

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.

STAN LEVANDOWSKI, WB2LQF, #4740



I became interested in electronics at the age of 11 when I found a library book with plans to build a crystal radio from an oatmeal box wound with magnet wire, a large safety pin and a copper penny. I built it, strung an antenna wire throughout the house and clipped the ground wire to the dial stop on our old rotary phone because my dad said "the telephone company has good grounds." The darn thing worked and I was hooked on the magic of radio!

Boys Life magazine introduced me to amateur radio and I taught myself Morse Code by listening to W1AW code practice on a National NC-60 general coverage receiver. I earned my Novice license in 1962 at the age of 13.

I built my first transmitter from the innards of a discarded black and white television set and a broken RCA table radio. It was called the "22 Watt Monster." It used a 50L6 output tube and a 50Y6 rectifier. There was no power transformer. A simple voltage doubler provided the high voltage to the plate. The chassis was grounded to a cold water pipe and only the hot AC lead was plugged into the wall. It had 22 watts DC input and probably about 10 watts RF output on 80 and 40 meters. My first contact was WA8LAR in Hubbard, Ohio. I had a blast with my homebrewed rig until an Official Observer's pink card arrived in the mail advising me that I was transmitting on 40 *and* 80 meters simultaneously.

I earned my Technician Class license just as my one year Novice License was about to expire. I built a Heathkit Two'er and spent some time on VHF-AM. In 1964, at age 15, I finally had the opportunity to go

to New York City and sit for the General Class exam under the watchful eye of legendary FCC Examiner Charles Finkelman. Now that I had regained access to the HF bands, I built a Knight-Kit T60 and its companion R-55A receiver. I would rush home from high school every day to operate CW. In June, 1965 I qualified for the ARRL Code Proficiency Award at 20 wpm and joined the original Rag Chewer's Club.

With the Vietnam War heating up and a 1A draft status, I figured a floating foxhole might be a better long term investment in my future, so I joined the Navy. The local Navy recruiter examined my General Class ticket and said I would be guaranteed promotion to Petty Officer 3rd Class automatically upon graduation from Radioman School. So I signed on the dotted line.

That's how I came to spend the "Summer of Love" (1967) in Class A Radioman School in San Diego. When school was over, I was assigned to the USS BOXER as a Radioman. We had a ham station aboard, K9YGR/MM, and I helped the "chief op" – Harry – run phone patches back home for the crew when we were underway. My job in Radio Central involved both CW and secured radioteletype.

Upon release from active duty, I had to worry about a job, an education and ultimately a place to call home, a family and all the strings attached to these goals. This is sort of where my ham radio interest temporarily fizzled. I always maintained my original license and original call sign and I always had some kind of equipment, even if it was stored in a box on a shelf for some period of time. At one point, I even had a tower, a beam and a 100 watt Ten Tec Triton IV but it didn't get a whole lot of use. Another major conflict with ham radio occurred when I became interested in aviation. I earned my pilot's license, flew my family on vacations, learned to soar in sailplanes, took up aerobatics and ultimately built and flew my own Experimental-Category airplanes.

I retired from IBM in 1992 and in 2009 I retired from my second career as a college professor. The year 2009 was also noteworthy because I made the decision to sell my hangar and airplane. I figured 36 years of incident-free flying was enough excitement. I had a wife, two daughters and four grandchildren and flying homebuilt airplanes wasn't totally risk-free. My interest in ham radio, especially QRP, then blossomed. I bought a Ten Tec 1340 and strung up a simple dipole. WOW, did I have fun. My CW skills came right back! I was RE-hooked for sure.

A subscription renewal to QST introduced me to the Elecraft advertisements in 2010 and I've been their steady customer ever since. I've built and operated the K1, K2, K3, KX1, KX2 and KX3 along with the KXPA100 and most of their accessories and mini-modules. Eventually, I pared my station down to its current configuration – a KX1 for portable ops and a KX2/KXPA100 for my QRPp to QRO home station.

I consider myself a 100% CW op and a 99% QRP/QRPp op. I don't own a microphone. Rag chewing and QRP DXing are my favorite activities, followed by NAQCC sprints, working on vintage tube gear, operating QRP portable and participating in Special Events. My preferred key is my Vibroplex Presentation bug, followed by my GHD sideswiper. I enjoy being able to work a little personality into my sending. When working DX, I usually use my N3ZN paddle and match the DX's speed. I generally operate around 16-22 wpm but I can still hit 30 wpm if I use my electronic mill to type the copy.

Since retiring, we've moved to a townhouse and I have the usual CC&R hassles to deal with. The good news is a townhouse means I have plenty of time for operating because someone else shovels the snow, trims the lawn and does the maintenance. I am extremely lucky in that my two story attic (32' AGL) is extremely RF friendly. I installed a 136 foot doublet, all bent up, into my 24 foot attic! Incredible as it may sound, this antenna performs fabulously. I feed it with about 14 feet of 450 ohm window line to an SGC-231 autocoupler located in a second floor linen closet.

The experts among us will cite coupler loss, unknown radiation pattern, signal cancellation and signal absorption among the many reasons this shouldn't work. But it does! I even operate QRPp by

“pretuning” the doublet with my KX2 at 5 watts before switching to my KX1 or reducing KX2 power to QRPp level. I’ve got the hardcopy QSL cards to prove my claims. Infrequently, I use my KXPA100 amplifier when conditions are unfavorable and I want to make the rag chew a little more comfortable for the other guy. Usually, I find I don’t have to go above 25 watts. The difference between 100 watts and 25 watts is only one S-unit.

In 2012, during celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Titanic sinking, I decided I wanted to earn the Commercial Second Class Radiotelegraph Certificate – just because. It always irked me that I had earned my Amateur Extra *after* the code requirement was eliminated. I guess I just wanted some official recognition of my CW skill. I earned it on the first try and added it to my GROL with Ship Radar Endorsement and the GMDSS Repairman’s licenses .

Because of my Navy background, in 2012 I was drawn to the museum ship USS SLATER in Albany, NY. The SLATER is the last fully restored WWII destroyer escort afloat in America. I’ve been a volunteer tour guide and I am a member of the “radio gang.” We have a very rare and operational Westinghouse TBL-8 transmitter and RBA and RBC receivers in our fully restored Radio Central. We also have a modern CW/SSB station consisting of an Elecraft K2/100. Our call sign is WW2DEM and we’re on the air, often at QRP power levels, using our original 1945-era maritime antennas. The antennas are a 100 foot long wire, a 190 foot long wire and 70 and 80 foot wire verticals. Our counterpoise is 1,240 tons of steel floating in the Hudson River. As a point of interest, I worked N3AQC when they were holding their “SUB-pedition” aboard the USS REQUIN. I worked them QRP on both 40 and 20 meters, using the 100’ long wire. Sort of neat – a destroyer escort communicates with a submarine instead of sinking it!

HAM RADIO – THE BEST HOBBY IN THE WORLD!

72, Stan WB2LQF

