

K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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The Story Within

Some Little Objects Bare Big Stories

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Within every object there is a story. Some objects, even the most minuscule and unimposing, possess a narrative unrelated to their mass. One such object of little mass is my E.F. Johnson Speed-X key, described in the

manufacturer's 1961 catalog as model no. 114-310, black wrinkle, no switch.....\$3.10. It's only competitor for my attention at the time was the ubiquitous and finely finished, Japanese, brass, and ball-bearing key, priced at a still unbelievable \$1.00. I thought, at the time, and still do that the Speed-X was worth more than three times the price as it came nicely boxed featuring the E.F. Johnson logo and, in my youthful provinciality, "Whoever heard of Japanese amateur radio gear?" That's even before I learned, decades later, that the Speed-X featured the "New Johnson cushion-contact design (that) provides smooth keying action." Purchased at Chicago's Allied Radio in my freshman high school year, whether in storage or on my operating desk, it has been my telegraphic companion for more than 40 years.

The Allied Radio store located at 100 N. Western Avenue in an area dotted with other electronics retailers, new and surplus, was smack-dab across the street from a flagship Olson Radio store. The surplus stores, bearing faded signage and grimly uncongenial from without, from within offered dusty hodge-podge displays of what WWII gear remained nearly two decades later. No matter, Allied Radio was the magnet drawing hams from the Chicago area and afar.

That Speed-X key came not just from Allied Radio, but was purchased from the store within the store, the ham shack at Allied Radio. A hard turn right after entering the main store placed you before its hallowed portals. Legendary in its own time, today it can only be imagined in its splendor as an icon of amateur radio's golden age. Rack upon rack of new and "reconditioned" gear bearing the names of today's most prized boat anchors then available new in a factory-sealed box for the price on the tag.

"Ham-to-Ham Help"

The "Ham-to-Ham Help" from a "staff of over 30 Amateurs" promised in their ads was no empty boast. When the friend who accompanied me on this visit purchased a Dow-Key antenna relay to switch between his Heathkit DX-40 and Hallicrafters S-40B the "Ham-to-Ham Help" promise was made true. The same gentleman who accepted payment, made change and issued a receipt asked my

friend if he knew how to install the antenna relay. The salesman asked what gear my friend was using. He then sketched out a wiring diagram for the DX-40's accessory plug and, in an impromptu lesson, employed Ohm's law to determine the value of a dropping resistor. What service and what Elmering!

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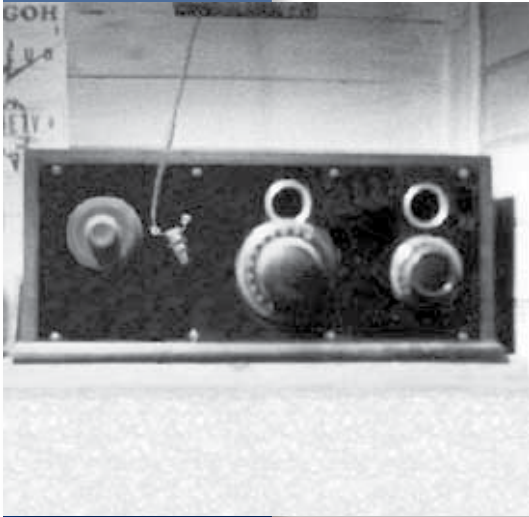


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How I Became a Telegrapher and a Radio Amateur (Part II)

Jim Farrior, W4FOK



The photo to the left, taken about November 1938, shows my first transmitter, which sat on a shelf above the operating table. It is built breadboard style on the wooden bottom of the case of an old radio from the early 1920s that someone gave me. The round holes above the dials were originally for looking in to see if the radio's tube filaments were glowing. For my usage, I removed the top of the case to provide adequate ventilation.

allowed switching the antenna between the receiver and transmitter. It was a little inconvenient, but no real hardship.

Others had already salvaged all the meters from the junk at Ft. Benning, so I didn't have any meters. Without the funds to purchase a meter, I had to build, test and operate the equipment without any kind of meter. The only measuring devices I had were the two simple ones shown in the photo. On the wall, near the left top corner of the transmitter, can be seen an oval object hanging on a nail. It is actually several turns of hook-up wire connected to a small dial-light bulb. It could be held near the plate coil when tuning and would glow more brightly at resonance. On the front panel of the transmitter just to the right of the left hand dial can be seen another small dial-light bulb. The antenna feeder wire comes through the front panel and connects to the bulb at the right terminal of the bulb socket, and the feeder wire can be seen connected

to the left terminal, so the feeder current would flow through the bulb filament. The dial at the left is for a capacitor that controls the coupling of the feeder to the transmitter output. At maximum power output, the bulb would glow at an almost normal brilliance. Another crude measuring device was that I could approximate the plate current drawn at resonance by observing the glow of the

type 83 mercury vapor rectifier.

When I finished the 12th grade with good grades, I fully expected to graduate. However, the principal, Mr. W. T. Porter, called me into his office and told me that since I had never attended the second half of the 11th grade, I could not be given a diploma. It made my mother so angry she went to the county courthouse in Hayneville, and talked with the county superintendent of education. She argued that she had been told I could skip the last half of the 11th grade and had been allowed to attend the 12th grade, but now they were taking it back, even though I had made excellent grades in the 12th grade. However, her arguments didn't prevail, and she told me that she went out and sat on the courthouse steps and cried. She feared I might never get my high school diploma.

The transmitter used a single type 6L6G tube in a tri-tet crystal-controlled oscillator with an output of about 15 watts, which was ample power for plenty of contacts, both foreign and domestic. I had only one crystal, 80-meters, to which frequency the grid circuit was tuned (right-hand dial). The plate circuit could be tuned (left-hand knob) to either the 80-meter frequency, or the second harmonic on 40-meters. Plug-in coils provided band switching for the plate circuit. To be different, I always designed my equipment to have the driver stage on the right side and the output stage on the left. The reason was that when the chassis was flipped over about the vertical axis for construction or repair, the stages appear in the same position as they are in conventional circuit diagrams.

The antenna was an "off-center Hertz," now known as a "Windom," that was a single wire for a half-wave on the 80-meter frequency. The single wire feeder connection was made at a point 1/3 of the way from one end, which is a compromise that made the antenna system work equally well on both the 80- and 40-meter bands.

I had no insulators for the antenna, so I used two Coke bottles of the old type that curved in near the bottom. The antenna wire was tied to the cap end, and the supporting wire was tied near the bottom. Not shown above the transmitter was a blade switch that

*"...I used two
Coke bottles..."*

My First Amateur
Radio XMTR



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Badly bent, but not broken, I reentered the C.C.C. My fear was that I might be sent to a camp in a district that had no radio net, and I might have to plant trees and dig ditches. However, when the truck arrived at the camp at Ashland, Ala., I immediately spotted the radio antenna! The operator let me use his key to talk with the signal officer, Lt. Bob Lowery, W4DQW, at the District "D" Net Control Station in Ft. McClelland, Ala. He told me that he needed a chief operator and that an army truck would come to get me the next morning. What luck!

There were actually two nets, each with its own transmitter and receiver, but operated from the same desk. Each net had more than six stations. The Mississippi stations used 4305 kc/s, and the net control station used the call WUNA when working them. I don't recall the frequency used by the Alabama stations. The net control station used the call WUMA when working them. The net control station had very good equipment and I received some good technical and operating experience while there. To improve my copying ability, I copied "Press Wireless" every night.

While at Ft. McClellan, I again had access to some junk radio parts. I collected everything I would need to put cathode-type tubes in my SW-3 receiver and a voltage regulated power supply to replace the batteries previously used. Also collected were parts to build a much better transmitter. Although it was all used stuff, I was even able to get all the needed tubes, plus some spare tubes that had plenty of life

left in them. I also found two meters that could be used to measure plate current in the driver and amplifier stages of the transmitter.

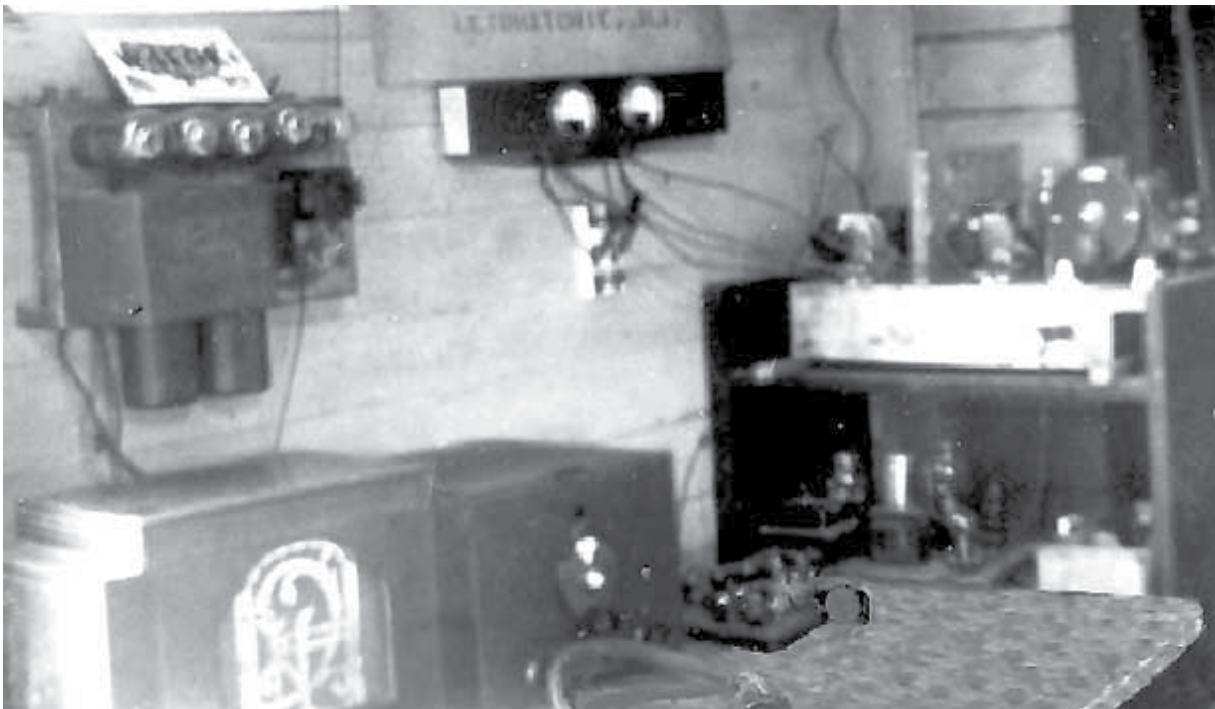
On March 31, 1940, I left the C.C.C. again and went back home to attend the required second half of the 11th grade. I was then 20 years old, and felt like an old man among my much younger classmates. I still felt bitter about the treatment I had previously received from the school system that didn't permit me to graduate earlier. Within several weeks after I arrived at home I had finished building the new transmitter and the modified receiver, and was on the air again. This time I had the benefit of the higher power, and was not crystal-bound, but could roam the bands with the variable frequency oscillator I built.

The photo below, taken in April 1940, shows the setup of my second amateur station. On the table can be seen the modified receiver, with my McElroy bug at the right, and at the left the speaker given me by Ed Montgomery when I was the radio operator in Greenville. Above the speaker is an audio ampli-



I am sending messages using the "bug" semi-automatic key at the Net Control Station WUMA/WUMA at the District Headquarters at Ft. McClellan. There are two RME-69 receivers, one for the Alabama stations and the other for the Mississippi stations. The two transmitters are on the other side of the room.

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A Special "Special Event" Moment

Don Keith, N4KC



Don, N4KC, works the pileup for special event station N9N at historic ship *Nautilus*, Groton, CT

I admit that I am a sucker for special event amateur radio operations. I check the lists and look for them on the air. They not only promote the event or location to amateurs all over the world but, when they operate from a public place, they expose people to our wonderful hobby. That was one reason I was especially proud to help initiate and carry out a resoundingly successful event station recently. But it was one little contact among the thousands we made that weekend that gave me a special special-event thrill.

The operation was to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the historic trip to the North Pole by the submarine *USS Nautilus*, the world's first nuclear-powered vessel. She and her crew reached the most inaccessible point on the planet on August 3, 1958, becoming the first ship to do so, and created a worldwide celebration similar to the first moon landing a decade later. After emerging from beneath the treacherous polar ice pack several days later between Svalbard and Greenland, she sent a radio message to President Dwight Eisenhower and the Pentagon. "*Nautilus 90 North*," told the president and key officers at the Pentagon of the success of a mission that literally changed the course of the Cold War and world history.

I had the honor of co-writing a book about the *Nautilus* North Pole run with the man who was her skipper at the time, the late Captain William R. Anderson. I knew all along that I needed to do something special to call attention to the anniversary, and I desperately wanted to include amateur radio if possible. Problem is, I live in Alabama and the place where we needed to be was in Connecticut. That is where *Nautilus* now rests, open to the public

as a museum ship. Thanks to a dedicated group of members of Southern New England Navy/Marine Corps MARS, spearheaded by Chuck Motes K1DFS, and to the staff at the Submarine Force Museum and Library in Groton, Connecticut, we were ultimately able to do our special event station from the grounds of the museum on the anniversary weekend.

Our operating position was only steps from Historic Ship *Nautilus*, one of only two ships in the country to bear the "Historic Ship" label. (The other is *USS Constitution*, "Old Ironsides," in Boston.) We were also in a very conspicuous place near the crowds attending special ceremonies at the ship and museum. We had use of the MARS emergency-preparedness setup, including two good stations, a comfortable RV-type trailer, and a four-element beam for 20 meters. The beam was on a 50-foot crank-up tower that sat on a modified boat trailer, rigged just for this purpose. We even had a legal-limit amp but that required a second generator so it saw limited use.

I was also able to secure the special event call sign N9N for "*Nautilus 90 North*." Action on the bands was fast and furious all weekend. We ended up with over 2,000 QSOs, working

"*Nautilus 90 North*"



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Primary Crew for the N9N Operation in front of *Nautilus*: L to R, WA1LAD, W1LOZ, N1JGR, N4KC, K1DFS, K1RJV, N1RMF

stations from all 50 states and 26 foreign countries. The MARS crew had arranged for and scheduled volunteer operators who did yeoman work all weekend on both 40 and 20.

In the planning process, I asked Chuck to try to have CW capabilities, just in case, and he did. However, since I did not know the abilities of the volunteer ops, I was not sure how much CW we could actually do. I did drop down to the lower end of 20 meters for a while on Saturday afternoon and made a few dozen contacts.

Then I received an interesting email from AC3Q, Harold Dennin, wondering if we were going to do any more CW. I responded that I doubted we would have the chance. We were getting tremendous response on SSB and that allowed the most people the opportunity to get N9N into their logbooks.

But then Harold told me why he was asking. And I promptly emailed him back, telling him to come on up on 20 SSB when I was at the microphone and we would take care of things.

Sure enough, on Sunday afternoon, I heard AC3Q calling amid the din. I answered immediately.

“Let’s go to CW right here and now,” I told him. “Other stations stand by for a moment and I’ll tell you what we are doing. This is something special!” And we proceeded to exchange signal reports on CW while the throng waited patiently.

When I went back to SSB, I explained to the pileup that back in 1958, when *Nautilus* made the crossing from Pacific to Atlantic via the North Pole, only about twenty people outside her hull knew where she was or what she was doing.



The commemorative QSL card for the N9N operation

“Talk about special!”

Hers was probably the most secret mission in naval history to that time. When she finally made it safely through where—literally—no man had gone before, she was in a hurry to announce her success to the president and others who were breathlessly waiting. It was a dangerous mission, risking the lives of 116 crewmembers and the world’s most famous vessel.

Propagation in the very high latitudes is spotty at best, and the radiomen on *Nautilus* pounded away on their key, trying to raise someone. The first people to hear them were at the U.S. Navy radio station at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Ironically, that was where *Nautilus* began her top-secret polar journey two weeks before.

The Navy radio op on duty at the time? The one who heard those weak dits and dahs from *Nautilus* near the top of the world? Young Harold Dennin! He copied and receipted for the “*Nautilus* 90 North” message and immediately sent it on its way.

So you can imagine what a thrill it was for me—and I hope for AC3Q—that Sunday afternoon in August 2008, fifty years to the day after *Nautilus* “pierced the Pole.” Sitting only a few yards from the vessel that made the historic transit, I was part of recreating a wonderful moment from that adventure. And AC3Q and I did it with a few notes of beautiful CW.

Talk about special! ■

Don Keith, N4KC, has been licensed for more than 46 years and remains active on most bands and modes. He is a best-selling author with more than 17 books in print. His latest, The Ice Diaries, co-written with Captain William R. Anderson, details the inside story of USS Nautilus and her trip to the North Pole in 1958. N4KC’s web sites are www.n4kc.com and www.donkeith.com. For more information on Nautilus and the Submarine Force Museum, visit www.usnautilus.org.



Inside the radio room as it looks today aboard Historic Ship *Nautilus*



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The Best Rig I Never Built

W9QEE had the Big Picture

Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD



Raytheon RK-20 Pentode
N6JV Photos

One of my most influential Elmers I met only twice. He answered my 40-meter CW with a bloopy signal. Bill, W9QEE, was only a few blocks away in Chicago and, I thought, should have been louder. He invited me over for a visit. I had been an amateur for a few months, heading for WAS with a 6L6 oscillator, two crystals and a Zepp. It was great to be a ham.

Bill, a no-nonsense guy about 20, operated from the basement of his father's apartment building. At a wide workbench he was methodically going through the ARRL *Handbook*. Breadboarding and testing every basic circuit, page by page. He worked me with a Colpitts oscillator running less than a watt. Bill said that he preferred the Hartley design.

After our greeting pleasantries he got right down to business, recognizing me as a brand new ham. "Are you a member of ARRL?" he asked. I hemmed and hawed and replied, "Not yet." "Every ham should be an ARRL member," he said. "Without ARRL all our ham bands would likely be commercial." My connection with the American Radio Relay League had been only through the *License Manual* and W1AW's code practice.

Bill handed me his copy of *200 Meters and Down* by Clinton B. DeSoto. "Read this. You can bring it back on your next visit." I gladly accepted the loan, a book that recounted the early precarious years of our hobby. W9QEE then noticed me admiring his collection of tubes, particularly

an RK-20. "I'll never get around to using that. If you want it, it's yours." A real transmitting tube: My own limited junkbox featured receiver tubes and other odds and ends. I carefully took the gift home.

Other lads my age were discovering girls. I was in love with an RK-20. What a beautiful bottle. Its most distinguishing feature was an external connection to its suppressor grid, allowing a watt or two of audio to modulate thirty watts output. When 40 meters was dead I played chassis chess with that tube. It required a thousand plate volts to get up to snuff. Where would I get 1,000 volts? I decided to cross that bridge when I came to it. I must have mentally built my RK-20 rig a dozen times, keeping watch for any component that might fit the project.



I built an amplifier stage for my 6L6 oscillator, intending it to be the buffer-doubler for my future RK-20 transmitter. No increase in power, but I could now double to 20 easily for a shot at DX. My endeavor entered its second year, not closer to realization. But I had fun in anticipation. Alas—fact is, I never got around to building that rig. Years later I, too, gave away that

RK20 to a newer amateur. Whether it eventually fulfilled its destiny I do not know. Just lighting its filament had been a pleasure.

Fifty years would pass before W9BRD used a genuine transmitting tube, an 813 outfit inherited from a Silent Key friend. As for W9QEE, I returned the DeSoto book with thanks, declaring myself now a new member of ARRL. Our paths never crossed again. Bill had progressed to his *Handbook's* receiver chapter and was busy building mixers and IF strips. His self-education in electronics paid off. Years later I heard he had become chief engineer for a prominent Chicago TV station. Way to go, Elmer! ■



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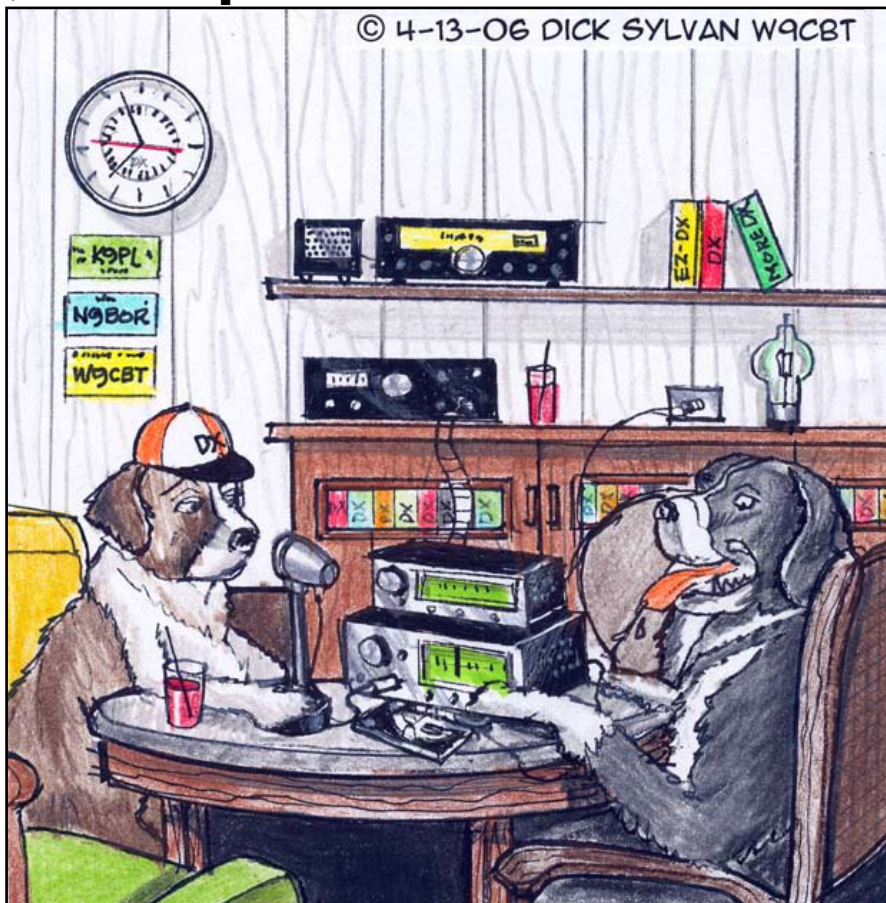
Cartoon Caption Contest

Mike Tortorella, W2IY, Takes Home All the Marbles!

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

WE HAVE A
WINNER!

Ham Quips



ON CW, NOBODY KNOWS YOU'RE A DOG

By Mike Tortorella, W2IY

Honorable Mentions

"K9 THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO THE
CALLSIGN, K9!!!!"

Michael, AB7OC

"RUFFFF COPY"

Bill, WB9CAC

"I USED TO USE A DOG
PADDLE, BUT WENT BACK TO
THE STRAIGHT KEY."

Jim, K9CNP

"THE BANDS SEEM TO
BE DEAD. WHY DON'T WE
TURN OFF THE RADIO AND
INVITE A FEW FRIENDS
OVER TO PLAY CARDS."

Scott, NØIU

"THE HECK WITH YOUR
MICROPHONE, I'M
PAWING BRASS!"

Carl, WBØCFF



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Ham Radio Tube

Web Site Offers Great Views

Donald J. Dubuque, KE4IAP



The spark that became hamradiotube.com jumped as I was searching the 'Net for some amateur radio information. My endeavors led me to You Tube where a search on "ham radio" turned up a lot of useless videos that had nothing to do with the hobby. So, with my existing interest in building Web sites I set out to build a hobby specific video site. Hamradiotube.com has been live now for just over six months and I've already passed the 150-member mark, far more than my club site at 10m-6m-Club.com, which has been up for just over 1.5 years with its membership at 146.

Hamradiotube.com has had an upgrade in the past few weeks and interest seems to have been boosted by an article placed on qrz.com by R.L. Brunton, G4TUT. Since that article's posting my site's hits substantially increased.

The site's biggest contributor, with some outstanding videos, is J.B. De Haan, PA3DMI, of the Netherlands. If you haven't visited the site and seen his videos you're missing out.

The site is restricted to video and audio files of amateur radio, early TV and radio

My goal for the site now is to find supporters to help keep the site afloat so that more amateurs

can go to the "one stop" shop for their hobby related information.

So, if you or you know of someone that has videos or audio files to share please don't hesitate, upload them; I'm always looking for good stuff.

Donald J. Dubuque, KE4IAP, was first licensed in 1993 and resides in the state of Virginia. His interests are computers, ham radio and building Web sites. Donald's been building Web sites since the late '90s and currently maintains these other amateur radio sites: hamradiotube.com, 10m-6m-Club.com and amateurradiowiki.com. ■

CONTINUED - THE STORY WITHIN FROM PAGE 1

Olson Radio

Before departing the North Western Avenue that was, let's drop into that Olson Radio store enthralled by Allied Radio's gravitational field. I visited only once, but was impressed by the place if only in contrast to its competitor. If Allied Radio was a palace proudly displaying its treasures gleaming and bright, then Olson Radio was a pirate's cave in its ill-lit gloom and piles, yes, piles of booty scattered about.

On my visit the most impressive heap was that of surplus Geiger counters displayed in a not inartistic manner just as they were dumped on the concrete floor. Whether these instruments were born of the uranium-prospecting craze of recent memory or discarded by some civil defense agency, I don't know. I do know they were supplied sans their pricey high-voltage batteries, so for a young high school kid they were tempting white elephants. There was new gear too, and for a child of the 1960s Philmore was a name exotic, unknown and inexpensive—downright cheap.

Most memories tend to smooth the sharp edges and mellow the regrettable, but some memories engrave themselves with photographic precision. This is one of those memories. ■



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fier from an old junk radio that was given to me by someone in Letohatchie. The amplifier was used to drive the speaker when the phones were not being used. I also had coils for the receiver that covered the short wave bands other than the amateur bands. The transmitter is located on the top shelf to the right, with the power supplies below.

The transmitter power supply was the same as used with my first station, as it had been built to supply more power. On the wall are mounted two meters, also salvaged from the junk at Ft. McClellan, that indicated the buffer and final amplifier plate currents in the transmitter. The meters made tuning the transmitter much easier. A third meter had been used to build a much needed current, voltage and resistance tester. At the right can be seen the variable frequency oscillator (VFO), of the electron coupled type that used a type 6SK7 tube. It had a high quality dial, and the operating frequency could be set quite accurately using a calibration chart. I had built and tested that section and done additional work on the new transmitter while at Ft. McClellan where I had access to more tools. Using the dial, shown at the right end of the transmitter, the transmitter could be set accurately to any frequency in the amateur band. The VFO drove a type 6V6G buffer, which drove a pair of type 6L6G tubes in the final. The buffer and amplifier were biased to cutoff, and the VFO was keyed. Keying was excellent.

The output power was approximately 45 watts. Plug-in coils were used, and the station could be operated on the 80-, 40- and 20-meter amateur bands. The same Windom antenna previously used on 80- and 40-meters, worked equally well on 20-meters.

On May 20, 1940, I received my much delayed high school diploma. I needed to find work as soon as possible, so I tried to join the U.S. Army Air Force. I was encouraged by some of the military radio operators I knew at Maxwell Field, at Montgomery, and felt that with my experience I could get ahead quickly. However, the army doctor rejected me for being underweight. Then I tried the navy, and the navy doctor said that I had an irregular heartbeat. Hoping there might be a need for civilian radio operators at WVR, the army signal corps station at Ft. McPherson, in Atlanta, I wrote a letter describing my qualifications. I felt that to be a very long shot.

For a much need break, my good friend, Guy Coleman, and I decided to make a trip down the Alabama River from Benton to Mobile in a small 12-foot paddleboat. We pooled our resources and gathered enough provi-

sions to last us for the trip. We could hitchhike back. A local man, Eddie Mims, agreed to haul our boat to the river; and my sister Anne; my young brother, Joe; Guy's brother, Jimmy; and some other local kids went with us to launch the boat on August 28, 1940. After many exciting experiences, we arrived exhausted and half-starved in Mobile 13 days later.

Upon our arrival at Mobile, I found a letter from my mother in general delivery at the Mobile post office saying that I had been selected for a job as a radio operator at Ft. McPherson, Ga. It surprised me, as I had not received an application form for taking the competitive test. They had obviously confirmed my qualifications by checking the references I submitted.

A few days later I went to Atlanta and began work. I enjoyed the job, which paid more than I had imagined I would be able to earn at first, and I received a considerable amount of additional technical and operating experience. At the boarding house where I lived, I was allowed to install my amateur radio equipment. I bought a Hallicrafters Sky Champion S20R, a low-priced communications receiver, and used the old transmitter shown in the photo (bottom, page 3) taken in April 1940. Although living in a city was strange to me, life was great!

Primarily to learn more about radio, I left Atlanta on Sept. 19, 1941, and went to Canada, where I joined the Civilian Technical Corps. I wore the RAF uniform and served for nearly one and a half years on the Isle of Man, an island in the Irish Sea, at an early warning tracking station. I thought that my commercial telegraph operating career was over, but on May 21, 1943, I joined the American Merchant Marine as a radio officer. I made a number of voyages in the Atlantic, North and South Pacific and Mediterranean war zones. In December 1945, the war having come to an end, I went back home to Alabama. Although my commercial telegraph operating career was over, I have continued through the years to use telegraphy on the amateur radio bands.

As I write this, I am nearly 88 years old, and still have my original amateur radio call, W4FOK. I wrote a computer program named *The Mill* that teaches both American Morse and International Morse. Mill is the name telegrapher's give their typewriter. My program is distributed as a download from my Web site, and has become popular around the world.

Long live telegraphy! ■

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