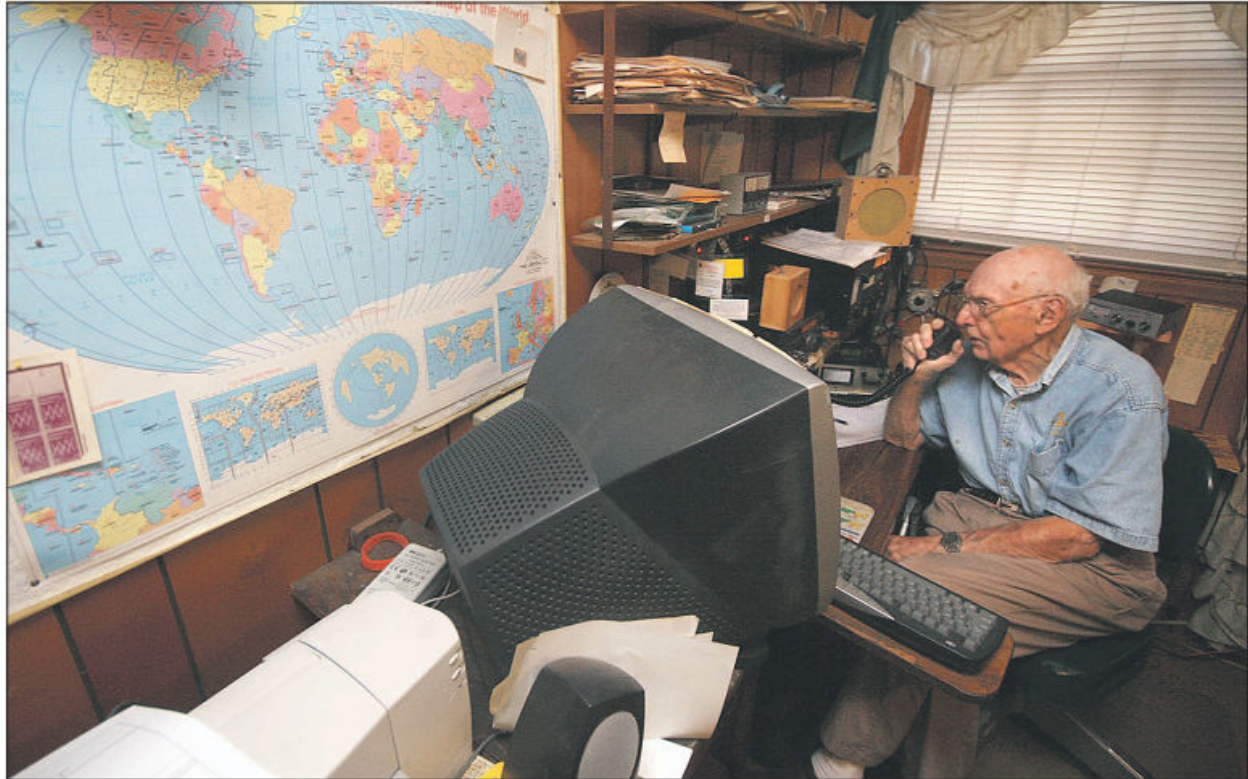


# Aristotle of the airwaves



Gazette photos by Mike Hensell

Donald Voigt, 89, has been using ham radios since he was 21, talking with people all over the world. Here, Voigt talks on his ham radio in a bedroom of his home on Old Dallas Highway on a recent Tuesday morning.

## Ham radio fountain of youth for 89-year-old Pop

By Nick Tabor  
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Don Voigt, 89, walks between piles of tools, wire and cables, and sits down between his computer and his black ham radio. He dials in to his standard morning frequency, waits for a pause in the conversation, and dicks the button on his handset.

"W4HQF," he says.

"Good mornin', Pop!" several staticky voices say.

One voice comes from Cross, S.C. Another comes from Salisbury. Most come from Gaston County. Most belong to retired men who worked in electronics for years and turned to amateur radios for a hobby.

The six or so regulars talk for about an hour and a half every morning, about electronics, antennas and the weather.

"Whatever comes on our mind, we talk about it," George Poteat of Dallas said. "It's just a bunch of friends, getting together and talking."

Voigt has operated radios most of his life, but since his wife died in 1995, radio groups like this one have provided him with much-needed

company, in the comfort of his house.

"I have a lot of good friends in radio," he said. "There's a lot of camaraderie. A lot of good fellowship in ham radio."

Voigt said he got "hooked" on radios during his childhood in Wisconsin.

He obtained his amateur radio license in 1941, the same year he married his wife and entered the Army to work on radios and radar equipment. He served for four years, then worked as an engineer for a North Carolina radio station while raising two boys.

In his spare time, Voigt would build radios and antennas at home, and travel to operate radios in other countries.

He has operated radios in China twice, under government permission that took him months to acquire, in Tahiti, Germany, East Malaysia and Bora Bora.

Voigt said he can't travel abroad anymore because of his age — he took his last trip seven years ago.

But after he cleans the house and tinkers with radios in his workshop,



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Don Voigt  
ham radio enthusiast

Antarctica and Australia.

Voigt remembers "the good old days," when simple tasks like finding a particular frequency took much more time and effort than they take now. He feels ambivalent toward the new technology.

"It's made it more fun I guess. I don't know," he said. "It sure was fun when you had to experiment."

Voigt keeps up with the new technology regardless. He interfaces his radio with his computer, and uses software to translate digital teletype — which sounds like beeps and whines — into words on the screen. He can find an operator's name and location in seconds, via an Internet search engine, if he knows the call number.

"At his age, ham radio actually gives him something to keep interested in," Poteat said. "I feel like it's actually making him live longer."

Poteat describes Voigt as "sharp as a tack," however.

"Everybody calls me 'Pop' because I'm so old," Voigt said with a laugh. "I guess, for getting close to 90, I guess I get along pretty good."

he often turns the radio on in the afternoons and evenings as well. During those later hours he has better chances of finding operators from other countries, he said. He has talked with operators as far away as