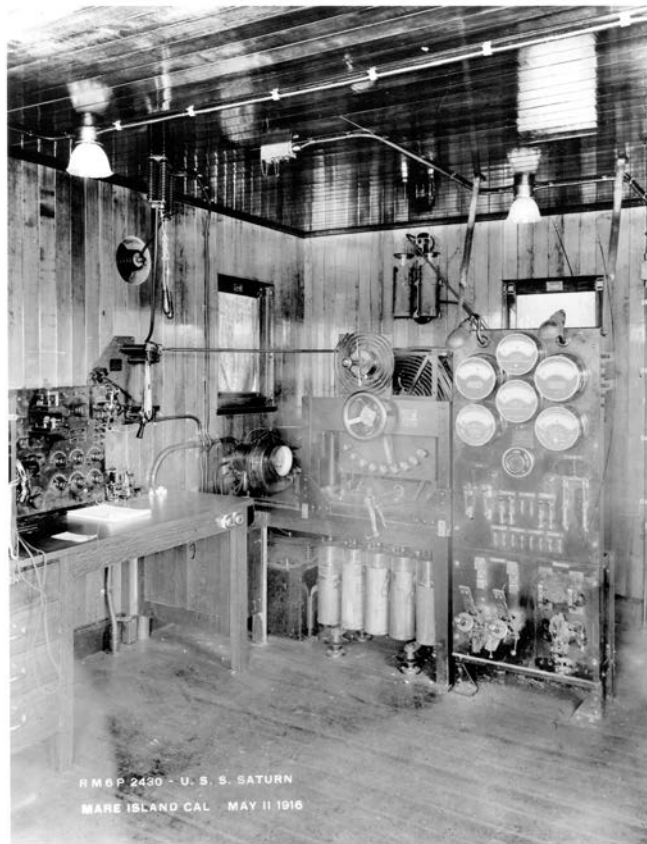


# US Invades Russian Siberia, Establishes Navy Radio Station

By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Archivist

In 1919, turmoil troubled the world, just after World War One. The U.S. Navy constructed and operated a large radio station in Vladivostok, Siberia. A navy vessel, USS *Saturn*, provided the wherewithal and construction crew. The CHRS archives hold a photograph of the Saturn's radio room, as of 1916, at Mare Island, north of San Francisco.



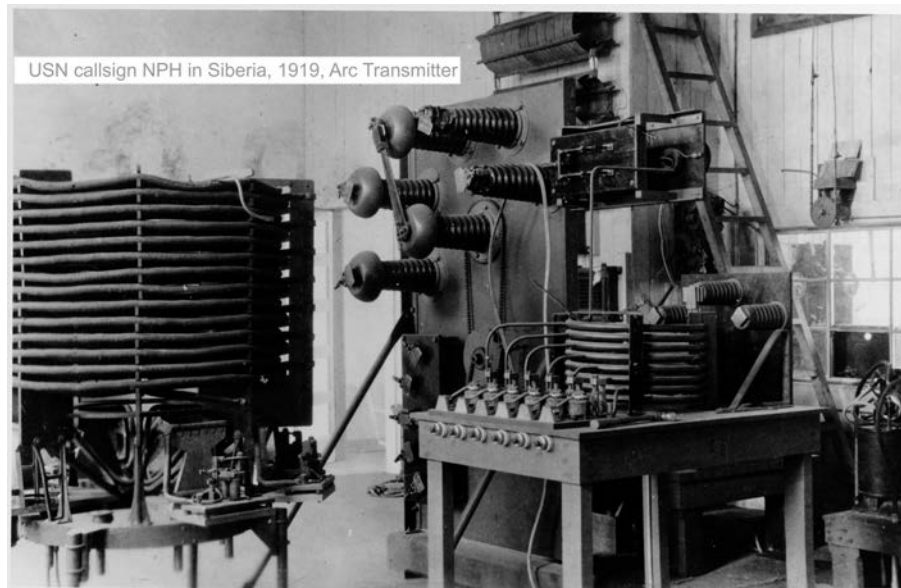
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\* Photo donated by Hal Layer, CHRS, KK6HY. An arc transmitter?

One source<sup>†</sup> summarizes the World War One era communications duties of the USS *Saturn*:

“In September 1916 Saturn began special duty as a tender and relay ship for radio communications between Alaska and the western United States. During the next year and a half she cruised extensively in the Northern Pacific, calling frequently at Seward, Sitka, Ketchikan and Dutch Harbor, Alaska, and Tatoosh Island, Washington. In November 1918 she carried coal and supplies to the United States Expeditionary Force at Vladivostok, Russia. She also transported the Vladivostok Radio Expedition, a largely civilian working party that built a naval radio station on an island in Vladivostok harbor. Returning to the U.S. West Coast in February 1919, Saturn resumed duty as a communications link for Alaska. She was classified a miscellaneous auxiliary (designated AG-4) in July 1920, was decommissioned in March 1922 and sold for scrapping in September 1922.”

The Navy radio station used the callsign NPH. A Federal arc transmitter powered it.



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<sup>†</sup> <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-s/ag4.htm>

“NPH - U. S. Naval Radio Station, Russian Island (Vladivostok) from a 1919 report - U. S. Naval Radio Station, Russian Island (Call sign NPH):

‘Located on Russian Island, Siberia (Vladivostok). Equipped with a 60 kw arc set, and a 12 kw arc set. At the present time no permanent wave lengths have been assigned.

‘Radio Communication: Tests are being made to establish schedules for this station. At the present time communication is effective with Peking, Cavite, Guam and with ships within range of the station. Can communicate with St. Paul and Cordova, Alaska. Signals are very weak from those stations, but it is expected to establish effective communications in the near future.

‘Recommendations have been made to lay a cable from the station to Vladivostok, a distance of about fifteen miles, for both telephone and telegraph service. It is expected that this cable will be laid by winter (1919). The Vladivostok end will be at the headquarters of the American Expeditionary Forces, with a loop to a U. S. ship in port. Telephone communications may be had at the Russian Island Red Cross Hospital, about one mile from the station, which connects to Vladivostok by cable.

‘Comment: This station will probably handle commercial traffic as well as Government traffic. It is of military value in furnishing communication to and from the American Expeditionary Forces in Siberia, and for communicating with vessels of the Fleet in Chinese and Japanese waters.

‘This station was taken over from the Russian Government, and was equipped with apparatus furnished by the Navy Yard, Mare Island, and equipment taken from the Heeia Point Station, Honolulu and was commissioned about 30 May 1919. U.S. Naval Radio Station, Heeia Point, Territory of Hawaii. The original Federal arc transmitter was dismantled and shipped to Vladivostok 7 December 1918.’”<sup>‡</sup>

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<sup>‡</sup> <https://www.navy-radio.com/commsta-prewar.htm> Both equipment photographs and the unloading photographs derive from this source.

A couple of photos of the *Saturn* off-loading the radio station components appear in connection with NPH's history:



Photo #: NH 79053 USS Saturn Unloading 1919

Photo # NH 79052 USS Saturn near Vladivostok in January 1919



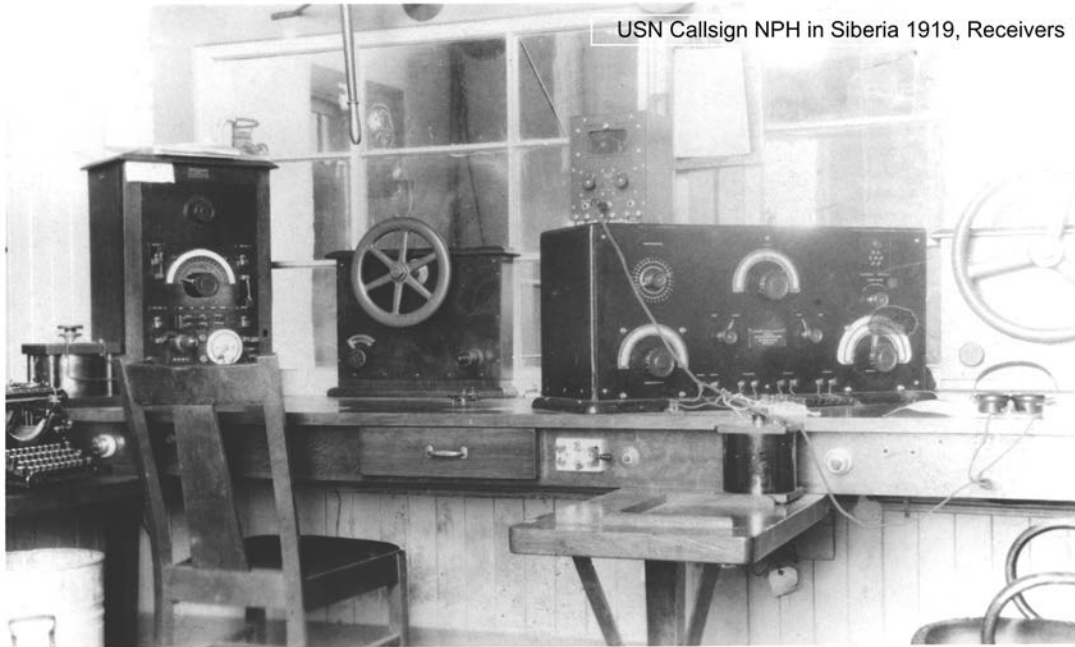
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§ Both equipment-unloading photographs are Donations of William W. Wilson, 1973. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photographs:

“Near Vladivostok, Russia, unloading equipment for the Naval Radio Station, Vladivostok, over the ice in January 1919. Note the Ford car in use for towing sleds. The radio station was built on Russkiy Island in Vladivostok harbor.”

USN Callsign NPH in Siberia 1919, Receivers



A philatelic source notes:

“A U.S. Navy radio station operated on Russian Island (10 miles southeast of Vladivostok in Peter the Great Bay). Date of inception and number of personnel are unknown, but the facility was closed down on 19 November 1922. Only a few pieces of mail have been recorded, with all but one being postmarked on Navy ships in the harbor. The postcard shown [below] was processed by USS Brooklyn. Registered cover could have been postmarked on Brooklyn or New Orleans, the only two U.S. warships at Vladivostok on that date. (Note that original 7 cent stamp had fallen off and was replaced by a hinged-on copy to restore a similar appearance.)”\*\*

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\*\* [http://www.militaryphs.org/exhibits/kugel\\_siberia.pdf](http://www.militaryphs.org/exhibits/kugel_siberia.pdf)



A note to the home-front from J. Robert Palmer, USN Radio Station, Russian Island, Vladivostok, Siberia, 1919. The Navy supported the US Army Expeditionary Force<sup>††</sup> involved in the Russian Civil War. The Bolsheviks won that.

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<sup>††</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Expeditionary\\_Force,\\_Siberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Expeditionary_Force,_Siberia)