

From the Gavel...



After a year of planning and organizing, Hamex has finally come and gone. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to make it a

success. Attendance was down slightly from last year and so were the Grand Prize ticket sales, but the club still managed to rake in about \$2,800 (our share of the total profit), about \$300 less than last year. Not bad for a non-profit organization!

Unless you have been involved in the organization of Hamex, you may not appreciate the time and effort involved. It takes the resources of both clubs (MARC and PARC) to ensure that all goes as planned. People were required for talk-in, parking, ticket sales, security, club tables, vender assist and of course table set up and take down. We even manned a Hamex Special event station and held radio examinations. While the doors were only open to the public for 3 hours, people were working behind the scenes well before and after.

Let's not forget the work that goes on prior to the event, i.e. the facility booking, table rentals and sales, advertising, web site administration and planning meetings to name a few. It all ends with the post mortem to determine how we can do better for next year.

This was exhausting work, but he benefits far outweighed the effort involved. The obvious is the additional revenue that enables us to fund assets such as the club station, Field Service Vehicle and the Repeater, all of which could not be achieved with club membership fees alone. Then there are the working relationships and friendships that develop within our club and Peel's, all of which help to further our interest and enjoyment of amateur radio.

It is because of the efforts of various club members in events like Hamex, that I now realize what makes our club one of the best radio clubs around. We have a lot to offer the amateur radio community. Keep up the good work guys!

One final note, we have found a nominee for the last and final position of Club Treasurer. He alone with the rest of the nominees will be presented to the club for election on the first Thursday of this month. We are all ready, willing and able to carry on for the year to come.

73 Rick Brown VE3IMG

This Month

2. Commentary
3. Club Calendar
4. Letters to the editor
5. Tiger Tail
7. Q Signals
7. DXing for Beginners By a Beginner
8. SOS
10. RAC Application Form

Sunday Brunch

Sunday brunches are held on the first Sunday of each month. Time is 9:30AM at Shopsy's, 6986 Financial Drive Unit 5 Mississauga (at the corner of Mississauga Rd and Derry Rd). All are welcome to come out and have an opportunity to chat in an informal setting.

Club Nets

2 Metre Tuesday Night Phone Net Join in on the chatter starting at 8:30PM every Tuesday on the club repeater. Hosted by various net controllers. 145.430MHz Tone 103.5 Minus (-) offset. Contact our VHF Net Manager, **Lorne (VE3CXT)**, if interested in becoming a net controller.

75 Metre Sunday Night Net Starts at 8:30PM every Sunday. Hosted by various net controllers. Contact our HF Net Manager, **Michael (VE3TKI)**, if interested in becoming a net controller.

Commentary



Did you enjoy Hamex? Struck any good deals there? Well I had a great time and surely you had a great time too. Just being there to see what people have to offer, new and used is interesting. Add to that the crowds as we saw till about 11

a.m. and that is enough to make one feel a sense of panic – what if that paddle you have set your eyes on is gone before you have had a chance to bargain? And that antenna you have waited so long to buy – which of the three big vendors is offering the best price today?

That's what happened to me. I lost the paddle but got the new antenna for 60% of the market price. A few other toys for my shack and I am a pretty happy man. What did you pick up?

Now that Hamex is behind us what's next? It's the Ontario QSO party on the 19th of April. To have the most fun, get to the club station. That is where the action is. This is one of the big contests in this part of the world and you don't want to miss it.

Speaking of the club station, there are plans afoot to install the massive Magnum antenna. This one is going to be the pride of our club. But to get it up there, the club needs your help. Contact the station manager to see how you can help.

One of our readers, Murray VE3JMY, who is also a member of the CW FISTS Club, came upon an interesting article of a rescue at sea where CW played a major role. I have reproduced that article in this issue. You never know when your skills are going to save lives.

There has been a flood of correspondence regarding the Roving Reporter's last article. Accusations and counter accusations have been flying and I have done my best to be neutral and publish your letters. As you will read, the plot appears more sinister than the initial article suggested. Read and enjoy!

73

Thomas VA3TMB

Executive Directors

President	Rick Brown, VE3IMG
1st Vice President	Asim Zaidi, VE3XAP
2nd Vice President	William Bressette, VE3WPJ
Treasurer	John (Sr) Lorenc, VA3XJL
Secretary	Dan Goodier, VE3NI
Past President	Dave Harford, VA3DFH

Club Managers

Membership Manager	Dave Harford, VA3DFH
Education Manager	Earle Laycock, VE3XEL
Basic Theory Courses	Earle Laycock, VE3XEL
Basic Theory Courses	Bob Hawkins, VE3AGC
Basic Theory Courses	Jody Levine, VE3ION
Basic Theory Courses	Don McPhee, VA3BOW
Basic Theory Courses	Basil Burgess, VE3JEB
Basic Theory Courses	Robert Dutton, VE3ZZF
CW Courses	Frank Lamb, VE3HTX
CW Courses	Earle Laycock, VE3XEL
House / Visitor Host Manager	Robert Humphreys, VE3HOW
Newsletter Editor	Thomas Bernard, VA3TMB
Researcher	Kim Cheong, VE3KTC
Net Managers HF Net	Michael Brickell, VE3TKI
VHF Net	Lorne Jackson, VE3CXT
Repeater Manager	Michael Brickell, VE3TKI
Assistant	Bryan Jay, VA3BLJ
Assistant	Bob Boyer, VE3XBB
Assistant	Lorne Jackson, VE3CXT
Assistant	John Duffy, VE3DRZ
Assistant	Asim Zaidi, VE3XAP
Assistant	Tony Champion, VA3QC
Assistant	Robin Stubbs, VE3VVS
Assistant	William Bressette, VE3WPJ
Club Station Manager	Stefan Bejusca, VA3OBR
Assistant	Rick Brown, VE3IMG
Assistant	Asim Zaidi, VE3XAP
Assistant	Alex Malikov, VE3MA
Assistant	Bryan Jay, VA3BLJ
Field Day Manager	Open
Assistant – Documentation	Tony Champion, VA3QC
Assistant – Logging	Jody Levine, VE3ION
Assistant – Refreshments	John Duffy, VE3DRZ
Assistant – Site	Thomas Godden, VE3TWG
Assistant - Press and Publications	Reg Vertolli, VA3JQA
FSV Manager	Dave Stubbs, VA3BHF
Assistant	William Bressette, VE3WPJ
Programs Manager	Lorne Jackson, VE3CXT
Webmaster Manager (Source Code and DB)	Dave Harford, VA3DFH
Assistant	Dan Goodier, VE3NI
Assistant	Rick Brown, VE3IMG
Graphical Support	Alex Malikov, VE3MA
Legal Consultant	Lorne Jackson, VE3CXT
Public Information & Media Relations Manager	Tony Champion, VA3QC
Photography	Reg Vertolli, VA3JQA

Audit Committee

Auditors Coordinator	Basil Burgess, VE3JEB
Assistant	Robert Humphreys, VE3HOW

Public Service

ARES Emergency Coordinator	Dan Goodier, VE3NI
Past Coordinator & AEC	Sean Conlin, VA3MED
Assistant EC - 1st Day	Michael Brickell, VE3TKI
Assistant EC - 2nd Day	John Duffy, VE3DRZ
Assistant EC - 3rd Day	Bob Boyer, VE3XBB
Assistant EC - 1st Night	Sean Conlin, VA3MED
Assistant EC - 2nd Night	Dave Harford, VA3DFH
Assistant EC - 3rd Night	Lorne Jackson, VE3CXT
CANWARN Manager	Peter Mosher, VA3PKM
Special Events / Walks Manager	Bob Boyer, VE3XBB

CLUB CALENDAR FOR 2008

April, 2008

03 Thu Exec Meeting
05 Sat NEWS
05 Sat SP DX Contest
06 Sun Sunday Brunch - Shopsy's
06 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
08 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
10 Thu Club Meeting
13 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
15 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
17 Thu Radio Night at Club Station
19 Sat Ontario QSO Party
20 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
22 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
24 Thu Club Meeting
27 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
29 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net

May, 2008

01 Thu Exec Meeting
04 Sun Sunday Brunch - Shopsy's
04 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
06 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
08 Thu Club Meeting
11 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
13 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
15 Thu Radio Night at Club Station
18 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
20 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
22 Thu Club Meeting
23 Fri CQ WW WPX Contest
25 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
27 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
29 Thu ARES Meeting

Provisional Schedule Below...

June, 2008

01 Sun Sunday Brunch - Shopsy's

01 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
03 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
05 Thu Exec Meeting
08 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
10 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
12 Thu Club Meeting
15 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
17 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
19 Thu Radio Night at Club Station
22 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
24 Tue VHF/UHF - 2 Meter Net
26 Thu Club Meeting - Pot Luck Dinner
29 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net

July, 2008

06 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
13 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
20 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
27 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net

August, 2008

03 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
10 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
17 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
24 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
31 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net

September, 2008

07 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
14 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
21 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
28 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net

October, 2008

05 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
12 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
19 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net
26 Sun HF - 75/80 Meter Net

NOTES

1. Meetings start 7:30PM at St. Thomas A Becket Church Hall, 3535 South Common Court unless otherwise noted.
2. Brunch is at 9:30AM unless otherwise noted.
3. Classes are from 7:00PM - 9:00PM at Meals On Wheels at 2445 Dunwin Drive

Visit our website: <http://www.marc.on.ca> for any updates of the calendar.

Letters to the editor

To the Editor:

In regard to the RR interview with Hermette in last month's Communicator, the poor RR reporter was completely deceived by her, to which deceit this rebuttal is addressed and in the interest of journalistic integrity must be published in the next Communicator. I, Lord Jackson of Crossbow, a.k.a. VE3CXT, defender not only of sheepdogs but of the poor, downtrodden and abused ICOM users, have got to the bottom of this story.

Herman was NOT crushed or smeared by the carpenter Tony in the FSV. Those two carpenter gentlemen (gentlemen?) Michael and Tony, even though one is a Yaesu user, for which naivete he has my sympathy, touched not a hair or leg of poor old Herman. Herman had a bad habit, he was always spitting. Because of this his friends dubbed him "Hermaniot Spitzer". Herman also led a double life, cavorting with harlot-pillers, especially a very sexy expensive one named Kristen, which was a stage name of course. Kristen proceeded to pretend to be a ham-piller interested in DXpeditions, which turned Herman on because she caused him to dream of being on Ducie island with half his legs operating the VP6DX station and the other half operating her. That is another way of operating "split". Anyway, Hermette found out about this salacious affair and murdered Herman, pinning the blame on Tony, who though totally innocent has a guilty look about him (which is explainable, after all he worked for the CBC). How did she do it? Simple. She watched the two carpenters drinking their cappuccino brew and noticed that the carpenter Michael, after taking a sip of his java, always put his cup back in the same place on the FSV floor. When he did so he also tapped out in cw with bottom of the cup against the floor the word "Yaesu". All Yaesu users do this, it is on Pg. 13 of the Yaesu manual. She said slyly to Herman, "why don't you stand over there in that spot to see better what the carpenters are doing?"

Michael took his sip, put the cup down in that spot and did his cw thing, and that, my friends, is how Herman met his demise, much to Hermette's satisfaction.

Yours sincerely;

Lord Jackson of Crossbow, VE3CXT, LLB, DOTDIMS*

*defender of the downtrodden, including murderous sheepdogs

To the Editor:

Well I am just shocked to the core at the gross misrepresentation of events in the summer of 2002 (I think it was then, but I'm getting old and decrepit, and I tend to forget things) .I was just sitting down to eat my polate (this is an ancient English word that I invented some years ago, a synonym for "plate") of humble pie for dinner, when I read this scurrilous attack on my virtue, when I read this scurrilous attack on my virtue. (I apologize for the occasional repetition repetition; it comes from my unfortunate association with John VE3DRZ, in the infamous "taking the repeaters to the dump" affair). Now as I was saying before I distracted myself, you have to realize I was tried, convicted, hung, quartered and keel hauled without so much as an inquiry, never mind a trial.

I am not a murderer. I didn't have sex...oh wrong crime, wrong time! At worst it was self defence as Herman scared me when he moved and I thought for an instant that my life was in danger. Caterpillars, bugs, flying insects and snakes can be poisonous you know.

Being such a little fellow in an adult world, he/they should have known better than to get underfoot in the first place. Have you not tripped over your little ones at some stage in your life???

Besides with all those feet he should been able to move much quicker than he did. Pas mon problem as we say back home in the great Nation of Quebec.

I guess caterpillar justice works under a presumption of guilt with no chance of being innocent, not like our system which presumes innocence even when proven guilty hence our light sentences.

I am doomed to purgatory for the rest of my life over this over-rated and overblown incident. As the expression goes "He wouldn't hurt a fly", but I had no compunction over squishing an overweight, bloated multi-coloured centipede that looked like an incognito bumble bee.

RIP (Resplendent in parts)

From the files of James, John, and It's a Sad, Sad Fart.

Sincerely;

Tony Champion, VA3QC, UCCTORIPWCTTD*

*unrepentant carpenter, co taker of repeaters in perfect working condition to the dump

To the Editor:

I must protest at the injustices represented by the completely and utterly unfounded charges by Lord Jackson in his letter to you. How can Lord Jackson possibly think that I, a kind, caring, and considerate carpenter, would stoop to the depths of depravity described in his letter and carry out such terrible deeds. Lord Jackson conveniently overlooks the facts: (a) Timmies cups have ample space underneath them for a caterpillar (I hasten to note I have not tried to kill a caterpillar in the way described), and (b) the smear is clearly and unequivocally on the driveway. Any jury of my peers, or a judge, would take note of the absolutely spotless floor of the FSV shown in the photographs in the February Communicator and immediately draw the correct conclusion that Herman met his unfortunate end on the driveway under the foot of a cruel and uncaring carpenter, and not under the bottom of a large black coffee, double cupped, from Timmies. All you have to do is look at Figure 2 in the RR interview and draw the obvious and correct conclusion. However, I did take the opportunity to call in some favours with CSI-Miami, and they did the proper DNA tests and say that I am right. Unfortunately I find myself unable to produce the actual report, as CSIS

says it is secret and confidential, as well as being a matter of national security. Also a jury of my peers would note that Lord Jackson contradicts himself in his letter; first saying that I am innocent of any and all wrongdoing and then saying that I am a terrible criminal.

You will note also that Tony, in his letter to you, unequivocally, Enthusiastically, and unrepentantly confesses to this terrible crime. As writing letters to the editor is completely voluntary, it is obvious to every thinking and unbiased person that Tony's guilty conscience has been eating at him for the last 6 years, and so he took this opportunity to try to cleanse his soul by setting the record straight, albeit belatedly, and admit that he did this dastardly thing, thereby completely exonerating me.

Yours truly, I remain yours in complete and utter innocence, vindicated by events and testimonials etc etc etc (I could go on but it would get boring...)

Michael, VE3TKI, IAROTHC*

Aka Roving Reporter

*innocent in all respects of this horrible crime

Tiger Tail

Daniel Goodier VE3NI

In my fumbling around on the Internet for ARES related information I came across a term that I saw used a number of times but had no idea what it referred to, the term was "tiger tail". Further searching lead me to a number of articles talking about antenna improvement of hand held radios (HTs) with the use of a counterpoise to improve the antenna efficiency.

I was so intrigued with the idea that a counterpoise might help me trip the repeater with my handheld that I decided to give it a try.

Well two pieces of wire cut to the appropriate lengths (dual band HT), a ring terminal (my antenna is a SMA), and 5 minutes and I was done. The best part was that I was able to trip the repeater on my first try. I was quite pleased and I think you will be as well.

Read the article and then give it a try and you may be surprised as well.

HT Antenna Modification For Increased Performance! Edited and re-written from an article entitled "Getting the Most from Your Hand-Held Transceiver" By C. Edward Harris, KE4SKY, AEC Fairfax ARES

When limited to "barefoot" operation, with a "rubber duck", HT antennas are not very efficient nor adequate for communications. They fail miserably as an effective radiator due to their design! They are nothing more than an extended dummy load acting as an antenna!

The following modification will help you to make the most of your HT by increasing the factory antenna's efficiency and the cost is just a piece of wire!

FACTS ABOUT HT ANTENNAS

The National Bureau of Standards tests of Public Safety high band and amateur 2-meter antennas indicate that a "rubber duck" has -5db, "negative gain" compared to a quarter wave held at face level. In terms of effective radiated power (ERP), this means that a 5 watt HT with rubber duck, radiates only 1 watt. Operating an HT on your

belt results in another -20db attenuation, reducing ERP to 50 milliwatts! That's 1/20 of one watt!

UHF results are no better...

Due to the design of the factory installed HT antenna, you are effectively missing half of the antenna!

MODIFY THAT HT ANTENNA FOR BETTER RESULTS

Get ready to use that scrap of wire you have in your junk box!

A simple, inexpensive and effective method to improve a "rubber duck" antenna is by adding an external counterpoise or "tiger tail" thereby adding the other "half".

It should be noted that if your HT is under warranty, the internal modification may void that warranty...you have been warned!

ADDING THE OTHER MISSING "HALF":

You can easily build one from a quarter-wave piece, (about 19.5" on 2m, 11.5" for 220 and 6.5" for 440), of stranded insulated wire, crimped and soldered to a battery clip or use a small spring tension clip that will fit the BNC antenna connector with the wire attached to it. Use a clip or other connection that fits tightly but can be removed if needed. It must make both a good mechanical and electrical connection.

Another method would be to attach the end of the wire by soldering it to a grounded portion of the circuit board inside the HT, although this may not be practical with some models, or any point that is at ground potential on the HT such as the "ground" side of an external speaker/headphone jack, the BNC connector at the antenna, or the Negative side of the battery terminal. The preferred location is at the factory antenna base at the BNC connector. If you have

some other type of metal antenna connector the same applies.

Many of the newer models don't lend themselves to internal modifications easily. If the "rubber duck" antenna that came with the HT does not come off, then you will have to make the connection inside the HT to a grounded point. Extreme care must be taken to prevent shorting out other components!!!!!! Use insulated wire. You may have to drill a small hole in the case for the exit point of the wire and tie a knot inside to provide strain relief. Each installation will be different. Use your own judgment!

Always reinforce the soldered connection with heat shrink tubing or tape to resist flex and shorting to other components if possible.

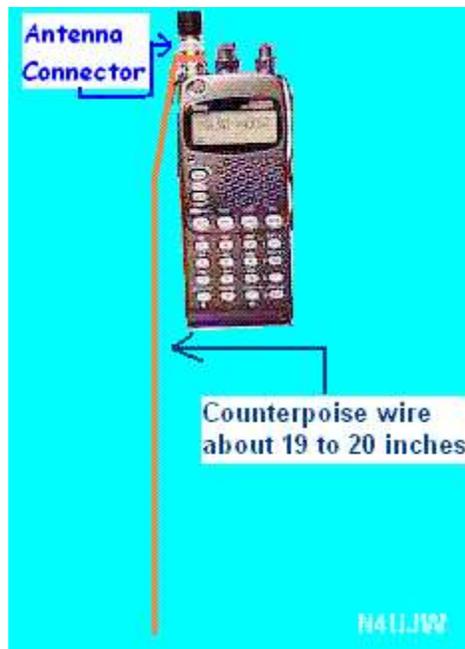
When the counterpoise, (the other half of the antenna), is clamped to the outer collar of the BNC connector on your HT antenna, it helps to prevent RF from coupling with your body, so your completed HT antenna "system" acts much like a center-fed dipole instead of an end-fed dummy load!

YOU JUST BUILT A DIRECTIONAL ANTENNA AND DID NOT KNOW IT!

In marginal conditions, extending the counterpoise horizontally and pointing your hand to steer the radiation pattern where you need it, produces a dramatically stronger signal than letting it

"droop" towards the ground. Experiment with the angle of the counterpoise to get the best results. In effect, you are creating a form of "V" type center fed vertical dipole with a bit of gain compared to just the factory installed antenna.

If you want to buy another HT antenna, rather than add the counterpoise described in this article, then it is recommended that you shop around. Don't be misled by the cheaper priced antennas. Buy from a reputable dealer that will answer your questions. Try to find an antenna with published gain figures compared to a dipole or 1/4 wave vertical. Don't expect Yagi or similar performance....have fun and get better performance than you were!



Q Signals

Q-signals are short, three letter codes used in CW (morse code) communication to speed up the contacts. Do not use these codes for voice communication, say what you mean instead.

QRG Will you tell me my exact frequency? Your exact frequency is...

QRL Are you busy? I am busy. Please do not interfere.

QRM Is my transmission being interfered with? Your transmission is being interfered.

QRN Are you troubled by static? I am troubled by static.

QRO Shall I increase power? Increase power.

QRP Shall I decrease power? Decrease power.

QRQ Shall I send faster? Send faster.

QRS Shall I send more slowly? Send more slowly.

QRT Shall I stop sending? Stop sending.

QRU Have you anything for me? I have nothing for you.

QRV Are you ready? I am ready.

QRX When will you call me again? I will call you again at... (hours).

QRZ Who is calling me? You are being called by...

QSB Are my signals fading? Your signals are fading.

QSK Can you hear me between your signals and if so can I break in on your transmission? I can hear you between signals; break in on my transmission.

QSL Can you acknowledge receipt (of message or transmission)? I am acknowledging receipt.

QSN Did you hear me on (frequency)? I did hear you on (frequency).

QSO Can you communicate with (call sign) direct or by relay? I can communicate with (call sign) direct or relay through (call sign).

QSP Will you relay to (call sign)? I will relay to (call sign).

QST General call preceding a message addressed to all amateurs and ARRL members. This is in effect "CQ ARRL".

QSX Will you listen to (call sign) on (frequency)? I am listening to (call sign) on (frequency).

QSY Shall I change to transmission on another frequency? Change to transmission on another frequency.

QTB Do you agree with my counting of words? I do not agree with your counting of words. I will repeat the first letter or digit of each word or group.

QTC How many messages have you to send? I have # messages for you.

QTH What is your location? My location is ...

QTR What is the correct time? The time is ...

DXing for Beginners By a Beginner

Brennen P. Ernst (KI4PRK)

<http://www.eham.net/articles/18080>

In a just over a year and a half of being a ham, the only thing I've found that I can do for hours on end without getting bored is DXing.

I've found that many people claim that DXing is too hard, or that they don't have the equipment, or that QSLing is too expensive.

I have one of the most basic setups a ham can have. Being 13 years old, I certainly don't have money to throw around, nor do I have the experience time in ham radio to be an expert.

So how did I end up with 188 countries?

DXing is something that EVERYONE can enjoy. And nobody says that you have to QSL to be a DXer. Many hams I talk to are DXers with over 200 countries but not a single QSL to speak of. DXing is not hard. You simply need to remember these five, simple rules:

- 1) Always listen before transmitting
- 2) Always be courteous
- 3) There is always propagation to somewhere

4) Know your propagation, at least basically

5) Be patient

If you already follow these 5 rules, you have 90% of what you need. For those who don't have unlimited time, a computer can be useful to pick up some DX spots. Some good spot sites are DXwatch.com, or DX summit. Your equipment matters very little for the first 50 to 75 countries. If you are very patient and willing to learn a little technique, you can stick with QRP to a wire for those earlier catches. But the easiest way to go is 100w plain transceiver and a Dipole or a good vertical.

There are excellent books out there. Too many to name, but my personal favorites are the DXCC handbook by the ARRL, and "The complete DXer", by W9KNI. Both are available from the ARRL.

While not necessary, an Extra class license helps. On 80, 40, 20, and 15 most of the good DX hangs out below the General class segment. But I worked 75 countries with a General class license, and you can too. 17 and 30 will be your best bands for now, and 12/10 when the sunspots come back. And once the sunspot cycle kicks in again, even the techs can work DX on 10M!

I recommend learning CW. CW has a very good signal to noise ration versus a SSB signal under same conditions. Of course, I have worked VU7RG, 9U9Z, and others running SSB but CW will be your best friend in poor circumstances. SSB works fine and some have achieved Honor roll #1 on SSB, but CW helps a lot.

And even at this point in the cycle, don't forget about the higher bands. Even 10 meters is open to Central America,

the Caribbean, and northern South America at some times, at least from the Eastern USA. I have PM5JC in Indonesia confirmed on 15M! So though not as active as 20 or 17, keep an eye on the spotting net while tuning 20 and you may get a nice surprise. 12 and 15 are often open to the pacific when other bands are not, usually in the mid/late afternoon.

While I've stated before that your equipment matters little for very casual DXing, I still recommend getting the best antenna you can. Put your Dipole up high, or get a good set of radials for your vertical. For the low bands, Beverages work nice for receive (only), and for 160/80 inverted L's are good for transmitting.

Don't abandon digital modes either! PSK31 is a very efficient mode, and with my Dipole @ 40 feet I've made it all the way to Ukraine on 3 watts using this mode!

And if you do chase awards, DXCC is not the only option. IOTA, SOTA, CQ zones, Worked all Africa (very hard!), or some of the smaller awards are fun too. I enjoy the Canadian awards. And WAC (worked all continents) makes a very nice first award.

QSLing can be easy. I won't go into detail about the complicated direct process, but via the buro is cheap and easy if you are willing to wait. And LoTW costs virtually nothing! Not all DX utilize this excellent resource, but some patient DXers have DXCC using only Logbook of the World! And though not accepted for DXCC, eQSL is fun and easy.

So next time you hear a DX calling CQ, don't just listen. Join in! It's fun!

73 and hope to hear you on the bands, de Brennen KI4PRK

SOS By Roy Clayton G4SSH

Reproduced from CW FISTS Club Newsletter

<http://www.fists.co.uk>

The North Sea in a winter storm can be one of the most dangerous places on earth. I have sailed through the Bay of Biscay, the Great Australian Bight, the Southern Ocean and across the Pacific, but believe me, the combination of the shallow North Sea and a northerly gale can leave you with experience to remember for the rest of your life.

It was such a foul night in December 1954 when the 12000 ton tanker "British Birch" sailed from the UK. It was my first trip in charge as an 18 year old Radio Officer, and the

sequence of events are as clear today as they were more than 50 years ago.

In those days oil tankers had two basic trade routes. The first route was loading crude oil from the Persian Gulf or Venezuela for transporting back to the huge refineries in the UK and the second route was transporting refined oil to the storage and distribution points throughout the UK and Europe. Both cargos are dangerous and strict safety rules apply on all tankers; no naked flames, no metal tipped shoes, no metal tools (only soft brass) no lighters, only special gas proof torches etc. Fumes from the cargo (kept heated for easy distribution) have a pungent aroma. One dropped tool, one spark from a shoe and 10,000 tons of petrol can turn the ship into a fireball.

Of the two cargos, crude oil is similar to black treacle and more difficult to ignite, whereas refined products such as Petroleum spirit, Aviation fuel, Paraffin, and Turpentine are highly volatile.

Fully loaded with refined products, we sailed from the Isle of Grain refinery in the Thames estuary. Our destination was Denmark and Sweden where we were scheduled to discharge our cargo into various oil storage depots in the Baltic.

However fate had another schedule planned for us, when around midnight the ships engines stopped and we were rendered helpless in a force nine gale. Under normal circumstances the breakdown of a ships engines is a fairly routine affair, this happens often with cargo ships and merely results in hoisting two black balls to indicate to passing ships that you are not under command, whilst the ships engineers repair the problem. To the crews of some "budget" shipping lines of those days these balls were sarcastically known as the company's "House Flag".

Unfortunately for us the situation was far from routine. Our QTH was 10 miles North-east of Skagen – the northerly tip of Denmark - and this was not a temporary breakdown. A major fault had occurred in the main engine lubrication system, with the result that the bearings had overheated and melted. We were not going to re-start the engines.

Under normal circumstances we would have notified company headquarters in Finsbury Circus and drifted around until towed to port by another company ship or a tug hired for the purpose. However the year was 1954 – less than 10 years after the end of World War II, when the Germans laid thousands of mines around the coast of Denmark. Apart from approaches to ports, most of these had not yet been cleared and were marked in red on the Admiralty chart labelled "Danger - keep clear - Mined area". With a force nine Northerly gale we were being blow straight into the largest of these areas. This was not the best place to be for a ship laden with 12,000 tons of highly flammable petroleum products. Even if we missed the mines the rocky coast of Denmark would be our next destination.

In those days Morse code was the only method of shipboard communication and it was with shaking fingers that I

adjusted the blue MF knobs on the Marconi "Oceanspan" transmitter, tuned the copper slug to the international distress frequency of 500 Kc/s, switched the Marconi 365 Morse key to the main transmitter and sent "SOS de GCBZ BRITISH BIRCH 57.49 NORTH 10.01 EAST = ENGINES FAILED DRIFTING ONTO THE COAST OF DENMARK IN STORM FORCE WINDS = IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE REQUIRED"



All hell broke loose.

I received immediate acknowledgements from Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, German, Belgian, Dutch, French and UK coast stations, plus a couple of ships in the area. I was also deluged with messages from Headquarters, Lloyds of London, and salvage companies. Fortunately, another British tanker was just a few hours

steaming away and reached us at daybreak. We now had two fully laden oil tankers in a mined area.

It took a nerve racking four hours in a force nine gale, with the coastline creeping ever closer, before a towing line could be attached to our anchor chain. First the rescue ship steamed around us firing her rocket lines, but with both vessels fully laden and us rolling and pitching uncontrollably they could not risk a collision by coming too close. A fully laden tanker has very little freeboard and high waves wash straight across the deck, so all rockets either missed their target or caught in the rigging and broke before they could be retrieved. A similar scenario ensued with our rocket lines when the rescue ships' rockets were exhausted. All communications with the rescue ship were conducted by CW on 500 Kc/s, with every other coast station and ship in the north sea remaining silent. This was before the days of VHF.

Finally, in desperation, the rescue ship threw a lifebelt over the side with a line attached and by careful manoeuvring up-wind managed to steer the line to drift within our reach, which was quickly hauled aboard, attached to a winch and a thick manila towing line hauled on board. Only then was I able to advise Danish control coast station OXZ that the distress traffic was over and communications returned to normal.

We were then towed back to Smith's yard on the Tyne where we all enjoyed a couple of weeks extra leave. It was to be another eight years before I was called upon to send SOS once more...

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