

Henry Joe Poy, Wireless Pioneer and Navy Radioman.

Archivist's transcription, lightly edited, and comment by

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The United States Department of
Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, licensed
Henry J. Poy as a Wireless Operator,
Commercial First Class, on March 19, 1918
(Number 6610). He was 16 years old.

Henry J. Poy, USN *circa*1923:



A US Navy photograph *circa* 1923;
the tag dates from 1919

“Hank” (Henry Joe or Jue) Poy told much of his radio story to the Society of Wireless Pioneers (SoWP), of which he was a member – SGP2351, in the 1970s. After YMCA radio school in Portland, he had shipped out on the Alaska

commercial run in 1919. After his merchant marine wireless operator experience, he joined the U.S. Navy. He served in the China theatre in the 1920s and served on the Navy's aid mission to Japan after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. After learning to operate arc transmitters in the Navy, he then went to work as a radioman for Federal Telegraph in San Francisco in the later 1920s, and Mackay Radio into the 1930s. His story follows, lightly edited from his (and others') documents submitted to the Society of Wireless Pioneers (now a program of the California Historical Radio Society: www.californiahistoricalradio.com and www.SoWP.org).

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I was R/O [the Radio Operator] on the SS *Jefferson*/ [callsign] WAJ of the ALASKA [commercial shipping] line, in 1919, only 16 at the time, and born of Cantonese parents, who were converted to Christianity in Portland, Oregon. I finished the YMCA radio school and Mr. Twogood was happy to know I was headed for Seattle to take the FCC [then Department of Commerce] examination from Insp. Wolfe which was atop the LC Smith building. I had studied "wireless" [telegraphy] very earnestly and was the first one in high school to have a crystal receiving "loose coupler" of the "rolled oats" genre that could bring navrad [Naval Radio station] NPE (100 miles away) in R-5 [clearest reception] on a Baldwin receiver [i.e., headphone].

Insp. Wolfe passed me on a grade of 85, and their office told all persons around I was the first Chinese wireless operator

(PY [probationary operator]) to ship out from Seattle. With a telegraph First [Class license] in my pocket, and heart full of thankfulness, I left the FCC office and reported to the SORS [Ship Owners Radio Service] at dockside. To my surprise, they wanted me and they didn't want me. Looking questionably and surprised at me, they put me through a strict question and answer test. My work qualifications were being challenged. I wrenched the documents from the inside coat pocket and the YMCA wireless diploma. Both were legally signed by authorized agents of the U.S. government and the YMCA authorities. Confronted with these documents was enough to belay their efforts to further questionability. In high school I carried five subjects which included Latin and math. I proceeded to a two-hour class in Cantonese at a Chinese mission school. Clarence and Bill, my two brothers, followed the same routine each day. One eventually became a mining engineer from Golden, Colorado, and Bill became an M.D. from Northwestern.



[This logo appears in the story as posted in the SoWP publication of Poy's documents]

The SORS (Ship Owners Radio Service) had a large vacancy list for the rest of the traveling season to Alaska. Their need was great. How could they turn me down? Peace between

the two World War belligerents was not signed as yet, and many former ships' operators were not discharged from the armed services. Then, the normal pay was very seldom over ninety dollars [a month]. I was very anxious to get assigned to my first career job as a wireless operator. So I told SORS in rebuff. I was getting "hot under the collar."

"I can speak Cantonese and become the steamship's Chinese interpreter. The SS *Jefferson*, the SS *Alaska*, the SS *Yukon*, the SS *Mariposa*, they all carry two to three hundred Chinese cannery workers to and from Alaska salmon packing plants." It was something going for me, even though there was no need for an interpreter. However, it was just an impromptu remark. My only amateurish attempt at translating was at an American-learning class for Chinese immigrants at the mission school in Portland where father was a layman-superintendent.

"Is this your right age, 16?" he asked. "Yes, I will be 17 in October." I added, "I have lived and worked the Alaska salmon canneries for three of my summer years. My father's cousin, Mr. Lock, was cannery foreman for Alaska packers. Sitka, Taku and Bristol Bay canneries are not new to me. I am husky at 140 pounds and used to do the 48-pound cases by piling them "eight high." I was fighting for my legal rights and felt that I was being unreasonably questioned. This SORS man probably possessed a bit of superiority complex, knowing I was of Chinese heritage. He apparently wasn't going to assign me to an official sea-going ship of the U.S. maritime company. "If you are hesitant in signing me, I will report back to the FCC. They will give me a letter of recommendation to the United States

Shipping Board (USSB) to an assignment on newly constructed ships of the Standifer Shipbuilding Company.” At the “Y” school, the bulletin board was pasted with notices of vacancies for “ops” to take the new ships on trial trips down the coast. They paid \$135 per month, room and board plus wireless uniform. They’re rock ’n’ roll trips.

Well, after much hemming and hawing, they assigned me as 2nd operator aboard the SORS (Kilbourne & Clarke [equipped]) passenger ship, the SS *Jefferson* leaving Puget Sound for Southeastern Alaska via Juneau and many cannery ports. As I predicted, the ship provided first class passage for 100 passengers and 200 steerage passengers.

The crimp-looking wireless room [was] not much over a crib-size stall. The one-half kilowatt quenched-spark transmitter with its loose-inductance coils and the ancient carborundum crystal sliding tuner was crammed against the forward bulkhead. The senior operator, whose name I’ve forgotten, was a crispy old “vet” of unknown repute. Much older than myself . . . had a slight slump on his back . . . red pimply face . . . and carried a domineering visage. WAJ was my “beginner’s” job, and my position was not promising. The only words the man would say: “Take over the watch, China boy.” I began fidgeting with the delicate “catwhisker” [wire probe] . . . and loudly came the [Canadian coastal radio] station “VAE” . . . the sending operator had a “Mary Pickford” swing. Our ship was rounding Juan de Fuca Straits. My associate frightened me much. He was a man of the WORLD. I was just a kid.

Undeniably, as a “Y” wireless operator, I was a greenhorn amateur on my first commercial adventure. Twisting the big tuner knob, a loud but mushy signal came down the flat-top antenna via the copper lead-in to my loose-coupler. I was a bit confused from the heavy static but full of anxiety. Jiggling the “catwhisker” to a more sensitive spot on the galena crystal, I grabbed a pencil and nervously translated this “mushy” signal. Lo and behold! I never heard such a hairy note. WAJ WAJ de WAW WAW WAW QRK? ar . . . The *Admiral Watson* calling the *Jefferson*! Believe it or not . . . the “China boy’s” first official call.

But suddenly, the signals stopped abruptly. The static disappeared. The ship's stern was jumping and leaping with each turn of the props. Each bump was like riding the railroad ties. I threw the main switch to activate the M.G. [motor generator] which was quite noisy. The quenched spark gap was even more disturbing, but like all 60 cycle rigs, it had to heat up a bit. Whew! I saw liquid leaking from the rim of the quench gap. The hi-frequency was arcing all over the place. I depressed the key thinking the dampness would disappear. My hands were all tied up . . . between the ugly catwhisker and the damping gap, I was all butterfingers. The ship's prop slowed a bit . . . the call from the *Watson* came in louder than ever. I found a good spot on the crystal, so I managed to answer feebly. WAW WAW de WAJ ga K . . . The 600 meter [signal] was loud and clear. After all, he was on his way to Alaska so he was not too far distant. He quoted his name: “Theron Bean, 2nd opr here ... who you?” Of all things, it was my old buddy at the YMCA Portland. He was a Jefferson High student and now officially established wireless

operator on the *Watson*. What a joy it was! “This is Hank Poy of Washington High. Headed for Skagway, Alaska.” The reason for the “mushy” signal . . . the WAW had a mercury rectifier transmitter aboard. Our direct QSO [radio communication] was a thrill, both of us being out at sea. I was very proud of my accomplishment. I gaped at the black and white “spark” insignia on my shoulder with distinguished pride. The “China-boy operator” slantingly smiled with glee.

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I should have mentioned before that my father’s family lived in a KwangTung village [in Western Guangdong, China] and came over on a three-masted schooner from Hong Kong. It took the barkentine three months to cross the Pacific. He knew no words in English, but was armed only in youthful courage and a strong body with willingness to work.

Jue Poy, my beloved father, a Presbyterian layman, was of the ancient order of Toishan’s village hierarchy. He was many times addressed as Reverend Poy. He preached very often from the mission pulpit in his “Sze-Yup” [Taishanese] dialect, which was difficult to render as educational to the younger aspirants. Only the elders were his peers.

After a stint working on the Pacific railroads, he became a true Christian through his friendship with the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Holt of the Presbytery in Portland. With hope and a great determination, he was made and assigned as head chef of a large boarding hostelry with 8 or 9 Chinese aides. He married my beautiful mother, who was trained in Christian living and a devout member of the mission.

I really don't know how they did it. Father was 55 when I went to Washington High. I was 13 after graduation from Stevens School, and third oldest in a family of seven kids. Father was making \$150 per month in 1917, bought himself a seven-room house on a lot 50 x 100. He had no days off. His only transportation from home on the east side of the Willamette River to his job was by no coaster-brake bicycle with wooden rims and solid rubber tires. For night riding, he had to light up a carbide lamp. The streets were rough and unpaved. In the early years before the 1911 revolution in China, he sported a long pigtail with a silken skull cap with a red button. His only English utterance during his teen-age was: "*Hoh-la-mah?* Come-look-see-me," etc. After ten years of mission school, he then escalated to: "How are you, sir, and do come and visit me sometime" with a sparkle in his eyes. Mrs. Murphy, his boss and owner of the boarding house was proud of her chef.

Everything that a 16-year old high school boy wanted or wished he could do, Mother would always nearly agree [to] but at the end, she would say, "Ask your father." I had a Portland paper route on the east side which brought in a measly stipend. It was enough for carfare to and from Cantonese school and a weekly band practice on Stark Street's Chinese Chamber of Commerce building. We had a Chinese student band of 35 pieces called the New Era band. Mr. Herman Lowe, the Chinese immigration interpreter was the owner and manager. He was wonderful and always successful in booking New Era in the yearly Rose Carnival parades. We wore a dressy blue uniform and caps. The boys struck up a rhythmic tune and marched proudly down Broadway under "Stars & Stripes": The first Chinese band of 35 pieces ever to gallantly play before tens of

thousands of applauding spectators. We brought great respect to the Chinese people of the city.

I was to receive with honor a diploma from the “Y” radio school and business college. At the end I was able to receive and copy the Continental Morse code on a typewriter at 20 words per minute. I also was accomplished at “touch typing” at 50 w.p.m. This touch typing put me in good standing with Federal Telegraph Company of San Francisco when visual tape telegraphy became standard procedure in 1927. HB/SF is still the office call for [Federal]/ Mackay/ ITT’s office on Mission Street. “Fifteen words for the price of ten” was Mackay’s gimmick that brought the company to national prominence. West coast officials were A. V. Tuel, Capt. E. H. Dodd, H. L. Rodman, E. V. Baldwin and J. T. Chatterton.

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Hank Poy joined the U.S. Navy after World War One, and served in the Pacific in the Asiatic Fleet. He wrote up, for the Society of Wireless Pioneers (SoWP), much after the events, the story of his involvement in the relief efforts after the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, and later events. Japan in World War One had been a United States ally. About the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, he later summarized:

Approximately 60 seconds before noon (on Saturday) September 1, 1923, came the greatest shock of a gigantic earthquake which destroyed the densely populated areas of Tokyo, Yokohama, Yokosuka and Odawara. The tremor of great

magnitude hardly left a building undamaged. The noonday shock was followed by a long chain of aftershocks and potent seismic waves which destroyed great portions of the city of Katakura. The serious aftershocks caused gigantic conflagrations which broke out in many areas. The underground water pipes were ruined by the tremor [which] made it impossible to check the spread of the conflagration. Many thousands of refugees took to the underground shopping centers, only to lose their lives when the flames swept through from three sides. The combined losses from earthquake and fire were estimated at 140,000 human lives and 100,000 injured and wounded. There were 40,000 people missing. Many could not be identified. The loss in property was from 4 to 5 billion yen.

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Radioman Poy wrote up longer story about his work before and during the earthquake's aftermath, which follows (SoWP LR 2712211807001; Henry Poy Memoirs.) He starts his history with pre-earthquake life in Dairen, Manchuria, China.

(1) Sociable city of Dairen — S. Manchuria.

The menfolks still sported a long braided queue down their backs while the Manchurian women waddled around in awkward looking shoes. Their feet were bound tight with texturized tape fabric when they were just babies. It had been in vogue for centuries. It was fashionable to be bound, and for those who left their feet unbound were considered from a mediocre class family.

The ships of the U.S. Asiatic fleet were disbanding after weeks of battle maneuvers and target practice. The flagship *Huron*, which I was on, dropped its anchor off the coast of South Manchuria near the seaport of Dairen (*Lu-ta*). The city of Dairen was under Japanese control. In 1923, the sea port was quite a thriving terminal for the Manchurian Transcontinental Railway. The population was over one million, composed mostly of Manchus, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Russians. The people were aggressive and dedicated to their civil government. They were proud of their beautiful tree-line streets, their efficient city transportation and its efficient public utilities. There were not many busses in 1923, but the efficiently manned tramways ran down the main business center to the train depot and then circled around to return up town like the cars did on "Market St." in San Francisco.

Shady trees still green with large leaves in late August brought fond memories of the states of Oregon and Washington, the evergreen country of the "great Northwest." I was touring the town, transferring from rickshaws to horse drawn buggies, called Russian "Droshky." They were light and open, four-wheeled carriages. The driver sat high in front with a commanding view. The rear passenger seats were shining white cushioned seats. It brought back sweet memories of our childhood days of 1911-12 in Portland Oregon. The craze in private transportation amongst the more affluent society was four-wheeled buggies with fringes on top.

Sometimes I would get off riding the Droshky and took to 'legging' it in the commercial area. Most of the shops and stores

were elegantly displayed with superabundance of merchandise.

It had a touch of modern Japanese “Know-how.” They kept the sidewalks and streets very clean, always ready to sweep and wash down each business night. Large signs and posters were advertised in Japanese, Chinese and Pidgin-English. Their English ads brought a little laughter to the foreigner: passing a mediocre massage-salon — “Will rub up and down till you fall to nice dreams”; passing a corner apothecary — “Clap today, gone tomorrow - try the nice herbs”; passing a Geisha tea-parlor — “Have delicious teas and girls for sale.”

Notwithstanding the ‘fanciful’ English — in the famous “Yoshiwara” districts where the Japanese geisha girls reign supreme, there were large elaborate tea pavilions with colorful and attractive entrance halls. The legend says when the Japanese military took over as potentate of South Manchuria, the ‘sensuous’ Gen. Satoh under his command would tolerate only the [most] graceful of the grace[ful] ‘geishas’ in his area. No[thing] was too good for his officers and men. Japanese from the most affluent society in Dairen came for a night’s entertainment. They were dressed in the finest of garb — silk and satin gowns with large obis [sashes] of colorful designs. Beautiful Japanese women escorted by the affluent business men [were] wearing the native wooden shoes. Like native Japan — the ladies carrying colorful silk ivory fans — gracefully kow-towing deeply to the senior-age folks with the greatest of respect. Their deep-seated traditions and customs kept the foreign society aloof from this sphere of relationship.

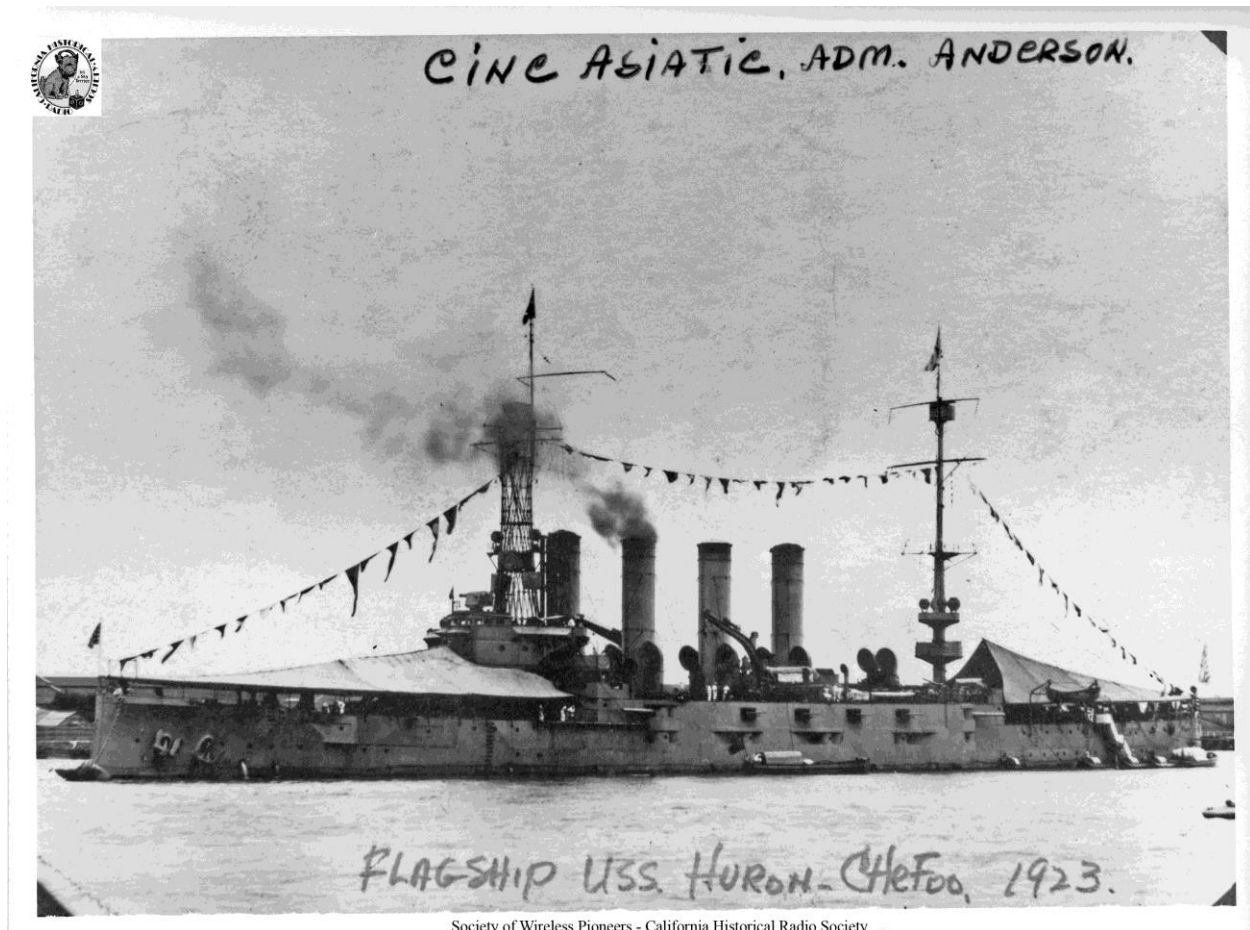
The large settlement of “White” Russians remained away in their own exclusive coterie. The tall Russian ‘bourgeois’ whirling his ivory-carved cane majestically escorting his blond ‘russky’ girl gracefully alit from a sleek black Russian ‘droshky’ with two shining black steeds. Uniformed doormen came out from fashionable ‘Cossack’ lounges to escort the handsome couple to the door. It was twilight and the colorful neon lights were switched on for the evening customers. Inside, the Russian ‘combo’ was filling the air with tunes from Moskva. Already the majestically set tables in the orchestra area were fully occupied, and the Russian belly dancers had received their cue to enter the arena. The Russian pom-pom drums and girls with their noisy castanets were beating away.

Meanwhile, the gay crowd was busy lifting their right elbows, and tightly clenching and waving their sparkling glass[es] of rich wine and champagne. A form of toasting was at hand. Chinese generally use the term “Kam-bay”; the “Yanks” as we were called, used “bottoms-up”; but why didn’t the Russians use their own term of “Ka-watz”? They repeatedly toasted the Skandinavian term of “Skoal”; skoal! These former Russian citizens escaped across the Russian border during the revolution as refugees ... to find solace and comfort [in] Manchuria’s Harbin, Kalgan, Charhar, Dairen and Chinese seaports to the south.

(2) The Earthquake alert of 1923.

An alarming news broadcast from Japan was received in the ship’s wireless room.

On Sept 1 1923 the USS *Huron*, flagship of the Asiatic fleet was anchored in the harbor off the port city of Dairen, south Manchuria.



Society of Wireless Pioneers - California Historical Radio Society

U.S.S. *Huron*, China, 1923;
photograph from and annotated by Henry Poy

The Japanese wireless stations JOS, JOR and JOU were sending out urgent calls to their naval squadrons and their commercial ships at sea to return immediately to Japan or the

nearest port to assist in a national emergency. Yokohama and Tokyo and suburban cities and towns [had been] jarred by a major earthquake with entire towns afire and many thousands feared dead was the gist of the disastrous news. The dots and dashes emitted from Tokyo were in the Japanese Kana code. Unfortunately, the USS *Huron*'s only radio operator who was an expert in receiving Kana was ashore on liberty. For us who remained aboard, we were able to detect the immediate urgency of the broadcast when a CQ CQ came through the 600 meter band reporting the heavy damage and fire caused by the earthquake.

These later communiques were transmitted in English from a foreign ship operator who was able to intercept and translate the nature of its emergency in the Morse code. It was also intercepted by radio amateurs on the ham bands. In response to the emergency call, all the ships of all nationalities in the vicinity of Japan changed their course 180 degrees and with all boilers steaming full blast headed towards Yokohama, Tokyo, Kobe, Nagoya and Osaka. The ether in and around Japan was all agog with dots and dashes. Interceptions of flash messages from American President Lines ships and code messages from Canadian Steamship liners indicated they also had received the call for help in a national emergency. They all turned back and headed in a ships' race to help out.

It wasn't long that urgent communiques from the U.S. Government and the defense department were broadcast across the high-powered 500 KW transmitters of NSS/ NPG/ NPM/ NPO/ NPN in a chain relay to all ships and stations of the

Pacific and Asiatic fleet. The American Admiral aboard the USS *Huron* was designated the senior foreign naval officer afloat. He was to proceed full steam to arrive in Yokohama bay as soon as possible with food and provisions of tents and all the medical aid that could be fostered. Seven destroyers of the US Naval 38th division were abruptly interrupted in their maneuvers and target practice to speed at 35 knots to Japan to render all the human aid possible. The Navy's great supply ship the USS *Blackhawk* was ordered to load up at Chafoo, Shantung province with millions of dollars in emergency supplies for immediate dispatch to the flaming cities of Japan.

Here on board the flagship *Huron*, the news was flashed to everyone aboard to prepare all hands to unfailingly support this great mission of mercy, and to make great sacrifices of food, blankets and provisions necessary to sustain human life. We loaded up with bituminous coal in the big holds to overflowing even unto the compartments of our sleeping quarters into the hammock bins. Canned goods and frozen meats were stored to the fullest capacity. Straw mats and reed baskets were a part of the supplies.

In Dairen, our shore patrol was heavily augmented by additional men carrying bull horns up and down the area announcing the recall of all navy men to return to their ships immediately. Their shore liberty was abruptly terminated. It didn't take very long to muster them. The call for aid was being answered. We all were dedicated to this great mission of mercy. The ship's crew of 75 men in the engine room, usually called the "Black gang" consisted of the chief engineer and his assistants:

such as enginemen, machinist-mates, firemen stokers who fed coal to the hot burners. To keep 18 boilers steamed up at full blast required an additional 25 stokers. The order from the chief of staff was to keep the 18,000 ton armored-cruiser running at top speed of 20 knots. A call for volunteers from all branches of the ship's crew was issued through the loud speaker system. The shifts would be on a basis of 4 hrs on and 4 hours off until arrival in Yokohama bay. A great response came from those who were off duty hours [who] volunteered. Men from the wireless gang; hospital apprentices, strikers for yeoman and storekeepers; seamen and coxswains from the deck gang; all answered the call for needed coal shovelers and fire-stokers. It was a dirty and dusty job below decks. The temperature in the boiler room was 102-107 degrees Fahrenheit. Non-firemen not acclimated to the intense heat would pass out from exhaustion. However, we all volunteered to help stoke the fires and man the shovels in the engine room. We all prayed for strength and endurance.

(3) Batten-down the hatches — anchors aweigh

With all hands present and accounted for, the famous USS *Huron*, a four-stacker of World-War-I vintage with all 18 boilers at full blast and the high-powered (30 KW) radio arc transmitter pounding at high speed, finally aweighed anchors. Never in the history of the ship's legend had its engine power ever reached its top peak as on this mission of mercy to a beleaguered nation. As we pulled out of the Yellow Sea port — the ship's compass duly read 40 degrees a hard west into a heavy wind and churning sea. Reports received by radio and weather stations read gale

warnings over 40 knots from a south-westerly direction — and possibly reaching typhoon intensity in 24 hours. Came the blast from the ships loudspeaker: “Prepare for the worst! Tighten all hatches, secure all ports, roll up all tarps fore-n-aft, and shore-up all the coal on the decks.” We were in for a rough voyage, the ships turbines [relentlessly] driving thousands of horsepower on to the propellers. A heavily loaded armored-cruiser with 4 smoke stacks with steel-netted conning towers and 8 armored parapets of 8 inch guns would have been able to ride through the storm. The “EYE” of the Typhoon was located at a point 150 miles S.S.E. off the coast of southern Honoshu Islands, traveling at a slow speed westerly at 15 MPH. Storms of this nature were known to suddenly change course. We were ready for the wors[t].

There were no coffee-breaks or rest periods. Those found loafing were immediately asked to shuttle black coal across the deck to coal apertures and shoots to the hot engine room. The storm was blowing the loose coal dust — and soon the entire ship was blackened. The white-skinned sailors took on a dark-pigmented color. The white hammocks usually stowed in their respective lofts were layered with coal dust.

Never did the *Huron* (which [had been] called the *South Dakota*) ever emit such a trail of dark black smoke from its four stacks. Every so often, the engine room was given the order to use their blowers, which would cause the smokestacks to emit the black soot that was accumulated in the exhaust system. It was the size of snowflakes only turned dark, and [it would] float in the atmosphere and stick to your skin, like a spotted leopard.

It wasn't but a few hours at sea, the medics carrying portable oxygen equipment and bottles of ammonia, [who] were followed by a corps of stretcher bearers. They ventured into the hot engine room to resuscitate the victims of heat-stroke. The redhot furnace was opened for a periodic stoking, and with the furnace door wide open — the heat from the red burning coals shot out as from a gun turret, knocking out the stokers at hourly intervals.

On time off from radio watches, I volunteered to shovel coal from our compartment-blackened sections to coal shoots below. It was hard enough for us who were not inured to hard work. We sweated during the sultry weather under cloudy skies. The loss of salt from our bodies often caused exhaustion, which tended to make one vomit and suffer dizzy spells. We were given [a] teaspoonful of salt in fresh water from the scuttlebutt. Those who suffered seriously were made to lie down with the head low and clothing loosened. What a relief it was for the overheated stoker to emerge into the fresh cool air! Instant resuscitation!

Way across the ocean to San Francisco, our busy staff of wireless operators was rapidly burning up the air with their dot-dash method of sending news to both Navy and commercial communication companies, namely, Mackay Radio station KFS. The SF Navy station was NPG. Like the ship's engine room, the carbon arc chamber of the high power wireless transmitter was running continuously hot. It was seldom shut down during this emergency, and then only shortly for a period of long distance

reception.

The insulation of the very high frequency coils was a thin coat of rubber. Just before the operator ignited the arc chamber with pink alcohol, he would always check to see if the big antenna switches were thrown to the right and also check to see if there were any of the ship's mascots, Pago, the southsea Monkey or the 3 year old cat, Pinky were snoozing on the warm insulated coils, which were just inside of a large port-hole. Over anxiousness to get the emergency dispatches to the States, the operator forgot to look and check — The high power switches were thrown to the right and the alcohol was added to the chamber to create the high arc voltages and the high frequencies, when a big animal-sounding whoosh — the only sight noticeable was a frightened hairy monkey leaping through the open porthole into the stormy sea. The first tragedy of our errand of mercy.

(4) Fire on the Radio Antenna — Sept. 3, 1923

On September 3rd, the heavy seas became violent — churned up a strong typhoon traveling northward from the southeast tip of beleaguered Japan. Tokyo and Yokohama were being wracked up by a severe earthquake of over 7.0 on the Richter scale.

The sleek-looking armored cruiser *Huron*, the flagship of the senior naval officer of the Asiatic fleet, was truly exhibiting

its seaworthiness and stamina far beyond the call of duty. Against a formidable storm, the mighty cruiser rose to the occasion. The powerful engines having released every important cubic foot of steam power into each and every piston, [this] caused the undaunted cruiser to shudder and *shimmy* at the powerful onslaught of towering waves. Manufacturer's maximum speed capacity on smooth seas was 22 knots, but today, the *Huron* broke its own record by bravely maintaining a speed of 25 knots in a swollen sea. The ship writhed and tossed; sometimes it dove like a jack-rabbit into a high crest which brought the towering seas over the wing of the bridge deck. From abaft, simultaneously the ship's stern would lift high above the waterline, causing the gigantic power relayed to the propellers to spin freely above water. It emulated the 4-stacked destroyers of the 4th division in high seas. But their tonnage was minimal (1800 tons) compared to the *Huron's* 20,000 gross tonnage.

The typhoon-bred antics of the *Huron* shook and tossed the wooden yard-arms and the fragile cage-like antennas. Thirty kilowatts of high frequency current was being transmitted into the ship's antenna each time the wireless operator depressed the Morse-like hand key. Urgent communications had to be established with both land and sea stations in this, a humane call in time of national disaster.

Looking up at a loosened guy wire which broke from the wooden yard-arm, I saw gigantic high voltage sparks grounding to a metal guy, which would have been fatal if touched by human hands. Each lurch and pounding of the ship brought on a

flash of electric charges leaping across the live cage antenna the loosened guy 100 ft above deck. A moment before I was able to reach the ships radio center, the wooden arm was on fire. The ships power antenna could very well unloosen itself from the insulated fastenings to the spar and the ships towering mast.

Having wended my way through the ship's passageways, it seemed like it took an hour before I reached radio center. The wireless operator on duty was Mac, the oldest sailor (in time served in the Asiatics) of the radio gang. He was *pounding* the brass both energetically and very professionally, trying to reach the west coast of the USA. I found him squatted on a swivel chair with both of his long legs crossed under his buttocks. It did not deter his efforts to exercise his proficiency as a radio operator. With tight cushioned ear phones strapped to his head and confined to a narrow receiving booth, he failed to hear my warning.

"The radio yard-arm's on fire!" He kept pounding away. I ran quickly to the arc room to pull the main switch to the transmitter where the relays were activated. The powerful motor generators ceased to operate and the arc chamber deactivated and the alcohol valve turned off. Mac mustered up the entire radio gang. He was aware of what happened after he had been deprived of key control. "All hands report to the boat deck, the radio yard-arm is afire," he bellowed to his aides. Yes, it was now a roaring fire, 100 ft up on the mast. The fat bo'suns mate ran to the iron cleats and began lowering the flaming mast pieces to the deck below. "Is the radio antenna deactivated? I don't want to risk myself on a high-voltage wire, ya' know," the

mate called out. “Yeah, I decommissioned the radio room, lower it away,” I replied and gestured. The gale was blowing a storm near 60 miles an hour. I had to admire ‘ole Mac’, who had the situation well under control. He ordered his strikers to fetch an emergency antenna from the store room. It was to be a tremendous task to have to replace a high antenna during a whirling gale and violent swells, which washed over the bridge deck. The hustling work crew bared their bodies down to their ‘skivvies.’ They were reluctantly getting a briny sea bath.

Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic fleet, Admiral Anderson, was temporarily deprived of communication facilities, and the *Huron* was weathering a typhoon at sea. Blow me down, I thought wildly. What would all the contacting ships and naval stations on land think? All of a sudden they lost all radio contact with the Admiral and his flagship. They could dream up any unforeseen incident that might befall the USS *Huron* in storm areas. Down below at radio center, with all the powerful receiving speakers turned on, I could hear numerous stations calling us: “A6W, A6W, are you ZAN ZAN, what, seems to be wrong?” We already had been out of radio control for 60 minutes. We just couldn’t answer. [“ZAN” means “no signals”].

(5) FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

The good ship USS *Huron* arrived in Tokyo bay after a technical delay of ten hours or more. Rumors had it that the Koreans who had been reluctant subordinates to the Japanese

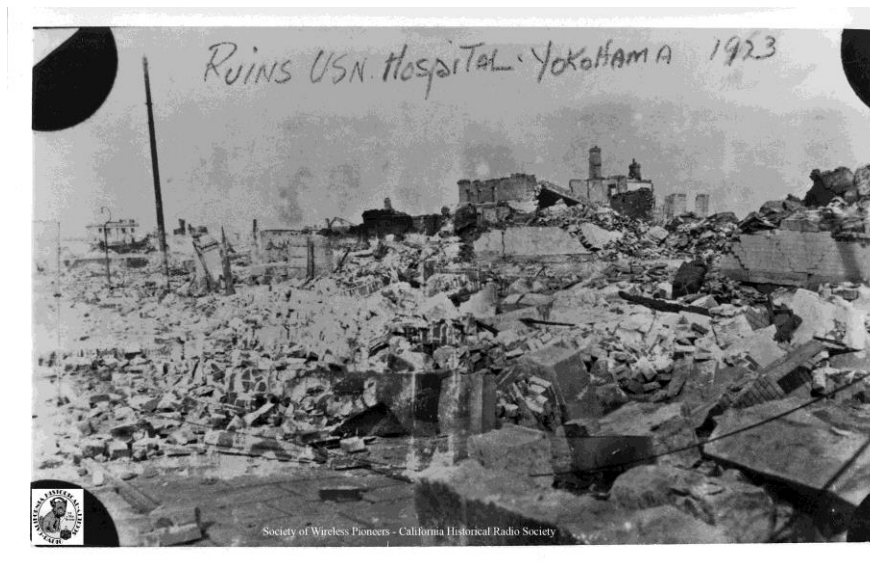
rulers were fomenting riots and enhancing the conflagration. In the Tokyo - Yokohama area, there lived over 100,000 Koreans and 44,000 Chinese. The prevailing rumors caused the central authorities to enact martial law and hold all foreign and alien personnel for investigation. Many innocent people fell under the popular fury caused by the unverified reports. The U.S. Navy was a bit flabbergasted by the continued reluctance of the port authorities to permit American vessels to enter Tokyo bay for aiding in rescue operations.¹ The *Huron* had amply loaded at Chefoo large supplies of meats and food provisions for the needy refugees. The *Stewart*, a 4-stacker destroyer, was dispatched at top speed to Yokohama to report conditions in advance, only to be denied entrance to Tokyo bay. The USS *Borie* was quickly dispatched Nagasaki to pick up medical supplies for the thousands of wounded. The USS *Rizal*, another 4-stacker, was kept on the alert at Dairen, and acted as an important radio relay communication ship for C-in-C Asiatic. The gigantic US Navy supply ship USS *Blackhawk* was quickly dispatched to the port of Tsingtao for immediate supplies. The remaining destroyers of the 38th division, accompanied by the commander of destroyer squadrons Asiatic (COMDESRONS), were also dispatched to aid the needy Yokohama city. Destroyer divisions forty three and forty five were in ChinWangtao under preparations for an immediate emergency call.

After the entrance delay, the *Huron* proceeded to anchor a few thousand yards off from the breakwater that disappeared under the surface during the first and subsequent shocks. We

¹ Archivist's Note: See the end notes for a Japanese analysis of the situation.

arrived to experience a long chain of after-shocks. It caused mini-tidal actions in the bay. Many of those structures on the hill-side of Yokohama that were weakened structurally by the original shocks, finally came tumbling down and crashed on to the rocky coastline. It was quite visible from the decks of the anchored ships. Then came across the P.A. system the Admiral's directives: "Hear Ye, all those aboard having two woolen blankets, prepare to donate one for humanitarian need ashore. Also to tighten your belts. All fresh meats and vegetables are to be distributed to the needy to prevent starvation. You will subsist on canned and frozen foods until further notice." Obviously, there were no dissidents. For several weeks diet, it was 'beef skin and cream,' and 'pork and beans' with black coffee.

A select volunteer group was chosen to lead a [Chaplin's] search party ashore. The report was [that] the modern facilities of the U.S. Naval hospital on the hillside had burnt to the ground.



It was indeed an unpleasant task. The stench from burning bodies penetrated the whole area. With the aid of some of the fortunate survivors of the hospital, we were lucky to have been able to identify some charred bodies by identifying rings, watches and personal jewelry. The charred corpses were officially tagged.



Photographs from Henry Poy; it is his writing on them.

Then came the kerosene gang to finish off the open-door cremation. The remaining ashes [were] stored in lead boxes which were labelled and sent back to the States over both American and Canadian liners.

Our search patrol was equipped with white face masks. Death, besides its sting, carried a penetrating stench of burnt and unburnt corpses of over 140,000 victims. I crossed a burnt-out

bridge and from a steel strut was suspended a partial burnt out body of a female. She was just barely hanging by the support of a few strands of her hair. To the left or the right, no matter which direction one turned, was the sad plight of thousands of refugees begging for food or medical attention. Death to some was the easy way out.

(6) SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSION — SEPT 1923.

The outside world had realized the magnitude of the catastrophe and wholeheartedly gave instant response and sympathy to a stunned Japan. The ship's personnel besides donating their fresh provisions had already surrendered half of their woolen blankets. The U.S. Asiatic fleet formally presented \$5 million dollars in supplies, while the American Red Cross made a similar contribution, besides quantities of medical supplies. The foreign ships in the Japanese harbors offered their kind services by taking care of refugees and supplying first aid to many sufferers. The great sympathy manifested by the United States in this hour of suffering and the superb service rendered by the American Ambassador Cyrus Woods, are the wonderful memories that no Japanese would [be] likely to ever forget. Even to this very day, discounting the man-made tragedy of the atomic disaster at Hiroshima, it's seemingly unbelievable that in so brief a space of time without warning that a densely populated city of Japan could be swept out of existence in 60 seconds.

We were informed while on a search and rescue mission that day of after-shocks, [that] multitudes of refugees had [sought] temporary haven under the roof of a gigantic cement warehouse, when there was an instant tremor causing the building to collapse killing thousands of people.

The cities in the area had hardly cooled off before reconstruction plans were already instigated by the Mayor of Tokyo. The Reconstruction board hired an American, Dr. Chas. Beard, formerly a New York City municipal researcher to make a general survey of the city. Private persons were also anxious to rebuild their homes and businesses as speedily as possible. It wasn't long that the banks had weathered the financial crisis after nine months, and the progress was near phenomenal. Schools and parks, homes and businesses began rapidly to emerge from the ashes of Sept. 1st, 1923.

American ships, both commercial and U.S. shipping board vessels, plus an armada of warships from the U.S. Asiatic fleet had gracefully remained until they themselves were suffering near depletion of fuel oil and supplies. The huge Japanese harbor hosted the greatest number of vessels of all flags at any one time. It was a symbol of international hope and sympathy for a devastated nation. The multitudes of ships of various sizes and nationalities were so closely anchored that one could almost traverse the length of the bay by foot from ship to ship. One glorious scene still imbedded in the deep inner sanctum of my memory was the greatest display of electrical brilliance when the thousands of magnificent ships switched on their warm and friendly lights to illuminate the grandest floating city of

“HOPE.” It was a symbol and expression of deep heart-felt sympathy to a sister nation from the other nations on the globe.

The *Huron*, a great ship of mercy, was weighing its mud-clogged anchor in the cool of the evening. She saved many lives and gracefully fed many mouths. The ones on the beach stood silently with tearful eyes and thankful hearts. The survivors of stout heart will remain to rebuild a greater metropolis of the future.

The *Huron*'s stalwarts stood emotionally at 'attention' as the graceful cruiser turned 180 degrees. They departed with heavy-hearts and deep condolence for [the Japanese's lost] loved ones. As the ship smoothly faced the high Yokohama hills towards the bay entrance, and the door to the open seas, there was pervading the silence at an auspicious time — the music of “Auld lang syne.” Oh! What a beautiful evening, with the NIPPON sun setting in the western hills as a “SAYONARA” to my shipmates of the *Huron*. The “ORIENTAL SUN” will be rising brighter for NIPPON, in the rosier days ahead.

The Commander-in-Chief Admiral Anderson was proudly acclaimed for the heroic services rendered by the American Navy. The *Huron* had other errands to complete. The ship was way behind schedule. Much had to be done to get caught up. The ship's crew was ready to clean and scrub the dirty ship. Decks needed 'holy-stoning' and the guns and armor needed polishing.

As the ship picked up speed through the mouth of the bay, we passed numbers of harbor revetments [protective walls] and military redans [angled walls], which seem to have been constructed as underwater fortifications.

The *Huron* on smooth seas, charted a course to the “Pearl of the Orient,” Shanghai China. I was originally assigned to a radio receiving center for Naval Radio Shanghai. For these many years, I’ve never found out, was this playful shipmate ribbing me — He said to me while eyeing floaters in the bay: “Dead women float up, dead men float down.”

[Dated] *U.S.S. Huron, 1923* [Signed] *Henry J. Poy, Radioman*

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(7) Poy addendum — from a letter to the Society of Wireless Pioneers in the 1970s:

I arrived in Chefoo in July 1923, stationed on the CinC’s [Commander-in-Chief] flagship USS *Huron*, which took me on a rescue mission to earthquake-shaken Tokyo Bay.

We all forfeited several weeks’ pay, a blanket each, surrendered our fresh foods and vegetables, living in austerity to help the ravaged Japanese. Admiral Anderson was senior officer afloat for the foreign fleets and donated large funds from the U.S. flotilla present.

Then I was transferred to ComYangPat [Command Yangtze Patrol; Shanghai, callsign] E6Z, in the USS *Isabel*.

Photo # NH 91408 RM1c Henry J. Poy on USS Isabel, 1923



Poy wrote on this photograph:
Radio Room E6Z Me 1923 Isabel²

² See endnotes for sources.

Rumors of large scale warfare between the powerful warlords brought *Isabel* upriver to protect Americans. I was on various landing parties. We seized illegal shipments on fast junks flying the American flag.

I spent several months in Hankow, some of it on shore patrol and trying to improve my Mandarin lingo.

When there was a vacancy in USS *Asheville*, temporary SOPATCOM [Navy South China Patrol Command] in South China, I requested a transfer by paying my own way — down the Yangtze on Jardine's [SS] *Suiwo* to Shanghai, where I located so many Chinese-American friends. While waiting for a President liner for Canton, I frivolously danced away the contents of my money belt. Evening games of *mah jong*, and performing the light fantastic at the Astor and Cathay hotels. Nothing but to search the Yangtzepoo docks for a China tramp.

The [SS] *Kwong Li* was a dirty coaster, slow boat to south China, carrying live sheep on the open deck and anthracite coal aft. My double occupancy roommate was a rich silk merchant in his sixties who constantly smoked the opium pipe. With the little steamer bouncing up and down and the odor of the opium, I was swooning away in the gray smoke, though kindly alerted by my roommate for a VIP meal of broiled salt fish and pork with steamed rice, which he consumed like a starving horse.

I ventured out on deck when the old coaster almost flipped in a monsoon off Foochow, and saw the last of the livestock

swept into the sea. At last, coming up the Pearl River, I was spotted by *Asheville's* deck watch with my bag and hammock, a U.S. bluejacket, well overdue. And the rest of my cruise was spent in South China.



A US patrol boat on the Pearl River (Canton);

Photograph annotated by Henry Poy – note the range of the ½ KW wireless aboard: 100 miles radius³

³ See endnotes for sources

End of SoWP edit 05 XII 2019;

Thanks to John Dilks, K2TQN for digitizing onto a CD scans of some of Henry Poy's story as it appeared in the SoWP *Sparks Journal*, and

Thanks to CHRS Deputy Archivist Bob Rydzewski for pulling together and scanning the available SoWP files, and

Thanks to Judy Mears for internet research for photographs and sources:

1) Masashi Kuratani, *Disaster Relief Operations by the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy in the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake*: Focusing on the activities of the on-site commanders of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy (JMSDF Staff College Review Volume 1 Number 2 English Version (Selected)).

https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/navcol/SSG/review/1-2/eng_1-2-4.pdf

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2) Re USS *Isabel*: U.S. Naval Historical Center Photograph. Photo #: NH 91408 Radioman First Class Henry J. Poy, USN Outside the after deckhouse on USS Isabel (PY-10) in 1923. The original print was marked by the donor with ship's radio call letters. Note the fancy woodwork on this deckhouse, which was installed aft of Isabel's mainmast during the 1920s. Collection of Henry J. Poy.

<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-i/py10-o.htm>

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3) USS *Pampanga*: Naval History and Heritage Command Title: USS PAMPANGA (PG-39) off Shameen Island, Canton, China, in 1924. Caption: USS PAMPANGA (PG-39) off Shameen Island, Pearl River, Canton, China, in 1924. Collection of Henry J. Poy. Writing on original image, including radio call sign “NQT”, is by Mr. Poy, a radioman with the Asiatic fleet in the mid-1920's. Catalog #: NH 100057 Original Creator: Collection of Henry J. Poy Original Medium: BW Photo, Original image.

<https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhmc-series/nh-series/NH-100000/NH-100057.htm>

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