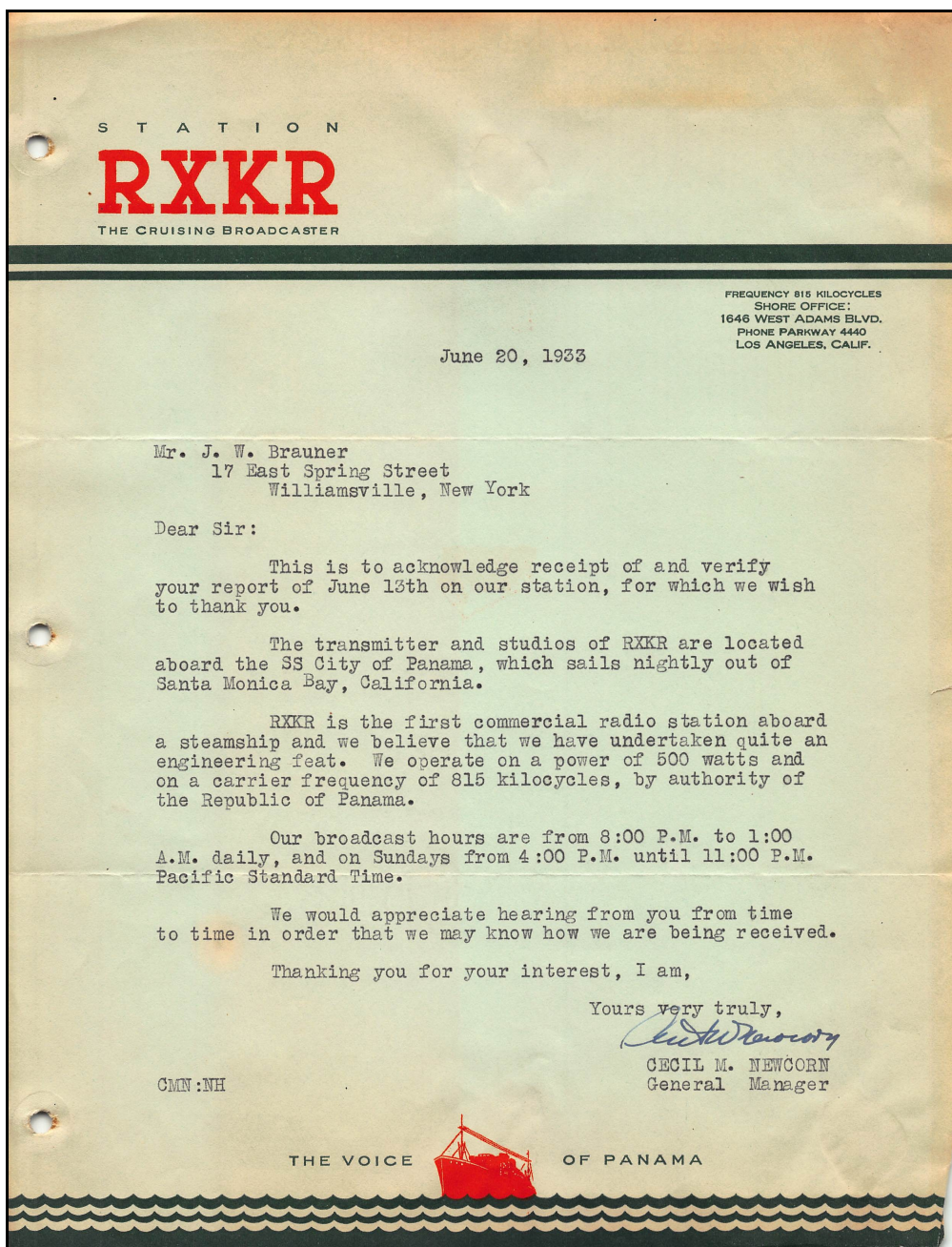


R_x for DX: Radio Outlaws of the West

by Jerry Berg,
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You can be sure it made his day when 29-year old Joe Brauner opened his Williamsville, New York mailbox in the summer of 1933 and found this letter waiting for him. California on the broadcast band from New York was serious DX, even in those days. But what was a station with the call letters RXKR doing in Santa Monica Bay, a few miles from Los Angeles, and why was it calling itself the Voice of Panama?





RXKR was one of the early broadcast band pirates, and its story has been told a number of times, including twice by Tom Kneitel, first in a March 1969 *Electronics Illustrated* article, [“Our Radio Pirate, 1933 Vintage”](#) (pg. 49), and again in August 1983 in a *Popular Communications* article, [“The World’s First High Seas Pirate Broadcaster!”](#) (pg. 10) (essentially a republication of the *EI* piece). Tommy mentions RXKR again in the [August 2008 PopComm](#) (pg. 21), and refers us to an article in the March 1934 edition of *Modern Mechanix*, [“Outlaws May Use Super-Stations at Sea,”](#) for information closer to the event (about seven months after RXKR left the air). The [Offshore Radio Museum](#) has a nice presentation on RXKR. And Andy Yoder has covered the station in his books.¹

The story in brief: After World War I, the British ship HMS *Mistletoe* was sold to Mexico and renamed *Chiapas*, then *La Playa*. By 1933 it had become a party ship, taking passengers on booze-and-gambling jaunts to international waters off Santa Monica, California. The nominal mission was the promotion of products of Panama, which had provided the *City of Panama* (the ship’s new name) with a temporary ship’s registration and a broadcasting license. Despite objections from the U.S. government, the Panama Broadcasting Co. commenced operation on 815 kHz. around May 1933. RADEX said they played records and IDed as “RXKR, SS *City of Panama*.”

Few concrete loggings of RXKR have survived. The NNRC, formed in 1927, was not yet publishing a bulletin. The National Radio Club was formed in August 1933, but copies of the NRC bulletin from that early period appear no longer to exist.² Ditto the International DXers Alliance, which was formed in 1932 but whose very early bulletins have not surfaced. RADEX reported in November 1933 that a Nova Scotia DXer had received an RXKR QSL for a July 1 reception that year. And a 1972 NRC bulletin shows Carleton Lord’s QSL for July 18 reception.

But it appears that the RXKR signal, estimated to be 5,000 watts although “licensed” for 500-1,000, was seriously disruptive to stations on nearby frequencies. Interference was suffered by stations far from California, including broadcasters in Minnesota and Kentucky, as well as in Mexico. The September 1933 RADEX reported that RXKR had been heard “from New York state to the Hawaiian Islands.” Aside from its questionable legal status, the United States feared that the growth of high seas stations, which could change locations at will, might devastate the airwaves wherever they went, and exacerbate the interference already being encountered from the high-powered, English-language “border blaster” stations located in Mexico.

The Panamanian government eventually thought better of its support of RXKR, and cancelled the registration of the *City of Panama* in June. It looks like the station left the air around July 28, the owners emphasizing that they were closing down “voluntarily.” And so ended the tale of what is said to have been the world’s first shipboard pirate broadcaster.

RXKR was mentioned in a number of news items. Here are some clippings, three from *The Los Angeles Times*, and the Jerry Newcorn article from the *Bridgewater, New Jersey Courier-News*.

the meeting and dinner.

Nightly Cruise to Nowhere
6 Glorious Hours at Sea

STEAMSHIP CITY OF PANAMA

First Cruise of the Season
Saturday, June 3rd, and Each Night Thereafter
"Freedom of the Seas--in Reality"

German Rathskeller Radio Broadcasting
Club Room Dancing
Promenade Decks Dining
Feature Floor Show

Ticket Office—Santa Monica Pier
 Sails Every Week Day at 6:30 P.M.—Sundays at 3 P.M.
 From Santa Monica Pier. Tickets \$1 per person, including cruise and parking.

City of Panama is also open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
 Tickets 25c per person, including parking on the pier.

STATION RXKR
 Frequency 815 Kc.
 Tune in on the Voice of Panama every evening from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m.
 For Reservations. Phone S. M. 22247.

A LA CARTE and DINNER, \$1.25

Castwell, 3. Umpires—Stark, Riger and Powell. Time of game—1h. 36m.

ANIMAL MEDICINES

Let's Go "Nowhere" Tonite!

Aboard the palatial S.S.

CITY OF PANAMA

Thrilling 6-hr. Cruise to Nowhere
 Every Night 7:30 Returns 1:30 a. m.

EXTRA CRUISE SUNDAY
 Sails 1:30 p.m. Returns 6:30 p.m.

Ladies: Free Tuesday Night With Escort

A refreshing visit to the freedom of the high seas ... and back the same evening!

Tune in: RXKR 815 Kc. 8 P.M. to 1 A.M.

Order management of CLARENCE BLAZER

SANTA MONICA PIER
 Roundtrip Passage \$100

Information and Tickets without added cost at GITTELSON BROTHERS TICKET OFFICES
 Biltmore Hotel... Larkensham Hotel... 6515 Hollywood Blvd. or Dock, Santa Monica Pier, Hollywood 3131 Michigan 3131


Tempting Beverages Dining * Dancing
 * Exciting Games * * Rathskeller *
 Lavish Floor Revue

IN ALL THE NATION... NO GREATER SENSATION

companiments.

TUNING IN

The Shadow Man is still trying to recover from a touch of seasickness after loading his photographic equipment aboard the S.S. City of Panama, to snap this one of Mark Harrington, golden-voiced tenor, whose songs are heard nightly at 10 o'clock over RXKR (815 kilocycles,) the broadcasting station aboard the natty ship which takes its guests on a cruise to nowhere.



MARK HARRINGTON

To the ladies! Rosalind Shepard, fashion editor at First National Studios, gives an...
 ...the meeting and dinner.

re. continue as it is until we receive further notice.

Jerry Newcorn Returns to City

While the majority of Plainfielders sweated through hot weather, Jerome D. (Jerry) Newcorn languished comfortably aboard the palatial liner, City of Panama, and assisted in the making of many radio hours.

Jerry, who is the son of Judge and Mrs. William Newcorn of 81 Woodland Avenue, left Plainfield last May to take over the position of announcer in a series of broadcasts entitled "The Voice of Panama" which emanated from the liner as she sailed the Pacific.

RXKR, the Cruising Broadcaster, was the station call letters and name, heard many times from the throat of Jerry.

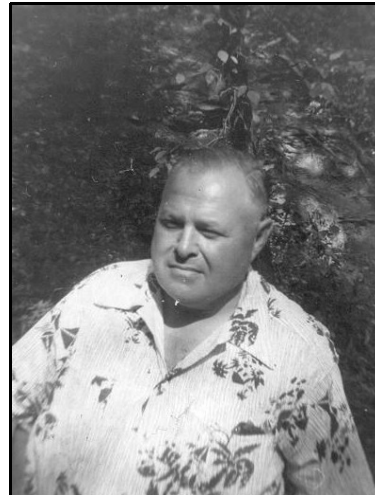
During his trip which afforded him several "stays on land," Jerry met many prominent film and stage people. He was the house guest of his brother, Cecil M. Newcorn, who is a resident of California. While in Los Angeles, Jerry visited the radio studios of several motion picture concerns and watched the filming of "talkies."

He returned home Saturday loaded with all sorts of remembrances and souvenirs as well as future plans to manage the next season's bookings of several prominent people. His main reason for returning is to enter into law practice with his father.

8 to 9 p.m.	
KECA	Nick Harris, 8.
KFAC	Wolford Trio, 8; Fraternity House, 8:30.
KFI	Standard Symphony (C.), 8.
KFOX	Christian Science, 8.
KFWB	"Drums of France" (play.) 8; Symphonette, 8:30.
KGER	Rev. C. E. Fuller, 8.
KHJ	Globe Headlines (play.) 8; "Laff Clinic," 8:15.
KMPC	Marengo's Orch., 8:30; Father Peeley, 8:45.
KMTR	Musical Comedy, 8; Strings and Reeds, 8:30; Sally Coy, 8:45.
KNX	Mid-week Parade, 8; Golden Memories, 8:45.
KTM	Judge Rutherford (E.T.) 8; organ, 8:15; Miniature Symphony, 8:30.
RXKR	(815 kilocycles)—Lou Singer's Orchestra, 8.
9 to 10 p.m.	
KFAC	Sherwood Beasley's Orch., 9:30.
KFI	Capt. Henry's Showboat (C.) 9.
KFWB	Lou Traveller's Orch., 9; Outdoor Reporter, 9:15; Jay Whidden's Orch., 9:30; Jimmy Grier's Orch., 9:45.
KGER	Organ, 9; Slumber Time, 9:30.
KGFJ	Dance Orch., 9.
KHJ	Ray West's Orch., 9; Buccaneers (C.) 9:30; Olga Steeb, 9:45.
KMPC	American history (play.) 9; songs, 9:30.
KMTR	Beverly Hill Billies, 9.
KNX	News, 9; Miles of Melody, 9:15; Sheriff Underwood, 9:45.
KTM	Miniature Symphony, 9; KTM Ranch Boys, 9:15.
RXKR	Zandra mystic hour, 9.

Finally, as can be seen from the radio program listings in *The Los Angeles Times* at left, RXKR was listed right there with the regular stations.

Here is a photo of Joe Brauner in 1953. Joe passed away in 1980 at age 76.



THIS IS TO CONFIRM YOUR RECEPTION
 OF RX4M THE VOICE OF CLIPERTON
 ON THE ^{13 MTR} BAND FROM 0035 TO 0132 GMT
 ON 21750 KC WITH 100 WATTS

s - no
 THE VOICE OF CLIPERTON

Exactly where the "RXKR" call letters came from is anybody's guess, but it would seem that they informed the name of another west coast "RX" pirate nearly 50 years later. Unlike RXKR, RX4M, the Voice of Cliperton, operated on shortwave. It started broadcasting around April 1980, and fell victim to an FCC bust on October 24 of the same year. An article by William J. Martin, ["RX4M—Anatomy of a Pirate](#)

[Bust,"](#) in the May 1985 issue of *Monitoring Times* (pgs. 22-23), recounts the station's life and death, and a recording of RX4M, made six days before its closure, can be found [here](#). The station was located near Seattle.

1. Andrew Yoder, *Pirate Radio* (Solana Beach, CA: HighText, 1996), pgs. 160-163; Andrew Yoder, *Pirate Radio Stations* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2002), pgs. 154-156.

2. [NRC DX News Archive](#).