MEASLES, MORSE AND MOBILISATION.

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(Being another interesting episode in the Amateur Radio history of RSARS members. This time we hear from G8PG and how he got started.)

At least my excuse is original. It was measles that started it all for me!. The year was 1933, the measles attack was a bad one, and I was 13 years of age. In those days they made you lie in a darkened room as part of the treatment, and reading was forbidden. It was summer, and hot and sticky, but the worst part was the family wireless set - you could just hear it when things were quiet, but if a car passed - as it always did at the vital moment - it was drowned out. It was thus that the GREAT IDEA slowly took shape. Once I was better I would build a radio of my own, and be free to listen as I wanted.

Partial recovery came at last (it was two years before I was given a final clearance) and work began on the GREAT IDEA. I knew absolutely nothing about radio or electricity, but I had lots of copies of "Chums Annual", a famous boys book of the time, which carried a regular feature for radio constructors by a gentleman who signed himself "5YM". These taught me a lot. I also bought a copy of "Wireless World" (weekly, and four old pennies in those days) and didn't understand a word of it!. A later visit to the newsagent turned up the old "Popular Wireless" (later amalgamated with "Practical Wireless") and this proved a life-saver for the next couple of years. But what about the building of the receiver?

Oh yes, I was building receivers alright. There were quite a few components and valves lying around at home, brought over from the States by sea-going uncles, and I built circuit after circuit with them - but not a single circuit worked!. In my innocence I did not realise that the valves were 6 Volts filament bright emitters, and that they would just not work with a 2 Volts accumulator! At least this five months taught me how to read simple circuits and put them together, but none of the end products produced a single signal!. (This period probably also taught me the most important attribute of a good operator - perseverance against any difficulty). I had been saving pocket money, however, and my fancy had been taken by a "Popular Wireless" design called "The Iron Core 2", a simple BC receiver using a detector and one AF stage. 1933 was the year that dust iron cores first appeared in quantity, and this design used a dual-range version.

Finally, on New Year's Eve 1933, the receiver was finished, Father Christmas having been fairly generous with hard cash that year!. At 2200 hours the miracle of modern technology was switched on. This time the 2V dull emitter valves settled down happily on 2V from the acc., and the second- hand 120V mains unit bought from the local radio shop for a quid was pushing out the necessary HT. And there was the old BBC long-wave transmitter Daventry 5XX belting in Switching to the medium waves produced not only the BBC Regional station, but also strange voices talking in languages like French and German. At that moment a DXer was born.

Already my reading had shown the existence of the short waves, and within three months (probably as a result of some cash contributions to my birthday in March 1934) I was building my first sw receiver. Someone was flogging iron-cored dual-range coils cheap and I sent for one. The vendor knew what he was doing - the coil never worked on its lower range, and only worked for a short while on its higher range before it packed up. During the time it did work, Moscow and one or two others were heard on 19m, however, and the bug had bitten. Another receiver was built with a different coil, and by the Summer we were in business and beginning to log the real SW BC DX such as KDKA and other North Americans, a bunch of Venezuelans, the new All India Radio station at Bombay and so on.

At this point a word about equipment may be in order. Virtually all the SW receivers in use at that time were straight sets. The reasons for this were mainly economic, but also partly technical. The cost of a imported superhet - and virtually no commercial communications receivers were made in the UK at that time - was around £25. Very cheap by present day prices, but equivalent to eight weeks wages for a skilled man in pre-war days!. So the simple but highly effective straight set which could be built for a pound or two was the popular choice. Apart from cost, at that time the highest intermediate frequency in use in superhets was 465 KHz so images were a great problem even if an RF stage was fitted. Mixers also presented difficulties. The triode-hexode had not yet appeared, and mixer noise was a real problem. A further headache was that capacitor manufacture was far from perfect, and almost all cheap superhets suffered instability early in their life because of leaky decoupling capacitors (rotary wave-change switches were also in their infancy and could produce an endless crop of problems as they became worn). A simple but effective code was used to describe receivers on QSL cards and during CW contacts. The basic unit of the straight receiver was taken as the detector valve, designated 'V' this could have RF stages in front of it, and AF stages placed after it. These were designated by their quantity, zero being used if none were fitted. Thus 0-V-0 indicated a one valve receiver, 0-V-1 a two-valve receiver consisting of a detector and an audio stage, 1-V-2 was a four-valve receiver with an RF stage, a detector and two AF stages, and so on. For superhets one used 'SH' followed by the number of valves used, for example, SH6 indicated a 6-valve superhetrodyne receiver.

The detector used in the straight sets was always a leaky grid detector, fitted with reaction, probably the most sensitive detector ever invented. Fig.1 shows such a detector using a directly heated triode valve. In this circuit the valve actually performs three functions at once. The cathode (in this instance also the heater) and control grid act together as a diode demodulator, in which the audio variations produced by the incoming signal appear across the grid resistor (known as the "grid leak"). But as the grid is also part of a triode the variations of potential produced across the grid resistor are given AF amplification by the valve as well. LR and CR form a positive feedback reaction circuit, LR being coupled to the grid tuned circuit and being connected in the right sense to produce positive feedback. The amount of feedback was controlled by CR. As the value of CR was increased, feedback was increased and a negative resistance effect was produced in the grid circuit which overcame the effect of damping losses and caused the sensitivity and the selectivity to increase greatly. Maximum sensitivity for voice reception occurred just below the point at which the circuit starts oscillating. If the feedback is increased beyond this point the valve begins its third role, that of an oscillator, and if the grid circuit is detuned 1 KHz or so either side of the incoming signal the valve acts as its own BFO, thus allowing CW signals to be read. In the hands of a good operator this circuit can produce amazing results.

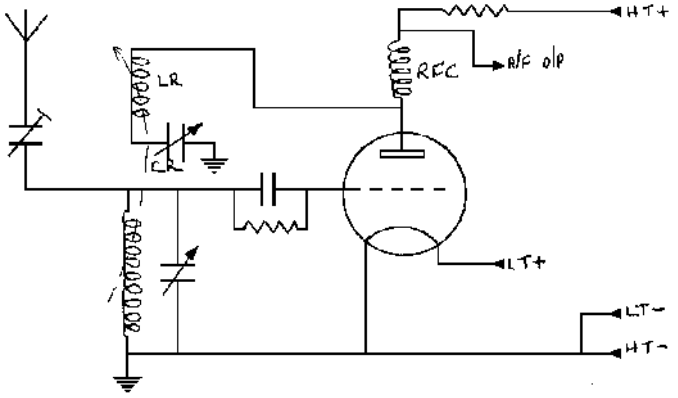

Fig. 1 Leaky Grid Dectection with Reaction.

Returning to the main story, with the advent of the first reasonable SW receiver, serious log-keeping commenced. It is looking at these logs over 40 years later that allows the writer to state categorically that the first amateur signal he ever identified was G6JL. This was on 40M phone at 1909 hours GMT, 26th April 1934 at RS 56!. Short-wave activity was nothing like it is now, and 1934 was a year of low sun-spot activity, so one really had to search for the stations. A log of 14 or 15 BC or Amateur stations often represented a good day's listening. But the DX could be winkled out and the country total slowly increased.

Construction methods were quite different in those days, particularly as far as impecunious schoolboys were concerned!. Electric soldering irons were in their infancy, and most construction was with components, which had screw terminals to which the wires were connected. Special components for SW work were also a problem unless you lived in London or Birmingham. Going into shops outside these areas and asking for, say, a 100 pfd air spaced variable capacitor was usually met with either incredulity or jeers!. The answer was to make do with the standard 500 pfd capacitors, preferably scrounged, strip them and reassemble them with half the number of plates, double spaced. Construction, apart from the lucky few with metal working tools, was with wooden front panels made from plywood, and a wooden baseboard. This lead to many hand capacity problems, especially with reaction circuits. In my own case I had not even got access to a good drill, so the holes in the plywood front panel were made with the aid of a red-hot poker heated in the kitchen fire. Looking back I now realise what a long suffering person my mother was!. Even so, the crudely constructed gear still worked, and bearing in mind that most SW stations, including BC stations, used only a fraction of the power that they do today, many present day owners of sophisticated communications receivers would be very happy to pull in some of the stuff that we used to hear. Aerials were also simple - a 50 or 75 feet end-fed wire hung to a tree or pole.

During 1935 a G station who was kind enough to QSL my listener report added a slip of paper suggesting that I buy "A Guide to Amateur Radio" from the RSGB. In those days it cost sixpence plus postage. This marked a turning point for me, as it opened up a new world in both the operating and technical sense, and my listening began to get more and more orientated towards the Amateur Bands.

One problem for the beginner in those days was sheer lack of contact with other enthusiasts, unless one was very fortunate. I started SW work at the beginning of 1934, and did not meet a fellow enthusiast until the beginning of 1936. It was certainly a case of soldiering on and learning the hard way. Morse is a good example of this. I had several goes at it during those two years, and at the beginning of 1936 had reached some amazing speed like 2½ words per minute. Then I read in the magazines that a Club was being formed in our area, came into contact with a number of other enthusiasts overnight and everything happened at once. Within 8 weeks I was a member of the RSGB, was getting regular Morse practice and, to my amazement, was the proud operator of artificial aerial experimental station 2BDT. (I say "operator" deliberately because being in the eyes of the law a minor at 16 years of age, the Post Office insisted that the actual license, was issued to my father on my behalf. Dad did not know a Key from a Kilocycle, but being the great chap that he was his only remark when I presented the papers for his signature was "Don't do anything to get me into trouble".)

In those days there was no such thing as an Amateur License in the UK. Instead, the PO issued experimental Licenses to those who they considered worthy of them, and at times they had been very selective indeed. By 1936 the writing was very much on the wall, however, and looking back it seems fairly obvious that licenses were being issued as part of

the defence build-up. Three years later young men with "live" operating and technical experience suddenly became a very valuable commodity. As apart from the Morse Test there was no formal technical exam for the licence, the PO insisted that most applicants hold an artificial aerial license for at least a year before they applied for the full license. No Morse Test was required for this license, and it empowered the holder to own transmitting equipment and to operate it into a non-radiating dummy load, usually on the 1·8, 7 and 14 MHz bands. Call-signs consisted of the figure '2' followed by three letters. No 'G' prefix was used. My own licence was issued for the purpose of experiments in the frequency stability in oscillators (not that I did many!). It is probably true to say that at some time just about every AA licence was used with 66 feet of wire instead of the dummy load, plus an un-allocated 'G' call, but that is another story!!!

At the beginning of 1937 negotiations were begun for a full license for the purpose of experiments with propagation and aerials. At the same time changes were made in the station. A new TX was built using the 42 tube on its own as a Tritet oscillator. The circuit was roughly the equivalent of an ECO, part of the pentode being used as an oscillator, with its output electron coupled. This meant that one could double in the output circuit and thus make a 2-Band 1-Tube transmitter. The only snag was that the form of circuit used in those days produced rather high crystal current when used 'straight-through', which could damage the crystal. More of this later. A chance also came to acquire an Eddystone Amateur Bands 2 from G6GL, who had just bought one of the first SX16's to reach the UK. The SX16 was a genuine Hallicrafter communication RX covering all the amateur bands with full band-spread, phasing type crystal gate, etc. The crush of locals lining up to see it can be imagined!. The Amateur Bands 2, on the other hand, was a really good 0-V-l using a screen grid valve (tetrode) as detector and a pentode AF stage. Reaction was controlled by varying the screen voltage on the tetrode and it worked beautifully. I later added a second AF stage which made it even better on weak signals.

By the time I got 2BDT my receiver was a pretty hot 0-V-1 built in a biscuit tin. No metal working tools, of course, so holes were literally bashed into the front of the tin with a blunt instrument, and the components not on the front panel were mounted on a baseboard screwed to the bottom of the tin. The plug-in coils were wound on old valve bases. Sounds rough, but on many occasions I received CW signals from VK at such strength that one could read them 30 feet away with the phones laid on the operating table. The first transmitter was a single valve Hartley oscillator for 7 and 14 MHz, using coils wound with 16 s.w.g. wire and screwed on to stand-off insulators. The valve was a Continental made 2V power triode, run with 4 Volts AC on the filaments and 300 Volts DC on the anode. Way, way outside its ratings, but it worked, and I happen to know that on odd occasions when I absent-mindedly connected the real aerial to it instead of the artificial aerial it was heard in America and Africa.

After a while a 7 MHz crystal was obtained from G6MY in Leeds, who used to grind them and sell them cheaply, and the first multi-stage TX was built. It consisted of a 2 Volts power triode (this time with 2 Volts on the filament!) used as a CO and a type 42 pentode as a PA.

At the beginning of March I was told by the P.O. that my application had been accepted subject to passing the Morse test. I was now attending Liverpool Wireless College for training as a Merchant Navy Radio Officer, so the Morse was no sweat and the test was duly passed. We were moving house at the time, the new one having a lot of garden space, so, with the help of Roy Barlow (now G3QX and ex-Royal Signals), I built a 40 ft 'A' frame mast and also put a shorter mast at the side of the house. (Nobody had ever heard of "Planning Permission" in those days - it was only after we had made the world safe for democracy that the bureaucrats took over!!). The help from Roy was very real - his Dad was the local blacksmith, so we went into the forge after hours and made the necessary metalwork. His uncle owned the local timber yard, so we probably got a bit knocked off the cost of that, too. The final result was supports for an aerial at a height of 40 feet. I wish I could do that now!!. The 'A' frame masts were a joy - two men could put one up easily, and once the guys were set up one man, could drop the mast and put it up again on his own. The design in still around in the ARRL Handbook. There was no plastic rope in those days, so the guys were made from stranded galvanised iron wire broken up with egg insulators every 10 feet to avoid resonance effects.

You may ask why, with only one crystal available, a VFO controlled TX was not built. There were three reasons for this. Firstly the GPO were dead nuts about accurate frequency control in those days. Even with crystal control you had to submit an official calibration certificate for the crystal when you applied for the license. You either got this from the manufacturer or sent the rock off to the RSGB calibration service, run in his spare time by an amateur, who would do you a calibration certificate for five shillings (25p). This was not all, however. When I received my ticket each amateur band had a GPO-imposed "Guard Band." of 5 KHz at each end in which G stations were not allowed to work. If you wanted to use VFO control you had to have an approved frequency meter, and there were no cheap Class D's or BC~221s around. Your Frequency Meter would need a 100 KHz standard crystal, complete with certificate, and again would have to be calibrated by the RSGB service at five bob per calibration point, so it would have probably cost as much as the rest of the station put together, and. most of us just did not have that sort of money. A final point was the very high signal standard of G stations at that time, which was respected throughout the world. You were always expected to be T9X on CW and if you were not, your fellow G's jolly soon told you about it. This meant that those stations that did use a VFO used a darned good one with plenty of buffering and a doubler after it, which could double the cost of the transmitter. Again, most people could not afford it.

Finally, on the 11th April 1937, a big GPO envelope arrived in the morning post. I ripped it open and found that I had become G8PG. By 0830, I was busy on 7 MHz which, sods Law operating to perfection, was weak, watery and long skip. I did manage to raise an F and an OZ however, and was just starting to put out a 'TEST' call (Gs were not allowed to call 'CQ' in those days) when there was a very audible "ping" from the TX and it stopped hackling. My blood ran cold as I lifted the top off the crystal holder. There was my one and only 'rock' neatly split into two halves. The poor internal screening of the 42 had produced too much crystal current, resulting in mechanical fracture!. So there was G8PG on the air and off again within two hours.

It is interesting to remember that the G8PG license as first issued was for 10 Watts maximum on the 1·8, 7 and 14 MHz bands.

The next couple of days were spent in frantic negotiations for advances in pocket money, plus putting the armlock on the odd doting relative who might be good for a couple of bob!. Eventually I raised enough to send off for a Brookes crystal which, around my part of the country, was considered the best that you could get. In those days most of us had only one crystal, so calling and searching were very different from what it is now. Before ordering, one had to decide what frequency it should be. If you heard a station calling on 7015 KHz and your rock was 7150 KHz you had to give him a very long call and hope that as he tuned up to your frequency he did not hear someone else calling him lower down the band. Life was even more difficult on 14 MHz, as the U.S. 'phone allocation was in the centre of the band with CW segments above and below it!!. If you only had one rock you were thus pretty well excluded from the other CW segment. Outside the U.S.A. (where sub-bands were laid down by regulation) there were no sub-bands at all, so CW and 'Phone were indiscriminately mingled, leading to much QRM. As an example, when I got the Brookes crystal, which was 7010 KHz, I found that Sunday morning operation on 7 MHz was often impossible because I shared the frequency with a certain Old Timer who had a 250 Watts license and used it each Sunday to chat to a neighbour a few miles away on AM 'phone. As mentioned, I chose 7010 KHz for the new rock, as this was fairly near the band edge on both 7 and 14 MHz, so hopefully stations tuning from LF to HF, as many did, would hear me. No single frequency station can ever have it perfect, but proved to be not too bad a choice.

It took three weeks for the replacement crystal to arrive, during which I could only console myself with such lesser pleasures as tennis and girls. I had raised a little over the cost of the rock, however, and blued five bob on a type 89 pentode which was more efficient than the 42 and better screened internally. The Tritet rig was modified to take it and, when the new rock arrived, it never let me down. Back on the air again the easier European countries were soon being worked and DX began to appear in the Log in the shape of W's. A lot of experiments were carried out with aerials including 66 feet end-fed types, the Zepp and eventually the W3EDP. This was an 84 feet wire parallel-tuned against a counterpoise. The counterpoise was 6½ feet long on 14 MHz and 17 feet long on the other bands. The coil in the parallel tuned circuit was inductively coupled to the PA tank coil and the coupling varied for maximum RF "up the spout". This aerial still appears in some handbooks. I used a separate 66 feet wire for receiving which allowed brute-force break-in working - you just started keying and never mind the clicks in the 'phones!. Must have been the teenage equivalent of the Disco of the time as it was equally noisy. Co-axial fed dipoles were unknown at the time as there was literally no co-ax available. A few brave spirits used dipoles fed with ordinary twisted lighting flex - heaven knows what happened to the efficiency when it rained!. Beams were also almost unknown on the HF bands.

Conditions were quite good during the Summer of 1937 and it became obvious that there were some good all-night openings around on 14 MHz. The question was how to use them, as my parents, although very understanding, took a dim view of all radio and no sleep. Cunning solved the problem. A temporary RX aerial very inconspicuous was slung from my bedroom window and a keying lead was run round the wall of the house from the shack to the bedroom. Then the RX complete with HT eliminator, 2 Volts accumulator, 'phones and key were smuggled into the bedroom and hidden in an empty drawer, and as soon as the old folks were asleep I was in business, having switched on the TX before going to bed.

Obviously no other lunatics in Europe were staying up all night and I had a real ball and worked W1, W2, W3, W4, W7, W8 and W9 during the first two nights. Also, testing the set-up late one afternoon I heard a ZS and worked him too!, so the one-tube, one crystal rig was earning its keep. I cannot remember now whether it was a change in conditions or sheer exhaustion that eventually ended that particular DX orgy. Shortly afterwards I slipped from grace and actually demeaned myself by having a 'phone QSO. It was with ON4GU, and the TX was modulated by connecting the secondary of the microphone transformer in series with the earthy end of the TX grid leak - a well-known technique at that time. The microphone was of course carbon. Anyway, ON4GU managed to resolve the signal and I was able to remind him about it when we QSO'd again a few months ago, just 40 years later. My next amateur 'phone QSO was in the 1950's and that deviation did not last long either!.

In the autumn of 1937 I joined the old Royal Naval Wireless Auxiliary Reserve, although officially under age. They grabbed me quick when they found that I could read 22 w.p.m. which was the speed required for a qualified Telegraphist. This Reserve wore no uniform in peacetime, and it was divided into Units of 10 people up and down the country. There was no bounty but you could do 14 days annual paid training at a RN Signal School if you wished. The Navy also provided a crystal for your Unit frequency (in the 3·6 - 3·8 MHz region) but you provided your own TX and

RX. It was a very efficient and interesting organisation, and every Friday the Admiralty came up and took traffic to and from local Units. Warships also occasionally worked RNWAR stations. My call was NJ4 and my best "DX" was when I worked HMS Barham when she was lying in Gibraltar. This was with the W3EDP aerial.

About the same time our local Club had a junk sale and I bought a PX4 triode for sixpence (this valve later became well known in the output stage of the Leak Amplifiers). A bread board was bought from Woolworths, and a new TX was built in which the 89 Tritet C.O. drove the PX4 as a neutralised P.A. It worked very well indeed. About the same time I got hold of a Top Band crystal for a couple of bob, the previous owner muttering something about it "being a bit erratic at times". This was true, as after about 30 minutes of use it would stop oscillating completely. When this happened the only cure was to leave it for a couple of hours or so, after which it recovered. I never discovered the cause of the problem - it was not overheating, as washing the rock in cold water made no difference. When things were going right many good contacts were made on the Band, but no DX was worked. Top Band DX had just come back into fashion, thanks to the efforts of W1BB and G6FO, and our star local, G6GL, worked W and VE around this time.

Measuring instruments were always a headache for the pre-war amateur. An 0 - 50 moving coil meter cost the equivalent of about £30 in present day money. I had one very manky moving iron mA meter, no voltmeter, and, for a while, a hot wire RF meter. When the latter gave up the ghost, the aerial was tuned by inserting a 15 Watts electric lamp in series with it and adjusting everything for maximum brilliance. This seemed just as good as an ammeter. Another invaluable tool was a flashlight bulb connected across a single turn of wire mounted on a wooden rod. This single turn could be coupled to any coil in the TX and, if RF was present, the lamp would glow. Every so often there was too much RF about and one bought a new bulb!. The other mainstay instrument was an absorption wavemeter, also using a flashlight bulb as an indicator. All crude, but very effective and after a few months experience you could tune any TX for maximum output.

One thing that would shake many present-day amateurs is just how few licences there were in Europe at that time. Less than a thousand in the U.K., and perhaps only 20 to 50 in some of the smaller European countries. This meant that activity at off-peak times could be very low indeed. Sometimes on a week-day you could tune 7 MHz for 30 minutes before you heard a signal, and it could be an hour or more on 14 MHz. At other times QRM could be very high, however. The Spanish Civil War was in full swing during the Winter of 1937/1938, and at night 7MHz was often a solid mass of Spanish stations. One part of the crowd were over modulated broadcast stations, and the reminder was made up of chirpy, unstable CW signals from transmitters with calls like SNT99. The broadcast stations were mainly rooting for Franco, but I never did find out which side the CW stations were from. Early in 1939 I saw a Franco Division being landed in the Canary Islands for demob, and judging by the ghastly arrangements made for dealing with the wounded - men with one arm trying to help men with one leg along the quayside - it must have been a rough War, as this was the winning side!.

During the Winter of 1937/1938 operation continued. The first W was worked on 7 MHz, and FB8 and KH6 were worked on 14. Some interesting QRP stations were also worked. G6ZN, the village Bobby at Horbury in Yorkshire, used to wield a potent 3 W signal using dry batteries as an HT supply. His record DX was 30 contacts with the U.S.A. in 30 minutes during the A.R.R.L. DX Contest. I doubt if any present day station will ever equal that one (The 1978 Call-Book shows G6ZN still listed and still living at Horbury - Ed.). Another character I worked, located in Berwick-on -Tweed, derived his HT supply from a hand driven generator, turning it with his left hand while keying with his right!!. He got about 5 W when feeling really fresh, and said that 14 w.p.m. with the right hand seemed to synchronise nicely with the speed at which he had to turn the handle with his left hand. At least one G station was using a pedal generator at this time, but I never worked him.

There were not many Portable stations around in pre-war days. A second licence had to be obtained for such work, and a separate call-sign was issued, solely for portable operation. The power limit was 10 W, and operation could only take place within a 10 mile radius of the centre point named in the licence. The only exception was N.F.D., when each R.S.G.B. district was allowed to nominate two stations which were allowed to operate portable for the duration of the Contest. In District 1 one station was run by the Manchester lads and the other by the chaps in the Merseyside area. My home at that time was Heswall, Wirral, and in '37 and '38, the Merseyside station, G2OA, (Also still listed - Ed.) was set up on Heswall Football Field, about a mile from our house. G2OA would bring along his home station rig for the event, including a National SW5, one of the most famous commercially made T.R.F. receivers. A large supply of 12 Volts accs. would arrive in a plain van, together with a 500 Volts D.C. genny for the H.T. These were not unconnected with the P.S.I. of 55 Div. Signal Regiment, our local T.A. Unit, who was, at that time, a certain Jack Drudge-Coates, better known as G2DC. In 1938 we racked up the best 80 Metre score in the Contest. The aerial was hung from a 40ft 'A' frame mast knocked up on the spot by G2OA before the contest started. He did not want the bother of taking it down again, so sold it for ten bob at the end of the day, and I became the owner of a second mast. Roy Barlow and I dismantled it, then we got it home by wheeling it on the handlebars of Roy's bike.

There was enough room at home to get this mast about 90 ft from the house at right angles to the run of the existing aerial. Once it was up I used it to support a second W3EDP aerial. At first I was going to switch from one to the other, but then had the idea of connecting the second aerial in place of the counterpoise so producing a 90 degree angle Vee antenna. This worked extremely well and soon added places like VE4 and SU to the Log.

I had continued my RNWAR training, having attended the Signal School at HMS Victory, Portsmouth, and passed out as Telegraphist (Qualified). This entitled me to pay at Twenty three Shillings per week when actually serving. Came October 1938 and the Munich Crisis. The call-up papers for my own RNWAR Unit did not arrive until things were just about over, so I rang the Unit Petty Officer and asked if we were going. The answer was an emphatic "Yes!". I thought, in my innocence that this showed great keenness and patriotism, not knowing that the buzz had got around that every Reservist who reported was being given a months pay and that there might be other pickings!

We duly entrained late that night and, apart from temporarily losing one Unit Petty Officer, one train and one large crate of beer arrived at Devonport without incident around noon the next day. Here the old, pre-War, supremely efficient Navy took over. Within five minutes of stepping off the train we were sitting down to a hot meal, then we were marched off to the famous Devonport Drill Shed (where, on one occasion, 5000 men were drilled completely under cover), which was the mobilisation centre. This literally had everything, including a free running buffet to while away the time. As an expert on mobilisations - I have done two for real, Munich (Royal Navy) and Suez (Army) plus two for practice (Army) I rate that particular one as the best organised I have seen. They had taken in about 15,000 Reservists in 3 days and the system was still coping, except that all available kit had been issued. This turned out to be one of the "other pickings", at least in my case. A R.N. rating always owns his kit, buying it from approved tailors after initial issue. When we reached the Paymaster we were given a month's pay plus £5 to buy our kit but when we got to the Purser (Naval Q.M.) the cupboard was bare, and I walked away with £10 in my hot little hand - the biggest sum of money I had ever owned up to that time. We all signed on for 12 years, or for the duration (Naval ratings are not sworn in, they sign an agreement with the Admiralty) and after 2 days were sent home on indefinite leave. This fooled nobody, and the general farewell was "See you next year around the same time".

From October onwards, amateur radio took a back seat as I was up to my eyes preparing for my exams. I sat them early in December, and a week later received the coveted P.M.G. Certificate qualifying me to serve as a Merchant Navy Radio Officer. The next four weeks were spent perfecting my typing of Morse, as any junior R.O. who could copy Press by the hour on a typewriter was smiled upon by his Chief, buying uniform (the Navy Kit Money helped to pay!) and packing away the ham gear. I was, at this time, honourably discharged from the RNWAR. I did not take down the masts, as a 100 m.p.h. gale broke them both - a symbolic occurrence and a warning of the bigger storm to come 9 months later. On 22nd January 1939 I signed on as 3rd Radio Officer in R.M.S. "Laconia", GJCD, later to be tragically sunk during the evacuation from France. But when this happened I was 6,000 miles away off the coast of Brazil. It would be 7 years in time, 6 years of sea service and one World War later before G8PG would be heard again.