

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Each month one of our members is randomly selected and asked to share their ham radio biography with all of us. Questions or comments should go to Paul, KD2MX.

DISCLAIMER: Any views expressed in this section are those of the submitting member and may or may not be those of the NAQCC or its officers.

## LARRY WANDEL, AH6AX, #7313



Hi Gang! Like many others (and probably some of you), I started my radio hobby during the Citizens Band fad of the 70's but moved to Ham Radio for the joy of being able to yak around the world instead of down the road a mile or so. Remember the days of "Breaker one-nine" and "10-4 Good Buddy?" We probably drove our big-rig driving friends crazy! This is not intended to denigrate CBers – it too is a fun hobby and I enjoyed it while I was a participant – this is just my tale of my personal journey into ham radio.

My ham radio 'story' actually starts many years earlier, when I was first introduced to ham radio as a teenager in a town in PA in 1961. One of my school chums was an amateur 'experimenter' in electronics – and he had a ham license. One day, while visiting him, he showed me his Hallicrafters™ and Hammerlund™ radios. These two big boat anchors with lighted dials and hot tubes were a sight to behold. As he spun the dial and we listened (and he made a few contacts) and he demonstrated what ham radio could do, it sparked (yep, small pun intended) my interest in the idea of talking to far-away places via ham radio. Who knew that one day, while in the U.S. Navy at an overseas site, I'd be tuning a Hammerlund receiver just like the one he had sitting on his workbench.

Time passes and I joined the navy after graduating high school. A few years later, while stationed in Scotland (UK) in 1968, I lived in base housing – my next door neighbor happened to be an avid ham radio operator. Tom, (NA4U today) had his radio equipment (I believe it was Swan twins) shipped to him and had the Scottish call sign GM5AOR. I can still hear him calling other stations with "...this is Golf Mike Five Alpha Ontario Radio") with me sitting while he operated on many evenings from his 'shack' in the quarters. Unfortunately, Scotland (UK) in 1968/69 didn't permit unlicensed operators to work the equipment with a 'control operator' present, so I never got to spin a dial. But Tom did give me an ARRL study guide which I started reading. But soon thereafter, I received to transfer back to the states for a

navy technical school and then went on to other overseas and shipboard assignments. So... another near miss for me in the ham radio opportunities.

In late 1978, while working out of Pearl Harbor on my second tour of duty there, I once again lived in naval housing (very few sailors could afford to live on the economy in Hawaii). A fellow sailor who was a ham lived two doors down and I asked him about ham radio – explaining that I'd been a CB'er but was interested in ham radio. Well, he didn't look down his nose at me, au contraire – he took me to the local ham radio store in Pearl City (now long since gone the way of many mom & pop ham shops) and got me signed up for a novice class. Well, because I already had morse code experience in the navy, I quickly obtained my novice ticket. Within a few weeks of getting the ticket, I was back downtown to the Honolulu FCC office for the general and advanced tickets. Thus, the call AH6AX was 'born'.

In 1979 I transferred to Fort Meade, MD for duty. Once there, I became very active in the Navy-Marine Corps MARS program for about 12 years. For my service to the organization as Area Coordinator, I received Associate Member status when, due to heavy military commitments, I was unable to continue as the MD/DC Area Coordinator. The navy program has since been discontinued. Now, it too is just a pleasant memory.

As is often said, "Life Happens" and during the 90's I dropped out of HF ham radio – but kept the call active and worked 2M while driving back and forth to work to yak during the "going to work/home shows" in the mornings.... In 2012 my interest was rekindled by another navy retiree (AC2C – Ron) and I started putting a station together.

Today I have a nice setup that gives me lots of capability (but I spent the kids' inheritance to get it – hi). I have Kenwood™, Icom™ and Elecraft™ HF transceivers: the Kx3 and the new Kx2 for QRP and for portable ops when traveling (my YL and I like to travel now that we're retired). I was fortunate to obtain a crank-up tower from the widow of a SK, and with very little investment and lots of help from members of my local ham club (Columbia Amateur Radio Association – for which I'm eternally grateful, as I am also a cardiac patient and unable to do much physical labor), I'm now able to 'reach out and touch some radios'. Fortunately, I have a 1 ½ acre yard to 'grow' antennas, so I also have two Windom OCFs for low bands and a hex beam for 20 through 10, and a 6m beam.

I have an Extra ticket but I've kept my Hawaiian call. I didn't go for Extra when I transferred to Maryland for duty in '79 because at that time, if you passed the test, you were given a call in the district where you 'lived', but if you just updated your address, you could keep your old call -- and I didn't want to lose my call. I found out in 2014 that the rules had changed so I took the test and kept the call — sorry to my Hawaiian "family" (ohana) of operators, you can't have it until I'm SK!

Now, the rest of the story: Remember my friend, "Tom" from Scotland? Well, serendipity is always at play: Who would have thought that almost 30 years later Tom and I would end up working together in the same project/program for the same large corporation. We continue to keep in touch. Tom now lives in SC and has a beautiful station.

Today I'm active on the bands, primarily working CW on SKCC and NAQCC. I enjoy the Challenges and have just started participating in the monthly Sprints. I plan on helping with this year's anniversary celebration and hope to work many of you on the bands. Oh, I also do *some* phone work and dabble in the digi-modes as well. I'm always up for a ragchew/chat or if you just need a quick contact. I support SKCC, FISTS and NAQCC – three excellent organizations that encourage the continuation of CW. NAQCC is a new 'challenge' for me – I got interested in QRP ops when a Ron (see above) showed me his Elecraft Kx3 and he was able to pull in a lot of stations on 5 watts and below (I eventually got a few at 250mW!). So, I now split my time playing QRP and QRO during the month – some for the NAQCC Challenge and some for SKCC/FISTS ops. I also play in the QSO parties and chase special events.

As a combat vet, I'm a member of the VFW (Vietnam); the American Legion and the Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association (NCVA). I also love shooting sports and I am proud to be a life member of the NRA. I'm ARRL too! Ok, this 'horn tooting' can be addictive so I better stop there before I think I'm the greatest... Oh wait, Muhammed Ali beat me to that, so you're safe! My humility returns: I'm SECOND in Command at my 'retirement quarters' in Carroll County, Maryland with MY skipper of 51 years. If you hear me on the bands, give me a call – I'm always up for a go – CW, SSB or Digi; QRP or QRO! Oh, and I QSL 100 percent – no SASE required – send a card/get a card! 73/72 and Mahalo/Aloha from Maryland!

