



Smoke Signals

Newsletter of Fullerton Radio Club

March 2024

President's Column

So far, March has been a pretty active month in the club.

On Saturday, March 16, Bob Houghton, Larry McDavid, Rich Belansky, Bart Pulverman, and Ray Rounds met at the Brea Mall at 6 am and car-pooled to the Claremont ham radio swap meet, where we met up with Dick Palmer who had a booth. After we left the the swap meet, all of us met up with Walter Clark, Larry Bennett, Lori Lorbeer, and Mike Rhey at Farmer Boys in Brea. It was an enjoyable morning.

Our Winlink and Software Defined Radio SIGs have met a couple of times and had some interesting discussions.

On March 20, we held our first “dual-mode” net. More on that in another article elsewhere in this issue.

On March 18, I received an email from Don Wheeler in Fullerton. Don had a Collins 75A-4 receiver that he was no longer using and wanted to ensure that it be preserved rather than “going to the landfill.” Don told us that the radio had been kept indoors but had not been turned on for “many years.” After some discussion at our March 20 FRC meeting, Bill Preston expressed an interest in “adopting” the radio, but wouldn't be back in California until June. Dick Palmer volunteered to “foster” the receiver until

Bill could come and get it.

On March 26, Dick and I drove to Don's house and took delivery of the receiver. When we got it back to Dick's house, we dusted off the chassis and discovered that under a layer of dust, the aluminum chassis looked like new. The radio came with the original manual, complete with the original owner's pencil-written notes about which tubes had been replaced. The only visible signs of the radio's age were a bit of rust on the Collins insignia and the paper covering the multi-band tuning drum was a bit yellowed.



Dick Palmer testing out Collins 75A-4

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March 2024 Board Meeting Minutes

The monthly FRC Board Meeting was called to order by President Bob Houghton AD6QF at 5:32 PM on Wednesday, March 6, 2024. All Board Members were present with exception of Bart Pulverman WB6WUW.

The February Board Meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

Treasurers Report:

- Bank balance as of February 29, 2024: \$6258.48.
- New deposits: Previously undeposited checks of \$45 were deposited on 2/2/24.
- Membership renewals were received from G. Levine, G. Miller, M. Stoops and V. Hernandez in the amount of \$75 were deposited on 2/14/24. A new unverified bank balance as of 3/6/24 is \$6278.48. An additional \$20 from Larry Bennett was deposited on 3/5/24.

New expenditures: Bob Houghton was reimbursed \$159.90 for use of his Zoom account for years 2024 – 2025. Bob was also reimbursed \$200 for ARRL liability insurance.

- Bob's records now show paid memberships at 29 plus one life member.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

- Winlink SIG has had one in-person meeting and is making good progress.
- SDR SIG held its first meeting this past Monday via Zoom.
- Developing activities include "Saturday in the Park", visit to Claremont Swap meet, and some sort of weekly on-the-air activity.
- After last month's review of club finances, it has been proposed that we readdress use of some of Bill Kohlenberger's legacy money for a charitable donation. Subject to be discussed at tonight's 7PM meeting.

Final discussion or announcements:

- None

There being no further discussion the meeting was ended at 5:52 PM.

Submitted by Secretary Paul Broden K6MHD

Smoke Signals needs your article. It can be as short as a few sentences or as long as a novel. If you have done something ham-related, why not tell us about it?



Three Missing Towers, or The Strange Story of WQST by Joe Moell K0OV

ED: You might recall a few weeks ago that there was a story all over the press about a radio station, WJLX, in Jasper, Alabama that had (supposedly) had its tower stolen. Well, FRC member Joe Moell has his own experience with missing towers...

Forest, MS is a town of 5,400 about 40 miles east of Jackson. The biggest employers of the locals are four poultry processing plants. Raytheon employs 600 persons in its manufacturing facility just east of town. In August 2004, the factory was making radar assemblies that I had designed and I was "asked" to spend a week there to review documentation and solve some production problems.

I like to listen to local radio when I travel, so I looked up stations in the area before leaving. FCC listings showed a 10 kW daytime-only AM station on 850 kHz in Forest with the interesting callsign WQST. (Could it be owned by a ham?) Its licensed 4-tower pattern had a strong lobe westward covering Jackson and a deep null to the southwest toward another station on 850 in Houston.

But from the Jackson airport I couldn't hear WQST. I didn't hear it until I was almost all the way to Forest. When I drove by the station on the way to the Raytheon plant, I only saw one tower. At

the time, I wondered if there had been hurricane damage, but now I don't think so.

Recently, I found enough information from the FCC database and old newspapers to figure out most of the strange story of this station. It originally went on the air in 1954 as WMAG on 860 with 500 watts non-directional daytime-only using a Gates BC-1F transmitter. In 1964, the main transmitter was upgraded to a Collins 20V-3.

A frequency change and 10 kW 4-tower directional upgrade with a CCA AM-10000D transmitter was licensed in 1973. The callsign changed to WQST soon after. The Collins 20V-3 was licensed as an auxiliary backup.

WQST went dark in February 1999. No hurricane then, so perhaps they lost lease on some of the land or the owners went broke or couldn't afford the electric bill for the big CCA transmitter.

In May 1999, the license was bought by Ace Broadcasting. The next month, Ace filed for a Special Temporary Authority (STA) to revert back to operation at 500 watts with one tower. Greatly reduced power would be necessary to provide adequate protection to the station in Houston. The STA was granted in February 2000, to expire in July 2000. No extensions to this STA were requested, but in January 2000, Ace applied for a Construction Permit for the same non-directional 500w operation on a permanent basis. This application was

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laughably defective, clearly not filed by a competent consulting engineer. A corrected application was filed in April 2000.

FCC issued a Construction Permit for 500w single-tower operation in late August 2000. A CP expires in three years unless it is extended or a License to Cover is issued upon completion of construction and proof of performance. Ace made the changes to single-tower low-power operation and was back on the air that month, probably with the old Collins transmitter. But Ace did not perform proof of performance and file for a License to Cover. So when I visited in 2004, the CP was expired but WQST was operating single-tower low power. The FCC database still showed 10 kW directional.

It gets better. Ace missed the February 2004 deadline to file for renewal of its license. The station didn't file for the renewal until April 2005. So when I visited Forest, WQST was operating with illegal power and an expired license.

FCC approved the late renewal filing, but issued a Notice of Apparent Liability for \$3000. The NAL is also laughable because it incorrectly lists WQST's City of License as a small town in Georgia. It also states that the proposed fine was minimal because "we find that (1) the station has served the public interest, convenience, and necessity; (2) there have been no serious violations of the Act or the Rules; and (3) there have been

no other violations..." Clearly FCC had no idea that WQST was operating far outside its licensed parameters.

Ace ignored the 2005 fine notice, so in March 2007, FCC raised the fine to \$4000. Apparently it was eventually paid. The next renewal in May 2012 was timely filed and approved through 2020. But a new manager took the station dark on 12/31/2012, citing unprofitability. Nobody wanted to buy the license, so it was surrendered to FCC.

So WQST illegally operated with 5% of its licensed power and three missing towers for nine years without being caught by FCC.

So what is a dual-mode net?

For the last few months, we have been talking about bringing back the Fullerton Radio Club Wednesday night net. You might recall that in much of 2020, we ran a net on the KQEH repeaters before the Zoom meetings. Although we started with a good turnout, interest slowly declined. I'm looking for a way to bring back the net, while keeping it interesting and encouraging members to test and stretch their operating capabilities.

The plan is to start a "dual-mode" net whereby each Wednesday at 6:30 pm, we will start with a "normal" check-in on

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Dick plugged the Collins into a VARIAC variable voltage transformer and switched the radio into “standby” mode. Over the course of about 30 minutes, he very gradually brought the voltage from zero up to 120 V. Nothing bad happened.

After letting it sit at full voltage for an additional 20 minutes, we connected an antenna and switched it from “standby” to “on”. We saw the “S” meter start to move. Dick plugged in a pair of antique bakelite headphones and we heard lots of stations on the 20 meter band (SSB and CW).

We tuned down to 14074 kHz and heard the warbling tones of FT8. I launched an FT8 decoder app on my iPhone and held the phone close to the headphones and immediately decoded 4 stations, including VA7TJH in British Columbia. Many vintage receivers are not stable enough to receive FT8 successfully. The 75-4a was quite the receiver for its day!

the K6QEH “Raytheon” repeaters, followed by a second check-in using a different frequency, band or mode. For example, perhaps after our K6QEH check-in, we would follow-up with a check-in using 10 meter SSB (just an example). Everyone should be able to participate in the repeater check-in, while fewer members would be likely to be equipped to check-in on 10 m SSB. Each week, the first check-in would stay the same (so that everyone will be able to participate) but the second check-in would change each week (to encourage members to try a less-used mode). At each week’s net, the second check-in plan for the following week would be announced, in case some people (like me) need to prepare in advance to be able to use a particular band or mode. (I have no permanent outside antennas). When our regular Wednesday Zoom meeting begins at 7 pm, we would announce who we heard on the first and second check-ins and find out who tried but wasn’t heard.



“It’s cold outside today, but I found a nice warm spot.”