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Page 1

War silenced amateur radio operators

By JOHN ENIGL

Leave it to Craig Jones at the Door County Library to find something for you when you're doing historical research.

An item from the Milwaukee Journal he showed me from Dec. 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was headlined, "Amateur Radio Sets Silenced."

"The Federal Communications Commission Sunday night prohibited all amateur radio operation in the United States and its possessions except for stations specifically authorized by federal, state and municipal authorities in connection with emergency matters," the paper reported.

Did we have any radio amateurs in Door County back in 1941, practicing the only hobby licensed by the federal government? We certainly did, although the Door County Amateur Radio Club wasn't formed until 1950. At least three of those Door County amateur radio operators are still active in the hobby; two of them, George Gabert, and Clayton Cardy, live here year 'round and Les Olson spends his summers here and his winters in California.

Les and Clayton resumed their almost every day communications by amateur radio after World War II and still continue to communicate today.

Peter Javurek moved here from Chicago after being highly trained in electronics. He was on the air up here before World War II also, but his skills in electronics were so much in demand after Pearl Harbor by the shipyards he hardly had time for the hobby anyway.

What did these people whose hobby was communicating by radio do when they were told they couldn't talk to each other over the air? They told about that in a recent interview.

George Gabert had gotten interested in electronics and communication back when he attended Sturgeon Bay High School in the early 1920s. He passed his first license exam back in 1923 and received the call sign 9JM. In the early 1930s, as the number of radio amateurs became greater, his call was changed to W9JM. The country had been broken down into 10 regions for call sign assignment and FCC control.

George started with the old spark-gap code communication by radio that is now prohibited by law because it causes too much interference and covers up communications on other bands. He even transmitted with a Model T Ford spark coil in the early days. He built some of the first vacuum tube receivers and transmitters. He says that most of the pre-World War II transmitting and some of the receiving equipment was hand-built, not factory bought.

George had gotten well entrenched in the hobby by the time Pearl Harbor was attacked. Back before the Anschluss, when



GEORGE GABERT

Germany gobbled up Austria in 1938, George had a QSO (talked to) Anton Hapsburg, a member of the family that once ruled Austria, whose call sign was, and still is, OE3AH. Anton is still listed in the foreign amateur radio call book; he survived the Nazis who tried to oppress Austria.

On New Year's Day of 1937, W9JM provided the only communications out of Door County by amateur radio when an ice storm descended on the area and took down the telephone lines and electric power poles.

So George was well-entrenched in the hobby when the FCC, on the afternoon of Dec. 7, 1941, ordered all radio amateurs to cease operation for the duration of the war.

What did George do for a hobby then?

George chuckles when you ask him that question.

"That's when I learned how to work with a lathe," he says. Since then, George has been able to make much of his own equipment and parts for them when needed. During World War II, he had to put aside his carpentry profession and work in Sturgeon Bay Shipbuilding and Drydock, because many of the materials to build homes were in short supply or not available.

After World War II, George went back to the hobby he left 50 years ago on Dec. 7, 1941. In 1951, he became the first radio amateur in the country to work all states from his automobile.

Clayton Cardy, W90V0, became a radio amateur in 1933, about the same time as his buddy, Les Olson, whose father owned what is now called the Pioneer Store at Ellison Bay. Les married Yvonne Bevry from Evergreen (she's now radio amateur N60PG, and only the second Door County native woman to earn a radio amateur license.)

When Les and Yvonne moved away, Clayton communicated with

Les by amateur radio for years before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was living up on Spruce Street next to the lot where he later built his home and had already married Leona Anschutz when the Japanese attacked.

Clayton still has the log book in which amateurs in those days had to record the times they went on the air.

"At 11:10 a.m. (on Dec. 7, 1941) I worked W8UXQ in Akron, OH; the guy's name was Warren. I pulled the switch at 11:22."

At 12:55 our time, 7:55 a.m. Hawaii time, the Japanese struck and the next time Clayton turned on the radio, the FCC was issuing bulletins for everyone to get off the air and stay off.

During the war, Clayton was kept busy with putting up the apartments for the shipyard workers and other work such as being an electrician in a shipyard, but what did he do then for a hobby? He studied up on the subjects, such as mathematics, that he hadn't had time to advance himself in before. And he could listen to foreign broadcasts such as those from Tokyo Rose.

The amateur bands were pretty well taken up by the military services and some of that equipment was used after the war by radio amateurs. Much of it either had to be improved so it didn't interfere with television later on, or it was discarded.

Amateur operation continued in some countries not involved in the war, but radio amateurs in the major countries had all been silenced.

Most radio amateurs in all countries were pressed into either teaching electronics or operation radio equipment in combat.

One Door County man, Colonel Gillespie, became head of all the training for electronics for the U.S. Army. He was a brother-in-law of Art and Laura Bertschinger.

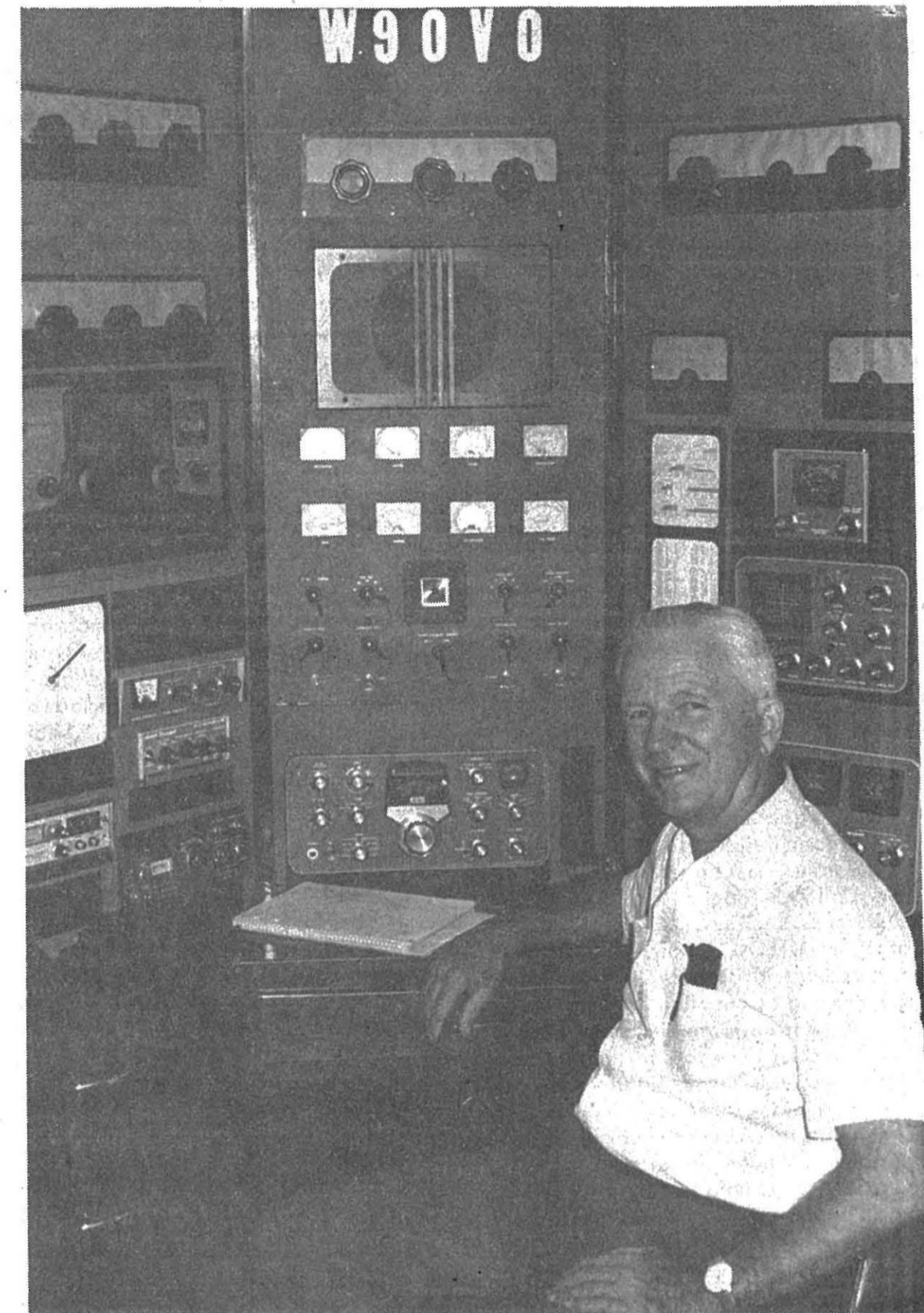
Clayton got back into amateur radio as soon as the war was over, and now with largely factory-made equipment when it became available.

Now, Clayton's gone into all the most modern equipment and modes; single sideband; two meter f.m. and the computer. He uses the computer to communicate on packet radio, in which messages are typed on a keyboard, put on a bulletin board and stored for the recipient to bring up on a computer and print out.

What does he think about the government ordering the radio amateurs to stop their hobby? Clayton explains that the radio amateur really doesn't have a right to the airwaves anyway. It's a privilege granted by the federal government.

However, with all the modern means of communications and frequencies available to the government and emergency agencies today, he doesn't think it will ever happen again that radio amateurs will be ordered to cease operations.

The only case might be if the government would suspect the amateur equipment could be used for espionage purposes. There is a story that surfaces every once in a while that there was a clandestine radio station in Door County that was sending messages to the enemy during World War II. Also, some German spies were caught up on Holy Hill near Milwaukee as they were sending messages by radio to Germany during World War II. However,



Since this photo was taken, Clayton Cardy has added new equipment.

very few radio amateur were ever found to be involved in such activities.

The 75 some radio amateurs of the Door County Amateur Radio

Club today, since many members have mobile and portable equipment, could furnish communications with the rest of the world if there were a disaster.