

Dick Stebbins Interview – 5-19-2016

VRCM: Dick, tell me a little about your background, the work you did, how you got into amateur radio and how got interested in the radio museum.

DS: Well, my interest in radio started with an oscillator my father had in his junk. And I figured out that I could transmit with this oscillator by putting an antenna on it.

VRCM: Was he in the radio business?

DS: No, he was an electrical engineer. His uncle was an early ham radio operator, probably in the early 20s, so he had some influence there. It sparked my interest. I couldn't understand why the radio in the car worked, because you had no connection.... (laughs). It also amazed me, as a youngster. So all these things sparked my interest in broadcasting.

VRCM: At the time you found the oscillator, were you a young kid?

DS: Yes, I was probably around 10 years old. And I put up a 100 foot longwire from the back yard to the front of the house. Later I got an amplifier for audio and I had a neighborhood broadcast station!

VRCM: Were the neighbors able to pick you up?

DS: Yes. Probably around a quarter mile away at most.

As far as my education, I went to trade school in Springfield for an electronics course during my high school years. Later I joined the service; the army, and requested the signal school at Ft. Monmouth. So they sent me there for a year, learning field radio repair. And from there I was sent to Germany to do field radio repair.

VRCM: What year were you at Monmouth?

DS: That would be 1957-58. So late 58 I was sent to Germany to pursue my career in field radio repair, but they didn't need that profession over there; that MOS they called it. And since I had a background, they said "how would you like to go to guided missile school – the warhead part – because that's electronic?" Another year of schooling, I thought it was great. Nothing wrong with that!

VRCM: Where did you go for that?

DS: In Germany; Seiglesbach, Germany, a little post in the boondocks. So that was my MOS from there on. I left Germany from late 1960 and was discharged at that point in Brooklyn. So now, I'm looking for a job and I fell right into a job at Hamilton-Standard, the electronics division. It was in Broadbrook at that point. Since I had a service background in electronics, they put me in the model shop, building models. That was a good education; I enjoyed that, building experimental circuits. The engineers would design a circuit and we would build it. I was there about six years and my uncle lived down in Deep River and he had a friend in a company called Chester Electronics. They were building electronic studio equipment for language and learning labs. They were also building TV studios for colleges, so with my background again, they put me in the... they had a gentleman that was building

circuits... developing circuits, so I was his assistant, since I had a background un building models.

From there I started building a TV studio. I was the TV studio department (laughs). So I got interested in television at that time. I was there about six years. GTE Sylvania took over this electronics company and unfortunately they shut us down. So I was looking for job again and I was referred to Burns Security in South Windsor. They did security cameras mostly for big companies. One that comes to mind that was an interesting job. I got involved in installing and servicing the hydroelectric facility at Northfield Mountain. We put cameras at the river where the intake was. We put cameras up at the reservoir. We put cameras underground at the generating area.

After Burns... I wasn't there too long; probably three years. I was out of a job in 1976 and did part time work: a clerk in a liquor store... whatever to supplement my unemployment (laughs). I saw an ad in the paper for a company called NAVCO: North American Video. They were based in Massachusetts and they were opening an office in South Windsor CT and they were looking for technicians – or field engineers. So I applied for that and with my background they said perfect. And that was the company I retired from. I worked there about 25 years; retired in 2004.

VRCM: Somewhere along the line you got interested in amateur radio?

DS: (Laughs) Yes. I was always interested in amateur radio. I was a listener. When I got out of the service I got into CB and used CB up until the time I retired. And I said now that I've got free time, I'm going for my license. Plus the fact they dropped the code requirement. I tried doing code and just could not get the rhythm of it. So I got my technician license in Bloomfield at one of their sessions there. That was 2005 I think. Obviously I wanted to advance to the next stage, which was General. So I studied up all the rules and theory and went to ARRL headquarters to take my examination. And while I was there I passed the General test and the examiner said why don't you go for your Extra while you're here? So I said sure, OK. Much to my amazement I passed the Extra the same night! That's pretty much my amateur career.

VRCM: How did you get involved with the radio museum?

DS: I've been interested in the museum since they were at the hardware store in East Hartford. I went to the grand opening and it sparked my interest. And over the next several years I visited them in Windsor. Gordon and I set up this station (W1VCM). I can't remember the year it was... maybe 2009. I've been here ever since.

Being interested in the television aspect of the museum, I started setting up a television studio here at one point. It was sto be "hands on" and I rigged up one of the big cameras with a small camera hidden under it (laughs). And I set up the console with the monitors in it. When I started going to Florida, Dan Thomas, who is a radio TV engineer, came up with another plan for the TV equipment, as I spend my winters in Florida and don't get too involved. Now I spend most of my time in the ham shack, cleaning it up and... I also work with Gene Gregory, installing lights, ladder work and other maintenance.

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