

Two Silent Keys, Silent Too Soon

Tom Morton – W5TOM (SK)

I met Tom many years ago and he has been a friend ever since. He was always doing something slightly esoteric with ham radio like building his own microphones or generating a web site (w5tom.com) that teetered on the brink of being slightly bazaar, but humorous, with an outreach of the curmudgeon hiding within. Tom liked to talk, so Ham Radio was right up his alley and had been for many years with a start in the St. Louis area as WD0FDJ, and then KB0AP. Old photos show shack stations of tube type Swan or Drake equipment running at times AM and then SSB and, of course, always CW. He wasn't the fastest CW Op, but Tom liked the casual conversational speeds of just over 20 WPM. Straight keys, paddles or bugs were the tools of his QSO's. Although, phone was the mainstay of his conversions, as it allowed him to expound on the topic of the day, of which there were many, ranging from technical to political.

Tom was a photographer by profession, being hired by the Teen Beat type magazines of the 60's and 70's to hang out with the rock and roll groups that came into town and photo-document their stay in St. Louis. The likes of Herman's Hermits, the Monkees and even the Beatles graced the lenses and film platen of his Nikon 35mm and even his large format Hasselblad.

Although he did many cool things in his time in Ham Radio, the one that most impressed me was the simplest. For getting his RF out of the shack and to the antennas he used regular 120 volt AC outlets and plugs. This made it easy to disconnect his radios from the antenna farm in the back yard. Adapters were built for coax to the 120 V male plug and the antenna coax was connected to the female outlets mounted in the wall. Of course, all well marked so that no mistake was made in connecting a 120 volt appliances to the antennas or vice versa. All this was for HF, so his measurement of the Z bump or SWR bump was minimal.

Tom was given the BVARC 2010 Loop and Zepp award for his work on HF Antennas. He was a regular attendee of the Saturday morning breakfasts for many years. The current venue, being the iHop, was where he headed up the table with the royalty that the head seat deserves. We will certainly miss his ham radio knowledge insight, his twisted humor and his curmudgeon's view of our blurry world. Echoes of W5TOM haunt the 80 M Rag Chew Net weekly. RIP W5TOM



Some W5TOM things to read and ponder:

Patented a portable HF antenna – reference Patent # 4,642,650

See ARRL's QST on-line Archive: March 2003 – [Of Mics and Men](#) & Feb 2004 [The Well Adjusted Ham](#)

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Dan Gannon – WA5ANF (SK)

I met Dan a few years back when Susan, his XYL, contacted the club to see if someone would help with clearing some ham radio gear. I, of course, put my hand up, as Dan and Susan lived in the West Chase area just blocks from my daughter and family. I quickly found out that wheel chair bound Dan had had a stroke and was no longer able to partake in Ham Radio activities, except for listening. Dan's stroke had taken its' toll on one side of his body and also on his ability to express himself. But, with the help of Susan and a fair amount of patience on both sides, he communicated his desires.

Dan was throughout his life a CW aficionado and his key, paddle and bug collection was quite extensive. Long story short, I was able within a few months to clear Dan's gear with a few local hams and to provide back ample funds to purchase an HF receiver. His antenna was a multi-band Carolina Windom, but it had been damaged in one of the hurricanes. With the help of K5IZO and his antenna launcher, we were able to get the support line re-deployed in the front tree,. After which I got busy rebuilding and re-erecting Dan's skyhook.

For a few years after, Dan checked in to the BVARC Rag Chew Net by calling in as a phone check-in (I happened to be the phone check-in person). I knew it was Dan by his Caller ID but all I heard after answering with "Hello Dan, got you checked in", was a simple "OK. OK". It was always a pleasure to hear Dan's voice, no matter how stymied.

Dan had an interesting past in radio. Susan told me that even as a kid in Port Arthur he always had a ham radio station. This led him to become Radioman 2nd Class during the years of the Vietnam conflict. His crowning glory was his operation of the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio Service) station assigned to his group. (See photo). His West Chase shack wall was covered with certificates, telexes and memos of thanks and kudos for his efforts in MARS. According to one USAF Brigadier General, Geoffrey Cheadle, Dan's efforts "contributed significantly to the morale and wellbeing of our forces away from home". Another telex from Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 26th Marines Landing Team September 1969 stated that Dan had set up HF gear on Hill 41 and placed and completed 98 calls over 3 days for the Marines on the hill thru stations in Honolulu and Barstow, CA. When the Arizona Museum honored US Senator Barry Goldwater for his MARS work a few years back, Dan acknowledged that he had spoken a few times directly with Senator Goldwater himself, K7UGA. Senator Goldwater's Phoenix based MARS station was a major gateway to the US for thousands of service personnel deployed in SE Asia.



Dan passed a few months ago. Last time I saw Dan was in 2021 when he was having trouble receiving anything on his receiver. What I found was that due to his lack of control of his fingers, etc. he accidentally hit a few buttons that changed his antenna input selection to one that had no antenna connected. An easy discovery and fix for me, but a brick wall for Dan.

I am very glad to have known Dan, but I do wish it could have been under better circumstances. We would have been great Ham Radio friends. My best and warm wishes to Susan, who has always been 150% supportive of Dan's hobby and also of my efforts to achieve Dan's goals in what he wanted and needed. Note that even after a stroke that limited his two way radio activity, ham radio and a simple receiver gave Dan the capability to listen to shortwave and the ham bands. This provided a source of joy for him until the very end. I'll echo the words of John, K5LKJ, here, "It IS the greatest hobby. WA5ANF DE W5RH 73 K

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