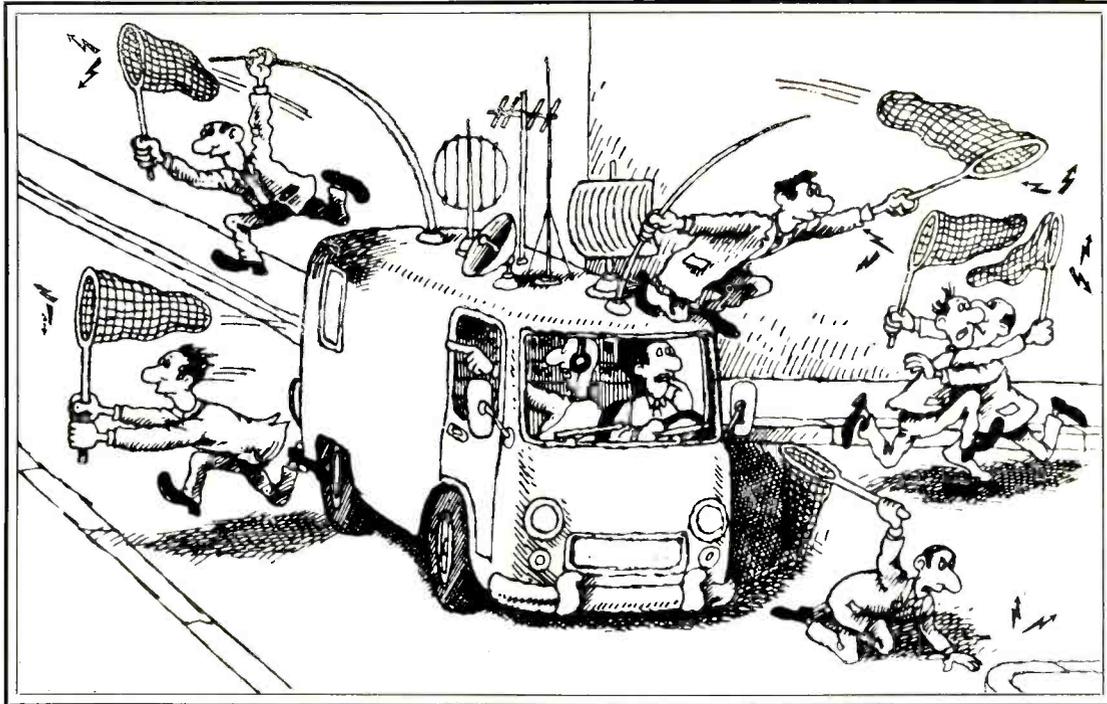


The Outlaw Callbook



Pirate Broadcasters: The Stations History Ignored

BY TOM KNEITEL, K2AES, EDITOR

When you look into the history of radio, you won't hear or read about station WUMS, or WGM, WBBQ, and many others which certainly played their part. They aren't listed in any of the official station rosters, yet they were on the air and they did provide news and entertainment for audiences throughout the nation.

These were unlicensed stations, the ones with call signs that were as homebrew as the equipment. In the early days they were known as outlaws, bootleggers, or pirates. Many listeners these days seem to think that, because of current media coverage and many active pirates, pirate broadcasting is mostly a phenomenon of the 1980's—but pirates seem to go back almost 60 years. Fifty years ago, in 1934, there were probably far more active pirates on the air than there are now, and there are quite a few differences between pirates of old and those who today fly the jolly roger.

Most pirates that have come into existence since the early 1950's seem to utilize modified ham radio equipment, while those prior to WWII were primarily homebuilt. Modern pirates seem to have primarily encroached themselves around 1620 kHz and some frequencies in the 7 MHz band, while most of the stations in the early days operated on regular broadcasting frequencies in the standard AM broadcast band.

While modern day pirates wear their defiance of FCC regulations like a badge of honor, pioneer pirates seemed to like to attempt

to palm themselves off as licensed and duly authorized stations. Moreover, while most modern day North American pirates appear to be irregularly scheduled one person hobby operations, early pirates were often quite elaborate commercial or semi-commercial efforts providing many scheduled hours of live studio entertainment. Some of these stations were sponsored by hotels, movie theatres, and other local businesses. Nevertheless, as interesting and evident as these stations have been, pirate broadcasters are a lost piece of broadcasting history.

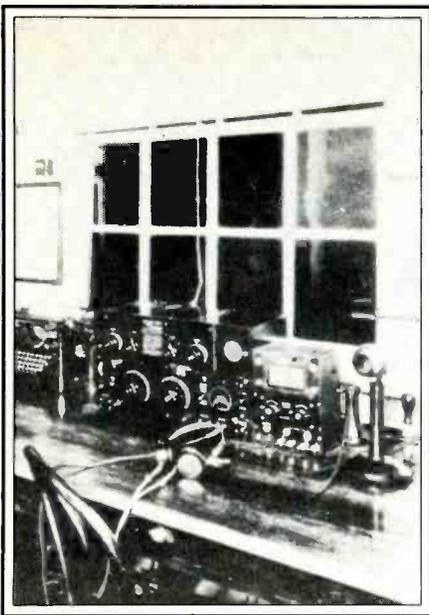
They Were There, Alright

By the early 1930's, listeners were well aware of broadcasting pirates and there was a strange mix of confusion, annoyance, and curiosity surrounding the existence of these stations on the airwaves. The Midsummer (1931) edition of *RADEX* (a popular hobby publication) noted that there were several stations being widely reported that were operating "in defiance of the Federal Radio Commission, which seems to be powerless to enforce its own rules. Certainly with the broad powers granted to the Commission by the Radio Act, it ought to be possible for that body to instantly stop any station from broadcasting without a license."

RADEX went on to complain, "In a recent issue we gave notice of a station giving the call of KMRF at Gretna, Nebraska, which was on the air regularly on 1490 kilocycles. They announced themselves openly as owned and

operated by the Sun Theatre of Gretna. A letter from the Commission brought the information that they knew nothing of such a station 'but would look into it.' It seems that with all the radio inspectors the Commission has, any station could do regular broadcasting without being noticed."

A reader wrote in to *RADEX* to comment: "About three weeks ago I wrote to you to ask for the frequency and power of a station calling itself KTFT and giving its location as Seymour, Texas. I had picked it up on about 1210 kilocycles in the early morning hours when it was testing. You informed me that you knew of no such station in Texas and suggested that I probably heard KTAT in Fort Worth. It happens that after I picked it up the first time, I told a friend of mine in Brooklyn of my catch. He is a member of the Newark News Radio Club and so he informed their program director. As a result, last Sunday morning, I again picked up KTFT broadcasting a special DX program for the above club in which they stated they were a new station on the air and requested letters or telegrams. Now comes a letter from the Radio Commission which says 'there is no station licensed to operate in Seymour, Texas.' It would seem that someone is sound asleep or else that the Commission lacks either the authority or backbone to proceed instantly and vigorously against outlaw stations. Surely it must realize that with every violation of its rules it is weakening its own power and standing."



Outlaw station WGM in Jeanette was on the air for several years and was a rather professional operation.



Listeners in the 1930's gave mixed reviews to the endless parade of pirate broadcasters who assailed their ears.

There is no information available on how long KTFT operated, but it is known that outlaw WGM was on for several years with a full and regular daily schedule. The pioneer pirate, WUMS in Ohio, was on for decades, commencing in 1925. Despite many efforts on the part of the government to silence WUMS, the station was operated very openly and its owner had "WUMS" on his Ohio license plates. The station was still active into the late 1970's and had issued a number of QSLs.

Hauled Into Court

The government wasn't at all unaware or indifferent to the so-called outlaws, it's just that the outlaws were not only plentiful but also doggedly determined to stay on the air as long as humanly possible. Although the outlaw operators were hassled by the government regularly, their standard defense tactic was to claim that their low-power daylight operations were of such limited coverage that the signals didn't cross state lines. As a result, such operations were not interstate in nature and were therefore outside the control of the federal government, at least that's what the broadcasters were

In September of 1979, CBS-TV presented its first show in the "California Fever" series. This program highlighted pirate radio by casting actor Jimmy McNichol as the operator of a station called "The Ghost of the Coast." The station was located in the back room of a teen hangout at an anonymous California beach.



claiming. Because Texas is so large, it was a prime area for outlaw operation in the early 1930's; broadcasters felt much more assured that their signals were not wandering off into other states.

When the operators of TEM-TEX, an outlaw in Temple, Texas, ran this defense up the flagpole, unfortunately the jury failed to salute. The operators of TEM-TEX were surprised to find themselves declared guilty and in 1934 the Radio Commission began a major crackdown in that state, moving through and yanking from the air as many outlaws as they could hear.

In commenting on the Radio Commission's attitude towards outlaws in 1934, Judge E. O. Sykes ignored the outlaws' claim that their operations were mostly in daylight hours when he noted, "Under the Radio Act, paramount consideration must be given to listeners. It is manifestly impossible to provide first-class reception from authorized stations, however modern their equipment or rigid the rules, if the signals of licensed stations are to be disturbed or distorted by signals from illegal stations. At the present state of the art it is not possible to erect a station for broadcasting purposes, operating at night, whose signals will not either extend beyond the borders of any state or be capable of causing interference with the reception of stations located outside that state, despite the use of low power. If the signals are not clear enough in an adjoining state to be heard by the general public, they will undoubtedly cause interference and play havoc with signals from authorized stations operating on the same or adjoining frequency."

A Lasting Tradition

Yes, outlaws were removed from the air but new ones have always seemed to replace those who fell in battle. The tradition has continued at varying levels of intensity, and with considerable changes in the orientation and nature of the stations involved. In the early 1960's, the tradition spread to Western Europe and spawned an influx of offshore pirates such as Radio Mercur, Radio London, Radio Caroline, Radio Veronica, and dozens of others.

Although you can't find any North American pirates written into the annals of broadcasting, certainly these stations have been in there plugging away for about 60 years. We thought it might be time to record here some of those pirates who operated between 1925 and 1979 and were discussed to one extent or other in the media.

Outlaw Callbook 1925-1979

KBIP: This was a station located by the FCC in the 1950's. It was operated by a 17-year-old who was (in the words of the FCC) "bright enough to be broadcasting but not bright enough to avoid detection by the FCC." KBIP was closed down by the FCC's Los Angeles office after being monitored by their Santa Ana facility. The operator said he had been "fooling around" and had selected a frequency which he thought would not cause interference.

KCBY: This seems to have been an alternate ID for King Kong Radio, 1203 kHz. 1969-era.

KDOR: Dick Dorwart, of Los Angeles, operated KDOR on 830 kHz. After being contacted by the FCC (in 1979), Dorwart voluntarily closed down KDOR, saying that he would apply for an "appropriate license."

KIDA: A pirate operating from Salida, Kan-



A radio publication of 1934 characterized the typical outlaw broadcaster in this cartoon. He was shown as an angry and wild-eyed fiend waving his arms around who was doggedly determined to jam licensed stations.

sas, just prior to the U.S. entering WWII. An early 1941 DX magazine said that its owner, one C. W. Trueblood, was being held on \$1,000 bail.

KIFS: Station reported in 1934, was located in Port Klamath, Oregon, and operating on 1510 kHz. Reported by a listener in San Francisco as good quality signal, playing records and announcing the time between each song.

KMRF: Supposedly operated by the Sun Theatre, Gretna, Nebraska, during 1931. Frequency was 1490 kHz.

KPON: During the 1950's, the FCC office in Portland, Oregon, and the area monitoring station combined forces to locate KPON. They found the location without too much difficulty. The woman who answered the door announced that, "My son isn't here, but I can show you the broadcast station if you like." Whereupon she led the way to the basement where a transmitter was located, along with a broadcast-type console which was being fed pre-recorded material from a large reel of tape. All of this was going out via a 50 foot antenna in the backyard. The whole operation had been built and operated by two friends, aged 16 and 17. The FCC pulled the plug.

KTFT: A 1931-era pirate operating on 1210 kHz from Seymour, Texas.

RXKR: Fabulous floating pirate of 1933. Was located aboard the S. S. CITY OF PANAMA and operated on 815 kHz with several thousand watts. Its story was told in the August '83 POP'COMM.

WAIR: Located in New Philadelphia, Ohio, and using 850 kHz in the early 1930's. See WJM.

WARD: This was actually, at one time, a fully licensed station in Brooklyn. It was licensed to the United States Broadcasting Corp. and ran 500 watts on 1400 kHz. In early 1936, the government refused to renew the license of WARD and, instead, awarded the use of the frequency to a proposed station which was to use the callsign WEGL. For some reason WEGL never took to the air, and WARD (which had a large listening audience) continued broadcasting for quite some

time after its license had expired, thanks to various court appeals. It was still on in late 1937. See WLTH.

WBBH: Operated between March and May of 1966, the shortwave (4970 kHz) broadcaster was supposedly run by the so-called "Courtland School of Music" from Rutgers, NJ. It asked for reports and freely sent out QSLs. When the FCC finally caught up with it, the 50 watt transmitter was found to be in Fair Lawn, NJ and operated by a young man 19 years of age. The operator and his assistant were happy to get off with only a warning.

WBBQ: Located in Hubbell, WV, and running 25 watts into a vertical steel radiator, WBBQ was closed down by the FCC in January of 1941. The young man who operated WBBQ was charged with violation of several sections of the Communications Act after area hams complained that WBBQ was causing interference.

WBTC: Reported as an outlaw station on 800 kHz by a listener in Swissvale, PA. This was in early 1934.

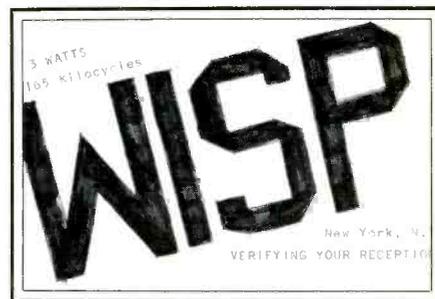
WCBX: A 1979 New York City station on 1620 kHz. Lots of rock music and plenty of outdated political recordings.

WCPR: This station, operating from Brooklyn, NY was on in 1975 and 1976 (until it was located by the FCC). Running 100 watts, it was heard over a wide area, took on-the-air 'phone calls, and issued QSLs.

WCPU: Possibly an heir to the WCPR mantle, and apparently affiliated with other New York City pirates of the day. The station appeared as soon as WCPR shut down and it remained active until 1979 while the FCC was eagerly trying to track it down. WCPU was on 1630 kHz.

WDBX: also known as **WPOT**, **WICE**, and **WFSR**. This station was located in Brooklyn, NY during 1978 and operated on 1620. There was an affiliation with WCPU and WGOR. Under the callsign WPOT it was heard at times into 1979. The 2nd harmonic of this station was also widely reported.

This flea-powered pirate sent out QSL cards to listeners as far away as Ohio. Both AM and CW were used for special broadcasts.



WDMC: This was a 7½-watt pirate operated by Willard G. Demuth from Uhrichsville, Ohio. In 1933 the station was on 800 kHz and sent out QSLs. Demuth claimed that the license application he had sent to the government had been denied but that he wanted to operate "in any event."

WDRF-FM: This is actually a licensed FM broadcaster in Hartford, Connecticut. For a few weeks, starting in December of 1974, and for reasons which were never understood, a former employee of WDRF-FM set up an unlicensed transmitter in his Meriden, CT home and rebroadcast WDRF-FM's signals on 1630 kHz—until the FCC closed down this relay station.

WFAT: See WGOR.

WFCC: See WGOR.

WFSR: See WDBX.

WGHP: In 1969 this station, announcing "With God's Help, Peace," operated regularly on 7285 kHz, carrying music, Mutual Network news, and "anti-establishment" commentary along with religious programming. Announced power as 50,000 watts. Unknown location.

WGM: Operated for many years from Jeanette, PA on 820, 840, and 860 kHz. In September '30 its owner, L. E. Spencer, was indicted on illegal broadcasting charges. The station shut down but soon came on again. In August '31 he was again indicted. In February '32 he was convicted and placed on parole for two years. WGM was on the air through the trial and didn't go off until February 17 when the judge handed down his decision. WGM later said it was filing for a license.

WGOR: Another well-known late 70's pirate. Also known as WFAT and WFCC, was operating on 1630 kHz. There was some sort of connection between WGOR and WCPU, and under the callsign WFAT (which issued QSLs), the station was heard from New York City into 1979 when it was shut down by the FCC after a 16 month hunt.

WH20: Heard during 1979 on 1620 kHz. New York City location.

WHBL: On for a brief period in early 1975. WHBL claimed that its 1620 kHz signals came from Bayonne, NJ.

WHGC: From late 1975 until March of 1976, this buccaneer was in operation on 1610 kHz from Charlottesville, VA. The gospel music station claimed to be running 1/10th of a watt fed into the power lines for local-only reception. When the FCC located the station, it was using a 50 watt transmitter. Station was operated by a minister's son from a room in his father's church. Several QSLs were issued by WHGC.

WICE: See WDBX.

WINT: A 1968 shortwave broadcaster on 6205 kHz. Location unknown.

WIRE: A 1932 pirate located in Philadelphia, being reported as having a fickle taste in frequen-

cies. It was reported on 720, 770, 780, 790, and 830 kHz.

WISP: A 3 watt New York City station on 1165 kHz in the late 1940's. Heard as far away as Ohio during special tests. Played music and offered commentaries. No regular schedule.

WJAE: Brookville, PA, 1030 kHz, mid-1933.

WJM: In early 1934, WAIR moved to the Lincoln Hotel, Massillon, Ohio, and changed its call to WJM. The 10-watter was mostly on 860 kHz, but also noted at times on 830, 840, and 850 kHz. QSLs signed by E.C. Whitney. Station Manager was Ray Wilson.

WJMS: In late 1969 this station was noted on 7320 kHz giving its location as "Free State, USA." Programs consisted mostly of Beatles recordings, announced by a pre-teen.

WJN: Heard in 1939, supposedly located in either Passaic, NJ or Brooklyn, NY. This station kept insisting it was licensed but it didn't appear in government records.

WKEN: New Kensington, PA, 850 kHz, early 1934 pirate.

WKUM: WKUM operated (on FM broadcast frequencies) only on Sunday nights, and each week from a different location near the U. of South Florida (Tampa area). Although programs were directed towards USF students, they were heard over a five mile range (and by the FCC). Last program was in the Spring of 1978, "WKUM, FM 104 Underground" was no more.

WLTE: A New York City pirate heard during 1979 on 1620 kHz. Heard early in the year, WLTE went off after a few months but started up again later in the year.

WLTH: This station was at one time fully li-

censed to a legitimate broadcasting company called "The Voice of Brooklyn." Running 500 watts on 1400 kHz, it shared time with WARD, but also lost its bid for license renewal in 1936 when the FCC turned over 1400 kHz to a new station to be known as WEGL. By late 1937, WLTH was still on the air due to continuing court appeals, although its license had expired.

WMKR: A 1932 pirate using 840 kHz from McKees Rocks, PA.

WMMO: A mid-60's pirate running 100 watts on 1550 kHz from Indiana.

WMMR: A shortwave pirate (7450 kHz) heard in mid-1978.

WNK: New Kensington, PA, 810 kHz, early 1934. May have been operated by same folks who brought you WKEN.

WOHH: This was an 8 watt pirate in Oxon Hill, MD operated by 27-year-old Fred A. Cresce. Operating on the FM band. Cresce said that he intended to provide "high quality audio" programming, something he claimed was not being offered by local broadcasters. Taking telephone requests and using local "live" talent, he operated WOHH until one night in April '74 when the FCC appeared at the door. At that time there were 15 people at the WOHH studios, including a guitar playing vocalist.

WPGA: In early 1934, WPGA was on 800 kHz from Greensburg, PA: 100% pirate!

WPOT: See WDBX.

WRB: Station in Bridgeport, CT in 1933. Was on 1510 kHz from 2 to 8 p.m. daily.

WRT: An Indiana, PA, station of mid-1933, operated daily on 800 kHz.

WSLY: Operating on 1200 kHz from a rural

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Here's the operating position of pirate station K-SOFT in Oklahoma. A few years ago, this station was on the FM band every day playing mellow music. Although it operated practically in the open, nobody ever complained to the FCC about it, not even the operators of the local hard rock licensed broadcaster.



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location in West Virginia, this station operates daylight hours on Sundays for the benefit of folks who live in one of the "hollers." Running 5 watts, it's been in operation since at least the early 1960's. Its operator claims never to have been hassled by the FCC. Programming consists of religious music and talks provided "live" by area residents, also some recordings.

WSVS: A station on the air from Buffalo, NY in the early 1930's. It ran 50 watts on 1370 kHz.

WTRO: Sykesville, PA, operated 4 to 5:45 p.m. daily and at various other times on 935 kHz during 1934.

WUMS: The pioneer unlicensed station which started out in Proctorville, Ohio, in 1925. It was still in existence three years ago as a portable transmitter retained by its owner, David F. Thomas of Florida. WUMS operated rather openly and issued its own QSL cards. Thomas had the FCC spending a lot of time trying to remove the station from the air and it was in and out of court many times, but feisty old Thomas just wouldn't call it quits. Several frequencies were

used, as was AM and CW modes. Special DX tests were broadcast to give listeners a chance at getting a QSL. It was widely reported.

WWSP: A Pennsylvania pirate of 1934 on 840 kHz. Announcing as "The Voice of South Hills," it claimed to run 2½ watts. Location was Pittsburgh. This station was still on the air in 1937, but had changed frequencies to 820 kHz.

WXMZ: An alternate call used by King Kong Radio, 1203 kHz, 1969.

YOKM: "The Voice of Yoakum" was a pirate in Yoakum, Texas in 1934. Possibly located in or connected with the Globe Theatre in Yoakum. The station was on 660 kHz and asked listeners to call in for prizes and gifts (their local phone number was "33"). Station operated from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; was obviously interested in local coverage only.

XYZ: A station operating daily in DuBois, PA, during 1933. Frequency was 1010 kHz.

Capital X: This was a station on 980 kHz supposedly operating from the Alamo Hotel in Austin, Texas, 1933-era.

"Crew": This was on 1620 kHz and apparently in Halifax, Nova Scotia, circa 1979. Although they asked for letters and 'phone calls, they never announced an address or a 'phone number.

"DNTX": This station was on 980 kHz from the Southern Hotel, in Denton, Texas back in 1933. The owner was R.E. Turner, who insisted that they were running 5 watts but had the equipment to use 50 watts; low power was used to keep the signals within Texas. The station operated 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Jolly Roger Radio": ID used by several stations prior to the most recent and well-known incarnation of the name. One of the earlier users was active in 1969 on 1580 kHz and announced a location of Cincinnati, Ohio. A fictitious telephone number was given out by the station.

"King Kong Radio": This is another popular callsign used by several different broadcasters at differing times, one as recently as 1974 on 6025 kHz. That one announced a location aboard a ship and may also have been calling itself "Radio Clandestine." An earlier version of KKR was in early 1969 when the station was also announcing itself as KCBY and WXMZ. Frequency announced was 1200 kHz (reported 1203 kHz), with a nice harmonic on 2400 kHz. The station was located in Massachusetts and operated by two high school students who, when caught, said they "weren't aware that they were operating in an illegal manner and promised to cease operations at once." The station was tracked down (and ultimately shut down) due to the repeated efforts of DXer Hank Bennett. He claimed that "One monitoring session revealed a recording supposedly made by a well-known night-club entertainer. This particular program can be classified only as obscene." Bennett said that he twice wrote to the FCC about KKR and when they refused to acknowledge his complaints, he tracked it down and complained to the principal of the school the KKR operators attended.

"Radio Clandestine": This station was on 6030 kHz in 1974 and claimed to be located aboard a ship. It was probably in a northeastern state, possibly identical to "King Kong Radio."

"Radio Liberation": A radio enthusiast in Oak Hill, FL, taped program materials from international broadcasters he heard and then rebroadcast them on 7426 kHz via his own transmitter, which he dubbed "Radio Liberation." In late April, 1979, the FCC liberated the station.

"TEM-TEX Radio": It was a 1934 bootlegger in Temple, Texas. The operators of the station, Fred Bitterman and Albert Cox, were found guilty in a jury trial. Their conviction upset the defense of many unlicensed stations in Texas that their low power kept their signals within the state and hence were not subject to interstate control. After their conviction, the Federal Radio Commission moved on dozens of pirates in Austin, Dallas, Houston, Fort Worth, and other cities.

W9ISH: This was a licensed ham station operated by Norman D. Sather of Minneapolis, Minnesota. In January of 1941, his license was suspended for six months because the FCC said he "used his station for broadcasting entertainment, addressed radio communications to the general public, solicited telephone calls from radio listeners, and made transmissions to points equipped only with receiving apparatus."

W9OCF: Operated by Cyril A. Streblov, St. Paul, Minnesota, this station had its ham license suspended in January 1941 for the same reasons as W9ISH, except that W9OCF was also charged with permitting "the emission of the unmodulated radio carrier wave thereof for extended periods of time when the radio station was not in actual communication with other radio stations."

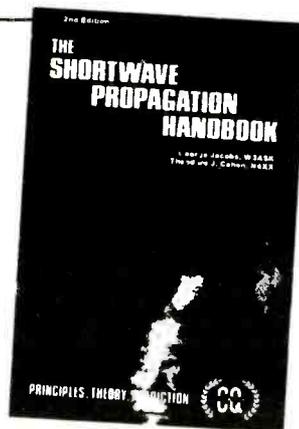
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