

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT DXing

By August Baibi

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles to be run in this and subsequent issues of UNIVERSALTE in honor of URDXC's 25th anniversary. Purpose of the articles is to share the experience of our successful DX'ers with the newcomers to the hobby. Future articles will deal with reception reports and verification; listening post equipment; propagation; antennae and grounds; and listening post procedure.)

Shortwave listening is truly a "window on the world" from your easy chair; a turn of the dial and you have spanned continents most any hour of the day. Soft music from Indonesia, drums from Africa, Swiss yodelers, classical music from Brussels, Big Ben's tones from London, chiming from Cairo, and Jocko's laugh from Melbourne, to name but a few, are all there, without any trouble.

Today, most of the better known countries have English newscasts, so you are "getting it from the horse's mouth," so to speak. And many countries, to teach their own language to listeners, feature lessons including English and their own native tongue. These may be heard almost daily from countries like France, South Vietnam, West Germany, and England, teaching English in nearly all the languages of the world.

After 25 years of SWling, I still consider it the most fascinating, interesting, and educational hobby, with lots of thrills in store for those who have the perseverance and patience needed to log those hard-to-get DX stations; "fishing" around the bands often brings surprising results.

For those who wonder about the term "DX," it was coined years ago, when DXing was in its infancy, and simply means "distance." The writer became interested in the hobby about 30 years ago, when the possibilities of short waves were just being realized. At that time, many took up the new hobby with zeal, for short waves have the oddity of traveling great distances, with reasonably little power at the transmitter, due to what's known as "skip." For lack of space, we won't go into a discussion of "skip" in this article, but refer you to the various radio publications available for a full treatment of the subject. Various short wave listening clubs were formed; periodicals devoted their entire space to the subject; and numerous make receivers were on the market for the listener. Many were the elaborate aerials, and vast were the "Antenna Farms" that some employed for listening purposes. At that date "Radex" was a popular publication; so was "Short Wave Craft"; and there were many other publications dealing fully with the subject. Among the receivers available were Midwest, Lincoln, Scott, Silver-Marshall (later to become McMurdo Silver), Patterson, National, Hammarlund, and of course, old line manufacturers such as Atwater-Kent, Philco, and many others, that manufactured "all-wave" receivers that were guaranteed "to bring in the world." Early stations were EAQ, Madrid; DJD, Berlin; VK2ME, Melbourne; GSA, London; and quite a number of others. There were also some Central and South Americans in operation, and many of them featured special English language periods for the English-speaking listeners. It was verily a new world for the listener. The hobby grew with healthy vigor for the next five to seven years, then began to suffer a decline. It ebbed to a rather low tide, but

(Cont.) with the ending of the Second World War and a return to civilian life of many men who had learned about communications in the services, it began a gradual resurgence. Today, at this writing, the hobby is in a good position, with many followers, and many youngsters taking to it with vim. The present figure of devotees is thought to be around 40,000 in the United States.

So much for a rather hasty coverage of the early history of SWLing, or DXing. We will now discuss another phase, that of actually DXing, and becoming acquainted with the hobby. Many listen with general coverage receivers; others with communications receivers. If one desires to follow the hobby closely, it probably pays to buy the best receiver he can afford, within reason. There are certain features to look for in making a purchase, but we can't go into that here. After becoming familiar with your receiver, generally, it is of prime importance that you know the calibration of your set down to 5 kc; also, become acquainted with GMT, as compared with your local time. Most clubs, like URDXC, like to list time in GMT, as GMT is UNIVERSAL and never changes, regardless of the time of year; also, most short wave stations announce schedules in GMT, with few exceptions.

Since it's impossible to remember all details, some system of logging is a great help; a calibration chart for one, a listing of tips noted from SW publications, or tips from DX sessions, in GMT or local time, should be kept handy, on the receiver, constantly, to remind you where and when to tune.

Experience is the best teacher; yet the more information you have about what others have logged, the better your chances. Remember, too, the difference in time and location might make it difficult, if not impossible, to log the same as someone halfway around the world, so it's what's heard and reported in your locale that's most important. Over the years, I have learned that many listeners are not aware of the vast difference in reception on the East Coast and the West coast of the U.S.A. Therefore, our own East and West sections of the UNIVERSALITE are of vast importance, and being separate, indeed a blessing for members of URDXC; our club is the only SW club with such a progressive system.

Never in the history of DXing have we had more and better information than today; and this in spite of "jammers" and QRM of many types, plus multiple stations on the same frequency. More countries and stronger signals are our daily fare; of course, mornings and evenings are the most favorable times. SWLing is just like any other hobby-- you get out of it what you put in. Like the weather, it has its good and bad days. Magnetic storms also take their toll.

It's still the "man behind the gun" rather than the "gun" itself that gets the "bird"-- or rare DX station. Of course, a good receiver plus an efficient antenna improve reception; most of my active DX career, I've found a 100-foot "L" type, #12 copper wire, doing a fine job, as my results will confirm. The receiver, an HQ129-X of 1947 vintage, plus a DB20 preselector, perform to satisfaction; even an old Halli-crafters S-20R, as a standby, comes in handy. The antenna is about 40 feet high, SE to NW, in a residential section of Los Angeles, with heavy auto traffic in front and usual QRM-- in short, just an ordinary location.

(Cont.) Back in 1933, the SW receivers had no calibration, just numbers 1 to 100, and it was some job to calibrate them. On top of that, many stations were audible on correct frequencies plus their harmonics. Bands far from Europe were audible only in Summer, Spring, and Fall, and then only for an hour or so each day. South and Central Americans were very popular since they had hardly any competition. My log book had only a few entries then, but today, a book is needed to list them all, if that were possible. I've kept a daily log since 1933, but the past few years I list only the more important stations, plus any changes in frequency, time, and of course new items. Reports are sent to clubs and other SW publications like WRH, D-W bulletin, Radio Australia's DX program, etc. Now frequencies logged are entered on a Calibration Chart containing all the bands from 3 to 26 mcs. It's lots of work but it has indeed proven its worth. Needless to say, an accurate clock is an essential. And don't spare pencil and paper; note all pertinent details when you hear them, rather than entering later and making a mistake.

Stick to either GMT or local time to avoid confusion; and remember, the date is an important part of your report to your club; no need to date each one, but state that all reports are either current or logged within the last four weeks. Sending old reports is of no help.

In spite of "jammers" and QRM, I can log up to 90 countries a day, beginning early in the morning and proceeding through the day till late at night. The SWL must know when to tune for best results, not when convenient; in short, you must adjust yourself to SWLing, not vice-versa. Bands at some times are so overcrowded that it's hard to find a clear channel, yet, retuning later, you may be rewarded with logging stations that you were unable to hear even an hour earlier. Listeners with experience know that, but there are still many who get discouraged. That's the reason I wish to stress that PERSEVERANCE pays dividends. Some members of the URDXC might remember the 11 mc. DX contest in August 1956, when I logged 114 stations, 39 countries, and six continents during the week, even though working a full six days on the job at making a livelihood. That proves my point above.

VOA schedule of 10/27/58 lists some 80 frequencies relaying transmissions, besides 49 in U.S.A., and 13 BBC VOA relays, a grand total of 142 frequencies. Add the BBC, London; Moscow; and Peking; and you wonder just what chance smaller countries have to get through. Yet most do at some time or another.

As many listeners are aware, identity of a station is often not distinct; some announcers seem to whisper, rather than give a strong, slow station identity. Possibly if SW clubs would stress that point, it might improve the situation. Also, if stations would give correct frequencies used, not just "broadcasting in the 19, 25, 31 and 49 meter bands," it surely would be a big help. Such types of information is outdated, but since few personnel of stations are active listeners, they do not understand our problems, so we should acquaint them. Through efforts of myself and others, many improvements have been made. D-W, Cologne, Germany, changed to GMT from MET; Radio Japan introduced a DX session; and several stations have special West Coast transmissions. Still others have changed their frequencies to avoid QRM-- all for the benefit of the listener in general.

(Cont.) The Far East is, of course, best for us on the West Coast; today, one can hear Peking and Tokyo and others around the clock. The Near East also provides several transmissions, with Cairo being number 1. Africa is heard better, with the SABC in particular being easy to log on several frequencies around 0430 GMT. The high frequency bands, 21 and 25 mcs., are very active from Europe, Africa, and Asia, daily, yet not many DXers explore them, and it's a good high frequency year.

In spite of the campaign against jamming, it's as severe as ever, and of course much resented by the SWL. Peak of the jamming is during the Russian transmissions; VO and BBC transmissions in Russian; others remain most of the 24 hours per day on certain transmissions of the VOA, RFE, and relay stations. Yet, rather than fret, try another band or station, something always manages to come through. Check over the reports in the UNIVERSALITE and it will prove a real help.

What I consider my outstanding DX catch is the M.V. KANIMBLA, the first ship's broadcasting station, on 6.01, logged at 1400 GMT on April 18, 1938-- a 50-watt transmitter, halfway between Melbourne, and Perth, Western Australia, and is CONFIRMED by verification. ELWA, Monrovia, Liberia, logged 1st hour on the air, on March 14th, 1955, at 1630 on 11.80, with new transmitter; CR7BE, 11.71, Lourenco Marques, Mozambique, heard April 15, 1937, another first on the West Coast, at 1530 GMT. I sure have had my share of thrills. My verification album contains many rare DX catches with verities of superior beauty.

The aim of the short wave broadcasts is to win friends, to keep people abroad interested in their Homeland. Today, all too often propaganda has replaced that, except the smaller countries, which still present more and better entertainment than the big powers with all their many transmissions. Many have learned about foreign countries so much that they feel that they have visited in person. Some are more like next door neighbors rather than being thousands of miles away. Radio is the finest medium in geography that I know, truly.

Honesty in reporting is the ONLY policy; DXing is not a game of chance. Being a member of URDXC or any other SW club is the best way to make friends the world over, to exchange tips and notes, and know-how. Both sides benefit in many ways. Also, we can induce others to become DXers and enter our great hobby. There is little publicity about DXing, so relatively few people know about the hobby and the meaning of SW. It's up to every DXer to spread the glad tidings about our great hobby to the general public. Mr. Gibson's article in Science Digest explained it well and has brought good results. We must continue with the campaign.

Our club is one of the oldest in the nation; NNRC of the East Coast is the other, both being formed when DXing was in its infancy. We of URDXC have two able and progressive editors, and we should give them the best of cooperation. There will come a day when we of URDXC can be proud of our achievements, as will our President, Charles Norton. To all my fellow members, the very best of DX and good hunting!

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