

## Recollections of the U.S. Navy Radio Station on “Radio Hill” and its Caretakers, Martha and Ernie Carr

This letter is to share my recollections about staying with the caretakers of the U.S. Naval Radio Station (later Radio Hill) in 1946.

First how my family came to the Bay Area: Early 1946 was a time of great change in our family. My father, CPO Lester O. Robertson, USN, returned from the Pacific Theater in December, 1945 and we joined him in Oakland in January 1946. We lived in temporary housing for 30 days. In February, he was assigned to Alameda Naval Air Station and we had to live in civilian housing there.

Mother's brother, Lt. Arthur W. Caddy, USN, had returned also from the Pacific Theater and was assigned to the 12th Naval District Headquarters in San Francisco. He and Aunt Nell lived again in their home in Oakland. Uncle Art worked with Ernest Carr in communications; and he, Ernie and Ernie's wife, Martha, became friends in a few weeks.

Now to tell you how our family met Ernie and Martha, and about our stay at the US Navy Radio Station, now known as “Radio Hill” in South San Francisco.

My paternal grandmother died April 4, 1946 in Lincoln, Nebraska. Taking leave, my father and mother took us 3 children for the funeral and burial. A few days after returning to Alameda, we 3 children became ill with the measles.

About April 20, 1946 my mother was called that her father was dying in Lincoln. She and her brother were discussing making another trip in such a short time again for their father's funeral. Dad couldn't take more leave and though we 3 were recovering, we were still not well enough for a trip, and no one could care for us if mother left. My uncle talked about the problems with his friend Ernie at work. After discussing the problems his wife Martha and Ernie told my Uncle Art they would help our family in this time of grief by taking care of us 3 children. They asked mother and dad to come to dinner, get to know the 2 of them better, and decide, hopefully, to allow them to help.

Going to meet Ernie and Martha was so exciting. We drove over the Bay Bridge and then to South San Francisco. The Carrs were the caretakers of an inactive US Navy Radio Station there. My recollection about their home is the gate at the entrance that had to be opened by hand and a gravel driveway leading up to the small houses, clustered on the left of the road near the top of a hill. Each house had two apartments and all were connected by wooden walkways. We were delighted with the walkways because they reminded us of our grandmother's home with wooden walkways in Nebraska. Across the gravel road and a short distance from Martha and Ernie's home was a tall 3 story building with lights on

the roof and the sides. The 6 adults talked and talked while we played with their German shepherd, Duchess.

We were told we would stay with Martha and Ernie while mother went to her father's funeral in Nebraska. My brother had his 5th birthday in April; I turned 8 years old in May and my sister was almost 3 years old.

We came to stay with Martha in April and were interested in everything at their place. Knowing our curiosity, she told us that she would show us the "big building" one time and that we could not go there again. She took us into the building; having us walk in single file behind her while she carried our small sister. Each floor had big windows where we could look out at the land and the water. There were a few tables or counters on one floor, cables terminated in some places on every floor, some broken glass here and there. She told us that sailors talked to the ships in the Bay by radio from the big building. She took us everywhere and when we left, she locked the door and reminded us not to go back. She said she and Ernie were taking care of the place and we must do what she told us.

One day when the sun was out, the temperature was warmer, and we were much recovered from our illnesses, Martha said she would show us another place on the property. We followed her and her dog, Duchess, bounded around us while we walked some distance away from the houses and the "big building" and came to a round, wooden 2-story structure. I am not sure, but I believe the "boards" were vertical instead of horizontal on the outside of the building. We went inside and there were some "counters" with rolled charts on them on the 2nd floor. We were intrigued with the charts. Martha told us they were used also by the sailors who worked in the "big building" when they talked by radio to the ships in the Bay. She again locked that building, reminding us not to go there again. We promised her we would not go there. Then we walked further toward the Bay. She would not let us go into the water, but let the German shepherd swim a few minutes. We went home tired from the walk, but had our curiosity much satisfied.

Martha and Ernie were given German shepherd puppies to train in the basic commands until they were old enough to be trained as seeing-eye dogs. Later we learned Duchess left Martha and Ernie for a new home.

Martha talked to us about so many things; growing up in Germany, marrying there, having her daughter Agnes, and being widowed. She left Agnes with relatives in Germany until she had enough money to care for her. Martha moved to New York City in the early 1930's and found work making salads in a restaurant. Martha learned all the "positions" in the restaurant, making all of the dishes. She became an American citizen and returned to Germany to bring Agnes here and at the same time told her family they should leave Germany too. She could not convince them that Hitler would lead Germany to disaster. She and Agnes lived in New York City and Agnes married there.

Ernie and Martha met at the restaurant, became friends, and married before World War II. He was in the Navy and she knew she would have to live in different places, leaving Agnes. She talked about how

she missed seeing her daughter and grandchildren.

In the summer of 1946, Dad was transferred to NAS Moffitt Field, and we moved to the Cape Esperance Navy housing on San Mateo Avenue, between San Bruno and South San Francisco. The first year we lived in a 2-bedroom apartment at 109 Wasp Avenue. We could sit on our front steps and look across a marshland to the San Francisco Airport, watching airplanes take off and land. The next summer we moved to a 3-bedroom apartment at 168 San Mateo Avenue. All of the streets in the complex were named after US Navy ships except San Mateo Avenue, of course. Our parents instructed us to memorize our parents' names and addresses. I see on the map that there are two private roads with ship names now in the area where Cape Esperance was.

We continued to share many good times and holidays with Martha and Ernie. Dad was transferred in June, 1948 to Pensacola, Florida and we parted from Martha and Ernie then. How sad it was! Our parents, Uncle Art and Aunt Nell, and the Carrs corresponded for years. Martha and Ernie were caretakers of a small estate in New York after he retired.

In 1951, Dad was again stationed at NAS Moffitt Field and again we lived at Cape Esperance for a year. I was 13 years old and a freshman at South San Francisco High School. I remember most of the teachers, particularly Mr. Murphy who taught Latin I, and II. That year was difficult. I started at Oxnard High School late due to the construction of the new high school and a late opening. When we moved to San Bruno, I transferred to Capuchino High. After a few weeks I was advised I would have to go to South San Francisco High School, so I transferred again. My parents advised the teachers about all of the disruption in my classes. Three teachers gave me extra work and catch-up time for several weeks. I have been grateful always to those teachers: Mr. Peterson in Algebra; Mr. Homan in social studies and English, and Mr. Murphy in Latin. I finished my freshman year with good grades and went into my sophomore year much better prepared, and not "lost in the cracks". We moved to Sunnyvale and I started my sophomore year at Fremont High School.

My children have heard my family stories about living in San Bruno and South San Francisco and about sharing some of the best of times with Martha and Ernie. My younger son visited your city a few years ago.

Respectfully,

Virginia Robertson Alyea