

A Special Day

By Steve Johnston, WD8DAS

Today is a special day, and not just because it is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday. I'm working on the restoration of my old WRL Galaxy 300 SSB transceiver - my first SSB rig I bought as a new General lo those many years ago. I had to pull use all my savings, plus cash gifts from my parents and grandmother to scrape enough money to buy it mail-order from Associated Radio in Kansas City in late 1977. I think it cost \$229.

This is also the rig that put me in the hospital on Martin Luther King Day in 1978. back then I was 14 years old, fooling around one evening in my room, trying to determine why there was a tube shield on the Galaxy's 6BZ6 RF amp tube. It is located right behind the finals in the PA compartment.

At one point I got very careless. With the transceiver turned on (bad), in fact transmitting a full-power carrier (very bad), I lifted the lid and reached back in with my right hand to remove the 6BZ6's shield. Trouble is, to get to it I reached over the two 6HF5 finals and their plate caps with about 900 volts DC, plus a couple hundred watts of RF. My wrist touched the plate caps at the same time my fingers reached the tube shield, and the shocking and the burning commenced. My hand drew up in a fist, making it seemingly impossible to pull it back out. Even with the pain of the electric shock and RF burns I found I couldn't get my hand out! Fortunately I was only using one hand for this madness, and I ultimately pushed myself away with my other hand on the wooden desk. This also meant that the current had only flowed through my hand and arm, not across my chest (very good).

I had some pretty serious and painful burns on my hand and forearm. Clutching my wounded limb, I sat on my bed considering my options. I had a VERY BIG CONCERN that if I told my parents what had happened they'd stop my ham hobby dead in its tracks. I was also embarrassed to have injured myself in such a dumb way. But I was also hurting pretty bad, and worried about the side-effects of a strong shock, so I decided to be up-front about it. As I think about it thirty years later, I'm not sure now how I would have hidden the injuries anyway.

My mom and dad handled it very well, and took me to the hospital emergency room. The doctor did not really understand my description of the incident and was checking my feet for burns, worried about my heart, etc - and he demanded that I be kept overnight. I was admitted and put into a bed in a large room with eight patients.

All night long, every few minutes one or another of these poor souls needed something and would start calling out, ringing bells, moaning, yelling, or crying. The nurse would finally enter, switching on the gigantic bank of fluorescent lights that lit the whole room like the surface of the sun. Click... zzzzzz.. , snap, snap, snap as the lights fired individually and finally hummmmm they were on and I was blinded by the light. No sleep for me, and I spent part of the next day in the hospital wasting an official Ohio school holiday - Martin Luther King Day.

My parents never said a word in judgment of my foolishness or against ham radio

because of this accident. And I was able to "milk" my injury to get me out of gym class for several months (very good).

Thirty years later, after a couple small repairs and alignment, the Galaxy 300 seemed to be working fine. One of the sideband generator crystals had drifted too far out to be adjusted by the trimmer, so I added a series 12pF cap and that provided the ability to get it on frequency. I also found it challenging to calibrate the VFO over the whole range on the dial. Spin the dial, adjust the trimmer. Spin the dial, adjust the inductor, Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Then I read the manual and found it only promised calibration would hold over a portion of the dial. Not much else wrong, and now it seems to be meeting specs all around.

The first time I spun the dial with an antenna connected what do I hear? - the distinctive laugh of a friend of mine as heard from a couple kcs away. I tuned him in and found Pat, WB9GKZ, was spiling with an old friend on or about 3820 kHz. At least that's what the dial said, and I'd just calibrated it. I threw in a couple wise cracks and was rewarded with a good report. And they confirmed that we were indeed on 3820.

"Before" and "After" photos of the Galaxy 300 are shown at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/34505242@N02/>

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