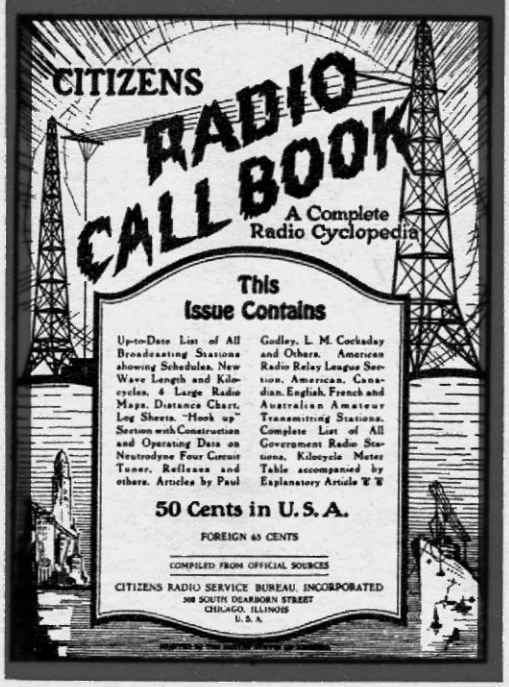
CB Special Section

How the FCC Stole CB



A short tale reveals the facts about who really got the CB ball rolling.

By ALAN LEVESQUE

AS with most things which issue forth from the halls of Washington, CB was a long time brewing in the pot before the first 27-mc signal was flung out into the ether. Governmental agencies like the FCC have been begging, borrowing and stealing ideas ever since our Constitution was written and the annals of CB now seem to verify this age-old tradition.

One of the most amazing predictions about CB we've seen this side of Nostradamus was an accurate description (right down to the use of the words Citizens Radio) which appeared in 1938, a full seven years before the creation of the service. It would be hard to believe the Commission failed to exercise its rights and didn't take notice of this unique proposal!

It turned up in a short letter written to the Editor of the amateur radio magazine, *QST*, which appeared in the November 1938 issue. Under the bold heading Citizens Radio appeared the thoughts of Herbert Brooks, W9SDG, of Port Wing, Wisc.

In the letter, Brooks said that the "Federal Government should . . . permit non-licensed operators to use sealed, fixed-tuned transmitters." Further, he says that this is desirable because there is a public need for low-power, portable rigs which "is not filled by commercial, experimental, or amateur licenses, especially . . . intercommunication between salesmen and truck drivers and the home office, and between small-town fire and police departments that cannot afford an operator, plus many other uses."

However, Mr. Brooks was ahead of his time. Technology had not yet advanced to the point where W9SDG's low-power, portable rig could be designed and then be produced commercially. Besides that, there wasn't any suitable spectrum space for the service to operate in—in 1938, all frequencies above 25 mc were strictly experimental.

Actually, one could say our story begins back in 1920 with the first known use of the term Citizens Radio. This was in the title of a semi-annual publication known as *The Citizens Radio Call Book* (see photo), which was published by the Citizens Radio Service Bureau, Inc., 580 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. The book was a directory containing callsigns, names and addresses of ham operators. Why they chose to use the title Citizens Radio instead of Amateur Radio is lost in the dust of 50 years. Most likely, the expression Amateur Radio hadn't taken hold at the time and the name Citizens Radio was still in the running for public approval. In any event, the name Citizens Radio has a genealogy which dates it back even 18 years before the proposal of W9SDG that appeared in QST.

World War II changed practically everything but it wasn't until 1944, as the end of the war was in sight, that someone trotted out the old Citizens Radio idea again for another lap around the track. Reasons? The needs of

the war had propelled radio technology toward the new frontiers of UHF and even microwaves, and the war had created thousands of veterans who were familiar with radio communications. Besides, there was now all that wartime radio gear which would soon be surplus.

Those were some of the reasons behind the first draft of CB ever to be presented officially to the government. It was an obscure project bearing the ornate title of The World War II Veterans Amateur Mobile Service Band. The originator of the proposal was former Director of Naval Communications, Rear Admiral Stanford C. Hooper (Ret.).

Speaking at the FCC frequency allocation hearings held during late 1944, Admiral Hooper said that the FCC "assign a new band, perhaps 2,000 mc wide, somewhere above 10,000 mc, to be known as The World War II Veterans Amateur Mobile Service Band for use by private passenger automobiles in any way they wish, with one provision that there be designated a few calling channels within this band, and it be, for awhile, only licensed to veterans."

Admiral Hooper added that, "thousands of experts in radio will be returning as veterans of this war, full of experience in new ways of using radio in crowded areas in the services and full of ideas and ambition, as to the parts they may play in the future in the application of new electronics services for the advantage of the public. It would be a gracious thing to give them special consideration in the ether, for a short period, especially where there is no demand for channels, and the public would profit from the developments which are certain to result."

Admiral Hooper's idea was never mentioned again but his speech must have rekindled the memory of somebody at the FCC who happened to be a regular reader of *QST*. In January of 1945, just after the Hooper plan was announced, the FCC took unusually rapid action in announcing their famous CB Docket (#6651).

The name Citizens Radio was resurrected, while the project appeared to be a selection of ideas gently lifted from both W9SDG and Admiral Hooper, plus a few technical standards from the FCC tossed in to fill in the gaps. The probability of the same ideas and exact name reappearing together seven years after W9SDG's *QST* letter seems outside the realm of coincidence.

At any rate, the Docket was there in all of its official glory. The idea was to set aside a band running from 460 to 470 mc for the Citizens Radiocommunication Service. Taking sole credit for the idea, the FCC went on to rehash the ideas of Brooks about using the service for trucks, emergency agencies, etc.

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And what a service it was to be! It was a CBer's fantasyland of rural stations running high power, booster and automatic relay stations, no specific channel assignments and plenty of room for future frequency expansion as the service grew. All of this was topped off with the FCC's generous announcement that "the possible uses of this service are as broad as the imagination of the public . . . can devise" and with the promise that ". . . only the minimum requirements of the Communications Act plus a few minimum traffic rules will be set up." The FCC even added that it would take an imperative need before they would resort to any limiting regulations.

The first CB station to fire up was W2XQD, licensed in February 1947 to John M. Mulligan, a radio engineer from Elmira, N.Y. Using homemade equipment, Mulligan was able to maintain spotty communications on tempermental UHF channels only by means of a secondary 152-mc circuit which was used by CB operators to keep track of feeble and shifting UHF signals. Even after an extensive souping up, the receivers wouldn't permit communications much past 5 mi.

This was a blow to early hopes for the CB service and by the end of 1947 there were only 40 licensed CBers. Nevertheless, the radio magazines were jammed with ads for all sorts of surplus UHF gear which could be purchased for as little as $5 per set and be adapted to operate as a CB rig.

The few CBers licensed in the UHF band relied heavily on this surplus equipment. There was some commercial CB gear, but it was hard to find because the entire electronics industry could muster but two manufacturers willing to attempt to produce the new gear —and the sales of these two companies were most disappointing.

CB would have been considered dead if it hadn't been for the fact that it had never really come to life. It simply remained in a twilight sleep, forgotten and ignored for about 10 years, until the FCC finally decided to once again drum up new interest in Mr. Brooks' old ideas.