Sidebands

The Newsletter of the EAST GREENBUSH AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

W2EGB

www.egara.org

February 2026

EGARA Receives Large Equipment Donation from Estate

A large amount of Amateur Radio equipment, electronics and other related items has been donated to EGARA by the estate of Thomas J. Mickel of East Greenbush. The donation was arranged through Coldwell Banker real estate agent Alan Bynum and the law office of attorney Edward Gorman, who are handling the estate.

Bynum reached out to EGARA board member Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, after realizing that Mickel's home contained a large amount of radio equipment. Bynum said he decided to contact the club after doing a quick Internet search for a local Amateur Radio club and discovered EGARA's website and Jackson's contact information. After coordinating with the estate's attorney, it was agreed that EGARA would provide an inventory list and acknowledge the donation as an IRS approved 501c3 non-profit.

Don and Walt carry two of the many boxes filled with radios and other electronic equipment donated to the club.

Jackson, along with EGARA members Don Mayotte, KB2CDX and Walt Snyder, N2WJR, met with Bynum on January 29th to pick up the equipment and do a preliminary assessment of the donation. Among the many items were Icom, Yaesu, Kenwood, alinco and Wouxon radios and accessories. There were also dozens of other items including batteries, chargers, and inkjet printers -- many of which were unopened in their original boxes. Documentation found with some of the items indicated that Mickel had a communications business.

EGARA will use the donated equipment to help support the educational and public service activities of the club.

In This Issue

FCC Updates Congress on Pirate Crackdown

The FCC imposed six financial penalties against alleged radio pirate operators last year. It also issued 10 notices of apparent liability that may turn into fines, and it entered into three consent decree agreements with pirate operators.

The biggest penalty was a fine issued last June against Fabrice Polynice for approximately $2.4 million for pirate radio broadcasting in North Miami, Fla.

The commission called him one of the most egregious offenders and said he operated "Radio Touche Douce" since at least 2012. Also on the list was a fine against Masner Beauplan for $920,000 issued in September for activity in the New York City area.

Other fines or settlements ranged from $6,000 to $325,000. The current maximum fines are about $120,000 per day and $2.5 million total.

Membership Meeting - February 12, 2026 @ 7 pm

Winter Field Day Brings Members Together to Practice Emergency Communications

Despite freezing temperatures and a pending snow storm, a hearty group of EGARA members turned out on Saturday, January 24th to participate in Winter Field Day at the Rensselaer County Search and Rescue Building.

The annual event began with a delicious breakfast of pancakes, eggs, sausage, English muffins and beverages provided by the club at no charge. Once again, club member and master chef Chris D'Allaird, AK2CD, staffed the kitchen and served up the perfectly prepared meal.

Master Chef Chris D'Allaird, AK2CD turned out a delicious breakfast to kick off the club's 2026 Winter Field Day.

Winter Field Day saw the club running two HF stations, although band conditions varied and contacts were sometimes a challenge. With severe weather impacting much of the nation's southern region, it seemed that this year's WFD activity might have been affected somewhat. One contact in Dallas reported that temperatures had plummeted to just 16 degrees. Most contacts were made with stations operating in the Northeast, although stations in Michigan also offered a lot of activity and pile up with them were common.

Peggy Donnelly, KD2LMU, sips a cup of Java later classified as a Level 3 Haz Mat incident after Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, greatly overestimated the amount of coffee to use.

The club ran its two Yaesu 450-D transceivers, with one driving a dipole and the other running into a portable vertical. At one point the rig running into the vertical refused to make any contacts. A quick check revealed that a strong gust of winter wind had toppled it to the ground.

EGARA was fortunate that it was able to operate despite the cold and predicted storm thanks to its ongoing partnership with Rensselaer County Search and Rescue. The Albany Amateur Radio Club was forced to cancel its Winter Field Day after the public park it planned to operate from decided to pull its use permit because of the predicted storm.

Left: Don Mayotte, KB2CDX, Andy Sullivan, KC2WWJ, and Russ Greenman, WB2LXC operate one of EGARA's stations during Winter Field Day.

Right: Jim Pendolino, KC2HRO, tunes up the dipole used on the club's second HF station.

Got a Tidradio H3?
Unlock New Features with Nicsure Firmware

If you have one of Tidradio's populars H3 HT radios -- and you're one who's always wondering what else your radio can do -- you may want to explore customer firmware created by Nicsure.

The guy behind the mods is Marcus Dudley, a developer known for creating custom, third-party firmware, software, and modifications for handheld Amateur radios. He has a particular focus on the TIDRADIO H3 and H8 models. His work, often branded as nicFW (NicSure firmware), provides enhanced features, interface changes, and improved functionality over stock radio firmware.

Of course, modifying the firmware on your radio is not without risks and not understanding what's involved can "brick" your H3. However, there's lots of support online to guide you and to offer step-by-step instructions.

That said, you might ask what's the benefit of trying the Nicsure firmware in the first place?

Once installed, users of these handheld radios will get extras like an improved S-meter and detection and display of CTCSS tones for repeater usage. There's also a programmer available that allows the radio's memory channels to be programmed easily from a computer and a remote terminal of sorts that allows the radio to be operated from the computer. However, be aware that programming an H3 using Odmaster (Tidradios's bluetooth interface) or CHIRP isn't possible with the Nicsure firmware installed.

Many users feel the user interface is much more attractive and more logical to use. Plus, if you want to use the radio for scanning, the scanning implementation in nicFW is unbelievably good, and about 200 times faster in terms of channels scanned / second than the stock FW.

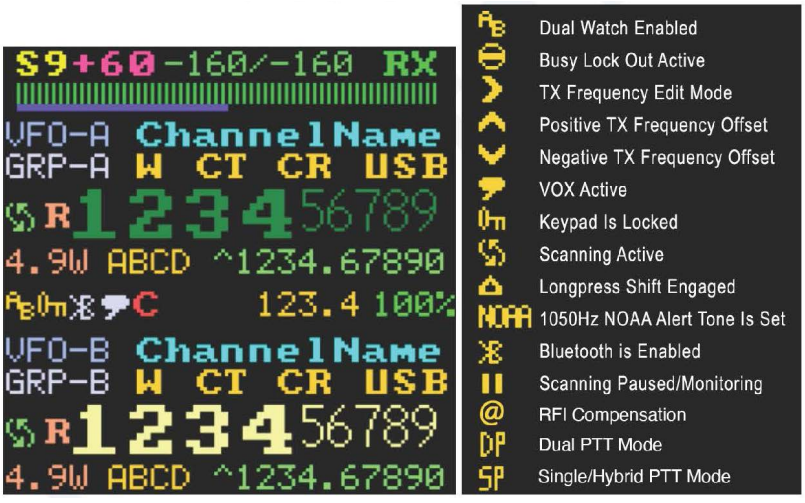
Some also believe The Nicsure windows app for managing and programming the radio is also much better than Odmaster or CHIRP.

You also have the addition of an activity scanner when the radio is connected to a PC. Starting an activity scan on a defined range of frequencies, it will then create a heat map of activity over time showing you which frequencies are most active.

The Windows application can also connect to the radio via Bluetooth and then use the app as a remote control to control the radio.

Fortunately, as previously mentioned, there is lots of information and support available. Dudley even hosts his own support page on Facebook at: ***https://www.facebook.com/groups/456942886822492/*** and he regularly answers inquiries about the firmware and issues that users may have.

The custom Nicsure firmware can be found here: ***https://www.patreon.com/nicsure***.



The graphic shows the many pieces of information that can be displayed after installing the Nicsure firmware.

Note: Not all of these items are available for display at the same time. This is simply a guide to what the various icons represent.

EGARA January Meeting Minutes

- The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.
- Introductions were made by all members (9) and guests (2) present.
- Pizza and beverages were served and a fund raiser raffle was held to generate revenue for the club.
- President Patrick Negus, W2PMN, noted that dues could be paid for the 2026 membership year. Negus also noted that the Estate Sale for Bill Hickey was still underway, with around 15 pieces to be listed and that EGARA members would be given first opportunity to purchase gear.
- Vice President's Report: Walt Snyder, N2WJR, noted that a VHF/UHF radio was added to the club station, and that member Don Mayotte, KB2CDX installed a DMR hotspot for operations.
- Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Peter Brickman, KD2YLG provided an update on the club's bank account and that three (3) custom-made EGARA jackets donated by club member Joe Ostering, N2CJF, were sold for $20/jacket.
- Board of Directors Report: · Board member Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ noted that he spoke at the EGB Methodist Church on Tuesday about Amateur Radio and invited the members to attend meetings and Winter Field Day.
- Jackson announced that the club purchased full logging software from N3FJP, and that all programs were included and installed on the station computer.
- Jackson thanked member Walt Snyder, N2WJR for cleaning the SAR Building the previous week.
- Jackson announced that the refrigerator from Feiden's that recently died had been replaced at no charge with a brand new one and was delivered on December 30th with a tax donation letter included.
- Jackson noted that the Christmas Party at the Schodack Diner had excellent turnout, and the club was considering returning there in 2026. He also suggested the club consider hosting a Santa Net at the EGB Library from 6 to 8 pm several nights before Christmas allowing children to talk with Santa via Amateur Radio.
- Jackson announced that Winter Field Day would be January 24-25, 2026 and that the club would host a breakfast at 9:30 am before the event at SAR on Saturday with two (2) operating stations to follow.
- Member Updates: there were no member updates given.
- Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, also passed around a hand-held SWR/Power analyzer for everyone to see, the Surecom Model SW-33PLUS. He recommended it asa low cost way to check radios for power output and
- The meeting concluded at 7:45 PM.

-- Minutes recorded by Secretary, David Jaeger, K2DEJ

Supercharged Ionosphere Delivers Rare Winter DX

A solar storm heated up the airwaves for North American long-distance signal hobbyists

By Nick Langan

For VHF radio and TV long-distance signal reception enthusiasts, or DXers, the wintertime doldrums are often real.

Cold temperatures and dry air masses often do not support tropospheric propagation. In the northern hemisphere, there is a winter E-Skip cycle, and there was some associated activity with it across North America earlier in January, but it's much less intense compared to the summer. Typically, by late January, chances for skip dry up.

From here on out, unless you live in a spot particularly hospitable for meteor scatter, it's possible you might not see another DXable opportunity until April or May. But for some DXers, the evening of Jan. 20 proved particularly special.

On that day, there was a strong geomagnetic storm — a class G4 Aurora event. While an Auroral event itself is known to produce "hashy" propagation on VHF frequencies, typically involving signals from the north, the exact impact on broadcast bands can be unpredictable.

Jim Thomas, now 70, has been DXing the band since he was 15. Today, he lives in Springfield, Mo., and is an avid FM and TV DXer and member of the Worldwide TV & FM DXing Association. He began the evening of the 20th with his antennas aimed north, seeking Auroral signals. He sought a beacon such as CITO(TV) in Timmins, Ontario, on 65.76 MHz. But Thomas found no indicators of Auroral propagation on his band.

Meanwhile, Bill Hepburn, located in southwestern Ontario, reported receiving low-VHF TV signals from the far distant south — counterintuitive to standard Auroral DX. First, Hepburn confirmed TV Venezuela signals on Channel 3, and then RCN Colombia signals on Channel 2 — both at distances over 2,200 miles. Later, he would receive signals from Nicaragua on Channels 2, 3 and 4.

He posted the logs to the WTFDA's WLogger propagation bulletin board. Based on the direction — south — and the style of signals observed, more stable than typical E-Skip, posters began to suspect it was F2-based propagation. Hepburn noted a similar event in 2001, the last time he observed F2 in the TV bands.

Here is how RCN from Colombia looked on TV Channel 2 in Akron, Ohio as a rare Ionosphere skip took place on January 20th

Thomas, meanwhile, was using SDR Console software to watch the band. At about 10:15 p.m. Central Time, he observed a weak carrier on the SDR's spectrum view on 65.75 MHz, the audio carrier for TV Channel 3. He listened with earbuds and could tell the audio was in Spanish. Soon after, he noted the same on Channels 2 and 4.

At first, Thomas suspected Cuba, which is a frequent E-Skip-based reception area. But checking Cubavision's schedule, it showed a drama, whereas Thomas was hearing opera-style music. Thomas recorded the audio and sent it to Raymie Humbert, a bilingual DXer considered an authority on DX from Mexico and Latin America. Humbert confirmed the identification of the RCN Colombia network.

"This is the first time I have ever experienced F2 TV DX," Thomas told us. "It was really strange to hear, but also exciting."

DXer Andrew Knafel (K8EL), near Akron, Ohio, also posted excellent clips to his X account of the signals he captured on his TV set.

What is F2, anyway?

How does a DXer aiming for Canada end up catching Colombia during a geomagnetic storm?

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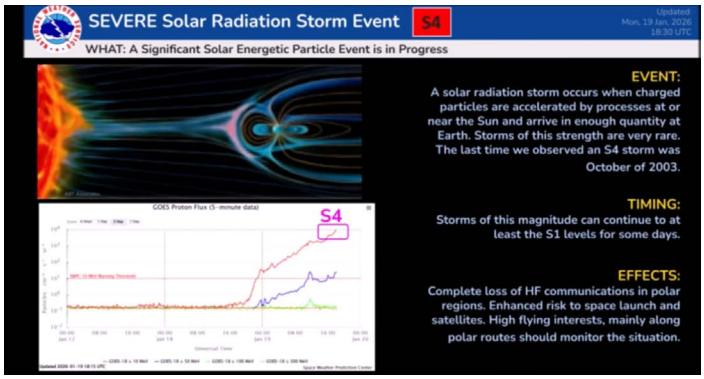
Rare Ionosphere Skip Brings DX Opportunities...



It's not 100% certain. It is not a given this was standard F2; it is still possible this was Auroral-influenced E-Skip set off by the geomagnetic storm. However, the stability and distance point toward F2.

First, a short primer on F2 reception. An article by J.R. Kennedy (K6MIO) describes F2 as the "holy grail" of VHF DXing. It relies on the ionosphere's highest layer to reflect signals over long distances. It is highly dependent on the solar cycle — and we are in a maximum right now. There is also a peculiarity in the F2 layer not found in the other layers, Kennedy notes, called the "winter anomaly."

"The central message in all of this is that, on average, F2 propagation between points on the same side of the equator will be much better in the local winter and near solar maximum," Kennedy wrote. Under normal conditions, Trans-Equatorial Propagation (TEP) allows signals to cross the equator. This is quite rare, particularly for DXers at Hepburn and Knafel's latitudes.

But some research, including a study by Elvira Astafyeva and five other authors presented at the American Geophysical Union Conference in 2024, indicates that during severe geomagnetic storms, such as the one on Jan. 20, a phenomenon called the "Super Fountain" occurs. The study describes it as an "uplift" of the crests that sit north and south of the magnetic equator, much farther poleward than usual.

Astafyeva linked the observations to a large coronal mass ejection that arrived at Earth on May 10, 2024.

"We note that, while the dayside ionospheric effects at low and mid-latitudes during the May 2024 storm are impressive, they yet seem to be more modest than that observed during the October 2003 geomagnetic superstorm," the authors wrote.

Incidentally, during that October 2003 event, according to the WTFDA VUD archives, two DXers in Texas and Louisiana tentatively had a program match to KHON(TV) in Honolulu, while DXer Mike Cherry in British Columbia confirmed KHON, the first time in then 35 years of DXing that Cherry had logged Honolulu outside of the summer E-Skip season.

South Korea in SoCal

One of the most prolific F2 DXers was the late Gordon Simkin. He penned multiple columns for the WTFDA's VHF/UHF Digest back in 2003 and 2004 regarding his experiences with F2 propagation in the 1950s.

Writing about his time as a research assistant at Loma Linda University in California in 1957, he recounted using a Heathkit FM-3A tuner with a converter to tune the 40–60 MHz band. South Korea was using the 42–48 MHz band for FM broadcasts in those days.

While recording a station, he captured an ID in English. "It was quite a delight to discover that I was receiving Seoul, South Korea!" Simkin wrote. He believed its call letters were HLKA, and it was around 45 MHz. This may be the most distant FM broadcast signal ever logged at approximately 5,000 miles.

He had several receptions of BBC audio from Loma Linda, reaching frequencies as high as 52.4 MHz in what he described as the "most extreme day for F2" he ever experienced — likely Nov. 20, 1959. Glenn Hauser wrote of this in his DX Listening Digest in 2002.

"Legendary DXer Gordon Simkin who lived in Loma Linda, Calif., managed to catch MUF as high as 53.75 MHz to the BBC in UK — rather phenomenal, as well as a French station operating with a video carrier frequency of 52.4 MHz (at that time)," Hauser wrote.

In general, the maximum usable frequency in F2 events is limited typically to about the six-meter amateur radio band (50–54 MHz), making the Channel 4 reports from Jan. 20 highly unusual.

Proposed Spending Bill Includes VOA Funding

It has bipartisan support and would run contrary to Trump's 2025 executive order

The U.S. Congress has reached a deal to fund the Voice of America, with lawmakers from both parties agreeing to provide approximately $653 million for its parent, the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

It seems to be a notable expression of congressional dissatisfaction with the direction of the administration's efforts to dismantle U.S. international broadcasting. But that doesn't mean the bill will become law. The funding package requires final House and Senate approval and then would head to the president's desk. But it includes language that reauthorizes the USAGM to "make and supervise grants for radio, Internet and television broadcasting."

The money is part of the broader spending bill known as the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act. The $653 million figure is down from approximately $860 million appropriated for the agency in each of the past two years, the Post reported, but it is more than four times the approximately $150 million President Trump requested that Congress provide to "support the orderly shutdown of USAGM operations."

In addition to VOA, funding would also be explicitly reestablished for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia. In essence this would reverse the March 2025 executive order that froze their budgets and terminated existing grant agreements.

USAGM Senior Advisor Kari Lake, who has spearheaded the administration's effort to shut down U.S. international broadcasting, issued a statement, according to The Desk: "While reductions from prior years are a step in the right direction, USAGM can still advance President Trump's message and share America's story globally without wasting so much taxpayer money."

Funding breakdown

The funding, according to a review of the conferenced agreement between the House and the Senate, is divided into two primary accounts:

- International Broadcasting Operations: $643 million for necessary expenses related to international communication activities, which includes VOA, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia. Of this total, $199.5 million is allocated specifically for VOA.

- Broadcasting Capital Improvements: $9.7 million for the purchase, rent, construction, repair and improvement of facilities and equipment. This includes radio, television and digital transmission and reception facilities worldwide.

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VOA Funding Sees Support in Congress...

Radio infrastructure and transmission

The bill contains specific language protecting shortwave and medium-wave terrestrial broadcast operations:

- Office of Cuba Broadcasting: The bill mandates that at least $30 million be made available for the OCB. It requires OCB's medium- and shortwave broadcasting be maintained at no less than the fiscal year 2024 level to ensure it can reach all provinces in Cuba.
- Capital Improvement Scope: Funds in the Capital Improvements account are earmarked for the installation of equipment for radio, television and digital transmission, including specific upgrades for broadcasting to Cuba.
- Congressional Oversight of Platform Changes: The USAGM must follow "regular notification procedures" of 15 days' notice before making significant modifications to broadcast hours or transmission platforms, including shortwave, medium wave, satellite, Internet and television.

Nonprofit media grantee funding

The bill provides specific allocations for USAGM's authorized grantees:

- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL): $112.5 million.
- Middle East Broadcasting Networks: $69 million.
- Radio Free Asia: $53.5 million.

Under the bill, the USAGM would be permitted to reprogram funds between these entities, but no individual grantee's funding would be allowed to be reduced by more than 10 percent without prior congressional notification.

Additionally, the USAGM CEO would be instructed to brief Congress quarterly until Sept. 30, 2027, about the status of transmissions, facilities and real property.

However, some Capitol Hill observers predict President Trump would likely issue a veto if it includes money earmarked for USAGM.

VOA: Back in Time

One of the Gates Radio Company's biggest projects was to supply the studio equipment for the Voice of America headquarters in Washington.

The contract was awarded in May 1954, and final delivery was completed by August of 1955. It included this custom-built audio console, 22 feet long and 6 feet high. It could switch any one of 100 inputs to 25 outputs. There were also dozens of consoles for the individual studios and 65 racks of supporting equipment.

It was all installed on the second floor of the Health Education and Welfare building on the National Mall.

In this 1967 image, VOA engineer James A. Boyd selects the programs to be sent to shortwave transmitters in North Carolina, Ohio, Florida and California.

On the Beam
News & Notes

Helderberg Repeater Site Gets Some TLC

EGARA members Walt Snyder, N2WJR, and Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, paid a visit to the club's repeater site on January 10th to check on the system and reset the video surveillance cameras that monitor the facility.

While at the site, they met up with Bob Isby, K2RHI, who had been hired to replace a burned out obstruction light on the tower located at WTEN's former analog transmitter site. Fortunately, it was a fairly mild day with light winds, making the job a little easier as Bob climbed up some 180 feet to access the defective bulb.

EGARA plans to relocate its repeater antenna to the tower when the weather turns warmer. The move is expected to greatly improve the repeater's coverage, which is now partially blocked by terrain at the Helderberg Mountain site.

Vandals Strike Amateur Radio Equipment Factory

A major act of vandalism has disrupted production and shipping at the Dishtronix / Ten Tec / Alpha RF Systems factory in Dayton, Ohio. According to company owner Mike Dishop, N8WFF, last month a group of vandals destroyed the factory's underground electrical infrastructure in order to steal copper cable.

"The thieves extracted approximately 2000 feet of half-inch copper cable weighing approximately 2800 pounds with an estimated salvage value of $12,000 and a replacement cost of over $35,000," " explained Dishop. Power was restored on January 14th, a month after the break-in, but explained that "(t)his interruption has impacted the timing for everything we had on schedule by at least three months due to loss of time and capital." He says the police investigation is ongoing.

In 2016, Dishtronix purchased the assets of Amateur Radio equipment manufacturer Ten Tec.

Listen to Your Uncle!

Sam knows your support of EGARA is what gives the club the resources it needs to keep its membership activities and services going.

So take a moment to send along your 2026 dues. It's fast, easy and secure: *www.EGARA.org/pay-dues*

The Morse Code of Resistance

Alan Higbie's Army enlistment was to avoid the infantry; Instead he communicated to a revolution

By Steven L. Herman

Editor's Note: Author Steve Herman (W7VOA) has been a licensed Amateur Radio operator for over 50 years and is a retired Voice of America correspondent.

To the average gamer, the "Hill" is a high-fidelity map in Call of Duty: Black Ops. But for Alanson "Alan" Higbie, the location outside Berlin, built on piles of wartime rubble, was a real-life cathedral of radomes and reel-to-reel tape decks. Teufelsberg was a key listening post for the U.S. intelligence community's fight against Communism.

During the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces, Higbie found himself on the Hill playing a bit part in Cold War history when frightened but courageous Czechs at the other end of Amateur Radio communications asked him to inform the outside world of their fate.

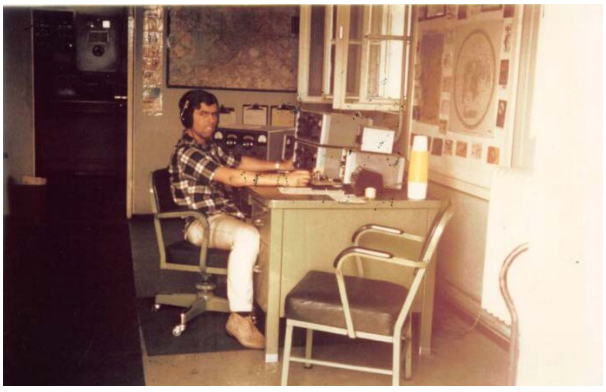
Higbie's date with destiny atop a German mountain of debris began with a childhood crystal radio set and an Amateur Radio license.

Enlisting in the Army

As a teen spending his time acquiring knowledge about electronics and radio communication, Higbie seemed destined for a career as an electronic engineer. But a learning plateau with the mathematics beyond basic physics derailed any such plan.

He took a pause from studies as a political science major at the University of Oregon, but that made him vulnerable for the military at the height of the Vietnam War. Higbie, in 1967, took a gamble and signed up for a four-year enlistment with the Army Security Agency, knowing it "would send you where they want you."

He figured, however, this increased the odds of going to language school or other non-combat component, while it lowered the odds of toting an M16 rifle in the jungles and risking ambush by the Viet Cong. Higbie asked for training in foreign languages, preferring Russian and Mandarin as "those would give me the best shot to get into language school."



An August 1970 photo of Alan Higbie, working the West Berlin, Germany MARS station.

And of course, "you don't get what you want." He got German. Not a bad consolation prize, remembers Higbie, who adds, "I've been very lucky in my life."

After basic training, he was sent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., for six months of intensive German courses. Higbie struggled in the military's language school with German. He was called in and told in no uncertain terms that if he flunked out he would not be able to stay in the elite, mostly non-combat cocoon of the Army Security Agency.

"I learned how to study literally at gunpoint and under the threat of death," says Higbie. "It was a big wake-up call. I still don't have much aptitude for language. But German is a very easy language for an American to learn."

Higbie, given orders for Germany with the junior enlisted rank of Specialist 5 — a grade equivalent in pay to a corporal — was initially unclear on what he would be doing there. "I didn't realize what the mission of the Army Security Agency really was," remembers Higbie. He quickly discovered that "we worked with the National Security Agency. They were our bosses. They were civilians on the site."

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The Morse Code of Resistance...

Teufelsberg mission

In 1967, Higbie took a gamble and signed up for a four-year enlistment with the Army Security Agency. He would head to Teufelsberg, Germany, which was atop a hill and ideal for radio communication.

Back then, the NSA was super-secret. Higbie's new post was Teufelsberg, a pile of rubble atop an unfinished Nazi technical college. Nearly 100 million cubic yards of Berlin rubble was hauled there after the Germans were defeated in the Second World War. That gave rise to a hill at an elevation of about 260 feet above a plateau, affording a spectacular view of Berlin. The Allies realized the artificial mountain was also an ideal spot for radio reception. The NSA, in 1963, moved in to snoop on the Warsaw Pact communications.

"It was a very, very productive site," according to Higbie. The Hill is immortalized in the 21st century in Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War as the video game's multiplayer Echelon map.

When Higbie discovered the site's mission, he was intrigued "because it was radios, and I loved working with and listening to radios."

Amateur beginnings

As a child, Higbie's parents had gifted him a crystal radio set kit. "I built it, and I could receive police calls and other things locally. I thought it was pretty cool and then started listening to shortwave – the Voice of America, HCJB — the high-power religious station in Ecuador — and Radio Moscow."

A friend of Higbie's parents in Cincinnati, Gordon Foote, a chemical engineer for Procter & Gamble, who had the Amateur Radio call sign of W8YKO, thought Higbie, then 13, should get a ham radio license. "He let me visit his station. We talked to somebody in South America." Higbie went home with a set of instructional Morse Code 78 rpm vinyl records.

The FCC's entry-level ham test, in addition to questions on basic regulations, operating procedures and electronic theory, required sending and receiving Morse Code at five words per minute. Higbie passed his Novice test and received the call sign KN8SQN. In that era, on the high, shortwave frequencies, Novice licensees could only operate continuous wave (CW) mode and use Morse Code.

After a family move to California and a license class upgrade, Higbie became WA6PMK and earned privileges to add a microphone to his ham station. But his love for Morse Code did not abate.

Eavesdropping

Higbie's assignment at Teufelsberg did not require Morse Code proficiency. He just needed to listen to German voices. Some were intercepted on microwave radio frequencies used to relay telephone calls, including the East German Communist Party novel telephone system.

A 1969 photo of Teufelsberg, with the radomes that concealed directional antennas.

After a civil uprising in 1953, during which the landlines were sabotaged, East German authorities decided that communications for the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands had to be destruction-proof and the microwave system was erected, with high towers in East Berlin and at its various district headquarters around East Germany. The system was line of sight and thought impervious to eavesdropping, but the NSA discovered it could intercept the side lobes of the electromagnetic waves.

"It was spotty, but sometimes the reception was really good. We had big antennas that were hidden under giant radomes so no one could see in which directions the receiving antennas were pointed," explains Higbie.

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The Morse Code of Resistance...

Although the ruling party officials in East Berlin were not supposed to use the telephones for secret communications, naturally, they did, allowing the intercepts by Higbie and his fellow soldiers to be pieced together to tell a bigger story. "In the Cold War, there was so much money available for fighting communism. This was a big, big effort. No piece of information seemed to be too small," recalls Higbie.

When Higbie returned to Germany after the Cold War was over and the Berlin Wall was down, he visited Stasi headquarters, which had been turned into a museum, and noticed the push buttons on the telephone on the desk of the secretary of Erich Mielke, the dreaded head of the Ministerium für Staatsicherheit. "I recognized the numbers," remembers Higbie.

Higbie also listened to soldiers in the field and border guards. Reports of flooding in East Germany, agricultural production … Higbie and the others recorded it on reel-to-reel tape decks and transcribed it for dispatch to the NSA.

One of the site's targets was the communications of the East German border guards. "We would hear them chasing a 'fox', as they called it. Then at some point you come to realize they are chasing real people who are trying to escape across the border to freedom in the West. Sometimes they'd catch the fox — sometimes they didn't. It's real. It's all fun and games until somebody gets their eye poked out." But, most of the time the intercepts were routine. On both sides of the Cold War there were a "lot of little people just plodding along," working around the clock.

Higbie's colleagues were linguists, with a few years of college who were qualified for the Army Security Agency, but not eligible to be officers as they had not graduated from university. While there was widespread disillusionment with President Richard Nixon and the war in Vietnam, for those with the U.S. Army Security Agency in Germany, who had volunteered in hopes of avoiding infantry duty in Southeast Asia, there was an esprit de corps.

Those at Teufelsberg took their job seriously, realizing they were on the front lines separating two alliances and ideologies, in a Cold War that if turned hot might result in leaders in Washington and Berlin authorizing the launch of nuclear weapons. "We were paying very close attention when the Warsaw Pact was conducting its exercises. It's a common cover for military aggression to begin as having an exercise," noted Higbie.

Extended duty

The situation was especially tense in 1968 after the first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček, initiated political liberalization, seeking to create "socialism to a human face." But the mass protests in Prague in favor of reform spooked the hardline generals in Moscow. On Aug. 20, several hundred thousand Soviet, Bulgarian, Hungarian and Polish troops invaded Czechoslovakia to crush the newfound freedoms.

East German troops were pulled out of the invasion force at the last minute to avoid comparisons to the Nazis rolling into Czech territory in 1939. Despite that, the Americans atop Teufelsberg were very busy. To increase available manpower, instead of working eight-hour shifts, they were now at their listening posts for 12 hours on and 12 hours off.

Higbie had a routine that when he was off the clock, he would volunteer to run phone patches on the site's Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) shortwave station. The phone patches – a telephone/radio relay system – allowed soldiers, sailors and airmen to talk for free with their spouses or parents across the Atlantic Ocean. The radio signals would be bounced off the ionosphere. It was low-fidelity and not duplex — one would have to say "over" for the radio operators on both ends to switch from transmit to receive or vice versa. This was an era well before cell phones and the Internet. A few minutes of trans-Atlantic talking through telephones would have cost approximately $12 for a few minutes of conversation – that's equivalent to $100 in today's money.

"It wasn't my job, but I would help the Signal Corps guys that were assigned to that. By running some phone patches, I could also operate the station on amateur frequencies using my German Amateur Radio call sign, DL4QQ," Higbie said.

That is, in addition to volunteering to help with the morale-boosting MARS operation, Higbie had access to the elaborate HF radio gear solely for his Amateur Radio hobby, his way of relaxing.

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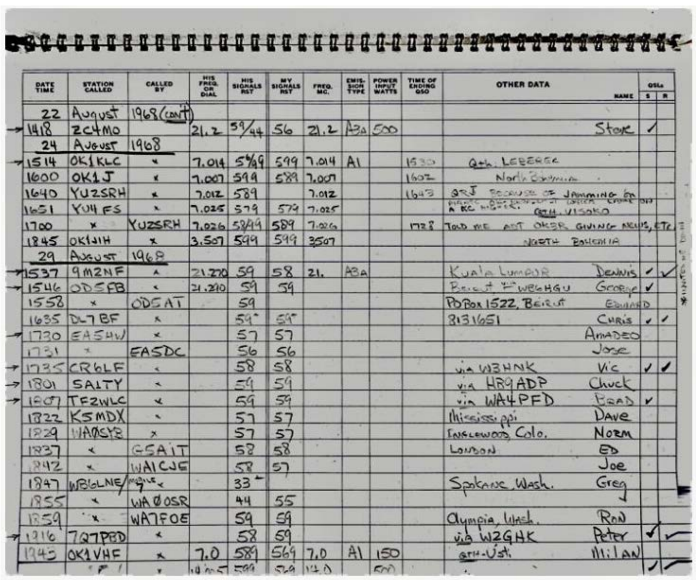
The Morse Code of Resistance...

Amateur Radio lifeline

The ham setup at Andrews Barracks in Lichterfelde was first rate: a Collins S-Line transceiver, a high-power transmitting amplifier and a directional yagi antenna mounted on a tower. In the days after the Russian military invaded Czechoslovakia, Higbie began having unusual conversations on the amateur frequencies. Using Morse Code on the 40-meter band, Higbie made contact with OK1KLC and other stations in Czechoslovakia and listened to other radio amateurs engaged in brief conversations in German and English. Instead of just talking about ham gear and the weather, the Czech operators pleaded with those in western Europe to relay urgent messages to relatives who were not behind the Iron Curtain.

Since Higbie was using a German call sign, others had no idea he was in the U.S. military. Some of the Czechs, to protect their identity and detection, began using fake call signs, which is normally a taboo. They sent messages for relay to England, the Congo and other destinations.



DATE TIME	STATION CALLED	CALLED BY	HIS FREQ. OR DIAL	HIS SIGNALS RST	MY SIGNALS RST	FREQ. MC.	EMISSION TYPE	POWER INPUT WATTS	TIME OF ENDING QSO	OTHER DATA	NAME	QSLs S	QSLs R
22	August	1968 (cont)											
1418	ZC4MO		21.2	59/44	56	21.2	A3a	500			Steve	✓	
24	AUGUST	1968											
1514	OK1KLC	×	7.014	5⁶/₄9	599	7.014	A1		1530	QTH. LEBEREC			
1600	OK1J	×	7.007	599	589	7.007			1602	North Bohemia			
1640	YU2SRH	×	7.012	589		7.012			1643	QRT BECAUSE OF JAMMING [illegible]			
1651	YU4FS	×	7.025	579	579	7.025				[illegible] QTH. VISOKO			
1700	×	YU2SRH	7.026	58/49	589	7.026			1728	TOLD ME ABT OK3R GIVING NEWS, ETC.			
1845	OK1JIH	×	3.507	599	599	3507				NORTH BOHEMIA			
29	AUGUST	1968											
1537	9M2NF	×	21.270	59	58	21.	A3A			Kuala Lumpur	Dennis	✓	✓
1546	OD5FB	×	21.210	59	59					Beirut [illegible] W6HGU	George	✓	
1558	×	OD5AT		59						PO Box 1522, Beirut	Edward		
1635	DL7BF	×		59+	59+					8131651	Chris	✓	✓
1730	EA5HW	×		57	57						Amadeo		
1731	×	EA5DC		56	56						Jose		
1735	CR6LF	×		58	58					via W3HNK	Vic	✓	✓
1801	SALTY	×		59	59					via HR9ADP	Chuck		
1807	TF2WLC	×		59	59					via WA4PFD	Brad	✓	
1822	K5MDX	×		57	57					Mississippi	Dave		
1829	WAØSYB	×		57	57					Englewood, Colo.	Norm		
1837	×	G5AIT		58	58					London	Ed		
1842	×	WA1CJE		58	57						Joe		
1847	WB6LNE/mobile 7	×		33						Spokane, Wash.	Greg		
1855	×	WAØOSR		44	55								
1859	×	WA7FOE		59	59					Olympia, Wash.	Ron		
1916	7Q7PBD	×		58	59					via W2GHK	Peter	✓	✓
1943	OK1VHF	×	7.0	589	569	7.0	A1	150		QTH-Usti	Milan		

Higbie's logbook, operating with the Amateur Radio callsign DL4QQ, from Aug. 24, 1968.

Call sign OK1J, identifying himself as located in North Bohemia, asked that "you give this news for all the world. Thank you very much, okay?" The Czechs want the world to know that Prime Minister Oldřich Černík, a staunch supporter of the Prague Spring reforms "fly from Moscow now." Days earlier, Černík had been forced to go to the Soviet Union and when he returned to the Czech capital he implored the public to cooperate with the invaders, while dubiously promising he would continue to support reform.

As Higbie wrote down these messages, he heard deliberate interference on the frequencies the Czechs were using. Most likely the Soviets were engaged in jamming to try to prevent the transmissions from Czechoslovakia getting through to the West. One Czech operator said he would like to continue to transmit but "I have to get off now" because helicopters with direction finding equipment were trying to locate him and the other Amateur Radio stations. Another radio amateur, tapping away in Morse Code in German, revealed that "many foreign soldiers stop our automobiles and take our gasoline, seize transistor radios, take bread and other food" and had also imposed a 9 p.m. curfew.

The Czech operators asked that the information be passed to the BBC. Higbie says he complied with this request to dispatch the message to the newsroom in London.

On the streets, Czech citizens engaged in non-violent resistance, taking down street signs to confuse the invaders, confronting tanks with offerings of flowers and shouted, "Ivan Go Home!" Warsaw Pact troops fatally shot more than 100 peaceful protesters.

A fellow American Amateur Radio operator stationed in Berlin, who was an officer with military intelligence and not in Higbie's chain of command, asked Higbie to share this type of information with him and his unit, but Higbie politely declined. "This was ham-to-ham kind of stuff, and I felt a little strange and would be like a betrayal of the amateur spirit, so I declined the offer as it wasn't an order, wasn't part of my job," Higbie recalls.

Higbie ironically adhered to a strict line between his Amateur Radio hobby and U.S. intelligence, despite his day job of intercepting radio signals and phone calls from East German officials and soldiers on behalf of the NSA. "We like to keep it a hobby. I was young. I really had a firm set of ethics," remembers Higbie. "It just didn't seem right to me." The military intelligence office, surprisingly, "as a ham, he respected that and that was the last I heard of it."

-continued on page 14 -

The Morse Code of Resistance...

By Aug. 27, it was all over in Prague. A doleful Dubček, who had been arrested and flown to Moscow, addressed his nation.

"We hope that you will trust us even though we might be forced to take some temporary measures that limit democracy and freedom of opinion," said Dubček.

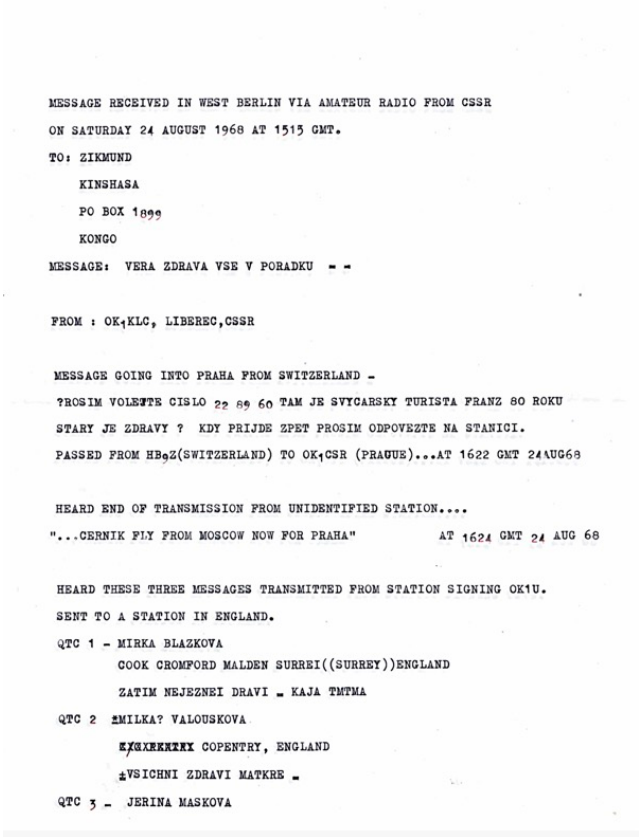
On the other side

The Communists in Prague would remain submissive to the Kremlin until the 1989 Velvet Revolution which climaxed with dissident writer Václav Havel being elected president. The Cold War would end two years later with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Higbie was long gone from Teufelsberg by then. Although after his initial four years he had become an instructor of special intelligence, teaching others the specialized vocabulary related to the communications systems they were monitoring, Higbie did not re-enlist in 1971.

He gained admission to the University of California – Berkeley, resuming his college education. Higbie grew his hair long but kept up his grades, graduated and then went to law school at the University of San Francisco. He moved to Colorado where he passed the bar exam and became a trial lawyer, specializing in criminal defense and personal injury cases.

Higbie is still an Amateur Radio operator, call sign K0AV, and he takes special enjoyment in digging out weak and distant signals. Occasionally, he finds himself engaged in a Morse Code chat with fellow hams in the Czech Republic. The conversations usually are centered on mundane topics, such as an exchange of weather reports.

But Higbie sometimes wonders if the person on the other end might be one of those who sent him a dramatic message during those fateful days of Czech history in the summer of '68.



MESSAGE RECEIVED IN WEST BERLIN VIA AMATEUR RADIO FROM CSSR
ON SATURDAY 24 AUGUST 1968 AT 1515 GMT.
TO: ZIKMUND
KINSHASA
PO BOX 1899
KONGO
MESSAGE: VERA ZDRAVA VSE V PORADKU - -

FROM : OK1KLC, LIBEREC,CSSR

MESSAGE GOING INTO PRAHA FROM SWITZERLAND -
?ROSIM VOLETE CISLO 22 89 60 TAM JE SVYCARSKY TURISTA FRANZ 80 ROKU
STARY JE ZDRAVY ? KDY PRIJDE ZPET PROSIM ODPOVEZTE NA STANICI.
PASSED FROM HB9Z(SWITZERLAND) TO OK1CSR (PRAGUE)...AT 1622 GMT 24AUG68

HEARD END OF TRANSMISSION FROM UNIDENTIFIED STATION....
"...CERNIK FLY FROM MOSCOW NOW FOR PRAHA" AT 1624 GMT 24 AUG 68

HEARD THESE THREE MESSAGES TRANSMITTED FROM STATION SIGNING OK1U.
SENT TO A STATION IN ENGLAND.
QTC 1 - MIRKA BLAZKOVA
COOK CROMFORD MALDEN SURREI((SURREY))ENGLAND
ZATIM NEJEZNEI DRAVI - KAJA TMTMA
QTC 2 EMILKA? VALOUSKOVA
[illegible] COPENTRY, ENGLAND
±VSICHNI ZDRAVI MATKRE -
QTC 3 - JERINA MASKOVA

A typed copy of Higbie's QSOs as DL4QQ, from Aug. 24, 1968.

Vermont Ends RACES Program

The Vermont Emergency Management agency has formally sunset the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) program. The program was canceled las November. The agency noted that it still retains overall responsibility for coordinating communications support during disasters and emergencies.

"Your amateur radio operator skills and expertise remain critical to our state's emergency preparedness. We encourage former RACES volunteers to continue their service by joining the State's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) program under the Vermont Department of Health (VDH)," VEM state in a statement.

The MRC is a national program under the Administration of Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), which brings together medical and non-medical volunteers with a public health/healthcare-focused mission to improve community outcomes for people during emergencies. Many MRC units across the nation support an Auxiliary Communications mission set which involves the use of amateur radio volunteers to support hospitals and healthcare entities with emergency radio traffic.

The agency directed affected hams to consider registering for the MRC at www.rms.vermont.gov.

Please Support EGARA's Hamfest Sponsors and Corporate Partners!

CALENDAR

February 12, 2026 @ 7 pm - Regular Monthly Club Meeting, Search & Rescue Building

February 21, 2026 @ 10:00 am. VE FCC exam session. Doors open at 9:30 am. Troy Amateur Radio Assn. Location: Public Library,1501 Broadway, Watervliet, NY. Walk-ins allowed, but per-registration preferred at Hamstudy.org

Pro Tip: Turn Down the RF Gain to Kill Noise

Noise -- or QRM -- can quickly turn an HF session into frustration.

There are many ways to combat this annoying distraction but among the easiest is to turn down the RF gain on your transceiver.

Chances are you'll still be able to copy the station you're after but with diminished noise because lowering the RF gain also lowers the noise floor.

If you haven't taken advantage of this simple tip, try it the next time you fire up your rig. You may just be surprised how much better things sound!

The East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association

Organized in 1998, by Bert Bruins, N2FPJ, (SK) and Chris Linck, N2NEH, the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association, an ARRL affiliate, is committed to providing emergency services, educational programs, and operating resources to amateur radio operators and residents of the Capital Region of New York State. The club station is W2EGB. The club also has several VHF and UHF repeaters open to club members and the public.

GEAR FOR SALE

Icom IC-V8000 FM Mobile Radio, 75 Watt FM 2 Meter FM Mobile Radio with Mic, Bracket, Power Cord, Hardware, Manual and Factory Carton. In very good clean working condition. One owner. Price: $139.00, includes shipping to NY

Seller contact: John, WB2HZT, at: Radiowizzz@aol.com

Digital Geochron Atlas 2B, gives viewers beautiful maps of the Earth in real-time with the sunrise/ sunset terminator line rendered through a small computer that plugs directly into your TV via HDMI. Includes Live Layers (requires Internet): Real-time Aviation Tracking by Airline Category and Continent Major Flight & Shipping Routes Real-time Satellites Satellite Weather: Precipitation, Temperature and Cloud Cover Mercator Mapsets: Geopolitical, Topographical, Amateur Ham Radio Workstation, Advanced Weather, Earthquakes & Volcanoes. ISS Live Earth Camera View. Air Quality & Pollution and more. Retail is $500. Asking $250.00.

Seller contact: Chris: AK2CD64@gmail.com

ICOM IC-71A Communications Receiver. Coverage: 100 kHz – 30 MHz, AM, CW, SSB, RTTY, FM. Features include a quadruple conversion receiver, direct keypad entry, two VFOs, 32 memories, notch filter, noise blanker, and passband tuning. Scanning functions are included. Tuning steps are down to 10 Hz increments. In very good condition, checked and working properly. Current Retail market value is $300. Price: $225.

Seller Contact: EGARAradio@gmail.com

See the complete listing of gear for sale at: www.EGARA.org/amateur-radio-classifieds

Sell your unused gear with a free ad in Sidebands and online! Send details to: EGARAradio@gmail.com