

## *Waves of Hope*

by Ronald Edward Negra

Top Down Press, 2020, 123 pages

Available at [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Indiebound](#)  
See the author's website at [ronaldwardnegra.com/](http://ronaldwardnegra.com/)

Reviewed by Jerry Berg,  
[jsberg@rcn.com](mailto:jsberg@rcn.com)

At [www.ontheshortwaves.com](http://www.ontheshortwaves.com) we have published quite a bit of material about POW monitoring during World War II (look under “DX History III/POW Monitoring”). This was the practice of listeners monitoring the shortwave broadcasts from Berlin, Tokyo and other Axis countries for the messages about captured G.I.s which were often broadcast over these stations. They would jot down details of the messages and relay the information by mail to the serviceman's family back home, which usually was unaware of the message. (The POW's address was usually announced.) Typically this resulted in the family member then sending a thank you card or letter to the listener. For an example of a collection of these cards and letters, see the links to August Balbi's monitoring in the POW Monitoring section referenced above. Remember: These are cards sent *from the families to the listener*.

As to the cards originally sent *from the listener to the family*, Lisa Spahr has written a [book](#) about the cards and letters received *from listeners* by her great grandmother after her son (Lisa's grandfather) was mentioned in a POW broadcast from Germany. In [“POW Monitoring and the Messages of Arthur R. Young”](#) I analyze another collection of cards and letters received from listeners by a POW's family. So these are cards sent *from the listener to the POW's family*.

There is a new book on this subject. *Waves of Hope*, by Ronald Edward Negra, tells the story of his mother, Agnes Joan Negra, who faithfully monitored messages from Berlin, wrote to the POW families, and preserved the cards and letters she received back *from the families*. Agnes's husband, August E. (Gus) Negra, served in the Army in Europe from 1944 to 1946, but it appears that Agnes's monitoring activities began in 1943 and continued until mid-1945, when she learned that her husband, whom she had not heard from in months, was all right. He had been seriously wounded, and, after being hidden by a Belgian family, had spent a month and a half in a French hospital. It would be ten more months before he returned home.

Agnes says:

At age 100, my memories of the war years are as vivid as they were seventy eight years ago, when our country went to war with the Axis powers. I have many specific recollections of those years, especially watching my husband leave for military service in Europe, and how I received information after he was wounded on

the battlefield at the Battle of the Bulge. There are other experiences that brought tears to my eyes during the war when the mailman came to my door. I received Letters of Hope from prisoner of war family members, acknowledging the communications I sent them regarding the status of their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers. Those personal memories have been kept in a box since the war ended in 1945. . . .

We don't know exactly how Agnes got into monitoring, but she knew of shortwave and had learned from a friend about messages from POWs. She discovered that five names were released from Berlin every night, and she became a faithful listener. She sent the messages on to the prisoners' families, notwithstanding her concerns about the propagandistic purpose of the broadcasts, and whether the messages were genuine.

Although the author's focus is on the cards and letters that Agnes received, one of the nice things about the book is the personal wartime story of Agnes and Gus and their families, whose roots were in Nutley, New Jersey. It is clear that while son Ronald took the laboring oar in producing the book, most of the book's narrative is told by Agnes herself, making for a highly personal telling of the story. She tells of hearing the news about Pearl Harbor, which occurred just three months after their marriage. Gus was working for a manufacturing company, which soon turned into a defense plant. He had two brothers who were also in combat (happily, all returned safely), and Agnes talks about them, and also her own two brothers, one in the Navy, the other in the Merchant Marine. She relates her feelings of joy when she learned that her husband was returning home, and tells of their reunion.

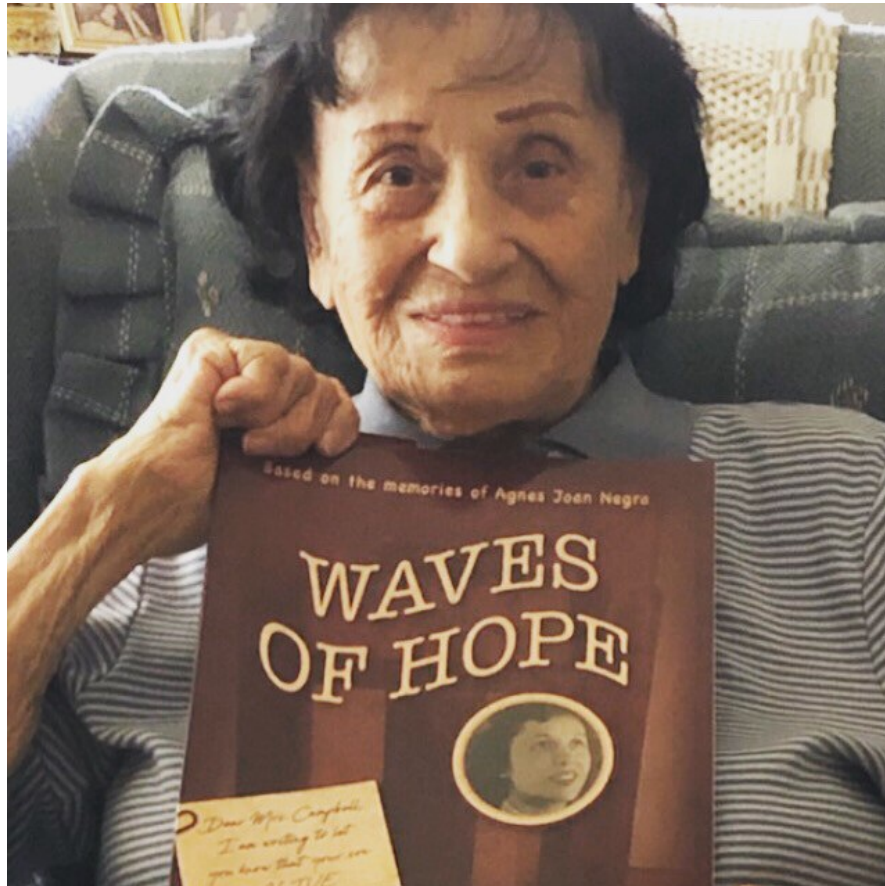
It appears that Agnes did her listening on a Philco console receiver. She wrote over 200 letters to POW families, and the book contains pictures of approximately 75 of the responses she received, all in 1943 (plus one from a POW who, upon returning home from the war in 1945, wrote to thank her for the letter she had sent to his parents in 1943). For those who would like to give them forensic treatment, the author has helpfully included photos of both sides of the postcards, and, in the case of letters, the envelopes as well. Some of the cards and letters did not reproduce as well as others, but all are accompanied by a transcription of their text, which makes reading easy on the eye.

How many other people were, like Agnes, monitoring POW messages? There is no definitive answer. Some of the letters and cards received by Agnes mention how many other communications the family received. Some statements were general, e.g. "many." Others were more specific, and the numbers were all over the lot: 2 (three families), 8, 21, 29, 30, 31, over 40, close to 50, about 50, 58, over 70, 75. One father said he had received several hundred messages. Roughly a third of the writers had also received word of the POW's status from the government. One writer had three sons in the service, another four; one had lost another son in action.

Cards and letters sent from individual monitors to POW families surface from time to time, either individually or in collections, and I have kept track of those names I have seen. So

far, my list contains approximately 350 names. Surely there were many others. The monitors even had an organization. It was called the Short Wave Amateur Monitor Club.

Unlike hams, shortwave listeners have had few opportunities for SWL-related public service. POW monitoring was a grand exception, and, as *Waves of Hope* shows, one that provided the monitors with lifelong pride and satisfaction.



Agnes Negra, who celebrated her 101st birthday on November 13, 2020.

December 31, 2020 - Links verified as of that date.