

A Place Signed with Honor

Motivated by a strong feeling that Amateur Radio operators who died while engaged in public service deserve a lasting honor, a group of Michigan hams created the Monument to Fallen Hams.



This story begins at the July 1989 ARRL Board of Directors meeting in Newington, Connecticut, where the Board accepted a petition from five radio clubs in Michigan to host the 1991 ARRL National Convention. Grateful for the Board's confidence in them and in response to a suggestion of then ARRL Vice Director George Race, WB8BGY, members of the host group began discussing an appropriate "thank you" gift to the Amateur Radio community. The group wanted the gift to be significant, something that would reflect an important element of Amateur Radio and Michigan's Amateur Radio community.

An idea arose from one foggy memory. *QST* had reported that an Amateur Radio operator had died in the southwestern US while involved in public service. No one on the Convention Committee could recall the person's name. Some had never heard of his death. If he had been forgotten, who else might have died in public service and been forgotten?

The idea crystallized in the questioner's mind: Why not eliminate those foggy memories? Why not make the "gift" a permanent reminder of heroism for all to see? Its form could be a high quality memorial to those Amateur Radio operators who had died serving their communities and country.

The Work Begins

Presentations were made in July and August 1989 to members of the five sponsoring organizations: Bay Area Amateur Radio Club, Genesee County Radio Club, Lapeer County Amateur Radio Association, Saginaw Valley Amateur Radio Association and Shiawassee Amateur Radio Association. The concept of "Public Ser-

vice" as presented included both disaster-related public service communication and other public service activities not necessarily related to a disaster. The criteria for inclusion on the monument would be death in the performance of duty as a volunteer involved in Amateur Radio communication activities. Individuals who might have been licensed amateurs who died in the course of their employment or in the course of military duty were to be excluded from this monument and honored in some other way.

The project was approved quickly. Initial solicitations took place in September. In light of the terrorist events of 2001, it is interesting to note that the very first dollars to honor those who gave their lives in public service were given on September 11, 1989. Records show on that date Virginia Jaikens,

KA8CPS; Harlan Bero, N8GNH, and George Cassidy, N8ETO, each contributed to the National Monument Fund.

Estimates for the cost of the monument were obtained from the Forest Lawn Granite and Bronze Works of Bay County, Michigan. Dave Erway of Forest Lawn suggested that four elements comprise the monument. Its upper portion would be cut from Black Mist Granite in the shape of the ARRL diamond. The diamond measured 4 feet 6 inches tall and 2 feet 3 inches across. The bottom portion would be cut from Barre Granite and measured 4 feet wide and 2 feet 8 inches tall. Mounted on it would be a 12-inch square brass dedication plaque. A poured concrete base would be installed at Newington at a cost of approximately



The brass plaque on the monument to fallen hams explains its purpose.

Several of the names and call signs engraved on the monument, which stands on the grounds of ARRL Headquarters in Newington, Connecticut.



\$1000. The Committee's final cost of the finished monument was \$10,121.00. In addition, the ARRL paid the cost of installing the concrete base at Newington.

A variety of announcements and promotions were used to identify potential honorees for the monument and to solicit funds. There were articles in *QST* and other magazines. Packet radio was used to disseminate information about the monument nationwide. Regional and state-wide discussions were hosted on miscellaneous phone nets and informational messages passed on the QMN CW net.

Nominations Arrive

The first written communication regarding nominations was received October 20, 1990. It was not really a nomination, but a reminder from Joe Mullen, W1ASI, that two hams had died while participating in public service during the eruption of Mount St Helens in May 1980. A few weeks later, in November and then in December, the first formal nominations were received for the two hams who'd perished at Mount St Helens: Reid Blackburn, KA7AMF, and Gerald O. Martin, W6TQF. The men were jointly nominated by Buzz Malbica, WB7M. Marianna, W7WFO, and Ty Kearney, W7WPF, nominated W6TQF.

February 1991 brought a nomination from the Briarpatch Amateur Radio Club of Galax, Virginia. Club members nominated Charles G. Litz, WD4DKF, who was electrocuted in 1979 while working with the Boy Scouts of America during the annual Jamboree-on-the-Air.

The following month, Arizona Section Manager James E. Swafford, W7FF, nominated Kenneth A. Rodrigues, W7KCM. Mr Rodrigues was engaged in an American National Red Cross drill at a Phoenix, Arizona airport when he died of a heart attack in February 1989.

In March 1991, Bonnie Girard, N6YXQ, nominated her cousin, Arthur "Pete" Vela, K5YLU, who had been killed in May 1983 by a building that collapsed after being buffeted by an unexpected storm containing winds estimated in excess of 100 mi/h. He had died at the Jefferson County (Texas) airport while engaged in a public service activity for Hughen School. It turned out that K5YLU was the ham from the southwest whose *QST* obituary had provided the original impetus for the monument.

The Committee received its final nominee prior to the Convention dedication ceremony in a letter from J. P. "Bill" Sandefer, ND5C, who nominated Dan Richard Moffett, N5MOR. Dan had died of a heart attack while in the middle of passing a message as part of a Military Amateur Radio System (MARS) communication network.

Postscript

Following the dedication of the original monument, the five clubs and the ARRL agreed that a standing committee would continue to review applications for new nominees. The committee members were: Harold "Smokey" Chambers, KA8ONX (now a silent key); Charlotte A. O'Connor, WD8RIM; Earl V. Ramey, WB8SIJ, and Joe Turner, K8CQF.

Since the original dedication the committee has received three nominations, two of which were approved. Two additional names are now inscribed on the monument. Robert V. Allard, KA1SJE, who was participating in the Rhode Island Lung Association Ocean State Bike Trek, died of cardiac arrest in August 1991. Frank Almeida III, WR1R, submitted his nomination. Shirley A. Emmerich, N9JKB, was participating in an ARES exercise near Tomahawk, Wisconsin, at the time of her death. She died in February 1992 of cardiac arrest. Her nomination was submitted by Walter T. Dieter, N9CLE.

We ask for your help in identifying other Amateur Radio operators who died in an Amateur Radio related public service activity. Nominators must provide the following information: a copy of the death certificate of the nominee; media clippings documenting the death of the nominee; a signed written letter or other document requesting that the nominee's name be included on the monument with information regarding circumstances surrounding the death, the nominee's call sign and other details of importance to the nominator. Include contact information so committee members may follow up with nominators.

Today, as it was in this quote from a 1989 packet message, "to be qualified for inclusion on the monument, the deceased must have died while performing as part of an Amateur Radio communication network that was not part of a military action." That is, this award is for amateurs who died as civilians.

Nominations should be mailed to ARRL Chief Executive Officer David Sumner, K1ZZ, 225 Main St, Newington, CT 06111.

You belong to an exemplary avocation recognized internationally for its contributions to humankind. Tell these stories to others. Discover what you can of our heritage. Reflect on September 11, 2001 and prepare yourself to respond to future communication needs by becoming active in programs such as ARES, RACES and the National Traffic System. Should you have stories you'd like to share regarding the history of Amateur Radio and public service, the author would be delighted to hear them.

Surprisingly, there were no nominations from the early and middle decades of the 20th century. As the Convention approached, the Monument Committee reviewed nominations and documentation. Nominations were cut off on July 31 in preparation for the official dedication ceremony, which was scheduled for the Saturday of the Convention, August 24.

Before the dedication, the last few details of monument construction were completed. A script for the bronze plate located at the base was agreed upon. Instead of focusing on the five groups that had fostered the idea of the monument, the script says: *This monument was conceived by Amateur Radio operators from the state of Michigan in order to perpetually honor those "hams" who died in service to the public.*

The Monument Committee discussed at some length an appropriate verse to be placed directly above the names of the deceased. The decision was made to use a line from a poem by Stephen Spender, "I Think Continually of Those who were Truly Great." The poem ends:

**Born of the sun they traveled
a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed
with their honor.**

The advocate for Spender's verse was Dave Norris, N8HKV. The Committee chose to have the text *Those recognized here left the "air" signed with their honor* inscribed in the Monument above information about the deceased.

The Ceremony

The formal dedication ceremony at which the ARRL accepted the monument and the names of those who would be the initial honorees took place at 2 PM. The program concluded with a somber reading of the names of each of the nominees and brief descriptions of the circumstances surrounding their deaths. David Sumner, K1ZZ, accepted the monument and offered remarks on behalf of the ARRL.

There is a special place situated in a grassy area in between the two main structures occupying the ARRL HQ grounds. Soft New England breezes gently caress tufts of grass there. The tufts of grass lie adjacent to concrete. The concrete forms the base of a granite monument. Not only is the granite etched with names of Amateur Radio operators who have given the ultimate sacrifice, but it is permeated with the aura, the essence, the intelligence and the will of all those who preceded them. Drop by ARRL Headquarters at 225 Main St, Newington, Connecticut, and soak it in.

Joe Turner, K8CQF, was Co-Chairman of the 1991 ARRL National Convention. You can reach him at 520 Jameson St, Saginaw, MI 48602; K8CQF@arrrl.net. 