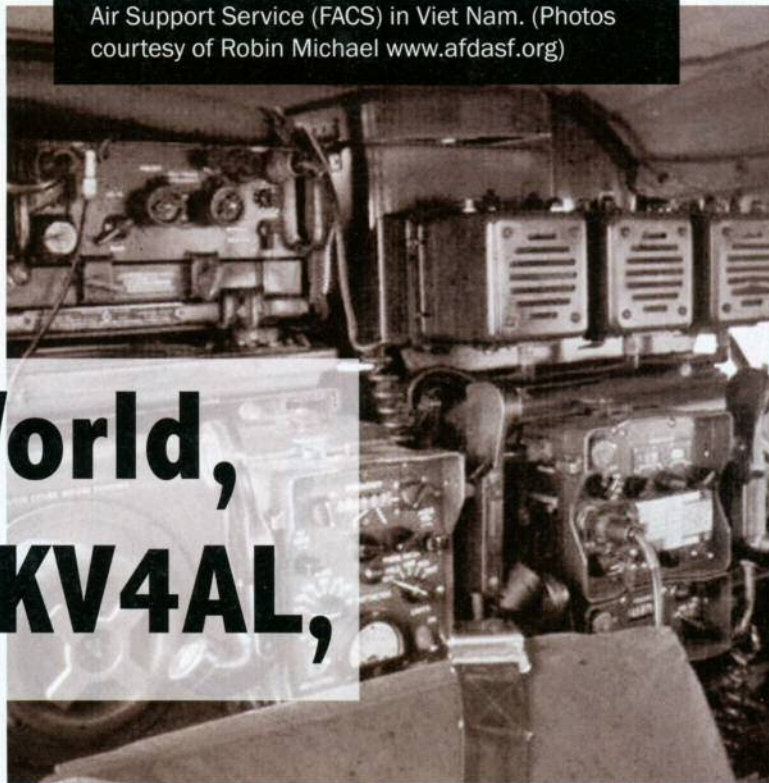


As an Air Force radio operator in a jeep full of equipment, Airman Robin Michael wore with pride the Air Commando Bush Hat of the ground Forward Air Support Service (FACS) in Viet Nam. (Photos courtesy of Robin Michael [www.afdasf.org](http://www.afdasf.org))



Robin Michael

# Hello World, This Is KV4AL, Tryon

Writer & Photographer Vincent Verrecchio

The Thermal Belt Amateur Radio Club (TBARC) is active in ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) for Polk County.

Close to the peak of Piney Mountain, in one of many possible scenarios in his home “radio shack,” Robin Michael hears a voice from the receiver speaking in Q Code, “QTH?” The accent is French, a language that Robin recognizes but doesn’t speak.

“I am in Tryon, North Carolina, USA,” responds Robin. He then adds “QTH?” which is Q Code for “What is your location?”

“Je suis ‘a Brantome,” answers an older sounding man.

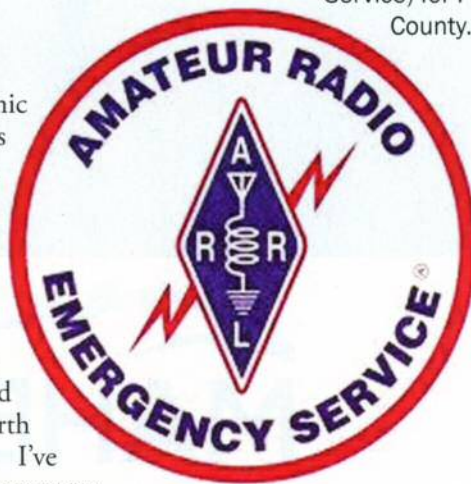
“QTR?” Robin questions, wanting to know the local time of the caller.

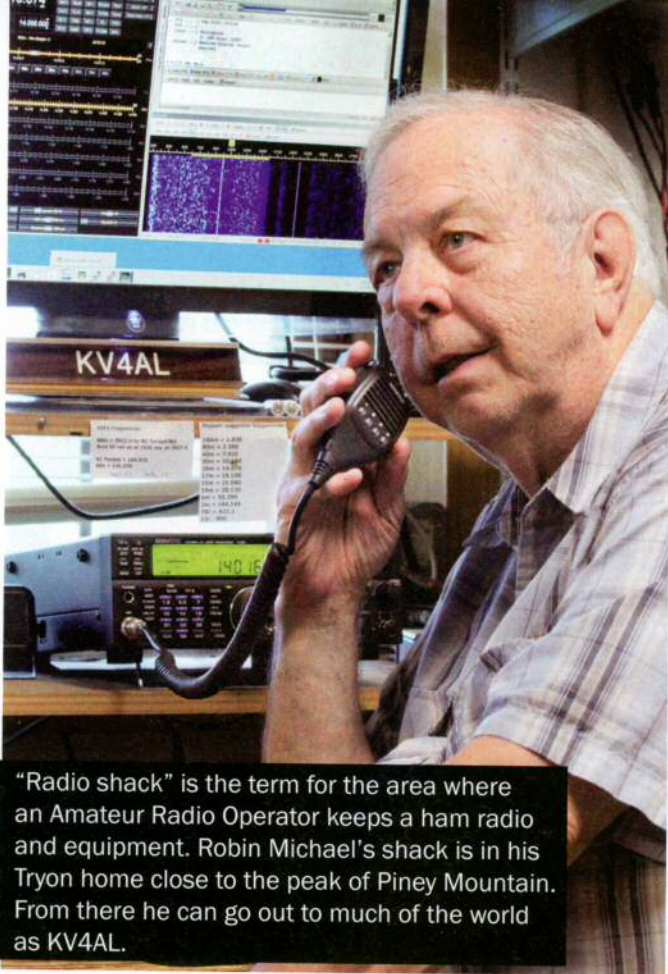
“L’heure exacte est 15h.” the Frenchman answers, adding, “I speak English,” facilitating a much easier conversation.

“90% of the amateur radio world speaks English,” Robin explains as we talk in the lower level of his home, sitting in front of his amateur radio equipment for station KV4AL. To our left and

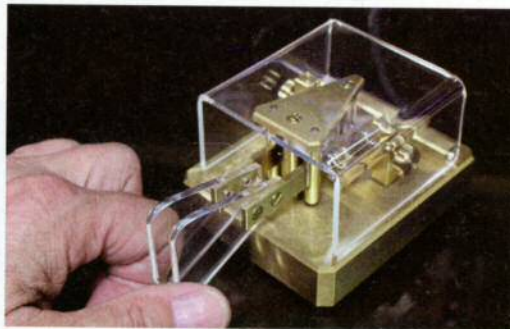
behind us, electronic memorabilia from his 50 years operating Robin’s Electronics on Depot Street fill shelves and cover the wall space.

“Amateur radio is heavily censored in China and forbidden in North Korea. Otherwise, I’ve talked readily with operators ranging from Italy to Iceland, Germany to Mexico, England to three-fourths of the United States. Accents can be a problem. Saudi Arabia, for example, and west Texas. I was trying to talk with this overjoyed Texan about his wife just giving him a new daughter, and barely got the gist of the story through his drawl.”

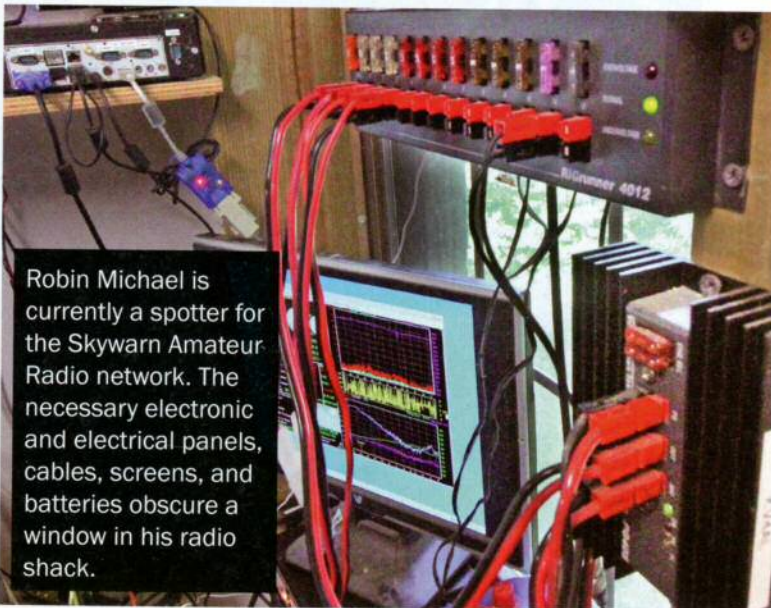




“Radio shack” is the term for the area where an Amateur Radio Operator keeps a ham radio and equipment. Robin Michael’s shack is in his Tryon home close to the peak of Piney Mountain. From there he can go out to much of the world as KV4AL.



There are three levels of operator licenses,” explains Robin Michael. “You don’t need to know Morse Code at any level, but I like having it as an option.”



Robin Michael is currently a spotter for the Skywarn Amateur Radio network. The necessary electronic and electrical panels, cables, screens, and batteries obscure a window in his radio shack.

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Robin Michael believes, "Ham radio is for all ages." An undated vintage public domain photo reinforces his position.



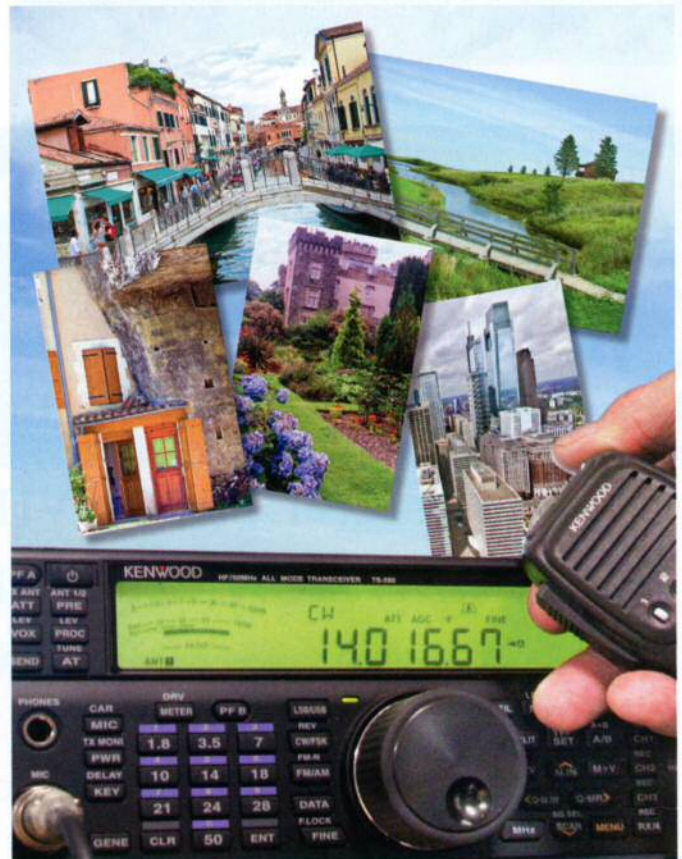
Under international agreement, amateur radio is a licensed service in every country. In the United States, the FCC helps assure the technical and communication skills of amateurs, and in cooperation with the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU), administers the use of radio spectrum airwaves. In each of three regions of the world, a share of frequencies is allocated for amateur, commercial, military, and government operations. This helps assure effective communications for users that are literally and figuratively on the same wavelength.

The ITU divides the radio spectrum into frequency bands ranging from 3 kilohertz (Very Low Frequency) up to 300 gigahertz (Extremely High Frequency). AM radio transmits at Low and Medium Frequency; amateur radio at High Frequency; and FM stations at Very High Frequency.

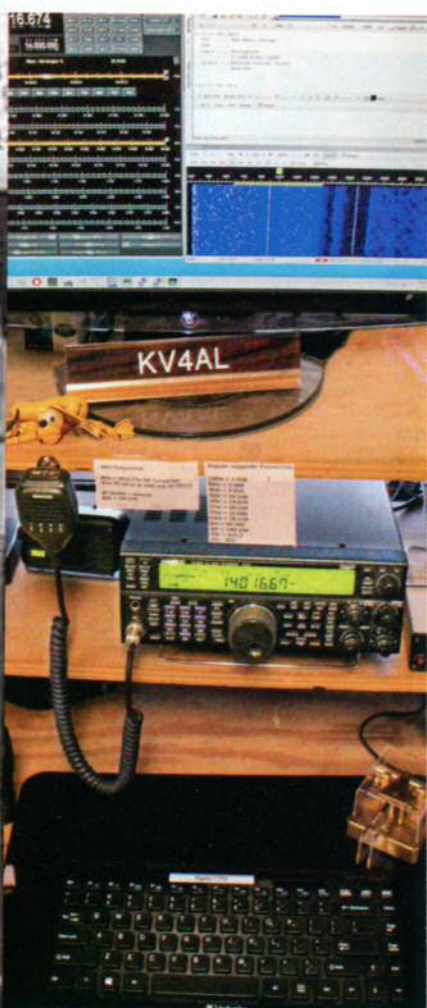
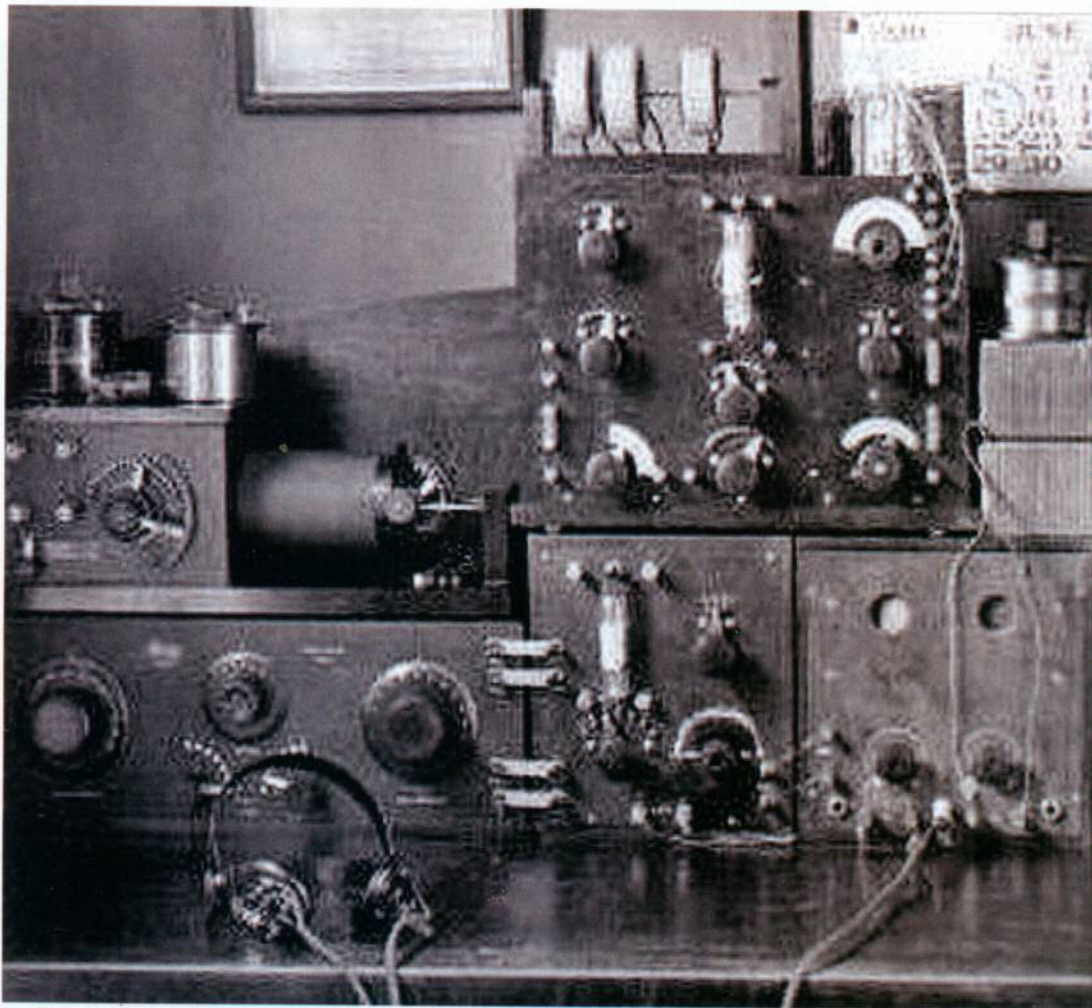
"Mister C.D. Stevens first got me interested not only in amateur radio but electronics in general," recalls Robin. "He was Tryon mayor, owner of Tryon's Builder Supply, and a Heathkit hobbyist. I was thirteen when he introduced me to building Heathkits and soon let me help him troubleshoot SWL and HAM receivers and HiFi audio equipment. One of the first kits that I assembled on my own was a Ham radio general coverage receiver."

The term HAM is an acronym and call name of the first amateur wireless station founded in 1908 by Albert HYMAN, Bob ALMY, and Poogie MURRAY.

"When I enlisted in the Air Force, I aced the electronics test." Robin eventually got to wear the Air Commando Bush Hat of the ground Forward Air Support Service (FACS) in



"I've talked readily with operators ranging from Italy to Iceland, Germany to Mexico, England to three-fourths of the United States," says Robin Michael, born at old St. Luke's Hospital and growing up on top of Piney Mountain.



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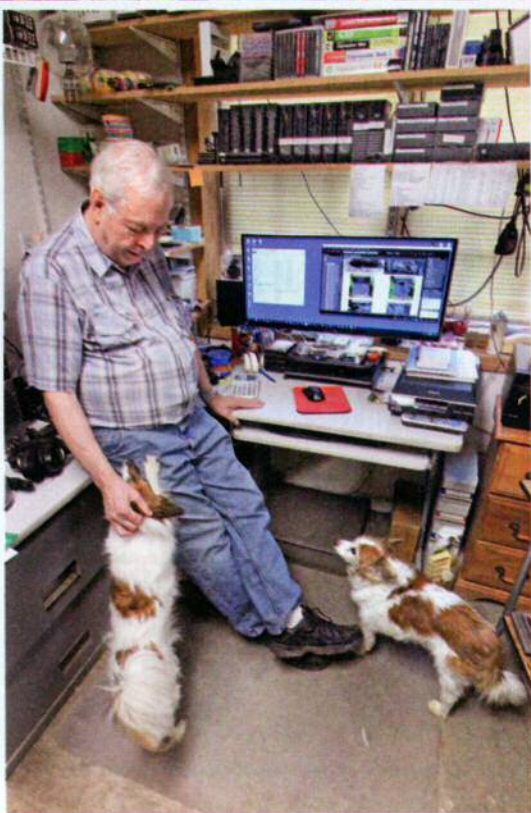
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Dolly and Pixie are Robin Michael's constant companions in his radio shack and in his camper when he packs up his ham radio gear and camera to explore America.



Electronic memorabilia from his 50 years operating Robin's Electronics on Depot Street fill shelves and cover the wall space of Robin Michael's radio shack.

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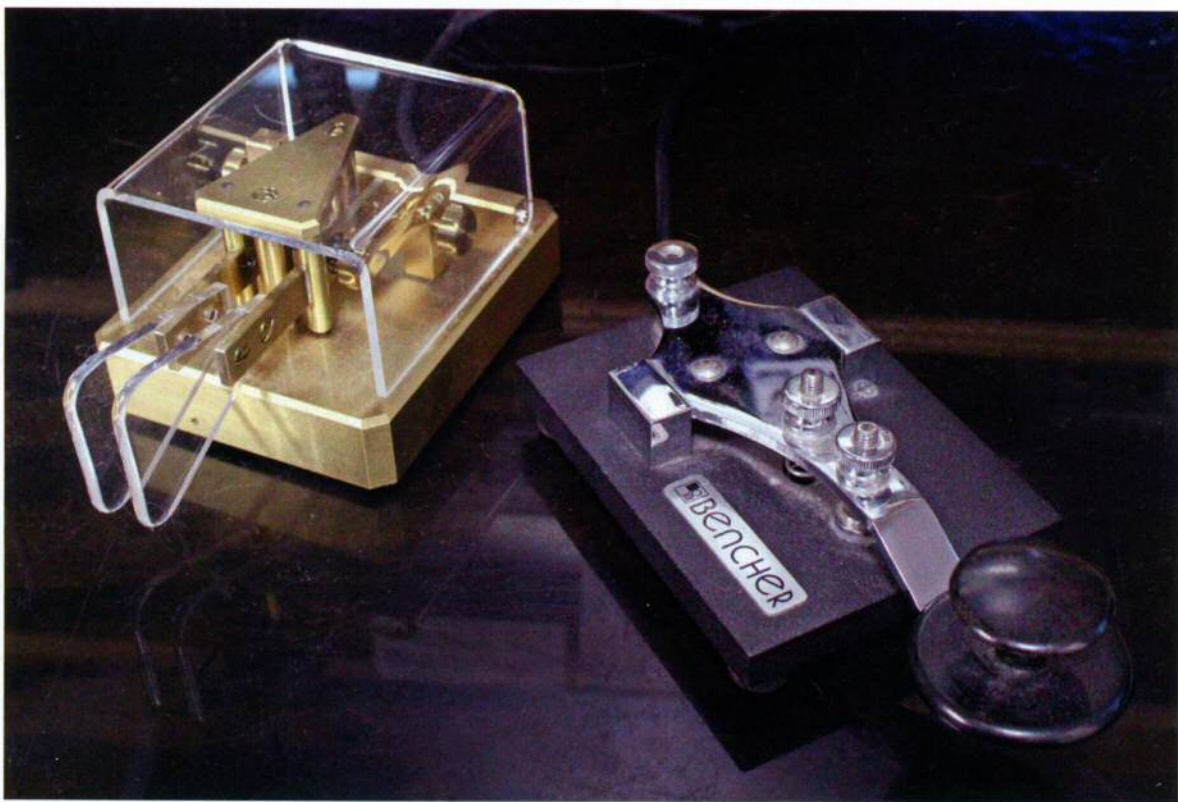
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Vietnam. As a radio operator in a jeep full of equipment, he pinpointed and transmitted enemy troop locations. After returning to hometown Tryon, he earned an Electronic Engineering Degree and started his electronics service business.

“Ham radio is my hobby...an opportunity to talk with new people, learn...hear news as it happens. For example, I was talking with an operator on Treasure Island across from Fisherman’s Wharf as it burned just a short time ago.

“One advantage of radio is that I can simply switch frequency to shut off someone who is being disrespectful of someone or using foul language about politics or wanting to argue about religion. I want to enjoy my time on the air, not get aggravated. I am not into radio contesting, but for many operators, it’s a fun way to earn bragging rights.”

The essence of Radiosport is for an individual operator or team of operators to contact as many stations as possible within parameters of location, information exchange, and time. Generally, the more contacts the higher the score. The purpose of some contests is to help contestants’ practice and improve messaging skills.

In exchange for this access to public radio space, ham radio also provides important public services.

“During the war in Iraq in the 90s, a MARSgram was relayed from Charlotte to me. MARS stood for Military Affiliated Radio System. The MARSgram was a casualty notification, and I had to deliver the message to a local family of their son’s injury. In 2005, I was getting messages out about what was happening in Hurricane Katrina.”

Robin is currently a spotter for the Skywarn Amateur Radio network. The necessary electronic and electrical panels, cables, screens and batteries obscure a window in his radio shack. The real time information he gathers is relayed to the National Weather Service in Norman, Oklahoma where it is accepted as first hand fact. Most members of the Thermal Belt Amateur Radio Club (TBARC) are Skywarn spotters. Robin, club president, notes that the club is also active in ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) for Polk County.

“Communications failures are typical in natural and man-made disasters. When all else fails, you can depend on radio. If necessary, a signal can be bounced off the moon. And you don’t have to operate only from your shack. You can have gear in the front seat of your truck or on your back. I had all the equipment I needed temporarily mounted on my motorcycle when in the advance support crew for rolling closure bicycle races. Even in mountain terrain, I always could talk with the rear support.

“Of the 350 or so Ham radio operators I know about in Polk and Rutherford Counties, and the Landrum area, 25 are TBARC members. We always welcome more,” says Robin. “Ham radio is for all ages. There is no age restriction to get a license. I’ve taught children as young as 6. There are three levels of operator licenses: Technician at the entry level, General, and Amateur Extra. You don’t need to know Morse Code at any level, but I like having it as an option. If you pass the General Class test with 26 out of 35 questions correct, you can say hello to the world in High Frequency.”

For more information on Ham radio history,  
 CONT. on Page 1 to cover below  
 pictures