



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

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John Geary dropped by the other day. That feisty Navy veteran, now retired from his second career selling Pacifica real estate, brought me a page out of QST, the radio amateur's magazine.

John's hobby of amateur radio probably goes back farther than he'd care to remember. His Navy experiences, his uncompromising opinions, his pioneering work in Pacifica civil defense would each be worth a full-fledged Tribune feature article. He's that kind of person.

THE MAGAZINE carried the obituary of Ralph Heintz, who was 88 when he died last May. Heintz was a pioneer inventor of radio transmitters. He had over 200 patents in radio and other fields.

Heintz was also one of the founders, in the mid-20s, of Globe Wireless. It's been a long jump from those days of heavy, hot and huge vacuum tubes to the present, when the emphasis is on cool transistors and microminiaturization, and communication is a routine matter of bouncing a signal off a globe-girdling satellite.

But it started with men like Ralph Heintz and companies like Globe Wireless. And what is now Pacifica was one of its nerve centers.

NEXT TIME YOU'RE hamburgering at McDonalds, take a few minutes and drive north a couple of blocks. Hidden by some old trees, a sturdy building on the ocean side is all that is left of Globe Wireless in Pacifica.

For 35 or 40 years Globe Wireless, from its acres of Coastside antennas transmitted messages from San Francisco around the world.

Trans-Pacific transmission was routine. And it was from what is now Pacifica that early Antarctic explorers kept in touch with the nation.

TRANSMISSIONS continued elsewhere, but our area's involvement dwindled away as developers like Henry Doelger closed in. Houses, schools and freeways replaced the acres of poles and long wires.

I learned the pleasures of long-distance radio in the mid-40s, as a teenager in Santa Rosa. I could never get the hang of Morse code, so the world of amateur transmitting was closed to me, but I was fascinated to listen on my little Hallicrafters receiver to radio stations around the world.

I listened to standard broadcast stations like WHO in Des Moines and KSL in Salt Lake. Once I heard KDKA in Pittsburgh. Wow!

BUT IT WAS short wave that provided the real thrills. Sometimes, of course, the Russian language that I patiently endured for an hour turned out to be the Voice of America in Redwood City, but more often that disappointment was compensated by Radio Australia's raucous kookaburra bird, or the beautiful opening tones of "O Canada," or the booming and familiar Big Ben from London.

Each day I would take potluck from Radio New Zealand, or Radio Nederland; or HCJB, "The Voice of the Andes," Quito, Ecuador; or Radio Moscow; or OTC, my favorite, broadcasting from the Belgian Congo.

It was a great way to learn geography...and patience. I owe Ralph Heintz and his fellow pioneers in radio a debt of gratitude. We all do.