

The Mystery of the Missing G7s

This is the tale of a quest to discover the gaps in our callsign series: it started with a chance hearing and gradually took on the fascination of an archaeological 'dig'...

four letters followed by a single figure (other than 0 or 1) in the case of other mobile stations; (f) one or two letters and a single figure (other than 0 or 1) followed by a group of not more than three

Have you ever wondered why you never hear G7 or G9 callsigns on the air? Well, Andy Emmerson, G8PTH, explains the mystery.

In 'What's In A Callsign' (March '83 HRT), I set out the number and letter series used for British amateur callsigns, so I won't repeat that information here. Suffice to say that numbers 1, 7, 9 and 0 were not used in the past for amateur calls, or at least not generally. The exceptions will be explained later in this article. Of course, radio amateurs do not have a monopoly of callsigns and of all the radio calls in use, only the so-called international callsigns need conform to a pattern. Calls used locally by taxi firms and armed forces (to quote just two examples) can take any convenient form. But for international recognition, the calls take specified forms, as explained in an old GPO Handbook for Wireless Operators.

"The calls consist of: (a) three letters in the case of land stations; (b) three letters, or three letters followed by a single figure (other than 0 or 1), in the case of fixed stations; (c) four letters in the case of ship stations; (d) five letters in the case of aircraft stations; (e)

letters in the case of private experimental stations, amateur stations and private radiocommunication stations; the prohibition of the use of the figure 0 and 1, however, does not apply to amateur stations.

The nationality of a station is indicated by the first letter or letters of the callsign."

Presumably the figures 1 and 0 were capable of confusion with the letters I and O. With the solitary exceptions of GB1RS soon after the last war and GB1IARU in 1981, the British licensing authorities avoided their use until recently. This just leaves us with the G7 and G9 series.

G9 = Private Experimental

The G9 calls are not very mysterious in fact; they come in the 'private experimental station' category mentioned above. More commonly known as Test and Development calls, they are assigned to organisations who design or repair equipment and need to test this on the air. I have not traced any

pre-war G9 calls; one of the oldest was G9AED, the pilot Band III transmitter used by independent television from 1955 onwards.

Nowadays G9 calls are issued only where speech is involved, not for video or data transmission. The series has recently passed G9BZE, so they are not issued very fast! A number of amateur radio dealers hold G9 calls, so they are occasionally heard on our bands. In fact it was hearing one of these dealers using a G9 call that caught my attention originally.

G7?

The callsigns beginning G7 were more difficult to track down, because the Radio Regulatory Department told me there are no G7s in force at the moment. Furthermore they had no record of any previous use (though the series is due for re-use shortly). The earliest recorded use was during the last war, as noted by Mike Ockenden in his article 'Bitte QRX Krieg' (Short Wave Magazine, June 1981). Eight British stations, G7FA-G7FH, contacted German and Swiss stations in 1945, while the war was still on. This was unusual to say the least — we were still at war with Germany and amateur transmitting was officially banned.

It is also understood that calls in the G7A plus one letter series were issued just before the end of the war by the Radio Security Service (RSS) to 'voluntary interceptor' operators. These amateurs were allowed to work 7MHz from home, presumably to make contact with stations operating as pirates inside Europe. This would enable the RSS to get bearings on these clandestine operators. Considerable doubt still surrounds these wartime activities and if nobody comes forward soon, the questions may remain unanswered forever.

After this, G7 calls were allocated to maritime colleges for training stations. These colleges have replica ships' wireless stations — operating into dummy loads — and used to have callsigns such as G7TM in Southampton. I'd be pleased to hear of other examples, especially if still in use. Apart from this, a non-directional beacon was heard transmitting a G7-plus-two call in MCW just