



Greater Norwalk Amateur Radio Club

Newsletter

"The Voice of GNARC"

April 2008

President's Blog

By Toy Alladin K1WYQ

THE PRESIDENT'S BLOG:

Spring is here and pretty soon the flowers and the greenery will be showing themselves in full force. Do not forget the yard projects and other household chores that you might have lined up and conveniently postponed for other worthwhile projects like getting your shack spruced up and the tower and antennas tuned up, as if you have not done that already. Ha!

ARES had their annual meeting at the Southington hamfest on March 30th and GNARC was well represented. In attendance, was Allan/NN1H, region 1 DEC, that's us, Tim/W1GIG, EC, Ned/KA1CVV, and me, Assistant DEC who was installed and given a certificate among others by Betsey Doane/K1EIC, SEC. There is a general drive to recruit active members and you are asked to register by accessing the ARES web site. Other areas discussed was the 1750 Hz European burst tone in an emergency situation and there is a schematic for making a small 1750 emergency box that can be conveniently used with a 9 volt battery and placed in a convenient spot at your home. There is also a need for digital communications workshops. A demonstration was given for handling and filling out NTS radiograms.

On the home front, I am told that our Field Day committee has been activated and that plans are afoot for the oncoming exercise at the end of June. Our FD coordinator, Steve/NA1SV will be giving us an update at our next meeting.

At our next meeting, April 9th, Tim/W1GIG will be our program speaker. Tim will be discussing the legal aspects about erecting towers in Connecticut and any particular laws that might be applicable for the city of Norwalk and the surrounding towns.

FACT: The largest fish is the whale shark. I can be over 50 feet long and weigh over 2 tons.

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of GNARC is April 9 at 8pm in the community room of the Shop Rite Supermarket, Connecticut Ave, Norwalk.

Secretary's Minutes

Minutes of the GNARC meeting 3/12/08

Toy, K1WYQ, called the meeting to order at 8:00 PM. There were 27 in attendance including one guest, Jeff Tang, and three new members: Frank Cassella-KB1IFX, Vlad Spitzer-KB1PUR and his son Max Spitzer-KB1PUQ.

Toy turned the meeting over to John D'Ausilio-W1RT who gave a presentation on the VHF/UHF contest station for the PVRC Delmarva Grid Pirates, K8GP who operate from atop Spruce Knob, WV at 4,863 feet. They run multi-op, all bands and at full legal limit from a series of converted motor homes/buses. John also explained VHF/UHF contest scoring and operating procedures.

Business meeting:

The minutes from the last meeting were accepted. There were five upgrades at the last VE session. Toy thanked Tom, KK2C and Allan, NN1H for their service as officers last year and introduced Steve, NA1SV the new V.P. He mentioned a number of family members of the club who had recently passed away and a number of club members who are ill.

Treasurer's report: Ed, K3EIN said we are back in good shape with more than 50 paid up members.

Repeater report: Allan, NN1H announced that both of the club repeaters are now fully coordinated as are their backups.

ARES: Fred, K1FC said that Frank, KB1IFX has taken over coordination for Stamford/Fairfield and that there will be an ARES meeting at the Southington HamFest on March 30th.

New Business;

Field Day is June 28-29 and we will be back at the Veteran's Park location and operating 3A again. Toy asked for volunteers to coordinate the Club effort this year and the following five members volunteered: Hugh-W1HBR, Steve-NA1SV, Ziggy-N1ICL, Hugo-AA1XV and Jay-NE2Q.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Francoeur-KC1FB, Secretary.

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An English Ham on a Connecticut Cul-de-Sac

By Al Bolton G4VSO

"Shouldn't that be a Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court?" my wife said. Well, at the risk of insulting Mark Twain, I thought I'd let the good folks in GNARC know about my experiences of operating - or, more correctly, TRYING to operate - in the USA and in Norwalk in particular.

My very British dad (who still takes tea every day at 3 PM) has lived in the USA for nearly 30 years and I'm fortunate enough to be able to visit him every couple of years or so at his home in Morehouse Lane, Norwalk.

I first visited Norwalk in 1987 and had decided to enjoy some Ham radio from the USA - this exciting a prospect felt to me just like being in a DX country. But to get there and to do the operating, I had to apply for a US visa AND get a reciprocal licence from the FCC. Luckily, this arrived in time and my UK Class "A" licence gave me "Extra Class" privileges, allowing me to operate anywhere in the HF bands. In those days, UK Hams had two classes of licence - Class "A" which allowed operation on all bands and Class "B" which allowed access to bands above 30 MHz.

My equipment was pretty lightweight - I took a Heathkit HW-8 I had built, and a home-brew power pack consisting of 8 alkaline D cells (since I had no portable power supply which would give both 12 Volts out AND would work from your charming 120 Volts, as opposed to our 240 Volts AC supply). The aerial was a simple, home-made wire dipole for 20m. That's all. I managed to string the dipole up outside my dad's house with one end in a tree - average height about 20 feet. With the 3 Watts of CW I managed to work about 10 US states plus a few contacts back into G-land. It was great!

Encouraged by this, when I next travelled to Norwalk in 1989, I brought a 2m handheld radio with me, since I'd heard tales of linked repeaters with enormous ranges. My radio of choice then was my 7-year-old Icom IC-2E and a "Slim Jim" (J-pole) antenna. Now I started to have problems: in the UK (and most of Europe) we have a smaller 2m band - 144-146 MHz only. Repeater outputs are located between 145.600 - 145.800 MHz (every 25 kHz in those days, but nowadays every 12.5 kHz); repeater inputs are always 600 kHz LOW, and a 1750 Hz tone was usually needed to "wake-up" repeaters.

I was greeted by a heck of a lot of repeaters, apparently scattered will-nilly just about everywhere in this giant 2m band, with inputs low, inputs high... You have to remember this was the time before the internet, and of course I hadn't bothered to get hold of a repeater guide, so I was in major confusion mode! I persevered and managed

some very pleasant contacts eventually in the area and even had super DX into New Jersey!

Returning to the UK, I met the lady who was to become my wife and our courtship caused my radio interests to wane somewhat. However, we returned to Norwalk in the autumn of 1994, for our honeymoon. My dad lent us his enormous Oldsmobile 99 and we undertook a rather slow journey on what felt like the wrong side of the road through the beautiful New England scenery and autumnal colours into Maine. I did manage to bring along a Sony 7600D portable, on which I spent some time listening to the HF bands and European Medium Wave stations! However, I thought it best to limit my listening time...

With the birth of our daughter in 1996, we weren't able to visit my dad in the latter part of the 1990's, although the radio bug caught on again at the start of the new Millennium for me. Finally, we decided on a major holiday to see my dad in 2006 - and I was determined to take as much radio gear as I could carry. This was a bit of a task, considering the much-increased security measures at airports since the tragic and appalling events of 9-11. Things were easier though licensing-wise, as the USA was now a signatory to the CEPT reciprocal-licence agreement, so I no longer required a separate reciprocal licence! So, in June 2006, I managed to get from my home in Caversham, about 45 miles west of London, to Norwalk with the following in my near-bursting suitcase:

- 1 X Yaesu FT-857 HF/2m/70cms radio
- 1 X Icom IC-703 QRP HF radio
- 1 X Yaesu FT-817 HF/2m/70cms radio
- 1 X Yaesu VX-7R handheld

...Plus wire, various rubber duck antennas, RF plugs, connectors, plug adaptors from British 3-pin plugs to US 2-pin, and a supposed AC power supply which would operate from 120 Volts AC mains...the list was endless. Luckily, my long-suffering family is very tolerant!

I was keen to buy some gear as well in the USA. Prices at that time for Ham gear in the UK were Pound-for-Dollar - so if something cost \$100 in the US you could bet that in "Rip-off Britain" it would be £100 - nearly twice the price. So I bought a Buddipole portable dipole antenna from Bud W3FF - a super guy - as well as a Miracle Whip portable antenna and a PAR end-fed half-wave antenna. The Buddipole and Miracle Whip arrived a few days into our three-week-long holiday.

In the meantime, I'd already been trying to get to grips with all these repeaters on 2m again! I had also ventured onto the 70cms band and found quite a few there as well! In the UK, the 70cms band is rather different to the US band. We only have access to 430-440 MHz compared to your 420-450 MHz. UK repeater outputs are found between 433.000 - 433.375 MHz (inputs +1.6 MHz) and 430.800 - 430.9875

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MHz output, with inputs at +7.6 MHz. Now I was faced with a much larger 70cms band but fortunately, I had printed out a giant list of repeaters in the New England area, so I was able to access many, many repeaters whilst in Norwalk and also during a "road trip" we made to Rhode Island! The list was invaluable to get the right CTCSS (PL) tone. In the UK, most repeaters now have CTCSS tone access as well as the 1750 Hz toneburst. Most repeaters ID in CW, and include a single letter which corresponds with the CTCSS tone - for example, "C" would be 77Hz. This makes operating quite easy.

I tried a few home-brew wire antennas with the FT-857 and IC-703 but I was having big problems hearing much - the power supply I was using was a switch-mode type which was happy with an input from 90-240 Volts AC but it was horribly noisy, with RF birdies floating up and down and a high level of hash - plus my dad's cable TV set-up seemed to leak RF. I then received the Buddipole, which impressed me - a nice concept, in an easily-portable container. It went together quite quickly, set-up for 14 MHz. I managed a few contacts throughout the USA but still had a big noise problem. In the end, I went over to using my FT-817 on its built-in rechargeable battery, which was a much quieter set-up than the 857 or 703 on the AC power supply. So I had just 5W output into the Buddipole, sat on my dad's deck on the end of a painter's pole at about 15 feet! This worked quite well and I soon managed to have QSOs with the UK, both on CW and SSB - I was well pleased with myself. In all, I had about 50 contacts with the best DX being into Russia. I even ventured onto 40m and worked a few US states and Canada.

The Ham bands have a different sound and feel in the USA. In Europe, we used to have access to just 7.000 - 7.100 MHz on 40m, although we now have up to 7.200 MHz. But there are numerous and very strong broadcast signals on that part of the band, day and night, making 40m a very noisy and crowded band in the UK at all times - but in Norwalk it sounded much quieter, especially during the day. 20m was similar - many, many US and Canadian stations of course with Europe fading in toward lunch time. In fact, some of my best DX was worked whilst taking tea in the English manner with my dad...

I was very fortunate to meet Dan, N1ZZ, of West Mountain Radio fame whilst on my holiday - Dan kindly invited me to his lovely house and shack one evening. He had a super set-up! In fact, it was a set-up I could only dream of in the UK. Here, houses and gardens are generally smaller than their US counterparts. Whilst Dan could get his 160m vertical nicely anchored at its top into a useful 100-foot tall tree, I have to make do with a rather sad 20-foot mast! Dan has a most impressive HF beam antenna - I have a sagging wire dipole which is raised up on the aforementioned mast. DX is not a frequent visitor to the G4VSO shack at home, sadly.

One thing I did miss during my last visit to Norwalk

was meeting up with the members of GNARC, as your next meeting was after we had returned to the UK (and I also had to do family things and not just "play on the radio"). But I hope to be back again in 2009, so looking forward to talking to you hen or meeting you in person over a pizza at John's Best in Norwalk!

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WA7BNM Contest Calendar

April 2008

Contest Name	Time/Date/(Band)
Montana QSO Party	0000Z, Apr 4 to 2400Z, Apr 5
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Apr 4
YLRL DX-YL to NA-YL Contest, CW	1400Z, Apr 4 to 0200Z, Apr 6
ARCI Spring QSO Party	1200Z, Apr 5 to 2359Z, Apr 6
SP DX Contest	1500Z, Apr 5 to 1500Z, Apr 6
EA RTTY Contest	1600Z, Apr 5 to 1600Z, Apr 6
QCWA Spring QSO Party	1800Z, Apr 5 to 1800Z, Apr 6
Missouri QSO Party	1800Z, Apr 5 to 0500Z, Apr 6 and 1800Z-2400Z, Apr 6
RSGB RoPoCo 1	0700Z-0900Z, Apr 6
RSGB 80m Club Championship, CW	1900Z-2030Z, Apr 7
144 MHz Spring Sprint	1900 local - 2300 local, Apr 7
NAQCC Straight Key/Bug Sprint	0030Z-0230Z, Apr 9
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Apr 11
YLRL DX-YL to NA-YL Contest, SSB	1400Z, Apr 11 to 0200Z, Apr 13
JIDX CW Contest	0700Z, Apr 12 to 1300Z, Apr 13
Radio Maritime Day	1200Z, Apr 12 to 1200Z, Apr 13
EU Spring Sprint, CW	1600Z-1959Z, Apr 12
Georgia QSO Party	1800Z, Apr 12 to 0359Z, Apr 13 and 1400Z-2359Z, Apr 13
Yuri Gagarin International DX Contest	2100Z, Apr 12 to 2100Z, Apr 13
SKCC Weekend Sprintathon	0000Z-2400Z, Apr 13
UBA Spring Contest, SSB	0600Z-1000Z, Apr 13
222 MHz Spring Sprint	1900 local - 2300 local, Apr 15
RSGB 80m Club Championship, SSB	1900Z-2030Z, Apr 16
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Apr 18
Holyland DX Contest	0000Z-2359Z, Apr 19
TARA Skirmish Digital Prefix Contest	0000Z-2400Z, Apr 19
ES Open HF Championship	0500Z-0559Z, Apr 19 and 0600Z-0659Z, Apr 19 and 0700Z-0759Z, Apr 19 and 0800Z-0859Z, Apr 19
Feld Hell Sprint	1500Z-1700Z, Apr 19
EU Spring Sprint, SSB	1600Z-1959Z, Apr 19
Michigan QSO Party	1600Z, Apr 19 to 0400Z, Apr 20
EA-QRP CW Contest	1700Z-2000Z, Apr 19 (20-10m) and 2000Z-2300Z, Apr 19 (80m) and 0700Z-1100Z, Apr 20 (40m) and 1100Z-1300Z, Apr 20 (20-10m)
Ontario QSO Party	1800Z, Apr 19 to 0500Z, Apr 20 and 1200Z-1800Z, Apr 20
YU DX Contest	2100Z, Apr 19 to 0500Z, Apr 20 and 0900Z-1700Z, Apr 20
Run for the Bacon QRP Contest	0100Z-0300Z, Apr 21
SKCC Sprint	0000Z-0200Z, Apr 23
432 MHz Spring Sprint	1900 local - 2300 local, Apr 23
RSGB 80m Club Championship, Data	1900Z-2030Z, Apr 24
SP DX RTTY Contest	1200Z, Apr 26 to 1200Z, Apr 27
Helvetia Contest	1300Z, Apr 26 to 1259Z, Apr 27
QRP to the Field	1500Z, Apr 26 to 0300Z, Apr 27
Florida QSO Party	1600Z, Apr 26 to 0159Z, Apr 27 and 1200Z-2159Z, Apr 27
Nebraska QSO Party	1700Z, Apr 26 to 1700Z, Apr 27