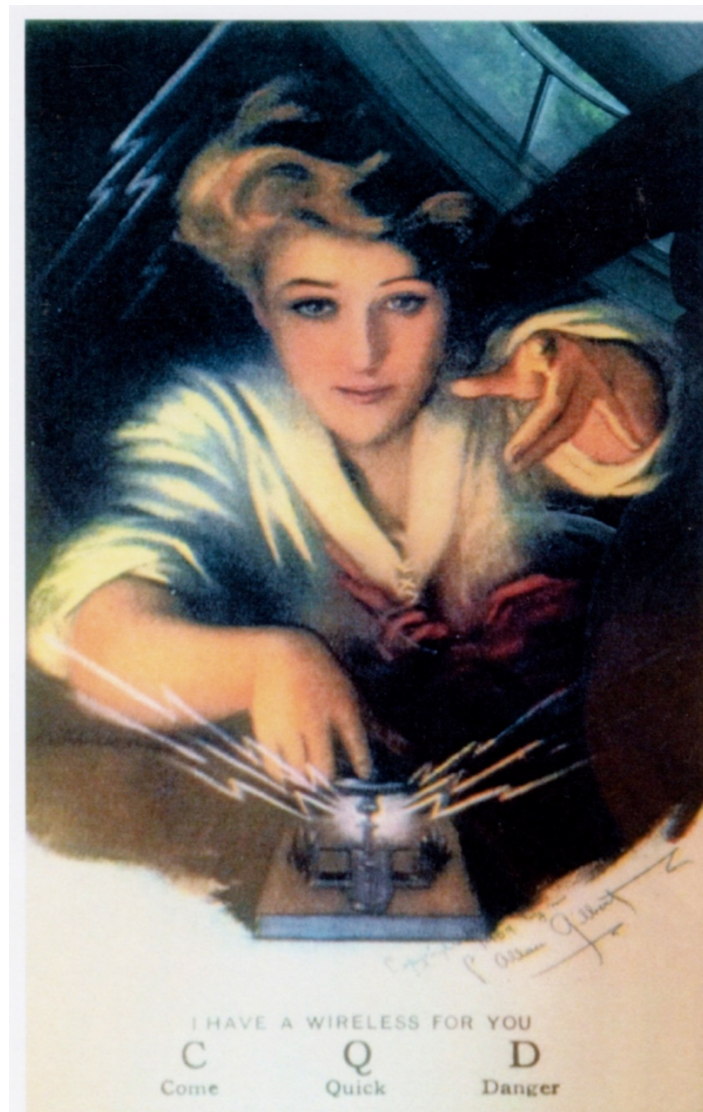


Bart Lee, A Vintage Vignette

C Q D 1909 – before “SOS”

This stylish lady wireless operator is sending CQD in this 1909 painting (by C. Allan Gilbert, a noted American illustrator). The image is now emblematic of the early romance of wireless telegraphy, especially in saving lives at sea.



In January 1909, a collision sank the RMS *Republic* off Nantucket Island.¹ The wireless operator, Jack Binns, sent out the distress call that saved all the passengers and thus became the first (of many) wireless heroes.



¹ See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Republic_\(1903\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Republic_(1903)); see also www.jackbinns.org

The *New York Times*, on January 24, 1909 reported:

“ ‘C Q D’ Out of the Fog --

“There were just a few seconds of waiting and then the Republic began to send in haste, repeating over and over again the letters ‘C Q D.’

“The added ‘D’ meant danger, and the three letters together are a cry for help — a general ambulance call of the deep sea.

“‘C Q D — C Q D’ called the wireless out of the fog, and then came the Republic’s identification letters and next the wireless instrument ashore and on the other steamers began to deliver this, the first message telling of the accident:

“6:40 A. M. Rammed by unknown ship 26 miles south of Nantucket. Latitude 40.17, longitude 70.

“Immediately the shore operator sent out another ‘C Q D’ call, and then repeated the message, letting all other vessels within the zone, 200 to 300 miles from the station, know what had happened and the steamship Republic’s need for help. The shore instrument is capable of covering a greater zone than the Republic, and could reach other vessels which might not have heard the call of distress from the Republic. It was an indirect appeal to every steamer within reach to make for the scene of the collision without delay. *** ”

Jack Binns became rightly famous for way more than 15 minutes. He often wrote introductions to books about wireless and radio. He served in World War One, and he later became the President of the Hazeltine radio company. He died in 1959. (de K6VK) ##