

Built Like a Tank — The WS #19 Mark II

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



Wireless Set # 19

Back in 1947 when I was 16 years old and newly licensed, I had the opportunity to buy a brand new WS #19 Mark II tank transceiver. I saw an ad in a war surplus magazine and sent in my \$35.00, shipping included. This was two week's pay working at my father's liquor store and tavern. Imagine my delight when a few weeks later two large

wood crates arrived. Also, imagine my mother's delight when I placed them in the living room of our 1-1/2 room furnished apartment. Anxiously, I unscrewed the crate lids and marveled at the protective coatings and wraps on everything. After cutting off all the packing of the first crate, my eyes popped at the beautiful transceiver I had purchased. All the lettering on the dials and controls were in Cyrillic! This version of the WS #19 Mark II was made for Sherman tanks lend-leased to Russia.

But the best was yet to come! All the lettering glowed in the dark! Wow, what a sight! I pulled down the window shades and sat in the dark taking in the impressive sight. Then, I removed the other components from the crate. What a bonanza! There were two radios in the main unit: a superregen receiver and transceiver for 220 Mhz for short range, and an AM/CW transceiver that operated between 2 and 8 Mhz, this would give me 80-meter and 40-meter coverage. The unit could put out between 15 and 20 watts, and even had a variometer for antenna matching.

Power was supposed to come from a 12-volt car battery, but my mother would not allow an acid cell battery in the house; I wonder why? So I would have to convert it to AC power. It had an impressive dynamotor — which I never used. I was immersed in all this equipment when I decided to open the second crate. I anxiously opened the box and, eureka! I found a complete set of critical spare parts for the entire rig including a full set of tubes.

I was extremely impressed and nearly jumped out of my skin — there was one tube whose number I never forgot — the EF50. Now, all the tubes I was familiar with always began with numbers, but this tube began with letters. It even looked different. No information in my old Amateur Radio Operator's Handbook even mentioned this tube. I had all kinds of components for future repairs. I wondered, where do they put all

this stuff in the tank? I placed the rig on a small table and the components along the wall and reluctantly discarded the two great looking wood crates. I spent the next few days, and nights, watching it glow, admiring this impressive unit and wishing I could plug it in and operate.



EF-50 PENTODE

Getting it operational was no easy chore.

I had to have help from a ham, W9OAV, who was a skilled builder and lived across the street. He also owned a TV repair and sales shop at the same location and was a bit hesitant to get the rig working as I might discourage potential customers with the TVI it would probably generate — it did. Anyway, I finally talked him into converting it to AC for me and a few months later I had a working rig. I threw the power switch on and spun the dials.

All I had for an antenna was a long random length wire going up to the roof. The janitor would periodically go up on the roof and cut my antenna down, which I'd reinstall the next day, so I couldn't have anything too elaborate. Anyway, I put on the

large noise-reducing earphones that came with the rig. They were so big, they nearly covered my whole head. Signals were coming through on 40-meters. Plugging in the included heavy duty key, worthy of service in an armored vehicle, I nervously sent a CQ. The set was probably putting out 5 to 10 watts and I figured any rig this size and with all these knobs had to be good. I finally got an answer to my CQ and when I told the other operator what rig I was using he said he never heard of it — I enjoyed having something different. I never used the rig on AM phone as I was afraid of RFI. The neighbor in the next apartment accused me of interfering with her refrigerator and I was never able to convince her otherwise. I went on to have many QSOs with the unit on 40 CW, I was never interested in 80-meters, and used it until I tired of working only 40-meters.

I can't remember exactly what I did with the rig, but have a faint recollection of trading it to the owner of another local TV repair shop down the block who had some components I was interested in. I wish I still had the rig, it would be fun to use it again.

I have fond memories of the WS #19 rig and wonder how many lives were saved during the war because of this rig. It was one of the best values I ever had in dollars per pound except for one of my old cars which I purchased for \$25.00.

From what I learned on the internet, there are many of these units still on the air. There is even a Web site devoted to it called "The Original Wireless Set Nr. 19 Group," a very impressive site. Check it out for further details.
www.qsl.net/ve3bdb/

STATISTICS OF THE WS #19 MARK II TANK TRANSCEIVER

FREQUENCY COVERAGE:
HF 2-8 Mhz Operating Modes: CW, AM phone and UHF 220 MHz — super regen receiver

OUTPUT POWER:
15-20 watts

POWERED BY:

12 volt dynamotor, later converted to AC power

ANTENNA TUNING:

Round variometer on top of unit, included

FEATURES:

Glow in the dark dials — radium coated — later I discovered the stuff was dangerous. All steel construction, super heavy duty connecting cables Fashionable olive drab color case and shock mounts. Complete with microphone, key, headphones, all cables and manuals Case of spare parts including all tubes. Audio amplifier for intercom use — to talk to the tank commander

WEIGHT:

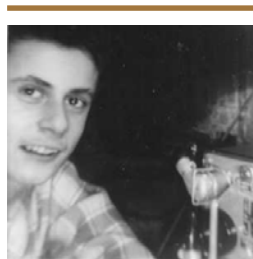
Heavy — particularly for a 10-20 watt rig

OTHER DETAILS:

Manufactured in Canada, furnished to other countries: U.S., Russia and Italy. Canada used it into the 1960s.



Sherman Tank



16-YEAR OLD W9CBT

K9YA Code Practice Nets

Fast Net

Every first Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (plus or minus QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (2400 Z). Check in, exchange FISTS numbers or hang around for a chat. The Fast Net is called at 20+ wpm.

Slow Net

Every 2nd, 3rd and 4th Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (plus or minus QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (2400 Z). Check in, exchange FISTS numbers or hang around for a chat. The Slow Net is called at 10-wpm, but speed will be adjusted to that of the slowest operator.