



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

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GUNSMOKE

Through the eyes of one of the sound men
by Ray Kemper, © 2002

Tom Hanley, Bill James and I worked for the Don Lee Broadcasting System (KHJ) in Hollywood during the late 1940s. We did many shows together but in March of 1951 a position in sound effects at CBS Radio became available and I accepted it. Tom and Bill continued working at KHJ but things were winding down over there and when another sound effects position opened up at CBS less than a year later, I strongly recommended Tommy, and we were soon back together as a team. Some months later Gunsmoke started and Tommy and I were assigned as the sound effects men (although I believe Clark Casey and Dave Light did the first show or two if memory serves me correctly). The Producer/Director of Gunsmoke, Norman Macdonnell, had worked with Tommy and me on other shows - Suspense, Romance, Escape, etc., and he had requested us for his new show. Tom and I quickly realized that Gunsmoke was a most unusual program.



Ray Kemper - 1951

Norm wanted great realism and insisted on sound effects being an integral part of that. It was a challenge for Tommy and me and one we thoroughly enjoyed. One thing that bothered Norm immensely were the gunshots. In those days most sound men used 22 or 38 caliber revolvers filled with blanks to do a show. One would think that would be good, but every sound leaving the studio went through a

limiter in Master Control and the limiter would allow the beginning of a gunshot to get through the system, then it would clip it off until the repercussion had been reduced to an acceptable level. The result on the air was a sound that was nothing more than a weak cork pop.

So Tom Hanley and I gathered all the guns we could get our hands on - 22s, 38s, and a 45. We took a lot of blank ammo and brought some live rounds also. We then loaded all this in our car, along with a tape machine and headed out to the desert to an area known as Bouquet Canyon, where it was legal to shoot firearms. We spent the better part of a day shooting and recording all the weapons we had using both blanks and live ammo. Unfortunately, when we returned to the studio and listened to the recorded sounds we were very disappointed. They all lacked the reverberation that gives a gunshot such a sound of authority.

The next day we remembered that Bill Conrad had a home in the Laurel Canyon area, and to make a long story short we wound up there with our guns and tape machine. It was perfect - Bill's home was backed by hills that formed a small amphitheater and one gunshot proved that the reverberation was exactly what we wanted. We called the police department to get an okay to discharge firearms and they said if we cleared it with the neighbors, it was okay with them.

Back in the studio we knew we had what we
(Continued on page 3)

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For information: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887, or email at jayhick@aol.com

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17th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention April 11 - 12, 2003; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 haradio@hotmail.com

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wanted so we dubbed all the gunshot sounds onto MacKenzie tape cartridges, placed cue marks at the beginning of each shot or series of shots and took them to the next Gunsmoke rehearsal. We had the engineer, Bob Chadwick, feed the output of the Mackenzie tape machine directly into a line to his console, set the fader at a fixed level and threatened him with death if he sent the output through a limiter. When the shots were first heard by Norm Macdonnell in the booth, he jumped up and did a tap dance on the console (a slight exaggeration). That's how the Gunsmoke gunshots were born and that's how they remained for the rest of the series. One side note: the recording of the 45 was by far the biggest sound and that became Matt Dillon's gun and always remained so.

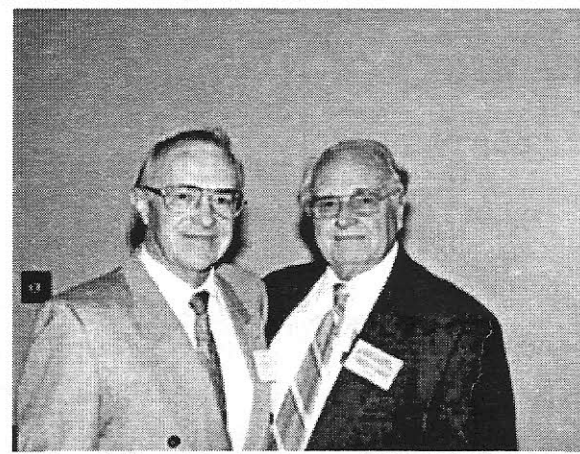
Unfortunately, it was only a month or two before our shots were copied and used on other shows. Norm tried to stop the plagiarism, but to no avail.

I think the remarkable success of Gunsmoke was a combined result of John Meston's great scripts and other writers, Norm Macdonnell's attention to detail and realism and the marvelous characters developed by Bill Conrad as Matt Dillon, Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot, Georgia Ellis as Kitty, Howard McNear as Doc and to a degree, Tom Hanley and myself (and later, Bill James) with special sound effects. It was definitely a team effort but the driving force behind radio Gunsmoke was, without doubt, Norm Macdonnell and John Meston.

As the show became a big hit a great rapport developed between the cast and crew. I can say there was a feeling of "family" among us as with no other show with which I have ever been associated. Norm Macdonnell tended to use a cadre of actors and actresses and seldom hired outside that nucleus, therefore, the basic group was relatively small compared to other shows. Bill Conrad would occasionally throw a party for cast and crew at his

beautiful Laurel Canyon home and a great time was always had by all. It goes without saying that Bill was a gracious host.

One of the things Norm asked Tommy and me to come up with at the shows inception was a distinctive walk by Matt Dillon so the listener could always identify Matt. We devised a very heavy, long step, enhanced by the sound of spurs. No one else ever wore them on the show and Dillon's spurs didn't jingle, they jangled - he sounded eight feet tall and Bill Conrad's deep voice made the listener certain that Matt Dillon was a very big man. There would sometimes be a sequence, such as a fight between Matt and a bad guy, in which not a word would be spoken. Perhaps one minute of nothing but grunts from the actors and the sound of



Ray (left) and Parley Baer at 1999 SPERDVAC

two large men beating the hell out of each other - not fast, but slow and ponderously - these were large men and they hit hard and viciously.

I will not go into detail about the jokes we used to play on the actors; suffice it to say they were many and they were sometimes obscene. That's why show day was known as "Dirty Saturday". The



Ray (left) Tom and Norm Macdonnell (right)

object was to break up the actors during rehearsal any way we could and Tommy, Bill and I went to great lengths to do that. Obviously, we were all very fond of one another or we could never have done all those silly things. However, make no mistake, when show time rolled around we were all very serious and very professional.

I worked on Gunsmoke from its inception in 1952 until about 1958 at which time I was asked to be the tape editor for the Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney show. Bill James (who had moved over from KHJ soon after Tommy) took my place, and he and Tom remained the primary sound effects technicians until the show went off the air, still trying to break up the actors during rehearsals.

Bill, Tommy and I all agreed that of the many shows we did through the years, Gunsmoke was by far the most enjoyable. Tom and Bill are not with us anymore and I miss them very much, but I have a feeling they may be pulling the same gags where they are now – I hope so.

Ray Kemper, former Gunsmoke Sound Man

New in the RHAC Library



by Maletha & Dick King

This month the CD library continues with the "The Lives of Harry of Lime and we have six more shows than were originally offered in the other libraries. Only CD #24 has marginal sound.

Our CD library also has added "Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle. Only one additional show has been added to this series, however as before, dates for #225 through 228 may be approximate - as are other references as well.

Finally, we end this month's shows with "Grand Marquee", which will be concluded next month. This is really a great series of shows, all of which are complete and entertaining.

We often wonder if the members realize how much time and research goes into selecting the shows that make up the CD library. A show is chosen only after Bill has spent many hours listening to several sources for each show before the best one is selected. This often takes four or more hours per show, plus the time spent finding the other sources.

*From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany*



This issue reflects a wonderful happenstance. Mr. Ray Kemper, who was one of the sound effects men on *Gunsmoke*, read Dr. Beckett's article on the show in our June issue. Our lead article in this issue by Mr. Kemper resulted from his correspondence with our president, Larry Weide. Additionally, Mr. Kemper and Dr. Beckett began corresponding, which inspired a part of Dr. Beckett's *Have Gun, Will Travel* article. May we have many more such happy outcomes.

On a more somber note, we are reminded that the 11th of this month is the 1st anniversary of the Attack on America. We are remembering both horror and heroism on this day. Hopefully, we will continue the spirit of coming together that began on this day one year ago.

RETURN WITH US NOW...

HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL ON RADIO

by Dr. Charles Beckett, © 2002



Have Gun Will Travel was first heard on radio November 23, 1958. The title of the program was "Strange Vendetta." After brief introductory theme music, a deep, commanding voice was heard to say:

"Sit down gentlemen, and sit still. I've come to order a coffin for the first one of you who makes a move."

Then, more brief theme music, followed by announcer Hugh Douglas setting the scene, telling us that this was:

"Have Gun Will Travel, starring Mr. John Dehner as Paladin. San Francisco, 1875. The Carlton Hotel. Headquarters of the man called Paladin,"

The show had the distinction of being the first major radio series to have had its beginnings on television. (The television version was first aired on September 14, 1957 and ran through September 21, 1963. It starred Richard Boone as Paladin, with Ram Tong as Heyboy and Lisa Lu as Heygirl).

The character of Paladin has been referred to variously as a gun-for-hire, gunfighter, soldier-of-fortune, troubleshooter, and knight errant. Whatever else he was, Paladin was educated, cultured, and a gentleman. He was West Point educated and an officer in the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war he settled down in San Francisco. When not hiring out his services and his gun, he lived well. His manner of dress was that of a gentleman. His favorite non-business pursuits while residing at the elegant Carlton Hotel were enjoying good food and wine, the company of beautiful women, and attending the opera - not necessarily in that order.

His business card featured the picture of a Chess knight and read simply, "Have Gun, Will Travel/Wire Paladin/San Francisco." By definition, a paladin is a wandering knight in search of adventure. To my knowledge, he was never referred to by any other name. His working attire included black

trousers, shirt, and hat; complemented by a holstered western revolver strapped to his leg. He often carried a hidden derringer as a back-up gun.

Paladin considered himself more of a problem solver and negotiator than a hired gun. Where reason wouldn't work, he was quite skilled with his fists, and when all else failed, with his gun. He demanded handsome fees for doing what others wouldn't or couldn't do. But he did it with style, logic and good conscience. He was not hesitant to refuse an assignment or to turn against a client if he felt the client's cause was not just. After completing an assignment, he occasionally donated his fee, or took no fee, when it would benefit a needy cause or person.

Paladin was a loner and had no close friends. The person coming closest to being considered a friend was probably Heyboy, a Chinese employee of the Carlton Hotel, who had become Paladin's right hand man in San Francisco, performing chores and running errands for him--and keeping him informed whenever a beautiful woman registered alone at the hotel.

John Dehner, who also had played a variety of characters on Gunsmoke and many other radio series, was a strong and convincing Paladin. Just before his Have Gun Will Travel role, he had starred in the short lived Frontier Gentleman western radio series.

The other two regular cast members were Ben Wright as Heyboy and Virginia Gregg as Miss Wong, also a hotel employee, and Heyboy's girlfriend,

John Dehner Was born John Forkum on November 23, 1915 in Staten Island, New York. He had studied art at the University of California, at Berkeley. He was a pianist in college, playing in dance bands. After college, he played professionally with a traveling acting group, doubling as an actor. Among his other accomplishments he was a fencer, competing in and winning several competitions. He served in the Army during World War II. After the war he worked in radio as a newsmen, commentator, and actor. He also worked as an animator for Walt Disney Studios - earning \$18 a week. His varied background served him well on The Hermit's Cave radio series. In his words, "Not only did I play the hermit, but I played all the organ music. So, I'd

announce it ... and then I'd put on my hermit's voice and I'd cackle away, ... then off we'd go into the drama. Between scenes, I'd dash over to the organ and play bridges."

Ironically, although he turned down the lead in the Gunsmoke series for fear of being typecast as a western actor, many of his radio appearances were in western shows, often as a villain. In addition to his radio work, he enjoyed long and distinguished careers in television and the movies, appearing in 98 feature films.

On February 19, 1984, Mr. Dehner was interviewed on radio by John Dunning.



When asked how he felt about the shows he was associated with during the era of the adult westerns (Gunsmoke, Frontier Gentleman and Have Gun Will Travel), Dehner had this to say: "Great warmth ... We had actors we knew well and loved dearly ... It was a tight knit group, and we enjoyed it very much ... It was a warm time period."

Asked how he felt about taking a part that had already been established on television, Dehner reflected that, "There was a story to Have Gun Will Travel. Dick Boone was doing it on television and while he was doing it, we also were doing the radio version. They - whoever they were - thought it would be a good idea to take the scripts that were being used on television, convert them to radio, and voila, you have a radio show, not having to pay any money for a new script. Well, it turned out that they were totally inappropriate for radio (the TV scripts), and they were forced to write new radio shows."

Asked if Boone's portrayal of Paladin had any influence on how he approached the character, his answer was, "No. I didn't pay any attention to him at all. It was whatever came out of me, ... I am not about to imitate. So, I just did it the way I felt it."

Prior to his starring roles as Paladin, and as J.B. Kendall on Frontier Gentleman, Dehner had been one of the most frequently heard actors in the Gunsmoke series, playing a variety of character parts. Some of his many other radio credits include: Pursuit (as Inspector Peter Black), The Adventures of Philip Marlowe, The Count of Monte Cristo, Crime Classics, Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar; On stage, The Silent Men, and The Voyage of the Scarlet Queen.

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John Dehner died February 4, 1992, in Santa Barbara, California.

Ben Wright (Heyboy), besides being a fine actor, had a talent for voices. In addition to playing a Chinese in *Have Gun Will Travel*, he assumed the title role in the *Sherlock Holmes* series - having replaced John Stanley in 1949. He also was Tulku, a Tibetan servant on *The Green Lama*. Some of his other credits include: *Pursuit* - as Inspector Peter Black (inheriting the role from John Dehner in 1951), *Crime Classics*, *Escape*, *Gunsmoke*, *On Stage*, *Broadway is my Beat*, *Maisie*, *The Modern Adventures of Casanova*, and *Mystery in the Air*.

Ben Wright was born in 1919 and died in 1989.

Virginia Gregg (Miss Wong), like Dehner and Wright, also enjoyed an illustrious acting career. She had recurring feature roles on *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar* (Betty Lewis); *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* (Nikki Porter), *Dr. Kildare* (Nurse Parker), *Let George Do It* (Claire Brooks), *One Man's Family* (Betty Carter), and *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* (as his wealthy girlfriend, Helen Asher). She also had supporting character roles in such radio shows as *Gunsmoke*, *Frontier Gentleman*, *Escape*, *Dragnet*, *The Halls of Ivy*, *Michael Shane*, *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe*, and *The Six Shooter*. She was one of the busiest actors in radio. She also had long and memorable careers in television and the movies, and was the (uncredited) voice of Norman Bates mother in the movie *Psyche*. Prior to her acting career, she had played string bass in an all girl band.

Virginia Gregg was born March 6, 1916 in Harrisburg, Illinois, and died September 15, 1986 in Encino, California.

In addition to the three main characters on *Have Gun Will Travel*, the show benefited from the considerable talents of the "Hollywood Radio Row" actors in character roles. (Dehner, Wright and Gregg had all come from this stellar talent pool.). Many actors from this group performed on *Have Gun Will Travel* and/or *Gunsmoke*, as well as being part of many other radio shows during their careers. They included such fine performers as Harry Bartell, Lawrence Dobkin, Sam Edwards, Lou Krugman, Barney Phillips, Joseph Kearns, Ralph Moody, Richard Beals, Jean Bates, Joseph Gunson, and Betty Garr - to name just a few.

Besides those mentioned above, there were many others, behind the scenes, responsible for the show's success. They included: Norm Macdonnell

(producer/director--for the first few months of the show), followed by Frank Paris (producer/director/writer), Herb Meadow & Sam Rolfe (creators/writers), Bernard Hermann (music), Gene Roddenberry, John Dawson, Marian Clark, Ray Kemper, Ann Doud, and others (writers).

Sound effects were created by Tom Hanley and Bill James. (Although involved in other projects at the time, Ray Kemper participated in the first show as a favor to Norm Macdonnell). The team continued to maintain the high standards they had set on the *Gunsmoke* series. Kemper also wrote several scripts for *Have Gun Will Travel*, including *The Gunsmith* (April 26, 1959)--one of this writer's favorite episodes.

The final *Have Gun Will Travel* show, *The Inheritance*, aired November 27, 1960. As he bearded a train to Boston to claim an inheritance left him by a deceased aunt, Paladin was asked when he would be back. His wistful reply as the train-pulled away was, "Just don't forget me. Keep looking for me. I may be back."

We haven't forgotten you Paladin. Fortunately for us, you are back - to stay - in our tape and CD collections. We are grateful to a superb cast and crew for providing us with so much high caliber (no pun intended) entertainment.

Footnote: The radio version of *Have Gun Will Travel* had some interesting comparisons with *Gunsmoke*. Both were adult western dramas. *Gunsmoke* began as a radio series and became a TV series. *Have Gun Will Travel* began as a TV series and became a radio series. For a period of time, the radio and TV versions of both shows ran simultaneously (*Have Gun Will Travel* - from November 1958 to November 1960, and *Gunsmoke* - from September 1955 to June 1961. Both shows employed many of the same actors (e.g., Dehner, Wright and Gregg had played supporting roles on *Gunsmoke* before becoming regulars on *Have Gun Will Travel*). Sound effects for *Gunsmoke* were also provided at various times by Ray Kemper, Tom Hanley and Bill James, (My thanks to Ray Kemper for providing additional insights about the cast and crew of "Have Gun Will Travel").

SCARIEST SHOW CONTEST

Remember to get your entries in for RHAC's Scariest Show Contest by Sept. 22 at the latest. E-Mail /snail mail are both OK. (see Aug. issue)