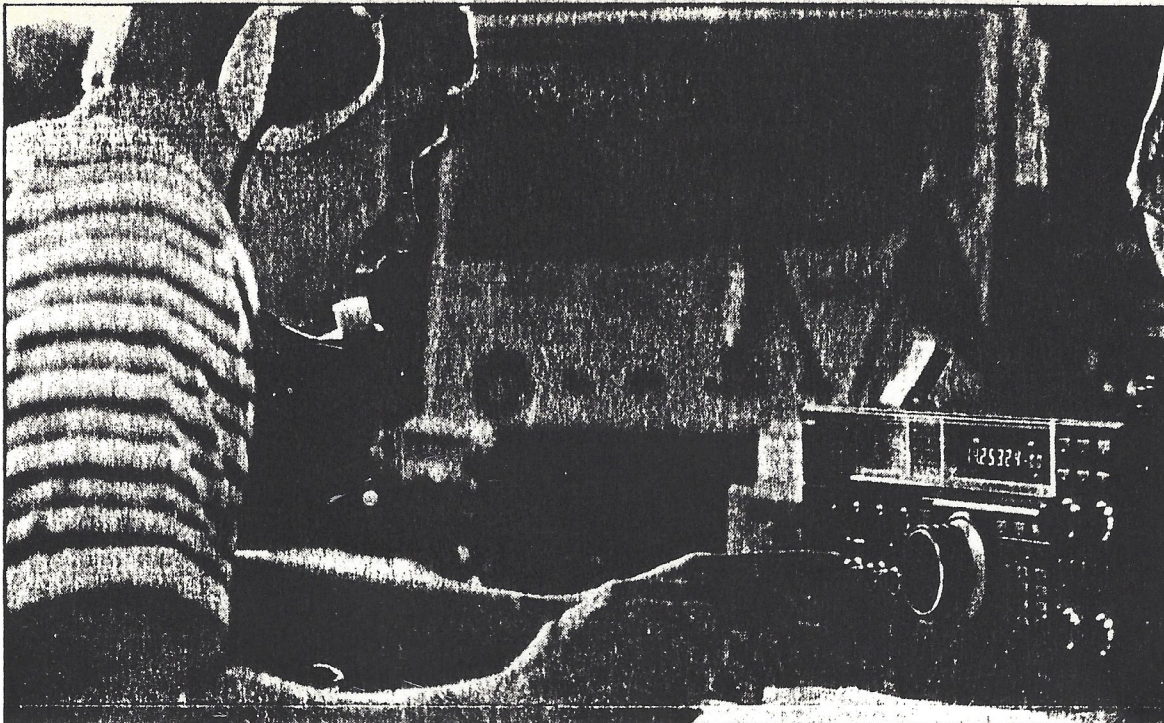


Smooth operators



Vladimir "Bob" Gordienko takes a no-nonsense approach as he makes contacts in ham-radio competition — he couldn't take time but to talk to visitors. KEVIN P. CASEY/P-I

Radio hams beam up world contest from Seattle

By Kimberly B. Marlowe
P-I Reporter

Jacky Calvo is suited up for the Goodwill Games. Blue sweats. White T-shirt. Running shoes. As the starting clock ticks into place, he leans forward and lights up a cigarette. Let the Games begin.

Calvo is off and running — well, talking — in the 1990 World Radiosport Team Championships.

The Cognac, France, resident is one of 44 people who spent most of Friday perched in front of a radio microphone, chattering nonstop or frantically tapping Morse code messages. Their goal: to contact as many other amateur radio operators as possible in 10 hours.

The Seattle gathering of "hams,"

as amateur radio operators are nicknamed worldwide, is an official cultural exchange event of the Goodwill Games. It might not generate the excitement of a gymnastics meet, but its devotees are just short of fanatic on the subject.

"For us, this is a worldwide event like the Olympics," said Claudia Wulz of Thoiry, France, who hovered behind teammate Calvo as he responded to a radio call from somewhere in the Midwest. "Once you start getting interested in ham radio, it just grabs you," she said.

Like most hams, Wulz loves electronic gear. When not pursuing her career as a physicist, she is scanning the airwaves. Some hams like the socializing; Wulz is more interested in the technology.

"I prefer short, interesting contacts," she said. "Generally I just exchange call signs and a signal report."

Signal reports rate the quality of the transmission and include the operator's log number assigned to the contact. Call signs are the identifying "handles" assigned to amateur radio operators by the Federal Communications Commission or the equivalent agency overseas.

Just off the kitchen in Adam Kerner's home near Shilshole is the cubbyhole crammed with radio equipment and manned by Calvo and Wulz. Kerner, one of the World Radiosport event organizers, is hosting a crowd of visiting hams and contest judges who are roaming from one station to another all day.

They introduce themselves with typical eccentric warmth.

"Hey, welcome to Seattle, I'm Don Walter — WZNG."

"Dick Norton, NEAA of Los Angeles."

"Hey, did you guys know that N6ZZ is here?"

The World Radiosport event marked the first time that dueling hams have faced off in the same city. Working out of 22 stations, the two-member teams from 15 countries raced against the clock to see who could make the most voice contacts, the most connections through Morse code and reach the largest number of countries.

Skilled operators can make as

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Hams: Each operator has a distinctive style

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many as 1,000 contacts in 50 countries during a 10-hour contest.

The complicated scoring methods and double-checking of logs means that the official winner won't be known until today, said Kerner.

With a common goal and identical equipment, in this case supplied by ICOM International, a Bellevue-based manufacturer of ham radio gear, the competitors pursue the winner's circle of the airwaves with distinct style.

Accompanying his wife Claudia Wulz to competitions has given Fritz Szoncs (affectionately known to his fellow hamsters as OE6FOG) a chance to evaluate the various national styles. Holding court in the Kerner kitchen, he shared his findings.

"The Italians must have the biggest antennas, and lots of power," he said. "The Germans will do it to the rules, perfectly. Exactly the same power level for everyone. But they do try to get the best equipment."

The Japanese are extremel,

listening all the while to the ham radio receiver in the kitchen.

Harry prepared a high-energy cocktail for the two power-talkers.

"I made a drink with nine vegetables, four fruits, amino acids, vitamins and brewer's yeast," he said. "They didn't even ask what was in it. They just drank it right down."

Once into the contest, Gor-

dienko does most of the talking in his slightly accented English. Cutthroat competition or not, the thrill of coming together for the first time with colleagues from around the globe is very real.

"When Bob and George were honored at our banquet last night as the winners in their last international competition, everyone gave them an ovation," said Harry

Lewis.

"Some of these amateurs have known each other for 15 years, they've talked to each other before, but this is the first time we've all been together in one place," he said.

"It's really an amazing thing that the world has changed so much, that we could all come together like this."