

# Voice In The Dark

*Rob Davis*

Tony liked Northumberland. He lived in a large industrial city in the Midlands, and until coming to the North East, hadn't realised what clean air really was. Not just clean air, either; the CB airwaves were virtually silent and whilst up and down the country Mr Blobby was trying to get a copy on Terminator, here on the extreme top right hand corner of England, it was only the occasional trucker on the A1 who broke the squelch.

On the last evening of his holiday, Tony left his wife fussing over the children's bags and suitcases. He knew that Sarah did this best with him well out of the way, so made an excuse and drove his car along the flat coast road from Bamburgh to Seahouses. Passing the magnificent castle on the left, he was disappointed to find that access to the castle carpark was closed; he needed as high a point as possible, and had hoped for the Castle's floodlit view as the backdrop to his evening DXing.

Somewhat frustrated at having nothing available except flat coast, he continued southwards in the hope of finding a high point. For five or miles he drove, and having found nothing, stopped to consult an Ordnance survey map. This revealed an abandoned aerodrome only a few miles away, and thinking that this would probably afford both privacy and wide open countryside, soon found the place. It was a bleak, stark monument, black runways and cracked perimeter track; no buildings at all. In fact, perfect.

Halting the car in a position where the coast was faintly visible, Tony flicked round the dial to an empty channel on the CEPT frequencies, prepared pen and notepad, and keyed the microphone:-

"CQ, CQ, CQ the frequency. Two Six Kilo Mike One Four Two, north-east United Kingdom. This is station 26KM142, north-east United Kingdom, calling DX and standing by."

A radio friend had told Tony about DXing when he had just started out in CB. *"You park up in what looks like a good place and see how far you can copy with your rig."*

*"Does it work, DXing?"* Tony had asked.

His friend considered. *"Sometimes it does,"* he admitted, *"and sometimes it's just a complete waste of time."*

Tony was used to it being a waste of time. He didn't do a lot of DXing, because very often once he had made contact with a very distant station, he didn't really know what to say. Chatting with fellow Controllers in his home town was one thing; swapping overs with a complete stranger, and a foreigner to boot, was another. He was constantly impressed, however, with such foreigners' command of English, which was invariably better than his own schooldays French or German.

"CQ, CQ, CQ the channel..... station 26KM142, north east United Kingdom, calling and standing by....."

Sometimes he thought that he ought to make up a cassette tape of this litany and save it for such occasions. He stuck at it long enough for Sarah to have dealt with the packing, and

then decided that the skip simply wasn't running, and that it was, on this occasion anyway, a waste of time. He was just reaching for the ignition keys, when:-

"Hello Darcy, hello Darcy, can you hear me, over?"

"This is station two six Kilo Mike one four two. QRZ the station calling?"

"Hello, station Kilo Mike, station Kilo Mike. This is Hazel R for Robert, Hazel R for Robert, do you receive me, over to you, over."

*This fellow's DX procedure is a bit stilted*, thought Tony, but he scribbled the date, time, channel and other callsign on his pad before replying.

"Roger, I have a copy on you, Hazel R Robert. Your signal is three pounds, radio four to me." He paused for a heartbeat, and then just to sound friendly, added "Over."

"Hello Kilo Mike, hello Kilo Mike. Hazel R for Robert answering, Hazel R for Robert answering. What is your location, what is your location, over?"

"My QTH is Brunton, I repeat, Brunton, that is bravo bravo, romeo romeo, uniform uniform, november november, tango tango, oscar oscar, november november. That is north east United Kingdom, over."

"Thank you Kilo Mike. Please would you give us a QDM for your position, we need a QDM to you, over."

*What the hell's a QDM?* thought Tony, frantically flipping his ready-reference book to the printed list of Q-codes; he had never come across the expression. But there it was, QDM, a bearing from one station to another. *His procedure might be a bit obscure, he said to himself, but he seems keen - nobody I know keeps Q-codes records in that much detail. Callsign, dates, names, PO Box details, yes - but bearings?*

"Station Hazel Robert, I am sorry but I can't give you a bearing, I don't have the equipment available."

"Kilo Mike, please give us a twenty second count, I say again, please give us a twenty second count, and we will DF on you, DF on you, over."

He must have some amazing kit! Tony was impressed. He keyed the microphone and counted slowly to twenty. There was a pause of no more than ten seconds, then:-

"Hello Kilo Mike. Thank you for the count, thanks for the count. You are bearing two seven eight from us. We will be with you very soon, with you soon, over."

"How far away are you?" Tony could see from the s-meter that the other station could not be less than five miles away. The signal was beginning to clarify well, with no trace of background hash except for a dull humming when came in with the modulation; a slightly duff power pack, Tony thought, having heard that kind of noise before.

"We make it no more than three minutes, we have three minutes to go," replied the voice. "Can you make ready for us, please confirm, over."

*What the heck is this fellow doing?* thought Tony. *DF'ing on me, then making a mad dash to arrive?* It was entirely outside the scope of his experience with CB radio, and it crossed his mind that in such a remote location he was wide open to any sort of idiotic prank, or even worse. More than merely curious, but reasoning that discretion was no small part of valour, he hastily retrieved a hefty spanner from the car's toolkit, stuffed it rather uncomfortably in his belt, and again keyed the microphone.

"I am ready for you, Hazel R Robert." A strange frisson of apprehension ran through him, the stab-of-fear feeling he had experienced as a driver when speed had over-reached skill. "What is your present position? Your signal is now very strong. What is your QTH?"

"We can see the coastline now, the coastline is in sight. Please show your lights, Kilo Mike. Your lights now, please."

Tony, suddenly mesmerised by the urgency of the voice, started the engine and flicked on the headlights to high beam. "My headlights are on now," he said. "Where are you?" he added, scanning the horizon for the approaching car.

"We have you in sight now ... we are downwind. Good show, good show! Thank you, Kilo Mike ... we were completely lost ... low on fuel ... shot up ... but that's just dandy. Finals, finals now."

The s-meter was now endstopping past the green of the 30+ but there was no sign of an approaching vehicle. *Nobody could get here that fast on foot*, thought Tony furiously, *so what the hell is all this?* He flung open the car door and leapt out. There was only the Stygian blackness beyond the throw of the headlights.

A great black shape with huge outstretched wings suddenly crackled and roared its way over Tony's head and thundered past, stretching out with rubber toes and reaching slowly down for the ground. The giant roar ceased abruptly and for a moment all Tony could hear was the loud popping of exhaust stubs and the sound of the wind shrieking over perforated metal. The great bird touched its wheels triumphantly to the cracked tarmac, settled, and in a few seconds was lost in the gloom, leaving behind only the imprint of its passing in the ripples of time.

Tony stood still as a great wave of emotion washed over him. It was several minutes before his heart had stopped thumping enough for him to be able to listen properly; but by then, the last vestige of sound had evaporated. He drove slowly down the old runway to the exit gate, not looking for the aeroplane, because he knew it wasn't there.

After closing the gate behind him, he sat down in the driver's seat and reached down to switch off the CB. As his fingers touched the dial, a voice, very faint, and sounding desperately tired, said:-

"Hello Kilo Mike, Hazel R for Robert calling. We are down and safe. Thank you."

Tony didn't key the microphone to reply. There was no point. It was just an old aerodrome.....