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Radio Graveyard

If you hang out with AM DXers long enough, you'll run into the term "graveyard" or "GY." DXers seem particularly proud of their "graveyard" loggings; the National Radio Club's newsletter has a separate column just for these loggings. Are people actually DXing from cemeteries?!

No, the term "graveyard" refers to six specific frequencies on the AM dial: the frequencies 1230, 1240, 1340, 1400, 1450, and 1490 kHz. These frequencies contain an unusual number of stations, between 150 and 180 each, as opposed to approximately 60 stations on nearby frequencies like 1250 and 1380. Because of the unusual number of stations, there is also an unusual amount of interference. DXing these frequencies can be a real challenge.

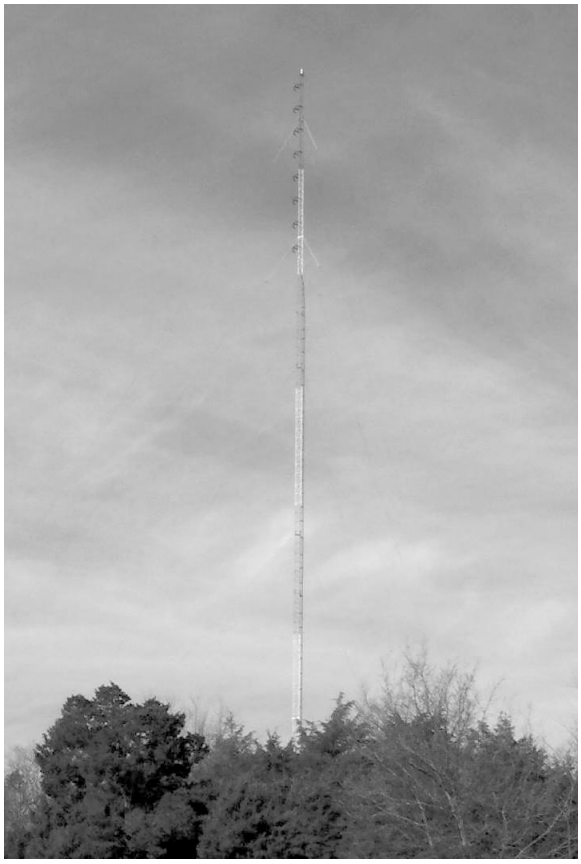
In the earliest days of AM broadcasting, all stations were lumped together on the same frequency. It didn't take long for interference to become intolerable. It became necessary to split stations into several classes, eventually arriving at a four-class system. Class I stations were completely protected from interference. They were intended to serve much or all of the country. Class II stations shared frequencies with each other and with Class I operations. Class II stations often delivered extensive coverage across several states. Class III stations had their own frequencies; these stations covered cities and their surrounding rural areas with powers up to 5,000 watts.

These three classes provided significant coverage. But, they also left many smaller cities without any available frequencies. A fourth class of station was provided to allow the establishment of local stations in these smaller locations. These Class IV stations also had their own frequencies, and were originally authorized 250 watts daytime and 100 watts at night. These are the "graveyard" channels.

Because of the relatively low power and limited protected coverage area, these stations could be packed close together. While the coverage may have been limited, there might be no other opportunity for a station to get a channel that permitted nighttime operation. Over the years, the number of "graveyard" stations grew; today, there are over 1,000 of these in the United States.

A few years ago, the FCC redesignated AM channels. Class I stations became Class A; Class II and III stations became Class B; and Class IV stations were renamed Class C. The power levels authorized for Class C/IV stations have crept up over the years. For many years, they were authorized 1,000 watts daytime and 250 at night; about 20 years ago, this was increased to 1,000 watts fulltime. As you might imagine, with over 150 1,000 watt stations on a frequency, the interference is ruinous!

Adding to the challenge of DXing these stations, these are small stations, far more likely to be satellite-fed. Still, the persistent DXer can make some interesting loggings here. Persistence is the most important thing. Just pick a frequency and keep listening. You're only going to hear brief bursts from any particular station, but if you're lucky the station will give some kind of identifying information during one of those bursts. It's the baseball season; you can count on being within range of five or six stations carrying different games. Stations often identify between innings. When you do get an ID on one of these frequencies, be proud. These truly are the "dead zones" of most DXer's dials.



WHOP-1230 Hopkinsville, Kentucky, is a "graveyard channel" station. The eight circles protruding to the left are the antenna of WHOP-FM.

Mailbag

• Here in the USA, most radio stations have been privately owned for decades. Such is not the case in Europe. While France has had privately-owned FM stations for years, it received its first privately-owned AM station in January. "Ciel AM" operates on 981 kHz with 5 kW from the Paris suburb of Romainville. Jean Yves Camus says the station carries mostly music for the city's Jewish community, with information programs at noon and 5pm. Reports have already been received from Finland; U.S. DXers in coastal locations may be able to hear this one later this year.

• James Henderson wrote from northern Alabama, sending a copy of a note he'd sent the FCC asking for help identifying some FM stations in his area. Unfortunately, he's unlikely to get much useful information from the Commission. The government doesn't keep track of stations' slogans or the type of music/programming aired. Your best bet for identifying FM stations probably remains Bruce Elving's *FM Atlas*, available through Universal Radio (800-431-3939).

James also comments "Some FM stations will identify as being in several cities as much as 60 miles apart, which makes it hard to pinpoint a location for the station." True! FCC regulations require that the "city of license" be given first. You will find the station in the FCC's records under this city.

Years of trying have brought me only ten loggings on the "graveyard" AM channels. Are you doing any better? Write me at Box 98, Brasstown NC 28902-0098, or by email to *w9wi@w9wi.com*. Good DX!