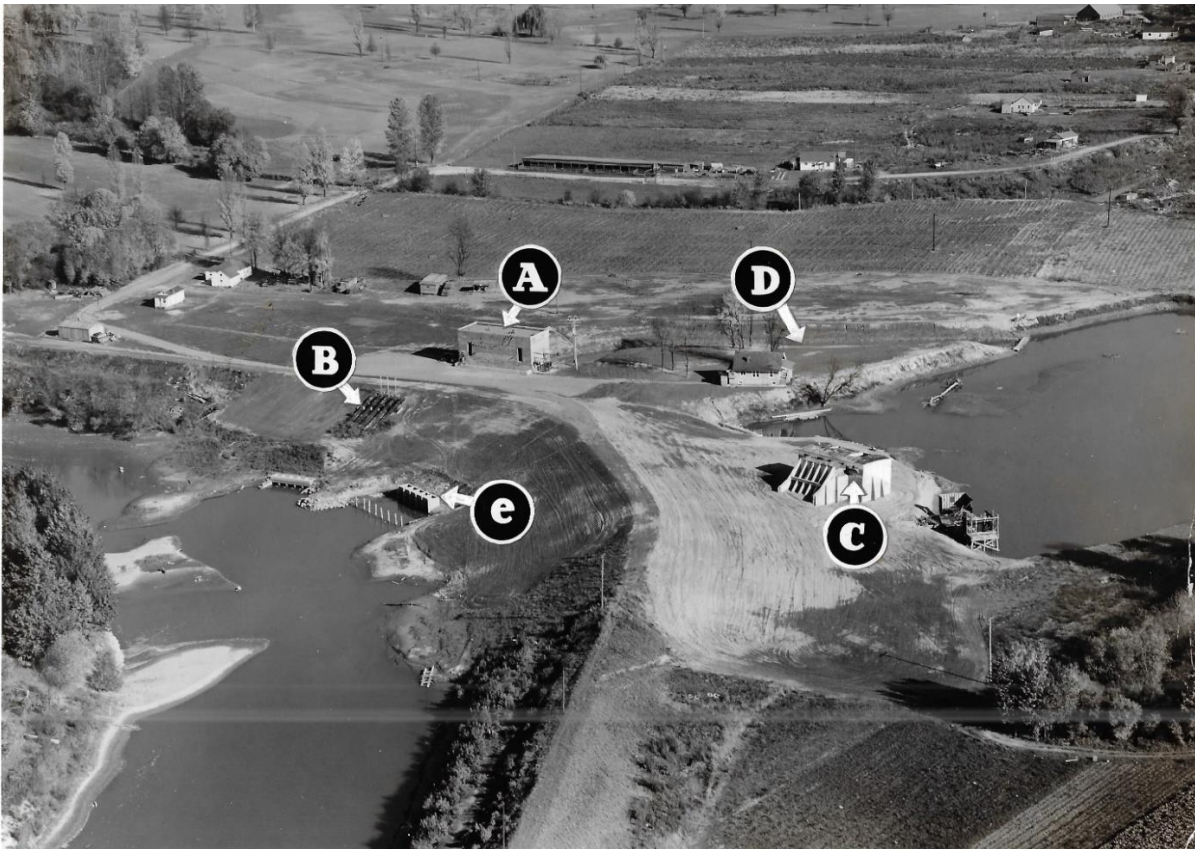


*Figure 7-11 Eldon Stevens keeps watch on a dike near Blue Lake. He's using a Forest Service Type SX 30-40 mc transceiver. (The Oregonian 6/3/48)*





*Figure 7-12 As the flood pushes east, Bonneville Power Administration employees move radio equipment out of the Troutdale electrical substation at the Reynolds Aluminum plant in Troutdale. From left Albert Thompson, Ben R Cohen, and Roy Betrand. (The Oregon Journal 6/6/48)*



*Figure 7-12 -As shown in figures 7-1, 7-2, and 7-3, failure of the dike near the 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave pumpstation allowed floodwaters to flow into the airport and points east. This photo, taken in November, 1949 shows the results of the Army Corps of Engineers' \$850,000 restoration project at the site. "A" is the new pumping plant capable of pumping 80,000 gallons per minute from Multnomah County Drainage District on the east side (right), over the levy and into the Columbia Slough on the left. "B" indicates the outflow pipes from the new pump station. "C" is the remains of the old pump house (shown in the earlier photos) now nearly buried in the reconstructed and enlarged levy. "D" is the 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave canal that brings drainage water to the pumping plant. "E" is the "tidebox" that allows water to drain naturally into the slough but prevents backflow. (Ackroyd Photo)*

## Type SX Radiophone



Figure 7-13 Type SX Radiophone (author's photo)

Battery-operated, light weight, portable, and operable by one person, the SX radiophones were used to establish temporary radio stations at many sites during the 1948 flood emergency.

The Type SX radiophone was designed by the US Forest Service radio laboratory staff in Portland in 1940. It operated in the Forest Service's band of frequencies near 30 mc. The transmitter frequency was switchable among three crystals; the receiver was tunable. The SX transmitted AM voice at  $\frac{1}{4}$  watt. Battery life was 6-10 hours under intermittent operation. An audio amplifier (SXA) was available separately.

800 SX radiophones were built under contract by firms such as Radio Specialty Manufacturing Company in Portland.



# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 8 – Vancouver and Sauvie Island***



On the Preceding Page: "Sauvie Island Housecall" And Army DUKW, a Navy landing craft, and what appears to be a private motor yacht pay a housecall at a farm on Sauvie Island. The tractors have been pulled up to higher ground alongside the house. The first floor furnishings are being loaded in the DUKW for a move to a dry location. The family chose to ride out the storm in the second story rooms.



*Figure 8-1 Looking south from Vancouver at the Interstate Bridge with the Columbia River at flood stage. The Interstate Bridge was carrying US Hwy 99 traffic in both directions at the time. The span shown above was opened in 1917 and today carries I-5 northbound traffic. The twin bridge was opened to I-5 southbound traffic in 1958.  
(Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*

## Vancouver

Low-lying areas along Vancouver's waterfront suffered the same fate as other communities along the Columbia River. The wartime shipyards were awash. Vancouver's Pearson Airpark was partially underwater. The waterfront ALCOA plant became known as "ALCOA Island" as flood waters surrounded it. The Fruit Valley neighborhood west of the city was evacuated after water rose high enough to enter the sewer system.

On Friday May 28<sup>th</sup>, national guardsmen from the Vancouver barracks, worked with members of the Red Cross to evacuate 200 families of

the Fruit Valley neighborhood to McLoughlin Heights.

With the Interstate Bridge closed to all but emergency traffic, the Vancouver barracks were opened for refugees, including 107 former Vanport residents.<sup>216</sup>

NWVRS member Bob Walters recalls his father, Bob, returning to their home after working some very long days during the flood. Bob had a degree from the University of Minnesota in Electrical Engineering and was employed by the Bonneville Power Administration.

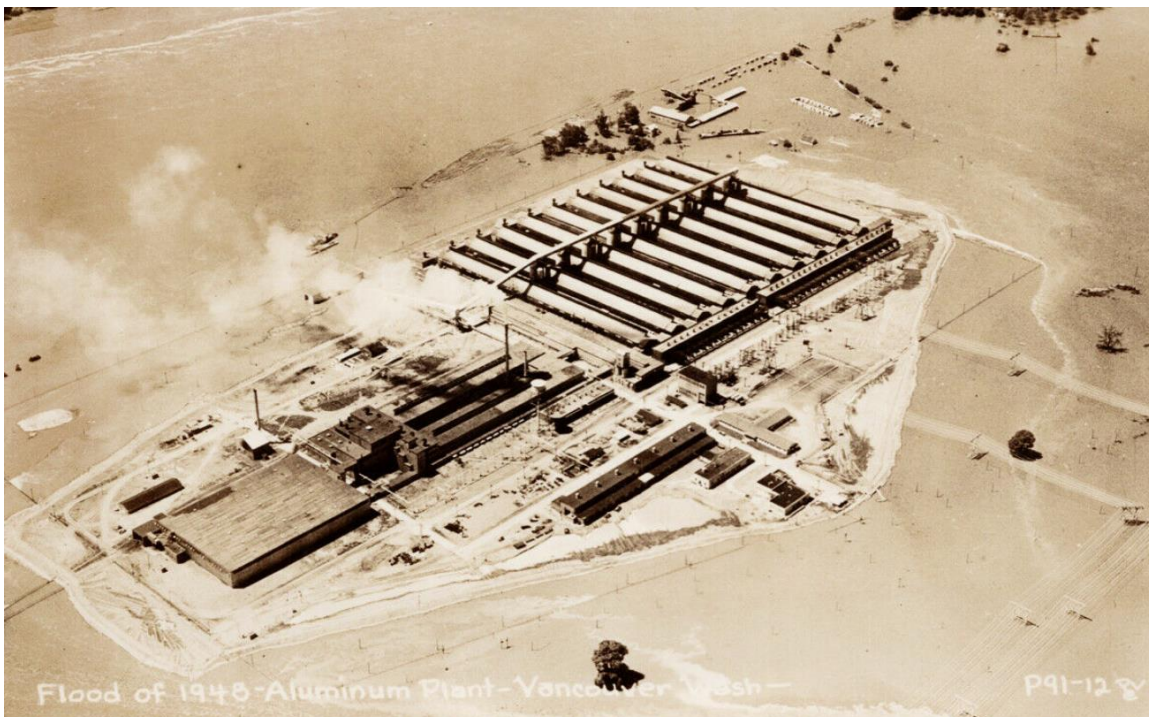
<sup>216</sup> Flood of 48

Although Mr. Walters was the Operations and Maintenance head at the Ross Substation east of Vancouver, he was tasked with keeping water out of the substation at ALCOA's west

Vancouver aluminum plant and keeping power on at plant during the flood. Bob said that his dad worked several 12-18 hour shifts during the emergency.



*Figure 8-2 Families living in the Fruit Valley subdivision west of Vancouver had to be evacuated.*



*Figure 8-3 ALCOA Island during the 1948 flood. (Courtesy Clark County Historical Museum)*



The ALCOA plant, built on the Vancouver Lake lowlands, was completely surrounded by water at times and was dubbed "ALCOA Island." Employees came and went by boat and helped sandbag the site in addition to keeping the smelters running.

Despite the flooding, the plant continued to function behind dikes 15 to 20 feet high. The Vancouver ALCOA plant was shuttered in 1986 and the site has been redeveloped as Terminal 5.

At the worst of the flooding, "Vancouver was virtually cut off from all avenues except the air. Rail lines in all directions were either severed or in an unsafe condition. Trains from Seattle were coming south only as far as Kelso. The tracks were under water near Kalama. Water had softened the roadbed about 100 miles east of Vancouver..."<sup>217</sup>

Vancouver was further isolated on the evening of Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, when the interstate telephone lines to Portland were lost when the Denver Avenue fill washed out. When the telephone lines were lost, the mission of the Vancouver-area hams expanded from providing communications for the local emergency to handling essential messages across the region.



*Figure 8-4 Vernon Bird in 1919 from his Application for Seaman's Certificate of Citizenship (Courtesy Ancestry.com)*

**Dr. Vernon J "Doc" Bird  
(7FH, 7ZK, W7ZK)**

Dr. Vernon J Bird was born January 14, 1899, in Rio Dell, California. Shortly after he graduated from Vancouver High School, he got his first amateur radio license, 7FH, on July 6, 1917.

As an employee of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., he began working as a wireless operator for the Pacific Steamship Company. In August 1917, he set sail on the SS Spokane. He also served aboard the SS Senator, and the SS Admiral Dewey, traveling up and down the Pacific Coast and to ports in the far east.

After several years at sea, Dr. Bird returned to Vancouver in 1922. In 1927, Dr. Bird graduated from North Pacific College of Dental Medicine and began his dental practice.

After an absence from the airwaves, Dr. Bird was relicensed in 1939 and was able to regain one of his early calls, W7ZK. In the 1920's, calls starting with Z (7ZK), were reserved for "Special Amateur Stations." His commercial

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<sup>217</sup> Flood of 1948

experience qualified him for a Z call in 1922 which carried with it privileges to operate in the 375 meter commercial band as well as the 200 meter amateur band.

*QST* mentions Dr. Bird's participation in the Vanport communications. We speculate that his commercial CW skills would have made him a valuable member of the 80 meter traffic nets. However, he also enjoyed operating 10 meters mobile, especially in the 1950's. So, he may have been part of the Vanport 10 meter mobile net as well.

Dr. Bird's grandnephew, Mark Richardson, a long-time Vancouver ham and NWVRS member, applied for his current call, WA7ZK, in honor of Dr. Vernon Bird's legacy.

### **Robert M "Sparky" Sherman (W7EEA)**

Along with several other Vancouver hams, Robert "Sparky" Sherman, W7EEA, was cited for his service during the Vanport emergency. Sparky's willingness to serve was so legendary, that the Clark County Amateur Radio Club named their Community Service Award in his honor.

The Sparky Sherman Community Service Award was established in 1982 and is awarded annually to the Clark County ARC member making the most significant contribution to public service. "For years Sparky was the most

visible ham in the vicinity, and many were enriched by knowing him."<sup>218</sup>

Blind from birth, Sparky Sherman graduated from the Washington State School for the Blind "WSSB" in 1932 after which he continued his formal music education at the Portland School of Music. Sparky played piano professionally with combos and jazz bands in the Portland area in the 1930's before returning to WSSB as a teacher in 1947.

Sparky and Helen Lessard were married in 1943 and enjoyed nearly 40 years of marriage. In addition to raising a family of three, Helen and Sparky housed students who attended Emil Fries Piano Hospital where he taught. Helen volunteered at the WSSB, was active in Camp Fire Girls and scouting, and was named Clark County's Mother of the Year in 1961. Sparky and Helen were both active in the Lions Club and other civic activities.

Sparky was first licensed about 1934. He kept the call W7EEA until his passing in 1982. Later his son, James D. "Jim" Sherman (SK), used W7EEA in honor of Sparky.

After decades of teaching and volunteering, Sparky was asked if retirement had crossed his mind. His response? "I've always said that it's better to wear out than rust out."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> K7GIT.com/awards.htm

<sup>219</sup> The Touch of Music pg. 6.  
Vanport Pg. 162

**CLARK COUNTY RADIO CLUB**

**W7AIA**

**CLUB ADDRESS — VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON**

|                     |                               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| RADIO <u>KA7FIP</u> | XMTR <u>Swan 500</u>          |
| DATE <u>6-28-41</u> | ANT <u>4el Beam</u>           |
| TIME <u>0646 Z</u>  | RCVR _____                    |
| SIGS <u>5-9</u>     | REMARKS <u>Inx &amp; 73's</u> |

*Figure 8-5 W7AIA QSL card. Today the Vancouver Amateur Radio Club is the Clark County Amateur Radio Club*

## **The Vancouver (Clark County) Amateur Radio Club**

The Vancouver Amateur Radio Club, W7AIA,<sup>220</sup> was established in 1930. Several members of the Club were credited in *QST* for their efforts during the 1948 flood. Local radio networks were established on 144 mc. And the W7AIA club station participated in the 3.941 mc emergency net, serving "the Coast Guard, Army Engineers and any other groups which might call for service."<sup>221</sup>

The following members of the Vancouver Amateur Radio Club are recorded as having participated in emergency communications during the 1948 flood:

|                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| W7AXA Ohlen R Higgins    | Portland (CCARC founding Member) |
| W7EDK Wilfred Stacey     | Vancouver                        |
| W7EEA Sparky Sherman     | Portland                         |
| W7JAS Henry Wastradowksi | Vancouver (CCARC president 1947) |
| W7KTL Earl Ringle        | Vancouver (CCARC president 1948) |
| W7LTY Ronald McNeil      | Vancouver (CCARC president 1948) |

Additionally, we gratefully acknowledge the efforts of other members whose names and contributions are still waiting to be discovered.

<sup>220</sup> Today known as the Clark County Amateur Radio Club

<sup>221</sup> *QST* 9/48 pg. 39





*Figure 8-6 Burlington Ferry to Sauvie Island Dec 24, 1950 on the eve of its retirement*

## Sauvie Island

To this day Sauvie Island is a wonderful pastoral agricultural oasis only minutes northwest of urban Portland.

On the westerly side, the island is separated from shore by the Multnomah Channel (formerly the Willamette Slough). The easterly side of the island has a magnificent view of the Willamette River flowing north and joining the Columbia.

The first bridge to Sauvie Island was finished in December 1950, at which time the Burlington Ferry was retired.<sup>222</sup>

Regular flooding made the island's land ideal for farming and dairying and a key stopover for migratory birds.

A small dike was built on the northerly end of the island facing the Columbia around 1925. The Army Corps of Engineers built a much larger dike around the southerly end of the island in 1941.

"The Sauvie Island levee, as completed in 1941, was designed to withstand the flood record which was 33 feet in 1894."<sup>223</sup>

However, in the seven years between the levy's completion in 1941 and the 1948 flood, "...settlement of the levee in various sections had lowered the effective height to as low as 31 feet."<sup>224</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Multnomah County replaced the 1950 bridge with a beautiful new structure in 2008.

<sup>223</sup> Pete Patterson Flood of 48 pg. 36

<sup>224</sup> ibid

## Sauvie Island Stories

The following vignettes are mostly from stories gathered by Mabel Howell Dudley for her memoir on the *Flood of 48* and represent just a taste.

I feel these first-hand accounts from island residents are the best way to tell the story of the Sauvie Island Flood and create perspective for the work done by Edwin Wiedmaier, W7HDN, and his son.

### Flooding Reaches the Island

In 1948, "the big dike was still new and houses were being built on low ground with the hopes of not being flooded twice a year, the boys were coming home from the war, if you had electricity it was still a novelty...and if you had a phone it was a 10 party line...."<sup>225</sup>



"The flood fight started in mid-April with casual dike walkers and lasted until late June. Many of the island kids with horses rode the dike during the early part of the flood looking for problems. As the water continued to rise, the operation became a small war, complete with:

- A Command Center – The Sauvie Island Soil Conservation Office
- Supply Dumps - trucks, bulldozers, sacks, generators, lights made with dishpan reflectors, radios, shovels, and more sacks
- Evacuations - families and livestock from the low ground

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<sup>225</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 9

<sup>226</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 36

- Special Operations - Omar Spencer's sand quarry and the Little Surgeon Lake willow logging operation"  
*Pete Patterson*<sup>226</sup>



"I was seated in church and heard the Pastor say that volunteer help was needed on the island to help fill and place sandbags on the dike. As soon as church let out, I went home, changed my clothes, and headed for the island."  
"I worked on the dike until after dark and went to my aunt's house to sleep. I was no sooner in bed when there came a knock on the door. Government officials were saying that the dike might break that night and everyone on the island was to go to the schoolhouse – the highest point on the island."  
*Bob Hutchinson*<sup>227</sup>



*Figure 8-7 The Hutchinson's Sauvie Island ranch  
May 30th, 1948.  
(International News Sound Photos)*



<sup>227</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 14

"I don't know how many [dike walkers] had walkie-talkies but Leo did, and one day he was standing a little north of where [Sauvie Island Road] comes up on the dike, when the whole dike started moving. A call for help brought quick response and after a few frantic minutes of sandbagging the dike was saved."

*Mable Howell Dudley*<sup>228</sup>



"On Sunday afternoon May 30<sup>th</sup>, [we] drove down to Burlington with the intention of ferrying across to Sauvie Island. Since we were not residents or worked on the island, they would not allow us to cross because of the high water and emergency conditions. We were on our way home when we heard on our radio that the Vanport dike had broken."

*Al Lerch*<sup>229</sup>



"The little Columbia County dike had broken...[and] the Sauvie Island Drainage District dike was in danger too, the water being so high that the Army Corps of Engineers had their headquarters at the Sauvie Island School grounds."

*Ida Reeder*<sup>230</sup>



"At the schoolhouse we find a yard full of tents, as the U.S. Army had sent 50 men from Fort Vancouver to help save the big dike, which was still under the management of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. The Army used the school

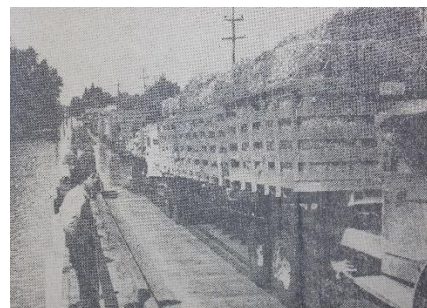
for its mess hall and they also had cots set up in the school. My sister went over to the school to borrow a large kettle. She knocked on the front door but was escorted to a rear door as there were men roaming through the hall in their birthday suits."

*Tom G Davis*<sup>231</sup>



With water flowing past the little dike, most of the homes and farms on the northerly end of the island were underwater or threatened. After evacuating their turkey farm by-barge and finding brooder houses to rent in Sandy, McMinnville, and Salem, Jim Lyon was headed for the St Johns bridge to go home. "...[C]oming west on Lombard, I ended up in the traffic jam at Union Avenue caused by the Vanport Flood. Hearing requests on the radio for trucks to help people get out of Vanport, I unloaded the turkey coops at Dad's home on Washburne Avenue, turned around, and headed for Vanport. However, due to traffic jams, I never did get there."

*Jim Lyon*<sup>232</sup>



*Figure 8-8 Farm trucks work to evacuate Sauvie Island. (The Oregonian 5/30/48)*

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<sup>228</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 44

<sup>229</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 10

<sup>230</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 19

<sup>231</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 30

<sup>232</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 27



## The Dike Watch Frequency

"At 10:00 A.M. on May 31<sup>st</sup> the ARRL Emergency Coordinator [Allen Davis, W7DIS] received an urgent request for ham communications from Sauvie Island which suffered from disruption of ferry service and only sporadic services via the one remaining telephone line.

The prospects were for complete inundation on the island with probable heavy loss of life and property. Highest priority was given to the establishment of the required circuit."<sup>233</sup>

Forty-nine year old Edwin Wiedmaier, W7HDN, (Portland) and his twenty-one year old son Gene made their way to the island by a circuitous water route.

Together, they set up a ham radio station in the Sauvie Island Soil Conservation Office (the headquarters for flood operations on the island) and successfully made contact with Willis "Lee" Campbell, W7ADH, in NE Portland.

The 75-meter phone circuit on 3900 kc "was kept open continuously for several days, and the channel was often referred to as the 'dike-watch frequency.'"<sup>234</sup>

Eugene "Gene" Wiedmaier got his ticket, W7OGI, shortly after the Vanport emergency. He went on to work at Portland Radio Supply until his death in the 1967.

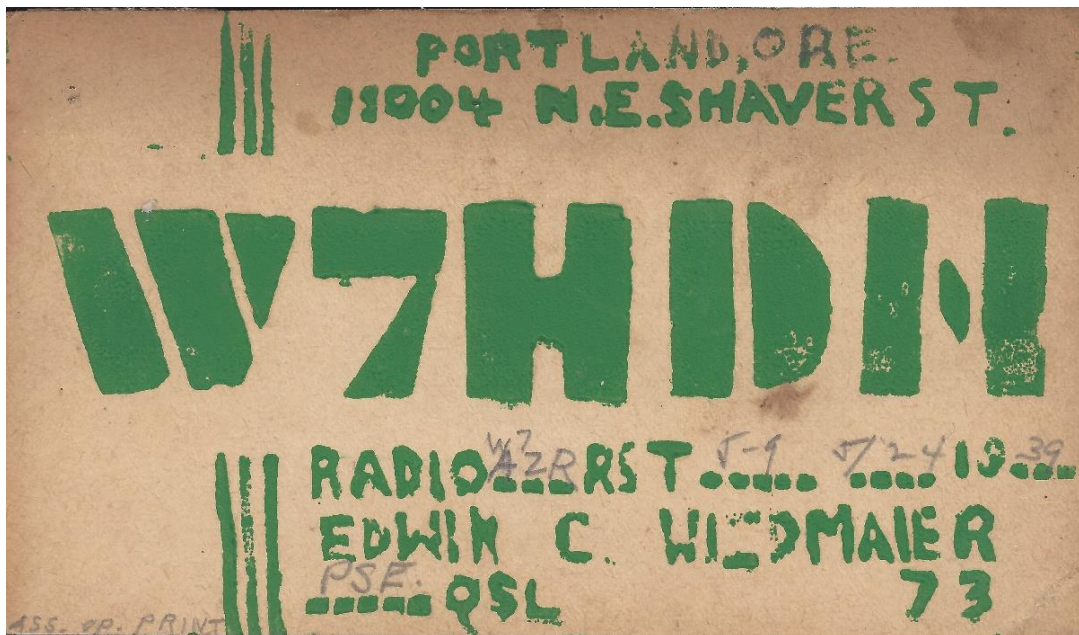


Figure 8-9 W7HDN QSL from 1939 (tempura on cardstock) printed by "assistant operator."

<sup>233</sup> QST 9/48 pg. 106

<sup>234</sup> QST 9/48 pg. 106

## The Dike Held

"The Omar Spencer Farm near the dike was sand and this area was used for sandbags. I had a dragline operating on ditch work and I moved it to the sand area. A loading chute was constructed, and sand was put in the hopper by dragline and the sandbags filled. The Army Corps of Engineers took over direction and did a fine job." *Tom G Davis*<sup>235</sup>

"Three one-half yard dragline shovels, two bulldozers, 35 trucks, 800 truckloads of willows and approximately 345,000 sacks of sand were used...."<sup>236</sup>

Hundreds of workers including soldiers, resident volunteers, and workers hired by the Corps, placed sandbags and woven willow mats to secure the dike.

"The dike leaked in many places but held."<sup>237</sup>

Though there was substantial property loss on Sauvie Island, efforts to support the dikes and evacuate the residents prevented losses from being much worse.



*Figure 8-10 Water spills over the Sauvie Island dike along the Multnomah Channel.*

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<sup>235</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 29

<sup>236</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 33

<sup>237</sup> Flood of 48 pg. 29

# THE VOICES *of* VANPORT



***Part 9 – Points West***



On the Preceding Page:

Sailors guide a Higgins Boat along the Beaver Slough near Clatskanie, Oregon in June, 1948. Note the difference in the water level on either side of the dike. In addition to the amphibious DUKW's, the Navy deployed landing craft to patrol and assist in the flood areas. Higgins Boats, (landing craft, vehicle, personnel) with their shallow draft and flat bottoms, could ferry any combination of dozens of people, small vehicles, livestock, loaded milk cans, hay, furniture, farm equipment, etc. and were called upon to do pretty much all of that and more during the flood of 1948. Higgins Industries in New Orleans, LA built 12,500 Higgins boats during World War II which were used both in the European and Pacific theaters to ferry infantry troops and jeeps.

## Introduction to Points West

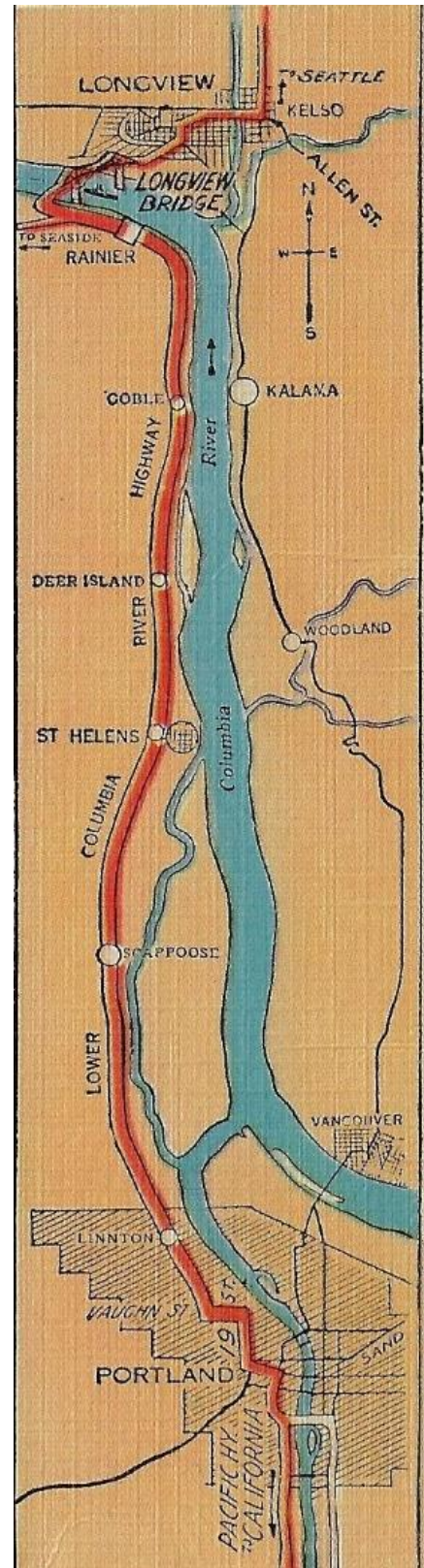
The following quotes, one a contemporary perspective on the causes and effects of changes to the Columbia River Basin, the other a period synopsis that captures the spirit of this book, offer a thought-provoking introduction to the final section of the story – “Points West.”

“Over the past 150 years,

- the Lower Columbia River Estuary controlling depth has approximately doubled
- the majority of historical wetlands and floodplain have been reclaimed
- numerous infrastructure projects have altered and confined pathways
- significant natural and anthropogenic changes to the discharge hydrograph have occurred.”<sup>238</sup>

“In times of emergency little men do great deeds, strangers become friends and all men become equals – striving against the power that threatens them. In some places men’s efforts were equal to the threat, as in Longview, Kelso, Cathlamet and other areas. But the waters proved the master in Vanport, Bonners Ferry, Umatilla, The Dalles, North Portland, Woodland, Puget Island and other localities along the river.”<sup>239</sup>

Points West looks at the impacts of the 1948 flood on the cities of Kelso-Longview, Washington and Clatskanie, Oregon. We’ll meet more heroes and see the surprising role that the Oregon State Department of Forestry played.



<sup>238</sup> Historical Changes pg. 1

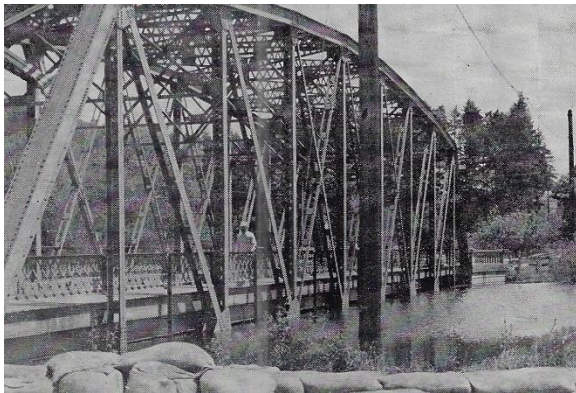
<sup>239</sup> Pictorial Revue pg. 3

## Kelso - Longview

The communities of Kelso and Longview, Washington were built on a low floodplain at the confluence of the Coweeman, Cowlitz, and Columbia Rivers.

Broad dikes were erected by local drainage districts to protect the cities and huge sawmills that provided most of the employment in the area. For a period of about three weeks in 1948, the swollen Columbia backed water into the Cowlitz and Coweeman Rivers to such an extent that only by reinforcing the dikes with hundreds of thousands of sandbags were they able to minimize the flooding.

"Most major industrial plants closed down...so that manpower was available to fight the battle with the waters."<sup>240</sup>

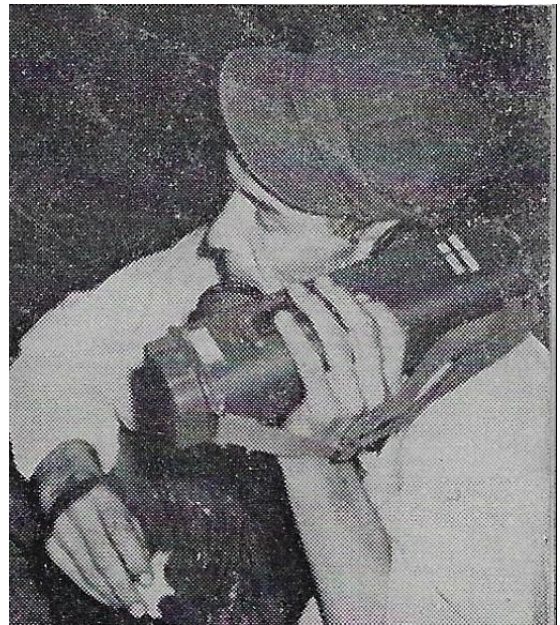


*Figure 9-1 US 99 over the Coweeman River south of Kelso. The dike along the river has been reinforced with sandbags. (Dahlquist Studio photo) (Pictorial Revue)*

The Pacific Highway (US 99) was closed south of Kelso at the Coweeman bridge and the only route open to the south

was the Longview-Rainier bridge over the Columbia.

On May 31st, Electronic Warfare Company 13-2, K7NRO, from Centralia, delivered and set up a generator at Kelso for lighting the dikes. Radios were provided for the dike patrols to communicate with Kelso flood headquarters. The commanding officer of EWC 13-2 oversaw these efforts and also worked with area hams.<sup>241</sup>



*Figure 9-2 With no time to stop for dinner, a busy worker snacks on a sandwich while continuing to communicate via a BC-611 Handie-Talkie. (Kelsonian-Tribune photo) (Pictorial Revue)*

"As the problem of manning dike patrols around the clock mounted, it became necessary to set up employment offices as well as dispatching points. Standby crews were organized to work at emergency jobs. While awaiting calls,

<sup>240</sup> Pictorial Revue pg. 16

<sup>241</sup> Naval Reserve pg. 45



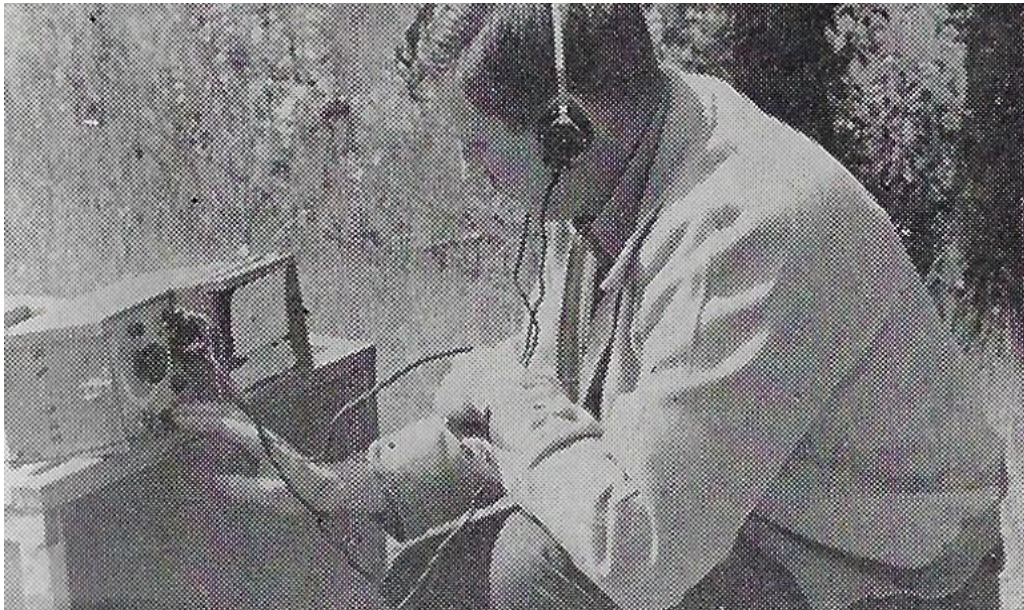
they slept at the YMCAs and Elks buildings in both Kelso and Longview and at the Masonic Hall in Longview."<sup>242</sup>

In addition to the Army Engineer's office, a flood control office for Longview was established in the chamber of commerce building."<sup>243</sup> At first, the excitement of beating the flood and saving the town was enough to bring out volunteers and paid workers in droves. Then, tedium set in as the dikes held. "On several occasions a sound truck toured the city and intoned "Don't let George do it all!. This same appeal was broadcast hourly over the local radio station<sup>244</sup> in order to relieve those men who had already worked on the dikes for too many hours."<sup>245</sup>

"Practically every day...managers hustled to their local radio stations to give an up-to-minute picture of the manpower situation and to exhort radio audiences to register for flood control work."<sup>246</sup>

During the emergency period from June 1<sup>st</sup> to June 18<sup>th</sup>, the employment offices recorded 10,247 paid worker placements as compared to a typical month of about 150 placements for the area.

Ultimately, the community's investment in the dike system and the efforts of workers during the emergency kept the Kelso-Longview community safe during the 1948 flood.



*Figure 9-3 A US Forest Service Type SX Radiophone being used for flood watch in the Kelso-Longview area. Radio Specialty Manufacturing in Portland built 800 SX's in 1940/41. The AM transceiver operates between 30 and 40 MC. (Weyerhaeuser Green Harvest photo) (Pictorial Revue)*

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<sup>242</sup> Pictorial Revue pg. 22

<sup>243</sup> Ibid

<sup>244</sup> Most likely KWLK AM 1400 kc

<sup>245</sup> Pacific Northwest Fights a Flood pg. 14

<sup>246</sup> Ibid

# The Lower Columbia Amateur Radio Association

During the 1948 flood, local ham radio operators volunteered to stand watch on the dikes with radios to report any issues. Among these were:

- Dr. John Nelson (W7AOB)
- Rolly Mietzke (W7BVO)
- Henry Hale (W7FON)

Following the flood, these three, and three others whose names have been lost to time, joined to form the Lower Columbia Amateur Radio Association.

Out of appreciation for their efforts, the Weyerhaeuser company donated a “line shack” to the club and provided a hilltop location to site it. “The original call of the club was W7NCW. But, on the death of Ray Sechler, we obtained his call. Ray (W7DG) had been the CW instructor to so many of us over the years that we decided to honor him in this way.”<sup>247</sup>

## Honored by the Governor

The club’s seventy-year legacy and on-going efforts to serve the community were recognized on May 30, 2018, in a letter from Washington Governor Jay Inslee.

“Born out of the Vanport Flood of May 30, 1948, LCARA has a long history of providing critical communications assistance and other emergency services, such as emergency transport and drone operations, to a broad range of organizations, including local law enforcement and fire departments, the Civil Air Patrol, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, hospitals and the Red Cross.”<sup>248</sup>



*Figure 9-4- Lower Columbia ARA Facility and Tower (Courtesy w7dg.org)*

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<sup>247</sup> W7DG.org

<sup>248</sup> Jay Inslee Letter

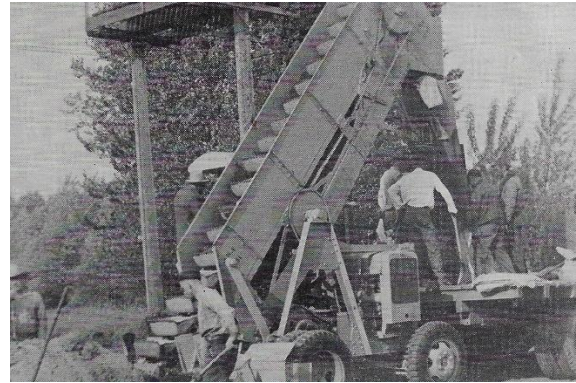


## Sandbagging

"Headquarters for bagged sand in the Longview-Kelso area was set up on two blocked-off streets near the community YMCA. Lights were borrowed from the Y's softball field and a 24-hour work day was established. Working at full capacity, this operation could turn out 100,000 filled sandbags per day."<sup>249</sup>



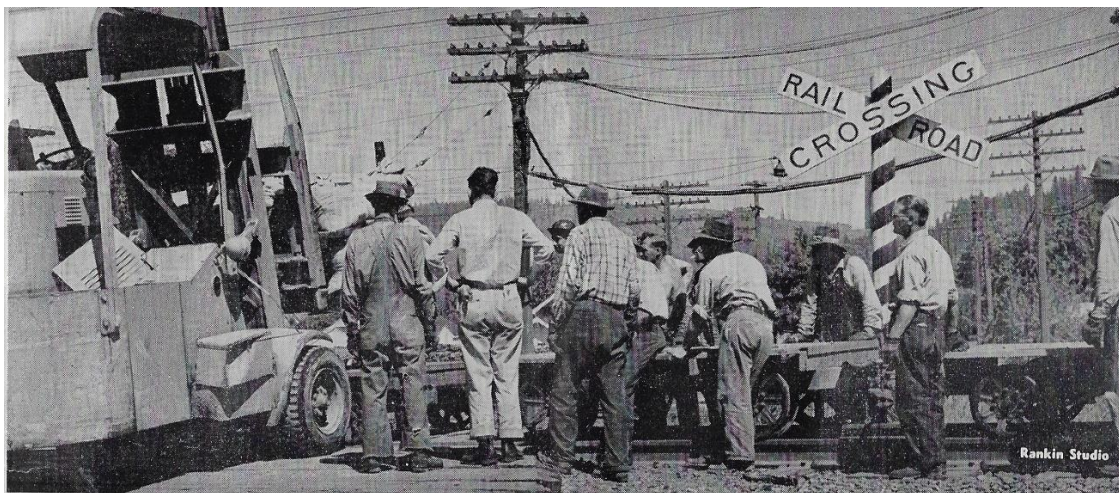
*Figure 9-5 Community youth, crews of longshoremen, and other volunteers contributed many hours filling sandbags by-hand. (Dahlquist Studio photo) (Pictorial Revue)*



*Figure 9-6 Various mechanical loaders were also used to quickly fill sandbags. (Dahlquist Studio photo) (Pictorial Revue)*



*Figure 9-7 Filled sandbags were tied to large wooden pallets. Here a lift truck loads pallets onto trucks. (Dahlquist Studio photo) (Pictorial Revue)*



*Figure 9-8 Where tracks ran near the dikes, sandbags were transferred to speeders and delivered by rail. (Rankin Studio photo) (Pictorial Revue)*

<sup>249</sup> Pictorial Revue pg. 18.



## Clatskanie



*Figure 9-9 Clatskanie June, 1948. (Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

Clatskanie is an Oregon timber town located 60 miles west of Portland and 35 miles east of Astoria. The city's business district is sited along the Clatskanie River about four miles south of the Columbia River and only 15' above sea level. Being so close to the Pacific Ocean, high tides and high-water levels in the Columbia River can have a dramatic impact on the city.

Nestled in a valley in the Coast Range of the Cascades, access to the Clatskanie townsite was by trail at first. Ships on the Columbia could tie up and transfer passengers and freight to horses and mules for the "last mile." Once the Clatskanie River channel was sufficiently dredged, steamboats began calling on the townsite. In 1898, the railroad between Portland and Astoria was finished. This was a boon to the growing timber industry.

In the 1920's, US Hwy 30 was finished. The original alignment of Highway 30 followed the railroad alignment across the lowlands

north and east of Clatskanie. The current alignment was built in the 1950's

The original Clatskanie business district was built on loamy land inside of an oxbow on the banks of the Clatskanie River. Buildings were built on wooden pilings to give them a solid foundation and raise them above the anticipated high-water level.

The front doors of the historic buildings on the westerly side of Nehalem St open onto the main street. On the back, the buildings have a continuous wooden dock that is left from the days when supplies were brought in by steamboat.



*Figure 9-10 The Dredge Muskrat at work ca. 1915  
(Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

The miles of lowlands that separate Clatskanie from the Columbia were diked

and reclaimed in the early 1900's by Richard B Magruder's Columbia Agricultural Co<sup>250</sup>. Columbia acquired 14,000 acres of tidal flood plains and used the dredges "Skookum" and "Muskrat" to open the Clatskanie River, build dikes, and construct drainage ditches.

The dikes had their first test during a highwater event in 1913 and performed "satisfactorily."<sup>251</sup>

At the conclusion of the project in 1920, the reclaimed land was divided amongst the principles of Columbia Agricultural Company and was resold as farm sites.



*Figure 9-11 Map of the Clatskanie Area. In the center, the Clatskanie River meanders its way north to meet the Columbia. In the upper right corner, the site of today's Port Westward juts out into the Columbia. This was the site of the World War II era Beaver Munitions Depot. US Highway 30 and the SP&S railway pass through the community of Quincy on their way to Clatskanie in the bottom center.*

*Dikes outline the many named drainage districts laying in the lowlands between Clatskanie and the Columbia. During the 1948 flood, the John District (upper right) and Marshland District (left of center) saw the worst flooding.*

*(The Clatskanie Chief 6/18/48) (Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

<sup>250</sup> The principles of Columbia were ES Collins, President, PJ Brix VP, RB Magruder, Manager

with three additional directors: AJ Byerly, Albert Brix, and Asmus Brix.

<sup>251</sup> Local Happenings pg. 8

Two important connections between Portland and Astoria, US Highway 30 and the Astoria Branch of the SP&S Railway, go through Clatskanie. In late May, 1948 both were cut off as water rose in the Columbia. The rail line was cut west of Rainier and was submerged in several places as it crossed the lowlands. Old Hwy 30, which followed the railroad alignment at the time, was also submerged in several places.

A 450-man detachment from the Navy's base at Tongue Point was quickly organized and sent to Clatskanie with heavy earth-moving equipment and radio-equipment communication cars.<sup>252</sup>

Sand berms at the recently deactivated<sup>253</sup> Beaver Ammunition Storage Point Depot became ready sources of fill for the thousands of sandbags needed to reinforce the dikes near Clatskanie.<sup>254</sup>



*Figure 9-12 Filling sandbags at the Beaver Ammunition Storage Point Depot  
(US Navy photo) (The Clatskanie Chief 6/11/48)*

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<sup>252</sup> Valiant Efforts pg. 21

<sup>253</sup> Opened in 1942, the Beaver Ammunition Storage Point (BASP) was used to load explosives and ammunition on Russian ships bound for Europe and American and British ships bound for Europe and the Pacific. Near the end of the war, unused ammunition, including some captured from the Japanese,

was unloaded at the BASP and shipped elsewhere. The BASP was deactivated on May 31, 1946 and put on inactive status in 1947. It was reactivated August 28, 1950 not long after the beginning of the Korean Conflict. (Oregonencyclopedia.org)

<sup>254</sup> The Clatskanie Chief 6/11/48





*Figure 9-13 Delivering sandbags downtown  
(Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

"At 11 pm on Sunday May 30th, telegraphic communication between Portland and Astoria was disrupted, believed to be because of a break at Clatskanie where Army engineers earlier in the day sent a power shovel and other equipment in a last minute-effort to repair weakening dikes."<sup>255</sup> Long distance telephone lines were already hopelessly jammed. In their place, ham radio enabled worried residents to communicate with friends and relatives outside the area.<sup>256</sup>

### **Naval Reserve Radio**

On Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, members of Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 (K7NRV), established a portable radio station at Clatskanie."<sup>257</sup> Lt. Dick Knotts<sup>258</sup>, US Naval Reserve, commanded the group.

"With its radio equipment set up in a fish truck donated by Bill Kindred,<sup>259</sup> EWC 13-36 arrived in Clatskanie at 4:00 pm on Monday and has been on duty there ever since.

The company went on the air immediately after its arrival, joining the naval radio network.

The EWC's primary mission has been to provide direct communication between:

- Naval forces at the scene
- the Naval station at Tongue Point
- Army Engineers headquarters in Portland
- the commandant of the 13<sup>th</sup> Naval District in Seattle.

Army communications were largely taken over on Thursday (June 3<sup>rd</sup>) by the air forces radio truck, but Naval communications continue to be handled by the EWC, which holds aside one complete radio outfit for emergency use direct to the Naval reserve training center (Swan Island), which in turn has a clear telephone line to the Army Engineers headquarters.

Fourteen Naval reservists from Astoria, Seaside and Warrenton went to Clatskanie and have either remained on duty continuously or have returned to Astoria for brief periods, to pick up a change of clothing and return.

Others have joined from time to time, serving as their personal affairs and employers permitted. These men are all volunteers. Most employers have been cooperative in retaining the men in their employe during the emergency period.

Lt. Richard B Knotts, commander of EWC 13-36, is in charge of this communications unit and has been

<sup>255</sup> Camp Clatsop pg. 8

<sup>256</sup> Ibid

<sup>257</sup> Naval Reserve pg. 47

<sup>258</sup> See the following section for more information about Lieutenant Knotts.

<sup>259</sup> Machinists Mate First Class USNR Astoria

assisted by Lt. Carl Russell, Lt. Ray DeHoff, and also by Commander A.L. Brown, of Volunteer Composite Unit 13-9.

In addition to its own personnel, several ex-servicemen answered Lt. Knott's call for EWC men last Monday.

There were:

- Bruce Rogers, (Astoria) Marine Corps reserve
- Carl Reith (Astoria) and Hugh McKenna, ex Navy radiomen first class
- Air Corps reservists Ed Hill<sup>260</sup> (Seaside) and W.O. Elliott (Clatskanie).

Reith, Rogers and McKenna have been on more or less continuous duty since arrival. Hill and Elliott helped set up the transmitter and then were transferred over to the Army Air Forces communications truck where Hill succeeded in establishing communications on amateur frequencies

with hams as far distant as New Zealand.

Lt. Knotts and Lt. Russell say this communications team will be on duty until its services are no longer required, and it is released by Commander R.J. Erickson, commander naval detachment, Clatskanie.<sup>261</sup>

The team from Astoria ended up spending two weeks on site in Clatskanie. "Fourteen days of around-the-clock radio communications work at Clatskanie ended Sunday night for Clatsop County's naval reserve EWC 13-36.

With three officers and 11 men on duty, the company kept two radio transmitters on the air throughout the two-week emergency. The company has now reinstalled its equipment at the naval reserve building on the port docks."<sup>262</sup>



*Figure 9-14 Flooding at the pumps. (Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

<sup>260</sup> Hill also helped establish and operate the Reservoir Radio Station.

<sup>261</sup> Naval Reserve Team Handles Flood Radio

<sup>262</sup> 14 Days of Duty Ends for Naval Reserve in Flood

### The Reservoir Radio Station

A radio station was set up at the Clatskanie reservoir<sup>263</sup> on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and staffed by personnel from the Army and National Guard, Coast Guard, and ham operators.

The US Army sent a portable radio station down from McCord Field and it was operated under the supervision of "Sgt Rudd." US Coast Guard Chief Bains oversaw operating two radio trucks sent up from San Francisco.<sup>264</sup>

Messages related to civilian welfare were exchanged via amateur radio and via a network of Coast Guard stations. People with outgoing messages could reach the hams by telephoning "Clatskanie 500."<sup>265</sup>

Two Seaside businessmen with experience servicing radios travelled to Clatskanie to volunteer their services. "Edward Hill<sup>266</sup>, Seaside Radio Shop, and C E Cochran, Clatsop County Creditor Bureau...have worked day and night as technicians and repairmen...."<sup>267</sup>



*Figure 9-15 Jack Mathews, Dr J L Wooden, and George Gardenier stroll down Nehalem St in ankle-deep water. Dr Wooden was the local source for typhoid vaccinations. Many of Dr. Wooden's personal effects have been preserved and are on exhibit at the Clatskanie Historical Museum. (The Clatskanie Chief 6/18/48) (Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Society)*

<sup>263</sup> The city water reservoir sits atop a hill just south of town near 4<sup>th</sup> and SW Bryant.

<sup>264</sup> Radio Communications pg. 8

<sup>265</sup> Ibid

<sup>266</sup> Hill was also part of the Naval Reserve team from Astoria

<sup>267</sup> Forestry Radio pg. 8





*Figure 9-16 An LCM (Landing Craft - Mechanized) is docked in downtown.  
(Courtesy Clatskanie Historical Museum)*

### **The Oregon Department of Forestry**

"The State Forestry department sent Clatskanie a force of trained radio men, who are rendering inestimable service... in providing the nerve center through which the various field men and headquarters are kept in immediate and constant touch."<sup>268</sup>

"The Department came into Clatskanie and set up a system whereby contact may be made between the main office and any station they wish to call. Secretaries are stationed by the operator and a complete record of all calls and answers is kept. No records are kept at the [field] units since it would be a duplication of the office records."<sup>269</sup>

"Six FX radio 2-way phone sets<sup>270</sup> are being used. One radio is at the control office.

There are four FX units and two peanut sets<sup>271</sup> at strategic points throughout the area and two peanut sets."<sup>272</sup>

"Calls and orders are issued from the main set to individual set, each has its own number and answers are received back at that same time. If there is a call which is of importance to the whole sector of flooded territory all the operators out on the dikes may be reached at one time."<sup>273</sup>

"The eleven State Forestry men stationed here and are billeted at the Quincy School. Bill Lang has been in Clatskanie as overseer in this department which is operated on a 24-hour basis."<sup>274</sup>

<sup>268</sup> Ibid

<sup>269</sup> Ibid

<sup>270</sup> See FX Radios in the following section

<sup>271</sup> See Peanut Radios in the following section

<sup>272</sup> Forestry Radio pg. 8

<sup>273</sup> ibid

<sup>274</sup> Ibid

### Protecting the Dikes

Concerned for the dikes, the Army engineers ordered the entire lower Columbia closed to navigation on June 1<sup>st</sup>. "Col Orville E Walsh, in charge of the Portland district of the U.S. Army engineers, said he feared that dikes were in such a precarious state, that the wake of a ship or a boat might be all that was needed to send the river crashing through."<sup>275</sup>

On Monday May 31<sup>st</sup>, dikes of the tiny Clatskanie Drainage District, just north of town, were the first to break.

The electricity in Clatskanie was off for several hours when a barn floated free of its foundation and damaged a powerline.



*Figure 9-17 Navy personnel use an LCVP (landing craft, vehicle, personnel), also called a Higgins boat, to perform a welfare check at a farmhouse in the flood district (US Navy photo) (The Clatskanie Chief 6/11/48)*

The dikes in the Marshland area and, especially the low dikes in the Johns District were holding but just barely. Many individuals donated their time and equipment to build the dikes up.

"Organizations including:

- the American Legion
- the VFW posts of neighboring towns
- the Army
- the Navy
- the Coast Guard

- the National Guard
- the Maritime Commission
- the City of Astoria
- Clatsop County
- and employees of the local lumber mills

all pitched in to help."<sup>276</sup>

As water continued to threaten the area, people living in the lower areas who hadn't already left were moved to

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<sup>275</sup> 120 Miles pg 1.

<sup>276</sup> Columbia's High Waters pg 1

shelters on higher ground by Army engineers, National Guardsmen, and civilian agencies.<sup>277</sup> "[Evacuees] lived in the schools of Westport and Clatskanie and with area families."<sup>278</sup>

Nearly 100 miles of dikes were patrolled night and day. "Each drainage district has a chairman who in turn has appointed a patrol chief to take care of the work of arranging personnel for the shifts and handling whatever problems arise in the patrol work. Two-way radios are placed in spots where there are no phones as well as in stations where there are phones."<sup>279</sup>

When the Marshland and Johns District dikes eventually failed, 1,050 additional acres of dairies and mint farms<sup>280</sup> were flooded causing an estimated \$3,000,000 in damage. The flood also damaged several commercial fishing stations that dotted the south shore of the Columbia in the area.

Part of Clatskanie's central business district near the Nehalem Bridge sustained some flood damage<sup>281</sup> although water was never much more than a foot deep over the road. In comparison, the flood of 1996 caused the Clatskanie River to jump its banks and flow through town. A plaque on the

wall in the Clatskanie Library shows the high-water mark.

The exceptionally high tides experienced during the first half of June, 1948 exasperated the problem in Clatskanie. Though the flood had essentially peaked, flood waters in the city rose and fell with the tides for several weeks.

During the week of June 4<sup>th</sup>, "the force fighting the flood waters under the direction of William Owens, Army engineer, was strengthened with the arrival of three units from the Army. The Navy, which had been bearing the brunt of work since the beginning withdrew 200 of their enlisted personnel but left 130 sailors on regular duty with 100 more on immediate call from the base at Astoria."<sup>282</sup>

"At one time 200 civilians, 230 Navy personnel, 570 army troops, and 70 National Guardsmen were on the job."<sup>283</sup> Revue

As the flood water receded and residents began returning, the Washington National Guard patrolled to prevent looting and used bulldozers to clear and reopen flood-damaged roads.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> *ibid*

<sup>278</sup> Pictorial Revue

<sup>279</sup> *ibid*

<sup>280</sup> Although grazing continues today, most of the family dairies are gone. The floodwaters contaminated the peppermint fields with a fungus that causes mint rust, wiping out the

farms. Some mint farming is coming back and poplars are being farmed for pulp on some parts of the lowlands.

<sup>281</sup> Flood Insurance Study

<sup>282</sup> Marshland pg. 1

<sup>283</sup> Pictorial Revue

<sup>284</sup> Official History pg. 12



## Richard Knotts, USN, USNR

Richard B "Dick" Knotts was born in Albany, OR on February 18, 1912. His wife, Barbara Ackerman, was born in Albany on November 22, 1921 and grew up on a farm north of Corvallis. The two were married on December 26, 1939.



*Figure 9-18 Lieutenant Richard Knotts  
(Courtesy Don Knotts)*

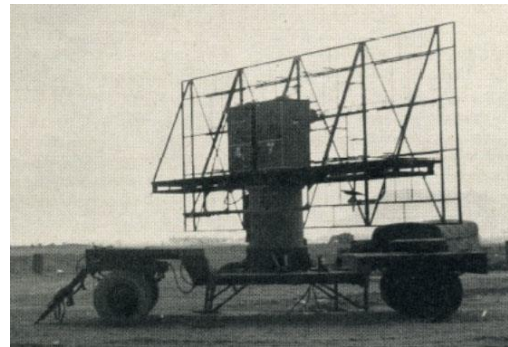
<sup>285</sup> The US Navy created the Argus program in October, 1942. The intent of the program was to train elite amphibious combat teams able to land in potentially hostile territory and rapidly deploy radar and radio communications equipment to allow for the interception and prevention of enemy air and surface attacks on allied Pacific bases. Training included classes covering radar plots, radio operation, and the study of type 588, 270, and ASE radars.

Once a foothold had been established on an island, a section of the Argus unit would go ashore carrying radios and portable radars. Once in operation, the Argus unit could take over parts of the fighter direction role from the destroyers and take the lead in detecting and warning of approaching enemy air and surface attacks. Eventually, the rest of the Argus unit

Mr. Knotts entered the US Navy in November 1942 and attended Bowdoin College (Brunswick, ME) and MIT for training in radar engineering.

In 1943, following his radar training, Lt. Knotts went to Los Alamitos, CA and joined Argus<sup>285</sup> Unit 27.<sup>286</sup> In October, 1944 he was transferred to NAAS<sup>287</sup> North Bend, OR.

In June 1945 he moved to Fort Stevens near the mouth of the Columbia River. While there he was in charge of a unit using type SCR 527 radar.<sup>288</sup>



*Figure 9-19 SCR 527 medium-range early  
warning and ground-intercept radar on Iwo Jima  
March, 1945.  
(US Army Signal Corps)*

came ashore with long-range type 270 radars, fighter direction type 527 radar, and surface search radars. The unit was also responsible for setting up the combat information center, the radio tent and telephone lines and for establishing a liaison with anti-aircraft batteries, PT Boat squadrons and other groups. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1943, Argus Unit 1 consisting of 20 officers and 94 enlisted, shipped out of Port Hueneme for combat duty in the South Pacific. (Wikipedia United States Argus Units).

<sup>286</sup> The early Argus units were shipped overseas and saw combat. Sometime in 1944 the Argus units not yet deployed were disbanded and the personnel and equipment were disbursed.

<sup>287</sup> Naval Auxiliary Air Station

<sup>288</sup> Don Knotts

Unlike other radars at the site that were used for aiming the fort's coastal artillery, the SCR-527 radar provided early warning of threats to the region's high-value targets such as the aluminum plants, the shipyards, and the Hanford project.

Following the war, the Knotts family settled in Warrenton where Dick operated the Columbia Hardware Store. Shortly thereafter, Dick was asked to become the Superintendent of Warrenton's school system where he served for decades. Comments from former students and staff indicate that he was a very popular administrator and teacher.



*Figure 9-20 Superintendent Richard Knotts and Sharon Carrington ca. 1952  
(Courtesy Memories of Warrenton Facebook page)*

Dick remained active in the US Naval Reserve and was the commanding officer of the unit in Astoria. During the 1948 flood, his unit volunteered to set up emergency radio communications for the community of Clatskanie and the Navy recognized his successful mission

with a special commendation, shown on the following page. Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 traveled from Tongue Point to Clatskanie on May 31<sup>st</sup> and had a mobile radio station on the air by 6 that evening. During the next two weeks, they handled over 325 official messages. Additionally, they maintained contact with the Naval Reserve Armory in Portland, Navy radio in Seattle and Tongue Point, and also mobile army units operating in the dike area at Clatskanie.

Dick held the special Naval Reserve ham call sign K7NRV (assigned to the Astoria Naval Reserve) until the mid-1950's. In February 1957, Dick and Don Knotts were assigned consecutive ham call signs (W7HJR, W7HJS). Dick resigned from the Naval Reserve in the mid-1950's. Don enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1958 while still in junior high school.

Don recalls that the Reserve Unit at Astoria had TDE and TDQ transmitters from World War 2 that were not in regular use.<sup>289</sup> The Reserve used other equipment when they checked in with Seattle during their meetings. There was also a "huge radar unit locked in a room on the bottom floor that no one ever entered."<sup>290</sup>

Dick Knotts passed away June 11, 1987 and was buried in Astoria.

Dick & Barbara's son, Don Knotts, provided key information for this feature. Don is a retired Tektronix employee and a charter member of the Northwest Vintage Radio Society.

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<sup>289</sup> See the next section for more information on these transmitters

<sup>290</sup> Don Knotts



C O P Y/ mih

NS19/F15  
(18:CAP:ga)  
Serial: 2444

U. S. NAVAL STATION  
Tongue Point, Oregon

1 July 1948

To: Commanding Officer, Electronic Warfare Company 13-36, U. S.  
Naval Reserve, Astoria, Oregon.  
Attn: Lieutenant R. B. Knotts, USNR.

Subj: Electronic Warfare Company 13-36, U. S. Naval Reserve  
Emergency Communication Team at Clatskanie, Oregon During  
Recent Floods - Commendable performance of.

1. During the recent flood of the Columbia River, naval personnel and equipment from activities of this station were called upon to assist in flood control and evacuation of residents of the Clatskanie, Oregon area. On the afternoon of 31 May 1948 the Electronic Warfare Company 13-36, through their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant R. B. Knotts, USNR, volunteered their services to this command by offering to establish a mobile radio station at Clatskanie, using their own equipment and personnel. Hasty arrangements were made and at 1803 that same day communications were established between the Naval Station and Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 at Clatskanie.

2. Despite the fact that Naval Reserve personnel comprising this communication team had been away from active naval communications since the end of World War II, efficient and continuous communications were maintained during the entire period of the flood crisis, from 31 May 1948 to 14 June 1948. During this period a total of about 325 official emergency despatches were handled between the Naval Station and our forces at Clatskanie. By this action alone, Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 proved themselves an indispensable and vital unit of the naval forces at Clatskanie. In addition to handling despatches to and from the Naval Station, Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 also maintained communications with Navy Radio Seattle, Naval Reserve Armory at Portland and also with mobile army units operating in the dike area at Clatskanie.

3. The Commanding Officer takes great pleasure in commending the officers and men of Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 on the splendid spirit of cooperation and the efficiency of their organization demonstrated by their prompt volunteering of services and their excellent performance of duty during the entire flood emergency period.

T. J. O'BRIEN  
Captain, U. S. Navy  
Commanding

Figure 9-21 Commendation for Electronic Warfare Company 13-36 for their actions at Clatskanie.  
(Courtesy Don Knotts)



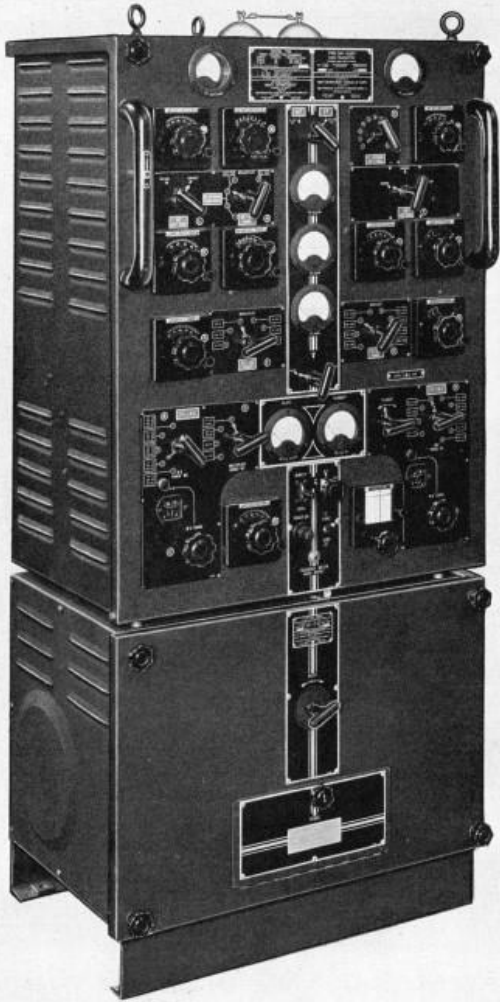


Figure 9-22 TDE Transmitter (CAY-52267) and power unit (CAY-21848).

The transmitter stood 40" tall and 28" wide and the power unit stood 22" tall. The transmitter weighed 334 lbs and the power unit added 372 lbs (note the lifting rings). The transmitter was capable of CW, MCW, and Voice. Power out was 125 watts, 35 watts and 30 watts respectively. The transmitter could operate from 300 to 1500 kcs (intermediate frequency) and 1500 to 18100 kcs (high frequency).

(Illustration from TDE instruction book)



Figure 9-23 TDQ (CRV 52328) VHF Transmitter. The TDQ can transmit about 45 watts of CW, MCW, or Voice on frequencies ranging from 115 to 156mc. Output is limited to four channels at-a-time and is controlled by crystals in a temperature-controlled oven that kept them at a constant 70 degrees Celsius. The transmitter is 32" tall, 25" wide, and weighs 283 lbs. Aboard ship it was typically controlled remotely by a radiophone unit (shown below).

(photo courtesy Jproc.ca)

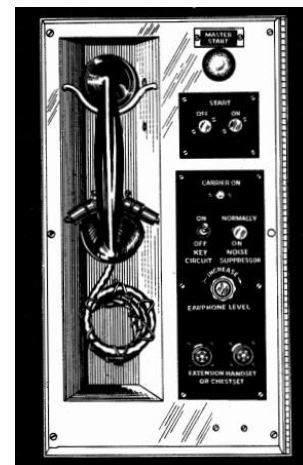


Figure 9-24 TDQ radiophone control unit. Besides the handset with a push-to-talk switch, provisions are made to plug in an accessory telegraph key and an accessory speaker. (Illustration from TDQ instruction book).

## Type FP Radiophone "The Peanut"



*Figure 9-25 Type FP Radiophone (author's photo)*

The diminutive Type FP "Peanut" transceiver was designed for the Oregon Department of Forestry in 1941. Its aluminum cabinet is just 8-3/4" wide 3-3/4" deep and about 6" high (including the handle).

The FP was designed primarily for smokejumpers who needed a small and lightweight radio. As such it used small batteries that limited its weight to 3 -3/4 pounds, but also limited its service hours. Most other forest service radios were made of wood at the time. And though aluminum was a critical war material, its use made the FP lighter and more rugged and helped reduce the overall cabinet size.

The transmitted power of the FP was 1/4 watt. The Peanut tuned the 31 mc range of Forest Service frequencies and was compatible with the Oregon Department of Forestry FX transceivers deployed at Clatskanie (provided that crystals for the same frequencies were available).

This example was made by Radio Specialty Manufacturing Company in Portland. The Peanut was also made by the Morrow Radio Company in Salem. Production apparently continued into the 1950's until the Forest Service converted from AM to FM radios.



## Type FX Radiophone



*Figure 9-26 Type FX Radiophone (author's photo)*

The Type FX radiophone was a portable radio set typically deployed to fire lookouts or to the fireline with a team of firefighters.

Though similar to SV transceivers made for the US Forest Service, the FX was designed by staff at the Oregon Department of Forestry's radio department. After trying several types of Forest Service radios, they were frustrated by the set's tendency to wander off frequency. So, they decided to design their own sets with crystal-controlled transmitters.

"Eastern Lane got the first one on a trial basis in 1940. It performed so well that 62 were put in service the follow year through the various districts."<sup>291</sup>

The radio uses a reinforced plywood cabinet and weighs 14 pounds with batteries. The transmit frequency (in the 31 mc Forest Service frequency band) is controlled by a crystal that plugs into the sockets below the receiver's tuning dial. The effective range of the FX is 10 to 100 miles depending upon topography. After the

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<sup>291</sup> Radio Plays Vital Role pg 4.



prototype was approved, technicians at the State Forestry Department constructed the first 65 FX's during the spring of 1941.

Construction of additional sets was contracted out to Radio Specialty

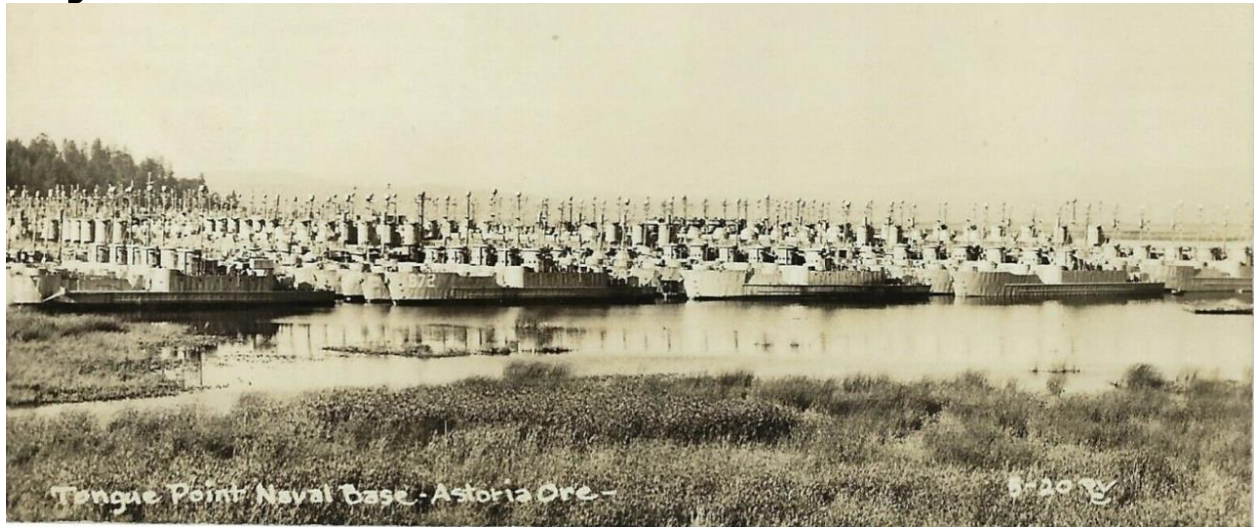
Apparatus Company in Portland and, perhaps, others.

The FX radios endured hard service and, through on-going maintenance, were used for over 10 years until replaced by FM radios.



*Figure 9-27 Type FX radiophone in use, undated photo. (Courtesy Forest History Society)*

## Tongue Point



*Figure 9-28 The Reserve Fleet Basin at Tongue Point, just east of Astoria, OR. In 1946, naval air operations ceased at Tongue Point and the base became a fleet facility for the Pacific Reserve Fleet. Over 200 vessels were tied up at Tongue Point so that they would be available to be reactivated should the need arise. To accommodate the fleet, the river was dredged, and eight concrete finger piers were constructed. There was some concern for the welfare of the ships stored at Tongue Point as the Columbia rose to flood stage in June 1948. However, no significant damage was reported. Eventually, most vessels stored at Tongue Point were towed to Suisun Bay, CA or Bremerton, WA. The Navy deactivated the facility in 1962 and the property was transferred to the Government Services Administration.*



*Figure 9-29 Aerial photo of the Reserve Fleet at Tongue Point taken in 1958.  
(Courtesy <http://navy.memorishop.com>)*

## **Acknowledgements**

I greatly appreciate the special assistance provided by:

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Don Hanson

Debbie Hazen

Dick Howard, K7DVK

Doris Howard, W7DVK

Lisa Howard

Dick Karman

Don Knotts, W7HJS

Ron Kramer

The Kremers-O'Neil family

Greg Magedanz

Mark Moore

The Naemura Family

Northwest Vintage Radio Society

Don Retzlaff,

W5RG.donretzlaff.com

Mark Richardson, WA7ZK

Oregon Tualatin Valley Radio Club

Portland State University Library

Special Collections & University  
Archives

Tom Roscoe, K8CX,

HamGallery.com

Don Tucker, W7WLL

Vintagetek.org

## **Errata**

If errors appear in this story caused by gaps in my research or by repeating errors from source documents, I sincerely apologize and assure you that they were inadvertent. And I certainly did not mean to leave anyone out or otherwise diminish anyone's contributions. As mentioned in the text, I'm sure that there are many more stories waiting to be discovered.

I would like nothing more than to hear your Vanport radio stories. If you have clippings, QSL cards, images, etc. to share, please contact me at [nvrstdan@gmail.com](mailto:nvrstdan@gmail.com).



# Appendix 1 - Hams Involved with the 1948 Flood

Names and Locations are from the Radio Amateur Call Book  
(Vanport residents are indicated by **red** text) (Legend of abbreviations follows at the end)

## W5COE

Richard K Brown El Paso TX

## W6CXO

San Francisco Naval Shipyard  
ARC  
National Red Cross  
Headquarters  
San Francisco CA

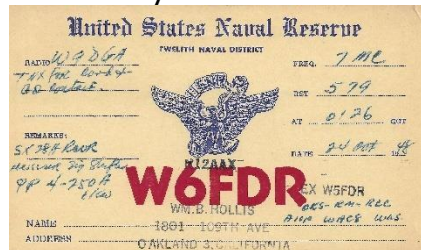


W6DDE ca 1932

(courtesy Kapiti Coast Museum)

## W6DDE

John E Wilcox  
North Hollywood CA



## W6FDR

William B Holli Oakland CA  
Naval Reserve

## W6GHS

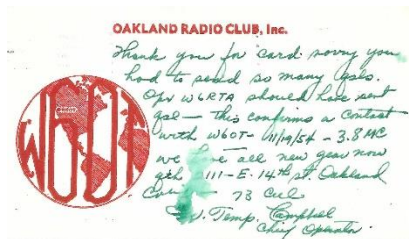
Delbert E Luck Manteca CA

## W6IOX

Vincent J Haggerty  
Santa Barbara CA

## W6NPH

unknown



(QSL courtesy W7WLL)

## W6OT

Oakland Radio Club  
Oakland CA

## W6QAF

Daniel M Thompson  
Signal Office, Presidio  
San Francisco CA

## W6QXN

Siguard W "Sig" Lassen  
Lafayette CA

## W6REB

Christian R Jensen  
Yreka CA



333 Tapadero St. VY73's Art McDole.op

(QSL courtesy K8CX)

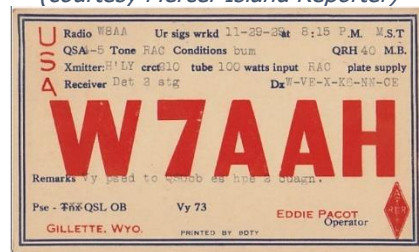
## W6WJM

Arthur E "Art" McDole  
Salinas CA



W7AAH ca 1976

(courtesy Mercer Island Reporter)



(QSL courtesy W8AA)

## W7AAH (W7ACR)

Eddie B Pacot  
Ellensburg WA  
Member ARRL, WARTS

## W7ACZ

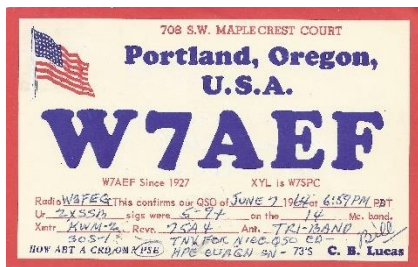
Edward I Jewett Portland

## W7ADH

Willis L "Lee" Campbell  
Portland  
Sauvie Island Dike Watch  
Member PARC

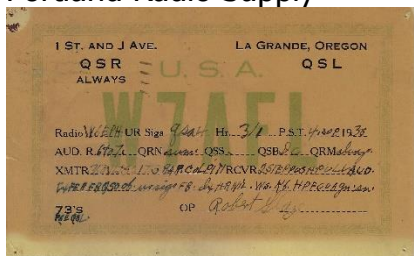
## W7ADW

John S Smith Portland



## W7AEF

Calo B "Bill" Lucas Portland  
28 mc mobile net control  
Member AARL, OOTC, PARC,  
QCWA  
Portland Radio Supply



## W7AFL

Robert W Glaze  
1902 N Victory Blvd  
Vanport  
RM2 US Navy World War 2



W7AGR ca. 1951  
Electric Radio Sept 1992  
used by permission

## W7AGR

Lyle Simpson Portland



## W7AIA

Vancouver ARC  
(now Clark County ARC)  
Vancouver WA

## W7AIE

Retlaw Walter Haynes  
Portland

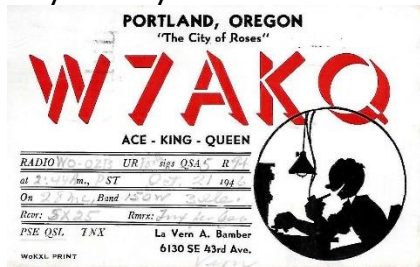


## W7AJN

Everett "Ev" France Portland

## W7AKC

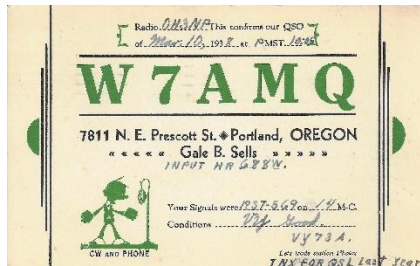
Lloyd E Taylor The Dalles OR



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

## W7AKQ

LaVerne A Bamber Portland



## W7AMQ

Gale Sells Portland  
Member PARC



W7AOB (courtesy Washington Farm Forestry Association)

## W7AOB

Dr John A Nelson Jr  
Longview WA  
Member LCARC, NWVRS,  
QCWA

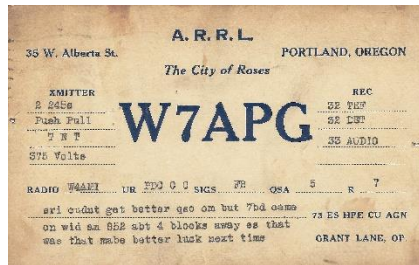
## W7APD

Joseph G McKay  
Rainier OR



## W7APF

Donald McPherson  
Cutler City OR  
Member OEN



## W7APG

Grant Lane Portland  
Member ARRL



**W7AQJ**

Eldred W "Ed" Start  
Vancouver WA  
Member WARTS

## WZARY

Byron R Paul Portland  
Member SOWP



W7ASF (Popular Science 8/1935)

W7ASF Hood River,  
Oregon, U. S. A.

Howdy, ~~569R~~ Ur RST 5-R7 at 1438 RPT: 2/20 1940

QRC ~~R5~~ Conditions Fair Ant Hertz Dip

JACK ~~807~~ PP4015 200 watts 2000 P

XMITTER ~~Real~~ Mew-DSX ss pp4015 elb B

Rcvr ~~Home Brew~~ -

Remarks THX For the FB. QSO

JACK ES I hpe to Cagun -

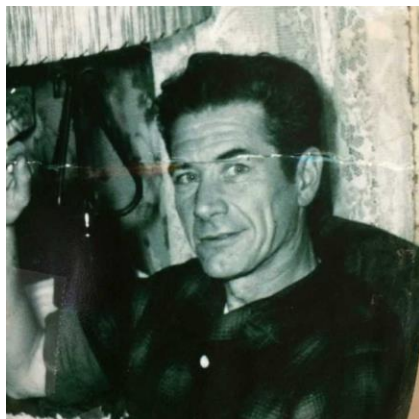
THX

QSL Stan R. RAND

1 Element, 1.2 QSO, 0.8  
Std. Rate, 1.72 P

**W7ASF**

Stanley R "Stan" Rand  
Portland



W7ASR (courtesy Find A Grave)

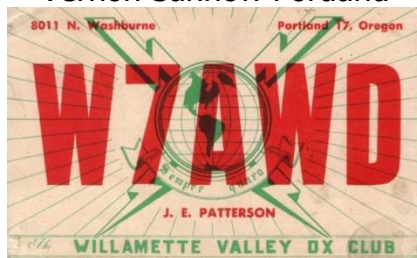
**W7ASR**

Robert L Colosky Portland

**HILLSBORO U. S. A. OREGON**  
 Radio 7.40 Acknowledging QSO 7/19/1932 at 1130 AM S.T.  
 QSA 5 R 5 QRN 7.40 QRN 7.40 QRN 7.40 QRG 35 MC  
**W7AVV**  
 Transmitted 10 to 14 with 3500 on 7.40 ...  
 Received 18 of 20 at 27 antenna 10 miles 2000 ...  
 Remarks Proposed to fac. agr. on land use to comm.  
 PSE QSL OM. TNX GUD LUCK ES 73 VARNON SAHNOV, opr

**W7AVV**

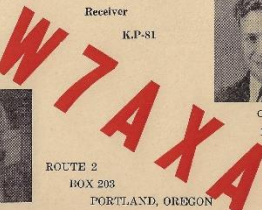


Vernon Sahnou Portland



(QSL courtesy K8CX)

**W7AWD**

Joseph E Patterson  
Portland  
Member ARRL, WVDXC

  
 Receiver K.P.-81  
  
 OHLEN  
 1009 WATT  
 NBFM  
  
 HELEN  
 ROUTE 2  
 BOX 203  
 PORTLAND, OREGON  
**GREETINGS**  
 PHONE  
 RADIO *WG7WS* Ur *30* MC. *QW* Sigs *Q 5* R *97*  
 Date *Feb 28 1949* , at *5:36* M. Pat.  
 REMARKS: *hello al try for swell*  
*contacts and also reflected*  
*Ship*  
 QSL? *I have 2 of*  
*your cards hi* 73's Ohlen R. Higgins  
 W7AXA - Design

**W7AXA**

Ohlen R Higgins Portland  
Member CCARC

**W7BIM**

Jack N Binnicker  
Lake Oswego OR

**W7BIW**

(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7BIW**

Sam A Davenport  
Pasco WA  
Member WARTS

**W7BKC**

Byron J Peffly (Sr)Portland

**W7BQD**

Herbert Mohr Portland





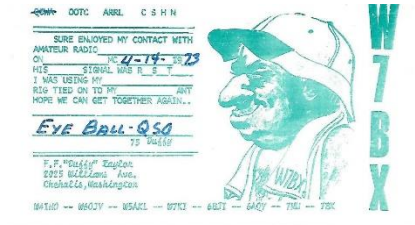
(W7BUW courtesy QCWA)

## W7BUW

John R "Dick" Borton  
Yakima WA  
Member QCWA, WARTS  
**W7BVO**

Rolland H "Rollie" Mietzke  
Longview WA  
Member LCARA, QCWA  
**W7BWC**

William L "Bill" Burris  
Pinehurst WA  
Member WARTS



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7BX (7BX, 6AQY, 6BJI, 7MU, 7KI, U7KI, W6OJY, W5AKL, W4IHO, W7JVM)**

Floyd F "Duffy" Taylor  
Richland WA  
First licensed in 1916  
Member ARRL, OOTC,  
QCWA, WARTS  
**W7CEJ**

Roland G Buri Portland  
MAM2 US Navy World War 2



## W7CFC

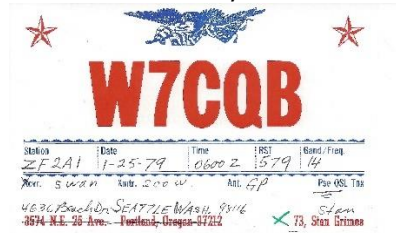
US Naval Radio Station  
Keyport WA  
Operated by Earle D Byer ex  
CM8UF

## W7CIH

Axel B Tyle Portland

## W7CKT

Lewis F "Rylie" Rylie  
Port Blakely WA  
Member ACARC, WARTS



## W7CQB

Stanley L "Stan" Grimes  
Portland

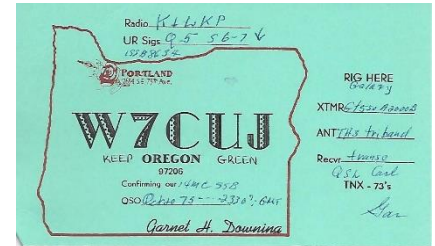


## W7CSC

Elmer J Anderson Portland  
Member QCWA, SOWP

## W7CUD

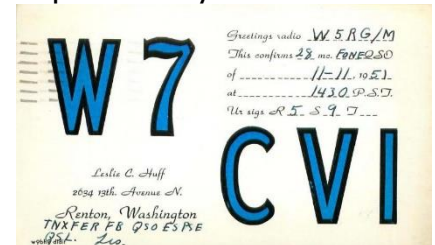
Bryant E "Skip" Page  
Richland WA  
Member WARTS



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

## W7CUJ

Garnet H Downing Portland  
Capt US Army World War 2



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

## W7CVI

Leslie C Huff  
Klamath Falls OR  
Member QCWA



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

## W7CYT

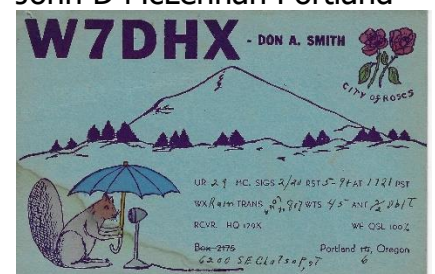
Fred Claussen Portland

## W7DCJ

William H Young  
2708 N Broadacre St #3655  
Vanport

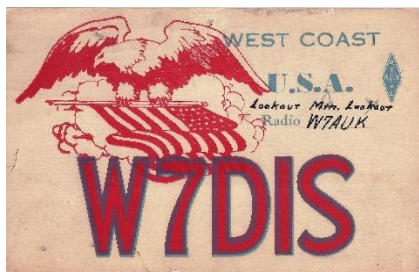
## W7DDG

John D McLennan Portland



## W7DHX

Don A Smith Portland  
Red Cross radio team  
Member OEN



### **W7DIS (K7DIS, W7DJK)**

Allen N "Al" Davis Portland  
ARRL Emergency Coordinator  
Member AARC, AARS, ARRL,  
OEN

### **W7DNB**

Clark A Sterett Portland



W7DNP QSL (author's collection)

### **W7DNP**

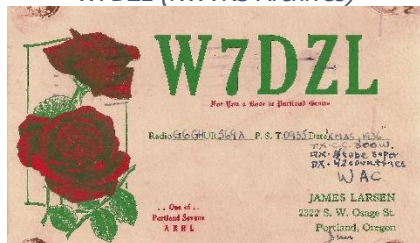
John Fitzgibbon Portland

### **W7DZY**

Everett J Gottschalk  
11206 N Lake Ave  
Vanport  
ETM1 US Navy World War 2



W7DZL (NWVRS Archives)



### **W7DZL**

Leland J "Jim" Larsen  
Portland

In charge of Red Cross radio  
team.

Member ARRL, Portland

Sevens, QCWA

Founder of Larsen Antennas.

### **W7ECI**

Ermund Zochert Jr Portland

### **W7EDK**

Wilfred E Stacey

Vancouver WA

Member CCARC

### **W7EDU**

Kenneth A House Dayton WA

Member OEN, WARTS

### **W7EEA**

Robert M "Sparky" Sherman

Portland

Member CCARC, QCWA

### **W7EFP**

Glenn L Briedwell Jr Portland

### **W7EFT**

David D Meeker

Vancouver WA

### **W7EGR**

Stanley L "Stan" Archer

Coulee Dam WA

Member QCWA, WARTS

### **W7ENR**

Bryon A Ashenbrenner

Hoquiam WA

Member WARTS

### **W7ENU (K7ENU)**

Mary B Davis Portland

Red Cross radio team

Member AARC, AARS, ARRL,  
OEN

### **W7EPS**

Virgil W "Virg" Treadwell

Yakima WA

Member WARTS



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

### **W7ERA**

Walter J Manning

Milwaukie OR

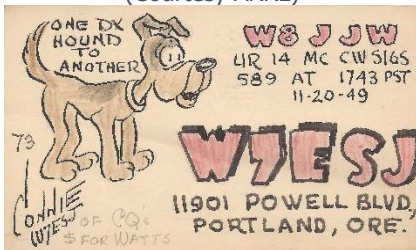
CRM US Navy World War 2

Member ARRL



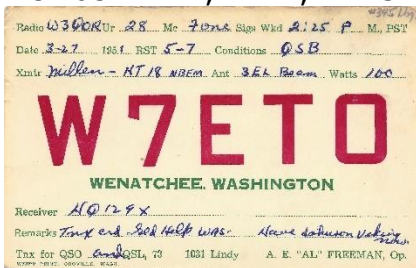


W7ESJ self-portrait (QST 7/55)  
(Courtesy ARRL)



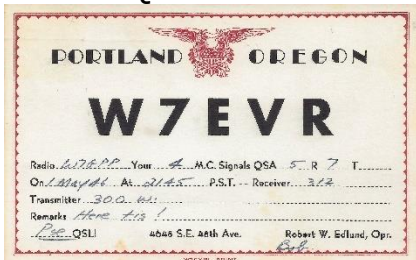
### W7ESJ (W8JJW)

Edward F "Connie" Conyngham  
Portland  
LT US Navy World War 2  
Member ARAB, ARRL, PARC



### W7ETO

Albert E "Al" Freeman  
Wenatchee WA  
Member QCWA



### W7EVR

Robert W Edlund Portland  
CRE USN

### W7EXQ

Bruce L Stokes Portland  
Red Cross headquarters  
team  
Member NWVRS, PARC

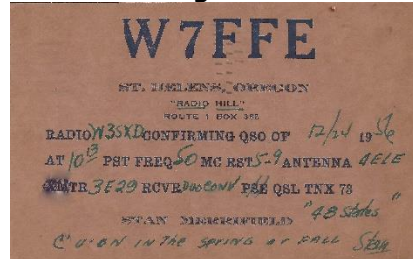
### W7EYW

Robert C Apperson Portland  
W7FAW

Paul J Sawin Longview WA

### W7FE (7FE)

Walter Baumgartner Portland



### W7FFE

Stan Merrifield St Helens OR



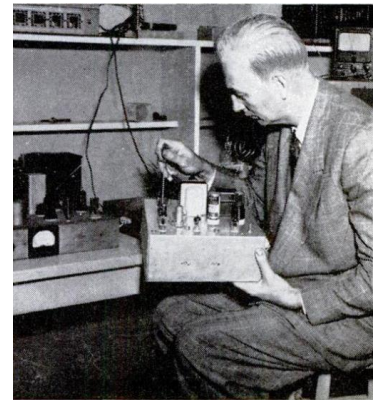
### W7FHJ

Paul N Young Portland



### W7FJZ

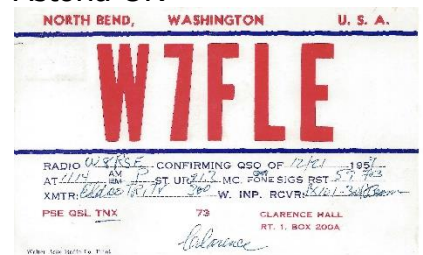
Zelmer A Sax Portland



W7FKZ Popular Mechanics April 1950

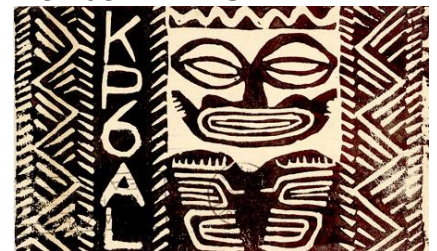
### W7FKZ

Leroy "Ed" Parsons  
Astoria OR



### W7FLE

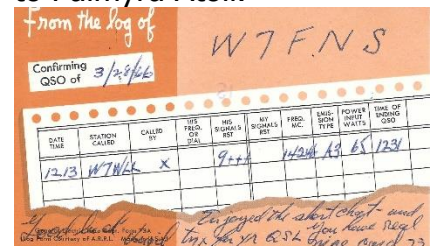
Clarence V Hall  
North Bend WA  
Member WARTS



(QSL courtesy K8CX)

### W7FNK (KP6AL)

Jack N Wheeler Portland  
QSL from Jack's DXpedition  
to Palmyra Atoll.



(QSL courtesy W7WLL)

### W7FNS

Virgil V Cowen Portland  
Maj US Army World War 2  
Member PARC, QCWA





(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7FNX**

Earl O Johnson Astoria OR  
Member QCWA



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7FNZ**

Milton "Tiny" Marsh  
Eugene OR

**W7FON**

Harry A Hale Longview WA  
Member LCARA, QCWA

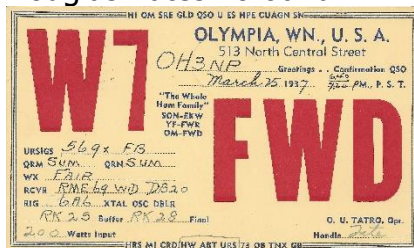
**W7FRU**

George M Marchand  
Woodinville WA



**W7FU**

Douglas Bates Portland



**W7FWD**

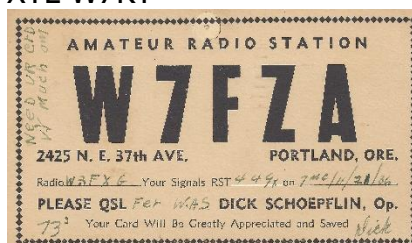
Orpheus U Tatro  
Olympia WA



W7FXE Radio Jan 1940

**W7FXE**

Lucile Allingham Portland  
XYL W7KY



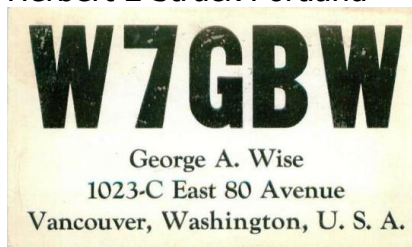
**W7FZA**

Richard N "Dick" Schoepflin  
Portland



**W7GAN**

Herbert E Struck Portland



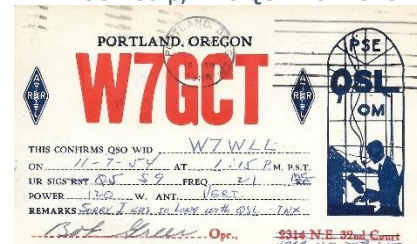
(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

**W7GBW (W7MB)**

George A Wise  
2602 N Broadacre St Vanport  
Pvt US Army World War 2  
Member ARRL, PARC, SOWP,  
WVDCX



W7GCT Corp, AAC QST Nov 1943



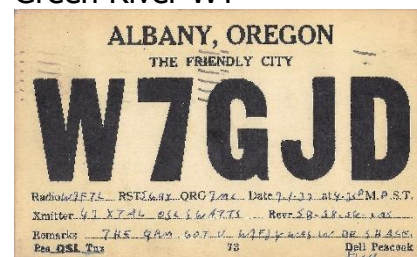
(QSL courtesy W7WLL)

**W7GCT**

Robt "Bob" Greer Portland

**W7GCZ**

Dean Elder  
Green River WY



**W7GJD**

Dell Peacock Albany OR



**W7GJY**

John S "Stan" Crawford  
Portland  
Member ARRL, Charter  
Member WARTS





W7GM Radio August, 1935

### W7GM

Walter E "Eddie" Swartout  
Portland

### W7GNR

Maurice L "Morrie" Monson  
Bellingham WA

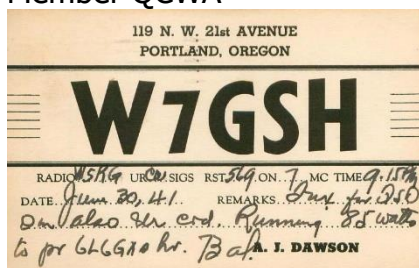
Member QCWA, WARTS

### W7GOO

George E Fisher Astoria OR  
Charter member of WARTS

### W7GPZ

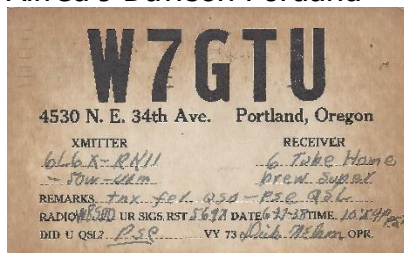
Clarence D "Clare" Newman  
Klamath Falls OR  
Member QCWA



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

### W7GSH

Alfred J Dawson Portland



### W7GTU

Richard M "Dick" Nelson  
Portland



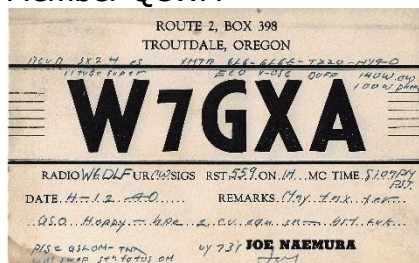
### W7GUR

James B "Jim" Boland  
Portland  
Member ARRL, OEN, WVDXC

### W7GWA

Robert M "Bob" Ryan  
Seattle WA

Member QCWA



### W7GXA (W7CG)

Joe Naemura  
10316 N Force Ave  
Vanport  
Member ARRL, NWVRS,  
SOWP, WVDXC

### W7GXO

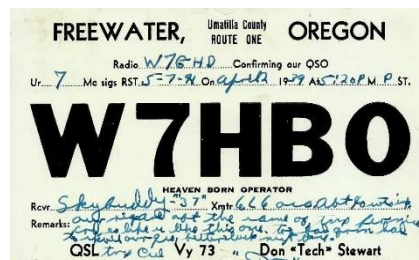
Arthur G White Portland  
Member OEN

### W7HA

James H "Jim" Platz  
Hood River OR  
Member NABET

### W7HAE

William E Holmes Portland



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

### W7HBO

Don E "Tech" Stewart  
La Grande OR  
ACRM US Navy World War 2  
Member OEN



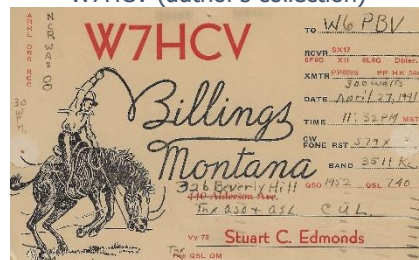
(QSL courtesy W7WLL)

### W7HCQ

Richard M "Dick" Rogers  
Portland  
Salesman at United Radio

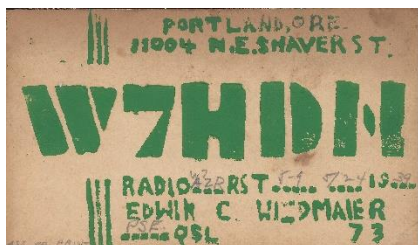


W7HCV (author's collection)



### W7HCV

Stuart C Edmonds Portland  
Member ARRL (relay  
station), RCC



### W7HDM

Edwin C "Ed" Wiedmaier  
Portland  
Sauvie Island "Dike Watch"  
station  
Member OEN



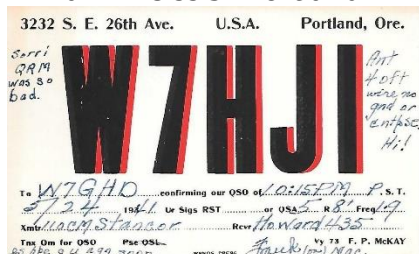
W7HIA YASME News Nov 1959

### W7HIA

Herbert "Herb" Gilbaugh  
Portland  
Member ARRL,  
Charter Member WVDXC

### W7HIK

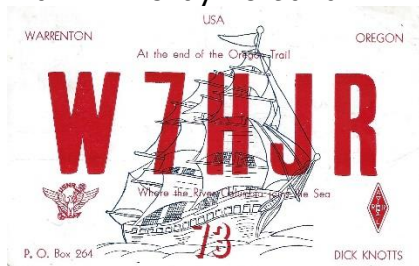
William Weiss Jr Portland



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

### W7HJI

Frank P McKay Portland



### W7HJR (K7NRV)

Richard B "Dick" Knotts  
Warrenton OR

Lt US Navy World War 2,  
USNR  
EWC Clatskanie  
Member ARRL



### W7HJU

Edwin S "Ed" Lamb Astoria OR  
Wireless operator since 1912  
Wireless officer on:  
SS Indiana  
SS Kukui  
SS Heather  
SS Manzanita  
Lighthouse tenders in  
California, Oregon, Washington,  
and Alaska until 1930.  
Member ARRL, OEN, PARC,  
QCWA, SOWP



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

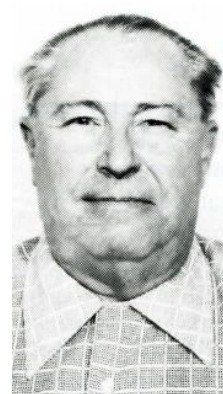
### W7HKI

A H "Jay" Gould Portland



### W7HKT

Edward E "Ed" Squier  
Portland  
Member ARRL, WVDXC



W7HKU APCO Bulletin July 1998



(QSL courtesy W8SOE)

### W7HKU

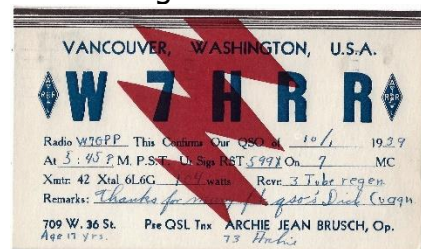
Charles A "Art" Cameron  
Portland  
Portland Police radio shop  
**W7HOQ**  
John R Ehr Portland  
**W7HPS (W9DUB)**  
Frederick "Fred" A Riebe  
Eugene OR



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

### W7HQL

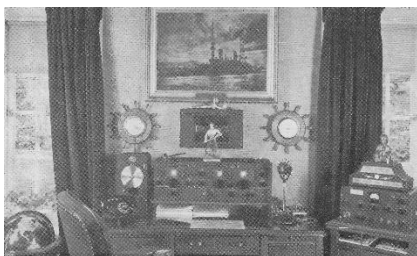
Bruce Rodgers Astoria OR



### W7HRR

Archie F Brusch  
Vancouver WA  
Member ARRL, WVDXC





W7HRV ca. 1940



### W7HRV

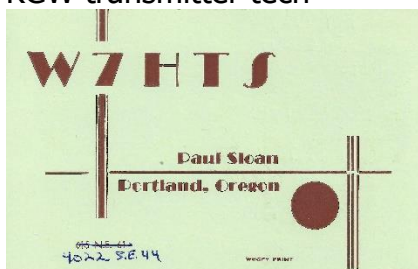
Carl Braun West Linn OR  
Chief Electrician, Oregon  
Naval Militia  
Member QCWA



W7HSZ (courtesy NAMM.org)

### W7HSZ

Rodgers W Jenkins  
Lake Oswego OR  
KGW transmitter tech



### W7HTS

Paul R Sloan Portland  
Multnomah County radio  
tech  
Member PARC

### W7HVV

Wendell R "Robert" Williams  
Portland  
Member OEN, PARC, QCWA  
**W7HWC**  
William O Eden  
10508 N Island Ave  
Vanport



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

### W7IAC

William L Boos  
Lake Oswego OR  
**W7ICA**  
Clifford N Olson Portland  
Portland Red Cross  
headquarters team

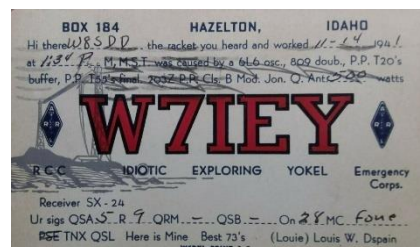
### W7IDG

Lockett S White Portland  
Member QCWA



### W7IE

Robert A Wright Portland  
Member PARC, QCWA,  
SOWP  
**W7IES**  
Leland Ready Troutdale OR



### W7IEY

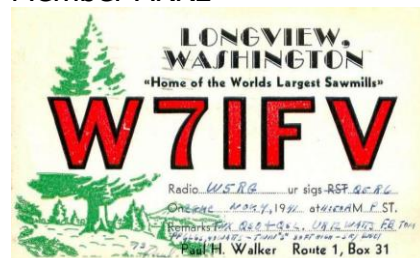
Louis W "Louie" DSpain  
Rupert ID  
Member ARRL, RCC



(QSL courtesy NC State ARC)

### W7IFN

Fred A Stocking Portland  
Member ARRL



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

### W7IFV

Paul Walker Longview WA



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

### W7IHA

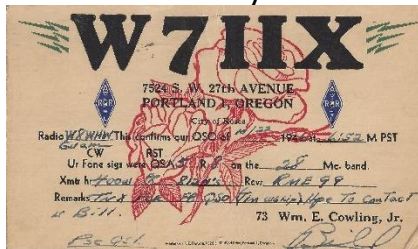
A H Jay Gould  
Ocean Park WA  
**W7IHI**  
Kenneth A Caplan Portland  
**W7IIA**  
Edwin H Marvin Portland  
Member QCWA

**W7IJJ**

Donald "Don" Johnston  
Portland

**W7IIV**

Marvin S Worthley Portland

**W7IIX**

William E "Bill" Cowling Jr  
Portland  
Member ARRL

**W7IQO**

Patrick A Price Burton WA  
Member WARTS

**W7IRJ**

Harold D Hanson  
Roseburg OR  
Member OEN

**W7IYK**

Walter P Greenwood  
Coulee Dam WA  
Member WARTS



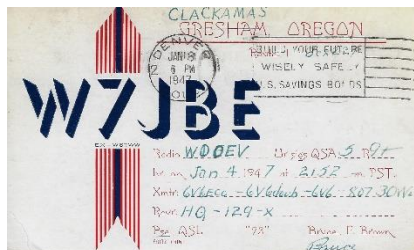
W7JAS QST Feb 1943

**W7JAS**

Henry Wastradowski  
Vancouver WA  
Member CCARC

**W7JAZ**

William H Gleason Portland  
Member PARC, QCWA

**W7JBE**

Bruce F Brown  
Clackamas OR

**W7JCT**

Jack W Stanyar Yakima WA

**W7JGY**

Frank D Matteson Portland

**W7JIG**

Russell G Brant Portland

**W7JJX**

Robert G Starr Portland

**W7JMY**

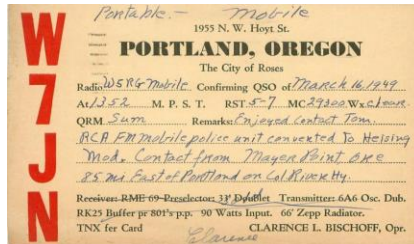
Don R Laird Portland



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7JMZ**

Robert T Murphy Portland  
Member ARRL



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

**W7JN**

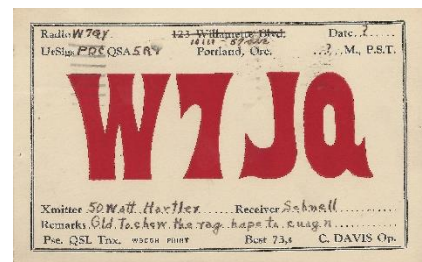
Clarence L Bischoff Portland

**W7JNG**

Warren B Carlton Portland

**W7JPQ**

Theophoulus G Williams  
Portland

**W7JQ**

Carl B Davis Portland

**W7JRT**

Warren E Luse Portland

**W7JRZ**

Herbert J Haag Portland



W7JSK courtesy W7ZI

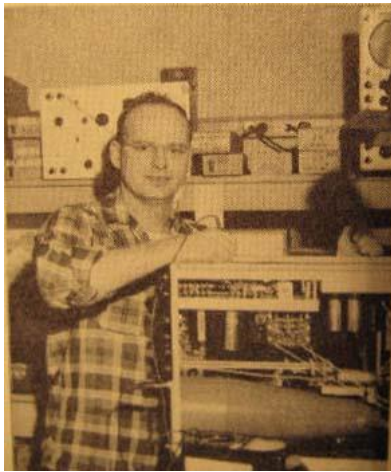
**W7JSK**

Clinton B "Jim" Rhoades Jr  
Portland  
Purchasing Agent at United  
Radio

**W7JSM**

Robert L Warnock Portland





W7JSO from 1955 Tektronix Directory  
(Courtesy Don Knotts)

**W7JSO**

Gerald S "Jerry" Kraxberger

11007 N Lake Ave

Vanport

Member TERAC

**W7JTK**

John McArdle Portland

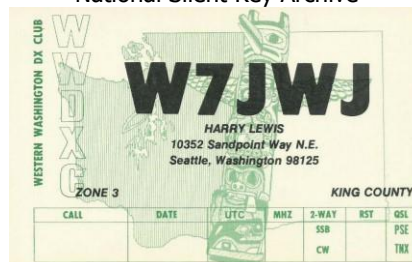
Member OEC

**W7JWD**

Leslie Hay Bellingham WA



W7JWJ courtesy  
National Silent Key Archive



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7JWJ**

Harry Lewis Richland WA

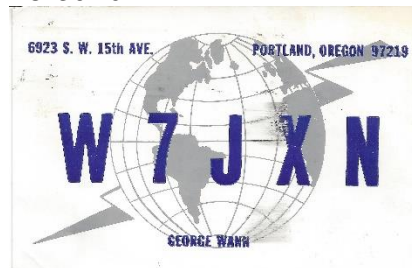
Member ARRL, QCWA,

WARTS

**W7JWL**

Vincent M Sullivan

Portland



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7JXN**

George E Wann

3606 N Victory Blvd

Vanport



(QSL courtesy cardcow.com)

**W7KAW**

Marie C Clark Portland



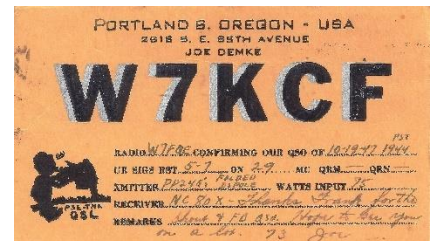
**W7KBX**

Norman E Kirkham Portland

**W7KCA**

John C Briggs Goldendale

WA



**W7KCF**

Joe Demke Portland

**W7KCL**

Verne S Criswell Portland

**W7KDC**

Wandalee Dspain

Rupert ID



(QSL courtesy cardcow.com)

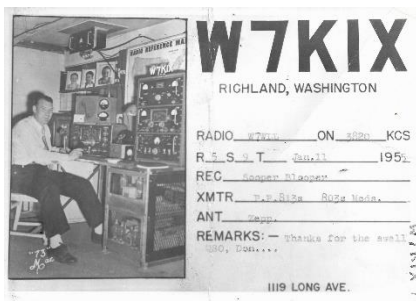
**W7KER**

Clarence P "Woody" Wood

Portland

Red Cross radio team





(QSL courtesy W7WLL)

## W7KIX

Marvin M McCartney  
Richland WA  
Member WARTS



W7KJC courtesy gsoc.org

## W7KJC

Frederick E "Fred" Miller  
Portland

## W7KJG

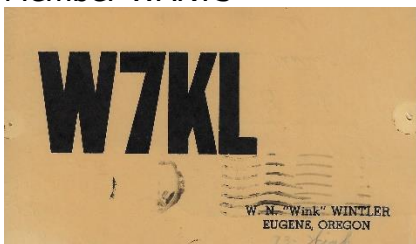
Earle Ashe Portland

## W7KJV

Gerald Van Kol  
Milwaukie OR

## W7KKI

Sylvester F Williams  
Bremerton WA  
Member WARTS



## W7KL

Wallace N "Wink" Wintler  
Eugene OR  
Member ARRL, QCWA

## W7KM

Frank Bloss Portland

## W7KNE

Theodore G Suomela  
Ilwaco WA

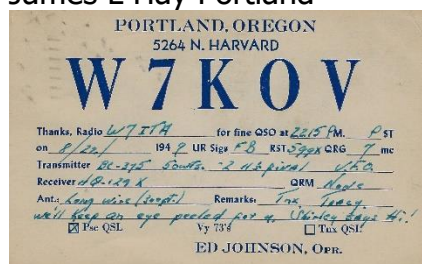


## W7KOF

David D "Dave" Barr Portland  
Member ARRL

## W7KOM

James L Hay Portland



## W7KOV

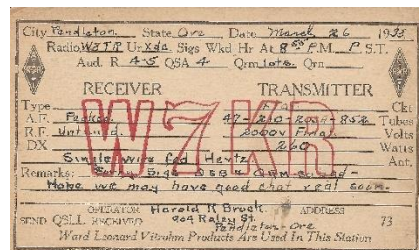
Edwin W Johnson Portland



(QSL courtesy cardcow.com)

## W7KPK

Delbert L Shampine  
2204 N Victory Blvd  
Vanport  
TEC 5 US Army World War 2  
W7KQY  
Howard F Wright  
3510 N Cottonwood St #713  
Vanport



## W7KRW

Harold R Brock  
Pendleton OR  
Member ARRL, QCWA  
W7KRO  
Huston Eckert Portland

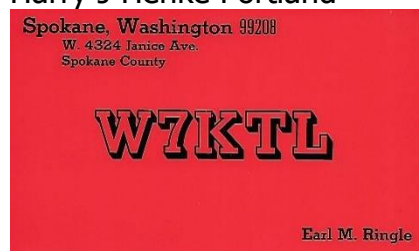


W7KSA courtesy seapac.org



## W7KSA

Clyde A Sylvester Portland  
Member ARRL, WVDXC  
W7KTD (W6MBN)  
Harry J Henke Portland



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

## W7KTL

Earl M Ringle Vancouver WA  
Member CCARC



(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7KTS**

William K "Bill" Ward  
Vancouver WA

**W7KUF**

Laurence A Morin Portland

**W7KUT**

John O Norback Portland

**W7KVB**

Edward M Davis Portland

**W7KWE**

Harold J Sterne Portland

**W7KWH**

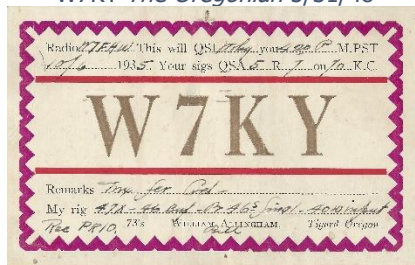
Alfred F Benz Portland

**W7KXD**

Donald D Kerlee Portland



W7KY The Oregonian 5/31/48



**W7KY (7KY)**

William D

"Broadcast Bill" Allingham

Tigard OR

Station Manager & Engineer  
for KBPS Benson High School

**W7KZA**

Thomas I Potter Portland



W7LAH courtesy oregonlive.com



**W7LAH**

Alvin D "Al" Schwartz  
Portland

**W7LAO**

William Siebert Portland

**W7LAX**

Jack N Wheeler Portland

**W7LAZ**

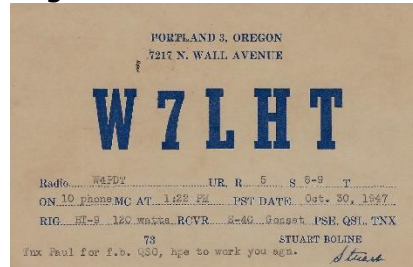
Wm Politz Portland





**W7LHP**

Eugene A Wiseman Portland

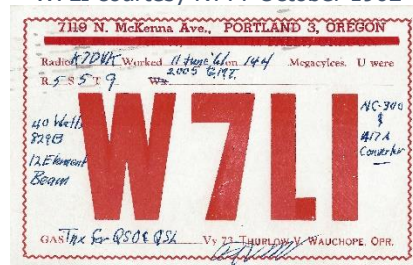


**W7LHT**

Stuart R Boline Portland



W7LI courtesy RTTY October 1962



**W7LI**

Thurlow Wauchope Portland

Lt Col US Army

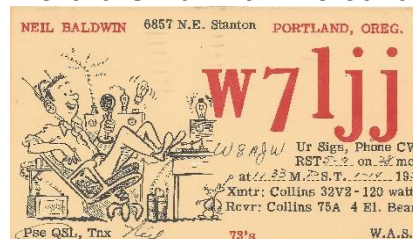
Member ARRL, PARC, QCWA, WVDXC

**W7LIN**

Nelson A Maxwell Portland

**W7LIV**

Richard O Burnham Portland



**W7LJJ**

Neil Baldwin Portland

**W7LJR**

Walter J Ernst Portland

**W7LLI**

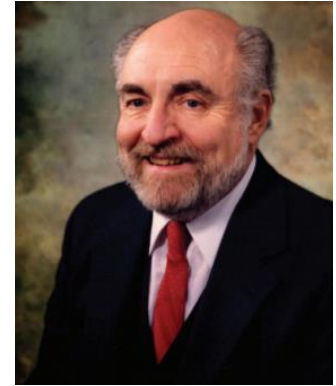
Eldin W Guthrie Portland

**W7LMC**

George N Baldwin Portland

**W7LMF**

John A Harrison Portland



W7LOU courtesy ieee.org

**W7LOU**

Dr Robert D "Bob" Hunsucker Portland

**W7LPV**

Edgar A Smith Portland

**W7LQJ**

Hugh Leacock Portland

**W7LQS**

Glen M Freeman Portland



**W7LT**

John A "Johnny" Peel

Portland

USNR

Member PARC, QCWA, SOWP

**W7LTW**

Alan E Hodgson Portland

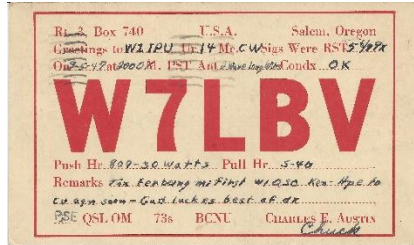
**W7LTY**

Ronald A McNeil

Vancouver WA

Member CCARC

W7LBV



**W7LBV**

Charles E "Chuck" Austin Salem OR

**W7LCL**

James R Tompkins Vancouver WA



**W7LDB**

James Ray Portland

Member ARRL

**W7LDF**

Robert W Evenson 10707 N Force Ave Vanport

**W7LFJ**

Russell S Kelsey Portland

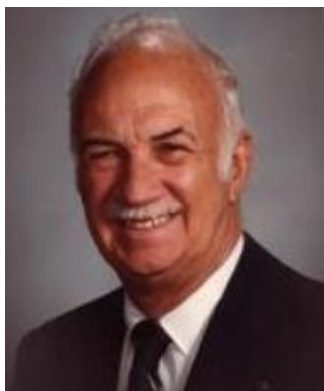
**W7LGV**

Albert L Smith 9901 N Denver Ct Vanport

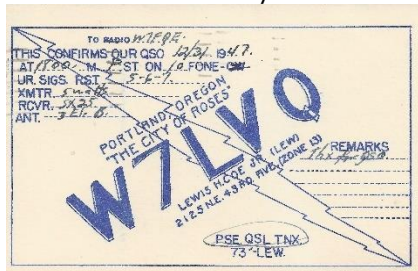
**W7LHB**

Merlin H MacKenzie Portland





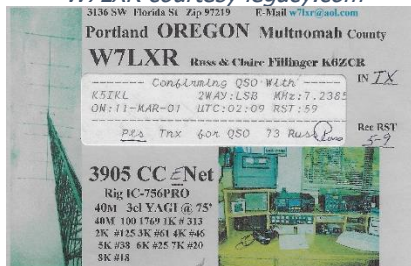
W7LVQ courtesy  
National Silent Key Archive



**W7LVQ**  
Lewis H "Lew" Coe JR  
Portland  
Lt Commander USN  
**W7LWD**  
Chris J Nizic Portland

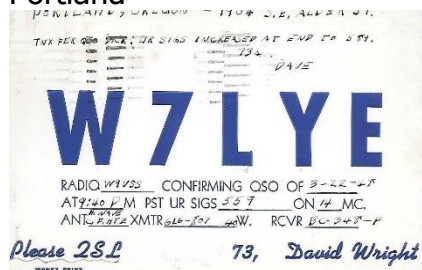


W7LXR courtesy legacy.com



**W7LXR**  
Russell V "Russ" Fillinger  
Portland  
Member ARRL, TERAC,  
WVDCX  
Russ also provided  
communications during  
Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

**W7LY**  
Robert E Thomlinson  
Portland

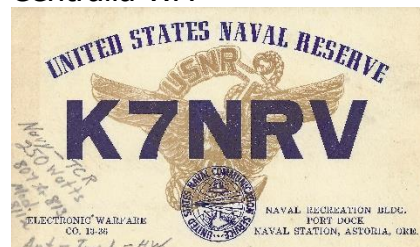


(QSL courtesy W8JYZ)

**W7LYE**  
David E Wright Portland  
**W7MBI**  
William R Brownell Portland  
**W7MEY**  
Frank P McKay  
Long Beach WA  
**W7MFS**  
Dan C Trusty Vancouver WA



**W7MHK**  
Mark L Nelson Jr Portland  
Member ARRL  
**W7NCW**  
Lower Columbia ARC  
Longview WA  
**K7NRA**  
Electronic Warfare Co 13-14  
Walla Walla WA  
**K7NRO**  
Electronic Warfare Co 13-2  
Centralia WA



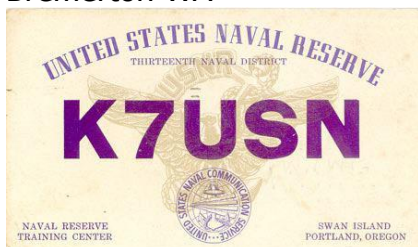
**K7NRV**  
Electronic Warfare Co 13-36  
Astoria OR  
**W7OZC**  
Howard Douglass Portland  
**W7RAO**  
Charles F Pierce Seattle WA



W7SSQ (courtesy  
National Silent Key Archive)

### W7SSQ (W9SSQ)

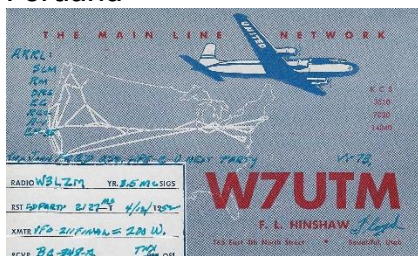
Stanton P Cleary  
Bremerton WA



(QSL courtesy K8CX)

### K7USN

Naval Reserve Training Ctr  
Portland



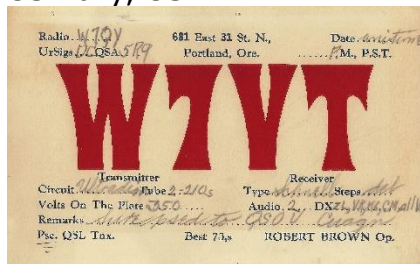
### W7UTM

Floyd L Hinshaw  
Bountiful UT  
Member ARRL, RCC



### W7VS (7AGK)

Temple V "Temp" Ehmsen  
Portland  
First licensed 1922  
City of Portland Police Radio  
Shop Manager  
US Navy, USNR

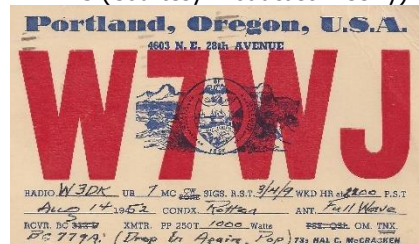


### W7YT

Robert O "Bob" Brown  
Portland



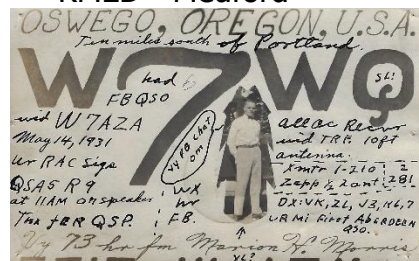
W7WJ (Courtesy Broadcast Weekly)



### W7WJ (7DZ, 7GK, 7KK)

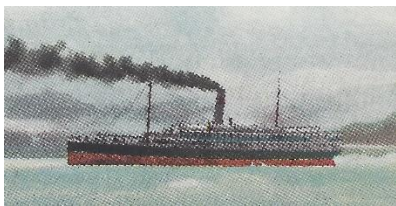
Hal C McCracken  
Portland  
Red Cross hq station  
First licensed 1920  
On-air personality at:

- KJR & KPQ - Seattle
- KOIN & KTBR - Portland
- KJBS - San Francisco
- KMED - Medford



### W7WQ

Marion H Morris  
Lake Grove OR  
Charter Member WARTS



SS Spokane in Alaska

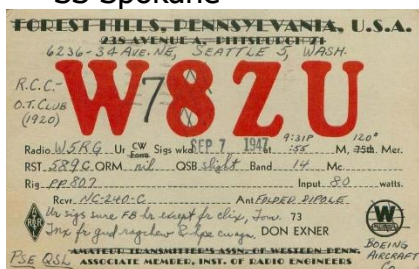
**W7ZK (7FH, 7ZK)**

Dr. Vernon J "Doc" Bird

Vancouver WA

Wireless officer on:

- SS Admiral Dewey
- SS Senator
- SS Spokane



(QSL courtesy W5RG Collection)

**W7ZU (W8ZU)**

Donald W "Don" Exner

Seattle WA

**W8QGZ**

Byron D "By" Richards

Detroit MI

**W0YOS**

Kenneth G McKee

Seneca KS

**KG6AC (KA7OS)**

Oakley L Stockton

Guam

HQ 20th Air Force

Lt Col USAF

Member QCWA

**KL7ME**

Richard Williams

Shemya AK

120<sup>th</sup> AACS Squadron

## Legend:

AARC – Artic Amateur Radio Club

AARS – Army Amateur Radio Service

ACARC – Apple City Amateur Radio Club

ARAB – Amateur Radio Association of Bremerton

ARRL – Amateur Radio Relay League

CCARC – Clark County Amateur Radio Club

LCARA - Lower Columbia Amateur Radio Association

NABET – National Association of Broadcast Engineers & Technicians

NWVRS – Northwest Vintage Radio Society

OEN – Oregon Emergency Network

OOTC – Old Old Timer's Club

PARC - Portland Amateur Radio Club

QCWA – Quarter Century Wireless Association

RCC – Rag Chewers Club

SOWP – Society of Wireless Pioneers

TERAC – Tektronix Employees Radio Amateur Club

WARTS – Washington Amateur Radio Traffic System.

WVDXC – Willamette Valley DX Club





*K7NRV Astoria QSL 1949*

## United States Naval Reserve Stations

Following World War II, the United States Navy activated the Naval Reserve program. People interested in electronics could apply to join an "Electronics Warfare" group in their community.

Depending upon the size of the local group, they might be issued surplus communications equipment such as a complete radio station, radio teletype equipment, radars, and direction-finding receivers. Testing equipment, tools, and television kits were supplied to help with training (and maintain interest).

Naval Reserve stations were given operating privileges in the military bands for drilling and official business. Reservists who were also licensed amateurs could get special Naval Reserve call signs to use for amateur purposes on the ham bands. Electronics Warfare stations in the northwest were in the Navy's 13<sup>th</sup> district.

### The Flood Response

During the 1948 flood, several Naval Reserve stations played key roles in rendering aid.

#### **K7NRO Roosevelt School Centralia, Washington (Electronics Warfare Co. 13-2)**

Reservists from EWC 13-2 in Centralia, Washington, delivered and set up a power generator at Kelso to provide lighting for dike work.


The group also provided and set up radio gear so that the Kelso flood headquarters could communicate with dike patrols.

The commanding officer of EWC 13-2 oversaw area communications and coordinated with area hams during the emergency.

**United States Naval Reserve**

TWELFTH NAVAL DISTRICT

RADIO W9DGA FREQ. 7 MC  
 THX for work &  
 Q8 contact.



REMARKS: SX 284 RWR RST 579  
Meissner Sig Stuffer AT 0126 GCT  
PP 4-750A DATE 24 Oct 48  
1/KW

**W6FDR** EX W5FDR  
 WM. B. HOLLIS OKS- RM- REC  
 NAME 1801 109TH AVE A10P WACB WAS.  
 ADDRESS OAKLAND 3, CALIFORNIA

*W6FDR QSL Oakland, CA 1948*

**W6FDR  
Oakland, California  
(USNR – 12<sup>th</sup> Naval District)**

W6FDR (Oakland) handled the bulk of East-West emergency communications and messages to California.<sup>292</sup>

**K7NRA  
Veterans Administration Hospital,  
Walla Walla, Washington  
(EWC 13-14)**

K7NRA (Walla Walla) stood by ready to assist as needed.

**K7NRV  
Recreation Building  
Naval Station Astoria, Oregon  
(EWC 13-36)**

Under the command of Lt. Richard Knotts, the EWC deployed to the City of

Clatskanie for two weeks. "...[The] EWC earned a 'well done' from the Commandant, Thirteenth Naval District, by handling without interruption all communications for the lower Columbia River valley for 14 consecutive days. These included Army, Navy, and Coast Guard dispatches, which added up to a considerable number."<sup>293</sup>

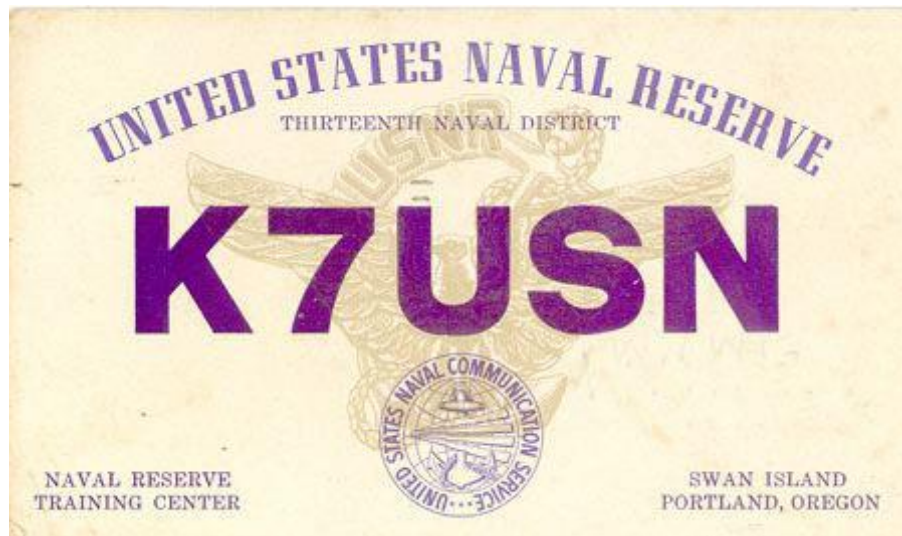
"This important mission was accomplished by these volunteers without pay. The men of the Astoria Volunteer Composite Unit assisted throughout the stricken area in building dikes, ferrying stranded inhabitants, and aiding in every way possible."<sup>294</sup>

See the Clatskanie section for more details.

<sup>292</sup> QRR...The Dike is Broken pg. 39

<sup>293</sup> Volunteer Reservists pg. 16

<sup>294</sup> ibid



*K7USN QSL USNR training Center, Swan Island (courtesy of K8CX)*

**K7USN**  
**Swan Island**  
**Portland, Oregon**  
**Naval Reserve Training Center**

Reservists at the Swan Island training center maintained a continuous watch at its ham radio station, K7USN.



*Swan Island Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Training Center, April 1949. (Ackroyd Photography)*



## Where noted, images in Appendix 1 were provided courtesy of:

|                                                              |                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| APCO International                                           | <i>The Oregonian</i> (oregonlive.com)                                              |
| CardCow ( <i>cardcow.com</i> )                               | Quarter Century Wireless Association (QCWA)                                        |
| <i>Electric Radio</i> magazine (ermag.com)                   | QST magazine (ARRL.org)                                                            |
| Engadget (engadget.com)                                      | Don Retzlaff, curator of W5RG Thomas Russell Gentry website (W5RG.donretzlaff.com) |
| Geological Society of the Oregon Country (gsoc.org)          | Thomas Roscoe, K8CX, Ham Gallery (hamgallery.com)                                  |
| Bob Green, W8JYZ, QSL Cards From the Past (oldqslcards.com)  | SEA-PAC (seapac.org)                                                               |
| Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (ieee.org) | Southern Ohio Amateur Radio Association, W8SOE                                     |
| Kapiti Coast Museum (kapiticoastmuseum.org.nz)               | Peter Steffes, W8AA QSL Collection                                                 |
| George Kirkwood                                              | Don Tucker, W7WLL                                                                  |
| Don Knotts, W7HJS                                            | <i>The YASME News</i> (yasme.org)                                                  |
| North Carolina State University Libraries (d.lib.ncsu.edu)   |                                                                                    |

Other QSL images are from Dick Howard, K7DVK, and the author's collection

Sources used to compile this list acknowledge that the names of other hams involved with the emergency have been lost to history. We appreciate everyone's contributions and regret any omissions. If you have names, stories, photos or QSLs to add, please contact the author at [nvrdsan@gmail.com](mailto:nvrdsan@gmail.com).

## Appendix 2 - Full Text of President Truman's Speech

Delivered at: Civic Auditorium, temporary Regional Red Cross Disaster Headquarters  
June 11, 1948 1:00 p.m.  
Broadcast by KGW and KXL  
Courtesy of [quod.lib.umich.edu/](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/)

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Mayor, Acting Governor Scott<sup>295</sup>, ladies and gentlemen: I tried very hard this morning to get a chance to see from the air just what this flood looks like here, but one of your western mists prevented me from seeing it. It certainly wasn't a rain, although I got wet. I wanted to have a first-hand look at the situation, and I am still hoping that I can take a look after this meeting is over.

I had with me, however, the Chief of Engineers of this District of the U.S. Army, and the Federal Works Administrator, General Fleming, and we had about 40 or 50 pictures taken within the last 2 or 3 days, which showed me the effects of the river from the Canadian border to its mouth. It is a terrible disaster. And I am in sympathy with trying to get that disaster met.

I ordered out every agency of the Federal Government to cooperate with the Red Cross and the State of Oregon, and the city of Portland, too, to meet the situation as best we can. I am told by General Fleming that there is complete harmony between all the agencies, both State and national, and the Red Cross, and that every effort is being made to meet the situation as far as we can.

Ordinarily the President of the United States has an emergency fund for such things as this, but last year that fund was eliminated, and it was not renewed again this year. There was only \$25,000 left in that fund, and I gave that to General Fleming so that some immediate emergencies could be met as far as possible. There is on the way to me now a joint resolution of the Congress authorizing the expenditure of \$10 million from the housing fund, which has already been appropriated. As soon as that arrives and that resolution is signed, which I hope will be before I leave Portland today, that much money will be available for immediate emergency relief. We are trying to get a

---

<sup>295</sup> At the time of the President's speech, State Treasurer Leslie Scott was the acting governor of Oregon. A plane crash near Lakeview on October 28, 1947, took the lives of Governor Earl Snell, Secretary of State Robert Farrell, Senate President Marshall Cornett, and their pilot Oscar Kittredge. Speaker of the House John Hall succeeded to the governorship until an election could be held in November 1948. Governor Hall declared an emergency just an hour after water poured into Vanport, thereby authorizing the Oregon National Guard to requisition material and personnel as needed. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, Governor Hall left Oregon to attend the National Governor's Conference in Portsmouth, NH. Under state law at the time, Secretary of State Earl Newbry would have become acting governor when Governor Hall crossed the state line. However, Mr. Newbry was also out-of-state at Atlantic, NJ attending a Shrine convention. So, for five days, from June 9<sup>th</sup> until Secretary of State Newbry's return on June 13<sup>th</sup>, State Treasurer Leslie Scott was the acting Oregon governor. Governor pro tem Scott himself left the state on the evening of Thursday June 10<sup>th</sup> to join the President in Olympia and fly with him back to Oregon on the following day. There is no record of who, if anyone, assumed the governorship during his brief absence.

resolution to authorize the Department of Agriculture to make grants to those farmers who have had their livestock washed away and whose stock had to be moved from farms to other places. I hope that can be arranged immediately.

Now that is so much for the present immediate situation. I have always been interested in the development and the control of the great rivers of this country. I live on the Missouri River at Independence, Mo., where a great many people started when this town was first organized over the Oregon Trail.

Independence, Mo., is by the Missouri River, and about 1 year in 3 the damage from that river basin has been all the way from \$100 million to \$500 million. This same situation has been true in the valley of the Ohio, and true in the lower valley of the Mississippi until the lower valley of the Mississippi has been controlled so that these floods that came in the last few years have not affected the lower Mississippi.

I want to see a regular flood control program in all these river valleys. As I said yesterday at Seattle, I want to see the river developed for the benefit of the people, for power, for navigation, for reclamation, and for flood control, and that can be done, and should be done. I was informed by the Chief of Engineers before I left Washington that the Missouri plan is completed, so far as the plan is concerned, but it will take 6 more years to get that flood control into effect.

There is a plan for the Columbia River Basin, not only for flood control but for power and for irrigation and for navigation. And I am hoping to see that Columbia River plan outlined completely. Had it not been for the immense power dams on the Columbia River, it would have been much harder to win World War Two. These immense dams at Bonneville and Grand Coulee-I went to see the Grand Coulee just the other day, and there are a million acre-feet of water pouring over that dam every 24 hours. That is the cause of some of your trouble down here. But if those dams had not been built over the opposition of people who wanted to look backward, it would have taken longer, and many more lives, to win World War Two.

There is not any reason in the world why these plans should not be carried out, and if we can get the cooperation of every branch of the Federal Government, we can get that done. There are some people, you know, who do not like public power, and there are some people who do not like to expend money for the reclamation of the land in the West. You know, Daniel Webster said the West wasn't any good, and the further away they could keep it from the East the better he would be pleased. That was along in 1835.

There are a lot of people who still believe like Daniel Webster. But I am trying to convert those people, and if I succeed in that, we will get the proper developments of those rivers. I am extremely sorry that you are faced with this disaster, but every disaster has some good at the conclusion of it. This will give you more sympathetic hearts when you hear that the Connecticut or the Missouri or the Ohio or some other



great river in this country has gone on a rampage. You will understand just exactly what other people are faced with. They understand exactly what you are faced with, and they are sympathetic, and they are going to help you. And I am glad they are. I have had a most appreciative welcome in this part of the world.

I have been out here time and again before, but I didn't attract so much attention as I do now. I was here during World War Two, in the capacity of chairman of an investigating committee of the United States Senate. I have been here in Portland on two occasions, and I have been in Bremerton, Wash., and San Francisco, and Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Sacramento-in nearly every town in the West. I have been out here before that, so I know something about what your problems are. I know something about what this country is in this part of the United States, and I know what a contribution it made to the war effort, not only in its power program which I have just talked about, but in the food production, in manpower, in ship production, and everything else that went to win that war.

Now I want to use those same facilities to win the peace, and I know we can do that. Everybody thought that, when the war suddenly ended, that everything was going to pot, there wouldn't be any jobs, there wouldn't be any work, there wouldn't be anything to do. Well, you know what a surprise it has been to everybody during the last 3 years, since the war ended. There is more work, and more jobs, and more things to be done than has ever been the case in the history of the world.

We finally have come to the conclusion that we must assume our position as leader in the world. In 1920 Almighty God, I think, intended for this country to assume that position, but we turned our backs on it-and see what happened? We can't do that anymore. We must accept our responsibility, and when we accept our responsibility-that leadership which God Almighty intended us to assume-there will be peace in the world. There will be enough for everybody to have the good things in life, not only in this country but in the rest of the world. We now have more than 61 million people at work; more jobs than ever before in the history of the country. And the income of the United States is \$200 billion or over. Now that can be continued, if we use our heads and our judgment.

That is what I am out here to explain to you. And I know how to do that. I know what to tell you to do. I told the Congress time and time again what they should do to continue that situation, and I hope eventually we will get action on it. I sincerely hope that when this severe flood subsides out here, we can immediately go to work and begin to put in a plan of construction along this river so that it will never happen again; and by the next time I come out here you won't be afraid of floods, and you won't be afraid of not having power, not having a lot of other things that will be good for you when they happen. That will take several years, but I would like to come out and see it, when it is finished.

Thank you very much.

## Appendix 3 – The Stassen-Dewey Debate

About three weeks before President Truman made his visit to the Northwest to see the flood damage, his Republican opponents met in Portland for a history-making debate.

Minnesota Governor Harold Stassen and New York Governor Thomas Dewey held a debate at the KEX studios in Portland on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1948 in advance of Oregon's May 21<sup>st</sup> Republican primary.

The debate was carried by Portland stations KALE, KEX, KGW, and KOIN and

by three national networks (ABC, MBS, and NBC). The hour-long broadcast was made without commercials and was heard by a national audience estimated at 40 million.

The Portland debate is noteworthy as being the first presidential debate broadcast by radio<sup>296</sup> and is credited with helping Gov. Dewey win the Oregon primary and eventually the Republican nomination.



*Figure 73 - The Dewey-Stassen Portland debate May 17, 1948. Gov. Thomas Dewey is standing. His opponent, Gov. Harold Stassen (dark suit), looks on from the left-hand table. Multnomah County Republican Chairman Donald Van Boskirk (center table) moderated. Each candidate made a twenty-minute speech followed by an eight-minute rebuttal.*

*Note the tour de force of microphone flags from Portland radio stations. (ACME Telephoto)*

<sup>296</sup> This was also the first time that audio from a U.S. presidential debate was recorded. The audio is available for download from the

University of Rochester  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1802/2134>

## Appendix 4 – Telephone Trivia

This Vanport telephone directory was published shortly after the TYler manual exchange began operating. At the time some facilities retained their prior numbers. Note the extensive list of services available in the city. The "Hospital" is the Vanport Permanente hospital, built for Kaiser shipyard workers.

| VANPORT TELEPHONE NUMBERS               |                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Administration Bldg.....TY 0180         | Warehouse-E. Vanport.....TR 2222 |
| Beauty Shop #1.....TY 0159J             | Welfare.....TY 0575              |
| Beauty Shop #5.....MU 9675              | Western Union.....TY 0835        |
| College.....TY 0655                     | Shopping Center #1:              |
| Coal Pit.....UN 1087                    | Cafe.....TY 0754                 |
| FIRE DEPARTMENT.....TY 0480             | Drug.....TY 0735                 |
| Gas Stations: ..                        | Grocery.....TY 0795              |
| Gen. Petroleum.....UN 9814              | Meat Market.....TY 0109          |
| Standard Service.....UN 9833            | Shopping Center #3 . . . .       |
| HOSPITAL.....TY 0280                    | Grocery.....TY 0300              |
| Lucas, Barney Washing Machine...TY 0500 | Shopping Center #4               |
| Post Office.....TY 0665                 | Cafe.....TY 0465                 |
| Red Cross - Madara Nichols.....TY 0830J | Drug.....TY 0140J                |
| Red Cross - Mrs. Robertson.....TY 0865  | Dry Cleaners.....TY 0230J        |
| Sheriff - Day.....TY 0405               | Grocery.....TY 0254              |
| Night.....TY 0184                       | Meat Market.....TY 0140W         |
| School or Nursery.....TY 0380           | Shopping Center #5               |
| Theatre.....TY 0635                     | Drugs.....MU 9760                |
| United Church Ministry.....TR 9381      | Grocery.....TY 0454              |

(Cut on the dotted line and post by your telephone.)

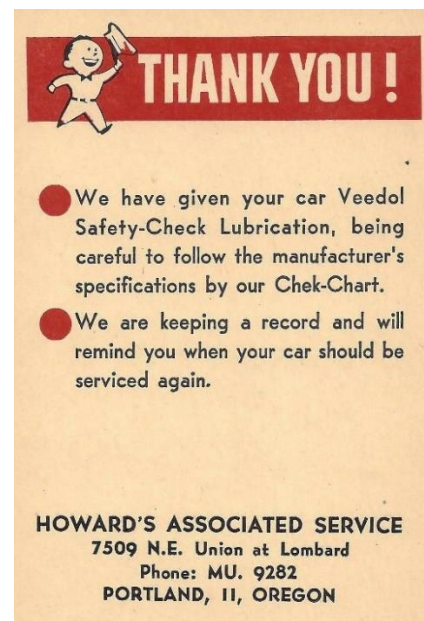
*Vanport Telephone Numbers from "The Voice of Vanport" 3/28/47 pg. 4.*

Prior to the TYler exchange, lines in Vanport were served by several Portland telephone exchanges.

Dick Howard shared how some of the North Portland telephone exchanges evolved into the current form:

- **MUR**dock→**AT**lantic**4**→284
- **TR**inity→**AT**lantic**7**→287
- **TY**ler→**TW**inoaks→**BU**tler**9**→289
- **UN**iversity→**AV**enue**6**→286

In the 1940's, the number of the payphone at Howard's Associated Service station at Union Avenue and Lombard was MURdock-9282. (At the time 9's were business lines).



*Howard's Associated Service reminder*



## Sources

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## Index of People, Places, and Things

This is intended as a key word index of selected topics. It is not intended to be exhaustive and excludes the Ham Radio Operator list. Readers of the PDF version are reminded to use the word search feature on their viewer to locate content of interest.

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| Pacific Reserve Fleet                           | 192           |
| Portland Amateur Radio Club                     | 95            |
| Portland Fire Department                        | 115           |
| Portland International Raceway                  | 130           |
| Portland Meadows                                | 139           |
| Portland Police                                 | 116           |
| Portland Speedway                               | 139           |
| Reynolds Metals Plant                           | 145           |
| Salem HS Amateur Radio Club                     | 94            |
| Sandbagging                                     | 175, 178      |
| Sauvie Island Soil Conservation District        | 165           |
| Steel Bridge                                    | 36            |
| SX Radiophone                                   | 154, 156, 173 |
| Telephones                                      | 119, 220      |
| Union Ave Auto Court                            | 144           |
| United States Air Force                         | 106           |
| United States Army                              | 106           |
| United States Coast Guard                       | 107           |
| United States Naval Reserve                     | 179, 212      |
| Vancouver Amateur Radio Club                    | 163           |
| Vanport College Amateur Radio Club W7NXP        | 131           |
| Vanport Hams                                    | 71            |
| Vanport Record Shop                             | 67            |
| Vanport Wrecking Co                             | 130           |
| WARTS (Washington Amateur Radio Traffic System) | 32            |
| Whitaker School                                 | 91, 150       |
| Woodlawn School                                 | 150           |

## About the Author

**Dan Howard** lives fifteen miles from the historic site of Vanport.

My interests in ham radio operating and vintage radio collecting date from the 1970's, being inspired by my dad. It was through these common interests we first became acquainted with Dr. Joe Naemura. We are so blessed to count the Naemura family among our friends.

The story of building Vanport and its eventual loss is well-known. However, so many stories remain to be told. Learning the Naemura family's personal story of loss, and the unique connection to radio, inspired me to dig deeper to discover and preserve this special piece of the mosaic. And, it was my pleasure to bring to light the many stories of self-sacrifice and heroism.

I especially enjoy researching and writing about radio history and my stories have been published in numerous publications.

Though I'm not active on the air currently, I've been a licensed amateur radio operator since 1974, holding a (code required) General class license.

