

RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

Volume 28, Number 7

July, 2003

RAY KEMPER

More Than a Radio Sound Effects Man
by Dr. Charles Beckett

Who is Ray Kemper? Actor, announcer, disc jockey, script writer, sound effects man, sound engineer/editor? He's been all of these -- and more.

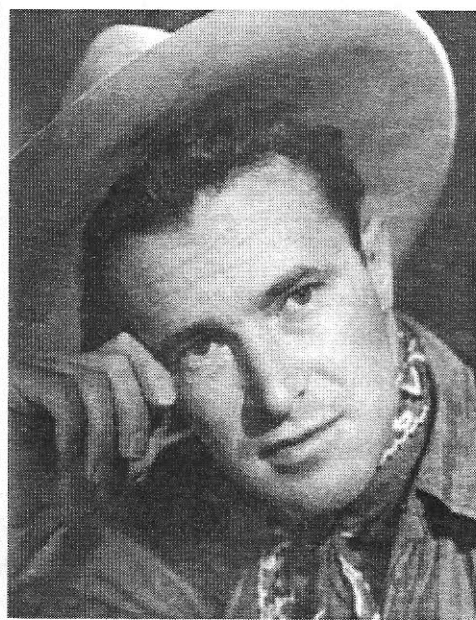
Ray Kemper grew up in southern California, with dreams of becoming an actor. In high school, he joined a little theatre group and won the lead role of Henry Aldrich in Clifford Goldsmith's play What a Life! Then, while still a high school student, he won a scholarship to the Celeste Rush School of Radio Acting. (Celeste Rush was the wife of well-known radio actor Lou Merrill.) Once a week, on Saturday mornings, he would attend her classes. In a class of eight students, he was the only boy. Students were the actors, sound effects men or women, and anything else that needed doing to get a show on the air.

Right after graduation from high school in 1942, with Ms. Rush's help, Ray was hired by radio station KHJ -- as a mail clerk. Shortly thereafter, he won an audition as a night shift announcer on KHJ's FM station. His job was to play sixteen-inch music platters, and announce song titles. In addition, each hour he was required to read the news from a teletype machine. In his words, "I

hated that because I had to read it cold and was always nervous about coming across words or phrases I couldn't pronounce. I'm sure all three of my listeners got a boot out of those occasions." His modesty and humor would remain with him throughout his career.

During his stint as a night time disc jockey, Ray spent his days trying out for acting jobs at movie studios, and was interviewed for several parts, among them the part of Henry Aldrich for the movie series and The North Star at MGM.

Then, in 1943, he graciously accepted an invitation from Uncle Sam to go to work for him, in the U.S. Army. He quickly learned the first rule of military life -- Never Volunteer! The unit commander had announced that the battalion was in need of a bugler. Ray had played alto horn in the high school band. So, never one to shirk his duty, he stepped forward and accepted the challenge. Sadly, he quickly decided that this had probably been a mistake. After being given some time to practice, he remembers that "I found myself in front of the entire battalion, blowing that stupid horn. One clinker after another came from the end of the bugle...



Ray during his acting days in 1950

The troops could not control their mirth... I even saw the Colonel choking up... That was the end of my bugle blowing."

(Continued on Pg. 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150 (303) 761-4139

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KNUS	"Radio Revisited"	Weekdays, 10:00 - 11:00 PM
KRMA TV Channel 6	Secondary Audio Program (SAP), "Tribute to OTR"	Sunday, 2:00 PM
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Convention Schedules

The Friends of Old-time Radio 28th Annual Convention Oct 23 – 26, 2003 at the Holiday Inn-North, Newark NJ. Our web site will keep you up to date. For information contact Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887 email: JayHick@aol.com, web site: <http://www.lofcom.com/nostalgia/fotr>

SPERDVAC Annual Convention Nov. 7 - 9, 2003 at Hacienda Hotel, Los Angeles, Ca. For additional information visit the SPERDVAC web site at www.sperdvac.org or write the club at : P.O. Box 7177, Van Nuys Ca. 91409

18th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention, April 16 – 17, 2004; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 haradio@hotmail.com

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July, 2003

Kemper's next career move was to attend classes to help fill the Army's need for engineers. But, his real ambition was to fly, and when the opportunity arose, he applied for, and passed the requirements to become an Air Corps cadet. But, once again, another career change presented itself. (In the Army, these are called "opportunities.") The Army decided that infantry men were more in demand than pilots, so Kemper was shipped out to train with the 103rd Infantry Division at Camp Howze, Texas.

Shortly before his unit was to go overseas, Ray sustained a compound fracture of a finger in a pick-up football game. After he woke up from surgery, he learned that his unit had shipped out without him. As a result, he became permanently assigned to the hospital as a reconditioning instructor, working with amputees and other seriously wounded soldiers coming back from the front lines. In his off-duty time, he spent most of his Army pay on private flying lessons at a local airport in Sherman, Texas. Around this time, an Army buddy told him he had to come over to the hospital post office and meet a beautiful girl who worked there. So when Ray had a chance, he did go over there, and in his words, "As soon as I met Novice Reynolds, I was a goner."

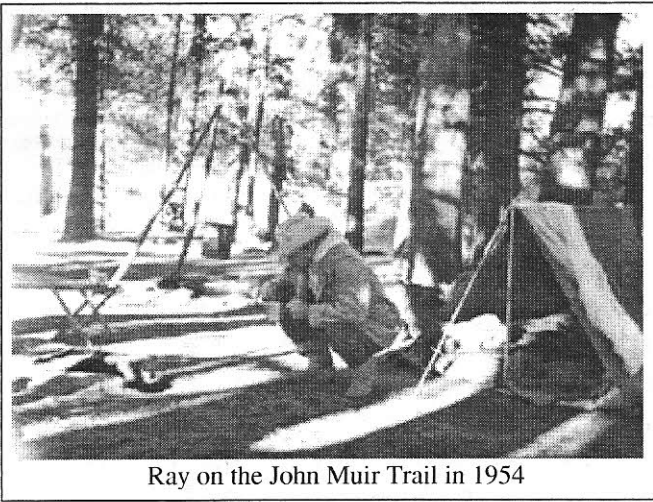
Ray and Novice began dating in February 1945, and were married that September. Possibly, one of the highlights of their courtship was the result of Ray's having recently been soloed by his "wacky instructor" after only three hours flying time. Here he was, an experienced (?) pilot with a total of eight hours in the air. But, he only had a student permit and wasn't allowed to fly with passengers. However, as far as he was concerned, that was a minor technicality. So, he invited Novice out for a flight. He rented a Piper Cub from the airport in Sherman, Texas. Since he couldn't officially fly with a passenger, he flew by himself to a pre-selected cow pasture nearby, where Novice and her sister had driven to meet him. After buzzing the field to scare the cows away, he landed. But, he hadn't realized how wet the pasture was. Once Novice was aboard, Ray slowly began his take-off from the soft ground, with a rancher chasing him on horseback -- probably the owner of the cows. He just barely avoided a stand of trees in his take-off flight path. Realizing he didn't dare return to the cow pasture to let Novice off for fear of getting shot by the rancher, he wagged his wings at Novice's sister on the ground

and she dutifully followed the little plane to a straight stretch of country road where Ray landed to let Novice disembark to rejoin her sister. When he flew back to the airport and landed, his "wacky" instructor took one look at the mud on the wheels and said, "You really shouldn't do things like that, it's dangerous."

After being discharged from the Army in 1946, Kemper re-applied for a job at his old radio station, KHJ. But, there were no openings for announcers, so he accepted a job as a sound effects man, at announcer's pay. He explained "... I snapped it up -- starvation being the only alternative." He was assigned to such shows as Pier 23, The Cisco Kid, Red Ryder, The Count of Monte Cristo, Voyage of the Scarlet Queen, and Straight Arrow, among others. At KHJ, sound effects was a big department of talented sound men, including Tom Hanley and Bill James, who became his colleagues for many years, on many shows.

In 1947, while working with Hanley and James on sound effects for The Count of Monte Cristo, Kemper added another facet to his career. "I always believed I could do anything anyone else could do and felt that I could write a script for the show." He did, on his own time, and presented the final product to Jaime del Valle, producer/director of the series, asking him to read and comment on it. The next day, del Valle told Ray that he was going to buy it. The show, Hour of Vengeance, aired July 20, 1947. "In all," Kemper recalls, "I think I wrote about eight or ten scripts for the show." A few remembered were; The Death of Monte Cristo, The Promise of a Rebel and Devil Mountain. He went on to write for Gunsmoke; Big Chugg Wilson, Bless Me 'Til I Die, The Sodbuster -- and for Have Gun Will Travel; The Gunsmith, Prunella's Fella, Sam Crow and others.

In 1948, Ray was hired away from radio to be a writer/director for an advertising agency in Hollywood. Two years later, somewhat disillusioned, he returned to his first love -- acting. However, the pickings were slim and after appearing in a few radio shows, and a movie, Navy Bound, he went to work in the CBS (Hollywood) sound effects department, in 1951. Once again, his reasoning was practical -- he and his family had become accustomed to eating regularly. He remained in the sound department for seven years, doing sound effects on the Jack Benny Show, Gunsmoke, Suspense, Escape, Fort Laramie, Have Gun Will Travel, and others.



Ray on the John Muir Trail in 1954

Commenting about working for Jack Benny, Ray said, "For the four or five seasons I worked his show as number two sound man (behind Gene Twombly) I got a check from him every week -- over and above my CBS salary. Not many stars did that in those days."

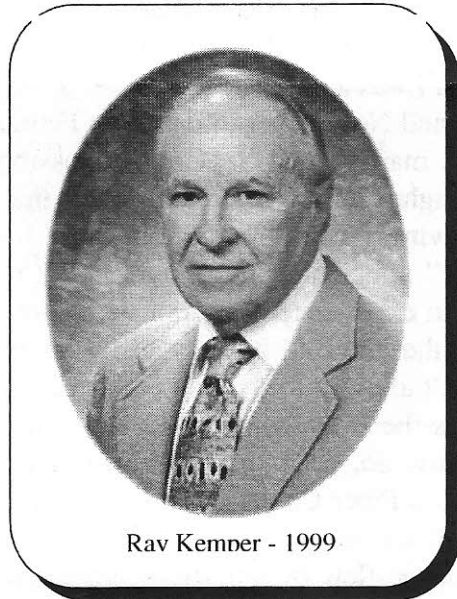
During 1958-60, Kemper was recording engineer and tape editor for the Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney radio shows. His job was to record the entire show, and edit it, using the best portions of the songs they sang. He explained it this way, "Although I never went into the studio when the singers were performing, I soon learned every nuance of their voices and could easily inter-cut any portion of music from one piece to another. It was a challenge and a lot of fun, even though I never met Bing or Rosie.

In 1949, while associate producer on the Straight Arrow radio adventure series, Ray Kemper, along with the show's producer, Ted Robertson, recorded Indian ceremonial rites and tribal songs for the Mutual Broadcasting Company's special radio salute -- *The Song of the Tom-Tom* -- to celebrate American Indian Day. Chants and dances were recorded during several inter-tribal Indian ceremonies that Summer. Some of this material was later used as background on Straight Arrow programs. During the United States Senate meeting On September 23, 1949, Senator Chavez of New Mexico had the following recorded into the Congressional Record; "I wish to add my thanks and congratulations to Mr. Robertson, Mr. Kemper, the Straight Arrow program, and to persons who gave their time to acquaint the American public with the cultural background of our American Indian life." Kemper's partner, Ted Robertson, in a newspaper interview -- called Kemper "the best sound man I've

ever worked with."

Over the years, Ray was responsible for the audio on such television shows as The Red Skelton Comedy Hour, The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour, and Jefferson's, Maude, Three's Company, The Carol Burnett Show, The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, One Day at a Time, and others. In 1967, he was nominated for an Emmy award for his sound engineering on the musical, Brigadoon.

Kemper was audio engineer on the Red Skelton Comedy Hour TV show during Skelton's final five years with CBS. Ray holds Skelton in high esteem, both as a performer and as a person. He recounts a story about the time Lana Turner was to be a guest on the show. She was understandably nervous and a little frightened, since this was to be her first live television appearance. Red recognized how distraught Lana was, so during the pre-show warm-up, he introduced her to the audience and told them how thrilled he was to have her as a guest on his show. Kemper said that "you could see Lana's face relax with those kind words. No doubt, Red's introduction inspired her to give an outstanding performance."



Rav Kemper - 1999

In 1980, Ray retired. He and Novice built a home in a picturesque area in the foothills northeast of Fresno, California, where they still reside. Their home includes many pieces of furniture that Ray made, and a beautiful seven-foot high Grandfather clock he built for their 25th wedding anniversary.

Ray briefly came out of retirement a few years ago, when he was asked to direct a re-creation of a Gunsmoke radio show he had written years before -- "Bless Me 'Til I Die". Afterward, he was presented with an award honoring him for his contributions to

the golden age of radio. His naturally humble and unassuming nature can be summed up with his reaction to that award: "Although very flattered -- I also found myself laughing because I knew something they didn't. I knew that deep down inside me I was still the same skinny, shy, red-headed kid I had always been."

Ray Kemper may consider himself to be shy, but it certainly hasn't prevented him from achieving whatever goals he has set for himself.

Ten Thousand Drunk Chickens

by Ray Kemper

In the early 1950s, Bill James and I were assigned to do sound effects on an Escape or Romance or some such radio show. The director was William Robson, not an easy man to work for. If a script called for the rattle of onion-skin paper, you'd better darn well have onion-skin paper there. In this case, the script called for the sound effect of ten thousand drunk chickens. Bill and I looked at one another and wondered how in the world we were going to create such a sound.

We went through our entire record library and finally found one record of a yard-full of clucking, squawking chickens. We then tape-recorded our own voices clucking and hiccuping, then we sped that tape up and overdubbed it with the legitimate chickens. The result was exactly right - and funny. However, Bill looked at me and said, "You know, Robson is never going to believe this". I replied, "I know, but I've got an idea". We took our completed tape to the engineer who cut records for CBS and asked him to record a platter for us from our tape. He did that, and gave us an official CBS label, upon which we inscribed the words, "Ten Thousand Drunk Chickens". We pasted the label on the record and waited for show day.

On that fateful day, I was working on the turntables and when the time came for the chickens effect and I began playing it, Bill Robson hit the talkback and bellowed, "Ray, that isn't ten thousand drunk chickens!" I didn't say anything; I just took off my headsets, picked up the record, walked over to the booth and held it against the glass. Robson read the label, blanched, and didn't say another word during the entire show.

Many years later, I was at a party at John and Mary Ann Meston's home. Bill Robson was there also, and I reminded him of the incident. He laughed

like crazy and said, "I remember that you son-of-a-gun! You know, I knew I had been had but I couldn't quite figure out how, so I decided to keep my mouth shut." We both had a good laugh about it.

Ah, the wonderful days of old time radio.

"Creaking Door" Effect Explained

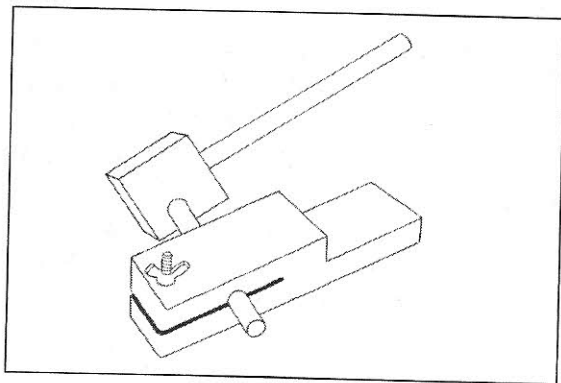
by Ray Kemper

Perhaps the most famous or infamous, of all OTR sound effects was the "creaking door" which opened the Inner Sanctum Mysteries show. Your editor recently asked Ray Kemper to explain how it was done. Ray graciously complied, including his own drawing of a "Squeak-box" with his description.

As far as the *Inner Sanctum* creaking door is concerned, that was an East coast show and I never had anything to do with it. I don't believe anyone on the West Coast did. I know we often made similar sounds, and the way it was done was simple enough; we had an open-top wooden box, approximately 3 inches wide by 9 inches long by 4 inches deep. A wooden hardwood rod was put through the sides of the box in about the middle, and on the outside of the hardwood rod was attached a wooden handle. An I-bolt was attached to the inside of one end of the box, and a small diameter cotton rope was secured tightly to the I-bolt. The rope was then impregnated with a lot of bees wax and wrapped one turn around the above mentioned wooden hardwood rod, then the end of the rope was attached to a strong spring which was attached to another I-bolt at the other end of the inside of the box. The spring was placed there to always keep heavy tension on the rope. Now, with the beeswax-impregnated rope wrapped around the hardwood rod, when you moved the handle attached to the rod you would hear a great creaking door sound. The open top on the box amplified the creaking sound, and you could easily adjust the length of the creak by moving the handle just a little bit or a lot. We had several of those "squeak-boxes" as we called them, in different sizes. The larger they were, the deeper the creaking sound. I know Bill James and I used them with great effect on *The Voyage of The Scarlet Queen* to give the sound of creaking timbers on a ship. I suspect a similar device was used for the door of *Inner Sanctum*.

Here is another type of creaker we used. I managed a drawing for you to better explain how it worked (see figure below). With the exception of the wing nut and bolt, it was all made of wood. The dowel was hardwood and was covered with resin or

beeswax to enhance the "creaking" sound. The wing nut was used to intensify the pressure on the dowel; thereby making the creaking faster or slower as one operated the handle.



The Trivial Matter of OTR's Great Sound Effects

By Carol Tiffany

Many OTR shows had distinctive openings involving sound effects which became identified with the shows. Try to match the opening description with the show it represented.

- ___ Siren...Machine Gunfire...Police Whistle
- ___ Traffic Sounds...horns honking
- ___ Buzzing (prolonged)
- ___ Galloping hoofbeats...ricocheting gunfire
- ___ Lock opening...Creaking door...
- ___ Echoing footsteps on hard floor...
- ___ Approaching train whistle, siren, stopping car, clock striking
- ___ Clock strikes 12...voice intones "It is later than you think"...
- ___ Ascending whistle...rocket launch
- ___ Dog barks...multiple barking dogs.
- ___ Ship's whistle...bell buoy...footsteps.
- ___ Phone rings 3 times...(voice)"That's our ring!"
- ___ Bugle call...hoofbeats...gunshots
- ___ whistling (vocal)
- ___ zany laughter
- ___ train whistle...clacking of train wheels....

- A. *The Hall of Fantasy*
- B. *X Minus One*
- C. *Sergeant Preston*
- D. *I Love a Mystery*
- E. *Great Gildersleeve*
- F. *Lone Ranger*
- G. *Green Hornet*
- H. *Pat Novak, for Hire*
- I. *The Whistler*
- J. *Mysterious Traveler*
- K. *Inner Sanctum*
- L. *Gunsmoke*
- M. *Broadway is my Beat*
- N. *Gangbusters*
- O. *Lum 'n' Abner*
- P. *Lights Out*

New in the Tape

RETURN WITH US NOW...



Library

by Dick and Maletha King

This month we're adding to the cassette library. We have an assortment of comedies, dramas, music and a few mysteries and adventures. Please see the newsletter insert for details.

This writer's personal preference is "Father Knows Best" with Robert Young playing the father. This show, and all the other comedy shows being offered, are from the era of clean family comedy that you can have your grandchildren listen to and not be faced with embarrassing questions afterwards. "Father Knows Best" started in 1949 and went on to TV as did many of the good shows of that time.

We're also offering a couple of reels of "Kraft Music Hall" with Bing Crosby and his wide assortment of guest stars.

This month's entries are good listening and should give our members lots of pleasure.

The officers of RFAA, and the staff of RWUN wish all of you a great 4th of July. We hope you had the time to reflect on what America means to us all and of those who sacrificed to make it so.

Answers to the OTR Great Sound Effects Trivia Quiz

- N Siren...Machine Gunfire...Police Whistle
- M Traffic Sounds...horns honking
- G Buzzing (prolonged)
- L Galloping hoofbeats...ricocheting gunfire
- K Lock opening...Creaking door...
- A Echoing footsteps on hard floor...
- D Approaching train whistle...siren...stopping car...clock striking
- P Clock strikes 12...voice intones "It is later than you think"...
- B Ascending whistle...rocket launch
- C Dog barks...multiple barking dogs
- H Ship's whistle...bell buoy...footsteps
- O Phone rings 3 times...(voice)"That's our ring!"
- F Bugle call...hoofbeats...gunshots
- I whistling (vocal)
- E zany laughter
- L train whistle...clacking of train wheels....