



Radio Amateur News & Views

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COAST GUARD STATION TRIP The January 9th RANV Meeting

We are in for a special treat for our January meeting. Thanks to our newest former member, Rod N1PLA, we have been afforded the opportunity to take a tour of the Coast Guard station in Burlington. Have you ever wondered what an ATON is? Maybe you want to know just what the Coast Guard does on Lake Champlain, and why they are here anyway. Some of the boaters in the club have had contact with the station via marine VHF. Now you can see who you may have spoken with, and the communications position they were talking from.

There is also the opportunity for us, as ham radio operators, to be able to assist the Coast Guard. Rod will be explaining the ways we can help.

The station is located on the Burlington Waterfront. Parking is at the north end of Lake Street, just before the boat launching ramp. To get there go to the foot of Main Street. Cross Battery Street and take a right where the street ends at the old train station. This is Lake Street. Follow this street past College Street and continue on with Waterfront Park on your left. The road will curve to the left, and cross the railroad track. Just beyond the tracks and the bike path is a parking lot leading up to the Coast Guard Station. If you get lost, call on the 515 repeater. For those who want to meet at Zach's first, plan about 20 minutes to get to the Station.

See you at Coast Guard Station Burlington on January 9th, at 7:00.

SATURDAY RANV MEETING

We will be having a special Saturday morning **RANV** meeting. The purpose of this meeting is: 1. To get some members to the meeting who cannot make it on Tuesdays, 2. To discuss what we would like the club to be doing, 3. Eat (this is the highest priority, of course)

The gathering will be **Saturday, January 20th, 9 AM - Noon at the Lincoln Inn in Essex.** This will allow folks to drop in during the morning, grab some breakfast or lunch, get in some socializing and then have the afternoon free for other pursuits. The rough schedule will be eating at 9-9:45, followed by a group discussion of the future of **RANV** and Ham Radio until noon. This last portion of the meeting is open for wide ranging discussion. We hope to get some great new ideas to pursue! This will also be a great opportunity to meet some new faces, have breakfast and share lots of great ideas. Hope to see you there!

CODE IS NO MO'

by Mitch W1SJ

Coming on the heels of the phone band expansion last month, the FCC has finally released their *Report and Order* eliminating Morse Code testing for all amateur radio licenses. This eliminates the Element 1 Morse Code exam, leaving just the written exams, Element 2, 3 and 4, the Technician, General and Extra exams, respectively. The FCC also decided that all Technician Class operators will have access to HF, eliminating the distinction between "no-code" and "coded" Technicians.

As with most FCC Report and Order pronouncements, the effective date is 30 days after publication in the *Federal Record*. We expect that this will occur by early February. On that date, three things will occur. First, all Morse Code testing will be eliminated. Second, all Technician class operators will have privileges on the following HF frequencies: 3.525-3.600, 7.025-7.125, 21.025-21.200 and 28.000-28.500 MHz CW in addition to 28.3-28.5 MHz SSB. In other words, Technicians (*and Novices*) can use the same CW frequencies as Generals on 80, 40, 15 and 10 meters. Finally, on the effective date, amateurs with an unexpired Element 3 CSCE will be able to go to a VE Session and get an instant upgrade to General.

For all other Technician class operators, all they need do is to go to a VE Session and pass the 35 question Element 3 exam to gain their General class license.

Again, none of this is in play until the effective date, which will be posted on the web. In the meantime, sign up for a General class – they are now popular! Also, it will be snowing soon and this will be a good time to get your HF antenna ready!

OUR LAST RANV MEETING

by Carl AB1DD, Sec'y

It's party time! The December meeting was the annual Holiday Party at the QTH of Mitch W1SJ and Debbie W1DEB. As usual, they put on a great fest. Lots of good food and great company made this an enjoyable evening. There were 24 members and families attending this event. Some 10 main dishes and 6 dessert items kept the group busy for a while. Mass quantities of food were consumed in seemingly record time.

Even though this was to be a non-geek event, some geekiness did prevail.

Paul AA1SU had set up a sked on 40 and 80 meters with a station in Minnesota, so there was a group in the W1SJ shack trying to make contact. The contact was successful on both bands.

Bob KB1FRW wanted to show some pictures of an AB-577 portable tower (*rocket launcher*) he found for sale near Detroit. In the process, we were able to mess up one of Mitch's computers to the point it wouldn't turn on. Fortunately, there were enough geeks there, and we got it fixed and were able to see the pictures. Because of this, we decided that we should buy the rocket launcher. The motion to spend up to \$900 was made by Howie K2MME, and seconded by Moe N1ZBH. A vote was taken, and it passed with no opposition. Bob KB1FRW will take care of the details.

Out in the main room, Jeff N1YD ran a video of the Apollo 11 trip to the moon, one of the greatest geek flicks made.

On the non geek side of the house, Debbie and Barb had some serious discussions going on about how to tackle Sudoku puzzles.

Since a lot of the food was consumed by 9:00, most guests had departed, but a few hung in a bit longer.

THE PREZ SEZ

by Brian N1BQ, President

We are starting the New Year off with a bang! Just days ago, the FCC announced the dropping of Morse Code testing as a part of the licensing that grants HF operating privileges. There has been, as expected, a large outcry from a portion of the ham community, lamenting this happening. But, I am happy to say, there has also been some very thoughtful commentary. The following was written on the QRP-L Internet list by Jim Glover, WB5UDE, under the title of "Glass is at LEAST half full!"

*"Folks, we seem to be missing a lot of good fortune we've come by in recent FCC rulings. Yes, those who've wanted to eliminate CW testing are celebrating, but there's more for *all* of us to be thankful for.*

- Newcomers (Technicians) are no longer segregated on the VHF bands, away from the "heart and soul" of amateur radio, on HF.

- We pretty much got the more-Novice-like entry-level license that a lot of us were hoping for. It's still called "technician" but it now involves (expanded) Novice privileges on HF.

- The segregated Novice bands, which had become an often difficult place to make contacts, have been integrated with mainstream CW. It should be easier to attract and mentor many would-be CW ops.

There are many opportunities to enhance the experience and choices an amateur radio newcomer will face in this new environment. We can now encourage newcomers to consider starting off on HF rather than (or in addition to) VHF/repeaters. We can encourage people who've avoided CW/HF because they dreaded testing, to try out CW without the pressure of a looming test.

It seems to me that, aside from the disappointment some feel over losing the CW testing requirement, there is something for all of us to celebrate, no matter what our preferences may be.

(...except, of course, for the "no change!" contingent!)"

Now that was certainly some food for thought.

I personally would add one more positive aspect to Jim's comments. Back even before the restructuring of 2000, eliminating the higher speed code requirements, too many people learned the code at 5 words per minute in a fashion that made it very difficult to advance later to higher speeds. This slower speed was little more than an artificial barrier rather than a goal. Now that it is gone, CW students can now learn the code properly in a fashion that will permit them to advance as their experience grows.

Interestingly enough, the ARRL reports that demand for General Class study materials has gone through the roof. All you Technicians out there - it's time to start studying!

Contacting RANV

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Please send submissions for the newsletter to the editor, W1SJ.

MY VEE AND ME

by Jim KEIAZ

I expect that all hams have a stormy relationship with their antenna. I'm always interested in hearing other people's stories but I know the rule: to get others to share, you have to share first. So here is my story.

I have been a ham for twenty years. I'm only on HF and I listen much more than I talk, or key (*I wish I could keep that practice in other areas of my life*) but I get a lot of pleasure out of it.

In 2002, my family and I moved to a new place so I faced an antenna dilemma.

Like many people buying a house today, we found that the only place that met our constraints had covenants. But it wasn't bad – there are only four houses in the association so I hoped it would be low-key, and we have some woods that would provide a little cover.

Because of the covenants, I would rather not be noticed. For that reason, and for financial reasons, any tower was out. So was the antenna that I had on my previous house, a roof-mounted vertical. I was persuaded by the book, "Lew McCoy On Antennas" that my best bet was a simple wire fed by ladder line and run through an antenna tuner. I had woods; surely I could find an appropriate tree and run some wire.

I bought some ladder line, a device for connecting the ladder line to the dipole called a LadderLoc, and some insulated 14 gauge wire called FlexWeave. I tied fishing line to a tennis ball and managed to throw it over the crook of a tree. That let me to pull up some rope that could hold the antenna. The result was an inverted vee at twenty five feet and about a hundred feet long. To hide the feed line between the woods and the house I ran it through PVC pipe buried a few inches below ground.

That antenna worked OK. I had fun making contacts with the 20

meter DX group that I sometimes joined. But during the winter the down side of using woods to hide the antenna popped up – in one storm no less than seven trees fell on the wire. The rope was frozen to the crook of the tree and so I couldn't bring it down to make repairs. For a while I had to do without.

The next spring I brought the wire down to discover that the "weather resistant" rope was not up to Vermont standards – it was badly decayed. I also discovered when my antenna tuner settings changed suddenly in mud season, the PVC pipe had filled with water.

I repaired the antenna but this time I raised it in a more complicated way. I bought better rope and wrapped it together with a wire to prevent squirrels from chewing through the rope. I had seen teeth marks. Keeping in mind the problem of freezing in place, I did not tie the antenna to this rope. Instead, to this rope I tied a clothes line pulley. Through that pulley I ran another rope to raise the antenna. (*Don't laugh – last winter I was able to lower it in February.*) I also drilled holes in the PVC pipe to let out the water.

I used that antenna for a few years. But last year I was brought up short by its incompetence. There was a big DXpedition near Antarctica. I tried and tried to contact them but my antenna favored East-West. I simply could not hear them, let alone work them. Setting my alarm for the middle of the night didn't help.

That frustration got me planning another wire, oriented North-South. While I was at it, I made some improvements to the existing antenna. For both, I bought new wire and new ladder line. At each antenna's ends, away from the feed, I tied the wire to trees with ordinary string, hoping that if something fell on the wire then the string would sacrifice itself for the wire.

I also gave up on the PVC after QST magazine's Doctor column made fun of the idea.

The most important improvement was that my oldest son has been taking archery lessons and was able to get the fishing line through higher branches. It is not all that much higher – in the woods there are lots of trees, and those other trees get in the way of a good shot. The experts that I've read all agree that the most important thing is to get the feed line as high as possible.

I'm looking forward to seeing how these two hold up physically, and also how well they are coupled to the ether. It has been an adventure, and I'm sure there is more to come.

Some random notes from the antenna farm of Dr. DX (W1SJ):

1. A dipole or doublet fed with open wire line and erected high enough is a very effective antenna. We see that each year at Field Day.

2. A 20 meter dipole at 25 feet is hardly directional. Close proximity to ground kills the pattern. When it is high enough, the length determines the direction of maximum radiation. Maximum radiation is not necessarily broad-side!

3. A 20 meter antenna should ideally be 40-50' high for stateside and 70' high for DX. Lower antenna height will radiate very little signal at low angles and not be effective for DX.

4. Open wire line must not be in PVC, near metal, on or buried in the ground or near structures. All of these items will dramatically increase feedline loss.

5. Trees sway! Wire antennas in trees need shock springs or relief pulleys to allow slack. Even then, dipoles often need to be repaired annually. These "free" towers come with a price!

MILTON COMING

by Mitch WISJ

With the New Year, it is time to focus on the upcoming Milton Hamfest, which is only 7 weeks away. In the next few weeks I will endeavor to create an enjoyable program for many people out of nothing. Yesterday, I celebrated the New Year by attending First Night. I marvel how they manage to put together 200+ shows for over 20,000 people across 20 different venues and do it every year pretty much like clockwork. OK, so Milton is a much smaller scale: 10 little shows, 400 people and one venue, but the goal is the same: keeping the customers entertained and happy so they want to come back next year. In this regard, my job is pretty much the same as the Ringling Brothers.

But I do need two key items from everyone. First, some ideas of what new things you want to see. Bringing back the same stuff year after year doesn't work. Each year, I try to change 50-70% of the forums and demonstrations so there is something new and exciting. And second, I need your support. Support means telling everyone about the show, getting them to attend and making sure you show up as well. If you cannot come because of travel or work, make sure 3 others show up in your place! In a small market we must be ever vigilant to stand by and support our show or it can quickly vanish. Next month, I'll have all the details of what to look forward to at Milton.

PARTY SURVEY

by Mitch WISJ

I received some 20 on-line surveys about the Holiday Party. The format was invaluable in getting fast feedback on who was coming. Most agreed on the Party time and activities. Some 12 surveys were from eventual attendees and they gave feedback on food. The winner by a slight margin was the cold cut platter with a cum of 1.33 (*out of 5*). The hot dogs, wings and knishes were close behind at 1.45, 1.50 and 1.67. The knishes didn't make it this year as they weren't available. I'm playing with some recipes to crank out some homemade knishes, or if someone is heading to Coney Island, we can get some real ones from Nathan's! In the dessert department, chocolate cake (1.75) took the lead over a tight field of cookies (1.80), brownies (1.81), apple pie (1.81) and cheesecake (2.00). At the party, the cake, brownies and cheesecake were wiped out! In the beverage department, cider (1.89) edged out soda (2.20). The soda ticket was split down the middle between the regular and diet supporters. There weren't too many specific comments, but the one which sticks out, "it's food, isn't it?"

NEW TOWER

RANV has purchased another AB-577 Portable Tower (*also known as the Rocket Launcher*) for use at Field Day. Bob KB1FRW spotted a deal which was too good to pass up - a new old stock unit for a price lower than used units sell for. The only catch is that the item is in the Detroit area - not exactly local. We have arranged for a person in that area to hold on to the tower for several months while we figure out the best way to get it. Shipping will cost close to \$200. Ideally, if someone we know will be going out that way and has room in the back of the truck or van, that would be great! This tower will replace the ladder mast used at the Field Day GOTA station, a structure which has many concerned about its safety.

BIRD HUNT!

This year, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department placed five radio transmitters on young eagles released from the Dead Creek Refuge in Addison. They are hoping that ham operators around the state would be willing to monitor those frequencies. The frequencies are: 167.106, 167.133, 167.928, 167.979 and 167.995 MHz. Currently, they only know the location of one bird, so it would be very helpful to have people on the lookout for others.

There are two signals which you could hear - the first (and ideal) signal is a slow beep, indicating the bird is alive and in your area. The second is a rapid beep indicating the transmitter has been motionless for 8 hours or more.

If there is any chance you could help us out with this, please let us know. Ideally, we would like to have folks throughout New England monitoring the frequencies, as the birds are likely to travel. If you detect them we ask that you contact us so we may follow through on tracking down the birds, especially during the winter months.

Please contact Amy (amy.alfieri@state.vt.us) or David (david.sausville@state.vt.us), phone 349-8805, if you locate a bird or for more information.

**NEXT MEETING:
“Coast Guard Field Trip”
Tuesday, January 9th, 7 PM
Burlington Coast Guard Station**

**SATURDAY BREAKFAST MEETING:
Saturday, January 20th, 9 AM
Lincoln Inn, Essex Junction**

RANV

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