

# K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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## Two Amazing Amateurs

Richard Upjohn Light & Robert French Wilson, W1FJ - Part II

**Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL**

New York Times, August 24, 1934

### YALE MAN'S FLIGHT CREATES MYSTERY

Light and Wilson launched their journey on August 20 with a flight from New Haven to Sorrento, Maine. Arriving in Sydney, Nova Scotia Dr.

Light denied reports he was planning an around the world flight. Rather, he and Wilson were flying to Cartwright, Labrador for a vacation. Upon their arrival in Deer Lake, Newfoundland he told customs officials he had obtained clearance to Cartwright in Sydney, but did not produce the required papers. No matter, they continued their flight to Labrador.

### Chicago Daily Tribune Yale Professor in Labrador on Mystery Flight

Despite his assurances to Canadian officials it was learned "dispatches from Rome, Tokio, and other foreign cities have for some time disclosed that Dr. Light had asked permission to pass over those places in a round the world flight." In addition, "Mechanics who tuned up his plane in New Haven said the ship is capable of long distance flights."

New York Times, August 25, 1934

### DR. LIGHT WIDENS FLIGHT. Radio Amateur Reports Yale Man Bound for Europe.

A number of hams including Clark Rodimon, W1SZ, of West Hartford reported Light and Wilson planned "to fly at least as far as Europe." Rodimon added that the physician-aviator "refused... to divulge his itinerary." Stating only that following their arrival in Greenland they would head for Iceland and then to the Continent.

Chicago Daily Tribune

### YALE PROFESSOR TO HOP TODAY FOR GREENLAND

Setting out from New Haven on their way to Sorrento, Maine "it was understood they were only going for a pleasure jaunt." They would not disclose if Greenland was their ultimate destination. Much, apparently planned, confusion in press reports.

**Flight Journal**, August 28

Arriving in Julianehaab, Greenland Wilson repaired a recurring transmitter problem.

*Bob tackled the radio, and located the trouble again, in a filter condenser across the D.C. voltage, which is supposed to be 500 volts. I suggested that there might be a short circuit across the choke coil, which would also allow a large inductive voltage to build up between the generator and condensers, burning out the C1, which was rated at 1000 v. Bob said it*

*didn't work that way, and anyway the darned choke coil was inaccessible, so he took the whole transmitter up to the radio shack, and they gave us a 2500 v 2 mf. condenser, which seemed perfectly satisfactory. Whatever defect burned out the condenser may still be there, but the margin of safety is now greater.*

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"Mystery Flight"

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# QRP to the Field, Without the Fun

John Swartz, WA9AQN



A ham cannot spend all of his time on the air, reading the latest issue of *QST* or digesting the Handbook, can he? One day, while browsing in my favorite section of the local installation of one of the big chain booksellers, I came across a volume with what appeared to be an interesting collection of photographs. There they were the faces of DXpeditioners, SOTA activators, and their neat, compact packages of field gear and antennas. There were detailed

photographs of the gear, and the text provided brief explanations of what was depicted.

The price was not marked and I felt sticker shock when I asked at the checkout counter what measure of currency I would have to part with to acquire this gem. I quickly realized why the chain booksellers are beginning to feel like dinosaurs when I found the item on a popular Internet based purveyor's Website for about two-thirds the price (free of sales tax, and with free shipping, no less).

But, the faces in the pictures were not smiling.

Now, I have to interrupt the story for a bit of background because this book was not in the technology section of the bookstore, nor were the radio operators dressed in the gear we can find at LL Bean, Scheels, or Gander Mountain. About 15 years ago, my interest in modern history was rekindled, focusing on the World War II era, British intelligence, the Enigma machine and Ultra. At the core of it all was the role of radio and electronic communications.

The book is titled *The Clandestine Radio Operators* (ISBN 978-2-35250-183-1) and its author is Jean-Louis Perquin, who is the son a World War II resistance fighter. Histoire & Collections, of France, published it in 2011. These DXpeditioners and SOTA activators were the men and women who trained fiercely, took

off in the middle of the night in specially outfitted aircraft and jumped out over enemy occupied territory carrying the original "to go" kits. These were the infiltrators inserted behind enemy lines in Europe during World War II and in the run-up to D-Day, to feed back needed intelligence for invasion planning and to engage in operations to provide disruption, diversion and deception behind enemy lines.

Those who survived the jumps landed knowing the probability of their ever seeing their families, friends and loved ones again were less than favorable, to put it mildly. They carried poison pills as an alternative to attempting to endure almost certain torture and otherwise agonizing pain and death if captured. There were no illusions in their training; they were taught the best known techniques for resisting, but it was well understood that if captured, given time, they would break and the precious information they might divulge could jeopardize others. Their only

hope for the safety of their missions was to try to hold out as long as possible if captured. Their gear was the best available at the time, operating with vacuum tubes and crystals for the transmitting frequencies. The radios were designed and built by men and women who fully understood the quality of their product meant life or death for the operator and his or her team. Their antennas were basic wires strung up to whatever sup-

ports were available. Their signals were modest, what we would consider QRP or little better.

At the other end of the path, the stations tasked to listen for these field operators had the best equipment available, National HROs and Hallicrafters receivers, and the huge antenna fields necessary to any effort to pick out the weak signals from the noise.

Several things in this book stand out to one who really looks at its pictures. The faces of the operators show intent and purpose; these were men and women who chose to undertake substantial risks. The word sacrifice takes on a meaning of far greater impact than when that term is applied to Biblical stories of what is done to a ram on a mountaintop or to a type of play in a baseball game. It is closer to what the Biblical

*"They carried  
poison pills..."*



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father must have felt when called upon not to apply that term to the ram, but to his own son. Here are the faces of men and women whose Morse transmissions would not only be listened to by the home station, but also become the subject of mobile direction finding units whose purpose would be to eliminate not just the signal, but the operator, or worse.

The equipment that evolved during that war became smaller and as compact as technological developments would allow. The advantages given by our more modern, solid-state, equipment is starkly apparent. Hand-cranked and bicycle-driven generators are very seldom seen in field operations today, but they are a lot quieter than even our best fossil fuel-driven generators.

The pictures taken in the field are starkly different from our field operations. The operators are armed. The photos of the operating positions show the radio set, a Morse key, a power source, a knife, and a Colt as standard equipment. The reader learns that many of the faces shown never returned to his or her families.

A page from a manual shows how to set up a radio antenna and counterpoise in a hotel or other room. It looks so familiar, yet you know that the knock on the door would not be a manager simply wondering what the strange noises heard by the neighbor might be.

Another photo stands out for me. It is very simple. It shows a sheet of paper on which "Q" codes have been typed out, with their meanings given in French. I can't help but think how differently those operators must have felt about sending those codes than I feel when I use them in a QSO, or on the rare occasions when I check into an NTS traffic net.

### The Last Word

**SOMEWHERE IN SPACE**—Radio amateurs got their wish today for better propagation when the sun exploded.

There had been much hand-wringing among the amateur radio fraternity over the lack of sunspots until today.

For about one minute QRP enthusiasts will be QRO over the whole world when the blast from the explosion reaches Earth's atmosphere.

It is not know how long the great band conditions or the human race will last.

Professor Calvin Moriarty of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory was quoted as saying about the possible survival of the human race, "Well, arrgh...!"

NR8U

Getting caught in that foxhunt meant something completely different. Compared to what these men and women accomplished and the price they paid in doing it makes applying the term "stealth" to our efforts to conceal our antennas from nosy homeowners' associations almost laughable.

No, they didn't take their radios to the field to have fun and hand out QSOs to the Deserving. But, there is a serious part of our heritage as radio operators depicted in this book. It is worth a look to anyone who is interested in what price was paid so that we can enjoy our hobby. And, if you have not explored other historical treatments of the special operations that were conducted during World War II, this material should be an incentive to look further for some of the more detailed descriptions of those heroic endeavors.

Frankly, knowing where we came from makes each pleasurable QSO that much more meaningful; it is sobering to think that those men and women died doing something we love and enjoy as a pastime, exchanging information by wireless communication, and that in doing so the freedom for future generations to do so as a pastime was saved. ■



WWII Hand-cranked Generator

## Ham Lingo

DICK SYLVAN, W9CBT



"CW HOUND"

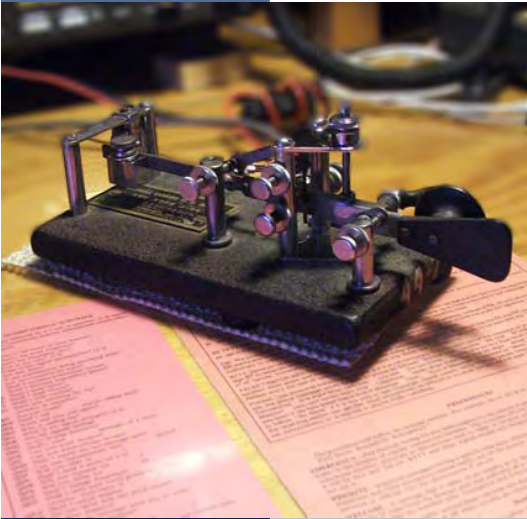


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# An Old Friend

John Swartz, WA9AQN



**I**t sat on a shelf above my operating table for many years, never out of sight. My eyes were drawn to it from time to time, but with increasing frequency this past year.

An inanimate object, fabricated by man and machine, it has no soul or being, does it? But, there are those who will claim that its designers and those who labored to machine its parts, and who assembled and tested it infused it with energy, spirit and purpose.

Maybe. Maybe not.

Made in 1941 under a contract with the U.S. government, it was one of thousands produced by several different companies when the world was embroiled in a war the likes of which had not been experienced or suffered in all of human history.

When my father acquired it that war was over.

When it arrived, it was missing one small part, but it was a part that was necessary for it to do its job properly. My father fabricated a replacement. It fit and function was restored.

It also had a buzzer so the characters it produced could be heard or read by the human ear. It has been many years since I saw that buzzer. Where did it go?

Trying now to figure out why it had a buzzer leads me to only one conclusion. It was used for practice and training of Morse operators who would learn to translate the thoughts and words of others into the electromagnetic pulses sent to yet other humans who needed to know those thoughts and words. The buzzer certainly would not have been used in the field.

But how would an instructor discriminate among the dozens of buzzers his students would be using? Maybe it wasn't used for training. Another source leads me to believe that the training theory is valid because its base has a countersunk hole for a screw that would be

used to hold it firmly to a table. Without anchoring, trainees would not have been able to keep it in one place easily. They needed to learn technique to make it work without it traveling around the table.

Who knows how many young men and women played its rhythm learning how to transfer that information, one time, correctly, and one time only. How many of them took those skills out into the field, into danger? How many did not come back? Did the information it sent cost lives or save lives?

Each one of the hands that touched it, trained with it, practiced with it, then went on to use other instruments just like it, or similar to it, wherever they were deployed over the few years after the company furnished it under that contract. In a sense, it was used to perpetuate its own kind and use.

A purpose? Well, life and death were at stake. Every dit and dah may have meant something that affected who would live and who would die. Or, it sent back the news of those lives and losses.

It served.

It earned a retirement. It came home, so to speak. When my father brought it home to me, I was only about 7 years old, just about the amount of time that had passed since the killing had ended. Had it still been teaching young men and women the same skills for the next horrible conflict?

It was going to have at least one more job, one more trainee. This trainee was quite a bit younger than the ones who needed to know how to send the information that might save lives, or cost them. The instructors weren't there any longer, but he will figure it out. Using part of it could generate Morse just like the other training devices, straight keys; only it would do so sideways. That worked, but our trainee wondered what was the rest of this thing meant to do?

He'll figure it out. He's still pretty young. He won't need to send messages that may mean life or death. Not yet, anyway, maybe never.

The itch, the urge and the drive were there; the magic of being able to meet and know people and places so

*"Where did  
it go?"*



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CONTINUED - AN OLD FRIEND ON PAGE 8

# Conan Wyatt Burtram Barger, W3CVE

Part IV

Scott B. Laughlin, N7NET

In the early '20s vacuum tubes started to come on the horizon and there was only one thing to do, get me a Cunningham 5-Watter. If I remember correctly, the price of the tube was eight dollars and to me that was a lot of money. I asked my dad if he would buy one for me and he said: "Son, you mow lawns, paint, carry out ashes, and if you work hard for your money I may help you out with a few nickels."

Well, I went over the neighborhood and cut a trillion lawns for twenty-five cents each. After I groaned and sweated for about three weeks pushing the lawn mower I had \$5.50. Dad and I jumped in the old flivver, went to Garvers Hardware Store and he put in the extra \$2.50 for my precious Cunningham. Fred Kirshner was the head guy at the wireless department at Garvers. He was an operator and I remember him saying words to this effect: "Your boy, Mr. Barger, has been down here many times and is very much interested in wireless and will make a good operator, I am sure." Those words from Fred made me feel good and I could tell that Dad was glad to hear those words.

With my constant mowing of lawns I subscribed for the QST and in the QST there was a circuit using the Cunningham tube using AC on the plate. That was my first tube transmitter and it worked. For filament voltage I got an old storage battery the fellow at the junkyard gave me. For plate voltage I got me an Acme transformer. That transmitter gave me a lot of service until one day the tube gave up the ghost.

*"...the Red-Headed Grass-Cutter."*

My heart sank and I was one unhappy kid, believe me. By that time I getting pretty well known as the "Red-Headed Grass-Cutter," and a few 25 cent pieces were coming in fairly regular. With other work like selling rabbits I soon had enough money to buy two Cunningham 5-Watters. The QST had another article on how to make a self-rectified rig and that was my next venture. For the antenna current indicator I had a Moyt Hot Wire Ammeter.



Image Courtesy Antique Wireless Association

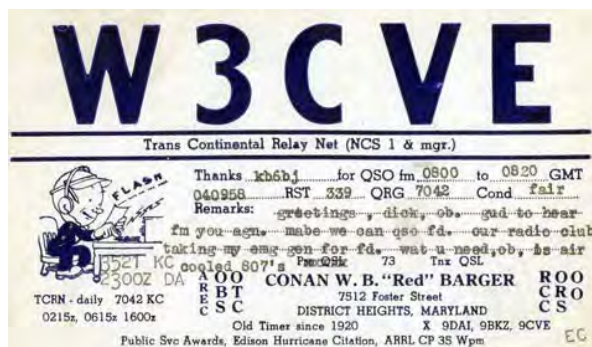
Then came some articles on how to make a chemical rectifier, and how you could get DC voltage, and a clear whistle note. So I borrowed my mother's jelly jars, two gallons of distilled water, and a box of 20-Mule Team Borax® and mixed up the solution.

I got enough lead and aluminum to make the plates to place in the mixed solution. The rectifier circuit was a bridge rectifier and of course the more "slop jars" you had the more current you could pull.

My first rectifier was small. When I would load up the rig the jars would boil over. I got some more of my mother's jelly jars and built up a rectifier that would stand the load.

Trouble started when my mother started her yearly canning program. She found no jelly jars and when she found her good jelly jars in my wireless room full of messy, sloppy solution, she raised the roof. I had to clean every of the jars and give them back to her and mow some more lawn so I could buy my own jelly jars.

Those were trying days for all concerned.



QSL image courtesy of W8SU/K8CX

CONTINUED - CONAN BARGER ON PAGE 8



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**Flight Journal**, September 8

[In Scotland.]

*Rod [Rodimon] comes on again. Hurray! Dad cabled mystically to "telephone George two Boston Mary", which Bob figured must mean "G2BM", an Edinburgh amateur. Today however a Mr. Millar called the pier to say he had talked with Rodimon. So tonight we went to his house, behind which stood a shed with a good ham layout, audience and all. Rod was weak for a time, but soon improved. We learned that Rudy will be in St. Anton till Oct. 1; - that Dad has nightly skeds through Rod with a Michigan ham; that Chaffee came down to New Haven and set up a successful triple circuit and peak voltmeter.*

New York Times, September 11, 1934

**DR. LIGHT REACHES LONDON BY AIRPLANE**

Still refusing to release his extensive flight plans Dr. Light said only that: "...he made the flight during a holiday mainly to visit hospitals in Europe, studying new methods of surgery." Further, following an air tour of the Continent he planned to send his plane back to the United States via ship.

"During their few days in Labrador Mr. Wilson talked by radio regularly with an amateur friend [W1SZ] in Hartford, Conn. The radio, as well as the plane and its motor, functioned perfectly."

Commenting on future commercial northern air routes Light did not believe the route "surveyed by Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh will be used for future transatlantic lines because the increased range and speed of machines will permit a shorter flight from America to Europe in one hop."

QST, October 1934

**Amateurs Undertake Ocean Flight**

Managing editor Rodimon wrote, "For years we have been looking forward to the time when amateurs would have a chance to show the feasibility of contacts via amateur radio with an airplane on a long flight."

This article trailed newspaper accounts of *Asulinak's* flight by nearly two months. Rodimon wrote the flight would be "made in easy stages over Labrador,

Greenland, Iceland and Europe, lasting through October." Was Clark Rodimon, Wilson's primary amateur radio contact, privy to the complete flight itinerary?

**Flight Journal**, November 8

Over India in a flight between Karachi and Bombay Wilson makes a mid-air repair.

*The radio difficulties are explained in the day's log; Bob deserves a hand for locating the trouble so quickly, and for removing the motor-generator in flight (I gave Zig Templeton mental thanks for insisting that we keep dual controls, for the m/g was under the left seat), and for setting it in operation again. We had a doubtful weather forecast from Nott's radio station at the R.I.N., but the weather was clear, with 50 m. visibility, the entire distance; -- and no rain.*

**Flight Journal**, January 12

*Los Angeles harbor may be satisfactory enough for battleships, but it is a treacherous berth for a seaplane. Out of pure inability to find the duck base of the Catalina Flying Service, I landed in the open harbor in heavy short swells, and we hit like a carriage back meeting a Mack truck. Anchored near enough to the battleships so that they could spot the plane with a searchlight once in a while during the night. We were soon in Los Angeles and, while Bob went off to visit with some radio amateurs, I took dinner with my old friend and roommate, Herbert Sturdy, and his attractive wife.*

New York Times, January 25, 1935

**TWO YALE MEN END 29,000 MILE FLIGHT**

A one-column recapitulation of the Light and Wilson flight, once again, their amateur status is emphasized: "Dr. Light and Mr. Wilson, both amateurs, said they were delighted with their trip and had not had a forced landing on the long flight."

Radio operator Wilson said, "they had been in constant radio communication from the plane up to a range of 2,000 miles."

QST, March 1935

**Amateurs Around the World by Plane**

In his comprehensive article Bob Wilson describes their flight itinerary and names the operators he communicated with via radio: W1SZ and W8GUC and eyeball QSOs: G2TM and G2BM (Edinburgh) and G2ZQ (London). In Berlin, Germany he met with D4BUF and D4CCF. An RAF radioman, YI7NN, in Iraq had a shack built into a "packing van" and gear built of "pick-up parts." From this station W1FJ heard "...SU's and U's [who] seemed to cover the band as W's do at home." At Batavia, Dutch East Indies Wilson and Light celebrated Thanksgiving Day



*"George two  
Boston Mary"*



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aboard the Asiatic Fleet's heavy cruiser USS *Augusta*. In Hong Kong they breakfasted with VS6AG and enjoyed a short visit with VS6AP. While in Honolulu it was K6CIB for a telephone chat.

Despite the Skyrocket's nominal six-passenger capacity, it was a tight fit for the two voyagers, "By the time it was made ready for the trip, a luggage compartment, radio gear, spare oil tank and other extra equipment, reduced it a carrier for three, and those three not too comfortable. Two could just about exist within the cabin without getting tangled up with each other and the various gadgets." This was the environment Light and Wilson occupied for five months and 30,000 miles.

From Amsterdam to Batavia they relied upon ground stations, spaced several hundred miles apart, operated by "Royal Dutch Air Lines (KLM), Britain's Imperial Airways, and Air France" for weather data and other information. The airlines, in addition to Britain's Royal Air Force, also rendered needed aircraft parts, supplies and maintenance at their repair facilities.

*Every ham knows that almost in every spot in the world where ships are likely to go there are stations standing watch on 500 kc. They are all eager to help airplanes and we had invaluable help from them.*

*Outside the United States the bulk of aeronautical radio is done by means of radiotelegraph and practically all of it on 333 kc.*

Departing Labrador for Greenland Wilson made a few failed attempts to work amateurs on 36 meters, "so this was the end of ham QSO's with KHMZA for a while." He attributed the generally poor HF conditions to the Aurora Borealis phenomenon at those high latitudes: "Notwithstanding reports from other northern observers, we can not help seeing correlation between the failure of high frequency signals and this display."

Wilson's article included an abbreviated version of the chart included in Light's flight journal of maximum two-way communications distances (in statute miles) achieved during *Asulinak's* long flight.

#### *Performance of KHMZA*

1. 600 miles on 600 meters in north over water.
2. 450 miles on 900 meters in tropics over water.
3. 300 miles on 600 meters in tropics over land.
4. 2500 miles still going strong 36 meters in south.
5. 1100 miles fixed antenna over land 36 meters.
6. Up to 30 miles with fixed antenna on 600 meters.

*"...tangled  
up with each  
other..."*

In Reykjavik, Iceland speaking with a local "unlicensed operator," Wilson was advised "of the difficulties of amateur operation" in that country. "Equipment is expensive and hard to obtain, and licenses also hard to get." Despite several call book listings; there "were no really active amateurs in the city."

During their stopover in Hong Kong Wilson observed, "strangely enough, QST seemed to be available on nearly every newsstand." That statement will surely strike a chord with hams old enough to recall the same widespread magazine availability in the United States.

#### **A Historical Footnote**

Unlike other great flights of this pioneering period including those of Lindbergh, Earhart, Kingsford-Smith and Post, neither Light nor Wilson

sought fame, fortune or sponsors. Rather, as amateurs, they remained true to the word's definition as *lovers* of their favorite pursuits, flying and radio. In their time fame was afforded them once the breadth of their accomplishment became known. In the ensuing eight decades their flight and the integral role amateur radio played in it is unfortunately little known and less remembered. Hopefully this article will help remedy that gap in our collective memory. ■

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Frank Sadalick, 9APM, was one of my good friends. Frank was much older than we “young squirts.” He was a man of 45 who had a nice family, two boys and a girl. He was a sales supervisor for Perfection Portable Kerosene Heaters. He built several tube transmitters using “slop jars.” When we could visit him he would explain the latest circuits for transmitters and receivers.

Another good friend of mine was Homer Hamilton. Homer was not a radio enthusiast. His main attraction was Boy Scout work. However, he could help me wind coils, put up aials, mix borax solution for my chemical rectifiers, and help build model airplanes from material we got from the Ideal Airplane Company.

Mapes Stanly was another good friend who was quite a moving picture enthusiast. Mapes would put out a movie demonstration at our radio club many times showing Charlie Chaplin and many of the old movie pioneers. Mapes moved to Hollywood and I lost track of him. But I have well imagined that he got connected with some big movie producer.

Charlie Vester was another good friend of mine who was very much interested in radio. Charlie was about the same age as Frank, 9APM, and he had a nice family of two daughters. He was a member of our radio club and he studied hard so he could pass the examination when the RI made his annual trip to Des Moines. I can well remember when Charlie went to down to take his test. Everybody passed but Charlie. He was one unhappy person. Each one of us in the club spent a lot of time getting him up on his theory and code. When the RI came around next year Charlie passed with flying colors. Our club celebrated the occasion with a banquet in his honor. ■

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### Great Caesar's Ghost!

Budding Jimmy Olsens and Lois Lanes needed.

*The Daily Planet*, aka, *K9YA Telegraph*, seeks articles. See your words and photos disseminated worldwide! Cub reporter? No problem, your copy will be emendated by the *K9YA Telegraph's* team of professional editors.

Stop the presses!

[http://k9ya.org/write\\_for\\_us.htm](http://k9ya.org/write_for_us.htm)

distant was working. He was entranced, like so many others who found new life in the old war tools. So it was back to work. The information was easier to handle now; it did not mean life and death somewhere. He didn't know, or realize that, but that was what it was. Get the information across the country, across the continents, to the remote places that most of us will probably never visit. But this time, it was to make friends, cement relationships that would make life better, more meaningful, more joyful to its users, and maybe others. Could it possibly be used in some small way so that life and death messages would never be needed again?

Then, a newer device enabled the generation of the Morse characters electronically with a bit less physical effort, a new skill, but with the same purpose. Could they both be used? Afraid he would never master the new, he thought not. So, it went on a shelf nearby. Not out of sight, though. Not discarded. Just retired, again. On “extended leave” would turn out to be a more accurate description. Other devices, parts, bits, came and went. None had the history, though. Some had broken down, irreparably. Some were seemingly more useful to someone else, and found new homes, but not this one. Could it have gone into the hands of someone who would feel and know the magic, who could use it to open new exciting worlds? New Friends? Or would it have gone on a shelf, an object of curiosity, an item of commerce?

Was it really twenty years ago? Maybe more than that. It has been sitting a long, long time, but never out of sight. The replacement part my father fabricated has itself been replaced. It is now more like the original instrument that trained those who would relay information that meant life and death. Or so it appeared. It felt as though it belonged closer to some “action,” though. So it was moved off the shelf and back onto the operating table.

Time has impressed its role and its purpose into my mind and heart. Does it “deserve” anything? Of course, that is an unknown, but I realized that it represented something. It is a reminder of a history, of lives unknown, loves flowering and loves lost, the world in conflagration. Putting it back to work meant something, at least to me. But now, its messages are of friendship. Does it help me give spirit and life to the greetings I send my faraway friends? Can it sing stories of life, and teach another generation?

It is time to stretch and flex again. My old friend, you will be ready, willing and able to help create friendships for far longer than I will. Let's see what music we can make. ■



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