

Captain William "Bill" Eddy



A graduate of Annapolis, ex-submarine commander, professional cartoonist, inventor and entrepreneur, Captain William "Bill" Eddy was the man who put Chicago's first commercial television station on the air.

From his first radio receiver built with a Quaker Oats carton to an amplifier, built with Kresge parts, that detected enemy submarines, his creative genius was legendary. In 1934, his Naval career ended when they found out Eddy could read lips and had been deaf for his entire Naval career.

Bill went to work for Phil Farnsworth and created lighting and make-up that produced an image the television camera could see.

At RCA, in 1937, he created miniature sets, special effects and a system of internal reflector lamps that were on swivels and run by pulleys.

In 1939, Balaban & Katz hired Eddy to create television station W9XBK. With a staff of 6 and about 50 TV sets in Chicago, he made camera mounts out of barber chairs; created remotes and the equipment to do them; and put 1 to 2 hours a day of pictures on the air. By 1942 his studio crews were made up of 50% women. In addition, during the war he and his staff trained thousands of radio and radar technicians.

When W9XBK got its commercial license in 1948 and became WBKB there was no network programming. So, Eddy hired Burr Tillstrom and paired him with Fran Allison to create a one hour noon program called *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*. Phil Wrigley gave Eddy the rights to air Cubs baseball for 2 years at no cost. Wrestling from Rainbow Arena, Marlin Perkins' animals, boxing from Michigan City, Cardinals and Bears football, Blackhawk hockey and Notre Dame football were all part of early WBKB programming.

At the time of his death in 1989, at the age of 86, he had been awarded 37 patents in the field of electronics and left a legacy of trailblazing leadership and creative genius.