K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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Etah, Greenland or Bust

The 1937 MacGregor Arctic Expedition

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Reflecting on amateur radio's long and productive history we can point with pride at our many services to humanity. Among these services may be counted the communications skills and ingenuity of hams contributing to the success of record-breaking endeavors and scientific expeditions during the first half of the last century.

The 1940 edition of the ARRL Radio Amateur's Handbook boasts that since Don Mix's participation in the 1923 MacMillan expedition aboard the schooner *Bowdoin*, there have been "…a total of perhaps two hundred voyages and expeditions …assisted." (See: *K9YA Telegraph*: "Zeh Bouck," November 2005; "The Hassell-Cramer Flight," January 2007; "Disaster in the High Arctic," October 2007; and "Beyond the Blue Horizon," December 2007.)

> *"…our many services to humanity."*

The MacGregor Arctic Expedition— July 1, 1937 to October 4, 1938

QST, August 1937, "Expedition Notes": Albert Gerald Sayre, W2QY (ex-9AG), O.P.S./O.R.S., will accompany the MacGregor Arctic Expedition aboard the polar vessel *General A. W. Greely* where he will use the calls OX2QY and WAWG. Two-way work with amateurs was scheduled on "3115, 4145, 5525, 6230, 8290, 11,050, 12,460, 16,580 or 22,100 kcs." These frequencies appear coordinated with the planned concurrent MacMillan Expedition traveling aboard the fishing schooner *Gertrude L. Thebaud* and using frequencies: "468, 500, 4140, 5520, 8280, 11,040, 16,560 and 22,080 kcs."

Chicago Daily Tribune, January 17, 1937: FLYER-SCIENTIST GOING NORTH TO WEATHER'S LAIR

"C.J. McGregor [sic], now meteorologist at Newark airport, described …how he will attempt to dissect the cloud masses which brew below the north pole and affect the world's weather." He will "retrace the route taken in 1882 by Gen. Adolphus Greely to Ft. Conger, on the North American continent across a strait from Greenland." (Thus the eponymous designation of the research vessel [ex-*Donald II*], a three-masted schooner, rebuilt for strenuous duty with "new motors, lines, rigging, sails, cabins, and internal bracing.")

"Mcgregor wants to photograph the Aurora Borealis in color film, study further the effects of the McKinley heavyside [sic] layer* on radio conditions, and check magnetic declinations in the area." (*Reporter's misquotation for the Kennelly-Heaviside layer.)

Clifford J. MacGregor headed the privately funded (crewmembers paid their own passage in cash or gear and some corporations contributed equipment—see

CONTINUED - EXPEDITION ON PAGE 7

Inside This Issue…

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The "Magic of Radio"

Kelly Klaas, K7SU

Kelly, K7SU

Made any HF contacts lately? It seems our activity level in ham radio changes over the years. I know mine does. I have single pages in my logbooks that span several YEARS and I have others that span a single weekend. We all get busy with life and sometimes our ham radio hobby takes a back seat to everything else.

Lately I've been trying to make an average of at LEAST one contact on HF every day. So far I'm well above that average, I'm happy to say. My contacts over the last few years have been a mix of CW, PSK and SSB. Over the years I've also toyed with RTTY and SSTV. If you have a computer with a sound card, it's ridiculously easy to play with the digital modes these days. SSTV is especially interesting. Gone are the days of needing rooms full of homebrew equipment with high-phosphorescence black and white monitors and an engineering degree to put it all together.

> *"…the magic of it."*

The allure of amateur radio is stronger than ever and the possibilities are endless. In fact, technology has been kind to amateur radio. Yet it seems it's getting more difficult to keep our interest in it. Why is that? Have we forgotten about the "magic of radio?" Have we forgotten how we felt when we first turned on a shortwave radio and heard a mysterious signal from another part of the world? Maybe it just takes a little prodding to get us back to that era when we couldn't wait to get home from school or work to turn on the radio and listen to the world.

I had an interesting QSO on CW recently. It was not particularly interesting in content, but more in the "magic" of it. Over the years I seem to get to the point where I take the QSOs I make for granted. I turn on the radio knowing someone will be out there to talk to. I call CQ or answer one, exchange some info and call it good. I'm happy to make the contact, but I just don't seem to have that desire any more to, after every contact, shout to the world, "I JUST WORKED A GUY IN___!" fill in the blank! Back when I was a Novice at 14 in the mid 60's I drove my parents crazy by telling them every jot and tittle of every QSO I had. They were very good about listening, though.

I've seen the term "magic of radio" surfacing online on ham sites of late. And after my recent QSO I spoke of earlier, I think I am beginning to figure out what it means. My QSO was with KH6RF/MM. Reese was on a container cargo vessel out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He was 300 miles west of Los Angeles steaming toward Honolulu. It was a typical QSO exchanging name, RST, WX and rigs and such. He was running an Elecraft KX-1 at 4 WATTS! I was running my Drake 2NT (crystal-controlled) at 75 watts into my delta loop and using my Hammarlund HQ-180A for a receiver. The band got to changing on us and we signed while we were still hearing each other.

It wasn't even until later in the evening that I got to thinking about that QSO and its relationship with the MAGIC OF RADIO. Here I was nestled in my basement room with glowing radios and seven (YES, SEVEN) keys, being a mixture of keyers, paddles and straight keys, at my operating position. And, there he was, on a large ship in the Pacific Ocean running 4 watts... and we had a conversation. Two tiny points on the globe with rigs that could be built using readily available parts, and capable of talking to a real live person at the other point who has common interests with me.

Anyone can tell you the theory of how that happens—the theory of propagation, and how that guy named Marconi (or was it Tesla?) invented the wireless over a century ago and a new era in communications was born. But no one can describe the "magic" to you. You have to experience that yourself. When you do, you will never be able to

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explain it to anyone else, but it's a feeling you just seem to understand. In other words, if I have to explain it, you wouldn't understand.

Whether a QSO is with someone just around the corner or on the other side of the world, the "magic of radio" is in the experience of the moment and not in the theory of the operation.

When I was a kid I built a pair of Knight Kit walkie-talkies. I think they were about $5.95 through Allied Radio at the time. This would be the very early 60's. They advertised a distance of a quarter of a mile. And when things were just right you could get up to a half-mile with them. To me, that was LIVING ON THE EDGE! Sometimes you could hear CB operators from all around the valley. To me that was like hearing signals from the MOON!

Nowadays, when I turn on my super-duper DSP, digital readout, auto-tuning rig I tune across the bands and hear signals from all over the world. I even hear signals from OUT of this world from satellites and the ISS. Funny thing is it's not nearly as exciting to me now as hearing those voices on the walkie-talkies from the other side of town back in the 60's. But when I talk to someone at the other end of those invisible radio waves I find the "magic of radio" feeling beginning to return. It's something I have to think about. It's like kissing your spouse! Do you still get as excited when you kiss them goodbye each day as you did the first time you kissed? Probably not—unless you think about it, then the excitement returns. Absolutely NOTHING can live up to the excitement I had making my very first contact as a Novice on 80 meters CW. It was with a guy in Salt Lake City. My hand still trembles when I think about it.

"Remember your first contact?"

I'm not a big DX hound, but I will chase them when the opportunity presents itself. Usually it's just an exchange of signal strength (always 599, of course) and QTH. Sometimes I talk to those in countries that aren't all that friendly to the U.S. in the political arena. However, for that moment, they are my best friend, and I am theirs. I've often thought that if we could put ham radio operators in charge of political diplomacy, this would be a much better world in which to live. Instead of figuring out ways to blow them off the face of the earth, we would be arranging DXpeditions!

But, let me get back to my QSO with KH6RF/MM. I guess the thing that got my attention was that he was in the middle of the OCEAN. Viewed from space merely a tiny speck on the globe surrounded by nothing but water. He was literally isolated from most other people on the planet. In the dark of night we were able to communicate and exchange thoughts. While talking he had my undivided attention and I had his. He was in the middle of water and I was in the middle of an Idaho desert. Yet any contact we make as hams is a contact with someone who is merely a speck in relation to this world. Think about that for a moment! It's even more remarkable than dialing a few numbers on a telephone and ringing just ONE telephone anywhere in this world.

A Small Collection of Keys, Paddles and Keyers helps Keep The "Magic of Radio" Alive for the Author.

Every QSO I've had since that contact has been a little more special as I've pondered the ability to communicate via radio. There's nothing else like it in the world. Cell phones are merely a means to an end. They are NOT a hobby. Chat rooms can be ugly and cold and similar to walking into a room full of strangers and trying to strike up a conversation. But communicating by "amateur radio" has an allure matched by nothing else.

If it's been some time since you turned on your radios and made a contact, I would like to encourage you to do it today. If you keep telling yourself that you just have to do that "one of these days" then let today be that day. You can never get today back. If you don't use today for doing something you once couldn't imagine living life without, you can never relive it.

I ask you again. Remember your first contact? Think about the feeling you had when you called CQ and someone "out there" actually answered you. What a thrill that was. You can be thrilled again… and again and again.

Something About Me

I was first licensed in 1966 at the age of 14 and have been pounding brass ever since. I'm mostly active

CONTINUED - MAGIC ON PAGE 8

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There She is Again

Scott Laughlin, N7NET

I didn't know an electron from a pipe wrench when the Air Force enrolled me in airborne electronic school at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. Nor, did I expect the instructors to be so near my age with personalities and emotions to match.

This surprise-filled era occurred so many years ago that the names of most individuals have faded from my memory, except for one—Airman Andover. Andover was a lanky individual with features that females found attractive.

Our classes were divided into three-week phases, each focusing on a particular aspect of electronics. Andover taught third phase—tubes. His creative instruction enabled me to grasp many important principles of signal amplification, especially how distortion would result if two mismatched tubes were used in a push-pull circuit.

"If both tubes conduct at the same rate we call them a "matched pair," he explained. "This is a classic example…," his voice trailing off as he pointed to a receiver/transmitter, a component of the APS-42 Search Radar System. "I should already have gotten a matched pair for that unit."

"…we call them a 'matched pair'…"

Andover hesitated, and then turned to study the young faces of his pupils, seventeen of us in all.

"You," he said at last, pointing an index finger toward the back of the classroom.

Turning, I spotted the individual to whom he pointed. He was a studious young airman, a North Carolinian with an overly prominent nose and deep-set eyes.

"Nelson. That's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes Sir."

"Good. Do you know where the office is?"

"Yes Sir."

"Good. There's an attractive blonde behind a desk on the right as you pass through the door. She's in charge of procurement. Do you know what procurement means?"

"No sir."

"It means she can provide stuff I need. Go down there and tell her to bring me a pair of matched fallopian tubes."

Perhaps the glint in Andover's eyes meant something to others, but I was the second most naive person of the lot. It came as no surprise to me when Nelson bolted from his desk and was gone in a flash.

Andover resumed his lecture for another ten minutes, but stopped in mid-sentence when the door burst open. Nelson was back. Instead of tubes, he'd brought with him a burly, middle-aged woman in civilian clothes. She was a person of authority. At least Airman Andover considered her as such, because his complexion turned ashen.

The glare she cast toward him was so rigid that I could have hung my wash on it. However she made no mention of the tubes Airman Nelson had sought. Instead, she went into a detailed lecture describing how to make vacuum tubes from sand, should we find ourselves stranded on a deserted island and in need of producing an emergency radio signal. All the while Andover shifted his weight and stayed clear of her peripheral vision. When she was finished she identified herself as an electrical engineer and Vice Superintendent of the Air Force Electronic School. She left the room in the same manner in which she'd entered, sudden and without warning.

Fifty years have passed since that surprising incident occurred. I had totally forgotten about the woman who fabricated radio tubes from island sand. And I might not be thinking of her now, were it not that I'm certain she turned up as attorney general during the last decade of the twentieth century. ■

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George W. Leck, W2POC

1908-1982—RCA Scientist and Researcher

Bob Ballantine, W8SU

I met George W. Leck through Bob Singer, K2LEM. George lived in a nice old country home with plenty of space for ham radio where he worked CW, made many skeds on 40-meters, and was a regular on the Rubber Boot Net that met on 3.680 MHz. He ran a good-looking Heath DX-100 that I'm sure had all the keying modifications.

In 1934, Irving Wolff and Ernest Linder of RCA's Camden research staff were conducting radar experiments at Atlantic Highlands for the U.S. Army. The two scientists were testing an odd looking collection of apparatus: transmitter; small receiver; audio amplifier; and two, four-foot, dish-shaped antennas. RCA reinforced the Wolff and Linder research team in 1937 with Rene Braden and George moved on to the first microwave scanning radar equipment capable of visually displaying the distance and angle of objects detected—an historic achievement. George was an associate of W. D. Hershberger at RCA Labs performing prewar studies in the useful effects of the materials used in microwave devices.

Those pioneering studies were continued by a team at RCA Labs comprising Dr. N.E. Norton, Elizabeth Bush, George Leck and others who researched the absorption of microwaves in gases; which promised precise frequency stabilization for microwave communications.

George contributed prefaces to books on cryoelectric receiver techniques and microwave applications.

His home was on "Grovers Mill Road." Remember Orson Wells' infamous 1938 Halloween broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*? The night that panicked America. It happened at Grovers Mills.

The answer to who "invented" radar is likely to remain buried forever beneath a mass of conflicting claims. However, the work at Camden during the 1932-37 period clearly made a basic contribution to the effective development of the system. It was to have such a radical effect upon military and naval tactics in WWII—that, testifying to this contribution—the U.S. Navy, in 1949, awarded Irving Wolff the highest honor it can bestow upon a civilian, the Distinguished Public Service Award. Accompanying the award was a fine citation. ■

"Tilted P"

Last month, Chuck Adams, K7QO, asked for any info on the character called "tilted p" as used in WWII training schools.

I was a civilian instructor in the U. S. Army Air Corps Technical School at Scott Field, Ill. in 1942 and 1943 before I entered the Navy. The Air Corps eventually became known as the Air Force. Most of our graduates ended up as radio ops on B-17s or B-24s where they spent a lot of their time in a tail or belly gun turret as well as at their Liaison Sets.

We used a character in practice messages which we called the "dash p." It was sent as a Morse "P" followed immediately by another dash. (di dah dah di dah or .--.- sent all as one character). I dislike using the typed dots and dashes as its very difficult for a telegrapher to comprehend that visual sign rather than the aural, but maybe some can feel more comfortable with it.

The "dash p" was used as a dummy character within messages sent in the SYCO code. This was likely only used in the training schools, but there probably was a similar version used in tactical traffic. The dummy was supposed to add difficulty of deciphering the text of a message. I thought I might find out more details of the tactical use of the "dash p" or its cousins when I entered the Navy but, very fortunately for me, my request for an operating assignment was ignored and I was assigned to the technical side of communications. At the time, one could not use the word, RADAR, due to its being highly classified so my rating was called Radioman. What I learned set me up for many years of earning a living.

73, Bud Frohardt, W9DY/m

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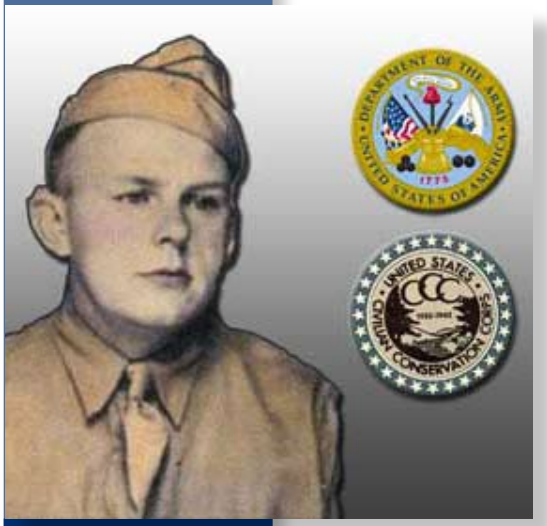
Jauhelihapiiras is Meat Loaf

I Bit Off More Than I Could Chew

Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD



Wilbur Johannes Kuure
1919 - 2000
Technician fourth grade, Radio Operator High-Speed 766, Company B, 583rd Signal Air Warning Battalion, New Guinea, Southern Philippines,

One bright episode in amateur radio's long and honorable public service history happened in the devastating economic emergency of the 1930s, a.k.a. the Great Depression. The Civilian Conservation Corps was a federal program that put young men to work in the great outdoors. Labor performed by "the Cs" on rural infrastructure can still be appreciated today. Widely scattered CCC camps operated military style, including communications. That's where hams pitched in.

And that's when I first ran across W9YNY, later to become my best foxhole buddy and lifelong friend. Willie and fellow hams manned official HF networks at the CCC camp near Houghton in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Thanks to an FCC-designated station trustee, off-duty activity on amateur bands was allowed. We QSO'd on 80 CW while I was finishing high school in Chicago. A few years later we were to meet personally during another national emergency known as WW2.

"…a chain of surprising coincidences."

Life sometimes is a chain of surprising coincidences. In Florida, early 1943, Willie and I became radio sergeants in the very same army outfit readying for overseas, Three exciting years later, after Pacific duty, we returned to civilian life, keeping in close touch via CW.

By the mid-'50s W9YNY had become W8YNY and was about to inherit his parents' farm outside Crystal Falls. I was still W9BRD, settling down to my career with Illinois State Police near Chicago. Our CW schedules continued. Time for the next quaint coincidence.

Unless my ears were playing tricks, my new boss at WQPC had the very same trace of family old-world accent displayed by Willie. Sure enough, Ero, W9HPJ, was another Finn from Michigan's U.P. I told Ero my wartime soulmate lived in Amasa. Ero grunted, "Amasa? Amasa is a kink in da road. Nobody lives in Amasa." Next time W9HPJ went north to his family's ancestral acres, he looked up Willie a few miles away. On his return Ero said, "I was right. Our pal lives *near* Amasa, not *in* Amasa."

Well, a year or two passed and I realized that W8YNY and W9HPJ, now sauna buddies, had never had a QSO. Willie favored 80 meters while Ero preferred 40. Band-hopping could be a challenge in days of homemade wireless. W9HPJ got himself tuned up okay around 3,600 kHz but they still couldn't seem to click on schedule. One or the other overslept or forgot about the drill. Doing a three-way with them was now an obsessive objective for me. After all, the three of us were supposed to be competent radiomen.

One early morning I finally grabbed the bull by his horn, literally. After keying with W8YNY on our usual sked with no promised appearance by W9HPJ, I bravely jangled the boss's telephone around 06:30. Ero grumpily agreed to get on the air. His homespun heap had a loosely calibrated VFO, so I talked him onto frequency. EUREKA—they made it! But my plan to chime in for a three-way was totally squelched. The rascals were doing Finnish at 25-WPM or better, still going at it when I had to leave for work. Wildest Morse I ever heard, and all my fault. ■

Call for Articles

Have a story to share? An experience to relate? Some gear to review? A technical tip to dispense? Feeling didactic or pedantic? Write it up, add a couple of appropriate photographs and send them off to the *K9YA Telegraph*. Hams worldwide will thank you, and so will we.

Here's the place to start:

http://www.k9ya.org/write_for_us.htm

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list below) expedition to Etah, Greenland (See: *K9YA Telegraph*, July 2006, pg. 8). His definitive report, published in the *Monthly Weather Review*, Volume 67, Issue 10, October 1939, listed the expedition's four main objectives:

1. To collect weather data from the Polar Basin, with especial reference to the effects of conditions in the polar regions to the formation of polar air masses and the weather of lower latitudes.

2. To make a magnetic survey for the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

3. To photograph the aurora borealis and study its effects upon radio transmission.

4. To explore the Polar Basin northwest of Ellesmere, Canada, in order to clear up the question of Crocker Land which Peary placed on the maps more than 30 years ago and which we found to be nonexistent. At the same time a study was made of the customs and mode of life of the Polar Eskimo and of the wildlife.

The Voyage Out

July 1, 1937: Depart Port Newark, N.J. for Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

Waypoints: Sydney, N.S. – Straits of Belle Isle – Idglorsuit, Greenland – Baffin Bay – Robertson Channel – Ellesmere Island

August 31, 1937: Arrive Foulke, Fjord – There the *Gen. Greely* ran aground and was eventually refloated. Refloated, a severe storm blew the vessel "out to sea." Two days later the ship finally reached Reindeer Point, Greenland, near Etah where a base was established, but not before one of the two overstressed motors "explodes and set fire to the ship."

A.G. Sayre, 9AG/W2QY/OX2QY

Of the 10 crewmembers (the 11th, a pilot, departed at Sydney, N.S.) Albert Gerald Sayre (1897-1990) was the expedition's radio operator. During WWI he served as a radio operator aboard U.S. Navy surface vessels and submarines. He earned his amateur radio license in 1919. In WWII, again serving his country, he attained the rank of USN commander. Mr. Sayre worked for the Rock County, Wisconsin sheriff's department, where he installed their first mobile radio system and held a position as electronics engineer at the National Security Agency. Among his many affiliations he was a member of the Society of Wireless Pioneers and the American Radio Relay League where he held station appointments as Official Phone Station and Official Relay Station.

MacGregor's *Monthly Weather Review* article describes one of Sayre's responsibilities: *Observations were made hourly; and coded reports transmitted daily to the United States by our own radio, and then sent by land line to the U.S. Weather Bureau at Washington.* These observations began September 8, 1937 from their base camp at Etah and continued "until the hour of sailing, July 7, 1938."

Chicago Daily Tribune, "News of Radio," July 10, 1937: The MacGregor Expedition plans "a series of broadcasts over NBC and expects to include Christmas greetings from the north pole."

Image courtesy of *The Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications* http://www181.pair.com/otsw/cprv1.html

Sayre's OX2QY QSL card, postmarked December 12, 1938, lends insight to the equipment of the era and acknowledges the support of many well-known manufacturers:

Xmitr: RK25 crystal tritet osc. RK39 doubler RK20's P.P. driver, HK 354's P.P. final 400 w. input 2000 v, at 200 mils.

Rig built from components supplied by the following manufacturers—KENYON "T"-line transformers and chokes, CORNELL-DUBILIER fixed condensers, IRC resistors, WARD-LEONARD relays and ant. terminat-

CONTINUED - EXPEDITION ON PAGE 8

7
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Volume 5, Issue 4

CONTINUED - EXPEDITION FROM PAGE 7

ing resistor. HYGRADE SYLVANIA tubes, UNITED ELECTRONIC tubes, RAYTHEON tubes, HEINTZ & KAUFMAN tubes, COTO coils, HAMMARLUND variable condensers and coil forms, A.E. MILLER crystals, BASSETT feedline, PAR-METAL racks, panels and chassis, ASTATIC microphones, BURGESS batteries, BELDEN wire, PYREX insulators, AMERICAN RADIO hardware.

Rcvr: HALLICRAFTERS Super Skyrider, SX11.

Ant: Terminated rhombic 275 ft. each leg 30 ft. high, 800 ohm terminating resistor, 580 ohm feedline 350 ft. long.

Additional support lent by:

Meteorological instruments: The United States Weather Bureau, Julian P. Friez Co., and Weston Electrical Co.

Hydrogen gas for weather balloons: American Oxygen Co.

Adding machine: Monroe Calculator Co.

Electric current: Exide batteries "kept charged by small windchargers."

Chicago Daily Tribune, "The Stamp Collector," May 16, 1937: In addition to the crews' scientific tasks and the workload imposed by living at an environmental limit, the *Gen. Greely* also functioned as a "ship's postoffice." Philatelists desiring postcards specially postmarked and cacheted onboard were advised to contact C.J. MacGregor in Port Newark, N.J.

The Voyage Home

Ice jams at Baffin Bay delayed the ship for six weeks. Departing, and taking on water, several open seams were discovered. Only constant pumping kept the *Gen. Greely* afloat before reaching St. John's, Newfoundland where repairs were made. Enroute to New York they encountered a tropical hurricane and the forecastle was lost. Arrived New York on October 4, 1938 after 15 months and 4 days.

The MacGregor Arctic Expedition does not enjoy the celebrity of the expeditions of Peary, Scott, Amundsen, Shackleton and the other outsize figures in that long ago era of discovery. Nevertheless, Clifford MacGregor with A.G. Sayre and the rest of his intrepid crew simply and elegantly succeeded in contributing to man's accumulated knowledge. After all, isn't that the ultimate aim of all such endeavors?

CONTINUED - MAGIC FROM PAGE 3

in CW, but also enjoy most other modes offered in ham radio. I currently maintain our local ham club Web site at http://www.k7mva.org/. My entry into ham radio went a long way in introducing me to my lifelong career in radio broadcasting where I'm the chief engineer at our local three-station AM/FM combo. I also anchor the morning news program on our AM station and have a daily talk show. ■

Telegraph Article Cited in *Polar Research*

A Letter to the Editor citing material from the November 2007 *K9YA Telegraph* article "Disaster in the High Arctic" by Mark Solomon, KQØA, and Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL, appears in the volume 27, number 1 issue (April 2008) of *Polar Research*. *Polar Research* "…is the international, peer-reviewed journal of the Norwegian Polar Institute, Norway's central institution for research, environmental monitoring and mapping of the polar regions."

K9YA Telegraph in Wikipedia

The *K9YA Telegraph* joins other elite amateur radio entries on Wikipedia, the premier Internet resource. Check it out.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K9YA_Telegraph

Ham Quips

DICK SYLVAN, W9CBT

HAM SIGNAGE

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