

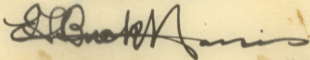
# INTERNATIONAL BROADCAST STATION KGEI

SAN FRANCISCO

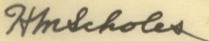
## EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION

NOTICE: Signature hereon should be compared with signature of bearer before he is recognized as an employee of this station.

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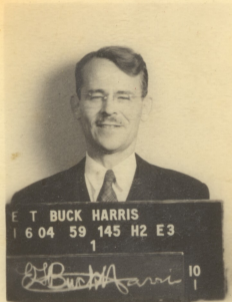


*Manager*



*Engineer in Charge*

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# SHORT-WAVE BROADCASTING IN THE PACIFIC BASIN AREA

BY E. T. BUCK HARRIS



IN ANY DISCUSSION of American short-wave broadcasting to the Pacific Basin Area, it is necessary, in order to orient ourselves, to review briefly the history of short-wave broadcasting from the Pacific Coast. It is impossible to do this without referring to KGEI, which until long after Pearl Harbor was the only short-wave broadcasting station west of the Mississippi and the only American radio station heard in the Orient. I have been the manager of that station since its birth, and therefore ask your indulgence while I sketch, as quickly as possible, the picture of our earlier short-wave broadcasting activities—and then attempt to bring the story up to date.

To most persons in this country, the letters KGEI mean nothing. But to millions outside the United States, they mean a great deal.

To millions in the Far East, the Antipodes, and the islands of the Pacific, who until the summer of last year could hear no other American radio station, KGEI was, as several letter-writing listeners put it, "the voice of Uncle Sam"—and almost their only source of honest news and unbiased accounts of world events. For Americans across the Pacific, KGEI was their daily contact with "home," and for them and many others KGEI was the "friend" who kept them informed on public opinion and news developments within the United States.

KGEI is an international short-wave broadcasting station owned and operated by the General Electric Company on a strictly non-commercial basis. It is situated at San Francisco, and here, I think, the importance of the Pacific Coast in American short-wave broadcasting should be explained. Short-wave broadcasting signals shoot upward from the antenna at an angle of approximately 25 degrees until they strike an ionized ceiling in the stratosphere known as the Heaviside layer, about thirty-five to fifty miles up in the sky. The signals bounce from the Heaviside layer back to earth and repeat the process as they travel around the globe. In following the Great Circle path, signals from short-wave stations in the eastern United States would have to pass through the magnetic pole to reach the

Orient. This is impossible, as the magnetic pole acts as a solid barrier to radio signals. Because KGEI is situated at San Francisco and thus is approximately three thousand miles closer to the Orient than East Coast short-wave stations, its signals pass south of the magnetic pole and are received in Asia.

Under the call letters W6XBE the station first went on the air on February 18, 1939, broadcasting four hours a day on a beam directed to Latin America, three hours a day on a beam directed to Asia. KGEI originally had 20,000 watts of power, that is, transmitter output. This was increased to 50,000 watts in 1941 and its hours of operation were lengthened. Through the use of Alexanderson panel directive antennas, which compress this power within a desired number of degrees, the station's signal is equal to 500,000 watts in the path of the beam. The effect of this directional beaming may be likened to the increase in a lamp's light in a desired direction when a reflector is placed behind the source of light.

Although KGEI's beam to Asia is centered on Tokyo, countries receiving these broadcasts with clarity are, in addition to Japan, China, the Philippines, French Indo-China, Siam, Netherlands East Indies, all the islands of the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Southwest Africa, Portuguese East Africa, and parts of India. In some of these countries, a few other United States short-wave stations are heard spasmodically, but in the Orient, until the summer of 1942, KGEI was the only American station heard regularly.

The station also broadcasts to Latin America, at a different time of day. A number of short-wave stations in the eastern part of the United States are heard in Latin America but, again because of geographical location, the San Francisco short-wave station is better heard in Mexico and on the west coast of South America. Mexico and the Canal Zone are KGEI's heaviest mail points in Latin America, with Argentina and Brazil tied for third place. Incidentally, before Pearl Harbor the station was receiving mail regularly from countries covering more than half the surface of the world.

In those days, even as now, news—honest news—was the most important part of KGEI's program schedule, and the reputation for honesty in its newscasts which KGEI built in its early days has stood our country in good stead since war came. Along with the news, the station shortwaved the finest music and entertainment available from the great domestic networks in this country.

I would like to give you a few direct quotations from letters received by KGEI during the three years immediately preceding Pearl Harbor. One American woman in Foochow, China, wrote that "after a day of bombing here, it was a joy to hear your broadcast last evening." A man in Tokyo wrote that KGEI "provides the first opportunity to get any world news unexpurgated." An employee of an American oil company at Foochow said: "Have not had a newspaper for nearly two months. We are supposed to be blockaded and shut off, but we still have the air, which means that we know what the score is most of the time, thanks to your radio KGEI."

And here's a pertinent paragraph from a letter written by a listener in Peking, China—before the Japs reached there:

Perhaps you have not realized how an honest and straightforward program, not designed for propaganda, has done insidious and grave harm to the propaganda stations coming from Europe. Because KGEI gives a direct, honest picture of the world news in its news broadcasts and then turns to good-natured fun and excellent music of all classes, Americans, Europeans, and many Orientals here are now listening almost exclusively to this station. This, to my mind, is a noteworthy contribution to human happiness in these troubled days.

Turning to Latin America for a moment, we have this interesting statement from a listener in Buenos Aires, Argentina:

Reception is excellent, very clear, and I believe your station is one of the best-liked in these countries as you give us news and good programs without political propaganda like that of the European station.

A Latin-American listener at Havana wrote in Spanish:

I also listen to our friend Charlie McCarthy; he is wonderful. I enjoy listening to him for, although I don't know English very well, I understand enough and Charlie serves as Professor of English.

The originals of these and thousands of other letters received by the station are available for inspection by responsible persons, especially by scholars and writers who may wish to record the history of short-wave broadcasting in this country.

Before bringing this review of United States broadcasting in the Pacific Basin area up to the present, it should be pointed out that, in addition to honesty in news, freshness and timeliness are vitally necessary, not only in newscasts, but also in all entertainment programs broadcast on short wave, for the magic of short wave is the speed at which it travels. Something to think about is the report sent to KGEI by a listener in Capetown, South Africa, following a speech delivered by Winston Churchill in Birmingham, England.

This listener in Capetown was more than twenty thousand miles from the speaker via the radio path on that occasion, yet he heard Mr. Churchill's voice before it reached the back row of the audience in the hall at Birmingham. And this despite the fact that the Prime Minister's voice was routed on that occasion from Birmingham to New York by "point-to-point" short-wave radio, from New York to San Francisco by telephone wire, and from San Francisco to Capetown by short-wave broadcast.

In the hall at Birmingham, Mr. Churchill's voice traveled with the speed of sound, 1,128.6 feet per second. But by short wave his voice traveled with the same speed as light, 186,000 miles per second, so we must indeed be "on our toes" in writing for short wave and in planning short-wave programs, if we wish to do justice to this medium.

As war approached our shores, the tenor of KGEI's broadcasts changed somewhat, and the station added to its schedule many programs specially designed for our troops in Alaska, the Philippines, and elsewhere in the Pacific, and for the men of the United States Fleet. Most popular of these programs was a "Mail Bag" for service men, in which wives, mothers, and sweethearts of the men were interviewed and allowed to send personal messages to their loved ones.

Being human, the staffs of the short-wave stations made some mistakes. One complaint was registered with KGEI that a Bing Crosby program, short-waved and dedicated to the defenders of Bataan, had included a "plug" for cottage cheese, which certain officials said was very much out of place when the men on Bataan were starving. This complaint undoubtedly was justified; the food advertisement should have been deleted from the transcription before the show was shortwaved. But to show the spirit of our men on Bataan, I would like to quote from a letter received by the short-wave station long after Bataan fell. This letter was one of the last to get out and was written just a very few weeks before Bataan fell. It reads, in part:

We don't know when or if you will receive this from "MacArthur's Magnificents." What the heck do you all expect—to surrender without a fight? But we're writing this in answer to your request for comments on your short-wave programs. We all gather around our radios and listen to every program we can get through the Nip's jamming. We particularly appreciate the old regular programs we used to hear. I've just asked the gang what else they wanted and the simultaneous yell was, "Put in an order for one carton of Kraft Cottage

Cheese in each of 100 good P-38 interceptors (I'm from Glendale!) and send 'em over on the Lexington—last but not least, one bag of personal mail in each plane."

There was a postscript which read: "We don't have any Kraft's cartons."

In the limited time available, it will be impossible to recount in detail all the changes in the short-wave broadcasting picture which have taken place since Pearl Harbor. For some time before December 7, 1941, our federal government had been showing more and more interest in short wave and had created the Office of the Coordinator of Information, which later became the Overseas Branch of the Office of War Information. When it was first created, the C.O.I. acted in an advisory capacity for short-wave broadcasts to all parts of the world except Latin America. By executive order of President Roosevelt, responsibility for Latin-American broadcasts was given to Mr. Nelson Rockefeller, Coördinator of Inter-American Affairs. Under these conditions, the private broadcasters were dealing with two government organizations directly concerned with short-wave broadcasting. At San Francisco we consulted with the C.I.A.A. on short-wave broadcasts to Latin America, and with the C.O.I. on broadcasts across the Pacific to Asia and the Antipodes.

It was not until November first of 1942 that the government had completed negotiations to lease at cost all broadcasting time on all United States short-wave transmitters, costs which up to that time had been borne entirely by private companies such as NBC, CBS, General Electric, and Westinghouse.

In the period between Pearl Harbor and November, 1942, before the actual taking over of programming by the government, the C.O.I. submitted copy to the private short-wave stations—news-casts, commentaries, etc.—“for your use as desired.” The short-wave stations had many varied and interesting experiences, some humorous, some not so humorous, during that period. In view of my experience as an executive of a privately owned and operated short-wave station and my work—since November, 1942—in the federal government service as manager of the English language short-wave network for Latin America, I think I can talk impartially on the need for sound judgment and good writing in American short-wave broadcasts.

Unfortunately, many newspapermen and writers (and I speak also as a former newspaperman), by some strange process of reasoning, think that the moment they are put on the federal pay roll

they must become high-powered propagandists, and their efforts to be propagandists would be ludicrous, were it not such a serious matter for the welfare of our nation.

I would like to quote paragraph 2 of page 1 of a master newscrip submitted to the San Francisco short-wave station by a government agency on January 19, 1942, "for broadcast in French, Dutch, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, as desired." It read:

One of Britain's greatest victories of the war, meanwhile, was scored far away from the fighting front, with the announcement in London that Premier U Saw of Burma had been arrested for heading a treacherous plot to sell out Burma and its fourteen million people to the Japanese.

No comment is necessary, but it should be pointed out that, if we had broadcast this paragraph as written, it undoubtedly would have been recorded by Tokyo and would have been rebroadcast throughout Asia by Japan as proof that the British were losing the war.

This is not an isolated example, it is only one out of hundreds. Fortunately, this situation has been rectified at San Francisco with the appointment several months ago of Owen D. Lattimore as Director of the Pacific Bureau of the O.W.I. Overseas Branch, and Kenneth Fry as Assistant Director.

Short-wave newscasts from America once again are written factually and honestly and in proper perspective, as contrasted with the heavy-handed German propaganda. Our newscasts are restricted to news, and commentary is labeled as commentary.

That this policy holds the respect of our listeners is evidenced by thousands of letters. Here is a sample quotation from a letter received a few days ago from a sailor with the United States Navy somewhere in the Pacific:

We listen in regularly to the short-wave broadcasts from San Francisco. The coverage, exactitude, and promptness of reports of the news, and the fresh and timely entertainment, is truly amazing—it is really a consolation to know that such is the policy of the United States.

Time will not permit a more detailed review of Pacific Coast short-wave activities. To bring the picture up to date it should be recorded that since Pearl Harbor, when KGEI was the only short-wave station in the West, the government has added a number of other such stations on the Pacific Coast. The O.W.I. broadcasts to the entire Pacific Basin area, exclusive of Latin America, for approximately twenty hours a day in twenty or more languages and dialects. From San Francisco the C.I.A.A. operates the United

Network, a network of short-wave stations broadcasting to Latin America in the English language for sixteen hours daily. Spanish and Portuguese language short-wave networks to Latin America are operated by the C.I.A.A. in the eastern United States. And in the East also are the O.W.I. short-wave networks to Europe, Africa, the Near East, and other lands.

The question has recently been raised whether our short-wave transmitters should be "slowed down" in the broadcasting of music and entertainment to other countries. Some persons, perhaps not realizing the magic of the speed of short wave, feel that our stations should not shortwave music and entertainment until shipments of transcriptions of such shows have had time to reach small local radio stations in other countries.

The United States battles against stiff competition to win and hold the ears of short-wave listeners throughout the world, and now more than ever it is imperative that our newscasts remain honest and factual and our music and entertainment fresh and timely.

In pre-World War II days, Germany built a tremendous short-wave audience in Latin America by assigning great symphony orchestras and famous artists to produce shows exclusively for short wave, in order that the entertainment parts of her programs, between which was sandwiched her propaganda, could be up to the minute. This has never been done to any great degree by the United States, but never before have our short-wave stations slowed down their entertainment programs until identical recorded programs could reach local radio stations in other countries.

It would seem foolish to harness our short-wave activities to radio's ox-cart days. An April Fool's Day joke by a Bob Hope does not go over so well on Decoration Day. A July Fourth program should not be shortwaved in September. And when Toscanini directs a symphony orchestra on Easter Sunday, the program should be shortwaved that same day, not weeks later. For the danger is that our listeners will realize that our short-wave music and entertainment are slightly stale and think likewise of our news and commentaries. We must not lose the magic touch of short wave.

American short-wave broadcasting in some respects is still behind that of Britain, Russia, Germany, and Japan. American short-wave broadcasting must go forward, for when the actual firing ceases, short wave will become our "front line" of defense and offense in the psychological warfare which will be waged to win the peace.