

BARBARA DUNN, G6YL

Europe's First YL Amateur Operator

(The first woman amateur radio operator in all of Europe was Barbara Dunn with the very appropriate and symbolic call of G6YL. Still on the air, operating CW with extreme proficiency, although plagued with illness in recent months, Barbara was first licensed on April 13, 1927 and her first contact was made on Nov. 21 of that year with G16YW in Ireland, a QSL she values highly.

(Her accomplishments have been many. She is a honorary member of SSA, REF and EAR and she confirmed 110 countries for her DXCC in 1960. By last year, Barbara had 159 countries worked with 144 confirmed. Among her awards held are WAC, WBE, BERTA, and WAS on 21mc. She was the first YL in England to make WPX.

(An independent householder, residing at Carraen Lodge 1 Dalston, Carlisle, Barbara is as good an operator as any man on the air today, using a vibroplex (bug) key which she slows down considerably because of her low power and what she terms as her "rotten lil" antenna. She thoroughly enjoys copying WIAW on coae at 35 wpm N 3.5mc and is proficient in copying DX through heavy QRM — something too many operators today find difficult to do.—Ed.)

Having read with great interest the life story of my old key friend VU2JA Joe Faithful, in the December 1967 Spark-Gap Times, I feel very diffident about accepting the invitation of my key friend, W5VA, to send in my story to the magazine. There is really nothing to tell. I have had no career like VU2JA, and amateur radio is just my absorbing hobby in the winter months. People always want to know how and why I began to take an interest in Ham Radio, so here are the facts.

The first time I heard, and sent Morse signals was when I was about 10 years old, at boarding school. I remember a man in a wheel-chair talking about Wireless and giving demonstrations on the stage of our large concert hall. At the end of his lecture he asked if any young lady in the audience would like to step up on the stage and stand between his aerial and his receiver, and see whether she could prevent the Morse signals passing over from one side of the stage to the other! Of course, I volunteered! The man keyed SOS, and he let me do the same. I was thrilled.

After leaving school my main hobbies were (outdoor) tennis, shooting, bird-watching, (but not collecting eggs), motor driving, and (indoor) piano and organ playing, and embossing books into Braille for the National Library for the Blind, London. I gained my Certificate of Proficiency for Braille, of which

Barbara Dunn, G6YL, a 1928 photo.



I was very proud, as I was self-taught. I had looked up books of instruction so that I could teach braille to a friend blinded in the first World War. Incidentally, I was surprised and pleased a few months ago to find I can still read braille in the "Radio Times" in spite of having done no Braille since 1923! Of course, I read Braille by sight, but I am assured that if I ever had the misfortune to lose my sight I would soon be able to read with my finger tips, as I know the position of the six dots, and all the Braille "shorthand" abbreviations.

It was in 1923, soon after the B.B.C. (British Broadcasting Company) began operating, that my father bought our first wireless set. I still have it, a real museum piece, with its five "AR General purpose" valves standing up in a row on the top of the cabinet. There were masses of controls to wangle, and I was put in charge of the set. This suited me well. At that time my QTH was Lilystone Hall, Stock Essex, a village about 28 miles from London, not far from the mouth of the river Thames. The result was that while listening to the B.B.C. London station, 2LO, there was frequently bad interference of a rasping kind. I was quite unable to tune the QRM out, so decided to try and find out what it was all about.

In those days most of the smaller ships used spark, so I began to teach myself the Morse Code in the worst way possible, without realizing it! I sat with a pencil and paper and jotted down the dots and dashes as fast as I could, with peculiar spacing. This was early February 1923. By March 8th, I was able to copy down quite a bit of slow Morse. By May 1st, I could copy at 10 words per minute. On July 18th, I was thrilled to copy messages without writing down the dots and dashes. On August 24th, I copied messages in English, French, Dutch, and German. These had to be accurate, with no guessing! I used to copy slow Morse from FL (the Eiffel Tower, Paris). By the way, after I had gotten the family listening to the B.B.C. on an appalling Loud-Speaker, I used to adjourn to another room, with my crystal set and "cat's whisker" and tune to 600 meters for the ships' spark signals.

My greatest thrill was when I picked up my first SOS, and copied the Latitude and Longitude! My father was a bit

sceptical and took the trouble to visit Lloyds in London next day to confirm my information. He came back duly satisfied and impressed.

The next thrill was picking up signals from Marconi's Yacht "Elettra" on, if I remember rightly, 90 meters or thereabouts. As he asked for reports I wrote and sent him some, I signed my letter "B. Dunn", and to my surprise and great joy, he answered and asked me to continue listening and reporting, I guess he thought I was an enthusiastic school boy. Hi!

Later, on the old broadcast receiver, I chanced to pick up amateur Morse signals on 1000 meters every Sunday afternoon from three English amateurs who were licensed for that wave length. Their keying was quite fast and good to copy. Then I heard some English amateurs on, if I remember rightly, about 440 mtrs.

On December 14th, 1925 I bought a 2 valve Short Wave receiver (15-200 mtrs) from G2LZ of Wickford, Essex. A battery receiver. I had no electric mains at my old home in Essex. From that moment I was up to the neck in Ham Radio! Copying the English stations on about 32 meters. On December 21st, I heard my first American amateur signals, USAUL W. Va. on about 39.5 mtrs. Also U2CVJ, U1CKP, U4RM, Ga. 9ADK and U4ITS.C., U8GZ Ohio, U2CVJ N.Y., U2PP N.Y., U1GA Mass., U2AHM N.J., U8CC PA., U5ZAI Texas., U1AAO Mass.

On December 24th, 1925, I heard U2APV N.Y., U9CCA W. Va., USALY N.Y., U3HG Md., U1CKP Conn. U5AEX Texas 1.CRE Mass., 1CJJ Conn. And, of course, the KDKA Broadcasting Station. I wonder how many of these amateurs are members of the OOTC?

In October 1926 my father died and I was undecided whether to apply for a transmitting license after all, as I realized we would have to leave our lovely old home in the next year or two. On November 28th, I was in Nice, so I went to visit the pioneer French amateur F8AB. On December 3rd, and had a good ragchew, though he had not done any transmitting for some time.

In 1927 I was bullied by the QT's G2NM and G2LZ to go in for my Morse Test. In fact, Gerald Marcuse, G2NM, said if I did so and got through, which he didn't doubt, he would send me an



Here is G6YL's "bucket of bolts."

old Tx (PRP) of his, which I could keep if I could get it to work! Hi! This was the old Split Hartley mentioned on my original QSL card. I still have it stored in the attic.

At my Morse test the examiner gave me a column from "The Times" newspaper and asked me to send it in Morse. This I proceeded to do, but very soon he stopped me because I was putting in all the brackets, colons and semi-colons, etc., etc., which he told me amateurs never used. He only wanted full stops and commas, and notes of interrogation and exclamation! So I started off again. Then he sent to me at 12 words per minute, which I wrote down correctly with no trouble. He said I had come through with "flying colors," and far better than most of the men. Then he said he would like to send faster and see how I got on. He sent at 25 words per minute and I copied correctly, so he was quite satisfied.

I obtained my transmitting license on April 13th, 1927, but didn't get on the air until November 21st, 1937, when I had my first QSO with G16YW. He told me I was nearer 49 meters than 45. Hi! So I returned until he said I was on 45 meters. O.K. Hi! I had no wave meter. But anyway I had gotten the old Split Hartley perking. My next QSOs were with GC6NX (Scotland), G6HP and

G2ZC (Jersey, Channel Islands). Four countries, according to present DXCC rules. My first 45 meters QSO with the USA was on April 12th, 1928 when I worked NU1ASY with my 6 watts. In May 1931, I forsook the 7mc band for a while, and started up in the 14mc band with a small T.P.T.G. Tx with 6 to 10 watts input. My first day on the band I worked my first USA station, W1WK.

I had left my old home in Essex on September 1st, 1928, and my new QTH was Acton House, Felton, Northumberland. Very near GML and (Edinburgh), GH-land. This was an FB spot for DX work, though again no electric mains. Just 110v D.C. from the house lighting batteries. On October 22nd, 1932, I had my first "Top Band" QSO, with F8BJ. (In 1930 and '31 I had won the R.S.G.B. Top Band Contest silver cup, but only as a listener, (SWL). On September 16th, 1936, I had my first 28 mc QSO with ZS1.H and my 6 watts sigs had an S5 report. My first VK 28mc. QSO was with VK4EI on October 26th. And my first W6, 28mc QSO with W6JNR on October 28th.

On September 18, 1937 I had my first 56mc. QSO with G5QY. This was one of many QSOs on the band, but as the distance between our stations was

only about 28 miles I thought it might be ground wave sigs. When World War II broke out on September 1st, 1939 I only needed four more countries for my DXCC on low power, so you can guess my feelings. Unfortunately after we had evacuees in the house for the first few months of the war, they were succeeded by troops, as the Army had requisitioned the house. My sister and I were left three rooms at the top of the house, while 150 soldiers took possession of the rest of the house, with others in a dozen Nissen huts in the grounds. Of course, my TXs had been removed by the GPO, but I still had my Rxs. During the war I was in a special branch of the R.O.C. (Royal Observer Corps), which was most interesting. Though it meant that I seldom had more than three hours sleep throughout the war, and was unable to rest during the daytime. In May 1945 after the war with Germany was over we decided to leave Acton House, Felton, Northumberland, but owing to petrol restrictions we were only allowed to move 50 miles by road.

So we lived for three years at Cheeseburn Grange, Stamfordham, about 12 miles from Newcastle upon Tyne. Here I at last had 250v. A.C. mains. On November 30th, 1945 the GPO returned my TXs to me though I only received my transmitting license again on April 13th. And after the rebuild I did not get on the air again until October 29th, when my first post-war QSO was with W4NH on 28mc. It was his first GYL QSO. My last QSO from Stamfordham was on March 26th, 1948, and my first 3.5mc, QSO with America (W4BZE).

The next morning I began to dismantle my station for removal to my present QTH, Cardew Lodge, Dalston, Carlisle, Cumberland. Once again no electric mains! So I ran a vibrator off the 110v. D.C. house lighting plant on 28mc and 3.5mc only. Having been told by several Hams after the war that it was impossible to work DX with only one crystal, and really low power, and a poor aerial, I was determined to do it. Hi! So in 1948 I gained my B.S.G.B. B.E.R.T.A. Certificate for having worked 25 British Dominion Radio Districts out of 27. And in 1959 I got my 21mc WAS and the /mm Club Certificate for having worked 50 ships afloat. That is an FB little certificate complete with Old Fa-

ther Neptune, mermaids, ships, etc. And in 1960 I got my DXCC Certificate for 110 confirmed. Now I have worked 158 countries, with 142 confirmed. Also got my DXYL Certificate in 1961. And c.w. WPX in 1967. Other certificates I have are the R.S.G.B., B.E.R.U. (1932), 28mc WAC (1934), and the R.S.G.B. WBE (1937). Nine all told.

Of course, I have had some very amusing experiences since I have been in the Ham game! Shortly after I started up on 45 meters I worked a Polish station who did not know much English. He asked me for my full address for his QSL direct. So I replied with "Miss B. Dunn" etc. Back he came with: "Hi! O.K. U are the S.S. B. Dunn. But where are you bounding?"!!!

Finally, I have made many friends over the air. And when I visited the GOM of Europe, SM6UA in 1930 my railway journey between Stockholm and Goteborg was like that of a film star, with amateurs presenting bouquets at stations where the train stopped at night!

In 1951, 1952, 1953, I was about QRT helping to nurse my mother in her last illness. On April 22nd, 1954 Cardew Lodge was at least connected to 240v. A.C. mains. But during the night of January 14th, 15th, 1955, in an extremely severe frost, the mains water tanks in the roof above my radio den overflowed through the ceiling, when the ballcock became frozen down, and the small overflow pipe on the slates also froze. Early next morning I found the shack flooded out. The water had soaked through a thick carpet and felting, and through two wooden floors and through the ceiling of the pantry below, which luckily had a stone floor. Dry rot started up in the floor, and, of course, the ceiling was sagging. Luckily the walls covered with QSL cards and framed certificates escaped the flood, though parts of the TXs were damaged. I really felt like giving up! Hi! The floor boards had to be up for months to dry out, so it wasn't until July 13th, 1956 that I got on the air again. This time on 21mc. And my first QSO was with W0HX. Since then I have been on 21mc and 3.5mc only.

So that's the life history of G6YL, for what it's worth! I think the call sign G6OG would be more apt nowadays! Wotsa OMs? Hi!