

MT Visits with Larry Van Horn, Assistant Editor and columnist

**Larry, how did you first get interested in radio?
What was the spark?**

Actually it started when my parents gave me my first radio, an "All American" five tube AM clock radio for Christmas in 1964. I started tuning around one evening after sunset and found that I could hear distant radio stations in the AM broadcast band. I was not only fascinated, but hooked.

A teenager in my neighborhood, who was also a ham, took me under his wing and I spent many a long night in his shack listening to stations from around the world. Thanks to him I also discovered *Popular Electronics* and *Electronics Illustrated*, and writers such as Tom Kneitel (yes, I remember back that far, Tom) and that set the hook in for good. Christmas 1965 found a new Hallicrafters S-120 shortwave under the tree and the rest as they say, is history.

When did you start writing about radio for a publication?

My first radio writing gig was with the RCMA (Radio Communications Monitoring Association) scanner newsletter around 1980. I had been a longtime member of the group dating back to well before it became a national radio club. There was an editorial opening for a satellite columnist, and since I had been active in that part of the hobby for a number of years I applied for the position and was accepted.

How and when did you get started writing for MT, and how many different columns have you written for the magazine?

Actually, it was a follow-on to my RCMA column. About a year into Bob publishing *MT*, we were chatting on the phone one day, and I asked him if he would be interested in a satellite column like the one I was writing for the RCMA. Boy, was I glad he took that bait and in the September-October 1983 issue of the then bi-monthly *MT*, my first byline appeared. I spent the first few years

writing the *Signals from Space* column, but in 1988, then-editor Larry Miller asked me if I could switch to the utility HF column. Since I also had a broad interest in that segment of the radio hobby, I accepted and renamed it *Utility World* and wrote 120 consecutive monthly (10 years) UW columns for *MT*. I have also tackled the *Fed Files* column (twice), and, of course, now pen the *Milcom*, *MT Help Desk*, and *First Look* columns, among other things.

SIGNALS FROM SPACE



What is your favorite story you have written for MT over these nearly 25 years?

I have written many, many feature articles for *MT*, but my sentimental favorite has to be the feature story I wrote on the *Challenger* shuttle disaster. A close second would be the story *Spies, Lies and Numbers*, where I exposed for the first time the true mission of the spy numbers station at Vint Hill farms in Virginia.

You've had such a broad interest in all kinds of communications – satellite, utilities, scanning, ham radio, etc – what would you pick as your favorite listening target?

Boy, this is real hard to pin down. I consider myself a full spectrum monitor. My family says, if it transmits, I'll DX it. But, my first two loves (after my wife and family, of course) are chasing DX and contesting voice and digital modes in the ham bands, and prowling the HF/VHF/UHF bands for military and government communications.

Many people are feeling overwhelmed by new technology and discouraged about the disappearance of so many familiar modes and broadcasts. What is your advice to people who think the best days of the hobby are over?

I have been blessed these many years to learn how to be a radio hobbyist from some of the best in the business. Bob Grove, Tom Kneitel, Larry Miller, and many more have all had a profound influence. And the one thing they all have taught me over the years, is not to be content with listening from a book or someone else's scanner list, but to go out and work up my own list based on what I have actually received. In other words – keep a logbook. For me and many of the old timers it is the hunt that is the most satisfying part of the radio hobby.



"Professor" Larry at an early MT convention.

Finding that new station, callsign, or frequency before anyone else does, identifying it, and then being able to pass that along to the rest of the hobby gives me a lot of satisfaction.

Unfortunately, too many hobbyists today are content with using information from what's already known. I see way too much of the "I need the frequency or callsign for..." requests on internet newsgroups. There *are* a lot of new and exciting things to hear on the bands – that is what makes radio listening exciting. With a little investment of time and cash, others could be enjoying the thrill of that hunt as much as I do.

While some stations and services have disappeared from HF and other bands, many others have come along to take their place. I totally dismiss anyone who says there isn't much to hear these days. They are probably using someone's old radio list instead of finding out what is currently happening in the radio spectrum by hearing it for themselves. There are a lot of signals to hear and we are blessed to have some great radio gear and computer technology to let us hear it. I think we are just now coming into the golden age of radio monitoring and I can't wait for the next sunspot peak to really dig in there and enjoy it.

You have mostly answered this, but what do you find most exciting about the future of radio?

I have marveled at all the new radio equipment technology we have at our disposal today. And I don't see that trend changing. We as radio hobbyists are doing a pretty good job of staying up with the communications industry as they change their technology, thanks to industry leaders such as Uniden, Icom, WiNRADiO and AOR. With the future promise of Software Defined Radios and the capability these radios bring to the monitoring plate, I would say we will still have a lot to monitor over the next 25 years. I look forward to finding many more yet to be discovered stations and frequencies in the years to come.



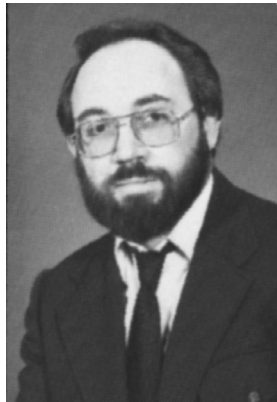
The editor of the short-lived *Satellite Times* in his office.

The Monitoring Times Rogues Gallery

Well, maybe they weren't rogues, but here are a few of the colorful characters who have populated MT's staff pages over the years... We just happened to find these snaps in our files.



Friend, teacher and Elmer to all who asked, they didn't come any better than Doug DeMaw (DeMaw's Workbench).



Pirate Radio columnist Dr. John Santosuosso may have been a swashbucklin' wannabe under that erudite exterior.



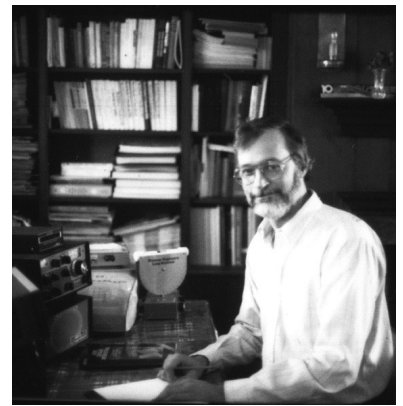
Don Schimmel sparked the imagination of SWLs with Utility Intrigue.



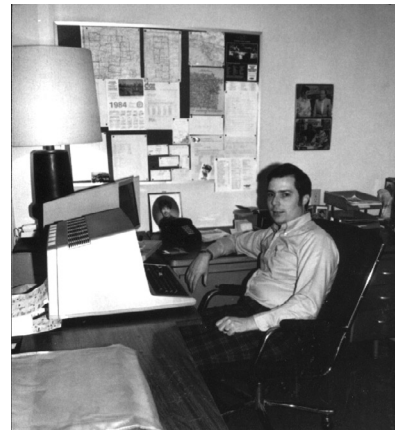
Ike Kerschner headed the On the Ham Bands column for many years - but there's no radio in sight here...



James Hay took DXers On the High Seas.



Larry Magne, editor of Passport to World Band Radio, reviewed SW receivers for this magazine for many years. He hails from Texas, so need we say more?



A familiar name to all, Norm Schrein wrote several scanning columns for MT before he started his own publication.

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Sangean's most recent ATS505P is a dual-conversion portable with continuous coverage from 150 kHz-30 MHz as well as 88-108 MHz FM (stereo with ear buds, included), with AM and USB/LSB reception, and even includes an AC power supply and reel antenna.

45 scannable memories allow automatic sampling of saved frequencies, while auto preset determines which signals are the strongest for reception. Frequencies may be entered directly with the keypad, or continuously adjusted with the tuning dial. Illuminated display shows frequency, 12/24 hour time, adjustable sleep/timer offers gradually-increasing alarm level; entire panel may be locked out to prevent maladjustments.

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