LINE OF SIGHT

A Message from the Editor

The Growing Interest in VHF-and-Above QRP

About a year ago, my friend Tommy Henderson, WD5AGO, bought a new house. For a long time Tommy has been one of the better-known EMEers in the Tulsa area. However, at this point in his life, his family is getting bigger and he needed more room for them to grow. All things being considered, he found himself a nice home in Broken Arrow, a booming suburb of Tulsa, Oklahoma. I say ***all things***—but the antenna consideration. You see, Tommy knowingly moved into a neighborhood with an antenna restriction.

Now Tommy is off the air—well, not exactly. He does have permission to use a TVRO dish in his back yard, and he did put up temporary antennas during last year's ARRL EME contest periods. Tommy is also on the air QRP.

When I learned that Tommy was operating QRP, I wondered if he had sold out to HF operations. He assured me that he had not left behind the VHF-and-above ham bands. By contrast, his interest in QRP has increased his interest in VHF-and-above operations. In fact, he has become a promoter of VHF-and-above QRP activities at gatherings of QRP enthusiasts, pointing out to the HF operators that weak-signal VHF-and-above operations have a lot to offer the serious QRP operator.

Operating QRP is a growing phenomenon. The commercial manufacturers are taking notice of this increased interest in QRP by developing radios ready to go QRP, with a few of them equipped to operate on some of the more popular VHF-and-above ham bands.

There is also a growing interest in kit radios equipped to operate on VHF. For example, Elecraft (see the extensive review of the K2 by Simon Lewis, GM4PLM, in this issue beginning on page 12) has developed three transverters for its K2 model. Surprisingly, one of the three is on 222 MHz, a not-so-popular VHF ham band. I wonder if Elecraft's contribution might bring about a bit of an upsurge in activity on that band.

Incidentally, because of its transverter-accommodating design, that K2 model is gaining increasing acceptance as an IF (intermediate-frequency) radio for EME operators. It doesn't hurt that one has to build the K2 from a kit, something else that appeals to those of us who are technically inclined. Speaking of building your own radio, take a look at the picture of Bob Friess, N6CM's 10-GHz transverter on page 68. Bob built that transverter for the K2 in an EC2 chassis.

Another entry into the put-it-together-and-tinker-with-it arena is Gerald Youngblood's SDR-1000 software-defined radio. With the SDR concept featured in the Summer 2002 issue of ***CQ VHF*** and a four-part series of articles appearing in successive 2002–2003 issues of ***QEX*** (beginning with the July/August 2002 issue), Gerald's radio is now off and running. Also, like the K2, the low-power (one watt) feature of the SDR-1000 makes it ideal an IF radio for weak-signal VHF-and-above transverters. For more information on the SDR-1000 see <http://www.flex-radio.com>.

One neat characteristic of these cottage-industry manufacturers is their ability to quickly respond to needed or requested changes from the field. For example, both Elecraft and the SDR-1000 were ready to go when the 60-meter five channels became available in early July. (By contrast, of the bigger manufacturers only Ten-Tec, with its Orion model, was ready to go on the starting date.) In addition, in response to field-generated requests, Gerald is working on figuring out how he can incorporate 2 meters in the SDR-1000 despite 60-MHz upper-limit problems with the microprocessor he is using in the radio.

Recently, I received an e-mail from a northeast weak-signal operator who complained about all of the QRO operators in his area. While he made valid points about how these operators are hogging the calling frequencies, his solution for himself I find a bit too drastic. He said that as soon as he could get all of his equipment sold, he was off the air. By contrast, exploring the increasing interest in VHF-and-above QRP operating could be a very creative alternative to slugging it out on the lower VHF calling frequencies.

If you also are having the problem of front-end overload in your neighborhood, I urge you to take a look at the higher VHF-and-above frequencies using lower power. Getting back to Tommy, he has two 5760-MHz QRP transceivers ready to go for any ham in his neighborhood who wants to stop by and run with him.

How about you? With what are you willing to experiment? When you get it built, write it up and send it to us. ***CQ VHF*** can give your project ample coverage.

Contests and Propagation

Late summer and fall always have their contrasts in propagation. There are the dying embers of sporadic-***E*** propagation that show up in early August. In the middle of the month is the ***Perseids*** meteor shower. This year the near full Moon will all but obliterate viewing the shower, so stay inside and operate rather than lying on the lawn and staring at the Moon. Also, for those of you on the west coast, there exists the possibility of transpacific tropo propagation. For more information on that mode, see Gordon West, WB6NOA's article "Watch the Weather," beginning on page 10. Then there are two microwave contests, the ARRL Microwave Contest and the first weekend of the ARRL 10 GHz and Above Cumulative Contest.

September brings a couple more contests, the second weekend of the ARRL 10 GHz and Above Cumulative Contest and the ARRL September VHF QSO Party, while October and November feature the annual ARRL International EME contest. Also in October and November are three more meteor showers—the ***Draconids,*** the ***Orionids,*** and the ***Leonids.*** November also may include a rare sporadic-***E*** opening, as well as possible trans-equatorial propagation (TEP) for the 6-meter operator.

Each of these activities has its propagation peculiarities. Understanding them is part of the knowledge needed for successfully operating the VHF-and-above ham bands.

Due to our need for increased knowledge, we have added a new columnist beginning with this issue of ***CQ VHF.*** Tomas Hood, NW7US, who succeeded George Jacobs, W3ASK, as ***CQ*** magazine's propagation columnist and who also has taken up similar responsibilities for ***Popular Communications,*** our other sister publication, has agreed to come on board as our propagation columnist. His first column begins on page 60 in this issue. Tomas is the first to admit that he has a lot to learn about VHF propagation, so be patient with him and be his teacher as he increasingly becomes involved with us in the weak-signal VHF-and-above facet of our hobby.

Again, Thanks

In my travels to hamfests I am meeting more and more of subscribers and contributors to this magazine. In the short time that it has been back you have made it very successful by your acceptance of it as a venue for presenting more technically challenging articles for the weak-signal VHF-and-above operator. We of the staff of ***CQ VHF*** thank you for your support, and we will continue to work at earning your respect. Hopefully, in the near future we will see one of your ideas or projects in the pages of this magazine, which will make it even that much more of a quality publication. Until next issue…

73 de Joe, N6CL