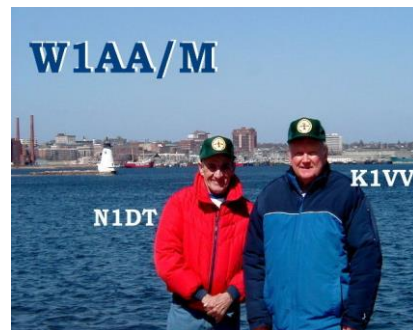


The Cape Crusaders  
By Jim Elliott  
KA3UNQ

“This is Whiskey One Alfa Alfa, QRZed”. Anyone who has had even a passing interest in chasing lighthouses on the air these past few years has heard that phrase multiple times, on multiple bands, most often on a Saturday morning. That’s because two close friends made the decision a few years ago to pool their many resources and considerable talents in an attempt to locate and activate as many lighthouses they could reach in southeastern Massachusetts, along Cape Cod, and coastal Rhode Island.

This intrepid pair met some twenty-five years ago in, above all places, a crowded parking lot, where they mistook each other’s car as their own. It seems both vehicles sported a 15-meter Hustler antenna on the back and both arrived at the same car at the same time, thinking it was his! As they began to talk, it soon became evident they had more in common than just antennas; they were both running the same rig, the Yaesu FT-7, and enjoyed working CW mobile.

Individually, they are known as Bob (Whitey) Doherty, K1VV, and Don Tanguay, N1DT. Collectively, when operating portable at a lighthouse, they go by the call W1AA, the club call they use, with permission, from the Marconi Radio Club to which both belong. Affectionately, Don and Whitey are known to the Amateur Radio Lighthouse Society (ARLHS) membership as The Cape Crusaders, a name reflective of the number of lighthouses this dedicated duo has activated on or near Cape Cod. To date, that number exceeds fifty and still counting.



That soft, mellow voice with which we are all so familiar belongs to Whitey, K1VV. He handles the SSB side of things on all their outings, though he is also quite adept at working CW as well. Licensed since 1955, Whitey received intensive CW training while serving with the U.S. Army in the mid-1950’s. Now retired, Whitey enjoys putting together various mobile and portable antennas, such as the 33-foot wire vertical they now use for the

majority of their portable activities. This antenna, by the way, is now in its fourth iteration.

For the past several years, Whitey has utilized one of his other interests, photography and video, to document numerous HAM activities such as Marconi Radio Club Special Events, The Museum Ships Weekend aboard the USS Salem and even a lighthouse activation or two. Over thirty such videos have been produced and converted to DVD. Whitey has donated a number of these DVDs to the ARRL and they are available on their website. During a break in the action, he will often grab the digital camera and take photos of the lighthouse they are activating. One of those pictures will eventually end up on the front of their colorful QSL card.



The CW contacts are the work of Don, N1DT. Though digitally impaired (see his personal QSL card!), Don is an excellent CW operator.

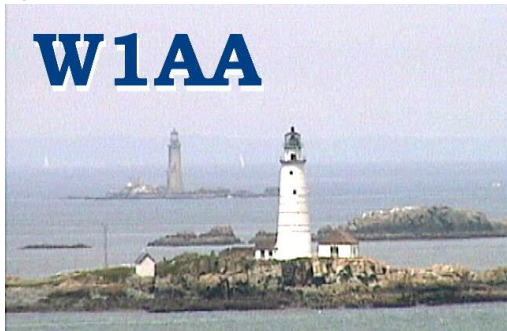


Like Whitey, he honed his CW skill while serving with the military, the U.S. Air Force, in such places as Crete, Alaska, and western Europe. It was during that time, apparently, that Don acquired his appetite for travel. Since retiring, he and his wife have journeyed to Europe twice, enjoyed the colonial scene in Bermuda and tasted the tropical fruits of Hawaii and the islands of the Caribbean. By the time you read this, Don will have just returned from fulfilling a life long dream of visiting a HAM friend, John/VK6AU, in Perth, Western Australia. They met on the air several years ago, became fast friends, and continue to chat with each other at least once a week.

The seed of what was to become The Cape Crusaders sprouted in early 2003 when Don and Whitey took part in the Marconi 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Station, KM1CC, in Wellfleet, out on Cape Cod. It was during this event they realized they shared similar passions, among them the enjoyment of operating CW and doing portable operations. Upon learning of

some local hams preparing to activate several Boston-area lighthouses for the 2003 ILLW, Don and Whitey decided to take part as well, but from a light a little closer to home. They looked around the area and found Ned's Point Light in nearby Mattapoisett to be ideal. It was their first activation together, and, as the saying goes, the rest is history.

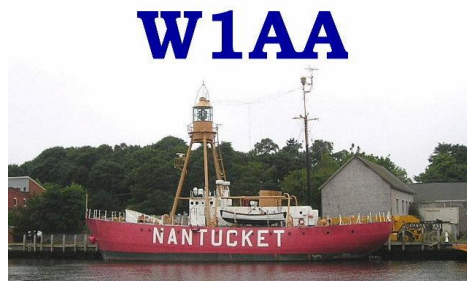
Over the next three years, these ambitious amateurs would travel the length and breadth of Cape Cod countless times seeking out and activating lighthouses for the Amateur Radio Lighthouse Society, many of them for the



very first time. Their travels would also take them to a myriad of scenic locales along the southeastern coastline of Massachusetts and across the border into Rhode Island. When asked, both commented on the exceptional natural beauty found at most of the lighthouse locations, some offering spectacular

views of the surrounding area. Most notable were the Boston Light and The Graves in Boston Harbor and the Long Point and Wood End lights at the end of Cape Cod.

One of the few disappointments encountered by this twosome was the attempted activation of the Bristol Ferry Lighthouse in Rhode Island. They were just finishing setting up their antenna following the fifty-minute ride to the site, when they were joined by several members of local law enforcement who asked them to leave or risk arrest. It turned out the operating site they had chosen was almost directly beneath the Mount Hope Bridge that spans Narragansett Bay and, due to recent heightened sensitivity about such things, the police thought it best they leave. The day was not lost, however, as the boys spent the time scouting several lights in Rhode Island they plan to put on the air at a later date.



Among the key elements to putting on a successful lighthouse activation is always having a plan, and, like so many other successful teams, these guys do their homework. During the cold, New England winter months, Don and Whitey will spend countless hours of their spare time in

front of the computer using GOOGLE EARTH, MAPQUEST, and various lighthouse-related websites, to search out possible targets for future activations. Their criteria for choosing a site is rather simple: is it situated within a reasonable driving distance, usually 100 miles or so, from their homes in Southern Massachusetts and is there a place to park in close proximity to the lighthouse? More often than not these searches will result in them making a scouting run to the site in order to confirm the presence of an operating location. It makes no sense driving two hours to a lighthouse only to learn you can't park there.

Another important factor, quite often overlooked by many, is the availability of "facilities", otherwise known as a rest room. During a long activation, a good deal of fluid is consumed in the form of coffee, juice and soft drinks. Eventually there comes a time Mother Nature will not be denied, making it necessary to use some of that good old 'Yankee ingenuity'. At many of the more remote lights, where proper facilities were not an option, these gents have had to employ such things as breakwaters, tall sand dunes or a nearby stack of lobster pots to help answer the call.

Other keys to a good operation is to have a rig that is both versatile and reliable, having a good power supply and using an antenna that is not only effective but quick and easy to put up and take down. When they first started, The Cape Crusaders utilized an ICOM IC-706 MK II G hooked up through a tuner to a dipole antenna supported by a portable base and mast. A 2-meter packet station using a ground plane antenna was later added to spot their activities on the DX SUMMIT website. As the self-spotting began to show results by way of a greater number of contacts, they added a 170-watt 2-meter amplifier and a 4-element vertically polarized yagi to assist them in making packet connections at a distance of over sixty miles.

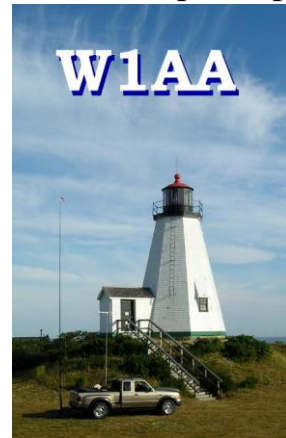


As they did more and more activations, it soon became apparent they would not always have a tree from which to hang the dipole. That idea was scrapped in favor of a 33-foot wire vertical supported by a fiberglass telescoping mast. The mast is mounted on the back of the truck and, when disassembled, can be easily stored in the truck. The boys have recently made one more change that makes life just a little bit easier

and that was replacing the IC-706 with the newer IC-7000. This new rig has a record feature for both CW and VOICE and is used by both operators to send automated CQs.

What keeps this gear running? Battery power and lots of it. Whitey uses the truck battery to power the rig and amplifier, and that, in turn, is supplemented by two spare automobile batteries linked in parallel to the truck battery using number six wire and Anderson Power Pole connectors. Every two hours or so, they fire up the engine for a short period to refresh the batteries.

One aspect of activating lighthouses both find interesting is the visitors they get and the questions they ask. It stands to reason a pick-up truck with two large masts supporting odd-looking antennas would generate some curiosity and it often has. For just such occasions, Don and Whitey bring along a QSL photo album of all the lights they have activated to show any visitors or HAMs that show up. Don says that lighthouses seem to have a special fascination with the general public and they are always interested in the history of the light. For that purpose, they bring along a 3-ring binder with pictures and a short history of the lighthouse they are activating. As far as trying to explain amateur radio and what they are doing to non-hams, well, that can be quite difficult. Not wanting to get too technical, they just say they talk to other HAMs and exchange cards with them, similar to how kids trade baseball cards. That seems to be just enough information to keep them happy.



For many of us who have followed this dynamic duo for the past few years, we have become aware of a curious ritual involving these two. It



seems that on most of their trips, the first stop made on the journey is to a Dunkin' Donuts shop. It is a habit that developed a couple of years ago when participating in the Marconi 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Event out on the Cape. After getting up at 4 AM to make that long trip every day, they needed a good wake up cup of coffee and something to eat.

Now, when The Cape Crusaders hit the road to do a lighthouse activation, no matter what the direction of travel, they inevitably run into a Dunkin' Donut shop to help start the day off right.

What, you may ask, keeps these two remarkable friends motivated week-in and week-out to provide us with lighthouses to work? I'll let them tell you:

DON: "I would have to say the main reason that keeps me motivated is the opportunity to spend a Saturday morning and afternoon with a good friend who shares my interest in amateur radio. Plus the fact that by doing it we hope we are satisfying the needs of the multitude of ARLHS members who would have no other way to add whatever lighthouse we activate to their Worked and Confirmed list".

WHITEY: "Both Don and I have had some health problems, and at our age, who wouldn't. What better way is there to spend a Saturday than with a friend. Don and I often say "Do it now...there will come a day when you will not be able to do it". Some of the greatest fun and satisfaction we get at the activations is when a familiar call and ARLHS friend answers our CQ! You all being there means a lot to Don and I. We will be out again this Fall, Winter and Spring to give out new ones....there are many more lights we have not been to yet!!!"

The Cape Crusaders, a real class act, no doubt about it. Be sure to say hello to them when they show up on a radio near you.