

FRENCH FRIGATE SHOALS IS CALLING

It's a quiet time past midnite
And the radio lights are dim.
A radio operator is waiting
For a signal to hopefully come in.

The static and the band-noise,
Reminds him of long past years --
The lonely nights and the watches,
Of comrades and experiences dear.

A time when a small far Island
Held a station of a handfull of men --
When loneliness and long waiting-hours
Were a part of life's tedious blend.

The Island is now abandoned,
Thirty six years has passed --
What once was a great installation
Is now covered with sea-birds and grass.

A few material remnants,
Half hidden in the coral sands,
Revealed that this far lonely place
Held antennas and towers grand.

Again it was time to tune the band
And listen for a signal to come in --
For a comrade of the Island-years
Had promised to call and check-in.

He, had returned to the Island
For a few days to be in the sun.
He took along a transmitter,
For contact when day was done.

Sure enough, slightly past midnite,
The call came rolling in --
Cutting through noise and static,
It was clear, and not too dim.

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Far, far across the Pacific,
Three thousand miles or more,
My thoughts go back with the signals
To remember the coral shores.

Once again the Island is active!
With low power to be sure --
But for this moment in time and space
A signal comes from its shores.

No longer is the Island lonely,
Without humans to walk on its sands,
To see and love the remoteness
And remember God's Beauty and Plan.

This may be the last time --
When a signal comes from that place.
The future years may bring great change
And prevent a return to that pace.

Yet, it will always be remembered --
When that signal came rolling in:
"French Frigate Shoals is Calling"
And my eyes grow misty and dim.

We all have a life and experiences,
We all have a moment in time.
We have to Praise and Thank The Lord,
For memories and moments sublime.

Dedicated to George Balazs -- WH6BLQ -- who made
the conditions for this Poem possible. June 1988

1-213-457-7895
and 1-213-457-1973

Sunday
July 6, 1956
9:00 pm

Hello George!

And thank you kindly for your interesting letter; what you had to say, and for the brochures. Most interesting; and I finally got to see what Johnston Is. looked like. I've talked to them out there on amateur radio — but never knew what the place looked like.

I was happy to hear that you had a nice "camp-in" visit at G.B.I. You're very fortunate to have that experience, which no one else has. It must seem ghostly strange to be on that Island at night, all by yourself so to speak. I've often wondered what that would be like now. There used to be so much activity on G.B.I. when the coasties were there — laughing, noisy, and the constant running of the generators. And the flashing light at the top of the antenna.

I wonder if some of the coasties, that have passed on now, come to visit from the "unseen side". Not only from the war years, but from farther back.

perhaps hundreds of years. Surely the Hawaiians visited the shoals quite often. If their many artifacts have been found on Necker Island, why would they not spend more time at the shoals. And perhaps years ago, more of the sandy islets were above water!!! If I've seen a decided change in 31 years, consider what a few hundred must have done.

I strongly believe that the shoals have been subsiding, and with that, the islets reduce in size. Am interested to hear what it looks like now. And did you get to Disappearing Island?

Was most happy to hear that the poem and plaque is still there. And that you have been considerate to repaint the box, etc. Hardly a week goes by when I don't recall some times on G.B.I... And the ex-coasties I still talk to keep bringing it up. No one ever really forgets that pristine place — and like Capt. John Cameron said: "our world of islands". And so, I feel that there are ghosts that

return in the form of memories and im-
pressions of that far-off beautiful place.
Thanks to God, it isn't overrun with the
trashy elements of present day humanity.

Will look forward to a photo of
you standing next to the pole, commemorating
the ten year time period. Yes, indeed,
time has gone most rapidly — and it
still seems like a month ago.

Glad to hear of your increased
access to telephones and such. Yes, please
do telephone whenever you can. I'm generally
in the house from 12³⁰ noon until 4⁰⁰ pm
on week days — excepting Fridays. And
I'm up real early in the mornings, and stay
up late at nite... Sometimes in the daytime
I may be down in the garden, but I do
turn on the answering-device.

I'm in the Western Tel. Directory under
HARRY EDWARD FINCH. I do have a second
telephone and its' number is 457-1973, and
it is also area 213. But the outside bell
on it is not too loud.

A couple of months ago I talked
to a radio amateur in Chatsworth that

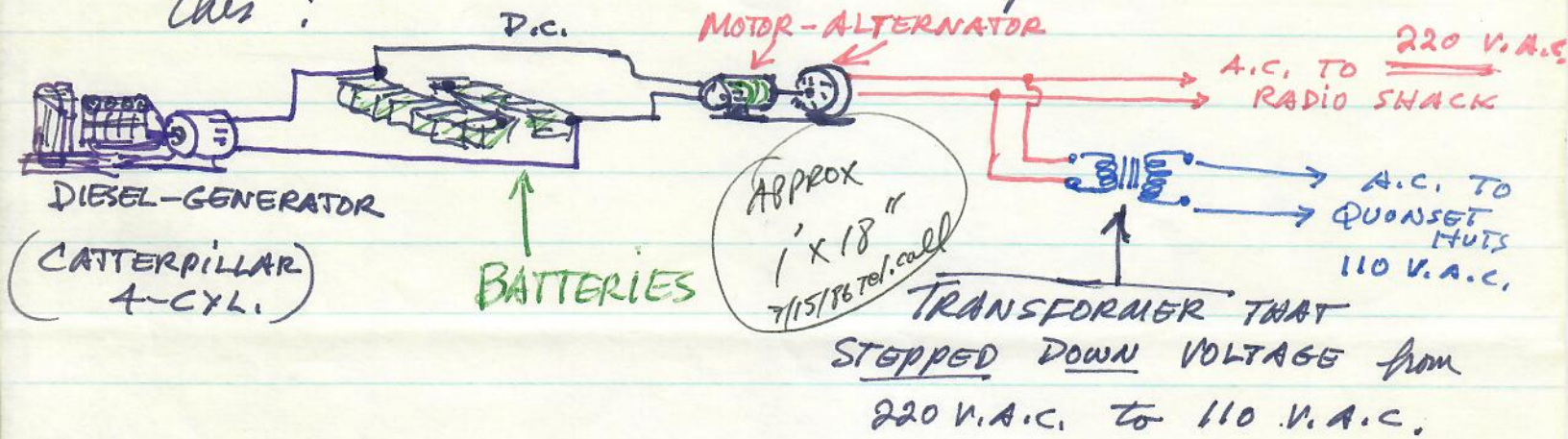
owned a Hawaiian inter-Island airlines since 1947... He sold it out about 15 years ago... But he must be quite wealthy and has some fabulous tales to tell. He flew into Tern Is. in 1945 with a two-engine Army transport that had engine trouble... And I miraculously was on Tern Is. that day and saw him land.

He later flew a twin-engine Beach-Craft into East-Island for approx. - four years from 1948 till it closed in 52!!! Apparently, he landed on G.B.I cross-wind on the S.W. side of the Island along the beach. And apparently that was why a small bulldozer was brought on G.B.I to level out that S/W side. And it must be the rusting tractor half submerged where the pier used to be. It was hard to believe what he said about those days when the C.G. chartered his then growing airlines to make the trips. But what he had to say, and what he said convinced me. That also answers the question I had about the 90" wooden pole on the far west/by North end of the Island---

That particular pole was very near the flag pole, and I climbed it to take pictures. But they probably took it down and placed it over by the cook shack, on the east side near the pier... As that's where I saw the stump of a large pole when we were there in '76. When I was on G.B.I. in '45, there absolutely was no pole near the cook shack (quonset hut). So they moved it and the flag pole to make it safe for landings and take offs from that side of G.B.I. Hard to believe this — but it was done successfully, and safely, for years. I can get you the man's name and number if you wish. He lives in Chatsworth — L.A. County.

Now, about that transformer you're wondering about. The first year of operation of that station, everything was run on large wet-cell batteries that were charged by 4-cylinder Caterpillar diesel D.C. generators. The engine blocks are still at the south-end half buried in the sand; as of 1976. The batteries were connected to a "motor-alternator"

unit which supplied the A.C. for the radio gear. So it basically looked like this:



There were two Caterpillar 4-cyl. Diesel generator sets keeping the batteries charged. But, it was not an efficient arrangement, and when I got there in June of 45 they were installing Allis-Chalmers Diesel-AC generators, basically for the Radio Equipment. They were started on gasoline (had spark plugs) and then were switched over to diesel fuel. Two of these units — not three like on Tern... And they were fairly small compared to the giants on Tern Is. One of their engine blocks was also seen on the S/E end of G.B.I in 76.

So now the Cat-diesels were only used to charge the batteries, run the motor-alternator unit for the A.C. to the quonsets and the cook shack. Thus the need for the

fairly large transformer. You might also see a small 4 cyl. engine block; but that was the little gas engine powering the walk-in freezer. I think it was a Palmer engine. About 25 h.p... The compressor is lying around there too.

So that's about it for now, George. Be sure to give me a telephone call and we can go into that G.B.I landing strip info. That was a big surprise to me to hear of such a thing — and perhaps almost a mystery. But it could be done back in those years, as the island was a bit larger. And the pilots were crazier! hah.

Goodbye for now, and eat up one of those Hawaii papayas for me.

Best wishes and regards,

From, Emmett

P.S. If East Island could speak, what tales it would have to tell?

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