

# **MARITIME COMMUNICATIONS**

By Richard Sorokin

Communications on the water probably started with a shout or a wave. The shout died quickly for it had no effect because of distance and the noise of the water. The wave grew. First, just a hand, then a piece of cloth or leather because it was bigger. Then a pole was added to get it higher and easier to wave. Someone came up with the idea that different patterns on the flags could mean special things. Code flags became popular during the Napoleonic wars. Then the idea of flags representing the alphabet came into play. These were used into the Second World War. These were flags that were hoisted up a yardarm or mast.

Some where back before the First World War semaphore signaling came into being. This was the positioning of two similar flags about the body to send a message. The position of the flags that were held by a person determines the letter of the alphabet that is sent. All flag signaling is only good as far as you can see. At sea there are great distances. Something better was needed.

Along came radio waves. The first radio communication was by Morse code. Morse is a system of dots and dashes that represents letters of the alphabet. By opening and closing of an electrical circuit, a radio wave could carry a message. This was the same system used to cross the continent, the telegraph. This method of communication was used during the Second World War. Radio with vacuum tubes technology was poor. It lacked the ability to cover large distances. In the 60's and 70's we had Citizen Band radio and marine short wave radio for a time. This was all dropped due to changes in our atmosphere.

Today we use solid state technology and satellites. The amazing thing is we can use our little old cell phones and communicate around the world with no dropped time. It's like talking to the guy next door. Even Spock would be impressed.

Communication at sea today can be by cell phone out to about twenty miles. Radio is the prime communication device today.

Nautical flags are still used but are only ceremonial.