

K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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Ham Radio Companions

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Is the Amateur Radio Service really moribund? The evergreen anxiety that Ham Radio is dying with its commensurate lack of operating

activity is belied by anyone actually listening to our signal-packed bands. Much of what the oracles of RF gloom disseminate is the “doom du’ jour” they’ve read on the Web. Active Hams are mystified by these prognostications; all those QSOs they enjoy, daily, must be with phantom operators!

With that dismal forecast in mind, the *K9YA Telegraph* staff recently ragchewed over some of the “companion” interests of Amateur Radio operators: we came to the (non-exhaustive) conclusion that these interests include railroading, both model and the real thing; radio control vehicles; photography; astronomy; and amateur rocketry. There runs a common thread through these pastimes — they are “old-fashioned,” “gee-whiz,” hands-on hobbies, the kind requiring an innate curiosity, study, knowledge and skills that cannot be acquired in an hour’s surfing of the Internet. And that’s just what makes them lifelong activities, assets enriching the lives of those willing to expend the time and effort.

Amateur Radio figures as the paramount hands-on avocation through its recognition by the United States government as a licensed *service*.

Acquiring an Amateur Radio license still requires commitment and patience — study, exam taking, awaiting the callsign, obeying governmental regulations and complying with gentlemen’s agreements. Despite streamlining over the decades, it remains a process that cannot satisfactorily be completed in a one-day cram session.

*“Amateur Radio
Figures as the
Paramount Hands-
on Avocation...”*

Once the new license is in hand there is yet more commitment: learning the accumulated jargon and lore of the century-old service; skills and knowledge enhancement; on-air etiquette; station construction; participation in Ham Radio events; joining clubs and associations; and for those aspiring to the Amateur Extra Class license, more study and exam taking.

That said, Ham Radio is probably not very much fun, nor very rewarding for those who want to extract all the service offers without a minimal investment of themselves. Those seeking that route will quickly find themselves thoroughly disillusioned, their hastily assembled “stations” joining other expensive gear gathering dust on the closet shelf, and providing yet another voice to the chorus of Amateur Radio nay-sayers.

So, has the sun set on Amateur Radio? Certainly not for those Hams who view every dawn as an opportunity to communicate, to meet kindred spirits, to learn and to yet again experience gray-line propagation. ■

Just Another Radio Guy from Chicago

Kirt Shore, KC9CBY



Kirt Shore, KC9CBY

I started buying many Hallicrafters S-38 and S-38As off Ebay and discovered they all needed back panels. While doing research on this five-tube receiver I read a great restoration article by Stan Watson <http://www.stanwatkins.com/hals38.htm>. After Stan received a scanned image of an S-38 back panel from John Bauer, W4AWM, he modified a piece of tubing to punch out the louver

holes, then, after cutting out the balance of the openings present on the original, it was complete.

So, I decided to try fabricating the back panels myself, but where would I get the correct material?

I have too many S-38s to mass-produce the panels by hand. I spoke to several of my mechanically-inclined friends and they suggested I contact Ron Steinberg, K9IKZ. Ron is a great friend and collector of Collins and other radio gear.

Ron suggested I contact a company he was familiar with many years ago as a boyhood collector of radio parts. In time I forgot the name and started searching again. I again found them after many hours of browsing the Web. So, off I went with a panel in hand. I found out this company still makes radio backs and stamps gaskets for many companies. I met Herb, their general manager, and he gave me the good news (we can do that with the same material) and the bad news (the price for the tool and die work).

I then asked Herb if they had done work for Hallicrafters years back. Herb said he had been with the company for about 10 years and did not know, but would let me know after he checked the files. Herb came back and stated they had produced back panels for Hallicrafters from 1950 to 1961. I asked if they still had the stamping die for this

radio. Herb stated the company had suffered a fire in 1999, and that after 10 years they destroy the dies because many things change and are thus not replicated.

Well, the back panels are made. I found the S-38's panel differs from the S-38A in respect to the headphone jack's (pin connectors) location. So, do I have one die for the S-38 and another for the S-38A, or do I combine the two? At this point the technology is there, but is there a market? In other words, CAN I SELL THEM?

I decided to make a universal panel where the owner punches out the hole he or she requires for the radio owned. The cost of tooling would otherwise kill this project.

Now, how will the customer mount it on the radio? I need to provide the correct screws of the correct color. More research. I have a friend in the screw manufacturing business and I received several bids. Could I order a run of 500 or so?

Lawson, of Winona, Minnesota, would do that for about \$2,000. That's about \$4 per bolt. I then found a company in Grand Rapids, Michigan that had the correct size and washer — only problem was they would not sell to me direct.

Sam gave me names of several companies close to my area. After some futile inquiries I said to Sam, "Hey, I just want to buy some

bolts." He gave me the name of a bolt seller in Bensenville, Illinois. I picked some up and found they were silver, not the black I needed. I tell you, it ain't easy. Off to a plater to get them stripped and black oxide washed to the correct finish.

Now we have a kit. Next, we add up the costs and see if they will sell, at a profit, as I can't do it for nothing. Maybe it will be the first of a series of replica parts for restoring Hallicrafters radios. After I add up the costs, scare myself and say this will fly, maybe, I figure the 401K needs to be supplemented, so why not give this a go?

The back panels are now listed on Ebay, and I have sold about 30 of them. I have an order for 20 going to a man in Arizona, two to a ham in Japan, two to a ham in Portugal and many within the United States headed to collectors for their restoration projects. ■

"So, I decided to try fabricating the back panels myself..."

Cross-Mode Contact Saves A Life

J. Bruce Prior, N7RR

I was on a solo snowshoeing trip to the Five Fingers Range west of Pitt Lake, British Columbia, not very far from Vancouver. Pitt Lake is one of the very few tidal freshwater lakes in the world. At high tide the Fraser River rises and backs up through the short channel of the Pitt River, becoming an inlet into Pitt Lake, then, at low tide, the Fraser River level drops, reversing the current in Pitt River, draining Pitt Lake. I chartered a float plane to take me near the northern end of Pitt Lake and made arrangements for pick-up five days later. I had my Ten-Tec Argonaut along, but it was too heavy to carry into the mountains, so I left it in a garbage bag at lakeside. My only radio was an Icom IC-2AT, which was useable only when I climbed high into the mountains. During my first night camping on a mountainside, it began to snow. By morning the accumulation was substantial and I got concerned about avalanche hazard, so I decided to retreat as the snowstorm continued. By the time I reached sea level, the temperature was just above freezing, and the heavy snow had become heavy rain. I was completely soaked. I spent a miserable night in my tent on the shore of Pitt Lake. My only decent insulation was a pile-lined sleeping bag. My main sleeping bag, although made of artificial fiber insulation, was too wet to be effective.

I don't know why I didn't have the presence of mind to build a fire. Even in the wet forest, I could have done so, since I still had white gas for my camp stove — I think hypothermia was affecting my judgement. When the light of morning finally arrived, I considered my options. I had a tiny dinghy along, and I thought of using it to travel a short distance to a dock at a cabin, where I thought I might be able to break in and later compensate the owner. If the dinghy capsized, I would surely die, so I abandoned that idea. The clouds were pretty low, but it looked like the ceiling was high enough for a float plane to fly above the lake. I decided to set up my Argonaut. I had a simple 20-meter halfwave dipole fed with RG-174 that I managed to toss over some low tree branches. I tuned around and heard VE6BLJ in a USB QSO with a Vancouver station which I could barely hear

on 14.140 MHz, the Canadian 20-meter calling frequency. I quickly scribbled out a message in ARRL format, interrupting Jean Ness's QSO with an SOS. She stopped talking and asked me to repeat my transmission.

When I repeated my SOS, she asked for details. I sent her my message in what must have been very shaky CW. I heard her relay it to the Vancouver amateur, who telephoned the float plane company. I didn't have a microphone along, just a

momentary switch which I used as a straight key. It was very hard to send in my cold state. In about 90 minutes I could hear the plane. During the mad scramble of packing up my gear, I actually warmed up a bit. When the plane came into sight, I fired a flare, since I was on the other side of a large creek from where the pilot dropped me off. I was soon inside a warm cockpit, headed home.

Nowadays, of course, I always carry a QRP rig (or two!) whenever I go into the wilderness. At the moment, that would be an Elecraft KX1, plus a Small Wonder Labs DSW-80 modified to hear LSB, since I consider the ability to connect with 80-meter traffic nets essential for routine contact with the outside world. The KX1 alone can do the same job the Argonaut did, since it is specifically designed to allow CW/SSB cross-mode communication.

The above is included in L. Peter Carron Jr.'s book, *Morse Code: The Essential Language*, published by the ARRL, pp. 1-5 to 1-6, but that write-up contains some inaccuracies. I was operating as VE7CKF at the time, and was using my first, rather than my middle name. The cartoon shows me in shorts and t-shirt, which isn't quite accurate! ■



J. Bruce Prior, N7RR

"I sent her my message in what must have been very shaky CW."

Advice to New Key Collectors

Lynn Burlingame, N7CFO



Vibroplex Bug

I frequently receive enquiries from new collectors about the *Keyletter*. A common statement is “I am a new collector and don’t have much of a collection, and I have a lot to learn.” Well guys, I am an *old* collector, and I too have a lot to learn! Since we have a lot of newcomers I will offer some free advice to them. I learned these things the hard way.

1. Document your collection. If you have a computer, use a database. If not, use 3 X 5 cards. At a minimum, assign a control number to each key, tag it in a manner that will not damage it, and list where you obtained it, the cost, the previous owner, the location and a general description.

2. Pack your dupes carefully. Sooner or later you will have extra keys. Buy some bubble pack so you can properly wrap them. Number the boxes they go into and update your database with the location. This may seem a little silly if you have only a few extra keys but it will pay off later.

3. Build a library and keep it organized. Buy any books on telegraphy you can get your hands on. You will be surprised how often they turn up in bookstores, garage sales and junk stores.

4. Make fair trades and sales; there are not all that many collectors out there, and your reputation is very important. No transaction is complete until both sides are completely happy. All sales or trades should be made with accurate descriptions and should be made on approval.

5. Shut up and pay the price... Gil Schlehman gave me this advice when I was a novice collector and of course I ignored it. I have a sad memory of a swap meet where a guy had quite a nice spark key for sale. I attempted to dicker him down and as a result he refused to sell it to me at any price. Likewise, I have turned down some prime stuff over the years only to find out later that the asking price was a bargain. Live and learn.

6. Make fair purchases. Sooner or later you will be handed an item by someone handling a silent key sale and asked what it is worth. This is a deadly situation, which must be handled carefully. If you buy the item, dig deep and pay a fair price. If you are unable to, state what the fair price is and that you will make an offer below it. You are in deep kimchi if you get a reputation as a cheat. Likewise, a reputation as an honest buyer will cause choice items to come your way. These will be sent by word-of-mouth referrals from people who have appreciated your honesty. I use the “ouch” system of appraisal in these circumstances. I examine the item and ask myself, “Would I buy this at an antique store at \$10 or \$20?” I keep raising the price until I feel a good internal “ouch” at the price. When the “ouch” is accompanied with a perceptible wince I have arrived at a fair price.

7. Get rid of the wire wheel! I have seen more fine items destroyed with a wire wheel than by any other means.

8. Leave it alone, dammit! If you don’t know what you are doing with a key, ask someone who does, or dig through back issues of *Keyletter* for restoration tips. You can always work on it later, but you can seldom undo damage done through ill-advised cleaning.

9. Dig deep and buy those expensive gunsmith’s screwdrivers. Trust me on this. I mentioned the screwdriver set sold by Brownells back in *Keyletter*

“I am an old collector, and I too have a lot to learn!”

Radio Rescue - Book Review

Mike Dinelli, N9BOR

Many veteran hams would love nothing more than to share their passion with a bright-eyed child. An ideal way to introduce this magic is through *Radio Rescue* by Lynne Barasch.

Radio Rescue is a beautifully illustrated picture book that tells the story of the author's father at age ten in 1923. It is written as a first person account of a boy "itching to get involved" in the magic of wireless.

Barasch spins the tale of her father's success in getting on the air after earning his Ham Radio ticket. She relates his efforts to get licensed, save for a secondhand receiver, learn Morse code and build his own transmitter. It also speaks of his meeting with Bill Irwin, 2CUQ, his 17-year-old elmer, and the relationship that grew from their common interest.

The book contains proper Ham Radio jargon, details the pain he felt after failing his first license exam and the elation of earning 2AZK. Early Amateur callsigns did not have a letter prefix — just a number indicating their region.

Though intended for children, ages 4 to 8, adults will also find pleasure in reading *Radio Rescue*. You can spread the joy by donating a copy of *Radio Rescue* to your local public or elementary school library. That act could result in a defining moment for a young person — when they too discover the magic of radio.

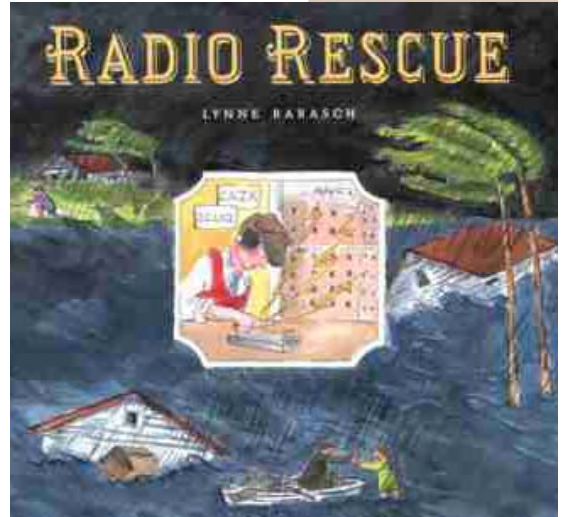
Radio Rescue is a hardbound book containing 40-pages. It is published by Frances Foster Books (October 10, 2000). ISBN 0374361665. I

purchased my copy from www.amazon.com for \$11.90.

Rich Holloch, KY6R, adds how he uses *Radio Rescue* in his Ham Radio for Kids class:

Required books were Now You're Talking and Radio Rescue. I wanted them to get a feel for the radio "nostalgia" that was so attractive to me when I started. And even though the book looks like a kids book — it was even okay for a 13-year-old (student) because it is written with the exact spirit that made radio exciting when I was a 13-year-old Novice in 1973. Back then, sending a radiogram using CW as a Novice was meaningful.

While everything ham radio is good to me, CW HF DXing is my lifelong favorite. There is nothing like the "magic" and uncertainty of propagation and I love the fact that we can only do so much to persuade distant signals to come alive in our rigs. ■



*Radio Rescue
By Lynn Barasch*

*"Spread the joy by
donating a copy
to your local
library."*

K9YA Code Practice Nets

Fast Net

Every first Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (plus or minus QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (0100 Z, Thursday). 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. (0100 Z, Thursday). 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.

PBS Programming of Interest to Radio Amateurs



Bob King, G3ASE

David and Debra Rixon have produced two shows that will be of great interest to radio amateurs, all about the use of Secret Wireless in the UK during the Second World War.

If you can receive any of the three PBS stations WMEC/WQEC/WSEC you will be able to watch the two documentaries called

“The Secret Wireless War.” The programmes have uncovered new wartime secrets, told by the men who were specially enlisted for those radio operations.

Monday February 9th

Beyond Bletchley Park

Visit Bob King, G3ASE, in his shack where he has recreated his wartime listening post when he was a Radio Security Service Voluntary Interceptor.

1. “Beyond Bletchley Park” explores how the WW2 secret German radio signals were intercepted, deciphered at Bletchley Park, and acted upon by British intelligence and subsequently dispersed back into the field in

occupied Europe. Radio Amateur and RSS listener Bob King, G3ASE, describes his important operations. Wilf Neal tells of his experiences in France with Pattons 3rd Army, operating one of the mobile transmitter/receiver units installed in a Dodge Ambulance. David White, G3ZPA, tells us about spy-sets and Geoffrey Pidgeon takes a ride in an authentic 1940 Packard used as a radio car.

Monday February 16th

2. “Black Propaganda” follows the development and content of the secret British black radio broadcasts against the Germans. We hear the fascinating tales from transmitter engineer Phil Luck and Ingram Murray, son of one of the important Foreign Office officials that shaped the operations. Travelling in a

genuine wartime Packard motorcar, Phil visits his old transmitter station still surviving on the Woburn Estate. Presenter Debra Rixon explores the remarkable remains of the black propaganda broadcasting station at Milton Bryan and visits the station managers son Peter Halliday. From an old trunk they uncover some extremely interesting and secret documents, which give an insight into wartime life at Milton Bryan. The programme is enhanced with genuine music and news from the last broadcast in 1945, none of which have been aired since the end of the war. ■

For additional information, visit the Grindelwald Productions Web site. <http://www.grindelwald.co.uk>

KEY COLLECTING - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

#5. Their “Super-Set” currently costs \$87.52, but I promise you that the cost will seem trivial if you mess up a prime item when a screwdriver blade slips. Brownells address is 200 S. Front St., Montezuma, IA 50171-9989.

10. Buy some Screw-Grab. Again, trust me on this. See page 134 of *Keyletter* #13.

11. Do some research! Most old timers will tell you the best fun they have had was researching a key manufacturer. This doesn’t take any particular skill. If you live in an area where a key manufacturer lived, or made keys, do some snooping around. You can often locate former employees of the company, and the local newspaper archives or library generally has information. Don’t forget the genealogical society — it is amazing what they can provide from their files.

[Ed. - Lynn Burlingame has been publishing the N7CFO Keyletter, a newsletter on telegraphy, since 1992. For information about the Keyletter or to contact Lynn, visit his Web site at <http://www.qsl.net/n7cfo/>]



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Viva Morse!