

## NCJ Profiles: Rod Linkous, W7OM

Take a look at any recent major contest log, and I'm sure you'll find "W7 Old Man" listed. An all-mode contester, Rod has earned the respect of his peers as a serious and consistent competitor in radiosport. Bob's early interest in electronics laid the groundwork for his long and distinguished career in the US Air Force, which gave him the opportunity to get on the air from around the world. Later, while working at Boeing Aerospace, Rod was instrumental in expanding the Western Washington DX Club. But, it all really started with a shortwave radio in the attic. Here is Rod's fascinating Amateur Radio story.

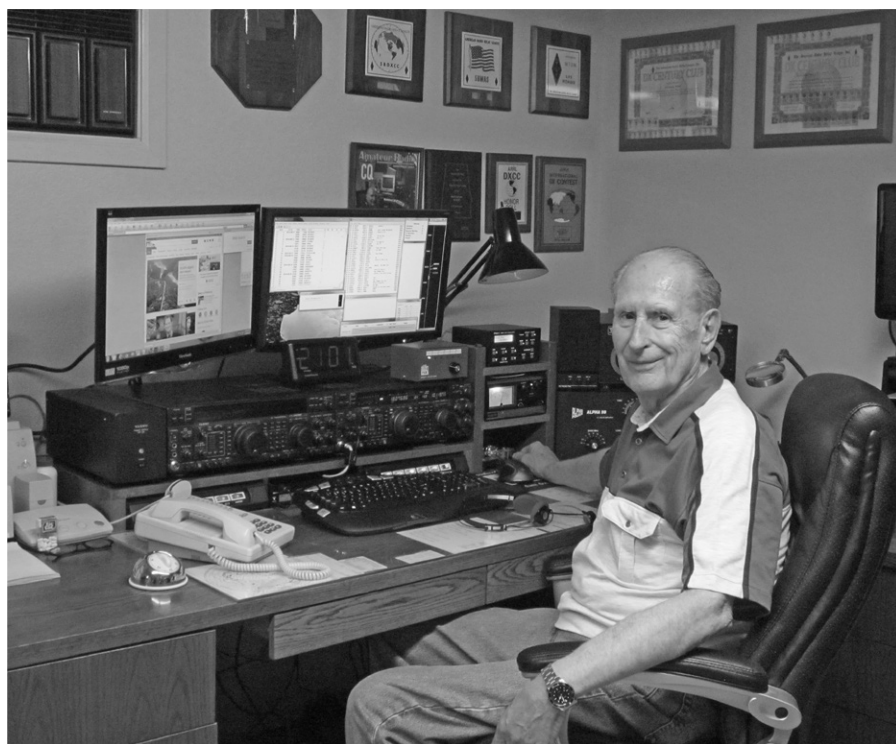
When I was around 7 years old, our family moved into a rental home in Baker City, Oregon. It didn't take long before exploration of the attic uncovered an old shortwave radio, complete with a headset. It took a few hours to get it to work, so I could listen to foreign broadcasts. A couple of years later we moved to a bigger house with an Amateur Radio operator almost next door. I only knew him as Mr Woodhouse. He introduced me to the world of Amateur Radio and the art of CW. It was great to visit his not-so-modern shack where he had the world at his fingertips. I was really bitten by the Amateur Radio bug.

When we moved to Richland, Washington, a few years later, I was lucky enough to have Aubrey Clayton, W7PTH, as a math teacher. He had just returned from the service after World War II and was starting an Amateur Radio club for the junior high school (and, later, at the high school). He motivated me to get my first ticket, with the call sign W7KIM.

My first rig was a set of ARC-5 aircraft radios, readily available from a local military surplus store. With wires in the trees, I was on the air, mostly talking with the locals. In my senior year in high school, I had a part-time job at a furniture store working in their brand-new TV department. I made deliveries and installed antennas, all thanks to my Amateur Radio experience.

### The Air Force Years

After high school, I entered the US Air Force aviation cadet program. I had learned to fly through the Civil Air Patrol and already had my pilot's license. Amateur Radio had to wait. With the end of the Korean Conflict a year earlier, however,



The W7OM shack. [Rod Linkous W7OM, photo]

the cadet program cancelled admission for those without 2 years of college. I opted instead for airborne radio/radar school. My first assignment after graduating was Ashiya Air Base in Japan. I enjoyed flying all over Asia and the Pacific, and during my free time, the MARS station on base allowed me to renew my amateur activities as KA7HH.

With a Collins 75A-4 receiver and 500 W AM to a 5 element Yagi at 90 feet, I had a lot of fun working more W6s than I could handle at first. That experience taught me the value of the word "up."

My first *real* contest was the 1955 CQ World Wide phone. I didn't do as well as my friend Everett Worrell, KA2CY (now W4WJJ), but I was hooked on contesting! We weren't supposed to work Japanese nationals, but we did. A lot of other GIs operated as KAs. Several military stations in Korea also bootlegged KA call signs to enter the fray.

One morning while on the air, I got a call from W6EZV/am — Gen Curtis LeMay — from a B-36 over the Pacific Ocean. He and

Art Collins, W0CXX (SK) were trying out a new airborne SSB transceiver. To say the least, this took me by surprise as well as some time to tune in the signal. The QSO was short, but the memory lingers.

On several resupply missions to Iwo Jima, I had the opportunity to activate as KA0IJ. I thought pileups from Japan were sometimes hard to handle, but Iwo was tough. At first I didn't use CW due to a lack of pileup skills.

In 1957 I returned to the US and Ellington AFB in Houston as an electronics instructor. As K5FHK I mostly chased DX and did a little contesting. I had met Chris Cook, W5URU, on the air from Japan and looked him up when I arrived in Houston. He and a buddy were in the midst of converting ARC-5s into phasing SSB rigs, and they invited me to build one too. It became my first SSB and first mobile rig. They also invited me to join the Houston Amateur Radio Club. That led to some multi-single and multi-multi operations that year and introduced me to some wonderful lifelong friends.

## Back to Civilian Life

My enlistment ended just before Christmas, and I returned to Washington to enter the University of Washington to study electrical engineering. The ham gear was put in storage.

Part-time jobs were short in short supply, so I joined the local reserve unit as an instructor to supplement my GI Bill. Flying three or four times a month meant a larger income too. Living in the dorm restricted radio pursuits for a while, until I met a few Seattle locals that I had worked from Japan. The first week, Bill Bennett, W7PHO, invited me to a weekend antenna party, which was a chance to meet the local DX gang. The crew included John Dack, W7KH (SK), and Ed Lutz, K7DZ (SK). Guest operating from Bill's shack and others' was my path back to getting on the air. Gordon Norris, W7FU (SK), had a big multi-multi station where I could spend some time contesting on weekends. Ed Lutz is remembered as the father of cellular telephone, from his days as the chief engineer for Macaw Cellular.

During the first week at the U of W, I met my Scottish lass, Donna, whom I later married. In 1961, I was hired by Boeing on the aerospace side. In 1963 we bought our present home in West Seattle. A year later I had a 60-foot tower and a tribander. My hamming was somewhat limited to state QSO parties and DXing as I got my engineering career off to a solid start. The exceptions were DX contests — primarily for the pursuit of a new one or two. It wasn't too long before a 2 element 40 meter Yagi went up. That combination lasted until I decided I needed a bit more. So, down came the tribander, and up went a 40-foot boom and interlaced 20/15 Yagis plus a 6 element Yagi for 10.

Seattle's weather allowed me to get away with those big antennas until one winter storm with 90 MPH wind gusts. Down came the 20, 15, and 10 meter Yagis, and up went a TH7DXC tribander with a 2 element Cushcraft for 40. That combination lasted until last July, when a new multiband SteppIR took their place. But I digress.

## Called Back to Asia

In 1968 it was back to Asia, as my unit was called up in the wake of the Pueblo Incident. My assignment was as the communication and electronics plans officer at Headquarters Air Forces Korea, Osan AB. I had brought along a SSB transceiver. Within a couple of weeks, I was back on the air as HL9WK. The CQ WW was interesting, as the *Status of Forces Agreement* that allowed amateur operation by US personnel restricted us from working the USSR. Being so close, the Russian



The W7OM antenna system. [Rod Linkous W7OM, photo]

stations interfered others, restricting any kind of rates. I never heard that anyone was ever cited for working the Soviet Bloc countries, so most of us worked them just to get them out of the way.

When I left Korea I was offered the choice of staying in the Air Force, but I elected to return home and remain a reservist. After Korea, it didn't take long to get back into the swing of chasing DX and contesting as time allowed.

### The WWDXC

W7PHO had been the president of the Western Washington DX Club from 1952 until he turned it over to me just prior to leaving for Korea. That meant picking up where I left off after I'd returned. Collectively we grew the WWDXC from 31 to several hundred members. Two major factors facilitated the growth: (1) a chain of buffet restaurants with free meeting rooms and (2) dinner meeting raffles, which financed the WWDXC for many years and obviated the need for dues. Also, George Loetz, K7NF, was an excellent editor for the club's new *Totem Tabloid*.

Interest in DX was a magnet to many who joined the WWDXC. DX-oriented contests were a prime place to add to one's totals and foster intra-club competitions. The debate as to whether the club is a DX or contesting club continues, but it is still a large club serving both aspects of the hobby. Recruiting new hams to contesting works well by inviting them to operate well-established stations with multiband

capabilities. Many of my guest operators can be found in a weekend contests. Some became disappointed with their own stations as a result and went on to improve their stations and skills. That was essentially my case, after I'd compared results with others. I took the wise advice to start competing against myself, comparing each succeeding contest's results with those of the past. I still keep that spreadsheet.

One year, Lew McCoy, W1ICP (SK), came to town and was invited to talk to the club on antennas. The restaurant had three meeting rooms, each holding about 100. We opened the dividing walls to handle the throng. The restaurant manager asked us to keep the crowd below 270 to satisfy the local fire marshal, and Lew kept a standing-room-only crowd spellbound for more than an hour.

The club hosted the ARRL National Convention in 1980, with local clubs chipping in some of the up-front costs. We underestimated the turnout, though, and we actually made a profit. We prorated the profits back to the local clubs, based on their up-front help. Fortunately a few years later we changed the bylaws to elect a new president every year.

The speedy growth of the Seattle area created a time-consuming trip to attend meetings. Also, when the buffet restaurant closed, we not only lost our long-time site, we lost members, due to the costs of a new venue.

Len Kaufer, KG6SW (SK), originally from

Seattle, asked me to be his QSL manager in 1970. We kept weekly schedules, ran phone patches and most of all sent out 46,000 QSL confirmations for a Saipan, Mariana Islands, contact. After 10 years as KG6SW, he obtained his final call sign, KH0AC, and we transferred the QSL management to Jon Zabel, K7ZA. It was a good time to shift, as John Attaway, K4IIF, had asked me to write the DX column for *CQ Magazine*. Writing a DX column for 5 years was a wonderful learning experience.

### Juggling Ham Radio, Career, and Military

The Boeing pace was picking up. As the program manager of a large personnel-detection radar system for the Air Force and then a crypto system for the Navy, my hobby activity slowed. Boeing job changes had me traveling a lot in the mid-1970s and beyond, including frequent trips to Washington DC. I looked forward to my times there, when I could have dinner with Fred Laun, K3ZO, and Don Rieboff, K7ZZ (SK), both of XV5AC fame. I became W7OM in 1977.

In 1979 my reserve assignment took me to the Pentagon until a promotion took me to Rome AFB, New York; then to Langley AFB, Virginia; and on to Offutt AFB, Nebraska. With another promotion and a new assignment, it was back to the Pentagon, where I was on the air from club station K4AF as time permitted.

When home, mostly on weekends, the activities shifted to whatever contest was on. The wins were few, but it was fun nonetheless. Besides one has only so much wall space. But the DXCC count grew. With only slopers for 160, 80, 30, 17, and 12 meters, it was a steady search for the new band/mode countries. Worked All Europe cleaned up those countries on all but 160.

In 1983 we did a CQ WW using my call sign, and we did work some Europeans on 160 from New England. I always wanted to do a WAZ from New England — that's still on the bucket list.

I retired from Boeing in 1993 to what I thought would be a lot of hamming. The Air Force had other plans. Until retiring from the Air Force in late 1994 I spent a lot of time on active duty in one short assignment after another. So after almost 41 years in a blue suit, I hung up the two stars and settled down to catching up on a lot of things I'd postponed.

As I write this I reflect on the great people who helped me along the way. Also it has been a pleasure to meet and know some of the great people in the Amateur Radio world. Some helped with only their friendship, others with sage advice. Bernie Skoch, K5XS, helped me in those final Air

Force years to juggle two jobs and a lot of necessary travel.

### Kicking Back

With some time to do fun things, K7DZ and I started having lunch on the first and third Tuesdays. The second Tuesday was the evening meeting for the WWDXC. At the beginning it was just the two of us plus an occasional invitee. Then word got out, and it grew to 23 at lunch. Now the lunches still go on with one (first Tuesday) in South Seattle and the other in the North End. It is an excellent chance to discuss common challenges and upcoming DX. Dick Swanson, K7BTW, our local DXCC card checker, tries to make all the South End lunches and can be found checking cards. I take care of WAZ applications. Bob Winters, N7XR, while still with the Coast Guard used the lunches to facilitate building the Puget Sound VHF DX repeater system and its digital conversion. Although the players have changed over the years, the work done at those lunches lingers. It is also a great means to meet and greet visitors.

After the years of travel I was able to share time with my wonderful and supportive wife, Donna, WB7OUN. Her parents were both from Scotland. After many years of trying, we finally traveled to Scotland and had a wonderful time. We enjoy traveling, mostly by cruise ship, especially when a trip takes us to Europe and Scotland. During one trip with friends to New Zealand and Australia, I looked up old friend Ron Wright, ZL1AMO (SK), and had a long chat about his Pacific Ocean operations. That day the Auckland club invited me to a club picnic. After introductions and the other members giving me a word or two over the recent US tariff on sheep meat, I had a great time with the Kiwis, and the food was terrific. Their hospitality was truly outstanding. Cruising has offered us the opportunity to see the world and to meet hams I have worked many times.

When the Northern California Contest Club started its Thursday night NS Sprint, my contesting Elmer, Dan Eskenazi, K7SS, encouraged me to join the fray. It was like jumping off a low-speed treadmill onto one doing Mach 1. During all my years as a radio amateur, I have enjoyed CW but never felt that I was good enough to be in the Sprint league. I knew the station was capable but wondered about me. Dan had set a record in the CW Sprint from my station one year. It didn't go in the record book, however, because *NCJ* no longer would accept paper logs. (Yes, Dan is *that* good with a pencil in one hand and a paddle in the other.) I jumped in over my head. After a few weeks I finally was having so much fun that I didn't care about my score, as

it eventually, but slowly, improved. I will always be thankful to the NCCC for almost doubling my code speed and allowing me to participate with the great ones in our hobby. Convincing newcomers to Sprints has had its challenges. Dan and I have encouraged others to try, and a few are occasional players.

A few years ago, along came The CW Operators' Club — another fine group of CW enthusiasts. I was honored to receive an invitation to join them while on an international trip, so I got in a little late. This group of some of the finest CW operators provides a low-pressure get together for some CW contesting once a week. When I am home, you will find me in the Wednesday CWops fray and the Thursday night NS Sprints. On the weekend I try to tackle a contest or two. The *NCJ* contest calendar is one I consult regularly to find opportunities.

My current station is two Yaesu FT-1000MPs, an Alpha 99 amp (only used for chasing the rare ones, as low power makes for better neighborhood relations); a Nye Viking tuner for the three slopers on 80 and 160; and a SteppIR DB-18E at 60 feet for 40 through 6 meters. This is all on a 50 x 128 city lot. It seems that modern electronic entertainment systems in the neighborhood have raised the 160 meter noise floor, limiting time on that band. My log since 1977 — when it went on a DOS-based computer — has grown to the point of retaining an XP computer to answer the QSLs. All the contacts are in Logbook of The World. I have noted that the incoming cards have dropped by 90 percent in the post-LoTW years. I still like the incoming cards, although it has become a costly part of contesting and DXing. I still QSL all cards received with few exceptions.

Some ham-related software has presented a challenge due to steep learning curves. I have yet to master a lot of new tools available like *CW Skimmer* and Reverse Beacon Network. Fortunately aid is swift in coming, when you ask for help. Hams are also first to help with that new tower, antenna design/build and technical problem solving.

My call sign phonetics get more applicable each year as the Old Man struggles to hang in there for the long contests. The fun is still there, however, so I'll continue to give it a go.

*Thanks, Rod, for sharing the various stages of your time in ham radio. It's always fascinating to learn how successful operators got their start in radiosport and find ways to keep their skills current even after decades of competition.*