ACROSS TIME

LISTENING FOR SIXTY YEARS -



FROM FOUR CONTINENTS

- AND SPACE

by TOM WILLIAMSON (Memoirs of a DXer)

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1. IN THE BEGINNING.

Nineteen twenty-three was an interesting year!F8AB the French amateur radio station of Leon Deloy, operating from Nice, made the first transatlantic contact on SHORTWAVE, with the Americans UlMO(Fred Schnell) and UlXAM (John Reinartz). This was on telegraphy (CW) and with a wavelength of around 100 metres!...just 22 years after Marconi had spanned the Atlantic on long wave.

Westinghouse put station KFKX on the air from Hastings, Nebraska, to relay SHORTWAVE signals of KDKA on 90 metres, for local medium wave listeners; and on shortwave, callsign 9XW for West Coast audience.... The entire medium wave (BCB) dial contained only 34 stations in Canada!

Paris was enlivened by the visit of Rudolph Valentino, the romantic "heart-throb" of the silent movies!.... and the Aero Club promoted an airplane race around London, England! Those were very different days from our modern nineties.... and in passing let us note it was the year of my birth!

The next year,1924,history was made on shortwave by Cecil Goyder, a former schoolboy in Mill Hill,London,and just then a student at City & Guilds College,who called in at his old school to use it's station G2SZ. He made the first England-New Zealand radiotelephone contact!Progress continued steadily,and Gerald Marcuse,G2NM,at his own expense,started experimental broadcasting to the Britsh Empire on wavelengths around 32 metres.By 1927 the BBC were testing from G5SW at Chelmsford,and by 1928 the regular Empire Service was inaugurated from Daventry.None of this was obvious to me at my tender age,but these were years of considerable developing interest of the public in radio listening as a hobby; tuning distant stations became quite a fascination.

It began for me one night in 1935; aroused from my slumber by an excited father, I tumbled downstairs with my mother, to "hear America" on the family radio. This was a British domestic receiver, Ecko make, with 3 tubes (medium wave only) and an "aerial" of about 30 feet of wire draped around the eaves of the house! My Dad pulled in East Coast stations like WGY Schenectady, WPG Atlantic City and ev en KDKA Pittsburgh on that extraordinary night. Shortly after this I tried myself to "pick up America" on that set, but the results were very tentative, only an occassional weak "Yankee" voice being heard!

I would like to be able to say that this event fired me up and launched me into the hobby, but such was not the case. A "seed" had been planted, but it still needed to germinate!

The next event was a Christmas present from my father, in 1936, when I was given a radio"kit" to construct the Scott-Taggart 900. This was the latest in a series of "do-it-yourself" construction sets, put out by the designer, and sponsored by the radio magazine "Popular Wireless", regretably long defunct. It was a remarkable receiver, a 5 valve (tube) circuit of regenerative type, with both RF and LF gain controls, either of which could burst into howls of oscillation if adjusted incorrectly! This instability was a marked feature, especially at HF frequencies, for example on the 11-metre band, then used for experimental broadcasting in the U.S.A. One dare not move one's hand from the controls or the signal would disappear! This is known as "body capacity" effect.

The set was battery operated, with 120, 9, and 2 volt supplies needed for anode, grid, and filament supplies; the latter was obtained from an accumulator (a wet battery similar to car batteries), and more than one DX session was terminated when the battery was discharged! Dry cells supplied the other currents, but all of this was supplanted in later years by a power unit plugged into the domestic house supply. All wiring connections to tubes, capacitors etc.was fixed to the unit by screw terminals (no soldering!), and two plug-in coils were used for each tuning range. The set covered 10-2000 metre wavelengths, provided one had sufficient coils. At the outset I did not have coils to cover the tropical bands, so that my nighttime LF DXing was restricted to the 49 metre band(or medium wave). Selectivity was not it's main strength, so that if Rome and Zeesen (Germany) were operating at the same time on one band, e.g. 19 metres, their huge signals wiped out a good half of the frequency range!!BUT it was sensitive, and although my school friends of kindred radio interest, would laugh at the strange construction, they were not amused when I pulled in signals they could not hear on their more conventional superhets.

At that time commercially built communication receivers were on sale, from U.S. companies like Hallicrafter, Hammarlund, National, and the British company Stratton (Eddystone receivers). However the cheapest of these cost around \$25 which was beyond the schoolboy budget! One could only dream about these, or go into sighs of pleasure if a ham friend showed you his prize possession; the "king" of all at that time was probably the R.M.E.69 (I think the letters stood for Radio Manufacturing Engineers). Interestingly, even some of of the National receivers at that time used plug-in coils. Today's listener cannot imagine the clumsy operating proceedure in changing bands with such

receivers, switching off the power to change coils! Compare this to the Lowe keypad, and you are truly in another world!

I often wondered whether my father regretted his present to me, because it became my driving interest as a hobby; I "roamed the ether "listening to anything and everything, and in the early days my main interest was logging amateur band DX.I found the "Callbook" and bought one out of my own "pocket money" for about \$1.50 which annoyed my parents who considered it to be like a phone book! Well it was, but now I knew where the stations I heard, were located.

As time went on,I became more interested in medium and shortwave broadcasting stations as they opened the door to appreciating different kinds of music and languages. In this I was fortunate, for in our house we had a regular flow of visitors from different European countries, in connection with my father's business. He spoke five languages and I became accustomed to the sound and intonation of languages, so on the radio dial I could identify many stations even if I did not speak the language. In fact however under his guidance I became proficient in French which was a pleasure to me, not a task! I could read books and magazines which gave me great pleasure. At a later point in time I took up the study of Spanish as a hobby, going to night-school and passing exams to an Intermediate grade of the Institute of Linguists. It is a great pity that we did not have the advantage of any kind of recording machines in those days, professional equipment being much too expensive; so in compiling a report to a station you had to jot down on a pad whatever words you could identify!

My understanding of propagation ideas was very primitive; there was little written on the subject, although one became aware of day-night changes in band signals, and to some extent of seasonal differences. Nonetheless, we all became excited at the special rare days when "conditions" permitted the arrival of an exotic station on the dial! I discovered a few radio magazines which dealt with the DX aspects of the hobby such as "World Radio" put out by the BBC which was a truly excellent source of programme and frequency data (well, "wavelengths" since the common custom in those days was to list them in such a manner; "kilocycles" were not yet the "norm") It was a sad day when this ceased publication at the outbreak of war. Among other excellent articles published in it, one I shall always remeber was "Romance of the Night Log", which discussed the geography and culture of several South American countries, with data on the more regular

stations that could be heard. These articles over several issues. were a treasure-house of information, and fuelled my growing interest in this part of the world.

Other magazines avidly devoured included the British"Short Wave Magazine"-still going today-and U.S.magazines when we could find them, usually on second-hand market stalls and out of date, but fascinating!Of these, "All Wave Radio" was definitely my favourite, and it really introduced the QSL aspect of the hobby to me.Soon I was into this and the first card received, W2XAD Schenectady, was a major thrill for this young DXer! As far as I was concerned, listeners "clubs" as we know them today, did not exist and this deficit highlights the drawback of those times—the lack of guiding information to the newcomer to the hobby. We had to dig around, and learn for ourselves. Friendly local hams were always helpful, but then as now, their main interest was in transmitting and construction; broadcast band listening was of minor interest to most of them, and they considered an SWL to be an embryo, or frustrated "Ham"!!

By 1938 I was keeping a log-book of all I heard, mixed ham and broadcast data. This has proved over the years to be quite invaluable, especially when comparing reception, and if the need to write an article arises. Power outputs in those days were very low, broadcast stations using around 2-50 KW, the latter being real "high-power"in the thirties. To be able to "hear America" even on shortwave, was a good event as it was not possible every day; a measure of good conditions was a day when at least one station from all six continents could be logged.

Among the more frequently heard U.S.stations were:W8XK Pittsburgh,W3XAU Philadelphia,W8XAL Cincinnati, W2XAD/F Schenectady,W3XL Bound Brook,W2XE Wayne,and W1XAL Boston.A real gem was W4XB Miami,relaying WIOD -"The Isle of Dreams Broadcasting Co." This station brought us some of the best music of the big-band swing era; names like Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, and Benny Goodman coming to life on the dial. Incidentally, the custom of relaying their medium-wave outlet was a common factor for these stations, although some programmes originated specifically for shortwave broadcasting. The "X" letter in callsigns denoted "experimental" operation; but one felt this was more appropriate in the ll-metre band, where stations such as W9XUP St Paul, W9XJL Superior, W4XA Nashville, and W2XJI New York City, provided fascinating listening!

From Central America came signals from TGWA Guatemala City, many Dominicans, and the occassional Mexican such as XEWW and XERF Veracruz.Many Cubans were often audible around 30-32 metres, such as COCH, COBX, COCQ, COCW, COCD, and COBZ, all in Havana; also COJK from Camaguey. Most of these relayed MW outlets. My favourite was COCQ relay of "CMQ Red Nacional" which used to sign off with the famous rumba tune "Siboney". From South America, there were many regular Colombians & Venezuelans heard in the 48-49 metre region.

Asian, African, and

Pacific stations were few and far between, but JZI Tokyo, and VLR Melbourne provided real excitement.

Of course, European stations were much easier to hear, and with stronger signals; EAQ Madrid, HVJ Vatican, OZF Skamlebaek, Denmark, HBQ "Radio Nations", Switzerland - home of the League of Nations, forerunner to the postwar United Nations - and TPA3 "Paris-Mondial", France, were all regular in the loudspeaker. Naturally Germany & Italy were widely heard, because these were the beginning days of serious radio propaganda for Hitler & Mussolini, whose voices were (too) familiar to my ears. Radio Moscow was heard, but more often on LONG WAVE!...where they had a very high-power transmitter, regularly audible, and with scheduled English language segments. It was fascinating but depressing to hear accounts of food & clothing "rations" from them..little did we realise that quite soon it would be similar practice in England because of wartime restrictions. In respect of home broadcasts the BBC on shortwave had a comprehensive "Empire Service" from multiple stations, announcing their callsigns (e.g. "London Calling over GSD for "Daventry"...) These were the days when almost every station announced it's callsign which was a tremendous aid to identification under poor reception conditions. The modern abandonment of call letters has been a backward step in shortwave broadcasting.

But truthfully, for easy listening to European stations the best approach was by medium-wave. Radio Paris on Saturday evenings provided some memorable music from the "Hot Club de France", a unique style of "jazz", with the world famous guitarist Django Reinhardt, and the amazing violin of Stephane Grappelli (STILL playing today occassionally on U.S. television). "Le jazz hot" as the French termed it, certainly set the feet tapping!

Utility stations were also very active, using AM mode on shortwave, and providing some unusual experiences; CGA2 Drummonville Quebec working London, SUZ Cairo relaying a political speech to GDC England, WNA Lawrenceville N.J. with a commentary by the famous political analyst Raymond Gram Swing, HAJ Budapest Hungary calling the U.S.A. with a contribution to "Salute of the

Nations" at the New York World Fair, and many others. A very special one was WlOXDA, a SHIP station, the S.S.EFFIE MORISSEY, which was authorised to use both commercial and amateur band channels, being logged by myself in July 1939 on 20 metres.

over the air from Spain for example. In the midst of it's agonising civil war, we could listen to the Government view over Madrid EAQ, and the Franco-led rebellion over stations in Burgos & Salamance. Also, in what might be deemed a political move within the democratic U.S.A., the government decreed that all SW stations must operate with a minimum power of 50 KW, and they were to use directional antennae, further increasing their signal strength. These rules were introduced in 1939, and several U.S. stations were already operating limited time broadcasts to foreign countries, especially in Latin America. This trend of presenting the American view of world events would mature ultimately and logically with the establishment of the official broadcaster, the Voice of America, by 1942. Not enough transmitters were available originally, so several Utility radiotelephone stations were used to carry VOA transmissions.

Any review of shortwave broadcasting before WWII would be very incomplete without reference to the activities of the Dutch experts at Phillips Radio in Holland.Operating stations PHI & PCJ (well heard in England), they provided some historical milestones in long-distance broadcasting, especially with tests to the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Furthermore, they were responsible for the first truly listener-orientated shortwave programme, the fa.ous "Happy Station"; this effectively made the fame of the late and great Eddy Startz, who, as announcer for the station, became "Mr Shortwave"himself!No one who has heard his sparkling zippy style will ever forget him, and he introduced many personal "trademarke" such as the lively Sousa marches opening the programme, the "I like a nice cup of tea "song, and the sound of horses bringing the mail, as well as the "University of Light Learning"! If Radio Nederland should repeat their 50th anniversary programme some time...don't miss it. You will be intrigued to hear the legendary man! ..and it included some of the old historic test transmissions to Java.

Yes, these were exciting days for us radio DX fans...but the clouds of war were gathering...strange test broadcasts were heard, "Dummox calling", and fighter aircraft from Kenley airdrome were logged on 60 metres!

Strange antennae appeared across the southern flank of Britain; for what - we did not know! (Later we would understand that this was the protective radar screen guarding the approach to London and the home counties.) At the time I lived in Surrey, between Croydon International airport, and the "B" sector headquarters of 11 Group, Fighter Command of the Royal Air Force. This was charged with the air defence of Southern England, and as you will see later, provided some interesting interruptions in DXing!

I had now left school, and was working in a bank temporarily, waiting for my university application to Medical School to be processed; I would be accepted in a few months time. However, on August 31st 1939, the Post Office closed down all the "G" amateur stations as a security move , and on September 3rd we heard the voice of our Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain announce that we were at war with Germany.....

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1938 logbook from the page



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October 19, 1939

Mr. T. B. Williamson 3 Highland Road Purley, Surrey, England

Dear Short Mave Listener:

August 15, 1839 of our short wave station WLWO (formerly WBIAL). This station operates on the assigned frequency of 6060 kilocycles (49.5 meters), with a power of 10,000 watts, as authorized by the Federal Communications Commission.

The present operating schedule of WLNO is as follows:

EASTERN STANDARD TIME

						-					
ıdays	8:00	A.M.	t	6:30	P.M.	11:00	P.M.		2:00	A.M.	
ndays	5:45	A.M.							2:00	A.M.	
uesdays	5:45	A.M.	2	5:30	P.M.	11:00	P.M.		2:00	A.W.	
Inesdays	5:45	A.M.	50	5:30	P.M.	8:30	P.M.		2:00	A.M.	
iradaya	5:45	A.M.						40	2:00	A.M.	
days	5:45	A.M.	2	5130	P.W.	11:00	P.M.		2:00	A.M.	
Saturdaya	6:45	A.M.							2:00	AM	

relayed from stations MLM and WSAI. Some programs, however, are produced especially for WLWO in the interest of short wave listeners throughout the World. The major portion of the programs for Station WLWO are

Trust that you will continue to enjoy reception from our Stations WLW and WLWO.

Yours very truly,

WLRO STATIONS WEN - WSAI

Technical Supervisor R. J. Rockwell

Station	WT TO	-	80 000	-		200			-	
-		t	20.00	WILLES		3	Allocycles		428.3	Meters
Station	WBXO	1	200,000	Watts		700	Kilocycles		428.3	Meters
Station		1	2,000	Watts	1	1,330	Kilocycles		225.4	Meters
1			1,000	Watts		Might				
Station	WAXNU	1	1,000	watts	1	25,950	Kilocycles	-	11.5	Meters

Oct.8, 1938 19 Hrs.11 Min.

Mr. T. B. Williaman

We acknowledge with thanks your communication reporting reception of our program on the above date from Station W2XAD—WDXAD—operating on 15 330 kc.

W2XAD operates daily from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. on 21,500 kilocycles, or 13.95 meters; from 11:15 a.m. to 6 p.m. on 15,330 kilocycles, or 19.56 meters; from 6:15 p.m. to 10 p.m. on 9,550 kilocycles, or 31.41 meters.

W2XAF operates daily from 3 p.m. to, 11 p.m. on 9,530 kilocycles, or 31.48 meters.

All times mentioned are Eastern Standard Time.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

SCHENECTADY, N.Y., U.S.A.

INTERNATIONAL STATION W2 X DOFNED AND OPERATED BY

The COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM. Inc.

483 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, U. S. A.

January 18, 1939

Mr. T. B. Williamson S, Highland Rd Purley Surrey ENGLAND

Dear Listener:

Thank you for your recent communication commenting on your reception of the programs of International Station WZXE.

The new, high power, completely modern W2XE transmitter, licensed to transmit with a power of 10,000 watts, is located at wayne, New Jersey, approximately 20 miles from New York City. Most of the programs originate in the New York City studios and theatres, the exceptions being those which come from Detroit, Washington, Chicago, Hollywood and other large cities.

For your convenience, we are enclosing a copy of the present W2XE operating schedule.

We appreciate your technical information, as reports such as yours are helpful and interesting. The comments and suggestions of our listeners are always welcome and we will be pleased to hear further from you should you care to write.

We hope you will continue to receive and enjoy the programs of International Station WZXE.

Cordially,

COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.

International Shortwave Division.

U.S.A. - THE "EXPERIMENTAL" SHORTWAVE STATIONS.

Prior to August 1939 all U.S. stations used a call-letter system with an "X" included. They were basically relay outlets for their parent stations on the broadcast bands, although some specific programmes were put out on shortwave. Note the directive antenna to S. America comment on the W3XAU card; this region was to become an important "target" for the U.S. broadcasts in World War II.

POSTCAR DS. SAN

We herewith verify your report of reception of W4XB on 2/24-27-28/37 W4XB. 6040 KC is an international broadcast station operating on an experimental basis in conjunction with broadcast station WIOD. Further reports from you will be very helpful in determining results of our experimental operation.

Transmitters of W4XB (5.000 watts) and W1OD (1.000 watts) are located in Miami. Florida. Regular hours of W4XB operation are: Week days. I to 3 p. m. and 9 p. m. to midnight: Sundays. 4 to 6 p. m. and 9 p. m. to midnight.

Miami is a lamous summer and winter resert located on the southeast coast of Florida in the American tropics.

T. B. Williamson.

F3 Hipheal Rd.

Present, Lucy

We are pleased to acknowledge your woork and to verify recent the of Intermeti and Promitionsting station #3%AU.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - M.C.A.

Reception verifies - J.G.Leitch

on 5/19/39 using 15270 cointes.

Studios - 1622 Chestnut St.,
Transmitter - Mewton Square, Pa.
6060, 0590, 15,270 E1,520 Kilocycles-10,000 Watt
Directive Antennas pointing
toward Europe or South America.



Programs of

LITERATURE SCIENCES WORLD PEACE ECONOMICS

NEWS MUSIC DRAMA TRAVEL Broadcasting

YOUR RECEPTION REPORTED ON

September 21, 1939 21.20 BST KOK 11.79Mc

Thank you and please write us again.

Do you know this is a non-profit Station supported by gifts and voluntary contributions?" Won't you become a part of this Station by joining our WORLD WIDE LISTENERS' LEAGUE? Write for our leaflet.

Special International Good 15.25 - 6.04 - 11.79 - 21.46 - 11.73 - 15.13 Mc. Will Broadcasts.

SUPERIOR, WISCONSIN U.S.A Head of the Lakes Broadcasting Co. WEBC - WMFG - WHLB W9XJL - W9XUX @ Superin WISCONSIN

This will acknowledge your report of reception of our High Frequency Broadcasting Station W9XJL operating on 26,100 KC. or 11.5 meters with a power of 250 watts.

Two interesting veris; the Boston station was a "cultural" broadcaster, with some considerable British backing, and regarded by some as a propaganda outlet for British political views.W9XJL was an example of the use of the 11 meter HF band which gave some interesting reception to the European DXer.Unfortunately these stations went off the air early in the wartime period, and the band was discontinued.

6130 KC

CHNX relays programs of CHNS, Lord Neison Hotel, Halifax, Nova. Scotla. The Transmitting Facilities are Located at Bedford, N. S. A special Short Wave Listeners Mail Bag Programme is Broadcast by the Transmitter Engineering staff on Sundays only at 6.00 p.m. and 10 p.m. A.S.T. or 2200 and 0200 G.M.T. -

CHNX



Thank You!

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE MARITIME BROAD-CASTING COMPANY ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THANKS, YOUR REPORT OF RECEPTION AND WOULD BE PLEASED TO HEAR FROM YOU AT ANY TIME.

500 WATTS

CHNX operates as follows: Daily except Saturday and Sunday. 8 a.m. to 12.15 a.m. A.S.T. 12 noon to 04.15 G.M.T. Saturdays: 9 a.m. to 12.00 midnight A.S.T 13.00 to 04.00 G.M.T. Sundays: 1.00 p.m. to 12.15 a.m. A.S.T.

1700 to 04.15 G.M.T.

Managing Director

Located In The Centre Of The Radio Population Of The Maritime Provinces Of Canada

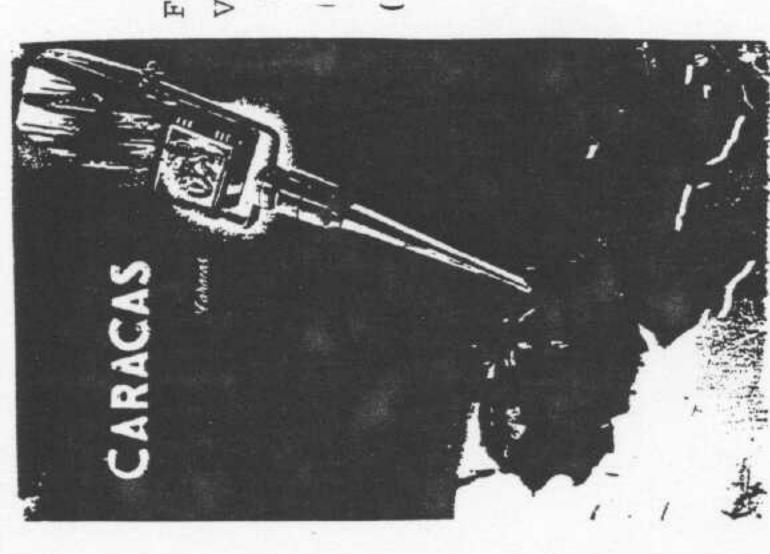
A famous and well-received Canadian broadcaster -STILL on this frequency, over half a century later! Was formerly VE9HX.



A long standing consistent signal in Britain, the Lisbon station remained an independent source of entertainment, devoid of propaganda, as the country maintained a neutral status during the war.

The famous pre-war rotating antenna system of the famous Dutch stations PCJ - PHI which carried the famous Happy Station programme with Eddy Startz.





VENEZUELANS: and "twins" 60 meter YV5RU YV5RN TWO AMOUS H



the but around country heard rare well Villarica"was Q MON War Ø THEN the of "Estacion Paraguay outbreak

dial

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visitor

frequent

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Was

VP3BG

in England



Su onda amiga que le liega dei corazón de Sud América



FRIEDMANN HOSS. 11721 Kers - 25,50 ", metros ESTACIÓN

especialmente

Agradecemos muy

T.B. Tilliamson

Senor

communi-

a un

brillante colaborador de esta obra y un excelente amigo de n/. casa, apro-vechamos esta oportunidad para reite-rarnos sus attos amigos y Ss. Ss. Ss. la gentileza que ha tenido al comun carnos sus impresiones referentes nuestra transmisiones. En la seguridad de tener en Vd. a u DEEL SP.

Z. P. 14 RADIO CULTURA

FRIEDMANN HODS.

Dirección Postal: Estación Villarrica (Paraguay)

"t... Tor which we thank you, BRITISH GULANA, S.A. Cómpany, Ltd.,

5.00 - 8.00 s,m. dally, C. 1008.

WAVE LENGTH:

TELEPHONE:

This verifies your report of our Broadcast of

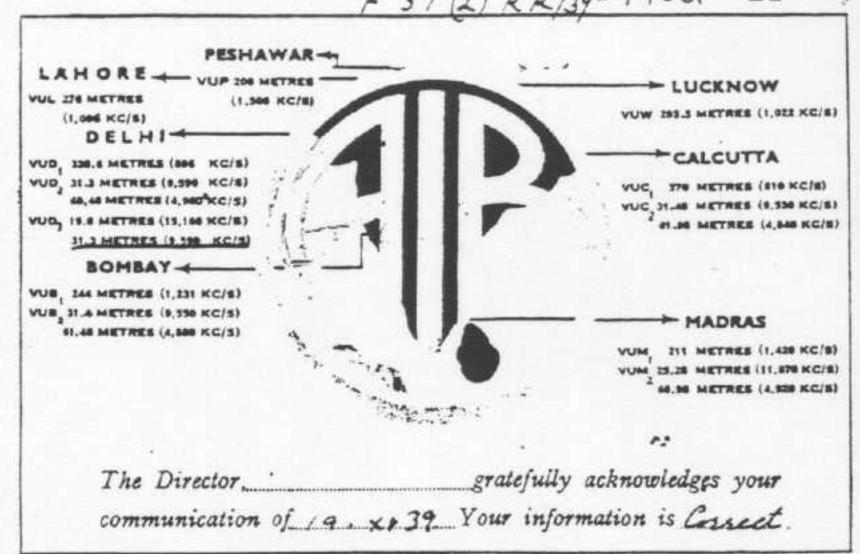
The B.G. United Broadcasting

GEORGETOWN,

P.O. BOK 11.

F 51 (2) RR/39-14861 12

ALL INDIA RADIO, Delhi, was a rare visitor to the dial!



LOS MEJORES PROGRAMAS CON EL MAYOR AUDITORIO



POR SU EFICIENCIA ES LA PREFERIDA DEL ANUNCIANTE



The Voice of the

Camagueyan
shortwave COJK, was one

of the "bunch" of Cubans

operating in the 8 - 9 mh;

region of the 31 meter

band.

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION VLR 8/12/39.

Dear Sr. Martene

Yours faithfully,

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION

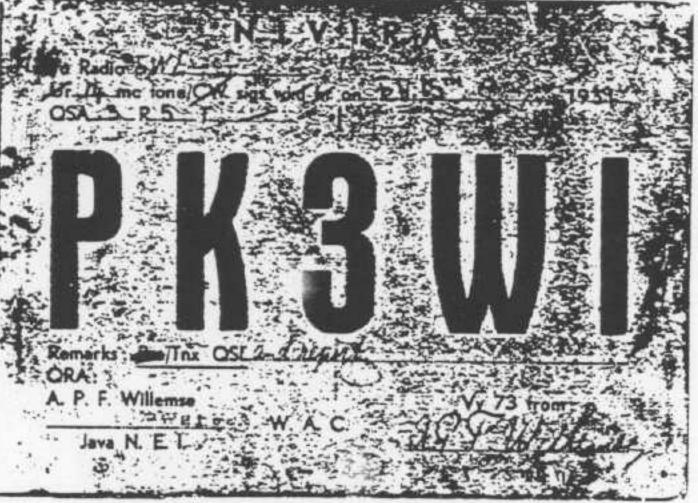
SHORT WAVE SECTION

Melbourne - a rare thrill in those days!

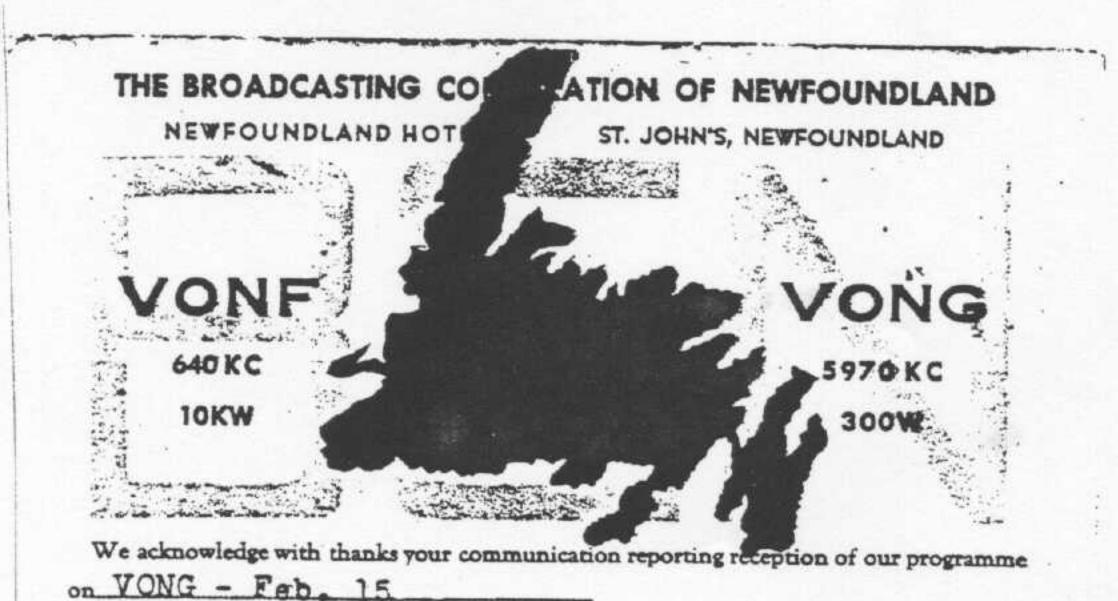
Some unfamiliar callsigns were heard on the ham bands! PK3WI of the Dutch East Indies (Java) - now Indonesia.



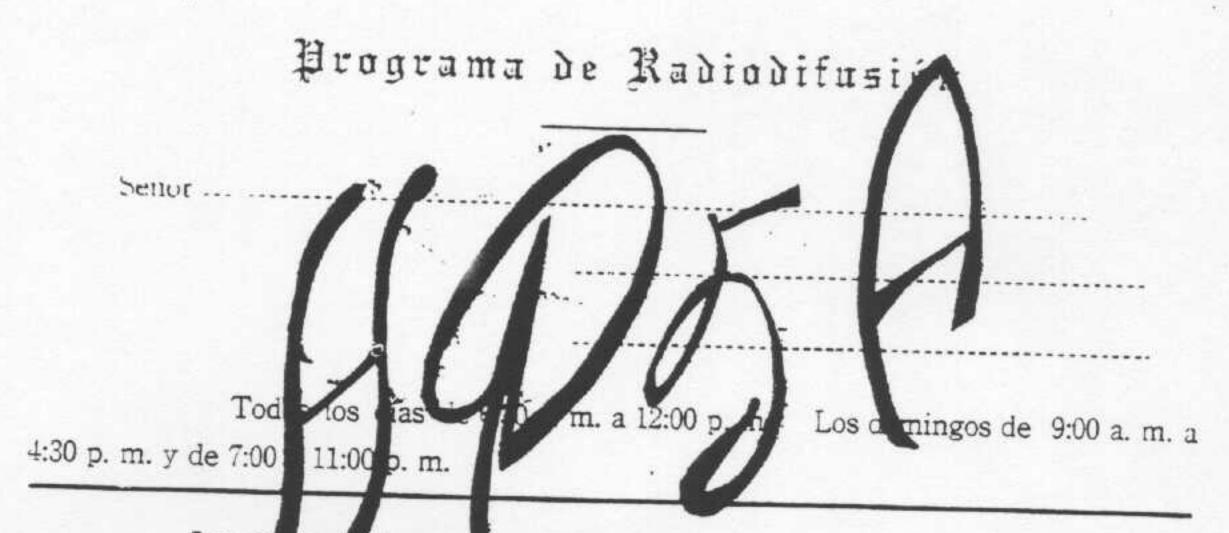
The Voice of the Dominican Party was a regular signal.



A separate country!Newfoundland did not join Canada until 1949! CBC stations now serve this Province.



VONF and VONG broadcast daily (excluding Sunday) 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. to m.00 p.m. NFLD. time. Special transmissions other than these will be announced at sign periods.



Para ny ros talles escrita a RADIO-TEATRO S. A. --- Apartado Número 954
PANAMA, REPUBLICA DE PANAMA

RADIO TEATRO, station of the Star & Herald newspaper in Panama City used to provide superb Latin music to it's listeners, and was one of my favoutite listening targets!



Unfortunately no longer on the air, the diminutive R.M. was well heard with some nice musical programming. It issued one of the most attractive QSL cards ever seen!

voice and no longer in the Pyrenees Spanish famous radio is with it programming ivities(!), and it's audience; sadly Principality musical Andorra - a tiny little country, a wide act "Aqui Radio Andorra!". Bright Ø French announcers gave it best known for smuggling on shortwave.

