

### **Come to the Club Meeting Thursday October 19<sup>th</sup>**

Come out to the meeting this month at Arise Assembly of God 710 South Kings Avenue in the Annex. Things get underway at 7:30 p.m. when Scott W8UFO bangs the gavel to start things off.

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### **LARA Hamfest November 4<sup>th</sup> in Tavares, FL**

The annual Lake Amateur Radio Association (LARA) Tailgate is fast approaching. As usual the event will be on November 4<sup>th</sup> (the first Saturday in November.) Vendors are welcome to start set up starting at 6:30 AM, and sales start at 7:30. We wrap things up by Noon.

This event will be at the same location as last year, the Institute for Public Safety, 1565 Lane Park Cut Off Road, Tavares FL 32778. This no charge for Set up or admission.

With the larger venue, it is a good time for all of us to gather up those items that are less than we can manage to live without, or can barter into something that fits our current needs. Talk-In Frequency 147.255 +600 PL 103.5. For more information please contact Dave Pennell, NP2MR at [np2mr@yahoo.com](mailto:np2mr@yahoo.com) or Frank Anders, KK4MBX at [twfrank111@aol.com](mailto:twfrank111@aol.com).

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### **Murder, Arson, and Death on the High Seas *Or was it just an accident?***

After the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* in 1912 it was a requirement that passenger ships sail with radio equipment to transmit and receive distress messages on the frequency bands allocated for maritime traffic. The radio operator although not directly employed by the shipping company, was given officer status, but he worked for

one of the radio companies. Many radio officers were employed by Marconi. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the capabilities of radio seemed miraculous. Wireless communication became indispensable for ships at sea. Prior to the Titanic sinking radio had already played a key role in saving lives at sea. With the development of the vacuum tube in 1906 transmission via continuous waves instead of the spark gap increased the range and efficiency of radio, but it would be several years before CW would completely replace spark. By the late 1920-s spark was gone. CW became the dominant transmission method on the airwaves.

The radio operator on a ship (Sparks) was the link to communication and rescue, certainly a respected member of the crew. After the First World War radio was firmly established as a communications medium. Travel to faraway destinations by ship was pretty much the only game in town.

In 1930 the Ward Line ran a regular service between New York and Havana. They ran two ships on this run: The *Morro Castle* and her sister ship *Oriente*. Both ships were constructed at Newport News Shipbuilding and were designed to provide luxurious travel. Both ships entered service in 1930 and the route enjoyed good success for four years. Both ships were built to carry almost 500 passengers and about 240 crewmembers. The ships could make the round trip in just under 5 days. One of the big attractions of this run even during The Great Depression was that Prohibition was still in effect, and the fun cruise to Cuba was a legal and easy way to enjoy an alcohol laden cruise!

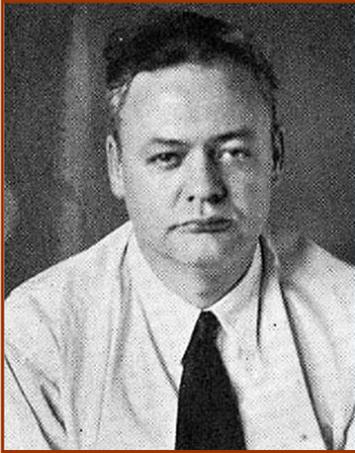
The last voyage of the *S.S. Morro Castle* began on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1934. She departed Havana heading for New York. By the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> the weather began to worsen as the vessel encountered increasing clouds and wind. Other events were occurring, too. On September 7<sup>th</sup> As the ship cruised off the east coast of the U.S.A. the winds and rain increased causing many to retire to their cabins early. In addition, the captain of the vessel, Robert Willmott, complained of sickness. That evening he had his dinner delivered to his quarters. Not long after that he died of an apparent heart attack. By this time winds had increased to over 30 mph. The ship continued struggling up the eastern seaboard. Just before 3 a.m. on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> fire was detected in the first class writing room storage locker on B Deck. It took 30 minutes for the ship to become engulfed in flames. By 3:10 a.m. the fire had burned through the power cables cutting off all power and plunging the ship into darkness. Fortunately one SOS had been sent at that time.



The situation soon became one of “jump or burn”. Lifeboats were launched. The six boats in the water could have carried 408 people, but only contained 85. Many passengers died because they did not know how to properly use the life preservers. As they jumped many were knocked unconscious by the life preservers or worse they broke their necks upon impact dying immediately. For those who managed to survive, the large ocean swells made it difficult for rescue ships to spot survivors. 139 persons out of a total of 549 were lost in the disaster.

Early reports of the *Morro Castle* disaster lauded the Chief Radio Operator George W. Rogers. Unable to get a clear order from the bridge to send the SOS (as is required by the regulations) he took it upon himself to get a distress call out before power was lost.

Later on, however Rogers became the object of suspicion. He had a criminal record dating back to the age of 13 years old. At age 16 he got into radio school to gain release from a juvenile detention facility. He eventually settled in Bayonne, NJ, where was employed by the Wireless Egert Company in New York. In 1929 a fire broke out at the facility. He was a suspect in the fire, but there was no proof of arson. His next position was with the Radiomarine Corporation which later became The Radio Corporation of America (RCA). They had no idea of his previous record and neither did the shipping line which (Ward Line) which needed radio operators. He was assigned to the *Morro Castle*. He appeared odd: there were times he would drop off to sleep during a conversation with someone. At other times he would seem almost hyperactive. He didn't look like a seaman. He was on the chubby side and looked pale. Others on the crew said that none of them knew much about him, but he acted uncomfortable around people.



Two years after the fire Rogers began working for the Bayonne Police Department in the radio room as an assistant to Vincent Doyle. After working with Rogers and asking him about the fire on the ship, Doyle became convinced that Rogers was responsible for the fire. Rogers may have been worried about Doyle's concerns because in March of 1939 he delivered a package to Doyle and asked Doyle to repair it. That package supposedly contained a heater for a fish tank. Nothing unusual there, people often brought in items for the radio guys to fix, but when Doyle plugged in the heater and turned it on there was an explosion. Although Doyle survived, he did suffer several injuries. Rogers was later arrested, tried, and convicted of the attempted murder of his colleague. He was sentenced to 20 years but only served two years before being released on parole to join the armed forces. By now the U.S. was in the war and radio operators were in short supply. He was rejected by the U.S. Navy because of his record, so he left the U.S. and went to Australia. In 1945 he opened a radio shop in Bayonne. He was struggling to make ends meet, in 1952 a friend, William Hummel, loaned him \$7500. The following year, June 1953, Hummel moved to Florida and began to pressure Rogers to repay the loan. In July of '53 police found the bludgeoned body of Hummel and his daughter in their Bayonne home. Suspicion immediately fell on Rogers and he was convicted of two counts of murder in 1954. Rogers would not serve his full sentence this time, either. He would die in prison in 1958 of a brain hemorrhage. So ends another story in the history of radio at sea.

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For more information on this story check out Wikipedia and <http://weirdnj.com/stories/mystery-history/morro-castle/>

### **Keep in Mind Our Weekly Nets and Bulletins**

**Monday 8 p.m. The Two Meter Net 147.765 - 147.165 MHz Hosted by Doris Haskell WB9VDT**

**Tuesday 7 p.m. 6-meter Roundtable 50.200 MHz USB followed at 8 p.m. with the 10 Meter Roundtable 28.365 MHz USB**

**Send us your articles AND PICTURES! We do much more in the digital format! I would like to have pictures of BARS members and their ham shacks!**

**Remember to check out the BARS website:**

**[brandonhamradio.org](http://brandonhamradio.org)**