
SCANNERS

SHORTWAVE

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NYDXA@yahoo.com

NEW NY-NJ SCANNER DISCUSSION SITE

Some of our readers may already be aware that the long standing scanner discussion site hosted by Jim Fordyce is no longer.

<http://fordyce.org/scanboard/>

Over the past few months a select few individuals who used the site to vent personal issues accessed the database and disrupted the operation. While the site could probably be easily restored, Jim obviously had enough. Who can blame him.

On September 28 Jim posted the announcement that his site would be disbanded. From those of us who used the site, Jim needs to know how much we appreciated his efforts over the years.

Realizing the need for such web sites, the NYDXA quickly seized the opportunity and will start hosting the New York portion of the site immediately.

<http://www.n2nov.net/phpbb/>

Charlie has already posted "the rules" by which the board will be run. Rants, and "flames" won't be tolerated – user abuse will not be tolerated.

Scanner enthusiasts in New Jersey will now be served by Larry Morin's Scan New Jersey site at <http://forums.scan-nj.com/>

The main body of the site can be accessed at <http://scan-nj.com/>

For the most part, the format will be the same and the moderators should be familiar to many of you. Charlie and I ask you all to support both sites by sharing all your scanner related info with the scanner community.

UNIDEN BCD996T

Uniden America Corporation, a leading manufacturer of wireless consumer electronics, today announced a new mobile digital scanner, the Bearcat BCD996T. This model introduces the first-ever GPS-enabled scanner, allowing the product to automatically select nearby radio systems for scanning. The BCD996T also offers APCO 25 digital capability, allowing consumers to monitor the activities and signals of city and government

THE URBAN DX'ER

Established 1984

service departments, and features advanced scanner technology in an in-dash or mobile mount design.

The GPS-enabled feature offered by the BCD996T provides automatic system selection, which permits the scanner to turn system reception on or off depending on the user's location, and allows the user to define the scanner display to show location-based information.

In addition, when a GPS unit, not included with this scanner, is connected to the BCD996T, it will alert at areas of special interest, such as dangerous intersections, school zones, or general points of interest.

Featuring APCO 25 capability, Uniden's BCD996T is poised to further enhance Uniden's offerings to public safety and increase interoperability between agencies using different types of radio systems. Uniden's BCD996T will not permit users to monitor sensitive, encrypted signals from national and local security services. The Bearcat BCD996T also offers Close Call T RF Capture Technology, Dynamic Memory Management, Fire Tone-Out, and Multi-site programming as well as 6,000 channels and a frequency range of 25 MHz to 1.3 GHz (excluding cellular and UHF TV frequencies). This new model is slated to hit retail shelves in spring 2006 and carries a MSRP of \$849.99.

"The BCD996T, the first GPS-enabled model in the scanner industry, is another milestone in the evolution of scanning," said Paul Opitz, product manager at Uniden America Corporation. "These new features will provide an efficient way for agencies that need compatibility in multiple geographic areas to use the scanner without having to reprogram the equipment for each location."

An extended list of features will be available on the Uniden America Corp. website (www.uniden.com).

FDNY CHANGES

October 3, 2005: As of Monday at 0700. All dispatchers will have new numbers. Any permanent

civil service dispatcher will be from 100-499 with 120 retired and a few others blanks for recently promoted supervisors. Any provisional dispatcher with more than a year on has 500-699. Any probationary or provisional dispatcher with less than a year is 700-up.

For some of you scanner buffs out there, 247 will now be 104, Tree Tree Oh, K will now be 125. And this is Queens 324 will now be this is Queens 123. You'll be able to recognize most of the voices.

AMTRAK MONITORING

New Amtrak "Code Black":

A "code black" transmitted by via railroad radio, public address system, or other authorized means of communication, indicates that a confirmed detonation of an explosive device has occurred on a transportation mode in the United States that could pose a threat to Amtrak. Passenger train engineers and conductors who hear the radio transmission "code black" must immediately bring their trains to a safe stop at an area of "safe haven" clear of tunnels, bridges, and stations when practical to await further instructions. It is permissible to stop trains in areas adjacent to open or unsheltered commuter platform areas. Trains should be stopped at a location where it is safe to evacuate if necessary, and where local authorities may readily have access to the train, crew, and passengers. Freight crews including those of Conrail, CSXT, and Norfolk Southern operating on Amtrak property, upon hearing the radio transmission "Code Black" must also take immediate action to stop their trains at an area of "safe haven", unless otherwise instructed by the Amtrak Train Dispatcher, or if the train is in such a location that it is more expedient to continue movement off of Amtrak property. Public address announcements to passengers will be made immediately after a train has been brought to a safe stop. A "code black" essentially amounts to a system shutdown which must begin within minutes of initial notification that an explosion has been confirmed. Station employees must prepare for the orderly evacuation of stations and other facilities, if directed, pending security sweeps.

All standing equipment in stations during the system shutdown must be inspected and secured. Once standing enroute trains and the infrastructure ahead have been inspected and cleared, trains may Receive instructions to proceed, or to evacuate passengers to alternate transportation, depending

on the circumstances. This instruction will be authorized by the CEO of the Amtrak Command Center or by CNOC, and communicated through the train dispatcher. During a "code black", no train may depart an initial terminal until all equipment and infrastructure inspections have been completed, and authorization to proceed has been received from the train dispatcher. In the event of the detonation of an explosive device onboard an Amtrak train, at an Amtrak station, or other facility, any employee who is able must notify the train dispatcher or the Amtrak Police. When initiating a radio call from a train on which an explosion has been confirmed, the transmission must begin with the words "Emergency, emergency, emergency, train number ...is in code black". Train dispatchers hearing this radio message must respond promptly by retransmitting the train's emergency radio message to ensure that it is received by as many trains as possible, and then must attempt to obtain further information regarding the situation.

IMPROVING MW (BCB) DX'ING

Antennas for MW reception
Marc Dekenah, ZS6MGD

If you are experiencing bad MW reception then good news would be if the receiver has an external antenna connection point. It should also have A ground (GND) connection as it is rare such a point does not accompany an external antenna connection.

Before we start with the discussion of antennas: The problem with MW reception is the vast frequency range of the MW band being 540-1760kHz or just over 3:1 span. Using the formula wavelength = $300 \div f$ (in MHz) we see our MW band encompasses wavelengths from approximately 555 meters down to 170 meters.

Wire antennas, e.g. half wavelength, are only suitable for about 10% either side of the frequency for which they are cut (narrowing to only 3% when used for transmitting). With such a vast wavelength span having "a piece of wire cut to wavelength" (or proportion thereof) is just not feasible. Antennas, for MW, therefore have to be designed for wide frequency use.

Two rules need to be remembered with external antenna connections of this nature. Unless otherwise stated these inputs are usually high

impedance. Also, most are simply capacitive coupled to the internal ferrite antenna and therefore the external antenna must not load the input as this will detune the input circuit thus defeating the object of using an antenna.

Determining the input type, and thus the type of antenna to be used, is a fairly simple task.

First, touch the antenna lug with your finger. If the signal strength is drastically improved the chances are the input is high impedance. To confirm this connect a short wire (1.5 to 2m) to the lug, this should also make a drastic impact on the signal. Now add a second piece of the same length to the end of the first wire thus doubling the length of the wire. This should have a much smaller effect on the signal strength. If it appears to double the signal strength the chances are the input is a low (50 to 75 ohms) to medium (300 to 600 ohms) impedance type.

The next requirement is to determine if the input is capacitive coupled to the ferrite antenna system or not. First, remove any the antenna connected in the previous test. Tune to a station at the highest frequency possible and then short the antenna lug to the ground lug. If the signal is drastically reduced the system is likely to be coupled to the internal ferrite antenna system in the usual manner being a capacitor. What happens when you short the input is the capacitor is put in parallel with the ferrite antenna which detunes it. This indicates that the external antenna must not be large or of a design that will load the input circuit.

Choosing the antenna:

First a word about MW stations; these stations transmit using vertical polarization, and not horizontal as most would believe. This means the best orientation of the antenna is up and down e.g. secured from the top of a tall tree down through a window, and not stretched out horizontally as done with SW antennas. Most MW antennas installed e.g. in the attic of a house, would mostly be using the down lead with little extra signal added by the horizontal leg.

Having a signal on the end of an antenna without any reference point to work against renders it fairly useless. This is where the ground lug comes into play, "completing the circuit" so-to-speak. In order for the maximum amount of signal to be fed into the receiver the ground lug needs to be secured as best possible to Mother Earth. A wire (and the shorter the better) from a buried cold water pipe

serves superbly for all wire antennas. Loop antennas will not require the ground lug to earth connection as the signal appears across the loop and the circuit is completed at the receiver.

Back to the main subject: There are basically three types of antenna available to you. The first is the only one usable on high impedance inputs, the first and second for medium, and all three for low impedance (the effectiveness being the only deciding factor here).

THE SHORT, LOW CAPACITANCE ANTENNA:

This antenna is nothing more than a short piece of wire that assists by increasing the effective "capture area" of the internal ferrite antenna. The length of this antenna is not to exceed one-eighth wavelength and is therefore controlled by the highest frequency to be received. As 1760kHz is the highest for the MW band our antenna may be no longer than 21m (70ft). One point to remember here is the average self capacitance of a piece of wire is about 5pF/m which means our piece of wire could be in excess of 100pF.

Although there is extra signal this amount of capacitance will undoubtedly detune the input, the extent of the detuning determining the amount of Benefit of the extra signal. There is a point at which any extra length, which detunes the input through the extra capacitance, would counteract the extra signal available.

A good starting point, using a station at the top end of the band (as Tuned circuits are more affected by the capacitance at higher frequencies), would be a 5m (16ft) antenna. Then double this to 10m (33ft) and noticing if the signal improves dramatically. If it does then extend this by 5m a time until 20m is reached, each time listening to the extra signal received. If no significant improvement is heard then remove the last extension made and call it a day.

If the very first extension from 5 to 10 meters seems to not improve things much then halve the length to 2.5m and notice if there is any serious degradation. If so then 5m is the length required. If no degradation is noticed then even this small length is already affecting the receiver's antenna tuned circuits. Unfortunately there is no golden rule here and experimentation will be necessary.

THE MEDIUM IMPEDANCE ANTENNA:

Only two types fall into this category being the long

wire and the loop.

Long-wires unfortunately require a very large backyard as they need to be over a half wavelength in length before being effective enough to warrant their set up. Setting up a long-wire, however, is simple. Just point it at the station required and you're done. Long-wires are suitable for vertical polarization although they do work better with horizontal, which makes them slightly unattractive when trying to blot out interference from power lines (being horizontal makes them emit any interference in a horizontal plane).

Long wires are directional devices so best reception tends to be limited to one direction.

Loops are also directional but their size allows for the direction to be changed as required. Usually some experimentation is needed but a good starting point is a frame made about 1m X 1m (3 X 3 ft) wrapped with 50 turns of fairly thin insulated wire, with connection points made available at Every 10 turns. Connect the 'start' to the ground lug and then experiment with which point (10, 20, ..., 50 turns) works best when connected to the 'Ant' input.

Usually one 'tapping' works fairly well across the whole band. Using this loop is a two fold process in that the station should be found then the antenna turned for best reception.

This is a derivative of the loop known as the "tuned loop", but we believe the scope of this paper is for simple alternatives and have steered away from such complexities.

LOW IMPEDANCE antennas:

There is only one suitable antenna for this extremely wide frequency spectrum being the Windom. This antenna is effectively a 'serial quarter wavelength'.

For MW it would be best to use two such antennas to try having at least some element close to quarter wavelength at any one time.

One feature of a quarter wavelength antenna is that it also operates at odd multiples of frequency i.e. that which works at 550 kHz will also work at 1650 kHz, so only one piece of wire will cover both ends of the band.

There is one antenna that is open to the more

adventurous (and those who have an electronics store available to them) and that is the "traveling wave". As said previously MW stations transmit using vertical polarization which makes this antenna a little simpler as only one leg needs to be constructed (using a horizontally orientated would mean twice as much work. Simply using a Quarter wavelength the lowest frequency (in our case 540 kHz) and inserting a 100 ohm at the one-third point and a 470 ohm at two-thirds point we effectively create an antenna with about 3 to 4:1 frequency ratio. Dimensions are shown below. As this antenna is only for reception we require nothing more than ¼ watt resistors.

Mount this antenna between a high tree with the other end directly connected to the receiver. Should there be a long distance between the antenna base and the receiver (i.e. a large proportion of the antenna lands up in the house) then use a piece of 75 ohm TV coax from the receiver to the antenna base, not forgetting the earth also has to move to the end of the coax as shown.

FCC approval means better communication

By SARAH NETTER

THE JOURNALNEWS

(Original Publication: September 28, 2005)

Planning for the county's \$30 million emergency communications system is back on track. The Federal Communication Commission has ruled that Rockland County can keep eight of the 10 radio frequencies it purchased in 1998 in hopes of revamping the outdated communications system for police, fire and emergency medical services. Rockland purchased the frequencies for \$5,000, but hadn't used them when the FCC took them back last year as part of a nationwide audit. Knowing that losing the frequencies could push back the creation of the new communications system, Rockland and state officials, including U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey, D- Harrison, petitioned the FCC to reverse their decision.

The FCC handed down its decision Sept. 21. "We're very pleased to get them back," County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef said of the frequencies, adding that he wants the new system up and running in three years. "It's aggressive, but I think it can be done." Pablo Ramos, director of Rockland's enhanced 911 system, said the county didn't get back two of its original frequencies

because they were deemed unusable because of interference. Currently, police, fire and EMS personnel can't communicate with other departments without having to go through each department's headquarters. "They do it through a relay system," Ramos said, adding that the communications equipment is as outdated as the process.

The new system would cut out the middle man and allow for direct communication.

"A firefighter in Piermont would be able to talk to a firefighter in Hillcrest or Stony Point," Ramos said, adding that the departments would also receive new equipment.

The County Legislature approved \$4 million in 2003 to start planning the system. The Legislature must now vote on another \$21 million, Ramos said, adding that there will also be \$5 million paid by local towns and fire districts.

Legislature Chairwoman Harriet Cornell said the Legislature stalled in approving the \$21 million because the fate of the county's frequencies was up in the air.

"Now that the approval has come in from the FCC, it should go through quickly," she said. Frank Voce, president of the Congers Fire Department, said the new system will be a welcomed change.

"Time is essential," he said, adding that the current communications system causes precious time to be lost during an emergency. "If these seconds can be cut down, or these minutes cut down to seconds, it's a big deal." Nanuet Fire Chief Vincent Pacella likened the current system to the "telephone" game children play in which a message is relayed from child to child and inevitably becomes distorted. "It's a nightmare," he said. "Especially in this day and age with the technology that's available. It shouldn't be happening."

The new system will be a "godsend," Pacella said. "This is something we've been waiting for, for a long time."

SCANNER HOUNDS LEFT OUT OF THE LOOP
[HTTP://WWW.FREEP.COM/NEWS/METRO/JOURNAL21E_20050921.HTM](http://www.freep.com/news/metro/journal21e_20050921.htm)

In upgrading the radio systems used by its fire and police departments last week, the City of Detroit unquestionably did something good for public

safety.

But the change has had unintended consequences -- all of them bad -- for many civilians who monitor police and fire radio traffic on receivers known as scanners.

The problem: Most of the inexpensive old scanners in widespread use won't pick up Detroit's new, digital signals. All they have received since Sept. 13 is white noise.

The solution: Buy a high-tech scanner that decodes those signals. A new one costs about \$500. This has become a major issue in the scanner community, which is somewhat of a cult. It has its own jargon, folklore, specialized gear and all-time hits, such as recordings of frantic fire calls during the 1967 riot and 1984 Devil's Night. Some members, with a touch of self-deprecation, call themselves scanner geeks.

The cult includes fire buffs, police buffs, and residents curious about what's happening in their neighborhoods, journalists and suburbanites. And Renee Lynch of Detroit. She's a dispatcher and longtime member of the Detroit Area Residents East, or DARE, citizen radio patrol.

"We're very concerned about the change," said Lynch, 78. "We've always relied on our scanners." DARE is one of about 40 such volunteer patrols in Detroit that keep an eye on neighborhoods and summon police when members see problems. They listen to scanners to keep abreast on what police might already be doing in their territory. "If we hear there is someone shooting a gun, we have to warn our people to get off that street," Lynch said. "Now, there is nothing on the scanner. It's scary." A lot of scanner geeks scan both because of their jobs and because they love scanning.

"The switch to digital radio signals is part of a project by the City of Detroit to improve its emergency response operations. It will allow Detroit agencies to communicate with one another via radio and will tie Detroit into a statewide communications system."

Like Mickey McCanham, 51, of Commerce Township, assignment manager at WXYZ-TV (Channel 7). He already has an updated scanner. "I started listening when I was 8," he said. "I would ride my bike to fires. I think I have every scanner ever made." McCanham was asked whether it is true that he has a scanner over his bed. "So?" he

answered. "If it's a high-activity night, I have to have it on. If my 10-year-old son can't sleep, he'll come in and say, 'Dad, can we listen to the scanner?' "

What's the attraction?

Scanners are reality radio, especially those broadcasting Detroit's busy police and fire traffic. "It brings the action into your home," said Dan Jasina, 44, a member of Box 42 Associates, a group of Detroit-area fire buffs. "I'm not into science fiction. I like real stuff. This is real. Firemen are laying their lives on the line, and you're part of it." Gary Bouwkamp, editor of a Web site titled South East Michigan Scanner Page, www.bouwkamp.net/miscanner/, said scanning also appeals to people who enjoy the technical challenge of finding new frequencies. Lynch, of the DARE patrol, had another interpretation. "It's a man thing," she said.

"Scanner models that are compatible with Detroit's new system: Uniden BCD 396T and BC 796D; Radio Shack PRO-96 and PRO-2096. All four retail for \$450 to \$575."

Scanning can be addictive. Bill Eisner, a Roseville freelance photographer who has used scanners to find fires in Detroit for 43 years, wears a portable scanner and has scanners in his basement, bedroom, living room and girlfriend's house. "I need it," said Eisner, 68, whose photos have been used by the Detroit Fire Department, the Free Press and national publications. They also have been collected in a 1987 book of fire scenes titled "We're Stretching." (as in hoses.) Eisner says he needs to upgrade his scanners. He has felt untethered since Detroit's upgrade. "This is terrible," he said. "I don't know if there are fires. I can't chase them."

POLICE CALL KING CALLS IT QUILTS

By Kevin Poulsen for Wired.com

It was the best day amid the worst years of Gene Hughes' life. He was 13 years old and seeking escape from the loneliness of a Los Angeles foster home by playing with an AM radio his uncle had mailed him. Tuning around the dial, he picked up something different from the dance hall music and campy radio dramas that normally spilled from the tinny speaker -- something unexpectedly genuine. "I suddenly heard strange voices, women broadcasting addresses and numeric codes," he recalls.

He quickly figured out that he'd somehow tuned into Los Angeles Police Department dispatchers crisply directing the city's black-and-white police cars to real robberies, domestic disturbances and traffic accidents throughout the City of Angels.

That was 1940; nearly a half-century before shows like Cops would turn live police action into mass entertainment. And what might have sounded to someone else's ears like unwanted interference from a city transmitter, was to Hughes the pulsing music of an invisible world. He bought a map and started marking out the police calls with a pencil. As he moved into adulthood, his interest only increased, and he invested in specialized radio receivers. "If they had the word, I guess you'd have called me a nerd," says Hughes.

But that nerdiness paid off. In 1964, in a bet with his wife, Hughes took all the information he'd accumulated -- call signs, frequencies and codes for police, fire, paramedics and other agencies -- and rolled it up into a 16-pagemanual titled Police Call.

It was the start of something big. Under Hughes' direction, Police Call would eventually expand into nine regional volumes covering the entire continental United States, with a peak circulation of a half-million copies. Updated annually, it would sell countless thousands of radio scanners and play a crucial role in incubating and growing the hobby of radio monitoring, which traces a line from the cop watchers of the 1970s to the rail fans of the '90s and the NASCAR dads of today.

Along the way, Police Call would help spawn local and national clubs and organizations, spark brushfire controversies over information disclosure, and turn Gene Hughes -- a pen name -- into a household word among scanner Buffs and anyone who spent too much time at Radio Shack when they were kids.

Last month, Hughes, now 77, announced he was closing down Police Call after 41 years. Radio heads call it the end of an era. "He's a giant in the hobby," says Peter Laws, 42-year-old scanning buff and founder of a popular e-mail list dedicated to monitoring. "I'm not saying there would have been no hobby without him, but the hobby would have been very different without him."

It began with a bit of marital banter. Confronted with Hughes' compulsion to gather and organize information on Los Angeles' radio spectrum, his wife, Mitzi, pointed out the obvious. "She said, 'You're doing the stupidest thing in the world,'" recalls Hughes. "I said, 'I bet people would pay for this.'" That first edition of *Police Call* sold 800 copies through a Southern California radio shop. Mitzi did the cover art -- a sketch of a police car and a fire truck with lightning bolts radiating from their antennas. "I never imagined there would be a second copy," says Hughes.

But there was a second edition, then a third and a fourth. The book continued as a Southern California phenomenon for the better part of a decade. Then, in 1973, Hughes teamed up with a computer jockey named George Switlyk who knew how to crunch the opaque FCC frequency databases into meaningful data, and the pair began banging out nine national editions covering nearly the entire country.

Their timing was impeccable: Three years later, the first programmable scanners hit the consumer market, and cracked it wide open.

Before then, the most flexible monitoring equipment differed little in operation from a transistor radio -- if you wanted to listen to the sheriff's department, you'd manually set the dial to the department's dispatch frequency, and rest it there. Alternatively, you could use a scanning receiver capable of cycling through different channels, but you needed separate, pre-cut crystals attuned to each frequency.

While crude by today's standards, the first programmable scanner, sold by a now-defunct company called Tennelec, was a breakthrough: It could be programmed on the fly to monitor up to eight different channels, rapidly cycling through them, stopping wherever it picked up a transmission, then moving on again. No crystals required.

It was *Headline News* where only CBS had been; RSS instead of HTTP. Here, a cop runs the license plate of a suspicious car; there, a paramedic radios the emergency room that they're rolling into with an accident victim; a moment later a fire dispatcher summons two more engines to a downtown blaze. Back to the cop and the driver has a warrant and someone's going to jail.

The scanner was a hit at the 1976 Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. But it was clear that people were going to need information to go with the new gadget: a TV Guide, of sorts, for reality media. A buyer for the Fort Worth, Texas-based electronics chain Radio Shack figured it out quick, and hunted down Hughes on the show's floor. "Are you still printing that book of frequencies?" Leon Lutz asked in a Texas drawl. Hughes said he was. "Well, I guess I got to buy some," Lutz said.

Radio Shack had 2,000 stores in shopping centers and strip malls around the country, and the company was going into monitoring in a big way -- it

Would soon have its own line of programmable scanners. The company's first purchase order for *Police Call* was for 65,000 books, says Hughes, more than seven times his previous print run. "I remember opening that envelope and, wow, the excitement lifted me off the floor."

Hughes and Switlyk would sell the books through Radio Shack for years to come.

"The scanners helped sell the book and the book helped sell the scanners," says Paul Opitz, former product development director for Radio Shack. "Drop either one out of the equation and the numbers go down significantly. It was a very nice symbiotic relationship."

But law enforcement agencies weren't used to the public listening in, and *Police Call* courted controversy from the beginning. "There were a lot of police that did not want their frequencies known," says Hughes. "I'd tell them they could go down to the FCC and see them."

Hughes voluntarily omitted some frequencies that he thought particularly sensitive, like FBI and Secret Service channels, but he says he never cut a frequency under external pressure. Crooks, of course, were delighted with scanners, and with *Police Call*. "People sent me several clippings where the police broke up burglary rings, and right there in the picture you could see my book sitting on the table," Hughes says with a chuckle.

Several states passed laws against driving with a scanner -- statutes that remain on the books today, but are rarely enforced.

But the typical scanner owner isn't a criminal. And if the very term police scanner summons an acrid flavor of dangerous isolation -- the whiff of neighborhood busybodies, cop wannabes and weird shut-ins -- the reality is broader: sports fans, airplane buffs and off-duty emergency workers have all found scanners useful.

When, 15 years ago, Hughes hinted he might stop publishing railroad frequencies, he was deluged with mail from railway aficionados -- a reader base he didn't even know he had. Today, scanners are must-have items for many NASCAR fans. "Being able to listen to the dialogue between the pit crew and the driver really adds a lot to the race," says Opitz, who's now a product manager at scanner giant Uniden and uses a scanner in his weekend sport of tornado chasing.

With each edition, Police Call had more information to track (recent editions have included CD-ROMs). Advancing technology allowed electromagnetic Spectrum to be handled in thinner slices, which meant more channels to go around.

At the same time, radio systems became more complicated over the years, forcing costly upgrade cycles on listeners. Cities began adopting systems that used "trunking," a computer-controlled technique for making efficient use of frequencies, which rendered old scanners obsolete. Digital radio required even newer, fancier electronics to intercept. The encrypted transmissions now being used in some areas make monitoring arguably impossible, and, for the first time, definitely illegal.

"It's switching over so fast," says Hughes. "If you look at the major cities, they've almost all switched to trunked, and they're switching to digital every day.... Orange County is not only digital, it's encrypted, which of course by law you can't listen to."

That, says Hughes, is why the 2005 edition of Police Call will be the last: Scanning is a waning pastime; people are put off by the growing complexity and cost. The internet has also been bad for the hobby, the way it's bad for all hobbies, Hughes says -- because it's an attractive diversion. (Still a technophile, Hughes has been on the net since before the web).

But he admits that he really lost his love of the home business when Switlyk, his friend and business partner since the 1970s, died in 2000 of

heart failure. "Broke my heart," he says. "We had a partnership that kept going for over 20 years."

Hughes and Mitzi celebrated their 50th anniversary last year. Hughes says he has no plans to pass Police Call on to someone else -- his children and Grand children don't want it -- nor will he offer to sell the Police Call title to Radio Shack, which has announced no plans for a replacement book. Indeed, the web is a trove of resources for scanner buffs, from frequency lists to streaming audio feeds of radio traffic, making printed frequency books less important than they once were. Scanning buff Laws admits he hasn't bought Police Call since 2000.

But Radio Shack says it's sorry to see the book close. "There were many resources that attempted to compete with the call books," says Radio Shack buyer Wayne Wilson in an e-mail. "But for a long time, the call book was the only resource that translated endless FCC database entries like Motorola into the actual services that were on those frequencies. No other resource I know of accomplished that. I can tell you over the years we turned down many vendors selling nothing more than the FCC database on CD."

Hughes says the company even asked him to reconsider his retirement during the Hurricane Katrina rescue efforts -- which likely produced the greatest concentration of emergency radio traffic in recent U.S. history. "I'm getting reports that the books are selling like crazy," he says. "They said, 'Will you print any more?' I said, 'Nope.'"

Of course, at 77, Hughes is allowed to retire -- if that's what you want to call it. He retired from his day job in commercial two-way radio in 1987, but 10 years ago accepted a volunteer assignment as a specialist reserve police officer for the LAPD. He's worked 20 hours a week at the front desk of the department's Wilshire Station ever since.

And when he comes home, he goes to his bank of scanners and tunes in, just as he did 65 years ago -- with some differences. "I make sure that my scanner is picking up the Wilshire Division," he says. "I hear a call go out, and I know everybody now. I say, 'Hey, that's Bailey rolling out on that call.'"

Events:

October 15: Bergen County Public Safety Day -- Bergen County Police Academy, Mahwah.

Live demonstrations of the latest police / fire technology, up close look-see of various public service vehicles / aircraft, and a great opportunity to catch some new frequencies!

CLOSING COMMENTS

This issue of the Urban DX'er marks its return after a few months of hibernation. Though I enjoy creating the newsletter each month, regrettably, priorities in ones personal and professional life sometimes take priority. Despite only six or seven hours sleep some days there aren't enough hours in the day! Now, as we approach the longer winter nights hopefully we can resume the monthly distribution we've enjoyed for almost 10 years.

Speaking of how time flies, next months issue will feature our yearly list of shopping mall frequencies. This list is updated throughout the year. Here's your last chance in 2005 to offer any updates you may have. We're especially looking for the PL's used by each mall. Often the frequencies have many users. Using PL provides more selective scanning.

And finally, let's not forget that the approaching holiday season often finds you are you "significant other" looking for a place to buy a new scanner or a new antenna. We're fortunate to have two dealers in our area that stock a wide assortment of the latest radio toys. Consider stopping by Advanced Specialties in Lodi

<http://www.advancedspecialties.net/>

Advanced@webtrix.net

and

KJI Electronics in Caldwell.

<http://www.kjielelectronics.com/>

Both are owned and operated by fellow hams that offer very competitive prices!

Urban DX'er would like to thank all those who contributed to this month's issue!

Charlie - N2NOV, N1MLZ, "Anonymous"

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