

Neil and Buzz, Walter and Andrew

There are times in every writer's life when events and circumstances converge and conspire to inform you of what you will write about, even if whatever it is wasn't in your original plans. This is one of those times.

I am writing this on the middle weekend in July (instead of operating in the CQ WW VHF Contest). At the end of last week, we learned the identity of our next Newsline Young Ham of the Year and heard about the death of newsman Walter Cronkite. The new week begins with Monday's 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing on July 20, 1969. Two threads—space and amateur radio—tie all these events together.

Neil and Buzz

Neither Neil Armstrong nor Buzz Aldrin, the first two men to walk on the moon, are or ever were ham radio operators. But they didn't go to the moon alone. The Apollo program was a huge team effort, backed by thousands of scientists, engineers, technicians and support personnel, hundreds of whom were (and still are) hams.

Part of that support team was a worldwide network of tracking stations, using huge dish antennas to pick up and relay weak radio signals from as far away as the moon itself. Some of those dishes are still in use today for various purposes. To help commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing, hams around the world this summer have been participating in the Echoes of Apollo event, using these and other big dish antennas to make Earth-Moon-Earth (EME) contacts via amateur radio. CQ's "VHF Plus" editor Joe Lynch, N6CL, tells us in his column this month (pg. 80) about a truly amazing contact made as part of that effort.

Walter

One of the space program's biggest fans was "the most trusted man in America," CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite, who passed away in mid-July at age 92. One of Walter's wishes that never came true was to fly in space himself. I was working at CBS News back in the 1980s when NASA was planning a journalist-in-space program along with its educator-in-space program. I recall receiving a memo stating that none of us was to apply for that program—that NASA would be receiving only one application from CBS News—and that would be for Walter Cronkite. He was one of 40 finalists for the program when it was canceled in the wake of the Challenger explosion in 1986.

I also remember my boss at the time, Joel Heller, WA2FFI, calling me into his office one day. Sitting there were Steve Mendelsohn, WA2DHF (now W2ML)—then the ARRL Hudson Division Director and an engineer for the CBS Radio Network—and Walter Cronkite, whom I had passed in the halls many times but never met. After making the introductions, Joel said, "Walter has decided he wants to get his ham ticket. Would you be willing to give him his code test?" (In the days before volunteer examining, any two hams with General Class or higher licenses could administer a Novice exam.) Of course, I said yes. Steve pulled out a key and a code oscillator and I sent five minutes of text at five words per minute. Walter copied. Thankfully, he passed (I certainly didn't want to be the person who *flunked* Walter Cronkite on a code test!). The written exam was next and a few weeks later, the FCC issued him KB2GSD. Walter's primary personal use for ham radio was as backup communication on his

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boat—he was an avid sailor—and he had a 10-meter rig installed along with his marine radio gear. He was never particularly active on the ham bands but kept his license current, renewing it most recently just last year. 73, OM.

Andrew

On our cover this month is Andrew Koenig, KE5GDB, of Houston, Texas, who has just been named the 2009 Amateur Radio Newsline Young Ham of the Year. CQ is a corporate co-sponsor of the award and yours truly is a member of the YHOTY judging committee. Andrew has done some pretty impressive things in his short ham career, including installing a complete VHF/UHF station on his bicycle (see September, 2008, on the CQ Amateur Radio Calendar) and building his own IRLP (Internet Radio Linking Project) node in his bedroom closet! That's the photo we've got on the cover this month.



Young Ham of the Year Andrew Koenig, KE5GDB, with Astronaut Bill McArthur, KC5ACR, during a presentation on ham radio to future educator-astronauts at the Johnson Space Center. (Photo courtesy KC5KBO/Newsline)

But neither his bicycle-mobile station nor his IRLP node was what earned Andrew the YHOTY Award. This is what did:

(1) Living near NASA's Johnson Space Center, Andrew has gotten involved both with conducting ARISS (Amateur Radio on the International Space Station) contacts and in *helping to train astronauts* for future ARISS contacts! He also joined astronaut Bill McArthur, KC5ACR (see photo) and NASA employee Nick Lance, KC5KBO (who nominated him), in explaining the role of amateur radio in space to the finalists in NASA's educator-astronaut program;

(2) NASA was looking to expand opportunities for astronauts to talk by ham radio with school children but wasn't happy with the options available for making contact. An IRLP node closer to the Johnson Space Center was needed. That motivated Andrew to start building his own link, which was then used for the first terrestrial astronaut contacts with two schools in Canada; and

(3) When Hurricane Ike blasted into Houston last year, Andrew used his IRLP node to connect the audio from a local repeater into a server in California, where it could be fed back to evacuees wherever they were, allowing them to keep track of what was happening in the evacuation area.

I look forward to meeting Andrew at the YHOTY presentation at the Huntsville Hamfest. It is truly a privilege for me each year to read about the activities of young hams like Andrew, to whom we are entrusting the future of our hobby. I am *not* worried.