

BREAKOUT *The Newsletter of the Hastings and Napier Amateur Radio Clubs*

Hastings Branch 13 NZART – Napier Branch 25 NZART

Volume 8, Issue 5, May 2010



Hastings Br
13
Club Calls
ZL2AS
ZL2QS

Napier Br 25
Club Call
ZL2GT

IRLP
Node
6793
147.250

Branch
Nets
9.00 AM
Sunday
Morning
3615 Hz
147.250
MHz

Editor
John Newson
ZL2VAF

*Interesting photos
of a second hand
shop window in
Christchurch
taken by Tony
ZL2UBN in his
travels*



<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/zl2as/>



*Join the KIWI DX Group
Talk to ZL2AL for Details*

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Club Nights: Fourth Wednesday each month at 7.30 pm Surf Club Rooms, Windsor Park, Hastings

Hastings Branch 13 - President's Report

Hi all.

Hi all. Winter is definitely here and it is very wet. A good time to leave the antenna experimenting and stay inside and operate from the shack.

At this months meeting we will be discussing the 6 remits for the up and coming AGM. There are some important issues to vote on, so be there. It is useful to have a copy of the March April **Break In**.

Next month will be an away meeting at the Faraday Centre in Napier.

Some events are coming up. The Gisborne car rally is in the 7th of August. The Hawkes Bay Rally is on the 28th of August. The Wairarapa Rally is on the 11th and 12 of September. We will be looking for assistance for these events if you are available.

Its good to see other parts of the country using the weekend training course now, and Auckland have just put through 5 new hams. We also plan to take our course to Gisborne in September.

Thats all the info and notices for this month. See you Wednesday.

Warren ZL2AJ



Membership Subscriptions are OVER DUE

Please pay \$20 to

Hawkes Bay Amateur Radio Club,
Westpac 030642 0733310 00

or Dave Walker at Apex coms.

or Bill Lowes, 27 St.Hill Lane, Havelock North, 4130.

NAPIER BRANCH 25

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Committee Meetings: Third Monday of the month 7pm at Club Rooms

Club Call: **ZL2GT**

Club Nights: First Wednesday each month (except January) 7.30pm at the Club Rooms:
123 Latham Street Napier

NAPIER NEWS...

The next Napier meeting will be at the clubrooms on Wednesday 7 June at 7.30 pm. There will be a brief report on conference remits plus.

Hastings Branch are visiting the Faraday Centre in Napier for their June meeting on Wednesday 23 June and Napier members are welcome to attend. See details under Hastings Presidents notes. The centre in Faraday St specializes in historical mechanical and electrical equipment etc.

At our last meeting members described items from their shacks after the remit discussion. Warren ZL2AJ is representing us at NZART conference at Auckland on Queen's Birthday weekend.

At the July meeting we will have a digital modes demonstration in preparation for a kitset construction evening later in the month. Lee has acquired all of the parts for the kitset project – a computer – rig interface for digital modes and the manufacture of a PC board under Lee's direction will be part of the construction evening. If you are interested in building a kitset come along to the July meeting. Hastings members welcome.

Congratulations to all of those who passed the exam last month and welcome to the world of ham radio.

Latest news on the National System is that it will continue as is until June 2011 with NZART and a benefactor funding the Kordia rental while NZART approaches the rental via political channels.

Band conditions have deteriorated again after a promising rise in sunspots for a while. The sunspots are back down at zero again at present with a flux of under 70. Some DX is being worked on the lower bands and 20M.

Stan ZL2ST

Diplomatic DX: A Foreign Service Officer's Ham Radio Memoir

By J. R. Bullington

"DX" is a term used by amateur radio operators, "hams," to indicate long-distance, usually trans-oceanic communication. When I first became involved in the hobby, as a teenager in the late 1950s, short-wave radio was still a cutting-edge technology, and the ability to sit in your bedroom or basement "ham shack" and talk to someone on the other side of the world, a DX station, was thrilling.

This early experience helped point me toward a Foreign Service career, as it provided my first awareness that there were such things as embassies and consulates, when I talked to some hams stationed at them. "Some day I'd like to operate as a rare DX station," I thought, as I competed with the thousands of other American hams trying to make contact with the very few hams in remote Asian and African countries. (Hams compete in contests and collect awards for talking to other hams in as many different countries as possible.)

This aspiration stayed with me as I completed college and passed the Foreign Service exam, and I was an active ham throughout most of my career. This enriched my experiences in the exotic places around the world to which that career took me. It provided entertainment and relaxation in posts where both could be hard to find; it connected me to family back home (through "phone patches" provided by hams in the United States) in the pre-Internet days when commercial calls were uncertain and expensive; and on a couple of occasions it helped me get safely through dangerous situations.

To Southeast Asia

My first overseas assignment was to Vietnam in 1965, where I was disappointed to find that ham radio was prohibited by wartime restrictions. Consequently, my plans to operate a DX ham station were delayed until my second post – Chiangmai, Thailand, in 1971. A fellow ham and Foreign Service colleague, Al Laun, had just completed an assignment there, and he left me some of his equipment as well as contacts with Thai hams and tips on how to get the necessary license from the Thai government.

Effective short-wave radio communication requires an external antenna, the bigger and higher in the air the better. So I built a huge one, called a "cubical quad," with a 30-foot-long boom to which were attached 16 bamboo poles forming four big Xs that supported 180 meters of copper wire in the form of large squares. This was mounted on a 40-foot tower together with an electric motor operated from my ham shack inside the house, serving to rotate the antenna in the direction of the station with which I was communicating.

The antenna worked magnificently, making mine one of the strongest ham radio signals out of Southeast Asia as well as gathering crowds of neighbors who watched its majestic rotations in awe, speculating on why the strange American would build such a contraption. The problem was not keeping it on the air but in the air, as my skills at fabricating a tower proved to be considerably short of what was required for this monster.

The third time the antenna blew down in one of the frequent thunderstorms that swept through Chiangmai, one of the Thai employees at the consulate, whom I had enlisted to help with erecting it, informed me that the problem was undoubtedly related to the fact that my house was on the site of an ancient battle between the forces of the Thai king and an invading army from Burma. The antenna was disturbing the ghosts of the soldiers buried there, he said. So, with his help and guidance along with the cooperation of my Vietnamese wife, who is Buddhist, I engaged a group of monks from the local pagoda to come to the house and perform a ceremony to propitiate those unhappy spirits.

The monks, chanting and burning incense as they strung a white ribbon around the yard, must have done their work well, since the next antenna erection survived until the end of my tour in Chiangmai in 1973. (Or perhaps it survived because I hired an instructor at the local technical school to build a new, professionally engineered tower. One never knows.)

After a tour of duty at the State Department, I was assigned to Burma, first to the consulate in Mandalay and then to the embassy in Rangoon. The Burmese government, then as now, was a paranoid, xenophobic military dictatorship that totally prohibited ham radio. As political and economic counselor at the embassy, I had some high level contacts among Burmese officials, and I was vigorous and persistent in efforts to persuade them to let me operate, but to no avail.

Adventures in Chad

Following a year of senior training at the U.S. Army War College, I was next assigned to Chad, as deputy chief of mission. Since there was no ambassador there at the time, for the first several months I was chargé d'affaires. This put me in a good position to approach the Chadian government for a ham license.

But there was no functioning government, in the normal sense of that term. Chad was in the midst of a long-running civil war, and the capital, Ndjamena, was ruled by a fragile coalition of mutually hostile warlords. Government ministries were headed by military chieftains, many of them illiterate, and staffed by gangs of armed desert warriors, many of them teenagers. My inquiries about ham radio were met with the silence of total incomprehension.

Nonetheless, I had brought ham equipment with me, and I was determined to get on the air. I reasoned that in such politically fragile and dangerous conditions the embassy needed a back-up communications system, so I set up my station in an unused embassy office, put an antenna on the roof, and proclaimed myself N4HX/TT8 – my U.S. call sign, N4HX, followed by the prefix for all radio stations located in Chad, TT8 (as assigned by the International Telecommunications Union). After all, the embassy was sovereign U.S. territory, and I was in charge of the embassy, so why not?

Since there had been no ham operation from Chad in several years and I was the only TT8 on the air, I quickly created a considerable stir among hams around the world who needed a contact with Chad for an award or points in a contest.

My time in Chad came to an abrupt and exciting end when the warring factions that had temporarily come together as a coalition “government” in Ndjamena resumed their suspended civil war. Fighting was heavy in the city, and we Americans and other foreigners, even though we were not specifically targeted, were unable to leave our homes, much less evacuate. By this time, a new U.S. ambassador had arrived, and I was his deputy. Our houses were side by side in a single compound, while the embassy communications officer lived on the other side of town and was thus unable to come to our newly-established command post in the ambassador’s residence. Consequently, I had to exercise my ham skills to operate our emergency radio communications net among the 25 Americans in the city as well as a sophisticated short-wave transmitter/receiver that was set up in the ambassador’s house for emergency communications with Washington and other U.S. embassies. My ham equipment was all at the embassy, and thus inaccessible.

After three days of nearly constant combat, my boss and the French ambassador were able to contact the warlords by telephone (amazingly, the local telephones still worked) and persuade them to call a temporary truce to enable foreigners to evacuate. We hastily made our way to the French Foreign Legion base a few kilometers north of town, and the next day the French Air Force flew us to Douala, Cameroon, where we were able to get a commercial flight back to the United States.

I’ve always wondered if the desert warriors who looted the U.S. embassy ever figured out what to do with my ham equipment.

Operations in Benin

My next assignment was as permanent chargé d'affaires at the embassy in Benin. The government of Benin was at that time (1980-82) a Marxist military dictatorship that was implacably hostile to the United States, so we had decided to maintain diplomatic relations at less than ambassadorial level in order to show our displeasure. Unlike in Chad, however, this was at least a functioning government, and there was an office in the Communications Ministry that was authorized to issue ham licenses.

I soon discovered that the bureaucrats in this office were unwilling to license an American, particularly the chief American diplomat, without political authorization. So I arranged a call on the president to ask, as a personal favor, that he permit me to operate ham radio during my assignment. President Kerekou, formerly Sergeant Kerekou of the French Army, may or may not have understood what I was asking for; but fortunately for me he was in a good mood, having earlier that afternoon imbibed most of a bottle of French cognac, which he generously invited me to help him finish off. He told the Foreign Minister, who was sitting in on the meeting, to give me the necessary permission.

week later, I received a diplomatic note from the Foreign Ministry authorizing me to operate ham radio in Benin.

The ambassador's residence in Cotonou, where I lived, is a large, two-story house overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, with a flat roof that proved ideal for mounting antennas. Since Benin was not exactly at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy concerns and bilateral relations were both limited and strained, I had ample time for ham radio, and my tour of duty proceeded pleasantly and uneventfully.

However, on the evening of Thanksgiving, 1981, our embassy communicator, together with a visiting technician who was there to repair our emergency generator, accidentally took a wrong turn on an unmarked road that led into a Beninese military camp. Rather than halting them for questioning, the guards shot into the car, seriously wounding the communicator. They took him to the local hospital and jailed the visiting technician (in spite of his diplomatic passport), charging that the two of them were American spies. I learned of this incident about 8 p.m. In the absence of the communicator as well as his back-up person, who was on vacation, I was unable to access the embassy communications equipment to inform Washington of the situation. There was a U.S. embassy regional emergency net, and I had a government-provided short-wave transmitter/receiver installed at my house (along with my ham equipment) to be used in such circumstances, but my repeated calls went unanswered – apparently no one was monitoring the designated frequencies. Consequently, I got on my ham radio and quickly contacted a ham in New York. I told him of our problem and asked him to telephone the State Department Operations Center and relay my request that they instruct our nearest neighbor embassy, in Lagos, Nigeria, to listen for my call on the emergency net frequency. This worked. Within an hour I was in touch with the embassy in Lagos, and they sent us a replacement communicator and a doctor, who arrived early the next morning. The Beninese had neglected to post a guard on the hospital room of our wounded communicator, so we were able to take him out of the hospital and to Lagos before they realized what had happened. This saved his leg from amputation. The Beninese kept the generator repairman in jail for three weeks, until the State Department persuaded President Mitterrand of France (Benin's principal source of economic support) to intervene and request his release.

Burundi and Niger

My final overseas assignment in the Foreign Service was as Ambassador to Burundi, 1983-86. We were on reasonably good terms with its government, and I was quickly able to become licensed to operate ham radio.

The ambassador's residence in Bujumbura is on a hill overlooking Lake Tanganyika, in a five-acre compound that afforded ample scope for several antennas, and I was very active on the air. Happily, Burundi's long civil war remained on hold during the period I was there, and we had no evacuations, shootings, or other dangerous incidents.

After a final assignment in Washington, I retired from the Foreign Service in 1989 and took a job as director of international affairs for the city of Dallas, Texas. This was followed in 1993 by a move to Norfolk, Virginia, to become director of a global business center at Old Dominion University, where I remained until 2000. During this period, I was not active in ham radio.

I decided I wanted one last adventure overseas, including some hamming, so in 2000 I sought a job as Peace Corps country director. My application was accepted, and not surprisingly in view of my previous experience in Francophone Africa, I was sent to Niger. Despite my intentions, my return to ham radio was delayed for more than a year, as I concentrated on my new job leading and supporting 120 young American Peace Corps Volunteers. By 2002, however, I was licensed by the Niger government and began ham operations. As one of only two hams in Niger, I was in much demand by hams around the world, and I happily obliged with many evenings and weekends on the air, helping pass my remaining four years in Niger very pleasantly.

An Ideal Hobby

Throughout my diplomatic service I tried to contribute to the ham radio hobby by acquainting senior host country officials with it. When I invited cabinet ministers and other local leaders to dinners and other official functions I would often take them to the ham shack to make a few contacts. It was unusual after-dinner entertainment for them, and perhaps it helped smooth the way for subsequent ham operations.

Reflecting on these years of operating as an exotic DX station from the posts to which my career took me, I recognize that ham radio was an ideal hobby, providing endless hours of relaxation and entertainment as well as practical help in emergencies. There was always a new antenna to try out, along with the challenge of building it from locally available material – mostly bamboo, wire, and rope. Ham contests were a particular passion, but I also spent many hours giving out contacts to those who needed a new country, chatting with old friends, and looking for other rare DX stations for my own logbook.

As I took down my antennas and disposed of my equipment in 2006, in preparation for leaving Niger and retirement in Virginia, I realized that this was the end of my last great ham radio adventure as well as the close of my full-time working career. But I cherish some extraordinary ham memories.



HBARC/Br13 meeting 7-30pm Wed 26 May.

We will deal with remits, please bring your Break In with the remits in.



Spot the tower

An aerial view of our illustrious Leaders abode, taken by ZL2SG



NOTICES

Gisborne Car Rally
7th August



Hawkes Bay Car Rally
28th August



Rally Wairarapa
11th & 12th September



SAREX
2nd & 3rd October

*Please feel free to send notices to
john@thecomputerman.co.nz*

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ZL2WL Wayne

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