



## **QSO Today - Episode 365 - Tony DePrato, WA4JQS**

**Transcript Funded by John Lockhart W0DC**

Like many of us, it was an early love of radio and a junior high school mentor that got Tony DePrato, WA4JQS, on the air in the early 1960s. An 80-meter DX contact from his native Kentucky to Australia, ignited a passion for DX that resulted in Tony leading two DX expeditions to the most sought after DX entities in the world. WA4JQS tells his ham radio story in this QSO Today.

WA4JQS, this is Eric, 4Z1UG. Are you there, Tony?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, I am. How are you doing today?

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'm great, Tony. Thanks for joining me on the QSO Today Podcast. Can we start at the beginning of your ham radio story, when and how did it start for you?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, I was about 12 years old, and I got a stomach bug, and I was at home for about five or six days, I missed a little... Right out of a week at school. So I started reading and staying up late at night. And I had an old Admiral AM Radio. I started turning around at night and I would hear stations, the border blasters out of Mexico, XERB and Wolfman Jack and those people, and KOMA and Oklahoma City. And it just fascinated me that I could hear stations that far away. I went back to school and I was taking industrial arts, and the teacher there in the class, I didn't know was a ham, till one day he brought a Knight kit R100 and a Globe Scout into the classroom, set it up, and hooked an outside antenna up and started turning around on the receiver. And I was just amazed. I was hearing people all over the world, and I just thought that was so fantastic that he could sit there with a microphone in front of him, and talk to someone 10,000 miles away with another microphone sitting at their home. And that was how I got interested. I just fell in love with it, it was love at first sight. And he let us play with the radio during our lunch hour.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Was there a radio club or a radio station? I'm assuming you had antennas on the industrial arts building. Was there an active group there at the school?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, he started the group. We got together, those of us that were interested, and we went up and put antennas up on the roof of the three-story building. Of course, he had to get the principal's permission. And we formed the first radio club at Somerset High School, and it was WA4FVC, Frank, Victor, Charlie. And there was eight of us that were members, and unfortunately, I'm the only one that's still living.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Really?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'm sorry to hear that on the one hand. On the other hand, it's nice to hear that you're the one. Okay, well that's very interesting. Now, I was looking at your QRZ page and you mentioned that

both your parents were also hams. Did this come later?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, it did. One of the guys that was interested, actually he lived two houses down from me, his mother started looking for someone to teach us the theory. And there was a couple of dispatchers at the local railroad station, which is about a mile and a half from my house, and she got Marian B. Johnson, K4RAG, was his call. The industrial arts teacher was K4UNE, Art Calhoun. But he'd come down three days a week, Monday, Wednesday and Fridays after school, and we would have two and a half hours of theory. He had us buy the old Ameco theory book, and then we'd have 30 minutes of code practice. And it took us probably about three months to go through the Ameco book, and get our speed up to 13 words a minute.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So this was a general class, Ameco book?

Tony WA4JQS:

Right. At that time, I don't even remember if there was a novice book, but this book was about an inch and a half, two inches thick. And we went to Louisville and took the test, me and my buddy down the street, and we both got our general. We got our calls about two months later, mine was JQS, and he was WA4JQR.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you've had your call signed since?

Tony WA4JQS:

My call had come in the mail September the 9th, 1962.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Wow.

Tony WA4JQS:

I'll never forget. His mother was the post mistress and the post office is across the street. I got mine three days before he did in the mail.

Eric 4Z1UG:

How old were you?

Tony WA4JQS:

I was 15 years old.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'm sure that was so exciting.

Tony WA4JQS:

Oh, it was one of the most exciting days in my life.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now, were you ready for it, did you have a station at home ready to go, waiting for that license to come in?

Tony WA4JQS:

When my license had come in, I had been at work, cutting yards and selling newspapers, and a little bit of everything trying to save money. Dad took me up to a local radio and TV shop, which was run by ham, W4KRY, and he had been a ham since Kentucky was in the 9th all district. He had a Globe Champ 350 Alpha, and an SX-101A receiver that were used. And I was about \$150 short. Dad ended up going the extra mile for me and buying me those two. I had 250 watts of AEM and a 108-foot trap dipole between the house and an oak tree in the backyard.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And that sounds pretty amazing. So where did you start working, which bands were your favorites?

Tony WA4JQS:

I started on 80 meters, and I was amazed. I remember sitting one night calling CQ, and a guy had come back from Alabama and he said, "I like your call, WA4JQS." He says, "The local radio station here is WJQS." I started on the 80 meters. And my mom and dad would come in and they'd listen to me. It wasn't long, probably a year later, my dad had started studying and went and took his test.

He got his license, and he was issued WA4LLK. Well, he started getting on at night, and we would always get on the Kentucky frequency and talk to boys in Kentucky in the evenings, which was 3960. Mom would come in, so she started studying, and she went and about six, eight months later got her ticket, and she was WA4RTJ.

Eric 4Z1UG:

She was RTG or RTJ?

Tony WA4JQS:

J. RTJ.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Also a general class, they used the same Ameco theory Course?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, both of them had general tickets.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now were you an only child?

Tony WA4JQS:

I'm the only child.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So all three of you had licenses?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, all three of us were hams.

Eric 4Z1UG:

How did you divide up the operating time?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, my operating time had become almost zero. When I get out of school, I would rush home to get on the radio, because I knew when they got off work at five o'clock, by 6:30 when the net started, I would not be able to operate until 9:00, 10 o'clock at night. And then they decided... My dad had a real gift for gab, so he started a late night net on the weekends, called the Bluegrass Hoot Owl Net. He had stations from all over the United States and Europe checking in on 3960, for about four years, it was an extremely popular net for people that just like to get on RAGJ. And I mean, there was some weird people on back then.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I don't think things have changed so much.

Tony WA4JQS:

No. And I remember one guy, Art out in Topeka, Kansas, his pastime for fun other than ham radio, he was an artist, so we would draw what he thought we all looked like and send us pictures, and found out he run the LSD program at that area. We had screenwriters from California that would check in. One of them wrote Gunsmoke, the TV series about Matt Dillon. And I never really had my dad's gift for gab, but he could sit and rattle on for hours at a time

and never taper.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So this was AM, an AM net, did you operate also, were you an AM operator or did you also like CW?

Tony WA4JQS:

I operated very little CW at the time. I never really cared for it, I stayed on AM. It always amazed me, somebody from California or Alaska, it just amazed me. But finally I decided I was going to get up and get on, try the other bands. Of course, with a 80-meter trap dipole, it's not a lot of bands you can get on AEM at the time, because the SWR was pretty high and I didn't have a tuner. But I remember down on the bottom end of 81 night calling CQ, and somehow I'd found out you listened outside the band.

There was a lot of Canadians at the bottom of 80 meters, so I'd call CQ at 3805 or 3810, listening down at 37. I never will forget, VE3AXC... I'm sorry, VK3AXC called me one night. I had no idea where VK was. I thought it was a Canadian call. So I'm searching on my wall map and I finally found it was Australia, and it just blew my mind, and the DX bug bit me then and that was it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I think we should talk about the DX bug, but before we do that, here you are a teenager interested in amateur radio. You're competing for the rig with your parents. Did amateur radio play a part in the choices that you made for your education and career?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, it did. I ended up taking technical electronics in high school, and when I went into the Navy, I went into electronics in the Navy also. And my ham radio license made a big difference, and my schooling, when I took the Navy battery test I scored really high, and my number one choice of electronics, I got it. I was an aviation electronics technician, and I ended up specializing in airborne radar.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And at this time then, this was, I would imagine what, the late '60s?

Tony WA4JQS:

Early '60s.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Early '60s. Okay. That was pre-Vietnam.

Tony WA4JQS:

Right. I went into the Navy, I went in a special class. I went into the Navy Reserve at age 17. I was just finishing my junior year in high school. So I was deferred, going to bootcamp until I graduated from high school. But every month I would fly to a naval air station at Andrews Air Force base in Washington D.C., and train. Then when I got out of high school, they sent me to NAS Grosse Ile, Michigan, in the middle of the Detroit River, and I took the first accelerated bootcamp at that time. And I was in bootcamp for three months. When I had come out of bootcamp, I come out as an airman or an E3.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Just curious, when you were at Andrews, did you ever see what was Air Force One in those days?

Tony WA4JQS:

I saw Air Force One a number of times across the field. The Air Force base was on the one side of the runway and the Naval Air Facility was on the other side. Now they call it Joint Base Andrews, but back then it was NAF, Naval Air Facility Andrews.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That would've been President Kennedy?

Tony WA4JQS:  
Yes.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
I think that Air Force One was what, a 707?

Tony WA4JQS:  
I believe it was 707.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
That airplane is in Dayton at the Air Force Museum.

Tony WA4JQS:  
That's what I understand. I've never seen it, but I understand that's where it's at.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
Yeah, I've walked through it. It's actually for anybody that goes to Dayton, when the convention comes back, they should also make sure they visit the Air Force Museum there because all of the older Air Force Ones are there. Okay, so here you are in the Air Force as a aviation electronics technician working on airborne radars. What happened after that?

Tony WA4JQS:  
Actually I was in the Navy.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
Sorry, the Navy. Yes. We forget that the Navy has airplanes.

Tony WA4JQS:  
Right. A lot of people forget. After I graduated from bootcamp, the Navy sent me to NATTC Memphis, which is Naval Air Train Center, in Memphis, Tennessee. And I went through B School, which is electronic school, and after I got through B School, I stayed there and went into radar.

The radar was called an APS-82, and the aircraft was a Grumman E-1B, which was actually the first AWAC. When I got out of B school, I stayed there another six weeks and took various other schools. And when I graduated I come home, I was home for about two weeks and then I got sent back up to D.C.

This time they put me at the old Bolling Field at Anacostia, and waited for orders. For some reason, I was there for three months waiting for orders, and when the orders come in, there was two of us that were electronic technicians in the radar. And by flip of the coin, the boy that was with me got sent to Guam, and I got sent to a Airborne Early Warning Squadron 121 Detachment NINE, at NAS, Norfolk, which is a USS Essex aircraft carrier. So I spent a lot of time on aircraft carriers working on the radar equipment in the AWAC.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
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And how was that in those days, was an aircraft carrier an interesting place to be?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, it was. At that time I was on the oldest aircraft carrier in the Navy, and she had been, actually she was a World War II aircraft carrier. Down in the hangar deck, there was a mural that had been painted along the wall that showed all the ships that had been sank during World War II, and all the metal ribbons she had received, and she was called the oldest and boldest. And it was a job, you just had to look at like it was a job. And actually I pretty well, I loved it. I didn't have a problem, because I was in the shop working on the radar equipment, and I would be able to go on and signed up for flight crew. So when I didn't have anything to a repair in the shop, I flew as a radar operator on the AWAC.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And were you operating ham radio from the aircraft carrier in those days?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, I did. When I was at... It's an interesting story. When I was at home port, when we weren't at sea, I went over and joined W4OPT, a amateur radio station, NAS Norfolk, and I met another hammer, he was a full commander, William Patti, W1CHQ. And we'd become friends, and I ended up becoming the station manager of NAS Norfolk. And one night he told me, he said, "Tony, I'm going over, there's a meeting here across town, why don't you go with me?" I said, "All right."

I can't remember Ray's last name or his call, but we went over to his house, and Chaplain Robinson was there, and at that night the Maritime Mobile net was founded. They decided they were going to start a net, and call it the Maritime Mobile net for running phone patches and traffic for military vessels at sea. Right after that I went back to sea, and I had a Collins S-Line set up in the [inaudible], in the front of the Essex, and I'd operate WA4JQS Maritime Mobile off the USS Essex, when I was at sea, run a lot of phone patches from the Essex during that time.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now was the Maritime Mobile net part of MARS? I mean were you part of any MARS operations?

Tony WA4JQS:

No, it was never part of MARS, it was always just an independent net, like any other net. But it was started out specifically for running Maritime Mobile traffic for U.S. servicemen at sea. And then of course they would pick up the merchant vessels or anybody after they run the military.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now was the Collins S-Line standard equipment on U.S. Navy vessels?

Tony WA4JQS:

Collins was standard equipment, and most of your Naval Air Stations had ham radio clubs, they

were either fully stocked with Collins or Hallicrafters. When I was W4ODRNAS, Memphis, as a station manager there, I had two rooms of Collins S-Line and two rooms of Hallicrafter SR-2000s, beautiful radios.

Eric 4Z1UG:

They're still beautiful radios. Do you own any Collins right now?

Tony WA4JQS:

I don't own any Collins other than a receiver that my dad bought, and a 7582 he bought new. But I do have a Hallicrafter sitting in front of me here, an SR-400 Cyclone that have been restored by W4OP.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Oh, that's pretty amazing. Okay, so what happened after the Navy, where did you end up settling out?

Tony WA4JQS:

After I got out of the Navy, I come back home, and I ended up staying home. I went to work for the state, toll facilities, providing security. And I started out doing electronics, wiring up toll facilities. We had toll roads in Kentucky at that time, we were building them all over, and we were integrating automatic code systems, stepping chain relay computers, which was a mechanical computer, is all it was. And it was made up of multiple hundreds of relays, and IBM was just come out with what they called a System 7. So I was with the group that put together the first completely computerized toll system in the world.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You're talking about toll roads and toll bridges, things like that, right?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes. Yes, you paid to travel the roads. There was nine toll roads in Kentucky at one time, and when we finished the Cumberland Parkway, we went from Russell Springs or, well it ended here in Somerset and it went to Bowling Green. It had the world's first completely computerized toll system, or well, it was actually a computerized traffic control system. We could tell you if you was entering the road, exiting the road, how many axles your vehicle had.

If you backed up through a toll plaza. When you threw your money in, we could tell you the denomination, how many pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters you threw in. And they came from Germany, and a couple of other countries during that time to look at our installation, because they were going to incorporate them overseas. If it happened, I don't know, but I remember giving interviews to some of the people there that were interested in putting the toll roads in Europe.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'm just curious, how did they know the number of axles in a vehicle, were they using wire loops in the ground, under the road?

Tony WA4JQS:

We had what we called a treadle, and it was a big rubber mat that was set in concrete, and when you drove over it, there was three plates on it. And when you drove over the plate, it made a contact to pull the relay in the building, and if A relay pulled, then B relay pulled, you were driving forward. If B pulled, then A, it would snap relay C, which said you back up. And that's basically how we done it.

And then we would send a pulse to the computer, it said relay B pulled, so they went forward, relay C pulled, so they backed up. At the time it was pretty complicated, but now looking back, it's pretty simple. But we spent nights away from home, as six or seven of us worked on it, and we'd try to figure out how to make this particular thing work that we need to get going tomorrow.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Were you pretty good with a relay burnishing tool?

Tony WA4JQS:

I learned to be very good with the burnishing tool, and these relays, they had fine wire that went in it, and the contacts were actually wires. You would have to... I carried boxes of a thousand little wires about an inch and a half long, and I would have to pull the burnt ones and bad ones out and put them back in the back of the relay. It was tedious.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think for the listeners, what we're talking about is that any time those relays made a contact, sometimes if there was any current on that contact, that contact would spark, right?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And it would put a little bit of charcoal or something on the contact. And so a burnishing tool was used to kind of like an emery board. It was used to kind of clean that contact so that it made a nice low resistance contact. I somehow remember having a burnishing tool for some reason and cleaning relays, but I'm not as old as you are, so I didn't clean as many relays, but at the time relays were quite a thing, for just about everything.

Tony WA4JQS:

As a matter of fact, I've got a burnishing tool sitting right here, I keep in the ham shack to clean the contacts on my Vibroplex bugs. And I've had that since that was... As a matter of fact, it's one of the ones I used when I worked for the State of Kentucky.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So let's go there. How was it that you were using a Vibroplex bug for the state of Kentucky, did you change jobs and move into communications?

Tony WA4JQS:

No, actually when I left electronics, I'll be honest with you, after the 10 years I was in the Navy, in about six years I started getting burnout because I was gone from home all the time, traveling and building these toll roads and wiring them up. And we had 80,000 connections per plaza, and there was three plazas per toll road, and I just got burned out. So I transferred over to the security division, and basically I just rode up and down the toll road for about a year, and if somebody had a problem, mine, I took care of it. If it had a wreck, I took care of that.

And we'd lay in the fields with our binoculars, and watch the toll plazas. And we could tell we had a unit that we put up on that lit up different colors. There was a box on top of each lane of the through plaza, and we knew what button and for how many axles that each toll attendant would push because it would light up a sequence of lights in the box above the toll plaza. We would actually catch people listing a tractor trailer as a car, and they would pocket \$3 for every time they'd done that. And back in the '70s, \$3 was worth a little more than it is today.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That's right. So you caught toll plaza embezzlers.

Tony WA4JQS:

Right.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you mentioned that the DX bug bit you. How did the DX bug bite you, and then what happened?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, I remember I was on 80 meters, and I would go down trying to work Canada, and I'd go down the low end of 80 meters, and I would call CQ and listen below 3800, and a VK3 called me early one weekend morning. It's probably a little after midnight on the weekend. And of course



I was still in school, so I didn't get to stay up late, except on the weekend. But I just could not believe I was able to talk to someone on an island out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. So I thought, "Well, if I can do it, I'm going up on 20 meters, I'm going to try some of the other bands."

And I had say a trapped dipole, so I didn't have a lot of signal, but I guess the thing that really blew my mind was I was up on 20 meters calling CQ about 14210. And I heard this guy call me, I'd called for probably five minutes and no replies, and it was, I heard 8KF, and then I heard V, and I'm thinking, "It must VE." And I heard, "Negative, negative." And it ended up being a VP8 in the Falkland Islands. And this absolutely, it started my whole DX career right there, working at Falkland Islands.

And here I am a 16, 17-year-old kid, I'm looking at the map trying to find where are the Falkland Islands. And I looked down off the coast of Antarctica, and I see Falkland Islands, South Georgia, South Sandwich. And I remember to this day sitting there and thinking, "South Sandwich Islands, what is there? Who's there? What do they do? What kind of weather? I want to go there." And I thought, "I'm going there someday." And I was 17 years old.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you really got bit by the bug. And so what happened after that, after you were working for the State of Kentucky, did you become more active in DX at that point?

Tony WA4JQS:

I become more active DX, and at that time I ended up buying a little HR and HX20, that got me on sideband as a kid, and I started working a little bit more DX. I had a whole 20 watts of sideband, so I was able to work more. But during my time in the Navy, I traveled around a lot, and I was a net control for the Maritime Mobile net from my Naval Air Station, Norfolk. And I got back into CW because I would tune around the bottom in the CW20 meter band, and I'd hear all these Russians. So I got back into CW and slowly got my speed up and working Russians on 20 meters.

So about that time I started playing with the equipment in one of the other rooms. I thought I'd go over next door at the other end of the barracks building where we had the radio station, it was the logistics that set all of the schedules and the transportation for all of the troops. They had the lines and lines of teletype units, and I'm talking to the guys in there, and they're radio operators, and they're sitting there, "Man, you're printing out all this, how do you do it?" And I got into that too. So I ended up getting started on RTTY, when that kind of took over a phase of my life there too.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you had actually worked DX on RTTY?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Were you using one of these what, Model 19s?

Tony WA4JQS:

19 was what it was with the reperf unit. And to this day I still have my CQ tape that I used back in the mid '60s, I kept it, it's in a little plastic box that I used to put then and run CQDX-WA4JQS.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you run RTTY now? Now being a digital mode that you could actually run using a computer, but in those days you were using a Model 19 teletype. Do you still run RTTY?

Tony WA4JQS:

Yes, I do. I love [inaudible]. Do some of the digital modes, they're not my favorite modes, but it's still ham radio. But if there's a RTTY contest on, I will try to operate if I can fit it in my

schedule. As a matter of fact, I just operated the Barts Contest last month, and a couple of others.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well I've never really spoken to anybody that's really big into RTTY. What do you like about RTTY, compared to say some of the other digital modes?

Tony WA4JQS:

I like the challenge that it's harder to make DX contact on RTTY. Pretty much this day and time on the digital modes, FT8 and those, you can work a station that you can't even hear. It's more or less the challenge, and I guess I'm old school, I just like the sound and I always like the smell of the hot oil and the [inaudible] all over the floor.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, it seems to me that I guess you'd have to use a hot plate to burn the oil now if you're using a computer, right? So you have that smell without actually running the teletype. I'm curious though, is the reason that it may be more difficult to make contact because there are less RTTY operators these days, or is there still a big contingent of RTTY operation?

Tony WA4JQS:

Sadly, there's not as much activity on RTTY as there was probably eight years ago. I remember back in the '80s and '90s, we had message boards and auto start RTTY stations that run on high speed, 78 words a minute. Instead of 45 mod, they'd put the message boards up on the high speed keyboard, keyboard, and just regular QSOs was at 45 bond. And I always loved it, hearing a D expedition that would get on ready, because that was a challenge to work a D expedition on RTTY. It wasn't hardly anything to work them sideband or CW, but it was a challenge and you had to have some skills, and work at it to work on teletype.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I would think that teletype, at least nowadays it's part of a software package, but in earlier times, taking a teletype on a D expedition might be kind of a challenge. Have you been on D expeditions yourselves?

Tony WA4JQS:

I have been on two D expeditions, one in 1992 and one in 1994.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And where did you go?

Tony WA4JQS:

1992, I went to the Falklands, South Sandwich and South Georgia. 1994, I went to the Falklands, Peter I, and back to the Falklands.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Let me take a quick break to tell you about my favorite amateur radio audio podcast, and that's the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast with George KJ6VU. Jeremy, KF7IJZ, and it now includes Michael Walker, VA3MW, where they pursue topics, technology and projects on their ham radio workbenches every two weeks. The group documents their projects and make circuit boards available to their listeners. They have interesting guests and go in deep. Jeremy may complain about the overall length of the podcast, but friends let me tell you, that I could listen to it all day, and that's good.

Even if you are a seasoned ham radio builder or just getting started, be sure to join George, Jeremy and Mike now for the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast on every podcast player. Use the link on this week's show notes page by clicking on the image. A new way to show your support of the QSO Today Podcast, is to buy me a coffee. I consume gallons of coffee to create this weekly podcast. Invite me for coffee by pushing the yellow button. Buy me a coffee on the QSO Today show notes page. And now back to our QSO Today.

And why those places? I mean, given all of the other places that you could have gone, did you go by yourself, or did you go with a large group? How did you end up traveling?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, I'll have to build a story. Well, you know what? I remember when I was a young teenager, I worked the Falkland station, and I was looking at these islands, South Georgia, South Sandwich. And man, I wanted to go, I wanted to see what's there. My curiosity got the better. Fast-forward to 1986, '87, I was getting on 40 meters working DX, and I run across the net one morning, on a weekend, and AA6BB and KA6, Victor, Jerry and Joanie Britson, were net controls on it, and it was a 40-meter DX net.

Well, I never was much for DX nets but I listened, and I thought, "They're really working some good DX on 40 meters, and it's very well controlled." And I said, "And no one's helping the operator get the report." It was if they didn't get it right, "Sorry, you didn't get it." So I checked in, and at that time I was QSL manager for six or seven VPH stations in the Falklands. I had got to where I was talking to them and become friends with VP8PU and VP8WA, and I would get parts for them and send them down, help them buy crystals for the inner island radio, because they was using two megahertz as the inner island communication frequency, and the Falklands back then they didn't have a landline.

It was everything in schools and everything were on via, basically ham radio and 160 meters at two megahertz. Jerry and Joanie, we'd become friends. We built up a friendship over a couple of months, and they asked me one night, they said, "We're going to be out town, you care to call the net?" So what started out as one or two times ended up, I started the net control on the weekends. They were talking one time about, found out I was a QSL manager for the VPA8s. So I talked to a couple of the VP8 boys into coming up and checking in on the net on 40 meters. I told Jerry sometime, "Well, I'm planning on going down and visiting Peter and Emily and some of them next year."

"Well, why don't you just go down there and operate?" "Well, I could do that." Well, that started to snowball. Somebody said, "Well, why don't you go to South Sandwich and put in, or South Georgia?" I said, "South Sandwich is way up on the list." "We need some..." I said, "Well I can probably do that." I had started to go down earlier and the Falklands Island War broke out, so we canceled it, but I said, "Well I can go, I can do that." So I started checking around and talked to Peter about it, and he said, "Well, we can get you a license but you have to get your visa through the Falklands Island desk in the UK." And I'm thinking, "How am I going to get to here and there?" And pretty soon I figured out, "Well, this is going to be a major undertaking."

So I had been talking to Terry Dukesen out in California and a few others. And Jerry and Joanie decided to say, "Well, we'll be the QSL manager if you can get this together." So I started writing the letters to companies to get support and clubs to get back in, and we got a bunch of operators together. So we started raising funds, and there was a guy in the UK named Harkin, and he was over the desk at the time that gave you visas to the Falklands. So we'd become friends, and I got visas for everybody to go to the Falklands, and ended up putting on D expeditions to South Sandwich Island, VP8SSI. And at that time it ended up being the number one most wanted country, and it basically ended up being the first mega D expedition.

Eric 4Z1UG:

As you say, it snowballed into an idea that kind of got going, and now you're running the expedition. How much money did you raise in order to do that, the expedition?

Tony WA4JQS:

We raised, the ship alone was 107, \$108,000, and in 1992 that was a lot of money.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And where did you get all the radios?

Tony WA4JQS:

I would write these companies and tell them what we're doing, "We've got the landing permission, and we've got this, we've got that." We've got Peter Short VP8W off in Stanley. He worked with the postmaster there and guaranteed us got our license, everything filled out and copies of our visas were sent down. So he got us all the licensing, the problems worked out. All we had to do is walk in the post office, present our ham license, they issued us our VP8 calls.

And I wrote to different companies. Well, by one, the big companies turned me down, but Wayne Yoshida was the USA manager for Kenwood at the time. He took a chance on me and said, "I'll provide you equipment."

So he provided us with the five stations. GAP Antenna provided me with the verticals for 160 meters, and Cushcraft provided me with all the other antennas. And there were so many people, and we managed to get all of the helpers put on the QSL card. And after equipment companies sponsored us, the DX foundations just started, all except Northern California, they were the last to come aboard at that time. And they finally, one of the guys that Peter taught, got them, and Marty Lane, got to California, DX Foundation to come aboard. Basically they come aboard after Marty joined the expedition.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You have all the equipment, and it was a real snowball. As soon as you actually had equipment, and the licenses started coming in, then people saw this as a real thing, and so therefore they started putting their money in. Out of curiosity, you say in your QRZ page, that you have all of the log books from the Falklands. Is that from this D expedition, or do you have other log books that you also collected from there?

Tony WA4JQS:

A lot of the VPH that I was QSL manager for, they would send me their logs, copies of their logs. I have those, six or seven of the VPH stations. I have to laugh, I still get QSL requests monthly for the South Sandwich and the Peter I D expeditions, wanting to know if I can confirm via logbook of the world. There was no logbook of the world in 1992, in 1994. It was just being started and thought about. Computer logging was really in its infancy, and we had so many crashes on the laptops that we took, that during the trial period before we left, that we decide we're going to hard copy all the logs.

So all the QSOs actually are on paper logs from both the expeditions, all 58,000 from South Sandwich, and I can't remember the exact number from Peter I. But all the QSOs we made in the Falklands and South Sandwich, South Georgia, Antarctica, they're all on paper logs. And I've got a box that I'm going to send them up to ARL, one of the Japanese boys contributed to all of the old major D expeditions to upload their logs into the ARL's logbook of the world. And every time I get ready to send them off, I'll get five or six requests, and then I've got to dig thumb. So pretty soon I'm just going to have to go ahead and send them.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So Tony, I want to make sure that I'm hearing you clearly. What you're saying is that you still have hams that worked these D expeditions back in 1992 and '93, that still want confirmations?

Tony WA4JQS:

Oh, yes. I just filled out and put in the mail yesterday one for B8SSI, and one for a request for 3Y0PI.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I shouldn't be at all frustrated or upset that some hams are slow on the uptake when it comes to getting back to me.

Tony WA4JQS:

I've actually pulled them out. So many hams have changed their calls, and I have one or two, I've got a QSL for their new call. I will not QSL that new call. That's not the call you worked this under. You want to send me your call that you worked this under, that's the one I QSL, because I go back through, pull those paper logs out, and go through 58,000. At least I know the paper logs are marked by the date, starting day, and the ending date that we started that log and we ended that log. So it makes it a little easier, but I've still got to run through 10 or 15 pages for each log.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That's amazing. What's the rig now at your QTH?

Tony WA4JQS:  
The rigs I'm using now?

Eric 4Z1UG:  
Yeah. What are the rigs now?

Tony WA4JQS:  
Well, I went to solid state. I've got a Kenwood TS-950SDX. I've got a Kenwood TS-H70, a Kenwood TS-850SAT. Those are my Kenwood 480HX, that I use on six meters.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
So you're a Kenwood guy, and can you blame Wayne Yoshida for being the Kenwood guy?  
You're just a loyal guy now.

Tony WA4JQS:  
Wayne Yoshida and Paul Middleton, who took Wayne's position after Wayne left. I'd become a Kenwood guy. They had faith in me, so I've always been a Kenwood guy, after the D expedition. Before that I was a Drake man. I restored old tube type radios. And you can't see the shack, but I'm looking at a, I also use the Hallicrafters SR-400. I've got two Drake B-Lines, two Drake C-Lines, a Drake TR7-Line, a Drake TR4-CW RIT. I have the TC-6, the TC-2, and the CC1VHF Drakes, and the C-4 console. And 6L4B Drake amplifiers, a Swan Mark 6B six meter amplifier, and an Alpha 87, I'm sorry, an Alpha 89 amplifier, and a Henry 2KD-5 amplifier. I changed radios to change bands.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
It seems to me that the ham radio station then takes over, at least either one large room or a couple of rooms at your house?

Tony WA4JQS:  
Would you believe, when my mother passed away, she was a beautician. She has a 800 square foot building that her beauty shop was in, that is now a radio room.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
Away from the house?

Tony WA4JQS:  
It's a separate building, about 100 foot from the house. It's actually a house that she planned, that she built, and had her beauty shop in, which she had four people working for. When she got sick and passed away, I took it over and moved my radio shack out into it, and I've been collecting and restoring old equipment for 20 years.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
So what's on the bench right now, what are you working on?

Tony WA4JQS:  
On the other side of the room, I've got an AC-4 Drake Power Supply that I'm updating, and there is a Drake C-Line in there, an R-4C that I'm upgrading, dating with all new crystal filters and roofing filters from Noble Radio. A good friend of mine, Frank, owns Noble Radio. We've been talking for about a year. I've got him into designing updates for the Drake tube type radios. He's got a lot of things coming out. It's going to bring the Drake C-Line into the 21st century with DDS digital readout, VFO computer interface. Pretty soon I'll be able to do everything with my Drake C-Line that I can do that you could do with a K-4.

Eric 4Z1UG:  
What do you think, if you were going to give advice to a new ham that wants to get on the low bands, can he pick up a Drake transceiver for a decent enough price that it would be valuable and maybe even a good starter rig? Or would you even recommend the old rigs anymore to a new ham?

Tony WA4JQS:

That's a tough question, Eric. I'm going to maybe ruffle a few feathers with my answer, but I'm an honest person, I'm going to be honest about it. If I was going up to a new guy and he was wanting to get into ham radio, I would ask him, "Do you really want to get into ham radio, or do you just want to be a ham radio operator? If you want to be a ham radio operator that just memorizes the questions and answers, then go ahead and buy you a solid state no tune radio.

If you want to be a ham radio operator, get Ameco theory book. They're still prevalent today. Study the theory, learn the theory, be able to do...

If your radio quits, don't send it to a repair shop to change a \$2 fuse, because you don't know how to repair them or don't know... At least know a little bit about how the radio operates, and learn that you've got to use a plate and load control on a tube type radio. And a lot of the amplifiers now are no tune, broadband, no tune. I don't own many non broadband, no tune amplifiers. All mine, I have to dip the plate, increase the load." That's what I tell people. If you want to learn a little bit about theory then you can go into the old tube type radios, and at least you'll know something you can fix, most times you can fix your own.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I think all of us have old transceivers. I've got a FT-101 under the bench. I've got the TS-520. There are times when I think that I want to give a radio away to a relatively new operator, but then I'm thinking, "Maybe I'm not doing them a favor, because it'll get them on the air if they can get it working, but it's more complicated, and maybe I'm thinking that maybe complicated isn't a good thing." That's kind of why I'm asking the question.

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, that's the way I feel too. I'm a VE, I've been a volunteer examiner since the course first come out. I probably talked theory to over 200 hams in my lifetime, and I never taught question and answer. I always taught theory. I said, "Stick with me, it's going to take a month, maybe two months to get through this class, but if you're going to take this class too then, I guarantee you that you'll get a general class ticket, and you'll know how to repair your own, how to build an antenna. You don't have to go out and spend \$100 buying a dipole antenna when you can build it for \$15 worth of parts."

My youngest general was a seven-year-old girl. My oldest general was a 90-year-old man, and they both knew theory after the class. I taught how to calculate parallel, series resistors, parallel series capacitors, inductance. They learned ELI, the ICE man, they knew the code for resistors. Little things we picked up in the service like ELID the ICE man, for lagging the voltage and currents and inductory. And I see all these new guys, and it's nice to get on top, but I've watched them lose interest over the years. And it's sad, because anything you have to work for, that you put a lot of time and work into, you tend to stick with it. Things that come easy, people, human nature, they just don't stay with it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

They don't value it.

Tony WA4JQS:

There's very little value to it. I've got a guy now that's got his license, he's wanting me to help him get radios. Well, I'm not going to put him into tube type radios or anything, because basically his theory is not, he doesn't know the theory. And I told him, I said, "If you'll sit down and learn the theory or I'll help you learn the theory. I'll teach you how to operate a tube type radio." So he's agreed, he wants to learn the tube type radio. I said, "Well come here, I'm going to teach you how and the principles of it, and what you're doing, and so you at least know what you're doing." I said, "We'll take it from there."

Eric 4Z1UG:

What's the antenna system that you have on top of your 800 square foot house?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, I used to build and design antennas. I built my own, four of them are cubicle quad. Up

until last year, I had run a four element cubicle quad on a 30 foot boom. And quads are great, it's one of the best antennas. I worked things that no other people... I heard the station, other people here in town could not even hear with the bigger rays. So till a year ago, I had a storm come through and it had a tree break the next house over, and the limbs had come through, tore it up. So I go rent a lift, go up or spend the day repairing the squad.

Two days later we had another storm come through and the rest of this guy's rotten tree tore my antenna up again. So I called the ordinance man here in town. I told him, I said, "I need to come over and have this man take his trees down." So we got that tree took down and I said, "I'm 74 years old, I'm too old to keep climbing, going up these towers and working on these things." So I called Gary, and I had him put up a Mosley, and I had him build me and put me together a Pro-57B. So now I've got a Pro-57B on the one tower. I have a Mosley CL-36 on another.

I've got a Hygain 402BA on the other tower, and I've got a Cushcraft [inaudible]. A Cushcraft 11-element two meter beam, and they have a Cushcraft 5-element beam on six meters. On 80 meters, I've got an inverted, or I'm sorry, on 160 meters I've got an inverted L with a 400-foot of 14 gauge aluminum fencing laid under it as a ground screen. On 80 meters, I've got a V-beam that's pointed on Europe, and I've got, it's down now, but I'll put it back up this fall. I run off one of the other towers, a V beam on Japan on 80 meters.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you're not a slouch on antennas, you're not like me, you're not running just a single inverted V. You've got a whole array out there on the property.

Tony WA4JQS:

It took me years to get these and buy them, get them put... It took me years to get the three towers up. But no, I'm a firm believer in a good antenna.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What do you think the greatest challenge is facing amateur radio now?

Tony WA4JQS:

The greatest challenge is getting young operators that are not what we call appliance operators for Q&A hams, but actually the clubs need to start not only... If you go and teach question and answer, at least have a week afterward, and get their license that you teach them protocol, operating procedures, and nothing, well, a new ham gets on, he comes from CB, and the first thing he does, he gets on and says, "My personal list." Well, I'll tell you what, the guys that have been in ham radio for 30, 40 years, they know right off that guys come from CB, and they don't need that.

And somebody always tells them, "This is not CB, this ham radio, you either use my name or my handle is." When I got in, you didn't say my name is, it was my handle. And I still say my handle. It's just something I picked up at 15 years of age. But I try to tell them, and I always try to have a little protocol at the end of my class and say, "Don't use personal, either use my name is or my handle is, and don't say you're putting a nine on me."

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think that may be from Kentucky. There might be more citizens band operators amongst the young people than there would be probably on the coasts, because I think maybe kids are using smartphones and stuff now. Do you think that amateur radio classes, classes that lead to licensing, maybe their weak in license gatherings, do they do a very good job of follow up with the hams once they have their licenses to actually make sure that they get on the air and are active hams?

Tony WA4JQS:

Some of the clubs do. A lot of them, I don't feel like they do. I think I started a club here in [inaudible] county in 1973 in my garage. I'm proud to say [inaudible] amateur radio association is still going strong today, after the day I started it in 1973. And they follow up. They tried to get the people into the club activities. They're now have a YouTube channel, and they actually

work at it. Clubs should follow up and try to get [inaudible] the new hams.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think you're right, especially in a place like America or the United States where you might have close to 800,000 licensees, but probably a good number of those are not on the air or even active. Do you have advice that you would give to your new hams?

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, my advice is, join a club that's interested in activities. Not a club that just comes to meet and have coffee and donuts. Get in a club that actually gets on the air, goes on the field day, does exercises, things like that. A club that has a net, join into a net and learn the protocol, make friends. The new kids today, they live with their cellphone and their iPad, and in a lot of ways it's been the destruction of ham radio. You can get the kids into things.

FT8, a lot of people don't like it, but it's put a lot of hams that have not been on air in years, put them back on the air. They can get on barefoot, mediocre antenna, and actually contacts all over the world. And in that aspect I like FTA, because it's killed six meters in my opinion, because I was always side banding CW6 meter operator.

Now 95% of the operation on six meters is FT8, but it's opened up a world of intercontinental QSOs on six meters that we never had, that was extremely hard to do. I'm glad that I've got WAS on six meters on sideband. I worked Alaska and Hawaii on sideband. It took me 50-something years to get my last state Hawaii on sideband, and I was only one of four stations in the United States that worked him, and it tickled me. But now on FT8, I've already worked Alaska and Hawaii on sixth, within a year.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Tony, I want to thank you so much for joining me on the QSO Today Podcast. This has really been fun. I'm happy to hear about your 800 square foot hams shack and all of the lines that you have there. So with that, I want to thank you so much for joining me, and wish you 73.

Tony WA4JQS:

Well, I thank you very much, Eric. It's been a great pleasure. And I guess I've got to say, I'm not the average ham when it comes to equipment. My mother always told me, "Son, drive everything into the ground." The ham radio is a passion with me. It's been a love since I was probably 14 years old, I started studying, and it probably goes back to the old days of 12 years old. And some people say I'm OCD, which I probably am, but I just love to look at radios, I love to operate radios, and I love to talk to people all over the world and expect to have a QSO with you on the air before long.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I hope so too, Tony. And I think that the QSO Today audience are people that also have the same feelings about radios that you do. Thank you again so much for joining me on the QSO Today Podcast.

Tony WA4JQS:

Thank you very much, 73s. Have a great evening.

Eric 4Z1UG:

73, Tony.

That concludes this episode of QSO Today. I hope that you enjoyed this QSO with Tony.

Please be sure to check out the show notes that include links and information about the topics that we discussed. Go to [www.qsotoday.com](http://www.qsotoday.com) and put in WA4JQS in the search box at the top of the page.

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My thanks to Ben Bresky, who edits every single show and allows both this host and my guests to sound brilliant. Thanks, Ben. Until next time, this is Eric 4Z1UG. 73.

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