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Dear Frank,

Since you jogged my mind about SOSs and things, have been thinking of my experience and thought this very early "Wireless Experience" would be of interest.

During 1911 summer vacation from the University of California, L.A. Malarin assigned me to the S.S. Spokane (GE), which ran excursions to Eureka [California] and back. As usual, its performance (operating) was determined by the extra gear brought about by its operator! I had my favorite iron pyrite crystal and headphones (Schmidt Wilkes 2000 ohms). By disguising the usual spark characteristics, I worked my own station in Oakland which was operated by a friend when we were north of San Francisco, and again near Eureka.

We had the usual rough crossing of the bar on its return trip and bumped the bottom. The only casualties were a few broken dishes and shifting of the transmitting rack of Leyden Jars which were NOT screwed down. After a few days in San Francisco the Spokane sailed (dead head) to Seattle to enter the summer cruise, Inside Passage to Skagway and way points, "Totem Pole Route to Alaska."

Of course, at that time (1911) I was the only operator. Sat at the head of its wireless table and went ashore at every port as a tourist! Watched many of these green people buy "Curios" from the "Natives," not knowing that they were brought from Seattle by the S.S. Spokane, HI! The only excitement on the first trip was the fact that we went through Seymour Narrows at 20+ knots, which was something remembering our ship could barely make 13 knots! While in Seattle I went to Bremerton Navy Yard and took an examination and received a "Certificate of Proficiency," which I still have. "Knows all systems and is proficient in International Morse and American Morse codes," it said. Dated June 1911. Much later I got a first grade commercial license in San Francisco in December 1920.

On the second trip I decided to stay up and see how it felt to go through Seymour Narrows at 20+ knots. As we approached the Narrows some ten or more minutes after the

change of the tide¹ the Skipper, Guptil, decided to chance it and go through anyway. The men in the boiler room were "HAULING ASHES" which further reduced speed and power! I was on deck outside the shack and saw the ship turn to the right around the whirlpool (Ripple Rock) and head for the vertical rock cliffs. When the skipper sounded full speed astern I knew something was wrong!

We hit a glancing blow on the right side of the bow. I thought the masts and stack would break, and ran forward on the right side and asked the Skipper what to do. He said "DO NOT send SOS. Salvage, you know... Has the City of Tacoma (not sure if this was the name) left Seattle?"² I said I heard him report leaving at 9PM and mentioned that I heard the S.S. Admiral Sampson, which was north of Seymour Narrows, report that he expected to pass through the Narrows tomorrow morning at 8:30. He said, "Return to the wireless shack and wait for me."

We backed off the vertical cliffs with a large hole through bottoms and double bottoms. Ran at 20+ knots through the Narrows and beached the Spokane in Plummers Bay (British Columbia) at the Queen Charlotte Sound end of the Narrows. After we beached the ship and unloaded 100 passengers and 100 crew in lifeboats and rafts to the small beach between the water and the vertical cliffs, Guptil came to the wireless shack and asked me to send his report to the Pacific Steamship Company in Seattle. Just then the ship rolled 60 degrees to the right and the lights went out. He said, "Run boy! Follow me." We ran the length of the ship and clambered through the wheelhouse to the high side. All of the passengers except for two old ladies made it. In spite of all the bad behavior of the crew, which jammed lifeboat davits and spilled lifeboats, all except the two old ladies made it. They died of heart attacks! I went ashore with the skipper and others. The tide was coming in and the beach was vanishing (25-foot tide) so the passengers and crew were moved again to high ground about half a mile away.

A couple of funny things happened. The Purser who had been in 16 wrecks in SE Alaska decided to sleep on the ground with his feet near the warm fire. When he got up to answer a

¹ According to SoWP member Art Starck (1155-V), Seymour Narrows was notorious for its rip tides. "Advice in the Sailing Orders recommended that passage through the Narrows should not be attempted except for a period of two hours either side of slack water." ("Memoirs of a Veteran," *Sparks*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 61)

² By maritime law, parties coming to the rescue of a ship in distress were entitled to "salvage rights", a monetary award based on the value of what they had saved, thus costing the shipping company plenty, and certainly the Captain his job (if he hadn't lost it already per footnote 1).

stuffy Professor from Yale he had a bad case of hot foot. The Professor asked in a condescending tone, "What are we going to have for breakfast, and when?" The Purser gave him hardtack and said, "THIS is your breakfast, and NOW!"

The skipper posted a lifeboat and crew up channel and the S.S. Admiral Sampson arrived ahead of schedule at 8:05 AM. The loading operation took place in an orderly fashion. Nearly everyone got aboard without even getting their feet wet. We had a comfortable trip and good food on the way to Seattle.

Mr. C.B. Cooper (United Wireless) sent me back to San Francisco on the S.S. City of Pueblo (GQ) and Malarin assigned me to the lumber schooner S.S. Norwood (WSG) and I made a couple of trips visiting Hoquiam (Washington), San Pedro, and San Diego before returning to San Francisco for college.³

³ Lewis M. Clement (153-SGP) completed his degree in Electrical Engineering at UC and went on to a distinguished career, including engineering and operating at the Marconi wireless station at Kahuku, Hawaii and installation of the wireless equipment on the S.S. Leviathan in 1923. He was a SoWP Director and member of IEEE and the Radio Club of America. "Lew" became a Silent Key on August 22, 1979.