

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Each month one of our members is randomly selected and asked to share their ham radio biography with all of us. Questions or comments should go to Paul, KD2MX.

DISCLAIMER: Any views expressed in this section are those of the submitting member and may or may not be those of the NAQCC or its officers.

DAVE JOHNSON WA4NID #9117

Hi this is Dave WA4NID, currently in Graham, NC, running lots of antennas and having lots of fun! It hasn't always been this way. Although first licensed in 1975, I've had times when life, profession, and restrictions have kept me off the air. Maybe you too?

STARTED WITH A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

Life is full of stories, and the one about how I got into ham radio is cool. When I was about 15 years old (1974 or 1975), I had a lot of fun riding my bicycle with friend Billy Hallows around our neighborhood, Ortega Forest, in Jacksonville, Florida. Although our family had a rather big lot with backyard smack on the water of the St. Johns River, many other houses in the neighborhood were on smaller lots. One of these that caught our attention had a short tower with a big beam antenna.

One of the advantages of doing something with a friend is that we gain courage together. Notice what's in the word "encourage"! Together Billy Hallows and I got up the courage to knock on the door of the house with the tower. We were greeted by a nice lady, Mrs. Hobbs, who soon had us talking with her husband, C. Harold Hobbs, WA4VZF (now silent key). Harold showed us boys his small and tidy "shack" in a corner of his garage, and even demonstrated some operation. I can't recall details of his equipment except that he had one of those huge Johnson matchboxes with the big knobs.

The most memorable thing about this initial visit was the open wire feedline positioned parallel to a fluorescent tube bulb. Whenever Harold transmitted, that tube would light up in time with his modulation, and the sight of that flashing bulb was the spark of my interest in electronics and radio! I knew instantly this would be the beginning of a fine obsession and active pursuit!

ELMER

Harold was not only the one who introduced me to ham radio. He was also my first "Elmer." He told me about the clubs, taught me about equipment, and got me started learning CW. He even helped me in my early CW operation by sending practice on the air during JTN, a special net (Jacksonville Training Net, 15m CW) for newbies, in 1975. My Novice class callsign was WN4NID (and besides a brief stint as AA4NID in bicentennial year 1976, I've been WA4NID since). I wrote down everything in those days and stuck it in my logbooks. I want to share with you some snippets of this code practice copy from Harold:

"Good net operators zero beat the net control station carefully without putting a signal on the air"

and

"Always get permission from the NCS to transmit."

Other "Elmers" (and many helpful friends) helped me after my training by Harold, but I will always be grateful for Harold's kind and patient teaching! Yes, I'd say he was a major inspiration to me. By the way, it seems my friend Billy didn't get bitten by the radio bug at the time. I quickly upgraded to General class (later to Advanced and Extra) and

was active for a few years in traffic handling on NTS and Navy MARS nets, mostly CW, and later in public service and emergency preparedness communications.

HOME LIFE

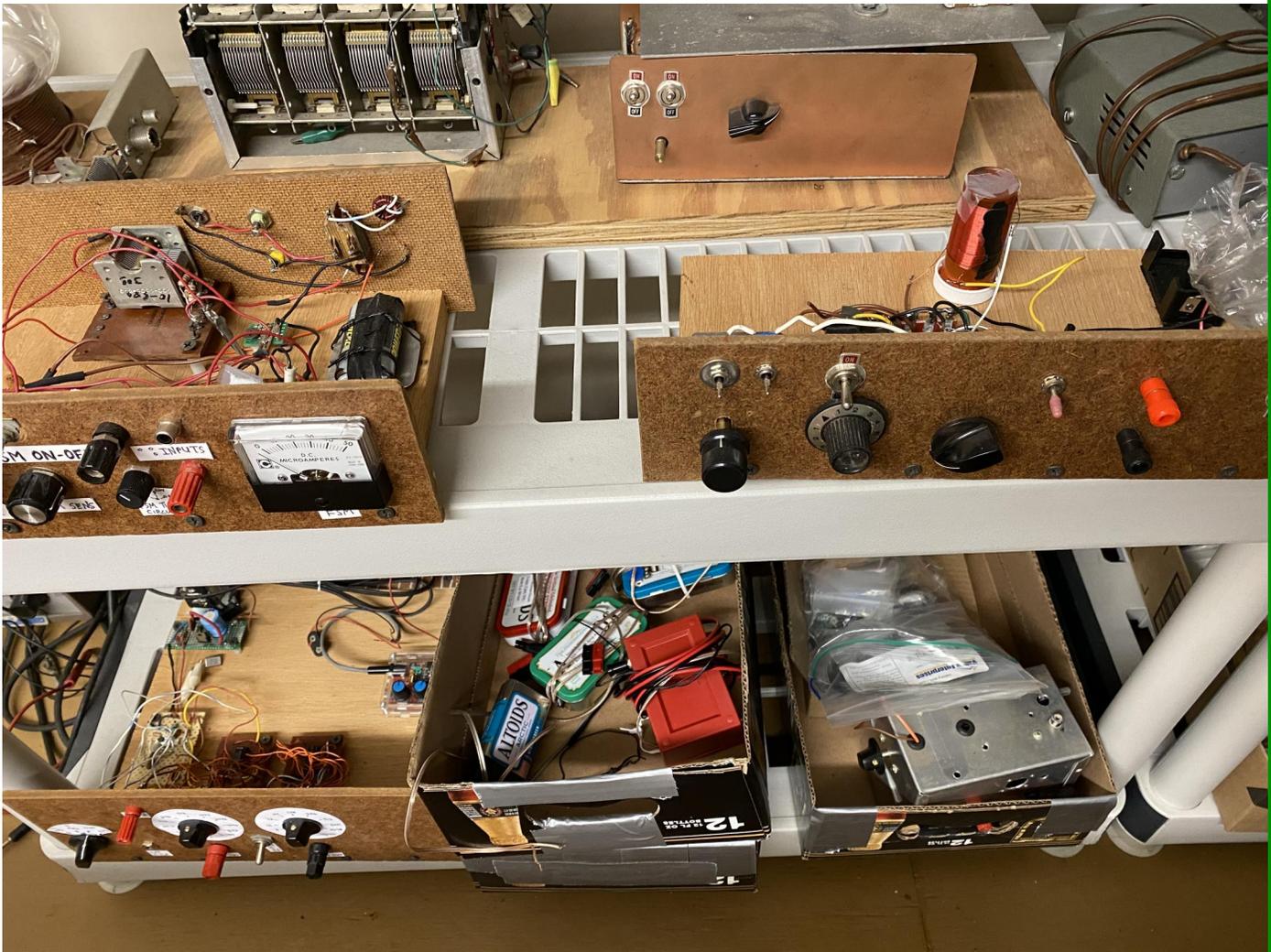
I am a scientist, with training in microbiology, cell science, and human molecular genetics. After my active career as scientist, I did independent IT consulting, and ministry with kids (with Child Evangelism Fellowship) working in the “hood” (public housing—many stories there!). Married to an amazing Chinese lady rather late in life, I have a son who is now an electrical engi-

neer! It’s nice having a wife who is tolerant of my hobbies. She even sometimes helps with installing and maintaining my antennas! How amazing is that?! I sometimes help her with gardening, after all, fair is fair. I say she grows the plants and I identify them—having studied botany (more specifically—oops even that’s a joke—plant taxonomy) as a hobby for about 45 years!

Through long years of school and work, there were times when I was not on the air at all. There were also times I lived in apartments, and I often got on the air with some interesting antennas. I plan to share about that through some future articles here in this newsletter.



My current operating position with IC-7300 (main fixed station rig, a replacement for my beloved TS440 that died recently after nearly 40 years), old TS-50, and FT-891. Various other accessories can be seen for tuning, digi modes, etc.



One of about five shelves of radios and accessories in my shack. This shows homebuilt radio accessories (field strength meter, dip oscillator, and power supply), and on bottom left is homebrew signal generator using digital chips and 2-stage frequency dividers, for making signals even below one Hertz! (Ken Cornell "Radio Scrap Book" is source. One side-hobby is logging LF beacons and making my own LF beacon transmitters). Bottom middle is box with several oscillator projects in Altoids tins, and homebrew signal tracer. Bottom right is one of many shelf-fulls of radio kits and homebrew circuits. Right now I am starting to plan for building narrow audio filters for CW.

ANTENNAS

For several years before 2007, I had a great time in Durham, NC, using homebuilt HF antennas. Especially gratifying was the 160m inverted L, homebuilt. Also a G5RV gave good results for other bands! Most recently, we lived in Cary, NC, from 2007 to 2017, with severe homeowner "restrictions" on antennas, and I was off the air. Then in

2017 we moved to Graham, on a lot that is 3 acres —until there are heavy rains and the creek rises! (Some scary stories there, maybe for later). Now I have room for antennas again. The lot is a topographical "bowl" in a flood zone! That's no problem for HF, though I'm finding out it is NOT a good situation for doing much on VHF and UHF except hit local repeaters. I look forward to sharing later about my current antennas.

LEARNING, BUILDING, & CHASING AWARDS

For the past several years, I've been blessed with being "semi-retired." Although my wife and I do some real estate investing and other business together, I have a lot of freedom with my time. I've focused on learning more electronics and doing more with radio. Since I have a lot of old radios, many kits that I've built myself (and some of them work, haha!), I've built some oscillators and signal tracers to help with troubleshooting my old radios (and to learn more about oscillators, a grand subject unto itself). Sometimes I feel handicapped in not being an electrical engineer or having formal training in electronics, but I also feel that I can do a lot with patient learning, troubleshooting, and experimenting. So even though I've done a lot, I have so many plans and projects that keep me excited and motivated.

Besides learning and building, a big focus of my "radio time" in the past 3 years has been operating on 3905 Century Club nets. I have a goal to get their Master award, and this takes earning about 25 awards along the way! Already I've earned 6. For Century Club nets, I operate using 95 watts, but for nearly all other operating, I am QRP 5 watts or less. I love the new digital modes, and often operate ft8 at 5 watts.

I'm not much of a DXer, but do enjoy the pursuit. In 2017 I earned DXCC (mixed band/mode). The joke is it only took me 45 years! And May 2020 I earned special DXCC using QRP power. Though I've admitted to you I don't always run QRP, and the first couple years as a ham I wasn't yet a QR-Per, for most of my active radio years QRP has been a major obsession. For some years in the 1990s I served as membership chairman of QRP ARCI. And I am cofounder of the KnightLites (knightlites.org).

CW GOALS

Lately I've found myself wanting to do more CW operating, and though I've not been active in events, I do plan to get going with the various NAQCC and SKCC events, as a way to increase my experience with CW.

Another goal is to earn the Code Proficiency certificate for copying W1AW at 25 words per minute (wpm). When I passed the Extra class exam, we had to demonstrate CW proficiency at 20 wpm. That was no problem for me when 20 years old, but I found my skills were rather rusty in 2017, when I could only copy about 12 wpm! Now I think I can handle somewhere between 15-20, so maybe that 25 wpm certificate will soon be within reach! You all can help me, let's get on the air and have some chats!

Although I've used a straight key and electronic iambic keyers (with my trusty Brown Brothers paddle) for many years, I've recently acquired a Vibroplex "Lightning Bug" and been practicing. This is definitely an acquired skill, but I'm almost ready to go "on the air" with the Bug. Thanks Randy KB4QQJ for all the tips and help since I moved to Graham! We have a great bunch of guys in our local club.

I encourage everyone to keep learning, and keep having fun with RF.

72,

Dave WA4NID

