

K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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AKA, Big Fat Cat

Sy, the Ham Radio Guy

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Logbook #1, Amateur Radio Station WD9ADE, 24 March 1977, 04:49 UTC, 21.113 MHz, first QSO with Sy Whitman, WD9BFC (Big Fat Cat), for 49 minutes. He was a new Novice, I was a new General and we were communicating

on a subband that served the very short haul needs of what would soon become a close-knit community of Hams (see: *K9YA Telegraph*, “Ham Radio to the Rescue,” July 2004). Our next QSO was four days later when we made plans for an eyeball QSO—so began our nearly 10-year friendship.

Sy got a late start in Amateur Radio, but quickly made up for time lost: he was of my parents’ generation, having served in the U.S. Coast Guard during WWII as pharmacist’s mate on an attack transport—in many ways he became my Ham Radio “father.”

In the beginning Sy relied on a HyGain 14-AVQ vertical that sat, unimpressively, in a forlorn corner of his backyard and depended on a short rod stabbed into the soil for a ground system—needless to say, it did not radiate well. Time passed—he upgraded his license class and antenna farm.

The Prickly Antenna

To celebrate his new General Class license we installed the original version of the Mini-Quad antenna. The two-element antenna, replete with its finicky and fragile, many-spoked, “hedgehog” capacity hats and a, seriously oversize for the job, HyGain rotator were balanced at the end of a 10-foot length

of 1.5-inch galvanized pipe. The final destination of the threaded end of this precarious assembly was a floor flange mounted in the center of a 4’x4’ square of plywood. The plywood, in its turn, was weighted to the roof by several concrete blocks. All this was situated on the, fortunately for us, flat roof of Sy’s house. As these projects always fill several more hours than originally allotted, it was well after nightfall as Sy teetered, forearms bulging, striving to keep the mast, topped by its seriously top-heavy burden, vertical, over the floor flange. Finally, with me locating

and centering the starting threads for pipe and floor flange, Sy performed the ageless Ham Radio folk dance known as the “Antenna Mast Death Spin,” as he turned round and round along the roof edge securing the satanic device.

New to the world of rotators, he had pre-installed the bell housing upside down, so when we tested the setup the

whole assembly—guy wires, eyebolts, mast and plywood base torqued—fortunately he stopped it before anything broke. Oh, did I mention we performed these aerial theatrics as a summer lightning storm brewed mightily to the west of us? Ever notice? All antenna raisings engender foul weather.

CONTINUED - WD9BFC ON Page 7

“the ‘Antenna Mast Death Spin’...”



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Zen and the Art of CW Operation

Orrin Brand, K9KEJ



Chinese character for
“nothing.”

Ham Radio offers much to those who join its ranks.

Without appearing to inflate an average-size ego, I can honestly say I've been fortunate to have “tasted” many aspects of this hobby. Unfortunately, not all of them have been happy-go-lucky experiences.

By today's standards, I am considered a dinosaur, a throwback to the age of the

J-38 straight key.

When I meet a cadre of today's younger Amateurs, I listen carefully to the snickering going on behind my back, as these members of a wayward generation take great joy in demeaning those precious few who still manage to embrace CW operation.

These days I spend about two hours a week re-honing my skills to get my receiving speed back to 25-30 wpm. It's not quite as easy as I thought, but nevertheless, I'm slowly reaching my old “fighting speed.”

It's easy for me to remember my glory days with a bug. I ran 50 watts, a simple dipole, and used an old, beat-up, receiver that looked like it came off the Bataan Death March. High-speed code operation taught me how to become a better listener away from my Ham gear. While walking down Chicago's Michigan Avenue one busy noontime, I managed to overhear three separate, simultaneous conversations. I heard and digested every word I picked up and fantasized contacting one of the super-secret spy agencies to offer them my talents at eavesdropping and snooping! I never followed through.

CW operation was a way of life for me. I could even talk in high-speed Morse to other Ham friends who were just as obsessed as I was.

Then I went to work for a major broadcast radio network in Minnesota. The management position was highly stressful. The hours were long and arduous and I would come home exhausted, spent and sometimes just shaking my head in disbelief I had placed myself in a scenario that offered little time for anything else except dedication to the job.

My children used to hold up an 8x10 photo of me in a broadcast studio and ask their mother, “Who is the man with that funny thing (microphone) in front of his mouth?”

Then I decided to tranquilize myself, not with alcohol or sedatives, but with a steady regimen of soothing dots and dashes. Down to the basement and my makeshift Ham shack I went, down into the recesses of fantasyland, where gray, cinder block walls surrounded me like a protective moat.

I had graduated to a multi-band transceiver, an 80-foot tower and three big arrays of aluminum tubing sitting atop this colossus, which was driven in a 360-degree circular path by a team of oxen

(just kidding).

I spun the dial down to 14.025 and sat there with headphones in place patiently waited for that first whimper of a signal coming out of the South Pacific. Suddenly, with a burst of high energy, came a distant sound, it was a New Zealander, clipping along at just over 25-wpm. Like Jackie Gleason, when he played Minnesota Fats in a movie with Paul Newman, I cracked my knuckles, loosened-up my wrist, and fired off my call three times to the ZL. He answered, and I trembled—DX at last.

I felt transformed—exhilarated and exhausted—all in one fell swoop. I sat there for slightly over an hour copying code like a wild man. I never missed a beat, nary

*“...I trembled—
DX at last.”*



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a letter or abbreviation escaping me. The fog lifted from my head. My eyes stopped hurting. My body tingled, and then I fell asleep! The term, “asleep at the switch” certainly applied to me at that moment.

Quickly as I nodded off, I awoke with a start to answer my newfound friend way off in the hinterlands of the Pacific. His mellow sounding signal seeping through my tightly fitting headphones served as a non-prescription tranquilizer, causing me to retreat into never-never land. But the real strange thing was that I never missed a single word he sent and managed to copy everything in my sleep and then turn around to continue the conversation.

The next day I told another Ham what happened. “You’re one of the rare ones, Orrin, who can copy high-speed code in your sleep,” he declared.

The very same thing happened three nights hence. This time I was in QSO with a station on Wake Island. Once again I fell asleep, and even laid my head down on the operating table. When the Wake station stopped sending, I immediately sat up and started my own discourse at a good 35-wpm.

This phenomenon went on for several weeks when I noticed I was more energized than ever before, especially at work. I even agreed to tackle home projects

without objections or excuses. I started to put two and two together; it must be the CW QSOs and related naps.

I went so far as to visit a shrink, who just happened to be Ham and CW op himself. After the second session, he told me I was experiencing a sort of Zen happening, an out-of-body experience, often associated with gentle, flowing music. I sat there, spellbound, realizing he was right.

I continued “self-medicating” with CW for many years and attained a code speed of 40-wpm. I maintained my ability to copy every transmission in my head, only writing down callsigns and frequencies in my logbook.

Forget about Valium. Erase thoughts of gulping or sipping down three Scotch-on-the-rocks. Take it from a guy who de-stressed with a flick of a wrist and a switch. Give it a shot yourself, and—Zen—you’ll relax. After all, isn’t this the stuff we call CW music to our ears? ■



“Self-medicating’ with CW”



K9YA Telegraph Staff and Friends Celebrate the Holidays at Burt’s Place

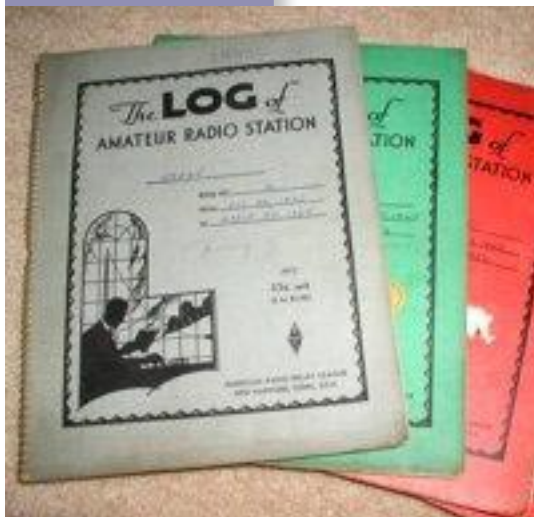


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A Look Back in Time

Stan Shure, W9GXJ & Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



One recent Sunday I read an ad for an estate sale near my home that mentioned Ham gear. The sale had started Saturday, but I stopped by anyway.

The woman running the sale suggested I check out the garage at the rear of her home; there I saw a vintage homebrew transmitter on a high shelf. I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy, so I lost interest. About to leave, I spotted some old papers,

books and magazines scattered on a table. There were five logbooks filled with DX contacts from 1947 to 1952; some blank QSL cards; and three call books for 1936, 1948 and 1950—for two bucks I became their owner. The woman couldn't believe I bought them.

Returning home, my wife wouldn't let me bring them into the house, so I brought them to my friend, Dick Sylvan, W9CBT, to see what he could find.

Dick, W9CBT, Looks Back

When my XYL sighted the new acquisitions she said, "Don't put those dirty books on the sofa." So, I set everything on the floor and examined the books one by one starting with the 1936 call book.

I have held the call W9CBT for 58 years and Stan's W9GXJ is 57-years-old, so it was eerie to look up our calls for 1936 (I was 5-years-old), and find who previously held them. William Campbell of Humboldt, Kansas held W9CBT and Robert Smith of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, held W9GXJ—what a strange feeling. I found my original elmers, Sy Passen, W9QLA (SK), and Art Bierman, W9OIG. W9QLA wasn't listed, and W9OIG was a guy in Valparaiso, Indiana. I checked for some old friends and found

a few of them. This call book included not only the U.S., but also all the Hams in the world, and it was only 3/4" thick!

I particularly enjoyed looking at the ads in the 1936 call book; most were for component manufacturers as most everyone built their own gear. Companies such as National, Hammarlund, Astatic and Amperite were prominent.

Looking at the call books from 1948 and 1950 I found myself listed at two QTHs and saw many ads from companies I then patronized. It was a nostalgic look at the Ham Radio of my youth.

The Logbooks

The logbooks of Fred S. Broderick Jr., W9BGN, spanned the years 1948-1951. I never knew him, but by studying his logbooks I was able to get an impression of the kind of operator he was. He was meticulous, listing not only CQs and all stations called and worked (and not worked), but even the time he turned his rig on and off. Amazing! Fred worked mainly 40-meter CW (crystal control) and had page after page of DX stations. Very impressive! He probably made DXCC several times over. I searched the Internet and found Fred became a silent key in March 2004. He had retired from the Chicago Fire Department.

I looked carefully through the rest of the logbooks hoping to find my callsign. It seems I never worked Fred, but by then, I felt I knew him. I discovered his local Ham buddies as the same calls were repeated on most every page. I even found several QSOs with one of my old friends, Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD, and now a frequent contributor to the *K9YA Telegraph*.

W9BGN's logbooks preserve a captivating record of Ham Radio's Golden Age. Thanks Fred, OM, for the fascinating experience! ■

*"...National,
Hammarlund,
Astatic and
Amperite..."*



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My Life in Ham Radio

Desmond Patrick O'Brien, ZL2OB

After I retired for the third time from the New Zealand Fire Service (they kept calling me back), Rosie, the XYL, encouraged me to take up Amateur Radio. I decided to do both the theory and the Morse study together, both being available on computer; we have an excellent Morse program, TEACH, a great asset to developing good skills and developed by Dr. Gary Bold, ZL1AN.

I spent a lot of time with an ear to CW nets with a FRG7. One net invited me to join, they were mainly an older group with wartime CW expertise, and I still, to this day, send CW one day a week with them. Jack, ZL1IG, made sure my "H" was not a "5" and that my spacing was correct. It is great to have real good on-air encouragement to get it right—thanks Jack.

I sat the written New Zealand exams in August of 1999 and passed without problem, earning me the limited privileges callsign, ZL2UOB, and with a simple aerial was able to work local repeaters on 2-meters and some sections of the HF bands. I purchased a Yaesu FT-101 at a local junk sale, your Hamfest, and proceeded to set up a couple of tower sections on the QTH.

With some good advice from older club members, a 35 foot high dipole, centre-fed with ladder line through the wall and into the spare room worked well, and after five years is still giving A1 service—I



ZL2OB QTH

see no need to change. I'm always impressed when a K9 or other stateside says, "Only a dipole at 35 feet?" KISS is my motto: Keep It Simple Stupid.

April 2001 gave me the pass in 12-wpm, my CW callsign now upgraded to ZL2OB, and full access to all bands. Looking at my logbook, my first overseas contact was Italy, followed by a KC8 in Dayton, Ohio—the world seemed to "fall out" of the 101 every time it was switched on.

In 2001 I parted with the 101 and purchased a Kenwood TS-830 for \$500 N.Z., and it is still giving faithful service. With a mechanical background, and a small home machine shop, I turned my interest to some construction, started by building an antenna tuner with a roller inductor (seen on the top of the desk in the photo), it gives 1 to 1 on all bands, all the settings being logged in a file for reference.

I followed the writings of Dave Ingram, K4TWJ, in CQ and some correspondence with him resulted in building some Morse keys starting with a bug, and at the moment a cootie key is on the drawing board—that will be interesting to use. Next adventure was into the "Clandestine TX" from WWII, a lot of research here resulting in the construction of a Paraset, which gave excellent results on air (see CQ, March 2005, Dave Ingram's column).

It seems Amateur Radio is a hobby of never-ending interests, the people you meet, the friends you make and the ideas to be shared. I only hope the knowledge we older ones have can be passed on and utilised by the younger generation of today. ■



Des, ZL2OB

"...Amateur Radio is a hobby of never-ending interests..."



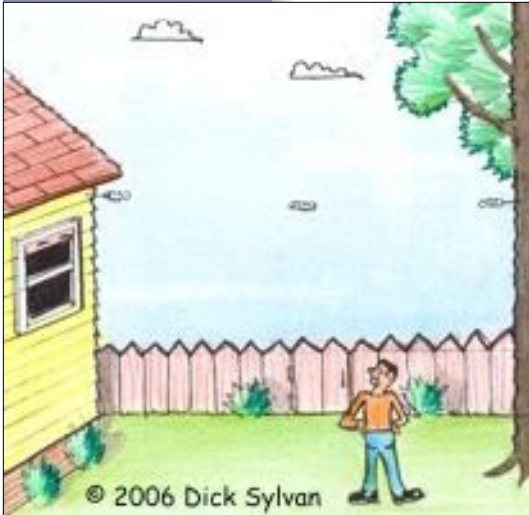
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The (Original) Invisible Antenna

California Dreamin' Pays Off

Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD



Young Rod Admires his New Stealth Antenna

Amateur radio's enthusiastic comeback after World War II was nearly aborted by the onset of television. Early TV reception was so vulnerable to the slightest interference that Hams were shutting down in droves. At fault or not, we must all live with our neighbors.

The most aggravating aspect of this widespread TVI was that your station, if known to exist, would likely be blamed for any and all reception problems in the area. Being out of town or at the office, nowhere near your equipment, was unacceptable denial. No wonder the hobby was literally being driven underground.

Anything on your premises that could be construed as an RF radiator was evidence of doubtless culpability. Lynching might well be too good for you. So, Rule No. 1 was to let no one know you were a wireless hobbyist. Not a pleasant situation after working hard to become a proud FCC licensee.

Then ARRL's February 1949 *QST* came out with a welcome suggested means of counterattack, a rollicking article by Arthur Scotten, W6ZMZ, titled, "The Invisible Antenna." Its subtitle, "Getting on the Air Unobtrusively" summed up the solution nicely. OM Scotten's radical departure in antenna design and construction was delightfully embellished with cartoons by the immortal, W1CJD. Spectacular.

Over the years our handbooks and periodicals had been describing skyhooks made of substantial No. 12-, 14- or 16-gauge copper conductor. It was generally reasoned that extremely skinny wire could hardly be expected to radiate properly. W6ZMZ challenged

that assumption and hung up an 80-meter dipole of No. 40 enameled. If you've ever seen No. 40 wire, even close up, you have darned good eyesight. With 20 watts he received signal reports identical to those observed on a No. 16 comparison dipole.

Equally fascinating, W6ZMZ found that his draped hair-wire was rugged enough to remain aloft indefinitely. Wind stress was negligible, birds magically avoided it, and there is no icing weather in southern California. Readers rushed to affirm his findings, causing local runs on the purchase of miniscule magnet wire. W9BRD, operating portable in Connecticut, joined the fun with a No. 32 horizontal about fifteen feet high in downtown Hartford. A few watts through a random-wire tuner on 40-meters quickly captured ZS2MI on rare Marion Island.

Initially raising such a radiator can be an adventure in itself. Tiny slivers of twinlead insulation go well as insulators at the hot far end. Do avoid kinking. Installation is not as delicate as one might expect. Suspended flat-tops can stretch several percent without breaking.

We're talking extreme stealth here. The job must be done surreptitiously and quickly. Best to prepare some kind of explanation if, during the project, a friend or neighbor should happen along to find you waving your arms at nothing in mid-air. How about having your family out practicing diversionary Tai Chi?

Anyway, in a few years TV stations were emitting more respectable signals, TV sets improved, and Hams were building cleaner transmitters. The TVI panic gradually subsided. This strange interlude in our hobby's history left behind an interesting question. How microscopically thin can an antenna be while still serving as a practical radiator? Perhaps someone out there in the *K9YA Telegraph's* expert scientific readership can provide an analytic answer. ■

“...practicing diversionary Tai Chi?”



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Wilson, Remember Them?

All it took was one afternoon to dig the hole, stuff his VW Rabbit with many bags of Sakrete over several trips, mix and pour the result for the Wilson tubular tower. Concrete cured and house-bracketed tower installed, we measured and clamped the Mosley beam's three-elements. Slyly, that inimitable dachshund, Mocha, she of the addiction to chew anything metallic and abrasive, kept absconding with sandpaper and file and was loath, with a show of canines, to relinquish the filched tool as we assembled the antenna on the family room floor. Eventually, the elements and boom extended down the hall and into the living room. Once complete, the antenna's components were passed out a window and into the backyard.

Sy was not new to electronics being a hollow-state McIntosh audio fanatic and buying a Sony Betamax strictly for its audio recording prowess. His shack, occupying the space and cabinetry that originally housed the built-in bar was flanked by a huge tropical fish tank.

It was Kenwood gear Sy favored as he worked all modes starting with the now classic R599 and T599 twins, these were succeeded with a complementary, coexisting, trio of TS-820, TS-120 and TS-430. His SM-220 station monitor was a wonder to watch as we viewed the 820's output and tuned incoming RTTY signals. He did RTTY with a Radio Shack TRS-80, and later, with a Robot multimode unit, he dabbled in SSTV.

Nucleus of Activity

Sy became the nucleus of a group of local Hams of all ages, male and female, from grade school to retirees—a cross-section of Americans—who met every Monday at the local Ground Round and a similar group who met Saturdays. The Saturday group usually went to Sy's home for a round of operating and general shooting of the bull.

It was he I accompanied to the FCC's downtown Chicago office when he took and passed his Advanced Class exam (see: *K9YA Telegraph*, "The Cracker Barrel," April 2005).

I moved out of state for a few years, but we had a weekly sked on 10-meters throughout that period. When I returned to Illinois, Sy shared something

with me that would mark the untimely beginning of the end of our friendship; he had been diagnosed with lung cancer. His cancer advanced steadily and he weakened, not so much at first, aside from some breathlessness, but then a rapid slide to the point where he could no longer drive an automobile or worst of all for him, operate his beloved station.

At this point I spent nearly every Saturday afternoon with him, I knew his time was short, but he insisted we limit our conversation and instead had me operate the station as he watched. He was too weak to operate himself, but he wanted to participate in Ham Radio, he did not want that beautiful station to sit idle.

In March of 1986, while at work, I received the phone call I knew was coming, the call that hung over my head—the foreboding of months—the call that could not be avoided—Sy was now a silent key.

Ham Radio has a lot of guys like Sy, every one of them unique. I hope you have the good fortune to meet one or be one. ■

Ham Quips



King Kong Assists Fay Wray with New Antenna Installation



Sy, WD9BFC SK

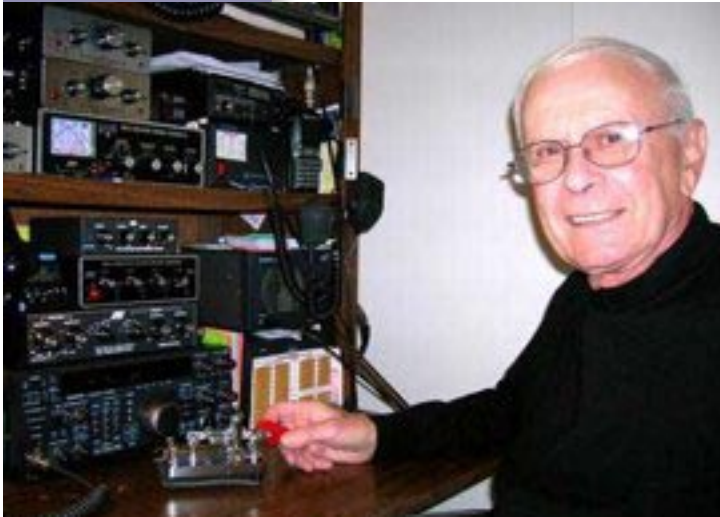


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Hi Hi – A Collection of Ham Radio Cartoons

W9CBT Pens Big Book of Amateur Radio Laughs



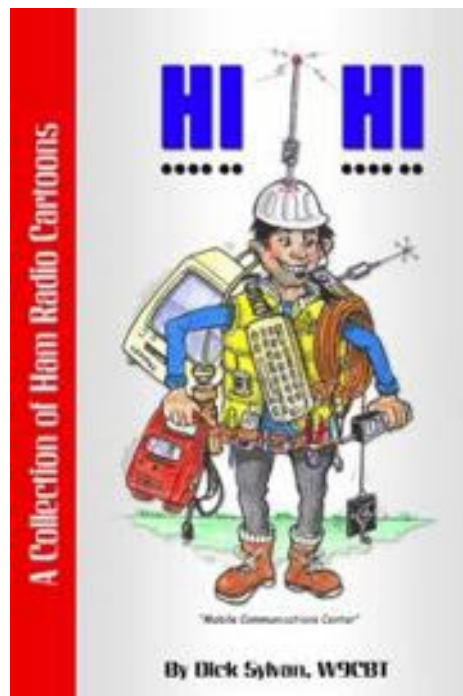
Dick, W9CBT

The *K9YA Telegraph's* resident cartoonist, Dick Sylvan, W9CBT, is proud to announce the publication of his book of Ham Radio-themed humor, *Hi Hi—A Collection of Ham Radio Cartoons*. Drawing on six decades of on-air adventures, Dick offers an insider's view of the bliss and twists of Ham Radio. *Hi Hi—A Collection of Ham Radio Cartoons* makes a great gift for any Ham—to give or get. Each of the book's three sections: Ham Lingo, Ham Quips and Morse Quips & Tips, looks Ham Radio square in the eye and finds it—hilarious—and so will you. So, drop that key, put down that microphone, stow that keyboard and pick up your copy of *Hi Hi—A Collection of Ham Radio Cartoons*.

Now in his sixth decade of Hamming, Dick retains all the enthusiasm for the service that originally brought him into the fold. He is an avid and skilled operator who works several modes, both QRO and QRP,

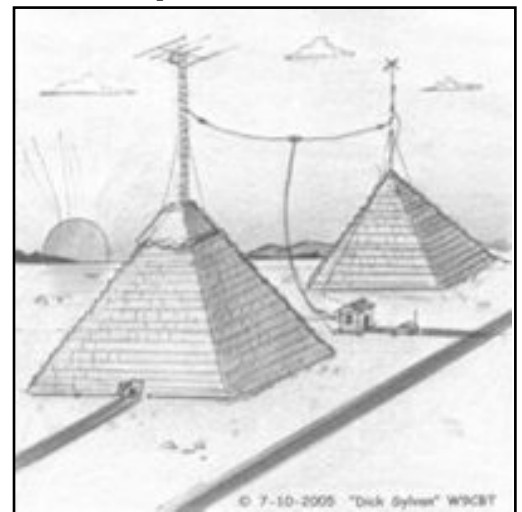
and still finds the time to pursue his profession as industrial designer, write articles and create cartoons for the *K9YA Telegraph*.

Available at <http://www.k9ya.org/w9cbt>, this collection of Dick's cartoons includes and greatly expands his body of work originally published in the *K9YA Telegraph*. ■



112 pages, 6" x 9" (Trade Paperback)

Ham Quips



The Real Reason the Pyramids Were Built

(Cartoons are high-resolution and printed one to a page.)



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