

The Origins of the W2ZQ Station at Mercer County Airport

By Gary Wilson, K2GW

The 1939 DVRA Articles of Incorporation filed with The State of New Jersey define such a station as a purpose for the club:

Second – The purposes for which this corporation is formed, are to serve as a means of social contact among its members, to promote goodwill and extend knowledge of the radio art, to found a civic center emergency radio station for the City of Trenton, New Jersey, and vicinity for public use during emergency, and for general use by club members.

The March 1950 DVRA NEWS describes the background:

Editorial by W2UPS

With several good possibilities for a clubhouse and ground in view, there will probably be considerable discussion on the subject. Many other members will no doubt pop the question “This has happened so many times before and there was just a lot of talk and nothing done about it. Is this going to be the same way now?”

Well, we are not going to try to answer that question, but would like to go back a ways in the club history and present a few facts. At the August 5 meeting back in 1931 just three meetings after the club was organized, a clubhouse was proposed, and two months later the DVRA had a club house of its own in a school house at Moon’s Nursery in Pennsylvania. They rented this house until the December 6 meeting which it was voted to move to the 112th Field Artillery.

The next clubhouse was located at the Trenton Yacht Club on Lambertson Street and was secured after a vote as of January 31 meeting in 1940. This location was left following the outbreak of the war due to loss of members to the Armed Forces and the FCC’s regs keeping amateur stations off the ether.

Although neither of these club houses were owned by the DVRA, they apparently functioned very nicely, and with W3AQ on the air, the minutes show that there were a large number of members on the roster, and that a majority of these members were present at the meetings.

Whether or not anything definite will be accomplished when the clubhouse matter is brought up, we cannot say, but after reading the clubs minutes in their entirety, we can truthfully state that a clubhouse is definitely an important factor in keeping a club active and working smoothly. So if the organization decides to build, buy or rent a clubhouse, we are 100% with them.

The US Civil Defense Act of 1951 then sets the stage, and the Club President, Les Allen becomes a Trenton Civil Defense official.

From DVRA News, April 1952:

TRENTON CIVIL DEFENSE NEWS

In accordance with the wishes of the Civil Defense Council, a division of amateur communications has been set up known as Trenton Civil Defense Amateur Radio Communications.

Through the efforts of the Delaware Valley Radio Association, a code class has been set up and started in order to encourage new amateurs, prepare them for a license, with the ultimate aim of investing their help in Civil Defense. This class is held every Monday evening at Civilian Defense Headquarters, 23 West Hanover St. Trenton at 7:30 PM. All applicants may call there and get additional information.

In connection with Civil Defense, a complete network of communications is in the making uniting, all the various departments which might be called upon in the event of an emergency.

The 10 meter mobile units have been organized and can be seen and heard on Friday nights at 8 PM holding a regular drill. The following are taking an active part in these drills: Dr Richard R Lamb, W2GSG; Dick Henrie, W2UPS; Larry Lloyd, W2DOX; Harry Ide, W2DZU; Chick Anderson, W2RYD; Walt Rekowski, W2GYW; Arthur Krey, W2EFH; Dick Walsh, W2IEQ; Bill, Malloch, W2ZJD, Sid Dietz, W2FDE; John Ferrara, W2FPT; Henry Krupa, W2AND.

The following men are active in amateur communications and other capacities: John Power, W2OKE; Charles Moore, W2HCR; John Calapos; Jim Taliferro, WN2MOS; and Lou Vasta.

We are expecting several more amateurs to join the ranks of the mobile and the group required at Civil Defense Headquarters.

We propose to reveal in the future issues of the NEWS, more intricate plans and workings of this particular unit.

Richard R. Lamm, W2GSG, Supervisor
Amateur Radio Communications
Trenton Civil Defense

The Club President, as a Civil Defense Official, now convinces the Mercer County Freeholders in 1952 to allow the DVRA to set up an Emergency Communications Station in the abandoned Naval Radio Shack at Mercer County Airport. Note that the abandoned shack was far away from the airport ramp operations at that time which were then located just off Scotch Road.

From the DVRA NEWS, May 1952

Report From The Director Of Communications, DVRA, Ed, Creedon, W2YFT

The DVRA kilowatt transmitter, receiver, and gasoline generator will be installed in a new home shortly, so that it will be available for emergency communications for the citizens of Mercer County in the event of a breakdown of regular communication channels due to any type of local or national disaster.

Freeholder John Curry has turned over to the DVRA the former Naval Radio Shack at Mercer Field to house this emergency communications equipment. The building is now being put into the habitable condition and the club rig will be installed at the earliest possible date.

The shack location was first used as a kitchen and rest area for Field Day in June 1952.

From the DVRA NEWS, June 1952

Field Day, 1952 excerpt by Don Field, W2UAE:

This year, our club's Field Day location will be the former naval radio shack at Mercer Airport in West Trenton, truly an ideal location. This year our facilities will be of an improved nature since the radio shack is now under the care of the club and will be used as a kitchen and rest quarters. We are planning to have three transmitters operating with one on eighty-meter CW, one on seventy-five meter phone, and one on forty CW. Possibly a fourth transmitter will be on ten meter phone if the band is open enough to make it worthwhile. We have the equipment lined up and it should be sufficient to do the job nicely. The equipment will be located in the surrounding areas in tents and a truck. Our antennas will be hung from the three ninety-foot poles which are there. Our power will be supplied by the club generator. Our kitchen, with be manned by our very capable chefs, Charlie Moore, and Doc Thornley.

The September 1952 QST (page 74) also describes it:

SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY — SCM, Lloyd L. Gainey, W2UCV — The Delaware Valley Radio Assn. recently acquired the facilities of the old Naval Radio Station at Mercer Airport with three 70-ft. masts and intends establishing a county civil defense control center which will house the new club station, W2ZQ. TNI is active on the low-frequency bands running 100 watts to a pile of 207-

The station in the building was first reported checking into the NJ State Civil Defense net on September 28, 1952.

From the DVRA NEWS, October 1952

Excerpt from: "ZI's Korner" by Ed Raser, W2ZI

Don Field, Sid Dietz, and Barney Bonczek have been working hard to put the new club station into shape. Last time we inspected the place, Dan and Sid were cleaning up the Navy type lightning switches we acquired, and the big antenna tuner was about to go into position. Barney's paint job sure dressed up the inside by golly.

The working station and its purpose were described in a November DVRA News Editorial.

From the November 1952, DVRA NEWS

Editorial by W2HAZ

Through its years of existence, the DVRA has had various places to call home. Our first real clubhouse was in the former Trenton Yacht club. Operation was on 160 and 75 phone and 80 CW with a 260 foot center fed antenna and a kilowatt transmitter. At this location in Club earned the ARRL Public Service Award for providing communications for emergency situation. The club also organizes the New Jersey

OPS Net here. The start of World War II in 1942 partly broke this. We dug in for a more important job.

Our second club location came shortly after World War II and we again set up shop. The club was then located at North Warren Street, in the center of Trenton with the same equipment which had been stored in various places during the ban. Code tables and other equipment were added there. This location, for various reasons, proved fruitless after a year, and we were out in the cold again.

This year the DVRA acquired the former radio building at Mercer Airport, which was used by the Navy during the war years. This was made possible by the sponsoring of Civil Defense communications by the club, and the efforts of the Mercer County Board of Freeholders. We obtained this location for the primary purpose of providing Mercer County area with Civil Defense and emergency communications, which we are now doing. Three 80 foot masts, arranged triangularly, support antennas, cut for 80, 75 and 40 meters. A ground plane antenna for 10 meters for communications with the area mobile forces is in the planning stage.

Much work has been accomplished by the members in the way of painting, cleaning up, repairs of the building and general repairs. Rebuilding of the equipment and servicing the generator is finished. But, that is only the beginning. There is still more to be accomplished in preventive maintenance to be done. We need operators to take care of the schedules.

Our civilian defense obligations are being kept through schedules and net operation. We sincerely feel that we are performing an important service, known to but a few, to the community, city, County, state of New Jersey, and the nation as a whole. Let's keep the ball rolling.

As was the initial setup work:

Dots Dashes And Feedback At Club Headquarters

By Don Field W2UAE

Activities at our club station since its reactivation have been on the increase and with the coming of the long evenings, we hope to have an operator on duty each night to spread the call of W2ZQ far and wide. Our radio shack is beginning to take shape and all the comforts at home are in the process of being provided for. By the time you read this article, a space oil heater will have been installed for heating and operating comfort.

Some of the operators who have been keeping the filaments hot on the hill are W2s, EUH, QVD, FDE, QOK, FTP, FPT, LZA, ZI, UPS, UAE. Bill Hannah, W2EUH has been keeping a schedule with VE9AN several nights a week. VE9AN is located in the northwoods and is a governmental experimental station 130 miles north of Quebec.

Our station has been checking into the State Civil Defense Net on Sunday mornings at 9:30 and W2QVR, Civil Defense Radio Coordinator, commented on the fine consistent signal of old ZQ. We want to make it a regular practice to check into this net (Take note Class A ops.)

A swell roundtable was enjoyed the night of October 19th with K4WSC at Fort Bragg, NC, W4RHH in Morgantown, NC, W2QOK, W2EUH, W3HFT/2 and W2ZQ. Amazing as it may seem, the report given to QOK and EUH from Fort Bragg were 10 and 15 dB respectively below W2ZQ signal and ZQ was running

375 Watts, QOK 50 Watts, and EOH was spinning the wattmeter to the tune of 6 Watts. Believe it or not, we really had the channel cleared.

W2UAE kept his schedule with W2RHU of Wildwood, New Jersey, who was a welcome visitor to our last club meeting.

Our night protection lights at the shack were recently changed to a better location on one of the poles to get better flood lighting of the area. The pole climbing and high wiring was done by our ambidextrous Dick Americh, and ground assistance was given by W2LZA, FPT and UAE. Dick Henry W2UPS hammered a hole through the wall and installed the feedthrough insulator to hook up our center fed antenna up. Also Dick accomplish some painting on the trim wood on the outside of the building when the weather permitted.

The club and all its members sincerely thanks Barbour Brothers Steel Company for the donation of some steel plate cut to fit the wiring troughs in the shack floor. W2FDE and W2QOK and Dan Weeks went to work on the surplus wire in the engine room, getting some of it untangled and stored neatly.

Ed Creedon, W2YFT has sets of keys for all the members in good standing, and they are obtained by depositing a dollar with him.

The facilities of the clubhouse are for the use of DVRA members only and to go into further detail, paid-up members. No non-members should be permitted to operate the transmitter. Visitors may always have operating privileges under the guidance of a member provided the visitor has the necessary license.

In December 1952, Don Field describes the ongoing setup work.

From the December 1952, DVRA NEWS:

Dots Dashes And Feedback

By Don Field, W2UAE

The month of November was opened at the club station with "Ole ZI" at the mike and this month the shack has made some real strides towards being a very nice clubhouse and a radio station. Many improvements have been added, including the very adequate heating plant, and a much-needed telephone. If you aren't getting up to the shack and participating in the activities, you are missing a lot of opportunities to meet the gang and an opportunity to operate one of the east's outstanding stations, W2ZQ. Our signal is one of the most outstanding on the 75 m phone band, the best of the New Jersey Civil Defense Net on Sunday mornings at 9:30 AM. We have also been suggested as becoming the NCS for this net since our signal is so outstanding.

Since our first participation in the CD net on September 28, we have been able to report in eight Sundays in all. This is an activity we must be part of, and through it would be a value to the community, county and state. W2ZI, QOK, and UAE have been handling the operating, with 2UPS and 2LZA furnishing transportation to 2USC after his car figured in an accident. We can use you, Advanced and Extra class ops, to help out on this net participation program.

WEUH supplies the Scottish accent to our operating staff, had several Florida and Georgia contacts while trying to get into Macon, Georgia for his brother-in-law, but was unsuccessful. W2FDE worked Wisconsin for another entry in the log. Our old friend, W2JAG, the Op with the sea legs, has made an entry or two in the log on his short runs here. W2QOK our old president, went up to the shack to let the telephone man in and give them a little demonstration on our transmitter. Two contacts followed; one in Trenton and the other in Morrisville. W2YGU has been up to tune in a few also. He is now supporting a new Collins V3 at the Home QTH.

W2ZQ was asked to represent the State of New Jersey in the recent regional net drill but could not take part because it was essential to have phone connections into the State Police Headquarters and the State House Civil Defense Headquarters. We now have the phone and can serve as needed.

W2QVD has a nice entry in the log, KP4PM. Keep up the good work, Barney. W2USA and 2UPS have been keeping the call of W2ZQ going in the CW circles. W2HAZ also added a very nice bit of CW work to the log when he made 71 contacts for the club station in the recent sweepstakes contest. Nice going Bill.

W2UAE got the heater installed and W2UPS finished the cementing around the stove pipe. W2UPS, to 2QV and 2YG made up the extensions for the center fed antenna feeder, and hooked up the antenna to the feedthru's. W3AFA made us a very nice sign for the outside of the building to identify the station for the public. Roy also made up a very nice bulletin board and a QSL board for the inside of the shack and spent several hours installing these boards at the shack. Many thanks Roy. (While on the subject of the QSL board, bring your own card up when you can come or mail to mail to me and I will see that it gets on the board).

W2FOS and Don Weeks now have house maid's knee from scrubbing the floor. W2HAZ got a hold of a use 9 x 12 rug from his boss which warms the feet on those cold nights. W2UPS plugged up the wire troughs on the floor which lead to the outside. Insect powder has also been placed inside to get rid of some of the wasps nests. W2HAZ donated a telephone stand and 2UAE installed it on the wall. Bill has a coat hanger under construction which should be in place by the time this is read. The shack is getting to be quite livable now.

We still have a few items which we need at the shack, and if you know of the whereabouts of these items, don't hesitate to get them out there. A small hot plate to make a pot of coffee is a must and can be put in the service as soon as it has been obtained. A fire extinguisher should also be standard equipment and we need one. A typewriter stand, some Danger High Voltage signs, a large world map, and a large United States map can also be used. Won't you help us add these items to the shack? Don't forget that every Tuesday night is "operational night" up on the hill and it's a good night to find out what is going on. See you there. "

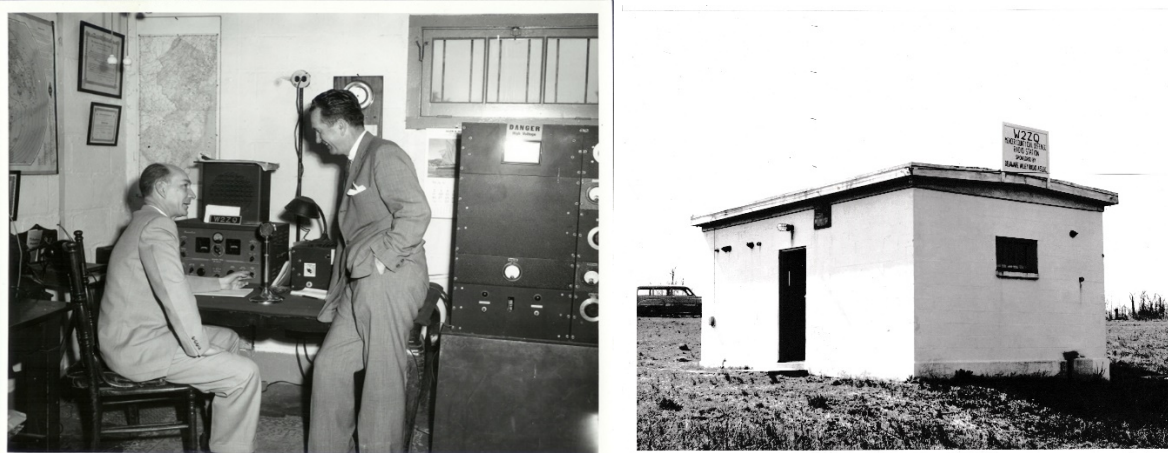
And in a "ZI's Korner" excerpt by Ed Raser:

"ZI's Korner" excerpt:

Activity seems to be perking up at the new club station, W2ZQ, at Mercer Airport. The bugs have been taken out of the 1 KW transmitter, new center fed antenna erected for 75 meter operation, and everything now looks shipshape at the operating position, thanks to W2UAE, W2UPS, W2OOK, W2EOH, and a few other kind souls. The net phone schedules have been taken care of by a few hearty folks who

have been able to arise on time for the 9 AM skeds, while Bill Petty W2HAZ has been handling the evening CW skeds when able. Nice work lads.

And in April 1953, formal photographs of the shack were taken and it was demonstrated by the Club President to the Civil Defense director.



Since then, the communications needs of Mercer County Civil Defense (now OEM) have evolved following its relocation from Scotch Road (where the club held its meetings until 1990) to the Dempster Center in Lawrenceville, but the club and W2ZQ shack still supports the county and OEM by:

1. Hosting WinLink and voice repeaters used by OEM and ARES operations.
2. Being available as an alternate OEM Radio facility operational on all bands from 160 to 1.2 GHz.
3. Providing continual training of citizens in radio technology so that they might be available as emergency communicators for Mercer County and the nation in an emergency.
4. Using Public Service events such as the New Jersey State Triathlon to train operators in net procedures that might be needed in an emergency.