

Local

# First football broadcast recalled

By KATHLEEN A. WAKE-FIELD  
Battalion Reporter

A radio station which originally operated as a ham system was set up at Texas A&M University in 1921, and by a chain of occurrences came to broadcast the first play-by-play football game known in history.

The events which led to the transmission of the game was originally intended to be a stunt, said W. A. Tolson, a former Texas A&M student who was the builder and broadcaster of the transmitter as written in documents procured from the Texas A&M University Archives.

After the war, when civilians were permitted to use ham radios, Tolson and his friend, B. Lewis Wilson, who was in charge of electrical maintenance in the electrical engineering laboratories, set out to build a ham transmitter.

In order to get a transmitter, Tolson and Wilson had to "steal" a high-voltage transformer from a professor's laboratory. The next step was to "procure" about 100 glass photographic plates from the Campus Photo Studio that were to be used as a transmitting condenser.

The third step proved to be the most difficult when Tolson and Wil-

son found they needed a rotary spark gap. This problem was solved when "in Professor W. G. James' office was an object which made our mouths water" — an electric fan.

Here is the story as Tolson and Wilson remembered it:

"The progress of science was somewhat delayed by the adamant refusal of Professor James to allow his fan to be placed in winter storage until the weather got cool."

However, "fate intervened in the favor of science" and somehow the fan miraculously fell out of a window where "someone had carelessly placed it." Once the fan was retrieved, the only part of the object not damaged was the motor which could easily find a useful purpose as a rotary spark gap.

The first transmitter was born at Texas A&M.

F. C. Bolton, professor of electrical engineering, got a transmitter license for the project, which carried the call letters 5YA.

Station 5YA operated as a ham relay until the idea came up to give a play-by-play account of the Thanksgiving Day football game on Nov. 24, 1921 between the arch rivals, the Texas Aggies and the Texas Longhorns.

Before the game could be aired, a major problem had to be overcome.

The Morse Code system that would be used to send the game over the wires was much too slow to keep up with the action of the game. To solve the problem, the legendary Texas A&M football coach, Dana X. Bible, developed some football abbreviations which could be sent over the wires.

Copies of the abbreviations were then sent to the amateur stations that would be interested in receiving the broadcast.

Some examples of the abbreviations are "TB A 45Y" which meant "Texas' ball on the Aggie's 45 yard line" and "T FP & Y L" which meant "Texas forward pass and yards lost."

The fans went wild as they listened to the Texas Aggies defeat the Texas Longhorns to a what may have been either a 7-0 win or a 0-0 tie, records at the archives are contradictory. If the score was 7-0, the Aggies had an "undefeated, untied, and unscored upon" season.

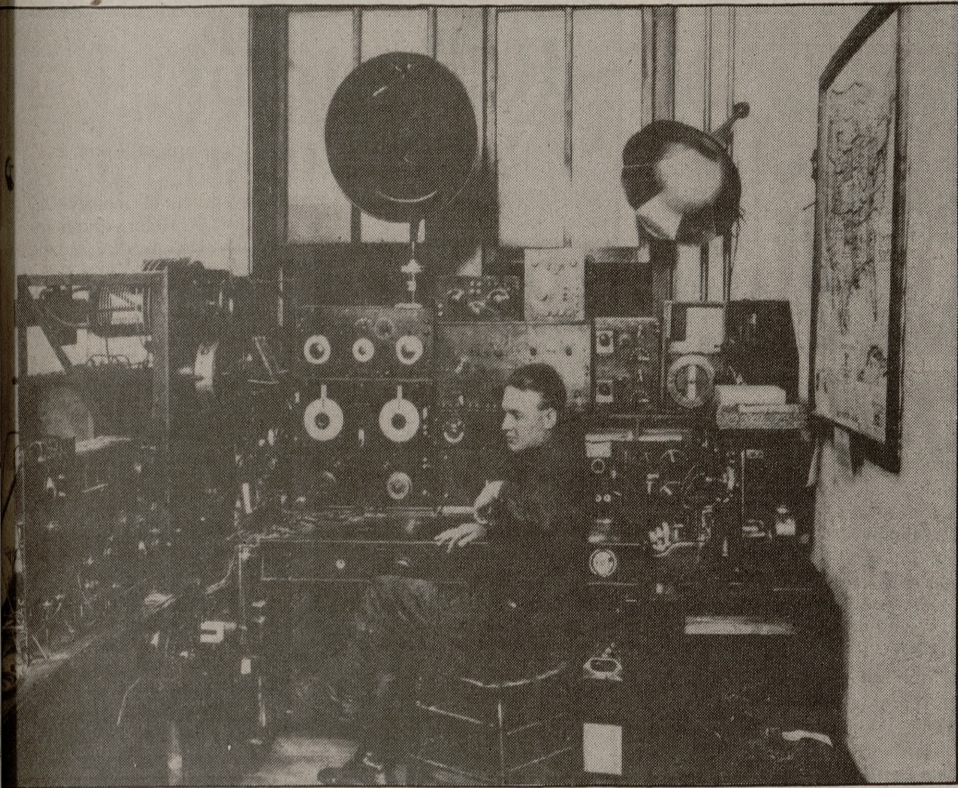


Photo courtesy of Texas A&M University Archives.

W.A. Tolson at controls of radio station 5YA, which became WTAW in 1957. The first football play-by-play broadcast in history was made of the Texas A&M-Texas game in 1921.

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Anyone interested in the trip to Europe from May 20 to June 15 can sign up now in the Student Programs Office in the MSC. A \$500 deposit is required upon signing up.

The final cost of the trip is \$1,499 excluding cost of airfare. Dec. 1 is the registration date for trips to Ixtapa, Mexico and New Orleans. The trip to Ixtapa, which is west of Acapulco, will be May through May 23. Cost of that trip includes round trip airfare and overnight accommodation.

A deposit of \$100 is required to sign up in the SPO.

The bus trip to New Orleans for Mardi Gras will be Feb. 27 through March 1. Price of the trip is \$79 which includes bus fare and two nights lodging. Full payment for the trip is required at registration.

## Insurance claims due

Texas A&M University faculty and staff who wish to file claims against their group medical insurance for injuries incurred during 1979 must do so by Dec. 31, 1980.

Ray Smith, director of personnel, said claims should be submitted to the insurance claims office of the Personnel Department by Dec. 5 to allow time for processing before the 31-day deadline with Southwestern Insurance Co.

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Construction is about to begin on the site of the old Circle Drive-In. Consequently, this area will no longer be available for student parking. We regret any inconvenience, but as of

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