

My interest in radio started when I was very young. A friend's grandmother had an old console radio that had the shortwave broadcast bands on it.

We would listen for hours at night to the foreign broadcast stations. Later, when I was probably around twelve years old another friend's dad had an old military radio in his workshop. I could hear people actually talking to each other and that really peaked my interest. I also heard my first CW on that old receiver. I remember at some point being taken to a local ham's basement shack and being bewildered by the array of large rack mounted equipment. The ham was busy operating CW using an old bug at high speed and the sight of all the equipment and the high speed CW was a little overwhelming to me. I remember trying to learn the code from characters in a book one time and eventually giving up on it. I did not know about learning by sound at the time.

Later I found myself in the U. S. Navy for a little over eight years. I was a Hospital Corpsman and ultimately was certified as an Independent Duty Corpsman on surface ships and submarines. The job of an IDT corpsman was to manage the medical department on ships and submarines of less than 300 crew members that did not have a medical doctor assigned. It was interesting duty and I got to travel most of the world beneath the waves. I think my longest time submerged I was 96 days. While I wasn't a ham at the time many of my friends were Radio operators in the Navy. I used to hang out in the radio room in the submarine when possible (because it had the best air conditioning)! Before leaving the Navy in 1979 I had established contact with a ham in San Diego and he showed me the proper way to learn CW. I purchased a code tape and started working on the code.

After the Navy I moved back to my home town in Oklahoma. Medical jobs were scarce and I ended up initially working for an oil field service company running a truck cementing oil wells. After that I worked for the local fire department, obtained my fire fighter certification at Oklahoma State University and later became the fire chief in my home town. It was during this time that I actually got my ham ticket.

Having no training in electronics whatsoever, I took the plunge and ordered a Heathkit HW101. We were struggling at the time (myself, wife and five kids) and I was between jobs when the kit arrived at the front door. My wife was not pleased that I spent \$400 of our money. After I opened up the large boxes and saw the array of resistors, coils capacitors and other components, I seriously wondered what I had gotten myself into. We lived in a very small house at the time with no workshop. I set up a card table in the corner, broke out the kit manual and started assembly of the HW101. I think it took about a month of my spare time to assemble the kit. I had no equipment to do the alignment procedure so I went to the nearest large town (Ardmore, OK) and started inquiring at TV repair shops about any local hams that might be able to help me. I was eventually given the name of two local hams, Charles Dibrell, W5BLW and Ted Spurgeon, K5PJO. I was able to contact Charles first and told him about my situation. He said "Sure, just bring the HW101 over to my shop and we will align it together." Charles was first licensed around 1928 and was retired from a long career as a radio technician. He still had his full workshop behind his house and his radio tower was an old surplus rotating beacon tower from a military air field. We went through the alignment procedure for the receiver and to my astonishment it worked! Now this is a testament to the high quality of the Heathkit instructions. Those were great kits! Charles said that we could get the transmitter going at another session which we did later on.

The Ardmore Amateur Radio club meetings were held in Charles' shop at the time so I started attending those meetings. Those old time hams were amazing. Most of the guys had been hams for many years and there was a wealth of experience available. They were never too busy to answer my questions and I often had to stop them so they could bring the explanation down to my level. I sure miss them all. Most are SK now. One of the members was Tom Banks W5HJ who was a certified electrical engineer who had been up on his ham radio tower just outside Pearl Harbor when the planes flew over on December 7th 1941. The Army confiscated his home brew transmitter and it apparently was used on some island in the Pacific. Years after the war it was offered back to him! Ted K5PJO was a WWII B24 pilot and former POW. The club was full of interesting hams with all kinds of interesting stories and backgrounds.

When I was ready I took my novice CW test at one of the club meetings from the side tone of Charles' old KWM2 transmitter. Later on Jack Gant, W5GM gave me my novice exam at his office.

I remember my first CW contact using the HW101 and a wire dipole that I had made out of scrap wire. I still remember the other hams call sign. He was sending just a little faster than I could copy. Although I asked him to QRS, he never did and I only copied his call sign and not much else. I actually felt like a failure after that first contact, but I k

ept plugging along. I made as many CW contacts as possible on the novice bands with the goal of upgrading to general and getting SSB privileges. The HW101 came with an Electro voice microphone that remained unplugged during my time as a novice. After finally passing my general class exam at the FCC office in Dallas, I rushed back home, connected the Mike and began to make some SSB contacts. After a couple of weeks of this I decided that I was much better at "talking" on CW than SSB and I more or less stuck with CW for the next 40 years. I'm only recently making a few more SSB contacts in an attempt to enjoy voice communications.

This was all in the 1980/1981 time frame. I kept making CW contacts and upgrading my licenses. My first novice call was KA5KSU; General was N5DSA, Advanced was KD5GI and Extra was KZ5Z. I decided to keep KZ5Z since it was the last of the two by one K calls. However it seems to be a call that most people have difficulty copying at first whether on SSB or CW. KZ5 was also the old Panama Canal Zone prefix which caused some confusion initially. I've had it so long now I guess I'll keep it.

After about five years in Oklahoma I accepted a job with the Diplomatic Telecommunications Service as a Communications Officer. For the next eighteen years I traveled around the world working at various Embassies and other locations as a communicator. In the early days, CW was still used a lot so it was a dream job for a ham or at least it was for me. During this time I was licensed overseas as G0COB, KZ5Z/DU1, DA1LO and VK1KZ.

Once, when operating from Manila, Philippines I heard a CW op using a bug with the call W5IS. I remembered that this was the call of the FCC Engineer in Dallas who had given me both my General and Extra code tests. I remember him at first as being very stern and for kicking someone out of the room for talking during a test, but after the last test, I visited with him for a while and learned of his call sign and ham radio history. I called W5IS on CW from Manila and he answered. It was indeed the same engineer, who had by then retired, that gave me my CW exams in Dallas. What a really exciting experience! I also heard my old friend Tom Banks, W5HJ and talked to him from Manila. I suppose my favorite overseas assignment was Canberra, Australia. I lived in a house on a hill with an open view for my Yagi to the USA. I bought my first amp out there and started SSB skeds on the weekends with my local Oklahoma radio club. It was great talking to my friends from over there. I made my last QSO with my Elmer W5BLW from Australia before he became a SK.

My first wife was having health issues (MS) which prompted me to take an early retirement and move back to Oklahoma where I could get more help for her. We moved back here to Oklahoma in 2002. We were able to get some nursing assistance and I continued working as a communications contractor in the Middle East until my final trip to the war zone in 2010. My first XYL passed away in 2011 and I remarried a few years later to Kerry Dawn, my present wife.

We live on 10 acres in the country. I have a radio shack separate from the main house and a 73 foot tower with a tri band Yagi and various wire antennas. I also have an HF rig in the main house.

I have too many interests to give any of them the proper time but I still try and get on the air as much as possible. You will likely find me on the CW bands although I've been branching out into a few SSB nets on 40 and 80 lately including the 7290 traffic net. I learned about FT8 recently and gave that a try. Although the mode is "interesting", I enjoy a good CW rag chew much more than making a lot of computer contacts. However, the great thing about ham radio is that there is something for everyone. I'm also interested in music and play my guitar at church on most Sundays. I like to shoot and I hand load ammo. I ride my Harley when I can find the time and I got back into flying several years ago after getting started back in 1972. I own an old Cessna 172D which I fly from time to time. I try to answer all QSL requests, no SASE needed. I also started using LOTW after trying out FT8.

I love my God, my family, my country and my freedom. After years of traveling overseas I know for sure that there is nowhere else I would rather be than right here in the USA. Despite all of our faults, we are still the greatest free country in the world. I hope and pray we always remember that our freedom was purchased with the blood of many others and that freedom is never free. God bless the USA. Hope to CU on the bands one day! Very 73s KZ5Z -Jon Lofton