

# Thoughts on Turning 65

For several years now, I have had a regular correspondence going with one of our long-time readers in the UK, Ray Howes, G4OWY. Ray has a different perspective on many things than I do, and I enjoy reading his views. Ray's most recent letter was of particular interest, especially timed as it was in conjunction with *CQ's* 65th anniversary, which we celebrate this month.

Ray was responding to my November editorial, "A Decade in the Rear-View Mirror." He said he'd been looking in his own rear-view mirror recently, back about two decades, though, and said, "I didn't like much of what I saw." He commented that underneath the "bonnet" of today's rigs, "a radical transformation has covertly taken place! The computer chip is now in the ascendant. Under the thin metal skins of our beloved rigs lies an impostor, an impostor so deceiving it will and has changed our hobby forever. 'Flex radios' are but the beginning of that inexorable change."

## The More Things Change...

I replied to Ray that I agreed with his observations, but not his conclusions. I don't see the ascendancy of the computer chip in our rigs as bad. I see it as essential for the long-term health of our hobby. As I dug back through old issues of *CQ* in putting together our 65th anniversary timeline (see first installment on page 70), it occurred to me that with a few exceptions, ham radio technology of 2010 is totally different from 1945. Sixty-five years ago, tubes were all we knew about—the transistor wouldn't be invented until 1948—"phone" meant AM (SSB also wasn't introduced until '48), and a large number of hams could remember back to when CW was not a synonym for Morse code, but a designator to set apart code sent using that new-fangled continuous-amplitude wave from the "traditional" spark gap. Of course, many hams in the '20s and '30s fought the advent of CW, fearing that it would ruin "real" ham radio.

But returning to 1945, there were no ham satellites (no other satellites, either), no moonbounce, no computers, no internet, no repeaters, no palm-sized handhelds, no transceivers, no Echolink or IRLP, no D-STAR, no Packet Cluster, no packet, no CW Skimmer, no eQSL or LoTW, and no 15-meter band (let alone 60, 30, 17, or 12). About the only things a ham from 1945 might recognize in a ham shack of 2010 would be some antennas (but not all) and either a hand-key or a "bug" (iambic keyers were still off in the future). So yes, the technology has changed radically in the past 65 years, and the ascendancy of the computer chip is heralding another round of radical changes that will likely make ham radio in 2075 as unrecognizable to a ham of 2010 as today's shack would be to a ham from 1945.

*(Fun project: We'd like to hear your ideas—based on what's happening on the leading edge of communications technology today—on what we could expect our stations and our means of ham radio communications to look like 65 years from now. E-mail them to me, and we'll share the most interesting and innovative ideas we receive.)*

## ... The More They Stay the Same

What has *not* changed in the past 65 years, though, is at least as important as what has—the people part of

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

ham radio and what we do with all of our technology. We still use our radios to try to talk to other hams and make new friends all over the world; we still enjoy chasing QSLs and certificates attesting to on-air accomplishments, and competing with each other and ourselves in on-air contests; we still love to tinker and come up with innovative uses for the technology that surrounds us (even if more of today's tinkering is in the realm of software than hardware); and we still are able to provide backup communications for our communities "when all else fails."

What also has not changed in the past 65 years is the basic mission of this magazine. As we approached this anniversary, I contacted "Mr. Magazine," Dr. Samir Husni at the University of Mississippi, who is widely regarded as the country's leading expert on the magazine industry, to ask just how common or uncommon it is for a magazine to reach its 65th anniversary. Dr. Husni responded:

The average life span for a new magazine being published today is one and half years, so needless to say, you have exceeded the average life span by many, many milestones. Also, in my last research I found that only 12% of the magazines that were born 20 years ago are still being published ... so how many magazines from the 7,000+ magazines out there can claim the ripe age of 65? A good guesstimate will be around 1 to 2%.

Congratulations on your new milestone and on staying true to your DNA. Age does not kill magazines, messing with their DNA does.

Our DNA, which dates back to *Pacific Radio News* in 1917, is wrapped up in the mission statement that *CQ's* founding editor, John Potts, set forth in our first issue, in January 1945:

This, then, is the *raison d'être* for *CQ*—a magazine for the radio amateur, with a particular invitation to the newcomer. It should not, however, be inferred that we shall confine ourselves to the ABC's of ham radio. We visualize *CQ* as a magazine that will stick with the ham long after the parts of his first rig are dust-laden in the junk-box, and as a monthly refresher course for the old timer. While placing some emphasis on the elementary, we are still under obligation to carry through with articles on modern techniques and apparatus. Similarly, we shall follow up tradition (with which every ham must be familiar) with all the vital news of amateur radio today and tomorrow.

There is no need to update or otherwise tinker with this basic mission statement. It is a formula that has worked well for the past 65 years, and hopefully will continue to work well for at least the next 65. It is our DNA, and we won't be messing with it.

## Additional Milestones

This year marks a couple of personal milestones as well. For me, 2010 is my 40th year in ham radio (I was first licensed in October 1970). For our publisher, Dick Ross, K2MGA, this year marks his 50th year in amateur radio publishing, a career spent entirely with the magazine you are holding in your hands right now.

Happy New Year to all, and may 2010 be a much better year than 2009 has been for so many of us. May the economy and the sunspot cycle recover together and reach new heights as we finish the first decade of the 21st century.

73, W2VU