

Loren A. Lovejoy, 442-SGP and the Wreck of the Hanalei

From the Historical Record of the Society of Wireless Pioneers Jack Binns' Chapter
as compiled by Dr. Erskine H. Burton, Historian, and
The Haraden Pratt Story by Henry Dickow, *Sparks Journal* Vol. 7 No. 3
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*It is a tale by all asserted,
Near Bolinas by the sea,
Upon the rocks that shoreward skirted
Was piled the steamship Hanalei.
At noontide on a day of mist,
From her course far led astray,
She quietly settled with a heavy list,
Unsheltered either from sea or spray.*

*Now all that remains of the little ship
Are some sticks and timbers on the sands,
Tossed hither and thither by the grip
Of the swells beneath where Marconi stands.*

- *A Tale*, by Henry Dickow

Introduction: *Dr. Erskine H. Burton, SoWP Jack Binns' Chapter Historian*

Loren is one of the real old timers of professional wireless operators.¹ He was first assigned to the steam schooner *A.G. Lindsay* (KD), running between Bellingham, Washington and Kings's Cove, Alaska, on March 10, 1910. He had learned the code and operated his own amateur radio station before there was any licensing system. His personal sign was "LA".

After just one trip on the *Lindsay*, LA was assigned to the *SS Governor* (GV) by C.B. Cooper, Chief Operator of the United Wireless Telegraph Co. While LA had been in Alaskan waters on the *Lindsay* Congress had passed the "Certificate of Skill" [COS] Act, of which he had been completely unaware. Consequently, while enroute to San Francisco as operator of the *Governor*, he was dismayed to be confronted by Mr. R.Y. Cadmus, U.S. Wireless Ship Inspector, who was a passenger. LA was asked by Mr. Cadmus to produce his COS; he was then given an oral test on the spot. On arrival in San Francisco, LA was taken to the Inspector's office, where

he was issued his COS on September 18, 1911. Curiously (and LA is at a loss to explain how or when it was endorsed), there appears across the face of his certificate and dated one year and one week later, in red ink, the endorsement "Passed 20 words Continental Code - R.Y. Cadmus 9-25-12." LA has no recollection of ever taking the test in code.

LA had a colorful career as an operator, operator-purser, operator-freight clerk, or operator-paymaster,ⁱⁱ on a total of 21 ships, as well as serving on several land stations. It was during his service on the steam ship *Hanalei* that he made history by becoming the first wireless operators to carry on communications with shore after the wireless cabin on board ship had been completely washed overboard together with its gear. He thus ranks high on the list of those heroic operators who have risked their lives in emergencies at sea in which loss of life would have been much worse but for their efforts in bringing assistance to these ships.

The story of the wreck of the *Hanalei* on Duxberry Reef, California on November 24, 1914 in which 23 persons lost their lives is best told in Loren's own words, reproduced in the original manuscript on the following pages...

Aboard the Hanalei: From "My Story of the Wreck of the Hanalei" by Loren A. Lovejoy

It happened that on the day of the wreck I had come on duty about 7AM. Operator Svenson my assistant had turned in and I set about attending to routine duties. We were both in the wireless room at 11:50 AM and I was arranging to go below when we felt the ship strike heavily, then her engines stopped. I left Svenson in charge and immediately reported to the Captain on the bridge. He ordered me to send the distress call; he also wanted to know what ships were near us and just where they were. I had heard the *El Segundo* just a while before, and knew she was not far from us. So I instructed Svenson to send the SOS and to call the *El Segundo* (WTQ). Then I reported to Captain Carey. I told him what I had done and informed him I would go below and assemble the passengers in the saloon, taking care that each one was provided with a life preserver. When I returned to the upper deck, I gathered together all the ship's papers and valuables, placing them in the inside pocket of my vest. Then I put on a life preserver and made my way to the bridge.

In the meanwhile, Svenson had been busy in the wireless room and when I reached the bridge a quartermaster informed me that my assistant wanted to see me. It developed that he had sent for me because the current from the ship's dynamos had dropped so low that it was impossible to use the main set. The storage batteries which we used with the auxiliary set were submerged by water which had entered the wireless cabin, and we were unable to keep up further communication. In this crisis I turned to the Chief Engineer, Mr. Pettingill, and he told me that the engine room was flooded, the fires having already been extinguished. He said that he would not consider sending a man below because the vessel was leaking considerably and the water in the engine room was increasing in depth every minute. When, however, he realized that our only means of communication depended on the supply of the ship's electrical current, he himself went below and, standing waist deep in the water, managed to obtain a sufficient head of steam to operate the dynamos for a few minutes.

This enabled me to flash the SOS again. I gave our position also and added that we were being pounded to pieces by the rocks. My signals were picked up by the Bolinas high power station, the SF Marconi station at Hillcrest, the *El Segundo* and the revenue cutter *McCullough*. The operator on the *El Segundo* responded almost immediately to my call, saying that his vessel was 16 miles south of Duxberry reef at noon and was steaming to our aid at full speed. I acknowledged his communication and had just started to call SF when our power once more failed. This was due to the fact that our boilers were once more dead.

The Chief Engineer having informed me that he could do nothing toward starting the fires, I reported the situation to Captain Carey and then turned my attention to the auxiliary apparatus. While I was examining the set a heavy sea struck the vessel and she suddenly listed from starboard to port. As a result, the water which had partly filled the cabin ran out on deck leaving the storage batteries clear. Drying the batteries as thoroughly as we could, I tested the set and was delighted to find I was able to obtain a small spark. I was greatly encouraged by my success, and after requesting the Chief Engineer to remain nearby to aid me in the event of anything unforeseen happening, I established communications with the *El Segundo*. My message to her was a request to hurry the rescue more as we were breaking up rapidly. Then without waiting for a reply I asked SF if the life savers had been advised of our plight. I read an

assurance that everything possible had been done to render assistance and that a crew of life savers as well as the *McCullough* and the tug *Hercules* had been sent to the scene of the wreck.

Barely had I acknowledged the message when a tremendous sea broke over the deck. The water poured into the shack in a great deluge and I should certainly have been swept over the side if the Chief Engineer had not seized me and dragged me from the maelstrom. It was a narrow escape and I feel that I owe my life to Mr. Pettingill who somehow reached me and held me while the wall of water receded. But although I had escaped the seas, the wireless cabin had not, the water having swept it and the apparatus overboard. With the disappearance of the radio outfit my usefulness as an operator ended and I made my way to the saloon to spread news of the preparations that were being made for our rescue to the anxious folks huddled together there. The tidings cheered them considerably because just about this time 4 of the 5 men who had made an attempt to reach the shore with a line in one of the boats were pulled back aboard, their craft having been dashed to pieces and one of them drowned.

When I returned to the upper deck, I endeavored to signal to those ashore by means of the fog whistle using the Continental code.

On Shore: Haraden Pratt at the Marconi high power station, Bolinas, CA

We heard the whistle blast of a steamboat nearby, but the fog-enshrouded ocean made it impossible for us to see anything at a distance of more than a few hundred feet. We ventured down the cliff and made for the beach to determine the source of the whistle we heard. In the distance we could faintly see the outline of a ship. She had run up on one of the reefs that fringe the coast between Point Reyes and Point Bonita, an area known to mariners as the "Potato Patch." The ship in distress was the lumber schooner Hanalei, equipped with a United Wireless installation and operated by Marconi with two wireless men. The senior operator was Adolph J. Svensen [sic], and the junior operator Loren A. Lovejoy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Aboard the Hanalei: Loren Lovejoy

Manager Baxter of the Bolinas station^{iv} heard the whistle and tried to answer with an auto siren, but because of the roaring of the surf the plan failed. In the meantime, McTeague,

our Chief Officer, had taken the small Lyle gun which weighed 35 pounds and, mounting it high on the forecastle head, prepared to fire a line ashore. Something went wrong - I don't know what. Either the gun was insecurely mounted or it backfired (exploded?). At any rate, I saw the flash of the discharge and heard the report, and then McTeague was hurled backward against the Captain with terrific force. The line failed to reach shore and it developed there was no more ammunition for the gun, so plans for using it again had to be abandoned.

The *Hanalei* gradually began to break up about this time. The main topmast broke and went by the board with a crash, and soon the foremast toppled over. It was the beginning of the end for the vessel and gathering the passengers and the crew on the upper deck on the starboard side we awaited developments. We could see only a short distance as the fog continued thick and impenetrable. To the seaward, however, we could hear whistles which we answered with blasts from our siren. An attempt was made to launch one of our starboard boats, but it was swamped and pounded to pieces a few minutes after it struck the water.

On Shore: Haraden Pratt

Soon the fog lifted a bit. A self-righting, self-bailing boat with 3 men aboard came from the Point Lobos life-saving station, in answer to a distress call sent from the ship whose whistle we heard. The men in the boat were unable to get close to the stranded ship and it overturned in the churning water.

Aboard the Hanalei: Loren Lovejoy

It was late in the afternoon when the crew of the lifesaving station at the Cliff House approached the wreck. Their attempt to reach us resulted in failure. Their boat finally capsized. The Captain was carried toward the shore by the current and picked up by rescuers on the beach while 2 other men clung to the lifeboat. They succeeded in righting it and clambered aboard. The 3rd man was rescued by the *McCullough* which was not far away.^v As the darkness came on the fog gave promise of lifting somewhat. The officers of the vessel and I knew that with the disappearance of daylight the fears of the passengers would increase, and we used every means at our command to improve their spirits. With the seas threatening at any

moment to break up the *Hanalei* and the rescuers unable to approach the vessel the chance of reaching shore alive seemed none too bright. But the little band of castaways on the *Hanalei* showed fortitude and fine courage in those trying hours, even the women and girls keeping up a brave front. When the prospect of effecting a rescue looked darkest the latter began to sing. And the songs were not of the doleful order either. I recall that one girl enlivened the spirits of everyone by singing "You'll Never Know What a Good Fellow I've Been Till I've Gone Away."

On Shore: Haraden Pratt

Our Chief Rigger, George Hanson, established anchorages on the cliff and prepared to rig up a breeches buoy in the event that a line might be run from ship to shore. About sundown a young man named Schwerin volunteered to swim ashore from the Hanalei with a line, but it became untied and when he reached the shore it was gone. At dusk, our men found a corpse in the surf and carried the blue body to one of the fires that had been started along the beach to aid in the rescue operation. Soon the corpse moved its eyes and we took it to the kitchen of the hotel where the wireless operators lived at Point Reyes. We revived the man. He was Captain Clark, one of those who failed to get safely back to the surf boat when it overturned. He was caught in a riptide and swam all afternoon before landing on the beach, where he fell into unconsciousness.

Meanwhile, a group of reporters from the San Francisco Examiner arrived. Finding that nothing much was being done to rescue those aboard the Hanalei, they called their office to request help. On telephoning the Golden Gate Life Saving Station the Examiner was told that no personnel could be dispatched to Point Reyes because there were no funds available for travel. The Examiner then hired a truck at its own expense and dispatched it with a crew of rescuers which arrived on the scene at about 1 o'clock in the morning.

Aboard the Hanalei: Loren Lovejoy

After a while the faint beams from the moon pierced the fog and we caught sight of lights glimmering along the shore which we afterwards learned were bonfires built by the watchers on the beach to cheer us and provide warmth for themselves. The sight of the fires

suggested to me the plan of signaling to those on shore by flashlight. I realized that it would be comparatively easy for one of the Marconi men to understand my signals and that the establishment of communication between the *Hanalei* and the beach would materially aid the rescue work. I had a small pocket flash lamp, and with this in hand I clambered up the rigging and began to make the characters of the letter "G". This I repeated again and again as I knew that G was Baxter's personal sign, and I signed my own sign, "LA".

Some time passed before I had a response to my signals. Finally it came and then I knew that I had "landed". Baxter, as I afterward found out, also used a flashlight for signaling and it was not long before our communication became clear to each other. I told him that we were rapidly breaking to pieces and that if any action was planned it should be taken at once. I also asked him to shoot us a line. He replied that there was no cannon at Bolinas but that one was on the way to the beach. A breeches buoy was being rigged up for us in the event of a line reaching the ship, he added. We were to communicate for a long period during the night and I gave him the details of our position, the number of passengers on the *Hanalei* and other information.

At length the cannon to which he had referred arrived and I tried to aid them by means of my light. The lines fell short and I signaled to them, "hurry, hurry, try again." Baxter replied that the cannon was too hot from repeated firing and that it would be necessary to wait for a short time before discharging it again. I signaled to load the gun up well and evidently this was done because when the next attempt was made to fire the mortar it burst! Thus, another possible means of rescue was destroyed and we on the *Hanalei* were forced to seek consolation in waiting and hoping. Captain Carey and his crew then tried to send lines ashore to the beach by fastening them to ties in hope that the latter would drift ashore. This plan, however, proved to be a failure and were compelled to pin all our hopes on the big Lyle gun which was being conveyed to Bolinas by truck. Baxter informed me of this in one of his messages, telling us to take heart as our suspense would be ended when the big gun arrived. But once it was mounted and began shooting lines out to us, we realized we were again destined to disappointment, for although some fell across the wreck, we could not reach them because of the position of the vessel and the seas breaking over her.

It was now early morning and as the hands on our watches neared 3 AM we realized—at least those among the seafaring folks did—that the critical point in our adventure was at hand. We knew that at 3 o'clock would come the first of the flood tide and it was only too plain that when the wreck became the plaything of both tide and the tremendous seas, she would go to pieces quickly. With this thought in mind I signaled to shore to shoot another line to us as the vessel could hold together for only a short time. Finally, a few minutes before 3, I sent my last message. I said that we were all coming ashore as best we could. Then I sent "goodbye."

On Shore: Haraden Pratt

The lifesaving crew eventually managed to get two lines aboard the stricken Hanalei, one fore and one aft, while the ship was rapidly breaking up. Her cargo of railroad ties, her wooden doors and furnishings were all washed ashore. Eighty-three persons aboard were huddled on the ship's bridge and in the pilot house as she began breaking up.

Aboard the Hanalei: Loren Lovejoy

Soon afterward the timbers of the vessel gave way with a shivering, grinding crash and before we knew it we found ourselves in the water. How I really got into the sea I don't remember. I grabbed a piece of wreckage. I think it was part of the stem of the *Hanalei*, and next discovered that my hands, face, and clothes were covered with crude oil. Then I knew that the oil tanks on the *Hanalei* had burst.

On Shore: Haraden Pratt

About 2 o'clock the ship broke up. We could hear the wails of the people aboard. Then the wireless operator's flashlight signals were seen again. He was communicating from a piece of wreckage to which he was clinging, telling us that the water was covered in fuel oil and that some people were being suffocated by it.

Later: Loren A. Lovejoy:

I was eventually picked up by a lifeboat about a hundred feet from shore and taken aboard the *McCullough*. The latter conveyed me to San Francisco where I boarded the good ship *Morpheus* and enjoyed a 20-hour cruise.

From the Seattle Star:

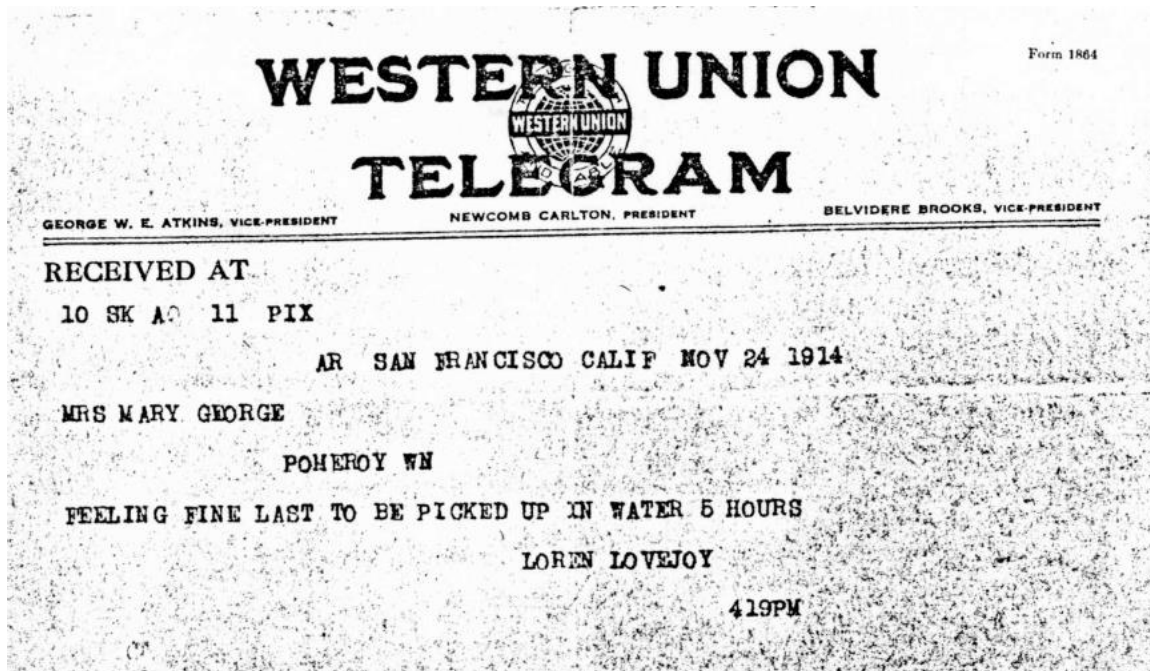
**SEATTLE WIRELESS HERO IS SAFE
BELIEVED LOST WITH 20 MORE, FOUND ALIVE**

Word was received here this afternoon from San Francisco by Jack Irwin, superintendent of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co that caused joy to take the place of gloom planted in the hearts of relatives and friends of Loren A. Lovejoy, Seattle boy, who was wireless operator on the ill-fated schooner Hanalei, and who was reported lost in the wreck at San Francisco.

Irwin received a brief message announcing that Lovejoy had been picked up alive and little the worse for his harrowing experience, by the United States revenue cutter *McCullough* while floating in the vicinity of the wreck, after he had been swept from the pilot house on which he had sought refuge by a huge piece of wreckage.

Word was received this morning that Lovejoy had been swept to his death in the waves. The Star notified his father, who lives at 314 72nd Street N... The report of his death was a shock to many Seattle friends... Young Lovejoy was the wireless hero of the wreck, remaining at his instrument as long as possible while the Hanalei was breaking up and signaling the last message, "Goodbye, the Hanalei is breaking up." Lovejoy's wireless partner, Operator Swensen [sic], also reported lost, lived at Astoria.

Telegram to His Mother:



Later, Aboard the Yacht "Chalena": Loren A. Lovejoy:

Throughout my account of the wreck of the *Hanalei* I have described the occurrences and incidents of the wreck rather than the persons who figured in them. But it seems fitting to mention Operator Svenson my co-worker who throughout the terrible experience remained cool and resourceful, upholding in an exemplary manner the tradition of the Marconi service.^{vi} Then there was Manager Baxter who "stood by" with his signal lamp through the long hours of the night, and Chief Engineer Pettingill whose bravery should not be forgotten. Those men and others showed their mettle in a crisis that taxed the courage of the strongest.

Later: Haraden Pratt

The next morning, when all was over and the Hanalei was no more, 23 out of 83 persons aboard were gone. Among the dead was the wireless operator Svenson. Captain Carey was saved, as was his First Mate. Following an investigation into the cause of the disaster, the Captain's license was suspended for one year. Later he served as master of a Dollar Line vessel which stood by the SS Vestris when she was in distress of the New Jersey coast. Following the

wreck of the *Hanalei* a lifesaving station was established at Bolinas, but it has long been discontinued.

ⁱ Written by Dr. Erskine H. Burton around September 1971. Loren made his final voyage in 1977.

ⁱⁱ Taking on additional shipboard duties enabled wirelessmen to supplement their very meager salaries.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note that by Lovejoy's account below this is incorrect; Lovejoy was the senior and Svensen the junior operator.

^{iv} This was George Baxter, station manager of the Bolinas Marconi high power station, later KPH.

^v This reference to a "3rd man" (not Harry Lime) is confusing. Was it the Captain? If so, he was washed ashore as Haraden Pratt notes, and not picked up by the *McCullough*.

^{vi} Operator Svenson died in the wreck of the *Hanalei*. His name is inscribed on the Wireless Operators Memorial in New York City.