

• THE BRASS POUNDER •



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THE COOL
OPERATORS
CLUB

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Meet Eddie ZS6BNE

My journey with amateur radio started well over fifty years ago. As a young boy in primary school I built a crystal set using a coil of fine copper wire with crystal diode and used high impedance headphones in the order of 3,000 ohms to listen to broadcast stations.

I liked chemistry too, the combination I still remember is a teaspoon of condy's crystals (potassium permanganate) and a few drops of glycerine could create a fire within seconds!

Using a torch battery and torch globe I'd send SOS using "dots and dashes" to my cousin as we played our imaginative games.

We moved to Alberton and for my three final years of high school, attended Alberton High. I joined an electronics club hosted by a friend's mom, Pam Barnes who was a radio amateur.

Some time before that my dad took me to a hobbies fare held in the Johannesburg town hall. Radio amateurs were manning a few large radios behind the counter and the sounds of Morse code filled the air. I heard a radio ham telling another what he was hearing. I was absolutely fascinated by what I was seeing and hearing!

It was the year 1974 that my dad took me for night classes presented at Saint John's



college in Houghton, Johannesburg.

In the meantime my brother and I learn't the Morse code characters for the alphabet and numbers. I later bought long playing records to listen to the sounds, already the visual impact of learning the Morse code provided a hurdle which was only eradicated many years later.

I wrote the written RAE in November of 1974 and passed the technical and regulatory papers. I took my 12 words per minute Morse code test at the Johannesburg post office around January 1975 and was allocated the call sign ZS6BNE in February.

I spent my year on CW using a Yaesu FLDX400 transmitter my dad bought for me from Hamrad in Johannesburg. My receiver was a KW77 bought second hand from Danny ZS6AW. It was difficult working with a separate receiver and transmitter!

I spent many hours on the air popping into the 40m WRR nets, there was always SOMEONE who could read Morse code.

Then, I was in my matric year and packed away all my equipment in the cupboard but all was connected, of course!

I was still an active radio amateur even though the priority was supposed to be high school matric! I spent many hours talking to John, ZS6BNS. He was at Wits then. We would often visit each other for Sunday lunches.

John and Norman, ZS6ASL used to often come around and tune my inverted vee's for me. I had a two element 40m wire inverted vee with a 17 foot "boom" that once fell and went through my dad's tile roof stopping just before the ceiling!

Matric year ended, the new year came around very quickly and I reported for national service in January 1977. My destination, Kimberley

I thought my knowledge of the Morse code would be of value to the military. Quite to the contrary, it meant nothing until after basic training and six months later while sitting at 91 Ammunitions depot in Pretoria, that Brian Austin, ZS6BKW heard me on the radio. I had set up station there. Within a week I was transferred to Wits Command signal unit where I spent another eighteen months as a radio operator also manning ZS6VT.

I met my wife and married in 1980 and although I was still an active radio amateur I was less so but still spent a lot of my free time in the back room playing radio!

During military camps, ham radio allowed me to get messages back to the family at home with the help of friendly radio hams active on the ham bands and willing to make a telephone call.



Mike ZS6ARU (SK) was a captain at the local commando unit, group 20. He arranged for me to be transferred from my citizen force brigade. I would become a signaller under Mike's command.

My last camp of seven and fourteen years later, I EVENTUALLY went to Heidelberg to do a Troop sergeants course. When I did basics in Kimberly they didn't care if I was a radio ham or a radio polony (So said the Lt) Thank goodness for Brian Austin six months later!

That was the end of the military as we know it.

We had a radio club and repeater in Lichtenburg. It was known as The Lichtenburg Amateur Radio Club. We even trained young candidates for the RAE. My son, Edwill learnt 5 words per minute CW in a week and became ZU6AAI.

Many of the ZR's in the club became ZS's after many weeks of night time Morse code lessons. Sadly CW proficiency is lost if it isn't regularly used.

We maintained an important packet radio digipeater and BBS network, long before the Internet. Now many years later many of my club members have gone silent or have simply become inactive.

The last twenty four years have been exciting times. I discovered long distance running which created an opportunity to run the Comrades carrying a two meter talkie a Alinco DJ-C1 donated by Sam ZS6BRZ.

I discovered trail running and cross country and the that was combined with amateur radio and RaDAR was born which became internationally known and is still practiced in the USA and Europe.

I really enjoyed communicating via the satellites especially in a manual way. Doing CW via the sats is awesome, that drift in tone is really special and you HEAR the doppler effect!

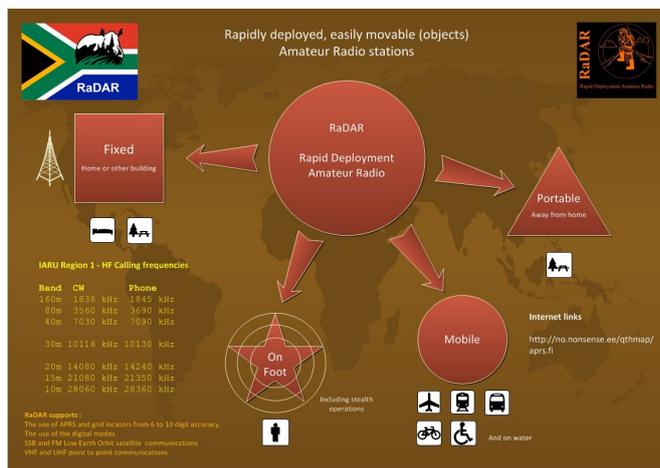
My goal for RaDAR was to go absolutely minimalistic and I sold my FT817ND and z817 ATU. I swopped my higher powered FT-897d and LDG ATU with built in AC power supply after seeing an advert on swop shop offering a brand new Xiegu X5105 for exactly what I had in exchange.

The propaganda on this rig was so positive and the Xiegu a lot cheaper than an Elecraft KX2 that my friends in the USA used for RaDAR, that in my mind it was a no brainer to go the route.

In hindsight I fell hook, line and sinker for this new direction doing my RaDAR escapades. I had taken a step back, unable to return and was barely able to practice RaDAR any further.

CW was my main mode of communications as a RaDAR low power operator and the CW coming from the Xiegu sounded like Hellschreiber on the other side. The audio with headphones was absolutely terrible. No matter the firmware, there was always something.

I now use a CW Only 40m QCX from QRP labs, for RaDAR. At least I managed to find an immaculate Icom 7200 which is a shack



radio really. I bought a decent power supply for it from Sam. Great for 100W output!

I developed The COOL in support of RaDAR. Our local group of CW operators were the majority users of the system. The CW guys needed a home and it made absolute sense to combine the two forming, "The COOL CW Operators Club".

From that first inspiration from hearing the sounds of Morse code echoing through the Johannesburg town hall to still making regular Morse code contacts throughout the world is in my opinion the highlight of amateur radio.

Sure, I also do FT8 and always loved the digital modes like PSK31, RTTY and SSTV but like a friend once said, "It's like watching paint dry".

The COOL was designed to support small communities much like our rather limited number of CW operators in ZS. My hope is that, in reading my life's story, that new hams would discover the very basics of radio communications, the Morse code.

Kind regards, Eddie Leighton ZS6BNE.

Consider becoming a member of the fast growing community of CW operators in South Africa.

The COOL CW Operators Club.