

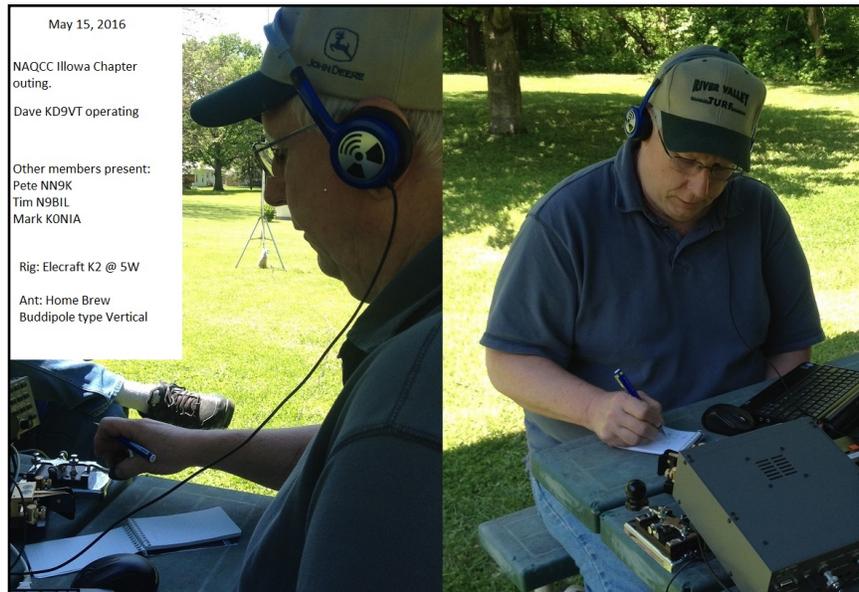
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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.

DAVE BELVILLE, KD9VT, #8323



May 15, 2016

NAQCC Illowa Chapter
outing.

Dave KD9VT operating

Other members present:

Pete NN9K

Tim N9BIL

Mark K0NIA

Rig: Elecraft K2 @ 5W

Ant: Home Brew
Buddipole type Vertical

Hello everyone. I'm Dave, KD9VT (NAQCC 8323) and I am honored to have been chosen for the Member Spotlight this month. I am 62-years-old and am retiring at the end of the February. I am semi-retired now and only work three days a week. I am a Systems Engineer in the IT industry and work for a small company in Iowa. I have a beautiful, loving wife, five wonderful children and four even more wonderful grandchildren. My QTH is Silvis, IL which is in the Iowa/Illinois Quad City area on the Mississippi river.

When I was very young (seven or eight years old) I had a strong desire to know how things worked. I would take anything apart (and could usually put it back together...but not always) to see how it worked. It wasn't long until electronic items grabbed my interest. My dad bought me a book titled "A Boy and a Battery" and that did it. I was hooked on all things electric. I learned quickly that electricity was something to be very careful with. The learning experience wasn't pleasant, but it was a good lesson.

By the time I was ten, I had fixed my first AM broadcast band receiver. A neighbor gave it to me because it had a loud hum. Having only played with low voltage DC after my 'learning experience', I didn't know for sure why the radio would do that. I put it on the table in my room for a few days and went to the library. I found a book on radio repair and one of the chapters was about filtering 60-cycle hum in a power supply.

I read that entire book several times and then sat down at the table to try my hand at fixing that radio. I knew that it was probably going to be a capacitor causing the problem but there were a lot of capacitors on the bottom of that chassis and I had no idea which one would make the radio hum.

After some poking around and looking at where the various components were hooked up and what they seemed to be attached to, I found that this one large capacitor was connected to a strange looking finned device that I was not sure of its function. After following wires and connections, I decided that the device was connected to the big transformer on the top of the chassis. Since the transformer was connected to the AC power, I was sure that capacitor had to be the culprit. The leads were long enough that I could cut them (so I could remember where it was connected).

So, I cut the leads, took the big capacitor and walked over to the Team Electronics store that was a couple blocks from our house. I told the man at the counter what I was doing and that I thought this capacitor was the problem. He looked at me and said, "Well, you may be right". He dug around in a box and gave me one that looked similar but the numbers on it (rating) were higher. He said, "Try it, it should work". I asked him how much it cost and he said, "Take it and let me know if it fixes the problem". So, I thanked him and took it home. I was so excited about the prospect of fixing that old radio.

I had a paper route in those days and almost ran through the entire (100+ papers) route that day. I couldn't wait to get home. I ran to my room and pulled out the big soldering gun my dad gave me (it was his but he never used it). I was not confident about soldering in a tight area and wasn't sure how to get all of the old solder off to solder the new capacitor in its place. I had noticed that there was a plus sign on one end so I looked at the old one to see if it had one. It did not have a plus sign but it did have a minus sign so I assumed the other end must be the plus end. I knew from my book and my battery experiments that with DC voltage, polarity was important but this radio ran on AC power!

I wasn't sure why it would matter but I put the new capacitor in the same as the old one by neatly wrapping the leads on the new one with the leads I had left in place from the old one and soldering them together. I neatly tucked it up in the chassis where the old one was. I put the chassis back in the plastic enclosure, held my breath and plugged it in. After a few seconds, the radio came to life and I couldn't believe it. There was sound with NO HUM!

I called my parents to my room to show off my work and I will never forget the smile on my dad's face. I had one more person to tell. I ran over to the Team Electronics store to tell the man that gave me the capacitor about my repair job. He congratulated me and shook my hand. His name was John and I will never forget him. He gave me an after school job when I was thirteen.

OK, fast forward three years. I am more interested in electronics than ever. My cousin, who happened to be a ham, was very supportive and helpful. He worked as a technician in a company that built electronic controls. He would always bring me relays, diodes, capacitors, resistors, etc. that were no longer being used and they did not want. I believe they had a major housecleaning once because he brought me boxes of stuff which included not only the usual but enclosures, connectors, wire, transformers, tubes, you name it. I was a boy in electronics heaven.

Not long after that, he started me building. We went through the boxes and pulled out an enclosure, transformer, diodes, capacitors, binding posts, fuse holder, power cord and a couple of terminal strips. He handed me a schematic and said, "I will be back in a couple days". Wow, I was going to build something, but what was it? I looked at the schematic a while and it dawned on me. A power supply!

I worked on it for two days trying to get holes drilled, parts mounted, etc. Finally, it was done. I got out my VOM and connected it to the binding posts. I was so excited I couldn't wait. I plugged it in and turned it on.....nothing. The voltmeter didn't move. So, I opened it up and spent two hours making sure it was wired right. It looked right so why didn't it work? Frustrated, I unplugged it and left it for a while.

Then, it dawned on me. I will trace the circuit using my VOM until I find the spot where there is voltage. It took me awhile but I found the problem. There was no fuse in the fuse holder. I put one in it and IT WORKED! The little neon light came on and the VOM needle moved up to about 12 volts. I felt like Dr. Frankenstein....It's alive!! When my cousin came over, he checked it and helped me neaten it up a little and said, "Good job". That's it, I was hooked on electronics.

Shortly after my power supply project, my cousin, whose name was also Dave, showed me his shack. I remember the D104 microphone sitting there just crying to be talked to. He fired things up and looked out the window while he tuned his antenna (he was watching a bulb to get it as bright as he could). He pulled the microphone over and called CQ.

I still remember his voice, the way he called, and the phonetics he used. I even remember his call. CQ CQ Kilo Nine Baker Easy Sugar.....finally someone answered and I was amazed. I started going to hamfests with him and one day we came home with a big Hallicrafters receiver and a speaker for it. We set it up and hooked a piece of wire to the antenna connection but didn't hear much but noise. He said, "I will be over on Saturday and we will put up a dipole". A dipole? What the heck is a dipole? A trip to the library answered that question.

On Saturday, he showed up with some coax, insulators, stranded copper cable, etc. and four hours later, I was hearing all kinds of things on my new receiver. What was I hearing though? Then, he pulled a device out of his box, plugged it in, and waited for the tube to warm up. It made a nice sounding tone. He pulled out a straight key and a paper with the Morse code letters on it. He showed me how to send and said, "Practice every day". I did, I practiced every day. I could send every letter and number at probably eight to ten WPM. I was sure I was going to be a Super Ham.

Dave came back a few days later and I showed him how well I could send Morse. He said, "Great, now let me send and you copy". What? I had to copy it and write it? What a letdown. I could send it but what the heck was I hearing? I got about one of every five letters.

He smiled and said, "Use your tape recorder and record yourself sending. Then, play it back and copy it". I did that and soon, I could copy at five WPM. He also had me listening to my receiver to try and copy actual QSOs. There weren't many I could copy well but I finally got good enough that he decided I should take the novice code test. We went to some guy's house and I sent my beautiful code to him and he sent something that vaguely resembled my code to me. I guess I did well enough because my cousin said, "Now, we have to work on the theory portion".

We never got to the theory. About a week later, a big storm came through in the night and blew the huge tree that my dipole was connected to over. It ripped the cable off the house and since the coax was very securely attached, it pulled my receiver right off the table and through the window it sat in front of. The tree hit the house and mom and dad came running because they heard the noise in my room. I will never forget that night. It was the night my Ham Radio career literally went out the window.

I continued with my electronics hobby and took some electronics training correspondence courses but never did anything more with Ham Radio.....until almost 50 years later.

In the summer of 2014, something sparked a renewed interest in Ham Radio in me. I decided that I was getting close to retirement age and wanted a year round hobby. I have never really had a hobby that held my interest for very long; but I was sure Amateur Radio would be different. Boy is it.

I researched license procedures, purchased the Technician class license manual and started studying. Morse code is no longer a requirement so hey, it is easier than before. I was through the manual in a couple weeks. I knew the answer to every sample question. I decided it was time.

I contacted a local club (Green River Valley Amateur Radio Society) and sent an inquiry to the club contact. It wasn't long before I got a response telling me about the club and when the next meeting was. I went to the meeting and asked for someone named Pete. That was the day I knew this hobby was for me. Pete (NN9K) quickly became my Elmer and a good friend. He got me going quickly and loaned me everything I needed to get on the air when I got my license. I tested at that meeting and passed the Technician element.

Even though I had not studied for it, I tried the General exam but missed it by one. Darn, one question. Oh well, I had earned a license and could get on the air. My very first QSO was with Pete. I was shaking and could hardly talk but I did it. I had my first QSO. I was a ham now. Two months later I tested for General and Extra. I got my Extra that day and couldn't wait to try it out. Pete helped me and supported me every step of the way.

It wasn't long before Pete suggested that I start to learn Morse. I was having so much fun with SSB that I wondered why I should learn it, but I did. I tried on my own and even though I was learning, I wanted to learn faster. I enrolled in a CW Ops CW Academy class. That did it, I wanted to do this. I practiced 3-4 hours per day and passed the class.

I felt confident enough to get on the air with CW. I was nervous as heck but I did it. That was February of 2016, about one year ago. You know who my first CW QSO was with right? Yep, it was Pete; my Elmer and very best friend.

One thing I immediately learned was that Morse copied on the air is much different than copying it from a computer. I knew the characters and what they sounded like but...what the heck was he sending? I only got about half of what he sent but I was happy. I worked all of the CW I could and built my confidence. I looked for stations calling CQ at my speed. There were a lot of them so I got lots of practice. As my confidence and ability grew, so did my interest. I joined a couple of clubs (SKCC and NAQCC) and participated in some sprints and contests. I did quite well in some of them and it made me more determined to build my skills. Pretty soon, I unhooked the microphone and put it on the shelf. I have not used it since June of last year.

I have participated in several NAQCC events. I was one of four N9A operators during the 12th Anniversary week and have received some nice wallpaper. I have found that QRP is not only more challenging, but is more exciting. I sometimes operate QRPp and am amazed at what you can do with 500mw and a piece of wire. I belong to the NAQCC Illowa chapter (The "Quad Cities" area of IL/IA) and have made even more good friends. I really enjoy portable QRP operating and sometimes sit in the backyard to play.

For QRP, I have a K1 that I built from a kit, a KX2 and a HB1B. I can't tell you how many antennas and tuners I have built and tried. I will continue to do that too. Experimenting is part of the hobby and I do a lot of it. A few times I have wished I hadn't but it is all part of the learning process. I have found that for me, CW is the only mode I need; and for fun and challenging things to do, NAQCC is the only club I need.

Five watts, a wire and NAQCC....it doesn't get any better.

Thank you all for the good times you have given me. By the time you read this, I will be close to fully retired. I hope that after I am, I get to know a lot more of you.

