

By MICHAEL NAIDUS

"Papa-Alpha-Under-Lazy, this is Delta-Alpha-Victor-Echo at the club station of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We're giving a demonstration of amateur radio to a friend here. Could you describe your QTH a little more clearly for us."

"All right, Dave, I'm in the town of Nizza, Italy - November-Italy-Zulu-Zulu-Alpha - known around the world for it's winemaking. We are about 150 kilometers north of..."

More than 35 University students are fluent enough in this strange

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language to speak it regularly, yet none of them receives any credit towards their language requirement for it.

But the students, members of the University's Amateur Radio Club, do not complain.

Club President Steve Phillips said Sunday that while the club is both a social group and a service organization, most operators participate for the thrill of the hobby's "do-it-yourself" aspect.

"There is a certain magic feeling in the idea of talking to someone over thousands of miles, when *you're* the one who is making it happen," he added.

Using modes of communication which include the traditional morse code, voice, teletype, and futuristic video transmissions, more than one million operators worldwide - 400,000 in the U.S. - form an extensive global communications system.

The operators are free to call anywhere in the world, and exchange "QSL cards," which identify each station's location and serve as proof of the contacts with other broadcasters for national competitions. Thousands

of the cards cover the walls of Room 214 in the Moore School, where the club has its office.

Most operators say they have made one call which is of particular significance to them.

"I can remember sending out a call for anyone to answer one night at 11," Phillips said. "I ended up talking to a scientist in Antarctica for about 20 minutes. He told me about the research he was doing."

Dave Pascoe, an Engineering freshman in the club, said his most memorable calls were those to obscure countries.

"I talked to an American in Qatar [a small country in the Persian Gulf region] who heads an electronics company there," he said Sunday. "It was Friday morning in Qatar - the holy day in Moslem countries - and he said he had to go work in his garden, I assume for religious reasons.

"To come across someone from there, just by chance, is incredible," he added.



Amateur Radio Club President Steve Phillips

Leslie Frank

Phillips said the operators were dubbed "hams" during the early days of two-way radio, when amateurs were just starting to use the medium in commerce, such as for ship-to-shore communication.

"Since there were no FCC regulations then, the people who were just experimenting with their own sets would interfere with commercial operations," he continued. "The commercial operators had a slang term for the poor operators. That term was 'ham,' and it stuck."

But now the hams are organized, and perform numerous public services.

Phillips said the club will relay messages for people, at no cost, to other states. He added that the practice keeps operators constantly prepared for an emergency situation in which telephone communication is impossible.

Each year, amateur radio groups hold an emergency test which simulates disaster conditions ranging from train wrecks to nuclear attacks.

As a result, their system of radio "networks" has been invaluable during real emergencies.

The University club already has been commended for its work during crises. Most recently, it was cited for its aid in contacting relatives of those paralyzed by the Johnstown Flood.

Despite the mountain of machinery emitting various bleeps, static, flashing lights, and wildly swinging needles, Pascoe said the hobby is fairly simple to learn.

As a voice from Barbados in the West Indies responded to a University operator's questions, Pascoe said the most difficult task for a new operator is passing the FCC licensing test.

"Sometimes, getting your license is just a matter of memorization - learning Morse code, understanding the basics of radio waves, and knowing some rudimental physics," he said.

"Once you get a radio, it's very simple," he added. "You have a full set of instructions."