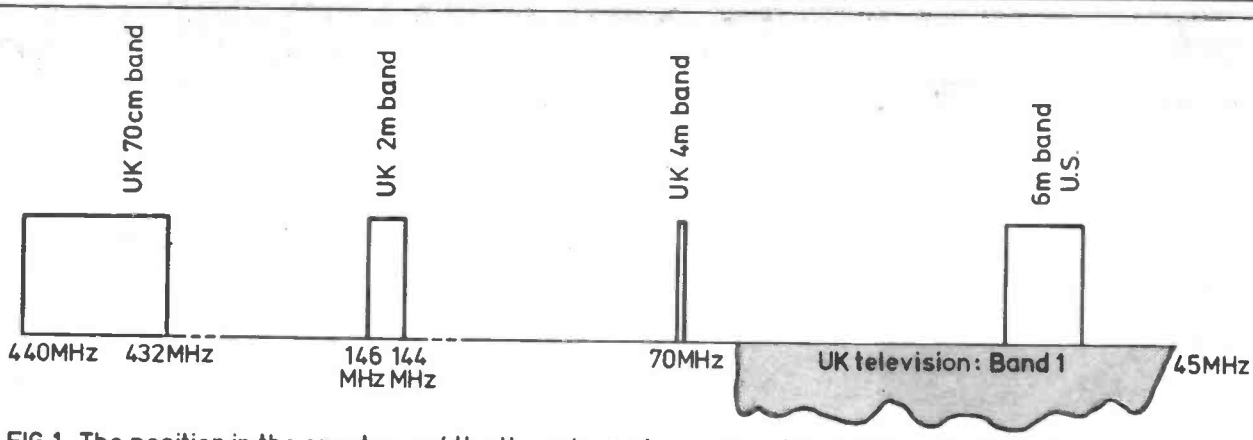

FIG. 1. The position in the spectrum of the three lower-frequency vhf amateur bands is shown in this diagram. A UK allocation at 50MHz would be within the 4MHz area enjoyed by North American amateurs but at present--in Europe--occupied by Band 1 television.

the middle Nineteen Fifties a special allocation — peculiar to the British because it was not internationally assigned to the Amateur Service — was granted at 70MHz. Here was 'electronic manna from heaven', a new band that promised to be better than 'Two' if not quite as good as 'dear old Five'. Subsequent experience proved that these guesses were substantially correct: 70MHz showed itself to be 'a bit to high' to catch the big openings remembered from the 6m days when the MUF extended itself into the metre-wave spectrum. And anyway even if 4m *did* produce extended propagation this was of little avail: there was nobody overseas you could talk to! As has been said, the band was peculiar to the British (apart from the few brave souls, themselves often British, whose jobs took them to Gibraltar or Cyprus or other emigré outposts where 70MHz stations could be established, if only temporarily).

By contrast, the 50MHz band being widely allocated to the Amateur Service offered the prospect of inter-Continental long distance working at those periods of the sunspot cycle when the maximum usable frequency would embrace it. Operators on 'the next band down' at 28MHz found conditions there to be a guide to what might happen on 'Six': if 'Ten' opened up to long haul working there was a chance that 'Six' might do the same.

All of which was small consolation to amateurs in the countries of ITU Region 1 (Europe and Africa) where 50MHz was sparsely allocated, by contrast with Region 2 (the Americas) and Region 3 (east Asia and Oceania) where it was in widespread use. Obliterated by video signals in much of Region 1 and in all of the United Kingdom, the 6m band looked rather like a write-off in amateur communication terms where the British radio man was concerned.

The phasing out of '405'

It was the advent of colour television which, strangely enough, offerred hope in the mid-Sixties that 50MHz might after all have a future within these islands. Surely, it was argued at the time (and more insistently as the years passed) the continuation of 405-line television in Bands 1 and 3 is a profitless policy when the nation is changing over massively to 625-line colour TV in Bands 4 and 5? Profitless, perhaps: but while the last small pockets of black-and-white reception remained in existence it was policy that they should be given a 405-line service on VHF.

Britain's rooftops told their own story of Band 4/5 antennas burgeoning by the million in place of the old VHF ones. Where Band 1/3 antennas were still visible it was generally in a prone position on house roof--tiles.

So if there was a minimal logic of continuing a 405-line TV service there was a rather stronger logic that pointed to the wasteful consumption of megawatts of mains energy for the benefit of a miniscule and dwindling 405-line clientele. Inevitably there came the moment, long awaited by 6m-band enthusiasts, of the announcement that VHF television would be phased out by the mid-Eighties.

PANEL 1: A SELECTION OF 6M BEACONS AND THEIR FREQUENCIES

Europe		
GB3SIX	50.02MHz	Anglesey
ZB2VHF	50.035MHz	Gibraltar
Africa		
ZS5TR	50.05MHz	Durban
ZS6DN	50.0501MHz	Johannesburg
South America		
FY7THF	50.039MHz	French Guiana
PY2AA	50.062MHz	Sao Paulo, Brazil
Asia		
Japan	50.01MHz	Many locations centred on this frequency
Central America		
6Y5RC	50.025MHz	Jamaica