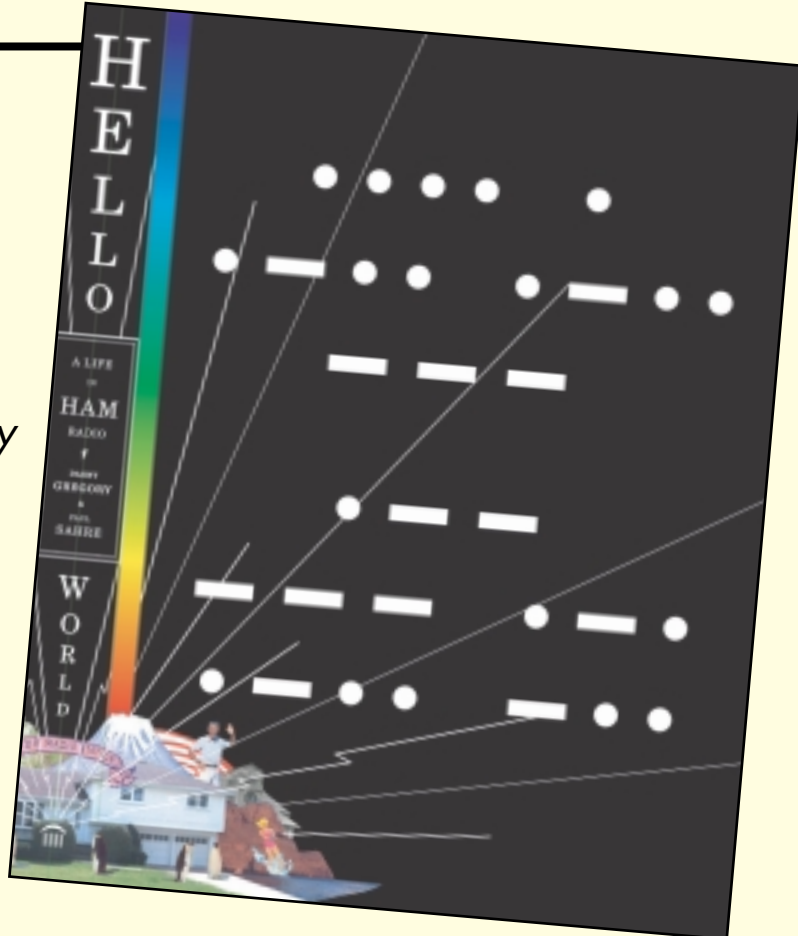


The new book, "Hello, World: A Life in Ham Radio," about a collection of QSL cards and the stories they tell, is quickly becoming one of the most heavily promoted ham radio books ever among the general public. CQ author Bob Hopkins, WB2UDC, helped the authors get to understand ham radio. Here's Bob's "story behind the story."



Hello World

A Story Behind A Story

BY BOB HOPKINS,* WB2UDC

Admit it: Most people who get to know me quickly discover my involvement in ham radio. Thus, it was not surprising that after a business meeting about a year ago, a colleague approached me and asked if I would meet with his two friends. They were working on a book about ham radio postcards. Sure I was interested!

Danny Gregory and Paul Sahre met with me, and we began a dialog that continues today. Danny is a writer and collector, and Paul is involved in education and design. Danny, the collector, had purchased this box of "ham radio cards" at a flea market in Lower Manhattan. The QSL collection was from the shack of Jerry Powell, W2OJW, now a Silent Key. It consists of over three-hundred pieces, covering the time from July 28, 1928, when Jerry, then licensed as

W9DOG, worked 5GF in Shawnee, Oklahoma (see photo A), to October 18, 1995, when Jerry worked 9U/F5FHI in Burundi on 15 meters.

As Danny and Paul soon discovered, the collection chronicles "a life in ham radio." In our many meetings and conversations I tried to translate the "ham lingo" of the cards into language they might understand. Early on in our friendship I even managed to share the QSO experience with them, when from my office in Manhattan we worked Bob, N4UPX/5, mobile on the banks of the Mississippi. Perhaps this experience convinced them that the QSLs indeed had a story. They proceeded to research the story, and they presented it brilliantly in their book, with words by Danny and graphic design by Paul.

There are many ham books out there, and in the research phase of the book Danny and Paul seem to have collect-

ed most of them. However, while most books on amateur radio address how to get your license, how to fix or build equipment, or how to string antennas, *Hello World* is that rare piece that dwells on the human aspect of the hobby. The book has a time line at the bottom of each page. Above the time line are reproductions of the cards issued in that era. Many of the cards are accompanied by short commentaries about the hams who issued them, or perhaps by a bit of history about the QTH of the station. The time line also notes historical events for reference: It seems Jerry often sought out contacts in areas where big events were happening.

Part of the fun of this book is the fact that you do not have to start at the beginning and read to the end; rather, you can navigate through in different ways using the aids provided by the authors. The inside back cover folds open to dis-

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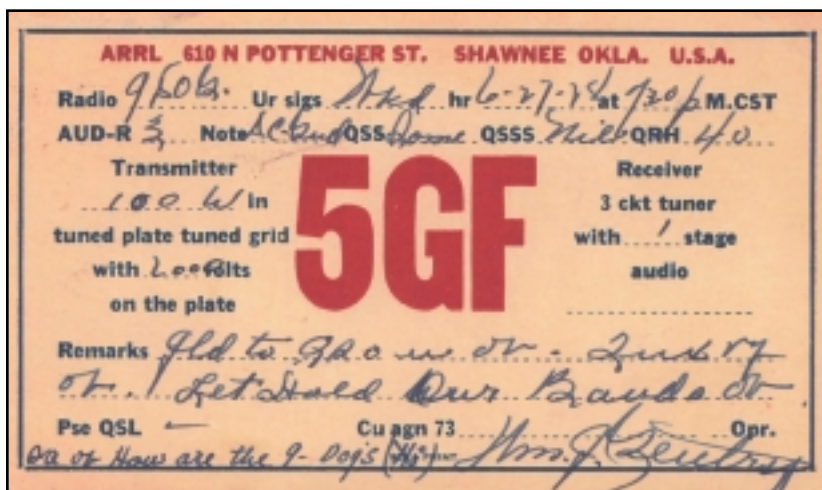


Photo A— The first QSL in the book, dated 1928, is from 5GF in Oklahoma to 9DOG, Jerry Powell's original call. (Photos from the book, via WB2UDC)



Photo B— A world map showing locations of contacts by image number helps readers navigate to specific stories in the book.

play an index of all the cards. This index gives a cross reference of the three-digit card number, the call, the date of the QSO, the name of the location, the operator's name, and where the QTH falls on the "Radio Activity" map (photo B) that folds out from the middle of the book. This world map marks each QTH corresponding to the three-digit numbered QSL. The authors used this numbering scheme to cross reference the whole shooting match. One can look at a part of the world and find the corresponding card. The map further indicates the decade of the contact.

In looking at the earlier cards, it becomes clear that Jerry was originally pretty much a CW op (who wasn't in those early days?), but after 1940 or so most of his contacts were on voice. Several contacts occurred on 11 meters before that band was designated to the Citizen's Radio Service. Most early QSLs listed the transmitter by stating the vacuum-tube type of the driver and PA stages. (And I always thought 807s meant bottles of beer!) Jerry worked a number of GIs on duty in the Pacific and elsewhere.

This book is not just for hams. On a recent commute from New York City to Metuchen, New Jersey, I showed the book to my friend Sue McCoy. She immediately noticed the graphical presentation of Morse Code on the front cover and proceeded to decode "hello world" from the dots and dashes. It turns out that her grandmother is WA1JYO, and she taught Sue the code as a child. Therefore, Sue, although not completely new to hamdom, found the book quite appealing. We looked at the map and Sue picked #335, a contact location marked on the continent of Antarctica. We flipped through the book to find that QSL #335 is on page 227 and belongs to VKØKC, worked by Jerry on March 4, 1991 at 1243 UTC on 20 meters. VKØKC's QSL (photo C) is beautiful. It shows a flat plain of snow with penguins everywhere. Amongst the crowd of penguins stand two humans, and behind them is a mountain of snow! I can just imagine it now, sitting at the rig, tuning around 20 meters, and hearing the rare DX station. I recall saying, "No, Sue, I've never worked Antarctica. It's not all that easy, but I'd love to"—especially after turning the page and reading the following commentary:

335 – VKØKC

Antarctica doesn't belong to anyone, but about a dozen countries have territorial claims and have established about 40 bases

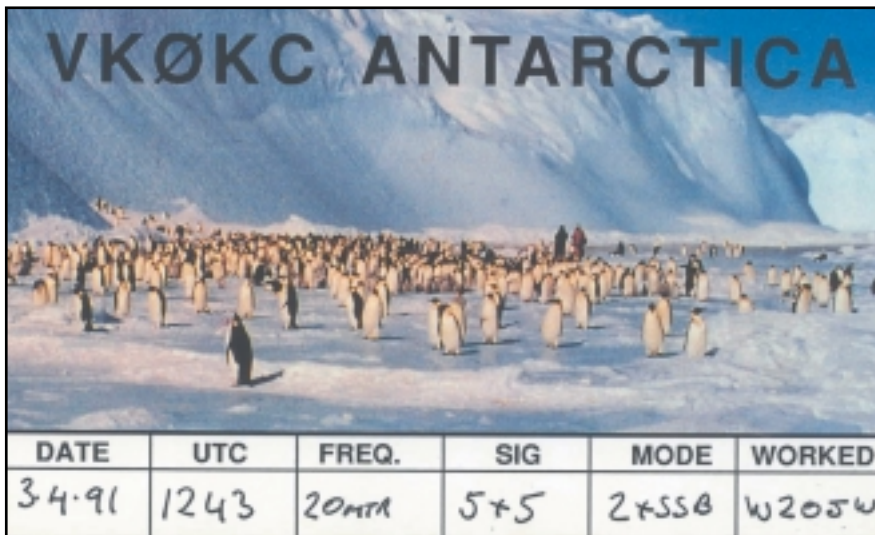


Photo C—VKØKC's QSL card from Antarctica proved to be a QSO starter (off the air) for WB2UDC as much as it must have been for W20JW.

on the continent. There is complete collaboration between the different scientific research stations. The distinguishing factor is that each station adheres to the time zone of its home country, so visitors to other bases can go through abrupt jet lag.

Life in an Antarctica station is tough and lonely. Studies show that after a year staff show similar symptoms to returning POWs. The annals of the frozen continent are replete with stories of people going stir crazy, getting blitzed on home-brew, and attacking each other with various implements. On an Argentine expedition, a doctor, anxious to be shipped home, burnt down his own base. A chess game led one Soviet scientist to axe another. When people freak out, they have to be sequestered in padded cells for months until they can be evacuated after the thaw.

Not all of the nuttiness is pathological. Members of the 300 Club have to jump naked out of a 200-degree (Fahrenheit) sauna and run outside and around the marker for the South Pole, where it's generally 100 degrees below. Members of the Varda Swimming club have broken through the ice of Lake Varda and plunged in, stark naked. (228)

Sue was hooked. She has already hit Amazon.com for the book to give to her grandmother. The book is full of stories just like the one behind QSL #335.

I remain hooked. The fact that the two authors had only a modest knowledge of ham radio when they embarked on this project really fascinated me. I would get a couple of calls a week from them, asking for some sort of interpretation or just to chat about another of their discoveries about our hobby. The Q signals, the phonetic alphabet, and the overall cheerfulness conveyed via the QSLs must have been some of the com-

elling aspects to the authors. I also know that when the authors contacted other hams, they almost always got a welcoming and positive response.

Also included in this book are little bits of ham lore, such as the often-debated "theological question," "Why is a ham called a ham?" or "Has the internet replaced the need for ham radio?" Discussion of these and other pressing issues can be found in this rich text. It touches upon the scientific aspects of radio as well as on the service part. The work done by the heroic hams of September 11th and beyond is presented quite well.

I know that Jerry Powell had made many friends over his 70-plus years as a ham—many more than even the QSLs represent. It is also apparent as you navigate the book that Jerry valued the public-service aspect of our hobby, especially with his involvement in the local QCWA chapter and other clubs in his area. On page 102 there is an image of a newspaper clipping from the *Town News* dated December 29, 1982 and entitled "Elmer of the Year award is Presented." Jerry Powell was honored by the QCWA as the Elmer of the Year. We all know what an Elmer is, and the value of mentoring in all aspects of life. Although W20JW's key is now silent, he seems to continue his "elmering" ways, for Danny is now KC2KGT and Paul is KC2KHN. They can be found on the New York repeaters. There also seems to be some competition as to who passes their General Class first. They both are anxious to build their own personal QSL collections.

I enjoyed having a small part in this work as well as being the "on-site Elmer." After reading the final result, I feel that this book presents the hobby in a very attractive and positive light. This is a story about W20JW and two authors' journeys of discovery into our dynamic hobby. Give the book a look. The artwork is beautiful and the stories are fun. If, by chance, someone asks you what ham radio is about, this book will surely open the door. It did for KC2KGT and KC2KHN. ■

A Personal Connection

One more story that's not in the book: When Bob first told me about this book and his involvement with it, I experienced yet another "Ham Radio Moment" (see my Dec. 2002 editorial). I knew W20JW ... talked to him on 2 meters on morning walks when I was accompanied by my HT instead of my wife. He was quite on in years and a bit forgetful by the time we met, but he always recognized "W-2-VOLume-Units in Bloomfield" when I got on the air. I never met Jerry in person, but he kept me company on many a walk, and I was saddened when I heard he'd become a Silent Key. I'm very pleased that, through this book, and with the help of Danny Gregory, Paul Sahre and a box full of QSL cards, Jerry lives on. — W2VU