

GB2BP on Magnus

The idea of an amateur radio station operating from the biggest steel structure in the North Sea may seem incongruous. Luckily, 'the powers that be' agreed to my request – what better time could be chosen for such a station than the date of the inauguration of the Magnus Field by the Prime Minister on 14th September 1983?

Stan Crabtree, GM3OXC, samples Amateur Radio on Magnus – “the biggest steel structure in the North Sea”.

The writer had twice previously operated a similar station in the Forties Oilfield in 1975 and 1978. A 150 foot long wire, suspended from the helideck and weighted with a piece of metal, had performed very well on all bands. However, this time it was not so easy. Whereas Forties had started up with communications on the marine bands, Magnus was implemented using sophisticated data communications circuits and multi-channel links to the shore by tropospheric scatter. Probably the lowest frequency in general use on Magnus was the marine VHF band around 160 MHz. On top of this the accommodation was pressurised and there was no question of simply drilling a hole through a bulkhead for an HF antenna entry. Eventually, it was decided to use a spare, fibreglass marine communications whip aerial about 30 feet long and protruding out from the structure about half way up. This was mounted on the south west side of the platform and good for UK contacts – the principal aim of the operation.

A few accessories were sent ahead but the station transceiver, a Yaesu FT101B was hand-carried by the writer on Tuesday 13th September, the day before the inauguration ceremony. GM4FFG

was fortunately the resident radio operator on the platform at the time and had everything generally ready by the time I arrived. Frank spent some time using the rig on CW when the writer decided to relax in the cinema!

Due to the lack of other available space and the position of the antenna feed point, it had been agreed that

the operating position should be in a corner of the radio room. This was situated on the 7th level of the 9 storeyed structure.

Licensing as a special event station had been effectively processed by RSGB head quarters and the requested call, GB2BP, was issued for the third time. On previous occasions of operation from a platform we had gone after DX. As well as the vertical top fed wire, a 14AVQ had been mounted on a high spot and resulted in many long distance QSO's on 21MHz and 28MHz. However, this time, we realised we were limited because of the positioning of the antenna. Our idea was to work as many UK stations as possible on CW and SSB and treat any DX contacts as a bonus. Again, because of antenna restrictions, top band (1.8MHz) would not be used.

On the air

The station was fired up on 40 metres just after noon on the 13th September and the first contact, after a brief CQ call, was with GM3TCW, Lanarkshire with a promising 5 and 9 both ways. After just three more contacts disaster struck. The Yaesu was muted on all but the 'TUNE' position and would not transmit on CW or phone. We

reasoned it to be a relay but the main send/receive unit appeared OK. With the help of Bob, one of the platform technicians, we turned the set on its side and removed the holding screws of the bottom. As the last came out, the set burst into life! It seemed a group of leads had somehow become jammed between the bottom panel and the case and had temporarily short circuited. Anyway, we were back in business and the rig performed marvellously for the rest of the sortie.

A marvellous run then developed on 14MHz CW of 87 stations in 2 hours. Unfortunately, this was the only time DX was easily available. The unusual call sign – at least on the higher bands – undoubtedly had something to do with our popularity. We didn't try to explain our locations in much detail as it seemed to prove confusing! Good conditions on 20 metres did not reappear during the rest of the operation and only two QSOs were made on 15 metres. After a spell on 40 again in the late afternoon we returned to 20 metres and packed in when the band folded at 2130 hours.

On Wednesday a few CW QSOs were achieved on 80 metres around 0630 hours local time but after half an hour we switched to 40 metres and remained there until 1330 on both phone and CW. Moving to 20 metres we managed a few JAs and Europeans. We remained on this band except for a brief look at 40m around 1530 hours until 'twenty' folded at 2200. Nothing very exotic in the way of contacts, VEs (Canadian stations) and the odd W. It was strange to hear Gs at good strength and without their characteristic 'watery' signals on this band. But, of course, we were over 500 miles from the centre of the UK.

Our bread-and-butter band was