

A Life of Service in Amateur Radio



Photo by Ken Reitz KS4ZR

This story begins many decades ago when a young lad of ten fell from a garage roof while trying to catch a swinging rope and hit the ground on his stomach. As it turned out, no injuries were sustained, but the parents of this fellow put him on house restriction and no more catching of ropes hanging from a tree!

What to do about this parental decision? Obviously, it was the end of all the fun, but was it? As a diversion from this outside activity, our young lad turned to his best friend and they decided to learn the Morse code (CW) together using little buzzer units connected by wire from room to room. It wasn't long before both boys became code proficient with increasing speeds.



Harry Dannals as W2TUK in 1947 at age 19 in the station he shared with his dad, W2GG, using an ARC-5 converted military transmitter for 80 meters and a BC-779 (WWII version of the Hammerlund Super Pro). (Courtesy: Harry Dannals W2HD)

Before long the young lad was listening to CW on the amateur radio receiver that his dad, W2GG had, and a life-long interest in ham radio quickly developed. As you now certainly know, that person was your writer and a wonderful and fascinating life began that has covered seven decades. The story continues today and what follows are highlights of that time.

Budding Ham Career Interrupted

As a twelve year-old I would often help my dad, the commanding officer at his Naval Communications Reserve group on Long Island, by sending CW to Navy trainees. Sometimes, when dad was on a distant assignment, "bootleg" radio contacts were made on CW between my dad and

mom. Mom would read my code copy over my shoulder and tell me what to send.

A year later I found myself riding in a National Guard half-track in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, as the radioman, relaying our position in CW to the other half-track on maneuvers whose radioman was my dad. I got the job because the actual operator had called in sick. My dad told the National Guard Commander that I could do the job and he said, "But, isn't he just a kid?" My dad said, "Yes, but he's a better operator than anyone else here."

Dad was called to active duty in early 1941, assigned to Norfolk, Virginia and, unfortunately, study for my ham radio license took a step backward because moving required school changes and keeping up with school work was very important. Dad was then sent to the Panama Canal Zone as Officer-In-Charge of a radio receiving site. World War II started just weeks later. By then the federal government had banned all amateur radio activities and the ham bands went silent. My plans for a license had to be put on hold.

After graduation from Balboa High School, in the Canal Zone, my Navy life began for real. My dad was my first commanding officer, something never to be recommended! There was no "boot camp," so my first assignment was washing dishes while attending radio classes on the local base. The classes were easy because my code speed was now more than 25 words per minute.

Since Navy operating procedure had been part of my early life with my dad, all that was necessary was learning to type. I began standing radio watch at the receiving site at the age of 17 and another phase of my life began with my entry into a career in electronics, radio, and communications.

Learning quickly about the operation of our radio equipment and, having a deep interest in naval communications, led to early promotions. Eventually I became the supervisor of more than 20 radiomen and support personnel. Radio Balboa, with the call sign NBA, was one of the Navy's key radio stations and it was an honor to be the youngest Watch Supervisor at that time at the age of 18.

Another Try at a Ham Ticket

Discharge from the Navy came in mid-1946 and I found myself back in the U.S. after almost



W2TUK in the attic shack at his first home with his wife Kay in Bethpage, on New York's Long Island. On the bench: a Johnson Viking II transmitter with VFO, a Collins 75A4 receiver, and Johnson MatchBox that fed a 40 meter dipole. (Courtesy: Harry Dannals W2HD)

five years away. I was ready for another phase in life; one that I hoped would include a return to studying for an amateur radio license. I had enrolled at Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (now Polytechnic Institute of New York University), majoring in electrical engineering with an emphasis on electronics. I was eager to learn as much as I could about the fast changing world of electronics.

College work required a lot of time, but I found a way to prepare for my amateur license by doing a research paper for an English class using amateur radio as a resource. Among my references was the American Radio Relay League's (ARRL) *Radio Amateur's Handbook* with the latest ARRL license manual on the side! It worked, and my call sign, W2TUK, was received that year with a great deal of joy by me and my dad.

My early days as a licensed ham started with the handling of messages on the air, something that had been a major part of my Navy career. This also began my association with the ARRL, an organization which has been a very important part of my ham radio involvement.

Graduation from college in 1950 was a milestone that led to my employment at the Sperry Corporation where I worked in radar and other engineering programs. But, Sperry, too, had a connection with ham radio. During almost



In 1964 at the New York World's Fair, Dannals was trustee for K2US, the official U.S. amateur radio station. Here he's at the key of an all-Hallicrafters station. (Courtesy: Harry Dannals W2HD)

40 years of my employment there, the company provided a club station, W2YKQ, which was on the air during lunch periods, a fact that made the more than 200 ham radio operators that worked at Sperry very happy.

But, let's get back to the days after graduation. Another avenue had been opened when I applied for a direct commission as a naval officer which resulted in a new Ensign being added to the ranks. The Naval Security Group program was anxious to have qualified applicants and a new naval career for me soon followed. The final result of several decades of service as commanding officer of two highly rated Security Group divisions and an association with the communications world, ended with my retirement from the Navy as a full Commander in 1987.

Kay Enters the Scene

Before returning to my association with the ARRL, there is a very important part of my life that must be told. It involves meeting a very pretty, pleasant employee at Sperry whose carpool had busted up with a change in overtime work hours. She was in this carpool with another rider who needed a ride and he was, of all things, one of the Sperry hams. He approached me for a ride and that was OK. Then he said there was another person who needed a ride from the same pick-up point. My answer was simply that, while he was an old friend, someone else was going to be a newcomer to me and was questionable as a passenger. However, he was convincing and the gal who has been my wife for almost six decades



Mid 1990s W2HD is at the key for Field Day at WA4TFZ, club station for the Albemarle Amateur Radio Club (Charlottesville, VA). (Courtesy: Harry Dannals W2HD)

was that passenger!

Kay and I have had a wonderful, busy life with four kids (two boys and two girls); twelve grand-children, and three great-grandchildren. Without her support for my involvement in amateur radio, there would simply be no story to tell. I thank Kay many times over for enabling my amateur radio activity.

As part of this story of ham radio and family, it should be mentioned that I am the son of a ham (K4GG when he became a Silent Key); the brother of three hams: Frank (W2DRL) and two who have become Silent Keys. And, I'm the father of two hams, Bob (W2GG, my dad's old call) and Tom (W2TUK, my old call). It's fun to have ham radio as a bonding tool.

The League Beckons

And now, back to the ARRL. During my direct involvement with the League, I have held many offices at various levels. As part of the League's field organization, I received appointments as Official Relay Station (ORS); Official Phone Station (OPS); Official Observer (OO), and Emergency Coordinator (EC). In the area of elected office I have been Section Communications Manager (SCM), the vice-director and director of the ARRL Hudson Division.

I was elected League president by the ARRL Board in 1972 and returned for a total of five two-year terms ending in 1982. It was my pleasure to serve the Amateur Radio Service which had given me so much over the years.

While, presiding over meetings of the Board and the Executive Committee was the responsibility of the office, to me, there was a message to be delivered to the League's membership and also to those hams who were not members.

This message is simple: Amateur radio is a service organization established with a basis and purpose as set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in simple terms with the following key points: It is a voluntary, noncommercial, communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications; to demonstrate a proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art; to provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art; to provide trained operators, technicians and electronics experts; and finally, the extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.

That was the key message I brought with me as I visited all fifty of the United States during my ten years in office. Many of my addresses to the assembled groups started out with the words, "I am proud to be a radio amateur because we continue to be responsive to our basis and purpose."

In addition to the visits to all 50 States, trips were made to the Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Peru, the Bahamas, Bermuda and the United Kingdom. Many of the visits to the countries beyond our borders were made as the U.S. representative to Region II of the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU). It was interesting to note as I traveled abroad that the ARRL and U.S. amateur radio was well respected and looked to for leadership in our mutual interest.

The Politics of Ham Radio.

One of the key events during my presidency was the preparation for the World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC) of 1979. The future of our radio frequency bands was of prime importance with retention and possible expansion as goals. ARRL staffers as well as volunteers were deeply involved with this effort. The concept of an additional band or more to bridge the gap between the existing Amateur Radio assignments had been set forth by A. Prose Walker of the FCC.

He envisioned having new bands between 40 and 20 meters; between 20 and 15 meters, and between 15 and 10 meters. The League took the concept into its workload by preparing details and promoting the idea with other countries seeking their support at the WARC level.

Vic Clark, W4KFC, then ARRL First Vice President (now a Silent Key), was asked to visit and work closely with IARU Region II countries in South and Central America plus the Caribbean islands. He performed this task with tremendous success and all of the countries in Region II voted in support at the WARC. All their efforts paid off with very successful results. The 30, 17 and 12 meter bands were approved with small, but foothold, assignments.

During my tenure, I made frequent visits to FCC offices in Washington to discuss ham radio repeater issues, possible expansion of Citizen Band (CB) frequencies, and other points. The CB subject ended with a congressional hearing on a Class "E" service taking the 220 MHz band from ham use to CB. My appearance before the hearing committee was to defend the continuation of the ham radio assignment and we were successful at that time. Subsequently, however, 40 percent of the band was lost to others (not CB) due to our lack of use. The remainder of the band is presently in use by hams for repeaters, links and other activities.

Another appearance before a Congressional Committee was concerned with radio frequency interference (RFI) to devices in the TV and audio field. Ham radio was successful here also; making the point that interference was not due to our equipment, but the lack of adequate filtering in the external device.

Without question, the time devoted to ARRL matters, working with the very capable and dedicated staff, and my association with the board of directors was a wonderful experience. Each year was punctuated by new developments for ham radio. A volume of great memories will never be forgotten.

Another chapter in my life began with the Quarter Century Wireless Association (QCWA) as a director and then president from 1989 to 1994. It is interesting to note that this was the first time that one person had held both offices.

As a licensee for 63 years, I am still active every day on the ham bands from my home in Charlottesville, Virginia and, if you tune to 14.291 MHz, you can hear me daily on the Sperry Net.

It has been a very interesting life. The challenges of new avenues in communication are wonderful to observe and, I believe, will keep amateur radio alive and well for decades ahead. I hope to meet you there!

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