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QST Issue: Aug 1988
Title: Elmers Who Made a Difference: A Tribute to "Daddy-O" Kawamoto
Author: Eric Nichols, KL7AJ

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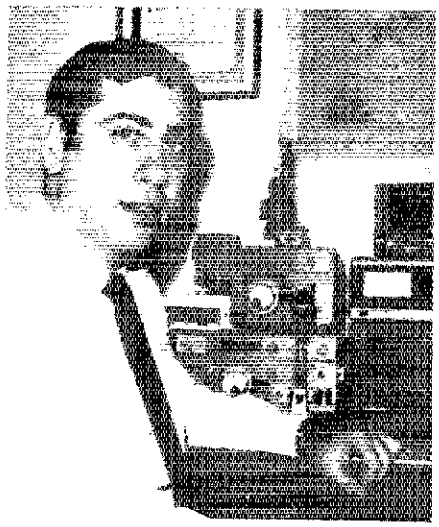
Bob Varone, WA4ETN, was first licensed at age 16 in 1963 with the call WN2GLI, and became WB2GLI when he upgraded. When he moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, he received his present call. He moved to Lilburn, Georgia in 1981 and upgraded to Extra Class in 1983. Bob enjoys the low bands and can usually be found in the middle of pileups on SSB, CW or RTTY.

Bob credits Amateur Radio as being responsible for finding his vocation, electronics and communications, at an early age. His 22-year career so far has included everything from computers to satellite earth-station electronics and antennas.



Taking a break from operating is Bob Varone, WA4ETN. (*photo courtesy WA4ETN*)

He is currently Operations Manager of the Meeting Channel for US Sprint, which provides videoconferencing services. Communications links are provided by fiber optics and, in the case of overseas connections, by satellite.

Active with the Gwinnett Amateur Radio Society, where he serves on the repeater technical committee, he is also Assistant Chief Volunteer Examiner Coordinator for the Central Alabama VEC, Inc and runs one test session per month.

Harry Davis, W3FDY: In the Beginning

They tell me Amateur Radio is a hobby. Someone who is interested in electronics, in tinkering and playing with radios is a candidate for this hobby. Some people think of it as a mode of communication or a way of knowing people in far-off lands.

Whatever it is to each person, it had a beginning, and usually that beginning started with an Elmer. An Elmer, or beginning, is someone or something that started us in the world of Amateur Radio. My Elmer's name is Harry. I was first introduced to Harry by radio.

My First Radio

In 1963 my grandfather gave me an old RCA receiver. It was from the 1940s and about 4 feet high; if you can remember an old Bill Cosby routine where he explains about listening to the Phantom on an old radio with a million knobs, a big clock-like face and only one knob that worked, that was my first radio. With a little tinkering, I got some of the other knobs to work and was able to listen to medium-wave and shortwave, including 75-meter phone.

I can vividly remember hearing W3FDY, Harry, every Saturday morning, talking to his ham radio buddies. Their conversations were magical to me. In listening to those voices, I learned many things about radio. I lived through many crazy experiments with their antennas and reverberations on AM. I learned about the individuals, their voices, their likes and dislikes, and even their troubles.

Harry's Mountain

It seems somehow odd, but I felt I knew these people, especially Harry. He always had an opinion about everything. Some guys called him "The Voice of Parkbury, Pennsylvania." And his ham shack, Studio B as he sometimes called it, sounded like an amazing place to be. It was on "Harry's Mountain," which I always thought was a tale.

To a 12-year-old boy, all of this was quite an experience. I enjoyed those Saturday mornings. I learned the spirit of Amateur Radio on the air. This is where I was injected with "the bug."

Time went by swiftly. The old RCA bit the dust. I started high school, and it wasn't until 1969, while in the Navy, that I got my ham ticket.

But it's the way with all Elmers that you never forget. In 1985, while driving down I-95 to work and listening to the local repeater, I received my first déjà vu of that RCA receiver and Harry; I heard this familiar voice talking to someone on the radio. I thought to myself, "I know that voice from somewhere."

It was Harry, W3FDY, 20 years later. Of course, Harry didn't know me, but I sure remembered him. I related this story to him that day and was late for work, but it was worth it. It isn't every day that you talk to your Elmer, the person who gave you the initiative 20 years ago to get involved in this wonderful, crazy hobby. I also found out that in those 20 years, Harry has instilled that spirit in hundreds of people like me by giving code classes and teaching ham radio to anyone who was willing.

About a year later, I finally met Harry face-to-face. It was at a picnic at his mountain. Yes, he does live on a mountain and has a marvelous display of Amateur Radio equipment from the past to the present. And there were many of Harry's friends there, the other voices I listened to years ago. For me this was quite a thrill, something I will never forget.

So this is one story of what an Elmer is. Sometimes it may take 20 years to find out, and perhaps some never will, but as long as Amateur Radio goes on, we will have them. Thanks, Harry.—*Jim Lanahan, WA3PHT*

Jim Lanahan works for Diamond State Telephone in his home state of Delaware. Jim describes his work in data and fiber optics as "on the edge of technology and very exciting."

Jim is active in RACES, his local Del Traffic Net, community fund raisers and athletic events. Other events he has been involved in include providing communications for Hands Across America and the Ladies' Professional Golf Association.

A Tribute to "Daddy-O" Kawamoto

Most hams worthy of the name can recall a certain person in their life—a mentor, Elmer or elder—who left an indelible imprint during their formative years.

In my case, this was one Mr Tadao "Daddy-O" Kawamoto, a man more reminiscent of a Sumo wrestler than a high-school electronics teacher. "Daddy-O" was, of course, our interpretation of Mr Kawamoto's first name, although upon first setting eyes on him it was considered the better part of wisdom to address him as Mr Kawamoto.

But this was 1969, and anyone or anything representing authority was subject to the scrutiny of the more enlightened generation of which I was part. Besides, as it turned out, Daddy-O had a heart of gold and had resigned himself to the fact that his name would be eternally mispronounced.

I had moved, and entered my new Southern California high school in the middle of my sophomore year, and electronics soon took priority in my curriculum. I was just getting into loudness at the time, and I was hoping to learn how to build the ultimate sound system with which to fry my cerebrum; Amateur Radio was about the farthest thing from my mind.

I had been given fair warning about Daddy-O's class being tough; the guy even had the audacity to mark down exam grades for spelling and grammatical errors. Who ever heard of an electronics teacher caring about spelling? Fortunately for me, spelling was one of my academic strengths, but it still bothered me that a budding electron jockey could be cut down in the prime of life for using lousy grammar.

Our first assignment for the new year was to plot the field-strength patterns for a dipole antenna radiating a carrier at about 4 GHz. Daddy-O explained that a bolometer would be used to actually measure the radiated field. Until that time, I had thought that a bolo was some kind of lasso used by cattlemen in Argentina, but if this Sumo wrestler thought he could measure radio waves with leather straps and iron weights, who was I to argue?

Upon further investigation, I discovered that a bolometer was nothing more than a piece of wire that absorbed radio waves and changed resistance. I had enough electronics under my belt to know what resistance was, but this radio-frequency stuff was pretty new to me.

Daddy-O ordered a couple of the more senior students to roll out a rack full of

electronic equipment. After the rack was in place, they were ordered to fire up the reflex klystron. Naturally, I had never heard of this either.

After a couple of minutes, these anointed students followed Daddy-O's instructions to check a few weird parameters like repeller voltage, and an even more mysterious thing that went by the code name "VSWR." Obviously, VSWR was Japanese for "watts."

The elder students then called Daddy-O over to take a look at the mystery meter. The Sumo wrestler frowned, disappeared into a cabinet in the corner of the room, and returned with a ball-peen hammer. He then confirmed my deepest suspicions by giving the waveguide which fed the dipole a sound rap with the hammer. I had seen the secret of Japanese technology revealed before my very eyes!

After a few more hammerings, Daddy-O smiled broadly, obviously proud of having beaten this VSWR demon into submission. It would be a couple of years before I would know exactly what had transpired between Daddy-O and waveguide, but the act had forever settled in my consciousness the fact that things are not what they seem, as Daddy-O would frequently point out.

The Hook is Set

Now that we had the kinks out of the test setup (or rather, put into it, depending on one's point of view), we were ready for the hard part. We commenced with the tedious process of taking dozens of field-strength measurements at various distances and orientations with respect to the dipole. When at long last we plotted the results on polar graph paper, I was astonished that the results exactly matched the picture in the textbook. I wasn't exactly sure what we had done, but I knew I was hooked. This RF stuff was really different. And for the first time in a long time, something I was involved with worked the way it was supposed to!

As far as I know, Daddy-O was not a licensed amateur, but his many years of experience as an engineer in a Japanese electronics firm made him a master of the practical. His many rules of thumb took the tedium out of learning electronics, although admittedly they annoyed the chemists in the class who were used to carrying calculations out to 10 decimal places.

One of the benefits of his former occupation was his ready access to truckloads of cheap electronic components, notably brown epoxy transistors. He would make frequent pilgrimages to his old firm in Japan for the sole purpose of bringing us goodies to fry on the test bench.

One of Daddy-O's dreaded "pop quizzes" was the infamous black-box test. The Master would assemble a variety of basic components in a sealed container with only two leads protruding. Our assignment was to draw a schematic of the hidden circuit after performing some basic tests on the box. I remember one student, in frustration, connecting a set of 110 V ac "funny-jumpers" to the leads of the box in question, which immediately exploded. He then nonchalantly wrote "electrolytic capacitor" on his answer sheet. Daddy-O, in characteristic fashion, gave him an "A."

A Touch of Class

The highest honor that could be bestowed by Daddy-O on a project was that of "having class." Only once during my tutelage did one of my projects earn that distinction. Ironically, that project was a VSWR meter. Perhaps it wasn't ironic after all; Daddy-O could make the most obscure concepts come to life.

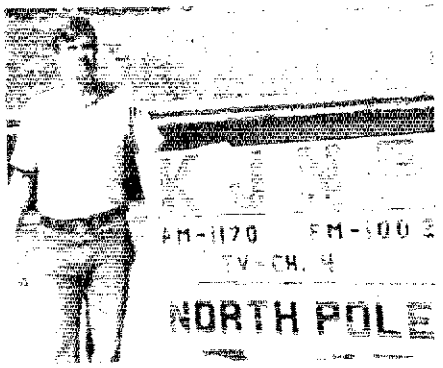
One of the items Daddy-O used to make RF come alive was a huge Lecher wire mounted on the sidewall of the classroom. The Master would astound us all with his running commentary as he would slide a light bulb along the wire's 25-foot length. Probably no other demonstration convinced me as much that radio was the only possible occupation. Where else could you do so much with so little? More importantly, Daddy-O's demonstrations showed us that there was a certain degree of order in the universe, a concept that was vitally important at that time in our lives.

A lot of electrons have gone through the RF bridge since those wonderful days in the Master's classroom. In fact, the entire microelectronic revolution has seen its birth and adolescence since that time. I have long since lost track of Daddy-O.

This is a day when heroes are in short supply. I was fortunate enough to have one at the right time in my life.

"Daddy-O" Kawamoto had class.—*Eric Nichols, KL7AJ*

Eric Nichols, KL7AJ, built his first crystal radio at the age of eight, and soon graduated to phono oscillators, broadcasting his wisdom to his neighbor's AM radio. He was temporarily distracted from radio by the discovery of motors, chemistry, skateboards and high fidelity.



Missionary radio station KJNP (in the background) and its chief engineer, Eric Nichols, KL7AJ. (*photo courtesy KL7AJ*)

After moving to Southern California, his interest in "real" electronics was resurrected by the object of this article. He received his Novice license in 1972. His second contact was with KL7GSC in Egegik, Alaska. This was Eric's first hint that someone might actually live up there. After two years of less-than-enthusiastic attendance at El Camino College, he decided that he had had enough concrete and thought that Egegik sounded more like the place he would like to be.

Eric finally ended up at KJNP, a 50,000-watt missionary radio station in North Pole, Alaska. Eric became chief engineer of the station in 1977, and he has held that position for 11 years, as well as doing announcing and just about everything else that can be done at a radio station.

Eric's favorite band is 160 meters; he especially appreciates the fact that in Alaska there is enough room to do some serious antenna work on that band, unlike the situation in Southern California. He would like to break the 50 WPM mark, but is stuck at around 45. Until then, however, he's decided to direct some of his energies towards writing a history of Amateur Radio in Alaska.

Strays

I would like to get in touch with...

☐ members of the 574th-565th Signal Aircraft Warning BNS for a reunion Sep 16-19 in Charleston, South Carolina. For details, write Angel M. Zargoza, W6ZPR, 1571 9th St, San Bernardino, CA 92411.

☐ anyone interested in collecting antenna end insulators. John Kruk, K3KR, 407 Irwin St, Lock Haven, PA 17745.

☐ anyone who has IBM-compatible software to send Cyrillic Morse code characters, possibly with Cyrillic print on screen. Jim Talens, N3JT, Box 19346, Washington, DC 20036.

☐ anyone who has a manual for an Eico model 430 oscilloscope. Tim Anderson, KØOR, 1545 Detroit Ave, Hot Springs, SD 57747.

☐ former members of the University of Illinois (Synton) ARC interested in receiving a club alumni newsletter. David Buyer, WD9AKV, Synton ARC, W9YH, University of Illinois, Electrical Engineering Bldg, 1403 W Green, Urbana, IL 61801.

☐ anyone who served on the USS *Chester* in the radio and radar division during WW II for the purpose of having a reunion in September. Charles Koon, WB5HES, 307 Delmont Ave, Sherwood, AR 72116.

☐ former OSS—COMMO veterans. Jim Ranney, W4KFR, 2640 Turkeyfoot Rd, Covington, KY 41017 or Joe Blahunka, W9RCJ, 317 E 2nd St, Lockport, IL 60441.

☐ anyone with an assembly/instruction manual for a Heathkit Impedance Bridge. Walter Bernath, K4UAS, 158 Buckingham Rd, Winston-Salem, NC 27104.