



EXPLORER'S GAZETTE

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WASA RADIO

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 ASA "Det A" Deep Freeze 72*

In 1971, I had the privilege of being deployed to the Antarctic for one year and three days. The following are excerpts from my diary in regards to my involvement with the WASA radio station at McMurdo.



Bob Flint On Air at WASA

During the winter-over period of DF-71 the radio station, WASA, providing news and entertainment to the crew, utilized an AM transmitter for broadcasting.

During the DF-72 austral summer, the transmitter became inoperable. A replacement FM transmitter was en route from the

States but would not arrive till after Thanksgiving.

To help with crew morale, the electronics technicians on base utilized a mobile FM radio to create an "underground" transmitter, broadcasting taped music on the FM band, and gave the station the call sign of MUGR (McMurdo Under

Ground Radio). This had limited operation because the transmitter utilized was not designed for continuous broadcasting and tripped off the line numerous times. On 30 November, Capt Van Reeth (summer Commanding Officer), directed the radio be shut down. We tried broadcasting on another frequency for two more days with call sign WRFM (Radio Free McMurdo) but due to transmitter limitations we ceased that effort on 4 December 1971.

Knowing that a new FM transmitter was en route to the site, a group of us (Bob Flint, Walter Harris, Mike Provot

and Kieth Miller set out to build a "professional" studio in Bldg 64. With some technical guidance from JO3 Thom Wilborn, construction of the studio was started on 4 Dec. We installed a wall with a plexiglas window so visitors could see the operation. A cue board was



Station Manager Thom Wilborn, broadcasting from WASA

manufactured, dual turn-tables installed, and an equipment rack assembled which provided technical flexibility allowing interface with the McMurdo Station phone system, as well as HF shortwave radio.

The FM transmitter was received in early December and installed at the Transmitter Site. The 100 watt FM transmitter went on the air at midnight on 13 December 1971. All the electronics for the studio was completed on 16 December.

Thom Wilborn got several volunteers and set up programming while he was there during the austral summer. I took over as the winter station manager and broadcast 6 AM till midnight, seven days a week with the help of 14 other volunteers. We had five news/sports broadcasts each day utilizing UPI Teletype news stories along with a structured schedule of AFRTS shows and "Disc Jockey" controlled music from Country to Classical.

On 3 January, we were told that Bldg 64 would be torn down at the end of the winter. After all that work, we were a bit depressed but figured we would deal with the teardown when the time came. (*Ed Note: Bldg 64 was not torn down until 2002*)

On 12 January 1972, a group of VIPs arrived and Thom Wilborn interviewed Senator James A. Buckley from New York and William F. Buckley, Jr., the writer. Both interviews were broadcast on the air that evening.



Thom Wilborn Interviewing William F. Buckley Jr.

Since the FM transmitter installation, we had been operating with the antenna installed on the building at the Transmitter Site. On 25 January, I installed the antenna 55 feet up on the mast of the Russian Rhombic Antenna at the site to increase our broadcast range since it was basically line-of-site. On 29 January, the Rhombic Antenna tilted to about 70 degrees. WASA was shut down for a day so the guy wires could be adjusted.

On 21 February, I was the station announcer when President Nixon first set foot in China. I broadcast it live at 1532 McMurdo time.

On 3 March 1972, the base was in Storm Condition I with winds of 40-50 MPH gusting to 80 MPH. This continued for

several days. During this period WASA was utilized as a "Civil Defense Communications System".

The first "live" coverage of sports occurred on 10 March 1972 when we broadcast from the bowling alley utilizing the base phone system for connectivity.

On 8 April, we ran a 24 hour "All Request" Marathon starting at 1800.

Then on 11 April at 2250Z, we had our first live broadcast from the States when my wife, Flo, said hello to the troops via a MARS phone patch. Her words were: "Hi fellas. I hope you enjoy winter-over. Remember, there is a lot of love waiting for you back here. NOT FROM ME!! From YOUR wives!"



ET1 Bob Flint and HM1 Chuck Yarnell . Note the U Barrel

On 17 April 1972, the launch of Apollo XVI was covered live. HF comms were bad, so later that day Ham Radio operator, Dave Porter from New Jersey, fed a tape that he had made which was crystal clear. On the 21st, we covered the Orion moon landing, live, at 0223Z and later lunar lift-off on the 24th.

The rest of the winter operation of the station became routine. I took on other projects like Mid-Winter Party and editing the yearbook.

For some reason, I didn't cover the shut down of Bldg 64 in my diary but I remember moving the studio to a small room in the Barracks in Building 155, again with the soundproofing and Plexiglas window. I departed Antarctica on 13 October 1972.

I know we could never compete with the Radio and Television operations that exist there today but WASA was a major morale factor during the DF-72 winter over period.

Editor's Notes:

1. More WASA photos may be viewed on the Radio Heritage Web Site at: <http://www.radioheritage.net/Story170.asp>
2. Over the years the McMurdo entertainment broadcast radio station had numerous call signs. During my first two winters (DF-63 & 67) it was known as KMSA (Kiss My Sweet Arse or K McMurdo Sound Antarctica) and WTFO (no definition required). In DF-71 it was WASA (W Antarctic Support Activities) and during DF-75, and thereafter, it was AFAN (American Forces Antarctic Network).