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*" 2 Remember Charlie Maass*

Dear Bill:

The recent issue of the SPARKS JOURNAL, was great, as usual. Most of my seagoing career was on West Coast ships and I thoroly enjoyed the Pacific Ocean Wireless issue. I was surprised to learn that Charlie Maass had been shipwrecked at the age of six. The mention of his name in the Journal brought to mind the many times our trails had crossed in the past.

On December 30, 1925, Stello Cayo, of the Seattle RCA office, called me and offered me an assignment as Chief Radio on the SS Ruth Alexander. I was surprised to get the offer because I had worked for RCA only a year or so, and seniority being what it was, I felt I did not rate a Chief's job. Stella explained that when the ship arrived at San Francisco, the radio department would shift from RCA to Federal Telegraph Company. We sailed for San Francisco via Victoria, B.C., at 5 p.m. New Year's Eve.

After we got out in the open sea, with the Second Op on watch, I couldn't sleep because of something rolling around under my bunk. I finally took out the drawer beneath the bunk, and found two quart bottles of Black & White rolling around. These were prohibition days and I wondered who could have foolish enough to leave such valuable possessions behind. *bean*

The next day I took specific gravity readings on the emergency storage batteries, and discovered two more bottles of Black & White, wrapped in towels, and tucked away in the back of the battery rack. Who could have abandoned such a valuable cargo?

There were no radio logs in the radio room but I did find a file of requisitions, signed by the Chief Operator, Charles E. Maass.

The Junior Operator on the Ruth was obliged to go down to the dining saloon for breakfast, but every morning the room steward brought me a breakfast tray with fresh fruit, cereal, ham and eggs, toast, potatoes and coffee. I told the steward that all I wanted in the morning was a pot of coffee. But the steward continued to bring me a full tray every morning. I drank the coffee and the untouched food went into the slop bucket.

Finally I angrily told the steward that if he did not stop bringing me a full tray every morning, I would report him to the Chief Steward.

"Sparks," he said to me, "How long you been going to sea?"

"About a year or so."

"Well, Sparks, Mr. Maass, the wireless man who just got off, he worked on the Chief Steward for a long time before he got breakfast served in his room. Maybe you don't want any breakfast; but don't forget, the next Sparks might like it. I'll just keep on bringing you your breakfast every morning."

And he did. For many months afterward.

Charlie shipped out on a West Coast tanker and I heard him on the air many a time. He had a fine fist and was an expert operator. Later I learned that Charlie was shipping out of the East Coast and eventually was assigned to the Leviathan.

During WWII, I joined Western Electric's Field Engineering Force and received some training at the Whippany branch of Bell Labs. When the training period was over, the company threw a big dinner for us at the New York Athletic Club, attended by big wheels from the Field Engineering Force and Western Electric. One of the FEF supervisors was Charlie Maass. We had a great time reminiscing about Stella Cayo and West Coast ships.

I was assigned to work on Navy radar installations at the Boston Naval Shipyard, where Charlie had recently been the supervisor in charge. The new supervisor met me at the Yard gate. He came riding a bicycle equipped with a large triangular metal sign that read:

Charles E. Maass  
Western Electric  
Number 1

Later during the war I was assigned to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. The big boss for all the Field Engineers on the West Coast was Charlie Maass. He started a company newsletter called "The WECO WAIL," publishing news items on the doings of Field Engineers on the West Coast. He tried to get everyone's name in the paper, and sometimes he stretched himself. I recall one item that read, "I wonder who has the biggest feet, Al Johnson or Grant Kelley." Charlie was an excellent supervisor and visited us quite often. He constantly lectured us about excessive creativeness in our weekly expense vouchers.

"Don't try to nickel and dime dear old Western to death. If you want to give the company a screwing, give them a good one."



Charlie's continual harping about expense vouchers led one Field Engineer at Puget Sound to compose a ten stanza <sup>e</sup>vers, with every stanza ending with these lines:

Climbing up the mast,  
Fixing up the SL,  
And kissing Charlie's ass.

After the war I ran a radar school in New York for dear old Field Engineering and I saw Charlie frequently.

In 1953 I was assigned to the DEW-Line Project, for which Western was the prime contractor. I went to Alaska for one year and stayed for eight. Charlie had several assignments on the DEW-Line. He was the Bell Lab representative for a series of tests we were running. He also visited every DEW-Line site from Cape Lisbourne to Greenland, photographing both men and equipment.

After four years at White Sands Missile Range, I retired from Western in 1965. My boss in New York threw a retirement dinner for me in New York, and Charlie was among those who attended. It was the last time I saw him. As usual he livened up <sup>the</sup> dinner with a string of stories. He was a marvelous storyteller.

Charlie is gone now, but I think of him often - how else could it be - and marvel at how much I miss him. He was a wonderful guy and I am a better man for having known him.

73

*Al Johnson*

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