



COMMUNICATIONS

by Ken Reitz

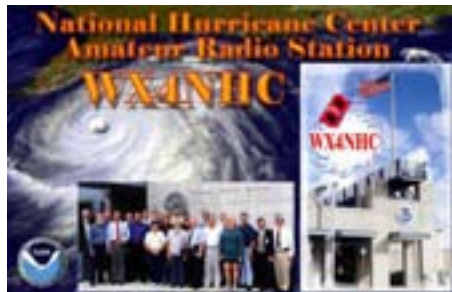
SHORTWAVE/AMATEUR RADIO

Two New HF Stations Granted

The FCC's International Bureau granted application to construct two new international shortwave broadcast stations. One, to George S. Mock (d/b/a/ Hill Radio International), is to be located in Milton, Florida, in the panhandle near Pensacola. The other is for Leap of Faith, Inc., of Lebanon, Tennessee. Both will air religious-based programming beamed to Europe, Africa, North America and South America.

WX4NHC's Annual Radio Test

The National Hurricane Center (NHC) held its version of Field Day May 30, when NHC's amateur radio station WX4NHC went on the air to promote awareness of the hurricane season and to test station performance on frequencies and modes used during an actual hurricane emergency. If you worked WX4NHC or heard it on the bands during the test, you can receive a QSL by filling out their on-line QSL form on the WX4NHC web page (www.wx4nhc.org). Or write to WX4NHC c/o Julio Ripoll WD4R, 14855 SW 67 Lane, Miami, Florida 33193-2027.



WX4NHC QSL card (Courtesy: National Hurricane Center)

The Hurricane Watch Net is activated on 14.325 MHz "...whenever a hurricane is within 300 miles of a projected landfall or becomes a serious threat to a populated area." For more details visit the Hurricane Watch Net at www.hwn.org.

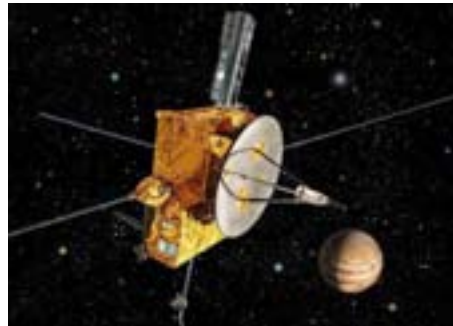
15 Year-old YL Top Texter

Kids love code, but they need a reason to want to learn it and, like it or not, it's not Morse code they're learning. Instead, it's a self-made code designed to be sent with thumbs flying on tiny cell phone keypads and appearing on screens only young eyes can easily see. It's called "texting" and the U.S. texting championship, held in late June and sponsored by electronics manufacturer LG, was won by a 15 year-old girl who beat out the two other top texters (also girls) out of 250,000 entrants, for the title and \$50,000 in prize money. Maybe you're thinking, "i i i o," but, I say, "u n t c o." LG also provides an online de-texter at www.lgdtxt.com.

SATELLITES

Ulysses Shut Down After 18+ Years

For more than 18 years the spacecraft known as Ulysses gave Earth-bound scientists views of the Sun never seen before. But, by June 30 of this year its jets had nearly depleted the onboard supply of hydrazine fuel needed to continue making maneuvers. NASA put the satellite in "monitor" mode on its final communications pass. According to NASA, Ulysses is "the first spacecraft to survey the environment in space over the poles of the Sun in four dimensions of space and time."



Ulysses in monitor mode from now on. Satellite spied on the sun from many angles for more than 18 years. (Courtesy: SOHO/NASA)

DHS Nixes Domestic Spying Program

Many news outlets were reporting the cancelling of a program to allow federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to use imagery generated by U. S. spy satellites. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano killed the Bush-era plan when she was told that such spying was not a priority by state and local officials.

Sea Launch Bankrupt

The *Seattle-Times* reported on June 25 that Sea Launch, a joint venture in which the Seattle-based Boeing company owned a 40% share, has filed for Chapter 11 protection. The company, created in 1995 by Boeing and several Russian and European-based companies, had been using an ocean-going platform in the Pacific Ocean to launch commercial satellites into orbit. The *Seattle-Times* piece noted that Boeing itself was owed nearly a billion dollars by the now bankrupt Sea Launch company.

Satellite/Cable Bills Buck Economy

Despite the plummeting economy, increasing loan default rates and general bad economic news, the cable and satellite TV industries strapped on the party hats to celebrate a 7.5% increase in monthly cable TV bills and a nearly 9% increase in monthly bills to satellite TV customers over the

period from July to December, 2008. The two are tracked by *Multichannel News*, a cable/satellite TV industry publication, in a report that showed that cable TV bills have risen 122% since 1995. The average cable-TV bill is \$71/month, while the average satellite TV bill is \$74/month. One reason for the upturn in billing has been that consumers are opting for more expensive packages such as high-definition channels and digital video recorders.

AM/FM/TV BROADCASTING

DTV Switch No Pay-TV Payday

An article in the *Financial Times*, following the final June 12 DTV switch, noted that cable TV and satellite TV companies had seen little additional signups in the run up to the final cutoff date. Instead, households were busy upgrading their home antennas for off-air reception. The article noted that the Consumer Electronics Association saw a 48% jump in off-air antenna sales last year. And, that Antennas Direct, one of the largest U.S. off-air antenna makers, saw a 224% increase in first quarter sales this year.



Clearstream High Gain DTV VHF antenna is one of new off-air antennas flying off the shelves at Antennas Direct in the run-up to the DTV shut-off date. (Courtesy: Antennas Direct)

FCC ACTION

NYC Jazz Station to Draw One Million New Listeners

Very few stations in the U.S. can potentially reach an additional one million listeners just by relocating its transmitter and antenna. But, if you're WBGO "Jazz88.3FM" that's just what could happen. This past June they received

permission from the FCC to move its transmitter and antenna from Newark, New Jersey to a midtown Manhattan building putting it nearly twice the height of its current location. But, it could take some time to happen. The station now needs to raise the money to make the change. The station already claims some 400,000 weekly listeners. To hear the once named "Jazz Station of the Year" listen live on-line at www.wbgo.org.

Midland Radio Fined \$21,000

A design miscue netted Midland Radio Corp., maker of FRS/GMRS, weather radios and CB sets, a \$21,000 fine imposed by the FCC. Somehow the Commission received information indicating that Midland was marketing General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) handheld sets that have a voice scrambling feature. It's that feature that landed the company in trouble, because the FCC doesn't allow scrambling of transmissions on such radios.

Midland maintained that they did so in order to compete in the market that had other manufacturers offering the same feature. And, according to FCC documents, Midland argued that "...because no enforcement action was taken and one of those products remained certified, it was justified in assuming that the Commission had decided not to require the products to come off the market."

However, the Commission found that two of the models were in violation of its FCC certification and fined the company \$7,000 per model for a total of \$14,000. The Commission tacked

on an additional \$7,000 for having marketed the noncompliant products over a five year period. The Commission said the total \$21,000 should be a deterrent to other highly profitable businesses dealing in noncompliant products. FCC documents put Midland's annual revenues at just under \$10 million.

GMRS License Fee vs. Fine

Compliance with FCC rules to be licensed in order to operate GMRS radios is rarely enforced. So rare is it that, of the millions of sets sold, only a few tens of thousands of licenses have been issued at \$80/each, and most of those are never renewed. Still, rules are rules, says the FCC. And, when a company using GMRS sets without a license gets caught, the Commission lowers the boom.

Acting on a tip to the Philadelphia office of the FCC from the Personal Radio Association, an *ad hoc* citizen's group organized to police GMRS license rules on behalf of legitimate GMRS license holders, the FCC set out to catch Bear Creek Mountain Resort, Macungie, Pennsylvania, in the act of flagrant GMRS radio piracy.

On February 21, 2008, working the day watch out of HQ, an FCC agent checked the Commission's database for a GMRS license issued to Bear Creek Mountain Resort and found none. Later that day, according to FCC documents, "the agent, using a mobile digital direction finding vehicle, monitored several frequencies near Bear Creek...the agent heard an individual request assistance bringing a girl with a broken wrist down the mountain." Gotcha!

Well, even if you're using GMRS radios for health and welfare and safety of the general public, if you don't have the license, you can expect a fine. So, the FCC slapped Bear Mountain for \$10,000, as stipulated by law. Bear Creek argued that the company that sold them the radios never explained that a license was required. The Commission was unmoved. But, Bear Creek applied for and was granted a GMRS license later that month and the FCC was mollified enough to reduce the fine to \$5,000.

"Communications" is compiled by Ken Reitz, KS4ZR (kenreitz@monitoringtimes.com) from news clippings and links supplied by our readers. Many thanks to this month's fine reporters: Anonymous, Rachel Baughn, Robert Fraser, Bob Margolis, Brian Rogers, Greg Smith, Larry Van Horn, Ed Yeary, George Zeller

MT READERS ONLY

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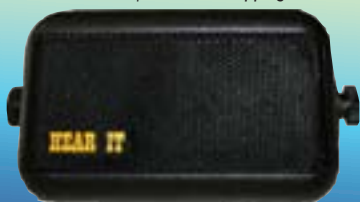
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