Remembering Bill Tynan, W3XO

There are moments in Amateur Radio that go far beyond circuits, antennas, and propagation charts. Moments where the people behind the knowledge matter more than the knowledge itself. This is one of those moments.

For many years, I read the words of William A. Tynan in both *QST* and, most especially, in CQ Magazine's *"The World Above 50 MHz"* column. Like many of us who found our way into VHF and UHF weak signal operating, I didn't just read those articles—I absorbed them. They helped shape how I thought about radio, how I built stations, and ultimately how I operated. His writing had a way of taking something complex and making it feel not only understandable, but exciting.

Bill wasn't just writing about the hobby—he was actively helping define it. Much of what we take for granted today in VHF/UHF operating—from calling frequencies, to grid square awareness, to weak signal techniques—was influenced, guided, or outright championed by him.

But this isn't a technical article.

This isn't about system noise figures, antenna patterns, or propagation modes—though Bill mastered all of those.

This is about the man.

I had the personal honor of meeting Bill in the early 2000s, around 2006 or 2007. What started as simply meeting someone I had long respected quickly turned into something much more meaningful. We became friends. He joined the HAMsters. And suddenly, the voice I had followed for years in print was sitting across from me, sharing ideas, telling stories, and offering guidance.

I learned a tremendous amount from Bill—not just from what he wrote, but from the time we spent together. There was something special about sitting at his Hill Country home, talking through projects, operating ideas, and the future of VHF/UHF. He had a way of making you think deeper, question assumptions, and at the same time, enjoy every minute of it.

We had just begun working together on a project—putting some dishes together and exploring where it might lead—when his illness took a turn. About five months later, he was gone.

Bill's mentoring played a huge role in my early development in VHF/UHF weak signal operating. And more importantly, his influence continues to shape how I approach the hobby today.

It's easy for names like his to slowly fade into the background as technology moves forward and new operators come into the hobby. But that shouldn't happen. Not with someone who gave so much, and helped build so much of what we now stand on.

And like many truly creative minds, Bill had interests beyond what most of the amateur radio world ever saw—something many people don't realize is that he also authored a number of romance novels. He was a varied-interest kind of person, and that creative spirit showed itself in more ways than one.

So this isn't about technical analysis.

This is about remembering a mentor, a friend, and one of the true pioneers of the "world above 50 MHz."

And making sure his impact is never forgotten.

Amateur Radio Satellite Pioneer, Past AMSAT President Bill Tynan, W3XO, SK A giant of the Amateur Radio satellite world has fallen. William A. "Bill" Tynan, W3XO, of Kerrville, Texas, died on August 7, following a lengthy illness. A past AMSAT President and the editor of QST's "The World Above 50 MHz" column from 1975 until 1992.

As a youngster in Washington, DC, he was entranced by shortwave broadcasts and police radio traffic on his three-band table radio. "I started listening to hams on 20 meters and was hooked by the thought of becoming one," Tynan said in his Amateur Radio biography, My Radio Life. That didn't happen until after World War II in 1946, when he became W3KMV. He was an early enthusiast and proponent of FM, which helped to put him on his path to broadcasting, VHF, and ham radio satellites.

In late 1951, he signed on with the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, where he worked on US Navy weapons system projects. He rose to the level of Senior Staff Engineer before retiring in 1988, when he and his wife Mattie relocated to the Hill Country of Texas.

In 1961, Tynan and Bob Carpenter, W3OTC (SK), founded the Washington, DC, market's first FM stereo station, WHFS in Bethesda, Maryland. After he passed his Amateur Extra exam in 1974, Tynan opted for W3XO, the call sign of Washington's first FM radio station in the experimental years.

His eager curiosity for VHF and above led him in 1969 to attend the first meeting of what would become AMSAT. He would become AMSAT President in 1991, serving for 7 years and rubbing shoulders with other Amateur Radio satellite titans. In his later years, Tynan served as AMSAT's OSCAR Number Administrator, the individual who confers alphanumeric designators on qualifying Amateur Radio satellites. He

stepped down from that volunteer role in July after 2 decades of service.

Through his QST column, Tynan was an early proponent of using grid squares as VHF/UHF contest multipliers. That led directly to ARRL's VUCC operating award program for 50 MHz and above. He also was a strong proponent of establishing beacon stations on VHF as well as a DX window and 50.125 MHz domestic calling frequency on 6 meters, and later 144.200 MHz on 2 meters.

Tynan played a key role as AMSAT's Vice President for Human Spaceflight (earlier "Manned Space") in convincing NASA to permit Amateur Radio operation from the space shuttles. The early SAREX (Shuttle Amateur Radio EXperiment) led to the current Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) program that offers students a chance to speak directly to International Space Station (ISS) crew members via ham radio. He also was a significant supporter of the ARISS interoperable radio system project, soon set to fly to the ISS.

From QRZ.COM
I passed the amateur license exam and, at the same time, the First Class Radio Telephone license exam in the fall of 1945. Early in 1946, I received the call, W3KMV.

My first operating was at W2SZ, the Club Station at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. We put a pre-War National 600 transmitter on 10 meters just as Solar Cycle 18 was rising and had a ball working Gs and DL4s (US troops stationed in Germany) as well as many Ws and South American stations.

Later, I built a 6V6 crystal oscillator rig on a piece of wood and operated on 80 meter CW from my dorm room. Still later, I built an 829 rig for 6 meters, but was never able to work anything from my dorm with a dipole hanging out the window - not surprising. But, I successfully used that rig after graduation, first from my parents' apartment in Silver

Spring, MD and in 1950 and 51 in St. Paul, MN. I had taken a job with Minneapolis Honeywell and later with KUOM, the University of Minnesota's 5 kW AM radio station. From the Twin Cities, during the summer 1951 Es season, I worked 22 states with the 829 rig using a dipole strung across the ceiling of a rented third floor room.

Retuning to the DC area in late 1951, I took a job with the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory where I worked on a number of US Navy weapons systems projects including such missiles as Talos, Standard Missile and Tomahawk. I retired from JHU/APL in 1988.

I continued my interest in 6 meters and the higher bands during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, but also branched out into HF, working all bands from 160 to 10 meters. In 1962, I became a member of the Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC), one of the Nation's premiere contest clubs. From well known and accomplished PVRC members, I learned a lot about contest operating. In 1970 I obtained operating privileges in the Netherlands Antilles, with the call, PJ9AF and journeyed to Curacao to operate the CQ Worldwide Phone Contest. With a lot of help from my companion operator, Al Roussau, W1FJJ, we managed to win in the Multi-Single category for the World with over 48K points.

Due to a little more than some peer pressure from my PVRC friends, I passed the Extra Class exam in 1974 and received my present call two years later. W3XO was the call of Washington's first FM broadcast station, and as a long-time enthusiast of FM radio, I wanted that call. In 1961, that enthusiasm had led me, with my friend Bob Carpenter, W3OTC, to apply for and receive a construction permit for an FM broadcast station in Bethesda, MD. Our station, WHFS hit the air in November 1961. The Washington area had its first Stereo FM station.

Though I enjoyed HF operating, especially DX and contests, my first love was still VHF and the higher bands as well as space. Early in 1969,

I attended the first meeting of what became AMSAT and later served as VP of Operations as well as on the organization's Board of Directors. In late 1991, I became AMSAT's President and served in that capacity for seven years. Following that, I was Board Chairman for another five years, stepping down from active participation in 2003.

As a result of my AMSAT Board affiliation I met Bill Dunkerly, WA2INB who was then Managing Editor of QST. Bill knew that I had been writing a column for Forecast FM, a Washington/Baltimore magazine, and meeting monthly deadlines; as well as my interest in the VHF and higher bands. Needing someone to take over QST's VHF column, he asked me if I would be interested.

Needless to say, I jumped at the chance. My first World above 50 MHz column appeared in April, 1975 and the last in November 1992.

Before leaving Maryland I operated on all of the bands from 160 to 432 MHz. - racking up 37 states on 2 meters and all 50 states on 6 meters. I was able to work aurora even up through 432 MHz.

My wife and I moved to our present Texas Hill Country QTH outside Kerrville in late 1988. At this location, just above 30 degree north latitude, I have heard aurora only twice and made only a few 2 meter 'buzz' mode contacts, and none on the higher bands.

However there are compensations. On 6 meters, I have worked some 125 entities from here in Texas as well as 29 states on 2 meters. In addition to an almost total lack of aurora, I find the 144 MHz band is very different in EM00 than in Maryland, FM19. Though aurora is not viable here, I have been able to work both coasts, with many contacts across the Gulf to Florida via tropo and a number with California stations via Es. The density of VHF stations is much less here than in the northeast, but, because of the flat terrain, under normal conditions,, one can easily work reasonably well equipped stations 250 to 300 miles

away on 2 meters as well as on 222 and 432. My first contact ever on 1296 was with a station in Louisiana, at over 450 miles. I have worked Florida on all bands from 50 MHz through 3456 MHz, and hold one end of the North American record for both 2304 and 3456.

In addition to being a Life member of ARRL and AMSAT, my radio-related organizations include the Hill Country Amateur Radio Club, the Radio Club of America, QCWA, Sidewinders on Two (SWOT) and the Six Meter International Radio Klub (SMIRK). I currently serve as Treasurer of SMIRK and as a member of its Board of Directors.

I am currently rebuilding my station around a Flex 5000A with installed V/U module and Down East Microwave transverters for 222 and 1296 MHz.

I still like contesting, but confine that activity, as I do all of my activities, to 50 MHz and above.