



ARCOVER

August 2024 Special Edition



Editors Note:

I missed some pages of Garys article in the August edition. Here is the complete article.

Lifelong Ham Radio Friendships and the FRRL

The longest friendship I had with an FRRL member was 61 years. The story of the friendship between Lou Petkus K9LUW (later K9LU) and I (K9MMS) had its beginning via a "chance" meeting on the air when Lou and I were both young Novice class licensees. In June of 1958, Lou and I had a CW QSO on 40 meters on 7171 kHz (kc back then) when we were both still "rock bound" (required to use frequency control via plug-in quartz crystal units). In those days, part of the requirement to obtain a Novice class license was to pass a test using Morse Code at 5 wpm, so our QSO probably progressed rather slowly at those speeds.

As was customary in those days, we quickly exchanged QSL cards via mail after that QSO. At that time, Lou was 16 years old and lived in Oswego, IL, and I was 14 years old and lived in Angola, IN. I saved the QSL card I received from Lou in June 1958, and I still have my original paper logbook documenting that QSO.

Very sadly, Lou became a silent key in June 2019 at age 77. After Lou passed away, I managed the sale of many of his radio items, and sometime later, I found his original logbook from 1958. Later, I found Lou's entry in the log for that June 1958 QSO between KN9LUW and KN9MMS.

To my great surprise and delight, Lou's wife Val, very recently found a box of Lou's old QSL cards. After I gained access to that box, I eagerly searched to see if my QSL from that June 1958 CW QSO was in the box. After going about halfway through the box, there it was – the QSL card I had sent to Lou in June 1958! Wow, what a great find and happy moment.

I have included photos of both of those QSL cards as well as portions of each of our logbooks, which contain the entries for that QSO of long ago. The information on the QSL cards indicates our ages and the equipment we were using. It is apparent that this was in the days before postal zip codes, and postage costs were significantly less back then as well.

I did not have a radio station of my own in 1958, but I often made the short walk (about 5 blocks) from home to the HS building to use the new radio station there. One of the science teachers was able to get permission to use a small room to set up a ham radio station, and I helped him get it set up one weekend. Since there was an engineering college in Angola, there were a couple of electronics equipment and parts stores in town. One was Lakeland Electronics, owned and operated by W9FEI Harold Stevens. Harold very generously donated a Johnson Viking Ranger transmitter and a Hammarlund HQ-110 receiver to the high school for the new ham radio station. Of course, this was to the delight of the several students and a few faculty members who recently obtained their Novice licenses. Harold administered my Novice exam at his station in the store.

A significant number of high school students, and a few faculty members obtained their first ham radio licenses (most started as Novice class) in the spring of 1958. Tri State engineers college was located in Angola, IN, and one of the HS teachers arranged for one of the EE professors to regularly come to the HS and give (voluntary) evening classes on radio theory at the HS. Morse Code was also taught, and the school had purchased a set of Ameco 78 rpm vinyl records for practice copying code at various speeds. During the summer, I obtained an ARRL license manual and often borrowed the 1958 ARRL Handbook from the library. I often borrowed the code practice records as well. During the summer, I studied for the General class exam.

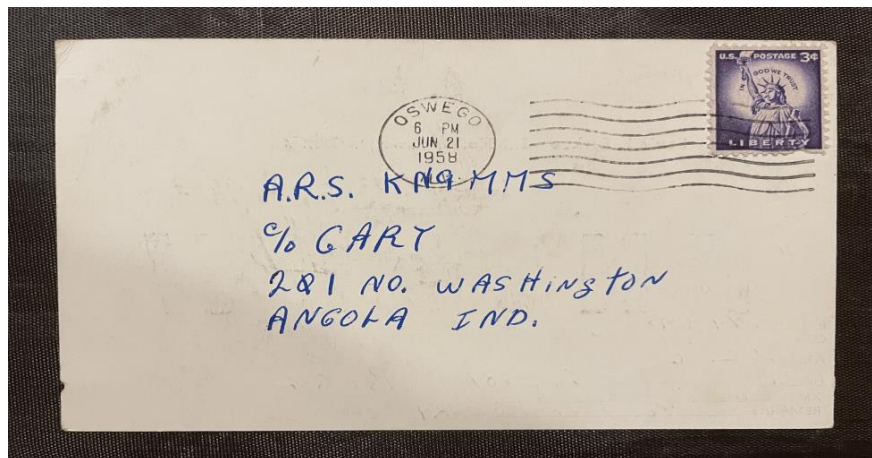
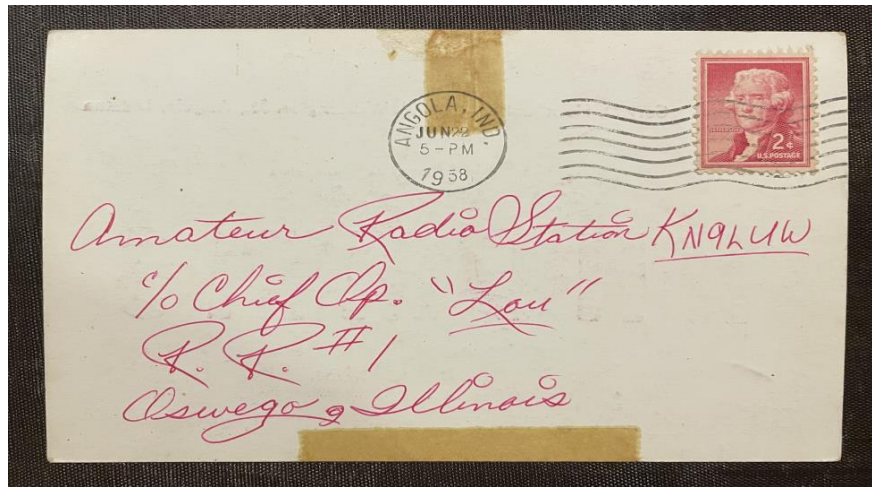
In August, my Dad drove me to the FCC Field Office in Fort Wayne, IN, and I took and passed the written exam and the 13-wpm sending and receiving Morse code test. In those days, part of the license exam was being able to draw circuit schematic diagrams. (I remember practicing that during the summer as well.) Near the end of August, I received my new, General class license from the FCC, via mail, and was able to drop the N from my call. Unlike today, in those days, getting the license after the exam took a while -- waiting for the FCC to process the application, print the license, and send it in the postal mail.

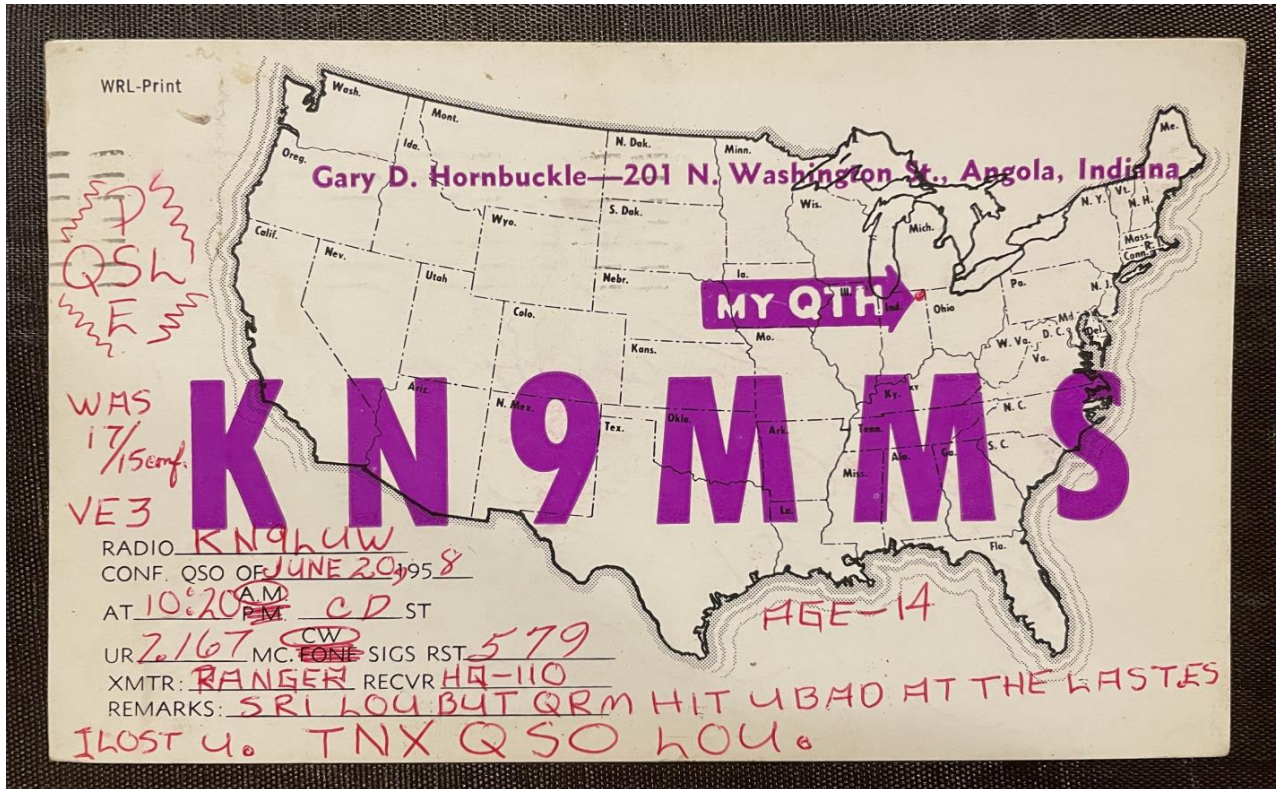
DATE TIME	STATION CALLED	CALLED BY	HIS FREQ. OR DIAL	HIS SIGNALS RST	MY SIGNALS RST	FREQ. MC.	EMIS- SION TYPE	POWER INPUT WATTS	TIME OF ENDING QSO	OTHER DATA
10:20	KN9LUW	KN9MMS	7.167	579	579	7.171	A1	75	12:02	KOU OSWEGO, Ill.
12:08	KN9MGN	KN9MMS	7.168	589	599	7.171	A1	75	12:45	KENT WEST FRANKFORT, Ill. AGN
3:00	EQ	KN9MMS				7.177	A1	50		N.C.
3:10	KN9LWP	KN9MMS	7.1			7.177	A1	50		N.C.
4:20	CC	KN9MMS				7.177	A1	50		N.C.

From the first logbook of KN9MMS – June 1958

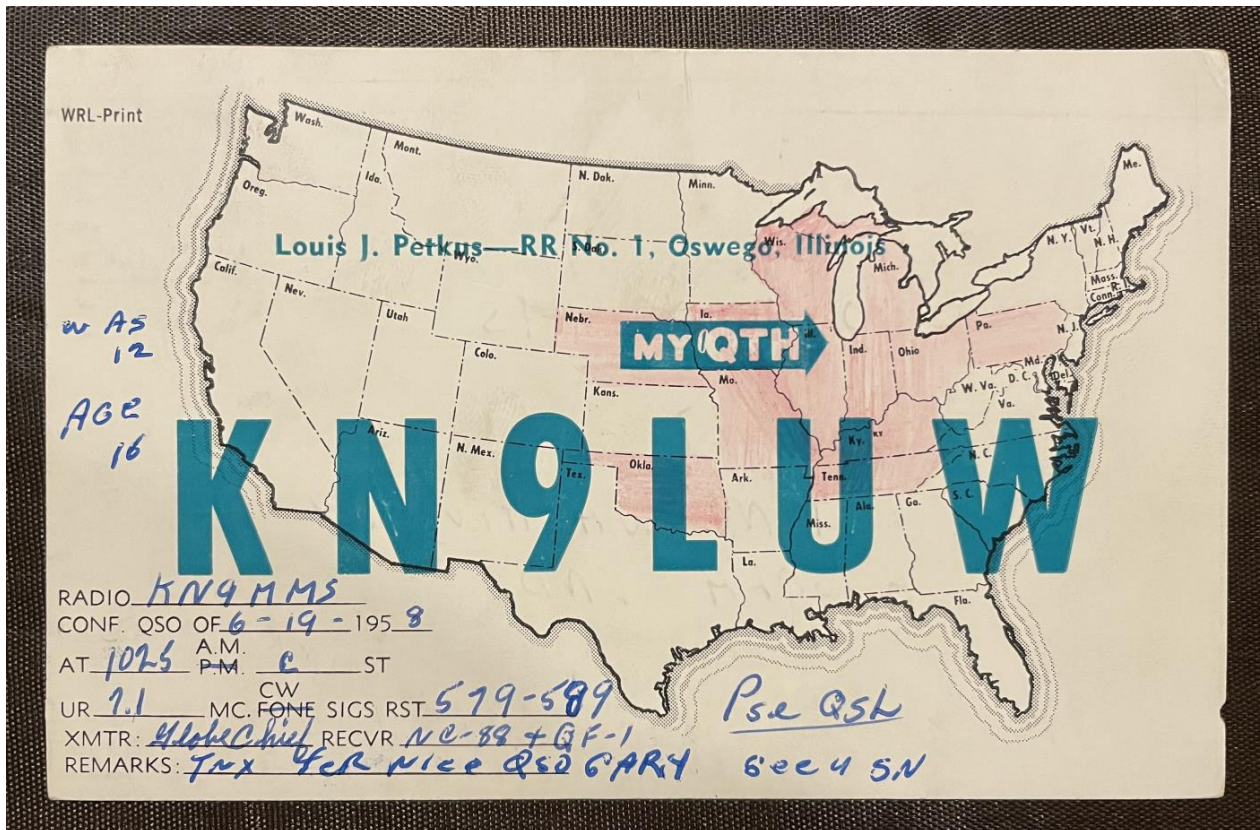
6-19-58										
1025	KN9MMS	X	7.1			7.1	A-1	75	1045	GARY ANGOLA IND
1525	KN9LWV	X	3.7			3.7	A-1	75	1600	BHAINA Mexico IND
6-21-58										
2036	KN9OPB	X	7.1			7.1	A-1	75	2052	SLIM LEBANON MO.
6-22-58										Don CHIPPEW FALLS wis
1100	KN9LGA	X	7.1			7.1	A1	75	1136	" " "
1710	KN9JHC	X	7.1			7.1	A1	75	1721	KARL SCRASTON KANS
1740	KN9LDE	X	7.1			7.1	A1	75	1750	
1833	KN9KJE	X	7.1			7.1	A1	75	1900	LLOYD INDIANAPOLIS IND
9-6-58										
	KN9EK	X	7.1			7.1	A1	75	1757	RODNEY Little Falls MINN
	KN9HR1	X	144			144	A3	6	215	NORM

From the first logbook of KN9LUW – June 1958





KN9MMS QSL sent to KN9LUW for QSO in June 1958



KN9LUW QSL sent to KN9MMS for QSO in June 1958

My family moved to Aurora in late summer 1959. I first joined the FRRL in the fall of that year, and shortly after that, Lou K9LUW and I met in person for the first time. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Several months later, I met Jack Ekstrom (then K9BQL and later K9JE) at the FRRL as well. That also was the start of another lifelong ham radio and shared FRRL friendship. Lou, Jack, and I shared many ham radio and FRRL experiences over many more decades of time.

For many years, Lou and I shared setting up and running the 40-meter CW station at FRRL Field Days. Lou would use his RV trailer for FD. Some years, I was a CW band captain (sometimes 20 CW and sometimes 15/80 CW), and I set up my pop-up camper for FRRL FD. I was FD chairman several times, so that reduced some of my operating time on those occasions. Some years, Jack K9JE would join us as part of the 40 CW crew. Some years later, WA9TPQ Bill Erickson joined the 40 CW efforts for FRRL FD. Bill liked to work the “graveyard shift,” and he would arrive late on Saturday carrying his thermos bottle of coffee to help get him through the overnight shift. Some years later, Bill took over as 40 CW band captain using his RV.

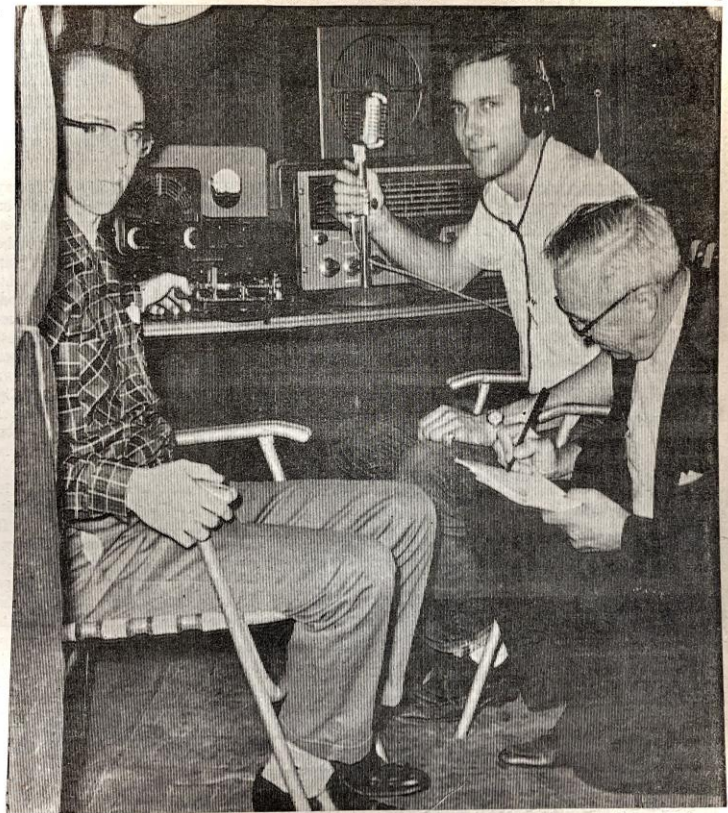
I previously shared some photos and comments about Lou and I sharing FRRL Field Day CW operations, over many years, in my article “FRRL 100 Years – Glimpses of FRRL Field Day History” which was featured in the July 2024 ArcOver Special Edition. A view of how K9LU and K9MMS have changed a bit in 50 years is evident in the photos on the following page.

A couple of other shared FRRL experiences by Lou and I were being on an FRRL bowling team in about 1963 for one season at Parkside Lanes in Montgomery, and participating in one running of the W1LD G0OSE Chase FRRL Road Rally many years later. We participated with our XYs riding along in the vehicle, and we won the rally that year. I seem to recall that the prize was certificates for ice cream at Colonial. (Lou changed his call from K9LUW to K9LU in 1997.)

Another activity that Lou and I shared for many years was radio contesting. We participated as multi-operator entries in many radio contests from about 1992 to 2003. These were mostly NAQP (North American QSO Party) CW every January and August, and ARRL SS (Sweepstakes) CW every November. We operated Field Day / Portable style for most of these events, and it usually involved hauling a lot of radio gear. We operated from IA (once), WI (Lou’s cottage in southern WI) many times, Lou’s house in Batavia many times, and my house in St Charles often times as well. When we operated from IL, we significantly modified our home stations for two-radio / station operation, and we sometimes computer-networked the radios. For NAQP, we were in the multi-two (multi-operator, two transmitter) category, and for SS CW, we were in the multi-single (multi-operator, single transmitter) category. We usually set up two stations for SS CW. We used one for running (calling CQ most of the time) and the other for hunting for needed multipliers -- interlacing with the run station in order to follow the requirement to only have one transmitted signal on the air at a time (if in the multi-single category). Our one-time “adventure” to IA for SS CW one November is a story for a different time. Several times, we won first place in our ARRL section entries.

In 1998, Lou and I formed a small contest club the Northern Illinois Contesters (NIC), and in 2000 we obtained the vanity call sign KW9A for the club. We held that callsign for 20 years, but it was most actively used only a few of those years. Later on, K9JE Jack Ekstrom joined the club, and around the year 2000 or so, WA9TPQ Bill Erickson joined us for a few contests. Very sadly, Lou, Jack, and Bill have been silent keys for many years. The club call KW9A was not used for a number of years, and I let it expire in 2020, since one person certainly does not make a radio club.

K9LU Lou, K9JE Jack, and I operated in SS CW as Multi-Op entries in 1998, 1999, and 2000. We won first place for Multi-Op CW in the ARRL Central Division in 1998 and 2000 and received plaques for those wins. We narrowly missed winning in 1999. Lou and I won first place for all Multi-Two entries in NAQP CW in August 1994 and 1995, and received plaques for those wins.



Equipment for field day exercises is housed temporarily in a tent. Operators are Gary Hornbuckle and Lou Petkus while Chuck Solomons makes out the FCC log. (Beacon-News Photo)

K9MMS and K9LUW at FRRL FD 1964



K9LU and K9MMS at FRRL FD 2014 (Appearances have surely changed in 50 years!)



K9LU and K9JE at K9MMS Station – SS CW Multi-Op 1998



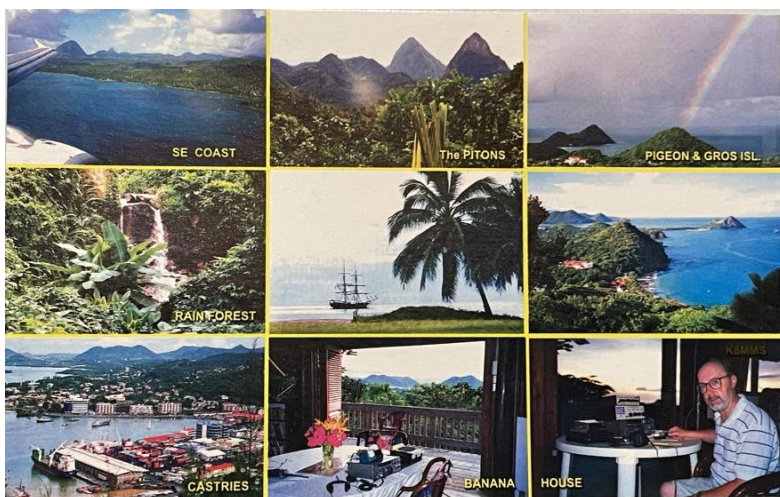
K9JE and K9LU at K9MMS – SS CW Multi-Op 1998

In 1998, K9JE Jack invited Lou and I to go with him to St Lucia to be part of the J6DX Multi-Multi team for the CQ WW DX CW contest in November. Over the years, Jack made several trips to St. Lucia to operate in contests with the J6DX group. Lou and I made the trip and joined the team in 1998, and this was the only trip the two of us made to St. Lucia. The team was large, and (if I recall correctly) we occupied three separate villas on the northern end of St. Lucia. The contesting site was in a villa, located on a very high hill, and the team annually rented this same site for a number of years. Most of the 1998 J6DX team members stayed on St. Lucia for about 10 days.

For a few days prior to the contest weekend, everyone worked to get all of the many antennas installed. That was the first priority task. Since the J6DX team frequently went to St. Lucia, some of the local J6 hams stored most of the antennas on the island, and they helped with the annual, temporary installations.

Near the beginning of the stay on the island, Lou, other new team members, and I were taken to the St Lucia ham licensing facility and we obtained J68 licenses – a quick process. I had the call J68MM. After the contest weekend, some of the antennas were left in place, and others were relocated to the other two villas. Like many of the team members, Lou and I operated from St. Lucia after the contest for several days using our J68 calls. Part of my folded-QSL is show below.

I think the originator of the J6DX team was W8OK Frank Schwab. Frank, was one of the originators of the Dayton Hamvention. Many of the team members lived in Ohio, but sadly several of them (at least 6) are now silent keys – including Frank.



Lou, Jack, and I made many trips to the Dayton Hamvention. For several years, Jack and I helped Lou (part-time) at his booth at Dayton selling Bulldog Keys. Lou invented the Bulldog Morse CW key in 1997, but it did not become widely sold until around 1999.

A brief overview of the Bulldog story follows. Around 1997 (per Lou's recollection) he was sitting at a desk at work one day and picked up a Bulldog, binder paper clip. He looked at the clip for a while and suddenly wondered if he could make a Morse code keyer paddle out of one of the clips. Subsequently, he experimented with technique and materials and resulted in inventing the Bulldog lambic Keyer paddle.

The following story has excerpts taken from comments by W9XT who sent me this in response to a tribute that I wrote about Lou after he passed away, and which I had posted to the FRRL and also to the SMC (Society of Midwest Contesters). Lou and I knew W9XT Gary Sutcliffe for many years, since all of us were members of the SMC.

Around 1998, Lou went to a Hamfest in Gray's Lake, and he saw W9XT there. (Gary is the founder and sole proprietor of Unified Microsystems. He is an engineer, and he designs and sells an assortment of ham radio accessories via that business.)

As it turns out, Gary was at that Gray's Lake hamfest with the first prototype of his XT-4, 9-volt, battery-powered, memory Morse keyer. Quoting from W9XT:

"I ran into him at the Gray's Lake swapfest. He showed me the keyer [paddle] he had just developed. By coincidence, I had the first prototype of the XT-4 battery powered memory keyer in my pocket."

"We had not set up to sell yet, so we moved our cars to be next to each other. He had 20 paddles he made to see if there was any interest. He was sold out in less than an hour. We were both astonished. The Bulldog paddle and the XT-4 [keyer] were made for each other, and that led to the booths [shared for several years] at Dayton."

So, as they say, the rest is history. To help keep up with the demand, around 2000 to early 2003, I helped Lou with the production of Bulldog keys by doing partial fabrication and making final assemblies at my QTH, and then delivering finished units to Lou. I had bought a Yaesu FT-817 while at Dayton with Lou one year, and Lou and I worked together to design a version of the Bulldog key to attach to an FT-817. I came up with the idea of using an angle bracket fastened to the side of the 817 which in turn had a Bulldog paddle fastened to it. A short, pigtail cable, terminated with a 1/8 inch plug, could then be connected to the key jack on the radio. It is interesting that some time after that, and after Lou had advertised the BD-817 version, Elecraft came out with a small keyer paddle that attached to the front of its small radios at an angle. Coincidence or something – not sure. Lou made and sold many Bulldog keys, developed several versions, and kitted and sold related parts until 2016 when he retired that business. It was a huge success. Lou was a very talented and inventive person among other impressive abilities.

A story, and some photos, featuring Lou and the Bulldog key at Dayton was in the June 1999 edition of the ArcOver. For several years, K9JE Jack and I traveled with Lou to Dayton Hamventions and helped him selling Bulldog keys in his Booth. Later on, Lou shared a booth with W9XT, and they shared duties manning the booth and making sales. In 1999, Lou sent me a copy of a portion of a page from a Japanese ham radio magazine that showed the Bulldog key and booth at Dayton. I have included a copy of that and some other Bulldog and Dayton photos on the following pages.

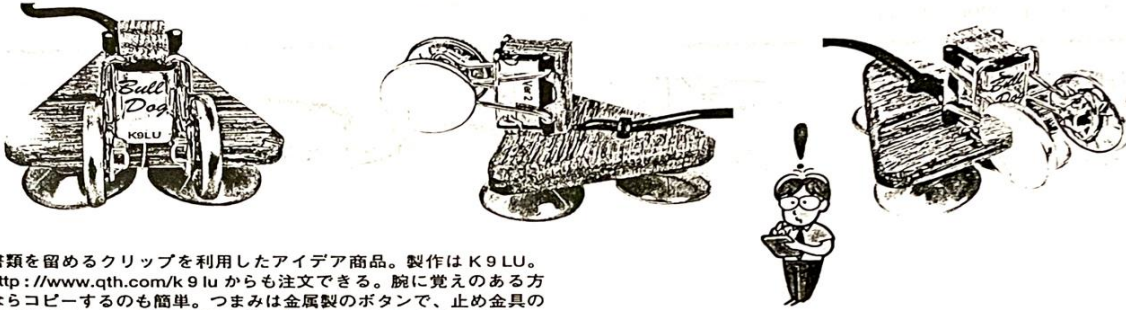


**K9LU Selling His Last Bull Dog
Dayton 1999 (From June 1999 ArcOver)**

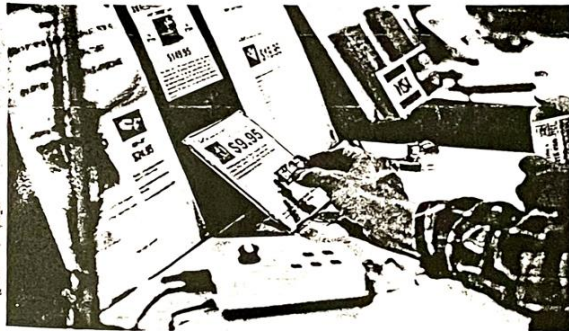


**K9JE Jack and K9LU Lou in Bulldog Booth at Dayton 2006
(Photo by N9CHA)**

19.95 ドルのマニピュレータを見つけた！



書類を留めるクリップを利用したアイデア商品。製作は K9LU。
<http://www.qth.com/k9lu> から注文できる。腕に覚えのある方
ならコピーするのも簡単。つまみは金属製のボタンで、止め金具の
加工がポイント。移動運用に便利。詳細なレポートを掲載予定。



Mobile Ham, July 1999 35

After Dayton 1999 -- Bulldog Keys Were Featured in a Japanese Ham Radio Magazine



K9MMS working at Bulldog Booth – Dayton 1999



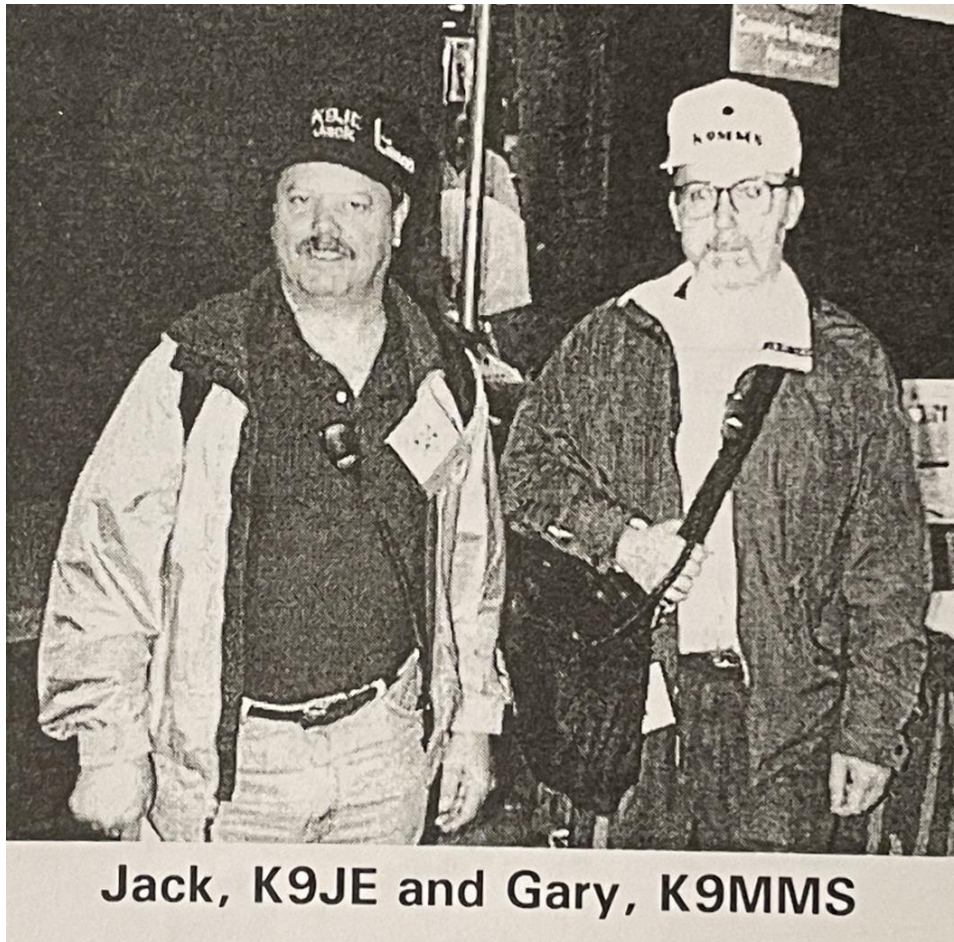
BD1 – First Model of Bulldog Key



BD4-HD Collector Edition 2003



Original packaging for sales of BD1 Bulldog Keys



Dayton 1999 -- From the June 1999 Edition of the ArcOver

I could probably write on for many hours about the good memories of times spent and activities shared, during my lifelong friendships with K9LU Lou Petkus and K9JE Jack Ekstrom. In addition, times and experiences shared with other FRRL old timers start to come to mind as well. It has been a mixture of joy and sadness remembering some of the things I have shared in this story, and to once again experience the impact and sorrow of having these great friends being gone now.

I hope you have enjoyed my sharing some glimpses of shared experiences of some lifelong friendships with FRRL members.

73, K9MMS Gary Hornbuckle