

The freighter SS *West Harshaw* (Emergency Fleet Corporation/US Shipping Board), was one of 111 steamships built of her design (Design 1013), constructed and put into service between 1918 and 1920 as a response to the exigencies of World War I; *West Harshaw* was launched in 1919. On 24 July 1926, the freighter was just two days out from New Orleans, en route to London with a cargo of wheat, when the ship's young radio operator, Hewitt Morris, started receiving radio transmissions warning of an approaching hurricane off the Dry Tortugas, some sixty miles west of Key West. Radio communications in those days came in the form of the dots and dashes of Morse code, and when Mr. Morris reported the desperate S•O•S of an Italian steamer in distress, the captain gave the order to go to the rescue.

Most of us have heard the bare facts of sea rescues before. Morris's first-person account brings the world of the merchant mariner from a single point in time to life. As a first for *Sea History*, we are printing the opening segment of his story here, followed by three short excerpts from the remaining manuscript, and putting the complete text on our website: [www.seahistory.org](http://www.seahistory.org). If you are interested in the rest of the story, you can read it online or download it to read it later. We understand the debt we owe our merchant marine, and by sharing Morris's story, we hope to contribute to our overall understanding of the role they played in our nation's history.

—*Burchenal Green, President, National Maritime Historical Society*