

John's Trip to the FCC

By Ken Cannaday, W4NZC

Here's a ham radio exam story that my long time buddy KZ4B (ex K4ESJ) tells.

John's novice days were in the late 1950's. He and I both lived in Charlotte and the nearest exam was in Winston-Salem, an hour and a half away. Exams were given four times a years. John and I were both 12 or 13 years old so he had to depend on his mother to drive him to Winston-Salem. John's mother did not have a high opinion of ham radio. She told him that he'd damn well better pass his general on the first try because she was not going to make the trip to Winston but once. The pressure was on.

When John arrived at Reynolds High School in Winston, the auditorium was packed. The other examinees seemed to all have slide rules, and that scared John. Not only did he not have one, he didn't even know how to use one. "Do I need a slide rule for this exam?" he asked. "Hell yes!" one of the older men said. However, before the exam began, John found out that those guys were all taking commercial exams.

The first part of the exam was code; if you didn't pass that, you went home. If you passed the receiving portion, then you had to send with a hand key (unless you brought your own bug), but everyone usually passed the sending test. In those days, as I remember, the receiving test was some sort of text of a maritime nature: one ship signaling another. It was not a ham radio QSO or anything like that, so it was completely unpredictable. You had to have a minute of solid copy to pass. John handed in his paper and waited for the results. The FCC examiner was a crusty old bastard and he was in a bad mood. He started going through a large stack of papers.

"Smith? Where are you Smith." Smith raised his hand. "FLUNK!" said the FCC man.

"Jones? Raise your hand Jones. Oh, there you are. FLUNK!" And so it went, one flunk after another, until he came to John's paper.

"McAlpine? Where is McAlpine?" John raise his shaking little hand, almost crawling under his desk at the same time.

"Come on up here, son, and send some code for me."
True story.

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