



# ***THE JAMAICA AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION***

## ***IT'S HISTORY AND ORGANISATION***

### ***1939-2005***

#### **THE AGE OF DISCOVERY**

The history of amateur radio is literally as old as radio itself. Contrary to popular believe, that the theories of two English physicists Michael Faraday and James Maxwell, were the first to predict the existence of radio waves in 1864. It was not until 1888 that Heinrich Hertz, a German physicist, actually applied these theories and constructed a spark-gap transmitter, a device that generated radio waves from an electric spark

In 1894 an Italian electrical engineer Guglielmo Marconi started experimenting with radio wave, (Hertzian Waves) his objective was to improve on the research of previous scientists like himself. In 1896 he was successful and obtained a patent and established the Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company Limited, which was the first radio factory in the world. Marconi did not invent radio, however he brought about a number of theories together in its first practical application.

In December 1901, Guglielmo Marconi launched the “Age of Wireless” he demonstrated the first transoceanic telegraph transmission from an old barracks in Cornwall England to St John’s Newfoundland which was a distance of approximately 3,400 km From this old barracks came a crackling series of buzzes, the letter “S” in International Morse Code. That prearrange signal was the climax of years of experimentation by many people.

In 1904 John Fleming, an English electrical engineer developed the first vacuum tube. However, it was not until sometime in 1906 that Lee DeForest an American inventor improved this development, paving the way for voice communication by radio. Professor Edwin H. Armstrong invented the Regenerative circuit, the Super-Regeneration, the Super-heterodyne and Frequency Modulation system that eliminated static noise and revolutionized broadcasting.

#### **AMATEUR RADIO IN JAMAICA**

John F. Grinan, a Jamaican who was born in Kingston on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1894, was responsible for the introduction of Amateur Radio in Jamaica. In 1926 he established the first Amateur Radio station NJ2PZ, this station was later known as VP5PZ, one of the most famous experimental stations in the world to be on the airwaves, he was then living at 2 Seaview Avenue in St. Andrew.

“Johnny” or “JG” as the radio fraternity knew him then, had the distinction of being the first amateur radio operator to send a relay message from his station at 808 West End, New York City to California, in 1916. Later in the same year he was successful in sending the first direct signal across the American Continent. Johnny’s most famous exploit came on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1921, when he took the Morse key and began to send



the now famous twelve word message direct from the station 1BCG in Greenwich, Connecticut USA to Paul Godley in Scotland. The message was repeated until 10:00 p.m. to ensure its reception since there was no means of checking. Godley's log showed that it was received in full the first time it was transmitted. John died in St. Petersburg, Florida USA on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1957.

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

Other pioneers of two-way radio communication in Jamaica were Charlie Isaacs NJ2PA, Cleveland Corinaldi NJ2CC who was resident in Port Antonio, Cyril Lyons and George McCulloch both of Kingston. These pioneers operated then without a Government licence. In 1932, the Government of Jamaica introduced licensing and those operators who met the qualifying standards were given a VPA prefix. This prefix was later changed to VP2 and later to VP5. When Jamaica attained Independence on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1962, the VP5 prefix was changed to 6YA, and in June 1964 it was finally changed to 6Y5.

Cyril Lyons was the first person to get his call letters VP5CM. Cyril had a One Hundred Feet (100 ft) wooden tower for his antenna at his residence "**Mon Bijou**" which was at the corner of North Street and Lissant Road, opposite the Roman Catholic Cathedral.

During a labour dispute in the latter part of 1937, the Government secured the services of several Hams and Radio technicians, and trained them for several months in Post Office telegraphic procedures, in case there was a breakdown of the service. Some of these persons trained were: John Grinan, Lloyd Alberga, Balfour Richards, Ruel Samuels, Thomas Myers, George McCulloch, Leonard Lindo, Tom Bailey and Berry Duncan.

The entire operation was very successful and the group was highly commended by the Government for their services. Thomas Myers suggested that since they were working together for such a long period, they should not allow the camaraderie to disintegrate, and he suggested that they form themselves in a club. His idea was accepted and the group inaugurated the Jamaica Amateur Radio Club on February 17<sup>th</sup> 1939 when radio was still in its infancy, and communication was primitive by today's standards. There were then approximately thirty (30) members, the officers were:

Executive President	Edward Metcalf VP5EM
Vice President	Ruel Samuels VP5RS
Honorary Treasurer	Lloyd Alberga
Secretary & Founder	Thomas Myers VP5AD

There was also a Technical Committee of five persons.

After seven months of operation Amateur Radio activities were suspended due to the start of World War II (Sept.1939). In May 1940 John Grinan decided to leave the



Island for the USA, before leaving he donated his station to the Government; this equipment was used to start the first licensed Broadcast Station in Jamaica, which was then **ZQI**. This station later changed its name to “Jamaica Broadcasting Company”, and later to “Radio Jamaica and Re-diffusion Network” (see web site)

<http://www.radiojamaica.com/corporate/history.pdf>

The war ended in 1945, and the Club was restarted, the name was then changed to Jamaica Amateur Radio Association JARA. George McCulloch (VP5GM) was given the honour of conveying birthday greetings from the club to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (who later became King Edward VIII), he was then patron of the Radio Society of Great Britain which the club was first affiliated.

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the Association are as follows:

- To promote the general advancement of the science and practice of Radio Communication, and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas on these subjects among its members and to obtain the maximum autonomy of action consistent with safe guarding the interest of all concerned.
- To affiliate with other Associations or Societies with similar objectives as maybe considered desirable by the Committee of Management.
- To enter into negotiations with Government in all matters pertaining to the terms and conditions of Amateur Radio licence.
- To liaise with other organisations in connection with Amateur Radio operations in times of National or Regional Disasters.
- To establish regional chapters within the geographic boundaries of Jamaica.
- To enter into such other activities as may have a propensity to further the General objectives of the Association.
- To have meetings of the Association to include reading and discussing communications for pursuing the theory and practise of Radio Engineering.

### **THE HISTORY CONTINUES**

This illustrious organisation consists of dedicated persons who operate within strict International guidelines and adhere to a well-established code of ethics. During these past sixty-six (66) years, Jamaican hams have contributed their time, skill, and equipment during times of crises. We have played a vital role in assisting the Red Cross and more recently the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency



Management (ODPEM) in monitoring hurricanes affecting Jamaica and the Caribbean.

Since its inception, JARA has played a vital role in close monitoring of all hurricanes affecting the Caribbean region. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1951 Jamaica was devastated by Hurricane “Charlie”, and for several days the Amateur Radio fraternity provided radio communications with the outside world.

Traditionally Jamaica Amateur Radio operators have contributed their time, skill and equipment during times of crisis. Roland Lewis 6Y5RL was the first Disaster Preparedness Co-ordinator; he was responsible for preparing the format of the Emergency Response System we are currently using. It was through his intuition in 1982 that he and Nigel Hoyow 6Y5HN (then president of JARA) was instrumental in obtaining the necessary financial assistance from the *Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)* to purchase VHF equipment to establish our first all Island two-meter repeater network. This repeater network was originally designed by Michael “Gypsy” Clarke 6Y5CW, he was competently assisted with the installation of the five repeaters and link radios by other members of JARA.

In 1989 Selvin Gabriel 6Y5SG (then President of JARA) was successful to have Volunteer In Technical Assistance (V.I.T.A) a volunteer group based in Arlington Virginia U.S.A. in collaboration with Citibank N.A. and IBM donate equipment which included computers, HF and VHF radios, generators and antennas that was used to establish a Packet Radio Network to assist with Emergency Communications.

During the devastation of Jamaica by Hurricane “Gilbert” in 1988, the most powerful Hurricane of this century, JARA provided VHF and HF radio communications for the Jamaica Red Cross Society and the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management. (ODPEM).

In 1989 when hurricane Hugo devastated the Eastern Caribbean Islands, a jump team of Douglas Lindo 6Y5DL, Dr. Eric Munroe 6Y5EE and Nigel Hoyow 6Y5HN were flown to Montserrat to assist with vital two-way radio communications between the Islands.

### **C.A.R.M.E.N**

The meaning of this acronym is Caribbean Amateur Radio Meteorological Emergency Network (see web site) <http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/w4ehw/carmen.html>. This is a joint project between the Caribbean Amateur Radio fraternity, the National Hurricane Centre (NHC) and National Oceanic Atmospheric Association (NOAA). The purpose of this project is for the Hams to supply supplemental surface weather data to the forecasters at the National Hurricane Centre in Miami Florida whenever a hurricane is within the Caribbean region. Five (5) *Peet Bros.U2000* weather stations were donated to assist with this project; these stations are installed at various operators’ homes across the Island.



## AFFILIATION WITH JAMAICA RED CROSS

The Jamaica Amateur Radio Association have put themselves completely at the service of the Jamaica Red Cross, not only to give of their time, skill and equipment but to be the first Amateur Radio Club to have our Headquarters located since 1958. In October 1962, the Hams maintained radio communications on behalf of the Red Cross Society with Belize during the devastation by Hurricane “Hattie” and with Guatemala and Mexico during tremendous earthquakes, which resulted in loss of many human lives. In 1979 and 1986 JARA rendered radio communication services to assist flood victims in Jamaica.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

Over the years JARA have lent their communication services to various non-Government organisations, such as the Negril Triathlon, Carib Cement International Marathon, Ramson Family Fun Race, Powertrack Road Race, and the Kiwanis Bike-A-Thon road race.

## BRAOLA CLUB

This exclusive club within JARA consisted of only three (3) Hams who it was said could chew the rag for hours; they were Balfour Richards 6Y5BR, Cecil Suarez 6Y5AO, and Lloyd Alberga 6Y5LA hence the name **BRAOLA**. A most prestigious club, to join this club one should be able to converse for several hours. Today there is only one surviving member, who is Lloyd Alberga 6Y5LA. Every Sunday morning at 1500Z the Myers net is conducted in memory of Thomas Myers on 7.150MHz LSB.

## CONCLUSION

Jamaican Hams have a tremendous reputation of providing humanitarian services in the field of emergency communication during times of disaster. They are proud and privileged to form part of the worldwide fraternity of Samaritans of the Airwaves; we are also second to none in the spirit of camaraderie, goodwill and international courtesy. Ham radio operators in Jamaica have come a long way since 1926 when the first station was first established. They are from a wide cross section of the professional society; the Constabulary Force, Military, Correctional Services, Doctors, Dentist, Ophthalmologist, Radiographers, Engineers, Managers, Bankers, Auto Mechanics, Salesperson and others. Edward Metcalf G4GYZ is presently living in the UK; his friends and acquaintances affectionately call him “Met”.

## REFERENCES

1. Jamaica Amateur Radio Association History Magazine 1990 edition.
2. Signal Hill, Newfoundland Dedicated October 1985 - IEEE Newfoundland-Labrador Section
3. Radio Jamaica website <http://www.radiojamaica.com/corporate/history.pdf>
4. Lloyd Alberga 6Y5LA.