

Ham Radio Sidestep

Now this is where I parted company with ham radio. We had to send perfect code and, to obtain a speed key certification, we had to send plain language, and five-letter code groups at 20, 25, and 30 WPM. One then received a numbered certificate. If anyone sent “sloppy code” when actually on a circuit, an official could ask for his number, report that person and he/she had to go back to a hand key until getting re-certified. I have heard some of the worst code in my life on ham radio! I have no problem working with slow operators. Each person works at his speed but, PRACTICE sending, copy yourself on tape and see if YOU can read it. I have also worked with very good ham operators, many of whom can snow me.

I eventually transferred into Air Traffic Control and code was mostly a mute subject. However, I still copied code and press reports occasionally on my short-wave radio just “for fun.” My brother-in-law always told me to get a ham license but after talking on the radio all day, the last thing I wanted to do was get on a radio at home.

Back On the “Bug”

(A “Bug” is a semi-automatic hand key for sending morse code.) Ten years after my retirement, a friend encouraged me to get my license. The code was no problem, but the theory was. I mastered it, though, and received my general license eleven years ago. I still work it on occasion and it is still enjoyable. I know from my years of experience that often one can work stations on continuous wave (CW) when voice cannot be used.

There are a lot of good operators out there: FISTS (members of the International Morse Preservation Society), the Society of

Wireless Pioneers, etc., and they have schedules. This is a great opportunity to meet some super people and lots of “old-timers,” some of whom are in their late 80s and early 90s and are still good code operators. Many hams I have talked to say they have a hard time learning code but on further query, they admit they only practice a few minutes a week. I don’t think it is possible to learn code that way – unless one is a genius. It takes time and a lot of practice, but once mastered, it is never forgotten.



“I hope to keep my hand on the mike button or the bug until I go to that “big radio station in the sky.”

A Life-Long Advocate of Amateur Radio

At 80 years of age, I’m probably not too different from a lot of hams in my age group. When I began as an air traffic controller, many changes were occurring, such as the SOS’s becoming “Maydays.” There were still a lot of aircraft “in trouble” (lost, low on fuel, and so on) and getting them to an airport and a safe landing was exciting and worthwhile.

Although I am no longer in the business of saving lives, ham radio is an extension of communications and a delightful hobby. Yes, I am “pro-CW.” Hey, it was a big part of my life! I also enjoy working sideband and have worked on all continents except Africa. There was even a Russian expedition at the North Pole. Fun? You bet. And I hope to keep my hand on the mike button or the bug until I go to that “big radio station in the sky.” Ω

Mr. Halston, as depicted in this short historical perspective, has had a full life so far, and we wish him the best of success for many years to come. He graciously met with Ms. Pat Davis, Assistant Editor for this issue, to further discuss his article, clarify terms, and to take the pictures used herein. He is a true gentleman, and may be willing to share more of his experiences if you Hams out there are in position to contact him. (Ed)



EMC Post Cards —From the Wireless Side

David A. Case, NCE

By the time you read this the World Radio Conference will be in progress in Geneva Switzerland. The conference runs from June 9 – July 4 and I am attending as a member of the U.S. Delegation.

From a quick review of the conference agenda it should be a very busy four weeks.

Satellite Use Tax

It seems that Ohio, New York, Nevada and several other states are trying to pass a special tax on satellite TV viewers. This tax, which amounts to 5 or 6% of the bill, is above the current sales tax already billed and is basically a satellite use tax by the state. Needless to say the satellite users in my state are up in arms and fighting to stop the tax.

FCC Activities

The FCC announced the release of a Notice of Proposed Rule Making on opening up the 5.4 GHz band for RLAN. In part, this was done to bolster the U.S position in the WRC now underway, and in part because of the USG – Industry deal on Dynamic

Frequency Selection criteria for the 5.4 GHz band. This NPRM will give us an additional 255 MHz of spectrum.

The FCC dismissed the petition for RF lighting in the 2.4 GHz band. This effort was supported by the RLAN industry who was concerned these devices would interfere with our devices in the 2450 MHz band.

The FCC also released a Notice of Inquiry (NOI) on Power Line Communication. This NOI should generate some interesting responses from across the industry.

I’m Staying Home This Year

For those looking for me at this year’s IEEE EMC Symposium in Boston, I will save you the trouble, since I will not be there. Between conflicting meetings, my long absence from home because of WRC 2003 and the general need to relax a little, I am not planning to attend this year. I am sure, as in the past, the show will be a success and I hope to see everyone the year after. Ω

Please send comments, thoughts, or opinions to me at davecase@cisco.com.