

Tribute to the Reverend Paul Bittner, WØAIH (SK)

The contesting community lost a real champion and ambassador of contesting on October 31, 2018, when the Reverend Paul Bittner, WØAIH, died after a fall suffered while working on one of the 50+ towers on his antenna farm at the WØAIH Super Station. Paul was working at about 60 feet above ground when a pulley he had placed at the top of the 200-foot tower sometime prior earlier gave way as he was repairing his 15-meter stack in preparation for ARRL November Sweepstakes.

Paul loved radio contesting. He worked with a large number of midwestern contesters with installing or building their contest stations. His wife Mary told me at his funeral, "Paul died doing what he loved."

Paul would have turned 85 on December 25, 2018. He was born in Nebraska, but became a ham at age 15 while living in Stewartville, Minnesota. Paul put up a Yagi at the parsonage where his father was a pastor soon after that.

He went to high school in Rochester, Minnesota, with Dick Ehrhorn, W4ETO (now W4EA), who later founded Alpha Amplifiers. Paul loved contesting almost as much as he loved his wife, his family, and his calling as a Lutheran minister. He attended the WRTC 2018 and was thrilled to visit Wittenberg, where Martin Luther — his inspiration as a minister — sparked the Protestant Reformation.

WRTC 2018 was also special to Paul because his "adopted ham daughter," Sandy DL1QQ, was part of the organizing committee. He told me of plans to return to Italy in 2022 for the WRTC there, but will now have to observe the contest from his heavenly perch.

Paul attended Hamvention® 2018 and the Contest Dinner as he had for many years. I fondly recall driving him to the Friday start at Hara Arena a few years ago, so he could sprint off like a 15-year-old to the flea market at opening. Later that day, we loaded the car with treasures that Paul had bought. He best described himself in his QRZ.com profile:

"I have been on the air since 1949, all with the call WØAIH. My main operating activity is multi-multi contesting from my QTH in west-central Wisconsin, known around the Upper Midwest as "The Farm". My wife Mary, WBØPXM, and I moved to our 120-acre farm in the country in 2000. Finally, *no* TVI — no neighbor closer than 1/2 mile! Towers & antennas started growing at the Farm in 1982. Almost all the



Paul climbing one of his many towers.

towers are retired from broadcast service and then taken down by me and moved to the Farm. My favorite band is 160; W1BB got me started when I was living in Ontario, and he found out that I had 160-meter capability with my Johnson Ranger and Collins 75A-4. From 1958 until 1962 I operated as WØAIH/VE3, and 160 has been "my band" ever since. My favorite contest is the CQ World Wide CW. I am a retired Lutheran Minister having served my first four years in Ontario; then in Virginia, Minnesota; then Grand Island, Nebraska, and finally in Fall Creek, Wisconsin. I retired on Pentecost 2000."

Paul was deeply honored to be a member of the CQ Contest Hall of Fame, to have hosted many US and non-US hams at his station for contests, and for his work in the former Soviet Asiatic republics where he also operated ham radio. Paul was especially honored this summer to officiate at the wedding of two midwestern contesters — Jerry, WB9Z, and Val, NV9L. He called me after the wedding to say how special it was for him and Mary to be there.

I asked a number of hams from around the country to pay tribute to Paul. Their tributes are published online at www.ncjweb.com.

Ward Silver, NØAX:

Paul was, and is, larger than life. One of his proudest achievements was hosting W1AW/9. While others know him better, I think my best memory will be from my visit to “The Farm” in 2009 and getting the full tour with WB9Z and KA9FOX. We must have walked a mile, trying to keep up with Paul, when someone asked how many towers he had up. He didn’t know, and he had no idea how many thousand feet of tower were lying on the ground waiting to be put up. He was an inspiration and set a high standard by cheerful example. There is no better way.

Glenn Johnson, WØGJ:

I spent a lot of time traveling and rooming with Paul. One time, and I don’t ever recall how we got on the topic, but we were discussing “funny” epitaphs that had been seen on tombstones. Paul’s favorite chapter in the *Bible* was Isaiah 53, and I’ve lost count of the times he recited the entire chapter to me from memory while we were driving along. He always said he wanted to be buried with his *Bible*, his hymnal, and his original key. Sometime later I wrote down a little poem and sent it to Paul. He immediately called me on the phone so excited I could hardly understand him. He was going to put that poem on his tombstone!

As a Lutheran minister, his hero was Martin Luther. He would often quote Luther to me. As providence would have it, Paul passed away on Reformation Day (October 31, 1571), exactly 501 years to the day when Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. He told me it was very special for him to have seen that spot this past summer at WRTC 2018. Paul is not resting in peace. He is singing praises to his savior as he’s never sung them before.

In 2012, Paul came over to help me put up my big antennas. On the crane truck it said “Since 1949.” I told him that was the year I was born, and he said, “That’s interesting. I’ve been a ham your whole life. I was *licensed* in 1949.”

Scott Neader, KA9FOX

Thank you for giving so much of yourself to me and the rest of the ham community. We will never forget you.

I recall when the first rhombics went up, and Paul took me on a tour of them. He was practically running through the fields and it was hard for this kid to keep up with him. That was Paul — he was Type A, always on the move, and usually moving faster than me.

When I finally bought some land and was ready to put up a decent tower and antennas, it was Paul who surveyed my land and marked where the tower and guy posts



Paul speaking at a Hamvention Contest Dinner, prior to giving the invocation.



Paul and Bill Lippert, ACØW, during a contest at “The Farm.”



Paul standing by his crane truck bearing the “Since 1949” logo, indicating when he was licensed.

should go. It was Paul who manufactured the guy posts. It was Paul who installed the 100 feet of Rohn 55. It was Paul who installed the antennas. It was Paul that came back to fix my 10 – 40 Yagi when the 40-meter reflector was about to fall off.

Funny story about when that tower went up in 2004: Paul had come down the night before. I had ground crew lined up for 8 the next morning. Around 6 o'clock my wife nudged me awake and said, "I think Paul is up." By the time I wiped the sleep out of my eyes and got moving, Paul was, indeed, out at the base of the tower and already had one section in place, despite the sun barely being up. He asked me to help him get the second one in place. By the time the ground crew showed up at 8 AM, I think we had 40 or 50 feet in the air. Paul was always moving.

One thing I picked up from Paul was using colored electrical tape to mark the bands (cables, antenna switches, amps, tuners, etc.). Purple tape (which can be hard to find) is 160 meters — Paul's favorite band — and so it is purple at my station, too.

Paul did everything *big*, as can be seen by looking at his station. One thing that I will never forget is how Paul used a ~30 foot piece of Rohn 25 tower as the gin pole for putting up my antennas in 2005. He attached that 30-foot Rohn 25 tower to my tower, then was able to install and work on my antennas from there.

Mike Lonneke, W4AAW

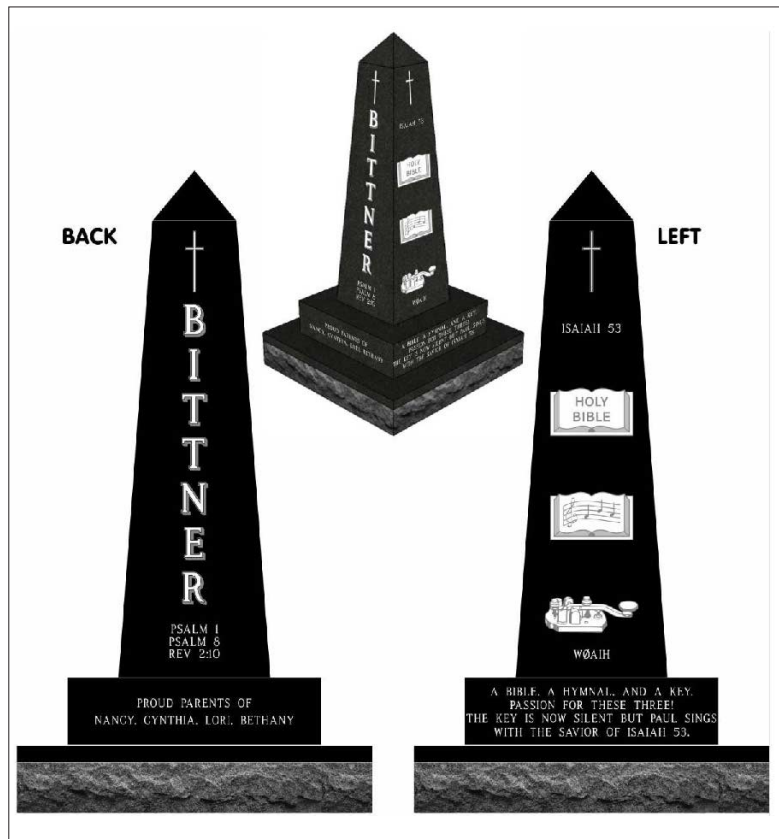
His station stands as a great monument to a selfless man of great grace and remarkable achievements. Paul once told me that AIH stood for "already in heaven."

Al Schlaugat, N9ISN

I'm still in shock and I am out of tears.

Gary Hosler, W0AW

Paul was an inspiration to all of us. Few of us are kids, but to watch him work on a tower was something to behold. He came over to help me pull my tower down when we moved up to northwestern Wisconsin, and I learned a lot from him. I also recall him diving into a 30-cubic foot dumpster had on hand to get rid of stuff acquired over the years for projects I was always going to build but never got around to. Paul watched me toss some guy wires into the dumpster and had to peek over the side. I recall him saying, "You're not really throwing that away, are you!" Next thing he is up over the top and handing me "stuff" to set near the back of his pickup. Paul hauled 2+ pickups' worth out of the dumpster and back to Eau Claire. 73 and RIP my friend. You were awesome!



Paul's headstone highlights his life priorities

Tony Wanschura, KM00

I've known Paul since the early 1980s. My first time visiting the farm was, I think, a couple of weeks after the Rohn 25 4-square went up. I'd never before seen anything built quite like it. Later, as even more equally-sturdy antenna structures were erected, I felt so honored to be part of Paul's team.

Jerry Rosalius, WB9Z

I was really only to Paul's antenna farm one time, but what a tour that was. It was hard keeping up with a man 21 years older than me. I want to sponsor a contest plaque in Paul's memory. I am sure there will be many others.

Chris Janssen, DL1MGB

I just had a QSO with W0AIH in the CQ WW last weekend, from the station of my good friend Rudi, DL5MEV, who passed away in September. I will never forget Paul doing the prayer at the start of the Contest Dinner in Dayton. I loved it. It was great to have Paul and Mary as guests in Wittenberg for WRTC 2018. RIP Paul!

Larry Loen, W07R

I had the privilege of operating at W0AIH once, maybe 15 years ago. It was an experience I will never forget. Paul was a special guy who had built a special station.

Jim Jordan, K4QPL

So sad to hear of Paul's accident and death. I did not know him personally, but many, many entries are in contest logs and he's remembered as a class operator. His loss takes something from SS.

Laurie Margolis, G3UML

As sad as this is, I can't help smiling first at a guy having a 4/4/4/4 topping out at 200 feet for just one of his many antennas, and then at age 84 having the nerve, ambition and self-confidence to climb up and fix the thing. Remarkable.

Jon Jones, N0JK

I was on 160 meters the morning of October 31 calling VP6D. I heard W0AIH call in and work them — perhaps one of Paul's last contacts. Paul will be missed.

Dan White, W5DNT

It is so very deeply saddening to hear of Paul Bittner's passing. What a tragic loss to the amateur community and the world. Besides being a unique Amateur Radio operator, DXer, and contester, Paul was above all a fine Christian and a true gentleman, who will be sorely missed by all who knew him and those whose lives he touched in so many ways. Paul always wore a smile and was full of energy. We often joked that Paul reminded us of the Energizer Bunny. When Paul made a presentation, even in his 80s, he hopped around on the balls of his feet, like a 20-year-old.

Rich Westerberg, NØHJZ

This story takes place more than 20 years ago. Paul sent me a note to see if I wanted to operate the ARRL 160 Meter Contest with him and KØFVF. I was not a speed demon CW op and not confident. Paul set me down and said "go to it." Later he came in to check on me. At the time, the AIH station was tied into an early SMC reflector, where stations could send notes to each other. The monitor was on a shelf above me. I was struggling with a pile-up, operating slow and making mistakes in sending (and asking for repeats). Someone on the reflector made a comment about the "Op at WØAIH" and how he wasn't very good. Paul saw that I had seen the comment. He said, "Don't worry about that. You're doing great! Keep running." It really filled me with confidence. The next morning, Paul had me harnessed in at 90 feet, helping him on the elevated vertical. He shared stories and was all excited to work on the vertical to make it better for the second night of the contest. Such energy. Such a caring man.

Bill Lippert, ACØW

For the 2007 ARRL DX SSB Contest I operated the 20-meter station at WØAIH. On Sunday I had over twice the number of Qs of the 15-meter station and four times the Qs of the 40-meter station. Lightheartedly, Paul accused me of making-up QSOs.

Paul and Mary had a trip that brought them through Austin, Minnesota, on their return home. Calling in advance they stopped by my QTH to review my antennas, station and wife's garden. We were standing by the tower talking about the antennas when Paul said he had to climb my 50-foot tower. He spent a few minutes inspecting things and was back on the ground as quickly as he went up. He did leave me with a few things to fix at the top of the tower.



Paul proudly displaying his club's winning Wisconsin QSO Party trophy.

Scott Jasper, NE9U

Paul has been a huge part of my life over the past 30 years. He is the reason I'm currently sitting in PJ4 doing a multiop. He instilled in me a love for multioperator contesting. The camaraderie and station and antenna assembly on the fly are things I learned from Paul. I talked to Paul the day before coming down to PJ4, and he was excited for my trip and looking forward to coming over to look at my new QTH when I got back (not to see my house, just the antenna layout). I was thinking of Paul as I was working tons of Russians on 160 from PJ4. I almost called him in the morning to tell him how good 160 had been. I wish I had.

Mark Seyffer, KB9S

Paul Bittner, WØAIH, was an Amateur Radio operator extraordinaire who was known all over the world. A one-of-a-kind, larger-than-life, indefatigable, exceptional human being. His energy and enthusiasm for Amateur Radio were always on display. At the local Eau Claire Amateur Radio Club meetings Paul was the first person willing to help out a new ham by loaning them equipment or installing an antenna to get them on the air. There was always an invite to come out to The Farm during the next contest. He was especially proud of winning the Wisconsin QSO Party.

He enjoyed finding bargains to build his contest station. My wife Kitty, K9KTT, and I traveled to Dayton one year. At 5 AM on Friday Kitty's cell phone rang. It was Paul calling from the flea market; he had gotten into the flea market area by climbing over a low spot in the fence 3 hours before the official opening time. Paul always said that you had to help the fleas unload to find the good deals! Our lives have been infinitely better for having known him. He will be dearly missed. RIP WØAIH SK