



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Radio Warstories

When the Danger is Outside the Transmitter Shack



By Ron Nott

[October 2010] We often think of the dangers presented inside the transmitter room but sometimes just getting there can be (how shall we say it?) an adventure. At least that is how Ron Nott remembers it.

Back in the 1960s, the station that is located on top of Catalina Island, CA, purchased a new 10 kW Collins transmitter to replace their old Gates, which was showing its age.

However, when they connected it to the common point of the three-tower DA, the coils in the output network would burn up. The edge-wound conductors were burnt and warped, and the Micallex™ bars supporting the coil turns melted. Now that is officially hot!

So naturally, the station called Collins for help and it turned out I was sent to Los Angeles to deal with the problem. I was picked up at the airport by the Chief Engineer and the contract engineer, who then drove me to Long Beach where we boarded a Grumman Goose seaplane for the trip to the island.

A STRANGE VISIT TO THE TRANSMITTER

It was late in the evening and dark when we arrived at the transmitter building. We were parked with the right side of the car just a few feet from the building door.

I started to open the door on the passenger side of the car, but both the Chief Engineer and the contract engineer shouted "*Don't open it yet!*" Both then peered into the darkness in all directions using large flashlights for a while after which the contract engineer said "*I'm going in.*" The contract engineer jumped out quickly, ran and unlocked the door, then ran inside and slammed it shut.

He then appeared in the window with the big flashlight and looked all around. Then he motioned for me to come in and the Chief Engineer said *"Make it quick!"* – which I did, doing just as the contract engineer had done. After more searching with the lights, the Chief Engineer climbed out the passenger door, the contract engineer opened the door for him and he ran inside. Again the door was slammed shut.

Naturally, I was a bit non-plussed about this procedure.

THE DANGER WITHOUT

"So please tell me what this is all about, gentlemen," I said. The answer was not entirely what I would have expected.

The explanation noted that the upper part of the island, which rises a considerable distance out of the Pacific Ocean, was totally uninhabited except for some wildlife. However, that wildlife happened to include some wild javelinas, which would wait in the dark outside for someone, and then attack by slashing the Achilles tendon of your ankle. If this caused them to fall, the entire herd would then attack with not a lot of chance for survival.



Visitors on upper Catalina Island need to beware the javalinas

By the wee hours of the morning, we had determined the cause of the transmitter failure. Then it was time to reverse the procedure to get back into the car. Even with the outside building light, there was a lot of flashlight searching of the dark.

In the next chapter, we will discuss other wildlife on the island – that and the transmitter problem that got me there in the first place.

Ron Nott is celebrating his 50th year in broadcasting. The founder of Nott Ltd can be reached by email at ron@nottltd.com

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