

The content which follows is a transcript of the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast hosted by Jerry Taylor, KDOBİK. This monthly version of PARP is typically released the last week of each month.

The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast – Episode number 48.

From the ham shack of KDOBİK, located in Colorful Colorado, this is the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast.

This is show number 48, volume number 4 with a release date of October 26, 2011.

Hello everyone. My name is Jerry Taylor; my amateur radio call sign is KDOBİK and welcome to the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast...Creating Elmers One Podcast at a time. Amateur radio or ham radio is what this podcast is all about. If you are currently studying for your exam or have been in ham radio for years....I'm hopeful this podcast will help you. If it has helped you, I hope you will continue to listen and I also hope you'll tell others. Also, in keeping with our Creating Elmers one podcast at a time philosophy, if you learn something from our podcasts....please share that knowledge with others.

Thank you all for downloading or streaming another episode. My apologies as this episode comes to you about 10 days or so behind schedule. For the past few episodes I've released these around the middle of the month. But this month has been a little hectic, but I've spent some quality time both in and out of my ham shack doing amateur radio things and of course learning as I go.

Also....wow....haven't those bands just been hot, hot, hot lately? One of the reasons this episode is a few days late is mainly due to the recent 10 meter band openings over the weekend of 22 and 23 October. I know WOW is such a simple word...but that is what comes to mind to express the excitement felt not only by myself....but by many others in the hobby.

For the past few years, (really since upgrading to general) the DX that I've worked as been mostly on 20 and 40 meters. I've heard some of the old timers say that when 10 meters opens up, it'll be as easy to work into Europe as good days on 20 meters. Perhaps better. They were right! If you were around your ham shack the weekend of 22 and 23 October, you know exactly what I'm talking about and if you weren't.....well.....You missed a heck of a party. But I'm sure this is only the beginning.

Did you notice the new poll question listed on MyAmateurRadio.com? The poll question asks, Are you a member of your national amateur radio society (like the ARRL, RSGB, JARL etc.). I'll share the current results with you and will leave the poll question up for another few weeks for everyone to get a chance to vote in this poll. But before I share the results, allow me to explain why I ask these poll questions on myamateurradio.com.

Simply...I do this as a way of better understanding my listener base. In most cases, I will ask a poll question about something related to amateur radio and then develop content around that topic.

I'm fully aware the poll question this time is somewhat controversial between amateur radio operators around the globe. I'm pleased with the results so far. A total of 52 votes have been cast and of that number almost 79% of you are members. Good for you and this leads me into what I have to say next.

I know I've made some mistakes with this podcast in the form of bringing in sponsors and that upset many of you. I've corrected these errors and have made it clear that this podcast will remain commercial and sponsor free.

Also, it has never been my intention to use this podcast as a political vehicle to get you my fellow amateurs to think differently about our hobby and service of amateur radio. My opinions are my own, but for the most part I keep the focus of this podcast simply for educational purposes.

Having said that, I know many of you are opposed to the amateur radio societies where you live. I'm talking about the ARRL, the RSGB etc. Trust me when I say that I fully respect your decision to distance yourself from these organizations.

However, I firmly believe the only thing that stands between us as individual amateur radio operators who do what we do either strictly as a hobby, as a service or both and the possibility of losing some of our spectrum are these national societies.

Please don't switch off your MP3 player. Please give me just a few more minutes and I promise I'll get on with the rest of the episode.

While I'm a member of both the ARRL and the RSGB, I've only ever had dealings with the FCC and never with Ofcom (who is the equivalent of the FCC in the UK). The example I'm going to give to you is rather small and it has nothing to do with protecting our spectrum. But it saved me a lot of headaches and eased my frustration.

Just a few months ago when I upgraded from general to extra, it took what seemed like ages for my upgrade to post in the ULS FCC database. Phone calls and emails to the FCC went unanswered. However, an email to the ARRL licensing group was promptly answered and action was taken to determine exactly what was going on.

Now here's my point. Yes, my issue was very, very, very minor. However, like most things government...it was unclear based on the information available to me as to what was causing the hold up. The ARRL individual who corresponded with me via email fully explained the situation and also contacted the FCC on my behalf to get status updates and of course kept me informed on what to expect next.

In the much larger picture, I believe when the FCC comes knocking for some of our amateur radio spectrum it is clear to me that they will only listen to one voice. That one voice represents all of amateur radio in the united states and that is the ARRL. Again, my thinking is this. If the FCC can't return my phone calls or answer my emails regarding a very simple issue....how on earth could I expect them to communicate with me when they try to take away some of our radio spectrum.

In closing, I do hear many individual hams state their reason for not belonging to the ARRL or the RSGB is due to the lack of quality in the monthly publications of QST and Radcom magazines. In the case of both of these national organizations, they are more than a magazine publisher. Much, Much More.

I have two favors to ask.

#1. If you are currently a member of your national society, but contemplating dropping membership....please re-consider.

#2. If you are not currently a member of your national society, please just take another look. There really is no other organization who will look out for our rights like our national organizations. Regardless of whether you live in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand or Japan. Our national organizations need your support. Please, just take a second look. If you still disagree with what you see and hear, then I will respect your decision.

OK...final 60 seconds and I'll stop talking about this topic. If you reside in Great Britain or are a member of the RSGB. You may (or may not be) aware of some important things taking place in that organization. An Extraordinary General Meeting has been called for November 19th. Several resolutions are up for vote by the members of the RSGB and complete information is available in the November issue of Radcom.

Colin and Martin Butler, the father and son podcast team of the ICQ podcast just recently released their series 4, episode 22 podcast titled "RSGB in Crisis" and they are planning to interview the current RSGB President Dave Wilson in the coming days. This interview will be made available in their next scheduled podcast release.

So if you are a member of the RSGB and/or an amateur living in Great Britain....please check out this important information. I have confirmed that full RSGB members living outside of Great Britain may vote and voting is open now through November 19th. Again, if you are an RSGB member, please educate yourself on these important issues and please vote.

I'll post links in the show notes for the voting website as well as a forum setup by the RSGB

<http://rsgbdata.net/yabb/YaBB.pl>

www.votebyinternet.com/RSGB11

Thank you for listening and let's let's dive right into episode 48.

Remember episode 45 where the topic of discussion was centered around, So you have your technician class license, now what? In other words, you either just earned your ticket or have been a tech for a while and really didn't know everything available to you as for as modes and such. The big take-away from that episode was there is a lot you can do as a technician class ham and despite what anyone else may say, or anything else you may read on a forum or blog....YOU are a ham and I'm proud to call you my fellow ham.

The discussion today for episode 47 will build on the information provided in episode 45. Again, in episode 45 I provided a rather long list of some of the many things you can do with a technician class license and a ham radio. Just to rattle off a few items I mentioned, you can volunteer in your community, you can work VHF/UHF simplex, VHF/UHF Repeaters, Satellites and the International Space Station, D-STAR, Echolink, IRLP, Packet, APRS, Fox Hunting, 10m and 6m. There truly is a lot to do with a tech license and a ham radio.

I also made a comment in episode 45 that I would like to expand on just a little. I said I was an advocate of going one step at a time and experience each step. Each rung of the ladder in amateur radio is sort of a right of passage to the other. Each class of license helps prepare you for the next. I think most will agree when I say....when you leave the VE session as a brand new technician class ham, your level of knowledge and level of understanding is perhaps just above the minimum of what you truly need to know to participate in the hobby at that level. This is not an insult towards the exam preparation process or an insult to ones ability to learn. This is just the way it is and many aspects of life are the same.

Allow me to take us off track for just a moment. Here in the US and especially in the rural areas, we typically learn to drive a car in our teens. The process has I'm sure changed in the almost 30 years since I was learning, but we do this typically in our teenage years. Of course, 30 years ago we didn't have all the distractions that teens today have. But I digress...

Regardless of how we learn to drive, the knowledge and experience we have only provides us a little more than the minimum requirements to operate a motor vehicle. If you were like me and grew up in rural Texas....you probably truly learned how to drive a tractor or a riding lawn mower before you drove anything else. I also had plenty of pasture and farm land and I remember sitting in my Dad's lap and driving the truck. My legs wouldn't reach the pedals, but I knew which way to point to front of the truck.

Ok..I'll get us out of this walk down memory road and back on track. The point I'm making here is like learning to drive, we gain experience and truly hone that basic knowledge we learned for the exam into practical experience. We then take this practical experience we learned as a technician class license holder (for whatever amount of time it has been) and add to that the basic and minimum level of knowledge to go to the general class. See how this works?

Now before I continue, I know some of you...perhaps many of you...went from being a non-ham to a general and even some all the way to extra all in one sitting. Congrats...there is nothing wrong with that. But I think you'll agree even though you walked out of the VE session with a general or even an extra class ticket, the truly practical amount of experience that comes with time was no different than the young person who only walked out of the room with a technician license.

Just one more thought about all this and I'll move on. Hopefully you've been watching Ham Nation. If you haven't , please check it out. Ham Nation features Bob Heil, Gordon West, George Thomas from AmateurLogic and or course Leo LaPorte who in recent months earned his technician class ticket and then upgraded to general. You can view HamNation by visiting twit.tv/hn I'll post a link in the show notes section.

Now....I respect Gordon West immensely, I used his materials to study and prepare for all three levels of the US amateur radio exams. He has an incredible Elmer spirit and I truly believe all that he shares with the amateur radio community is straight from the heart.

Gordon has mentioned a few times on Ham Nation and also on his technician class audio materials that amateur radio dealers (like HRO, AES etc.) should pre-program that brand new hand-held transceiver that as a newly licensed technician class ham will go out and purchase with all the repeater frequencies of the local area.

I believe his message is genuine in the sense that a brand new tech class ham can essentially leave the candy store with a brand new hand-held and pending he has his call sign, start having QSO's immediately. Again, I fully respect Gordon....but disagree with this concept.

In my opinion, Elmering is about teaching. Teaching a new or even an old amateur something about the hobby with the general understanding that he or she will then be able to duplicate the lesson over and over on their own. Of course, I also like to think that not only will they be able to perform on their own with that knowledge, but they'll also be able to share that knowledge with others.

Something I saw during my time of participating in emcomm exercises, was the number of hams (of all license classes) who couldn't program their radio. I realize I'm getting off track here and will start to bring things back into perspective in just a moment. There could be many reasons these hams couldn't program their radios, but it is my opinion that doing it for someone is not the solution.

This goes back to my statement I made a few minutes ago when I said that each class of license prepares you for the next and when you leave the VE session as a brand new technician class ham, your level of knowledge and level of understanding is perhaps just above the minimum of what you truly need to know to participate in the hobby at that level.

So back to Gordo's suggestion of amateur radio dealers programming that new hand-held with ALL the local repeater frequencies. I think the better suggestion or solution is for the dealer (if they have time) to perhaps show the new ham where in the manual it discusses how to do this and show them by programming one or two local repeaters into the radio.

Now, unfortunately this might also not be possible. I'm very fortunate to have a Ham Radio outlet within 5 miles of my home and office. Fortunately, (otherwise they might go out of business) but every time I visit the shop, they are busy. Generally they have two to three working behind the counter and I can see where they just may not have time to "Elmer" to a new ham who is shopping for a new rig.

Solution??? I think this is where the local amateur radio club comes into play. I say this for multiple reasons. First, is for courtesy reasons. Most repeaters are owned by local amateur radio clubs. Repeaters are expensive to purchase and of course there's a cost to maintaining them. This cost generally comes from the annual club dues collected from the membership of that club.

Now some may disagree, but it is my philosophy that if you are going to use a local repeater...you should be a member of the club sponsoring it. Again, this helps to support the costs. Now does this mean that if you are visiting another city or state, you must join those clubs in order to use their repeaters? No, this sort of falls into my 80/20 rule.

While I don't work many of the local repeaters in Denver, if I did it would represent 80% or more of repeater work I would do, with 20% or less being done on non-local repeaters when traveling for work or vacation.

As an example, if I'm traveling to my companies headquarters office which is located in the San Francisco bay area, and to pass time in the evenings I wanted to connect to a local repeater and chat with the locals, I wouldn't think twice about connecting to a bay area repeater. No, I'm not a member of a club in that area, I'm just visiting and I suppose in my naïve way of thinking about this...no one would tell me I couldn't. Of course, they could....but I wouldn't call that good amateur practice. I know the

local club I belong to wouldn't have an issue if someone from HQ were to visit the Denver office and do the same.

Of course, my second reason for joining the local club is to get the kind of assistance brand new hams need when first starting out. I realize episode 47 pointed out that some amateur radio clubs might not be as welcoming to new hams as they should be. However, as I pointed out in that episode and as I truly believe is true....these unwelcoming clubs are the minority. If you encounter one...just move to the next.

OK...Final comment on the pre-programming of hand-held transceivers. Now, let me admit to something. I have three handheld transceivers. A Yaesu VX-6, a Yaesu VX-8 and the iCOM IC92 D-STAR model. If I had to set down and manually program each of these radios with a new repeater, I may have to take a little time to knock the cobwebs from my memory in order to be able to do it, but I could certainly do it. In addition, I keep those extremely handy Nifty Manuals in my go-kit so if I do get stumped or need to do it in a hurry, I have the information right there. I've mentioned these Nifty manuals before. I think they are a must have. Check them out at <http://www.niftyaccessories.com/>

I throw that tidbit of information out there to say, that even programming your hand-held transceiver by yourself may not automatically stick in your long term memory (unless this is something you do on a frequent basis), but working through it while following the instructions in the radios manual or the Nifty manual will mean you can repeat these steps at a later date. I believe this is extremely important.

OK...let's get back on track.

For those who are truly taking advantage of that technician class license and working all the various modes and bands you have privileges for, Do you know what is waiting for you with a general ticket?

In two letters.....HF. The general class license opens up the door to the world of HF for you. Yes, you get some HF privileges with the technician class license. If you are setup already for HF and at least the 10 meter band, you can work some HF contacts when conditions are just right. I got my tech license in August of 2007 and didn't upgrade to general until early January 2008. Between August 2007 and January 2008, I managed to work two dozen or so 10 meter stations. Three of those stations were DX. Two in Brazil and one in Jamaica.

While Brazil and Jamaica aren't breaking any distance records, these contacts were important to me just like your first HF DX contacts will be to you. While 10 meters has had some openings in recent weeks, it will eventually close back down.

As I said, the general class license opens up the world of HF. This new world is "almost" always accessible. While it is true 20, 30, 40 meters and down will have their good moments, their really great moments.....the not-so-great and really lousy moments (and certainly in comparison to 10 meters)are few and far between. There has rarely been a time (at least that I can remember) where I went down to the shack, turned on the radio and didn't hear something, somewhere on the bands.

It is this something I just mentioned which I want to expand into. With exception to packet and APRS, most of what technician class operators do with their license is talk or speak to other hams using the phone mode of operation. If this is a mode you truly enjoy....then HF is certainly the place to take advantage of the phone mode. There are HF nets, contests, special event stations and just your basic run of the mill good ole rag chew sessions taking place all up and down the HF bands.

When you can't hear much in the phone portion of the HF band segments you have access to with the general license, exciting modes like PSK31, RTTY, Hellschreiber and Olivia may very well bear fruit for you and provide hours of entertainment.

Quite honestly, it was seeing the PSK-31 videos Randy Hall, K7AGE produced that truly motivated me to get my general ticket. As a tech, I had already purchased my HF rig (a Yaesu FT-897) and already had a soundcard interface setup and was already drooling at decoding all the digi modes. I called CQ on PSK in the 10m band segment with no success many times. I knew based on what I was decoding on 20, 30 and 40 meters that PSK would be a great mode and it is one of my favorite modes to work.

If memory serves me, I was so excited to work PSK on 20m, I came home from the VE session with my valid CSCE and began working PSK as KD0BIK/AG on the very same day.

Along with PSK and RTTY, there are other digital or soundcard modes with a lot of activity taking place on the bands. Tune into episode 38 and learn more about WSPR. WSPR is Weak Signal Propagation Reporter. While it's not really a QSO mode, it is a very useful tool to use to determine just how the bands are propagating and how effectively your station is operating.

Another weak signal mode which I discussed last month in episode 46 is JT65. This mode has become my new favorite and I've really had a ton of fun adding to my DX list. I've worked stations in the Ukraine, England, Scotland, Wales, Belgium and my furthest QSO in distance or miles was with JT65 to Australia. I'm also almost half way in working all US states using the JT65 mode.

Speaking of worked all states....chasing paper, paper chasing, wall paper hanger, QSL card collecting, certificate collecting is all made much easier to you via the general ticket. Certificates for working all states, working all continents and CQ zones are fun to work towards. It does take effort on your part...but this just adds to the fun of the hobby.

Before I venture too far from the topic of chasing paper and QSL card collecting. Special event stations is a fun and challenging aspect of the hobby. I'm a Titanic history buff and you can bet I'll be trying to work the Titanic special event stations next April honoring the 100th Anniversary of that tragic event.

The thing about special event stations, if you can imagine it....I bet there is a special event station celebrating something or honoring something. Like trains? Yep...there are special event stations for that. Like planes? Yep...I have the QSL cards to prove it. How about Route 66? Now that is a big one and I wasn't prepared for it this year, but I will be for next year.

Radio Sport or contesting is also widely available on the HF bands. Some may think it's a little too widely available....but if this is something you think you might enjoy....almost every weekend there is some sort of contest taking place on the bands. Remember, you can work contest stations without submitting a log for that particular contest. State QSO parties are a great way to get those worked all states certificates.

There is certainly plenty to do and plenty of room to do it on the HF bands with your general class license upgrade. Again, there are no guarantees....but the point I'm making is if you want to work HF...your opportunities improve greatly once you earn your general ticket and get access to the rest of the HF spectrum.

Featured Website Segment

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Our featured website segment this time is DXCoffee. You'll find it at www.dxcffee.com and I'll post a link to their site in the show notes section for this episode, episode 48. The Dxcffee.com address will take you to the Italian language site. From there you can either click the English link or use dxcffee.com/eng to go direct to the english language pages.

Now on the dxcffee.com website it says, Expressly for DX'ers. While a lot of the content, or should I say most of the content may certainly be geared towards DX'ers...I have found the content to be interesting and educational even for the non or casual Dixer.

I'll read to you from their "About" page then invite you to check out the dxcffee.com website on your own.

These pages are the "distilled" version of the Italian language site DXCoffee.com. They were created, and are maintained, to update the international ham community about projects and news concerning our main passion, DXing, which should transcend all language barriers.

We have tried, since the beginning of our web adventure, to establish a new way to promote and talk about ham radio and DXing. A young team, mostly under the age of 40, opted for a fresh, and passionate style. Ham radio is about sharing experiences and feelings. Ham radio operators are not bureaucrats. We're amateurs passionate about our hobby and DX. That's our insignia. You'll feel that any story you read in these pages.

We are convinced DXing is, first of all, a state of mind, not just a hobby. Therefore, we're constantly on the lookout for the "story of the day" on the radio scene, with interviews from the starring characters of DXpeditions, new software developers, association chiefs and everyone else involved in the evolution of our activity.

We do ourselves proud in also offering a column full of "upcoming" events, a sort of "News Alert" about soon to be happening DXpeditions, special activations, and everything you'll be able to find on your radio, occurring now, within a few hours or a few days.

So there you have it. Check out DXCoffee.com for yourself.

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Ham Adventures Segment

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It's been a busy few weeks I must admit. Just to quickly update you. As I mentioned in episode 46, I did upgrade to amateur extra back in the end of August. When I released episode 46 in mid September, my extra license upgrade was pending in the ULS database. All was resolved in time and is now correctly showing the amateur extra class and so is QRZ.

I did go ahead and submit my application to become a Volunteer Examiner or VE for short. I don't anticipate I'll participate every single month, but I will reach out to one of the VE groups here locally and observe a few sessions and that way I'll be available to help out if needed.

I've also been active on the bands. I worked both the Colorado QSO party and the Texas QSO party in September. I logged 138 stations for the Colorado QSO Party and 55 during the Texas version. During the Texas QSO party I worked NA5DV which was operating from the Battleship Texas. As a kid I would visit the Texas every 2-3 years and have fond memories of climbing on and around that beautiful battleship.

Between the two QSO parties and just actively working the bands every chance I could, I managed some 300 QSOs in the month of September and between September and part of October, I think I've added about a half-dozen new DX entities to my logbook. Just this month I added Wales, Hungary and my wife's home country of Belgium, along with the Netherlands, Germany, and Croatia. Can't wait to get those QSL cards for my wall of fame.

As I mentioned before, I also actively blog about both my adventures in amateur radio as well as every now and then blog about something semi-educational. You can view my blog by visiting www.kd0bik.com/blog

My most current blog entry has to do with a new amateur radio first. Having only been licensed for a little over four years, and not being as active as I really wanted to on the bands for years two and three, I still encounter a first. Or something I've never done or experienced before.

My newest "first" was working a Dxpediton. I've tried....I called Kilo, Delta, Zero, Bravo, India, Kilo until I almost couldn't speak anymore back in 2009 during the K5D Dxpediton. So when I heard about Tango, 32, Charlie and the Dxpediton to Christmas Island....I marked the dates on my calendar.

I'll speed this story along since you can go read all the details on my blog. But I did work Tango, 32, Charlie....not once, but 5 times on 5 different bands including 10, 12, 15, 17 and 20 meters. I've also already logged Tango, X-Ray, 7, Mike on 20 meters and will try to work them as many additional bands as I can.

I think my DX'er status is slowly evolving from casual towards more serious as time goes by. Of course, about the only thing I can really change is my attitude and knowledge. Living in a heavily HOA controlled neighborhood, I can't hang any additional aluminum or really string any additional wire. So attitude and knowledge, with a little bit of luck will get me by.

Finally, if you've been listening to the practical amateur radio podcast since near the beginning and I know many of you have and I truly thank you. You know I've been working on a new ham shack, home office and just general man-cave. As I've mentioned in updates over the past few years, the stud walls went up rather quickly and most of the electrical is also complete as is the plumbing adjustments needed to move the washer and dryer about a 18 inches.

The delays have really been caused by an indecision on what type of wall surface to use and whether my wife and I would tackle it or have it done. We recently decided we would have it done for a couple of reasons. One, it'll get done in just a couple of days versus several weeks or longer. Two, I think my wife is ready for me to vacate the part of the basement I'm currently using and well....that can't happen until

this new area is complete. So really it all boils down to we want to get the walls up so we can then start painting.

I've stopped setting dates or goals for completion on this project a long time ago. I have a few hours of work still to complete before the drywall guys show up and I'm working as much as I can (between band openings of course) to get my work complete so they can start. Could this new space be ready before the first of the year? I think that is possible....but I'm trying to also be optimistic as well. I'll certainly keep you updated.

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Mailbag

Mail goes here

Well this wraps another episode of The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. We will return again with episode 49 sometime in November.

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Until next time, 73 to all from KDOBIK.

This has been The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast is written and produced by Jerry Taylor. You may contact Jerry by email at kd0bik@arrl.net or by visiting his website at www.myamateurradio.com. The practical amateur radio podcast and myamateurradio.com are protected under the Creative Commons license. Please see myamateurradio.com for details.

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