

MEET CLIFF W4KKP, SOUTH-CARS' OLDEST ACTIVE MEMBER, 106 YEARS OLD; MEMBER NUMBER 4223

Article by: Rick Hatalski—ND4Z
South-Cars Net Manager



I had the pleasure of having lunch with my friend Mr. Cliff Kayhart on Thursday, May 24th at a Lexington, SC restaurant, along with several other ham operators.



Cliff was featured in the June issue of QST magazine, page 19. He has been a long time active member of South-Cars; checking into the net when the opportunity is provided by good propagation on the 40 meter band; allowing contact with a net control station. However, he has become such a celebrity over the past several years; in demand for contacts by all who hear him on the air, it is hard to find the time to check-in as often. He enjoys visiting amateur radio clubs and dining out with his fellow ham operators.

Cliff Kayhart W4KKP center with Rick Hatalski ND4Z to his left.



Cliff was not kidding when he said he enjoys eating out with friends. Nothing like a great “eat and meet” with your friends.

To learn more about Cliff’s life as a radio operator while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II and finding out how he became interested in amateur radio. Please checkout the QST article below and stop by his QRZ page, where you will find many more pictures of Cliff and his friends.

Member Spotlight

Cliff Kayhart, W4KKP

Charles “Cliff” Kayhart, W4KKP, is still an active ham at 106 years of age. With a degree in aeronautical engineering and his electronics expertise, Cliff had worked for RCA, AT&T, Bendix Aviation, Philco, the Army Signal Corps, and, before retiring, as an engineer at the Magnavox color TV manufacturing plant in Greeneville, Tennessee.

First Forays into Radio

In 1919, 8-year-old Cliff was fascinated by a friend’s crystal radio, and from that time on, learning and operating radios became his favorite hobby. He studied every circuit diagram, and the function of every radio component. Cliff built all of his radios, with many having RCA tubes. As a teen, he built a regenerative radio for himself and his father, and discovered the super regenerative receiver that was developed by Edwin H. Armstrong. All of Cliff’s inquisitive hands-on radio knowledge earned him a living in electronics, as well as enjoyment as an Amateur Radio hobbyist.

As an Army Signal Corps Lieutenant stationed in Iwo Jima during World War II, with the help of his crew of 12 men and the Navy Seabees, Cliff set up a commercial-type AM/CW station with a rhombic antenna erected on towers. One antenna was aimed toward the Pentagon, one toward China (US was fighting the Japanese in China), another to Hawaii, and the other to San Francisco.

Dream of a Repeater

While living in Tennessee in the early 1970s, Cliff’s dream was to build his own repeater and have it erected on a mountain peak. He decided the repeater should be built on the 4,844-foot peak of Camp Creek Bald. This would be a difficult and dangerous challenge as Cliff drove up the narrow dirt mountain with many 500-foot drop-offs. But because of Cliff’s persistence and motivation, his first working 2-meter FM repeater, WR4KKP, was ready to transmit and receive from a 15-foot tower near



Cliff Kayhart, W4KKP, one of the world’s oldest active hams at 106, enjoys getting on the HF bands.

the summit of Camp Creek Bald on the Tennessee/North Carolina border. The WR4KKP repeater had a single quarter-wave antenna. Round copper tubes served as resonators so that they could block out the transmitter from the incoming signal when the repeater was operating.

The severe mountain environment frequently detuned the resonators, so Cliff redesigned the repeater using two antennas — one right above the other, with a shield between them. This worked, no matter what the temperature was on the mountain. Today, Cliff’s repeater is still operational, and is maintained by the Andrew Johnson Amateur Radio Club, W4WC.

On the Air at 106

A year ago, Cliff became a resident of the Heritage at Lowman, in White Rock, South Carolina, and still enjoys working the HF bands from his room, thanks to members of the Dutch Fork Amateur Radio Group, W4DFG, and the Columbia Amateur Radio Club, W4CAE, who helped set up his antenna. There have been times when Cliff gets on the air and stations pile up to have a contact with one of the world’s oldest operating hams.



In the 1970s, Cliff Kayhart, W4KKP, installed his FM repeater on the summit of Camp Creek Bald. The repeater is still operational today and is maintained by the Andrew Johnson Amateur Radio Club.