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QST Issue: Jun 2002

Title: "The Flight of the Century"

Author: John H. Dilks III, K2TQN

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OLD RADIO

"The Fight of the Century"

On July 2, 1921, hams created the first Sports Network to broadcast "The Fight of the Century," the Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier heavyweight championship fight held in Jersey City, New Jersey. Because of the hams, 300,000 people heard the broadcast up to 400 miles away.

The entire broadcasting arrangements, both transmitting and receiving, were under the direction of the National Amateur Wireless Association (NAWA). This group of hams was resourceful and influential. Many of them lived in the area, which allowed them to participate on fight day. NAWA was also associated with *Wireless Age* magazine.

Through the courtesy of Tex Rickard, promoter of the big fight, radio proceeds and donations collected benefited the American Committee for Devastated France and also the Navy Club of the United States.

How did the Hams do it?

J. O. Smith, 2ZL, well-known ham and former director of ARRL, handled the installation and testing. The transmitter used was the most powerful commercial wireless telephone set ever built up to that time. It was donated by the Radio Cor-

poration of America and built by hams at the General Electric plant in Schenectady, New York.

The transmission was on 1600 meters, or about 187 kilohertz. This was a Navy frequency for which special permission was requested and granted. This frequency was chosen because it was reliable and the then current technology supported it.

The tower at the Lackawanna Railroad Terminal was used for the antenna of six wires, on 30-foot spreaders. It was connected between the 400-foot tower and the clock tower of the terminal building.

The antenna was 680 feet long, and had a natural period of 850 meters. The antenna current was between 20 and 25 A, representing approximately 3.5 kW.

The Day of the Fight

Using a telephone line constructed by AT&T, Mr J. Andrew White, acting president of the NAWA, with the help of Mr Welker, his observer, described the preliminaries and the main bout, talking over the direct wire from ringside. J. O. Smith then repeated this description word for word into the radiophone transmitter located in nearby Hoboken.

Hundreds of hams, mostly using their own equipment, constructed all the receiving sites. Along with their receivers, they also constructed loud speakers and amplifiers suitable for the size of the room or hall where they were located.

Reports received by the NAWA after the fights were complimentary.

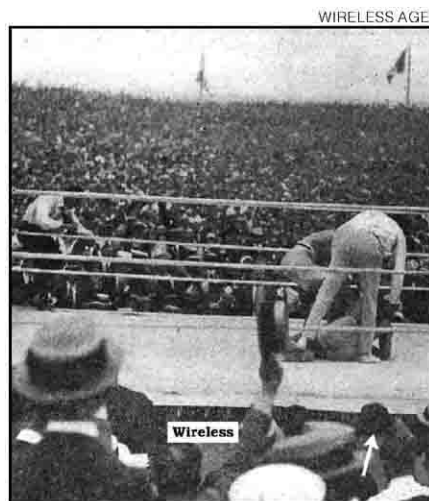
From C. R. Vincent of the Plainfield Radio Association: "I arranged for the reception of the returns at the Golf Club in Westfield, NJ. The entire voice description of the fight was clearly received and every body was surprised and delighted. A check for \$50.00 was sent in to the fund."

From William F. Diehl, 2CY: "The broadcast was received with remarkable intensity and clarity. The output was transferred to a Western Electric loud speaker, which made the voice easy to understand in any part of the arena, which by the way seats 8,000 people. It might interest you to know that not a single interruption of the voice was noted during the entire broadcast. Every word was clear and distinct. Not one person could be discovered in the crowd who had ever witnessed a demonstration of radio telephony before, and one could hear a pin drop, it was so quiet during the performance."

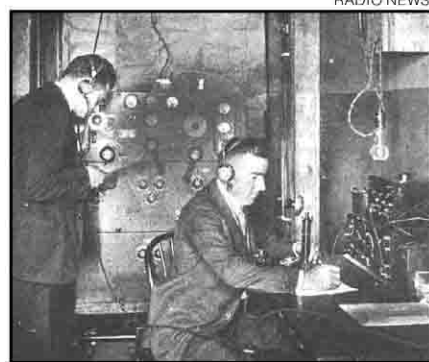
To read the original articles from the 1921 *Wireless Age* magazines, visit my Web site at www.eht.com/oldradio/arrl/index.html.

K2TQN's Mobile Museum

You can see my museum with some new displays at the Raritan Valley Radio Club Hamfest on Saturday, June 15, at the Columbia Park in Dunellen, New Jersey. Look for my call letters on my hat and say hello.—K2TQN QST



This photo was taken immediately after the final 10 was counted. It shows the wireless booth at the ringside. The arrow points to Mr J. Andrew White who described the contest for the radio audience."



View of the 3-kW GE transmitter and the operator reporting the fight.

