Marine Radio Operating

San Marino, Calif.

Editor, *QST*:

In practically all radio magazines one will find advertisements painting in glowing colors a delightful picture of the life of the marine radio operator. While the statements made are not direct falsehoods, they are sometimes misleading and do not present to the prospective student a representative idea of the conditions actually encountered by the average marine radio operator. For the benefit of those amateurs who are contemplating marine radio operating as a means of making a living, I will try to present, in an unbiased and truthful manner, the conditions that actually exist in that field at the present time.

At least a year of practical experience is necessary before the radio school graduate can be classed as an expert and efficient operator. The Department of Commerce requires a person to copy twenty-five words a minute in Continental Morse and to have at least twelve months' experience in "stations open to public correspondence" before he is permitted to take the examination for a first class commercial license. In order to hold down a job on a passenger vessel it is necessary to have an intimate knowledge of the "Q" signals and operating procedure as well as the ability to copy from twenty-five to thirty words per minute on a typewriter.

Living conditions on board ships vary greatly. Large freighters, tankers, and passenger vessels usually provide their operators with fairly decent quarters, although many of them are not too well equipped with washing or bathing facilities. On smaller vessels, such as "steam-schooners," fishermen, and tow-boats, the quarters are usually far from satisfactory and, in some cases, almost unfit for human habitation. The meals on freighters and tankers are nothing to go into ecstasies over; there is usually plenty of plain, and more or less wholesome food. Steamship companies only allow their stewards from forty cents to one dollar per man per day for rations, so it is evident that there cannot be very much "turkey and trimmin's." There are a number of notorious exceptions, popularly known as the "starvation lines," which skimp on everything, and it is well for anyone to steer clear of these. At sea, nearly all passenger ships serve excellent food and the officers are given the same meals as the passengers, but when port is reached and the paying guests depart, the decrease in quality and quantity of the meals is astonishing.

The salary of a radio operator on a one-man ship will vary from $65 to $120 per month, most jobs paying either $90 or $105. As would be expected, the aforementioned "starvation lines" are the ones which pay the $65 and $75 salaries. There are a few vessels on which the operator, in addition to his regular duties, does the work of a freight clerk or purser and receives as much as $175. On all except the largest passenger ships chief operators are paid from $105 to $150, second