South African Radio League

Amateur Radio Hall of Fame

Bert Howes, ZS6HS
Inducted in 2017

Herbert Louis Lockwood (Bert) Howes was born in 1915. He was first licenced as ZS1AL in Cape Town in 1935. He remained an SARL member from 1932 to his death in 2011, aged 96.

His plans to enter the local technical college to become a radio technician were thwarted by the Depression. He found a job assembling Fairbanks Morse wireless sets which were imported from the US in kit form. His skills as self-taught radio technician enabled him to design and build a wireless set for a vessel that was brought into port by the Captain and passengers after the crew had downed tools.

Bert was a true experimenter and a pioneer of VHF in South Africa.

In 1936, he used his home-built radio equipment to control the annual Grand Prix. His network included two aircraft stationed at opposite ends of the track. His use of airborne radio soon attracted the attention of the South African Air Force. Fortunately for Bert and his amateur radio licence, the Postmaster General's misgivings about this irregular usage of amateur radio were mitigated by the new abilities this technological innovation had conferred on the Air Force.

Bert joined 3 Brigade Signals unit as a radio operator in 1936. He served in North Africa and Italy during the War. He eventually advanced to the rank of Colonel, becoming the first Director of Signals for the South African Army.

Bert experimented on the 5 m band (56 MHz), using portable superregenerative receivers and a halfwave Zepp antennas around Cape Town and even on an expedition to Platteklip Gorge. In 1937, he picked up audio from BBC television transmitters.

After the Second World War, Bert established the first South African distance record on 50 MHz with MD5KW in Port Said, Egypt. Bert experimented on various propagation modes including sporadic E, Meteor Scatter, EME and satellites. He remained active on VHF into the twenty-first century.

Bert was granted the SARL President's Award in 2008.