

## Imagination and Adventure

“**A**erialist.” That’s what it says on the business card handed to me at the Dayton Hamvention® by John Brosnahan, WØUN. Some of you may remember John from his days as President of Alpha Power or as an avid con-tester. The dictionary defines an aerialist as someone who performs feats in the air, such as a trapeze artist. I would be very surprised if John has been anywhere near a trapeze lately (a motorcycle, definitely, though, as both he and especially his wife Priscilla are very proficient . . . *Tnx K2RED*). The same is probably true of a surfboard, even though John’s card also says—in somewhat smaller type—“Surfing the Ionosphere Since 1959.”

When John gave me the card, my first impression was that it was cute—a ham radio twist on trapeze artists and surfers (whether of ocean waves or the internet). It wasn’t until a few weeks later when I was looking up Thor Heyerdahl and *Kon-Tiki* that I realized the significance of John’s card. What do John and Thor have in common?

If you look at this month’s QRP column (which I certainly hope you will), you’ll see that N6GA is starting out with a low-power rig that was inspired by the radio gear aboard the raft, *Kon-Tiki*. For those who weren’t around ham radio in the 1940s and ’50s, Thor Heyerdahl was an adventurer who had a theory that islands in the South Pacific could have been settled by people sailing from South America in rafts. To prove his point, Heyerdahl went to Peru and built a raft, which he named *Kon-Tiki*, from materials that might have been available a few thousand years ago, and set sail for Polynesia. His one concession to modernity was putting radio gear—ham radio gear—aboard the raft.

Cam, N6GA, was looking for a suitable illustration to accompany his column. I remembered seeing photos of the *Kon-Tiki* in some back issue of *CQ*. In searching the archives, I eventually found the perfect photo (you can see it on page 53), but I also came across an editorial by my predecessor, K2EEK, from January 1991 that put all of this in perspective.

Alan wrote that when he was a kid, for about \$50 (a lot more than than now!), “you could actually (for real, no fooling) listen in and follow along with Thor Heyerdahl aboard the *Kon-Tiki* as he sailed from Peru to Tahiti.” The company selling that \$50 radio, he said, was selling more than a radio; it was selling a dream. “My imagination,” Alan wrote, “was taking me back to the deck of the *Kon-Tiki* where Thor and I are lashing things down as waves break across the bow.”

Alan continued, “The key words describing amateur radio for me and some of my friends who became amateurs at the same time are imagination and adventure, the adventure being someplace far away.”

The point of Alan’s editorial 21 years ago was that we need to find ways to perpetuate the sense of imagination and adventure as selling tools for our hobby. That’s when my mind flashed on WØUN’s card: Aerialist; Surfing the Ionosphere. *Imagination and adventure*.

My mind also flashed to the amateur satellite column in this month’s issue of our sister magazine, *WorldRadio Online*. In it, Terry Douds, N8KI, writes about a team of folks at the University of Surrey in

England, including AMSAT-UK, who are adapting video game technology—specifically the 3D spatial awareness technology of the XBOX Kinect game controller—to develop tiny satellites that can be commanded to dock with each other in orbit and to build themselves into larger modular satellites. The possibilities are endless—beyond satellites that can build themselves in orbit; it could be possible to send up a module with newer technology (or fresh batteries) to replace older modules; sending up a new experiment to replace one that’s been completed; changing components of an on-board amateur radio station.

*Imagination and adventure* ... still alive and well in amateur radio, still selling the dream of using technology to communicate, as Alan put it, between Point A and Point B, especially when Point B is someplace far away. Earth orbit certainly qualifies as far away. So let’s keep dreaming, let’s keep turning dreams into reality, and let’s keep selling ham radio’s dream of *imagination and adventure* on the airwaves.

### Another Goodbye

Bill Pasternak, WA6ITF, in “Newsline,” labels Silent Key stories as “The Changing of the Guard.” It seems that we are in the middle of a large-scale changing of the guard at the moment, as it feels like every month, I am noting the passing of another leader in our hobby. This month, it’s Gene Zimmerman, W3ZZ.

In addition to being a Ph.D. microbiologist with a distinguished career at the National Institutes of Health, Gene was a major-league VHF DXer and con-tester, a long-time member of the CQ Contest Committee, a columnist for *CQ Contest* magazine back in the day, a former CQ World-Wide VHF Contest Director (he reorganized the contest to its current format), and VHF columnist for *QST* for nearly a decade. His knowledge and expertise covered the full spectrum (and not just the RF spectrum).

N6CL talks more about Gene in his “VHF-Plus” column this month on page 80, but from my perspective, Gene was one of those go-to guys on whom you could always depend for help with something or to give you straight answers when they were hard to come by from other sources. Gene was a wise and valued counselor on many topics well beyond the scope of VHF contesting. He was also my secret weapon when starting up *CQ VHF* back in the mid-90s. I went to my first VHF conference to try to round up writers, knowing no one, but having been told to look for Gene. I remember walking up to him at the Friday evening social hour, introducing myself, and telling him what we were up to. We started talking, and within minutes it was like we’d known each other for years.

Gene immediately took me under his wing, gave me unsolicited (but excellent) advice on what should be in the magazine, and introduced me to all the key people in the VHF weak-signal portion of our hobby. It was also the start of a 15+ year friendship.

Gene will be remembered for his encyclopedic knowledge, his sense of humor, his total lack of pretentiousness, and his ongoing crusade for the highest ethical standards in everything with which he got involved. It was an honor to be Gene’s friend and I (along with the rest of the amateur radio community) will miss him greatly.

73, W2VU

\*e-mail: <w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com>