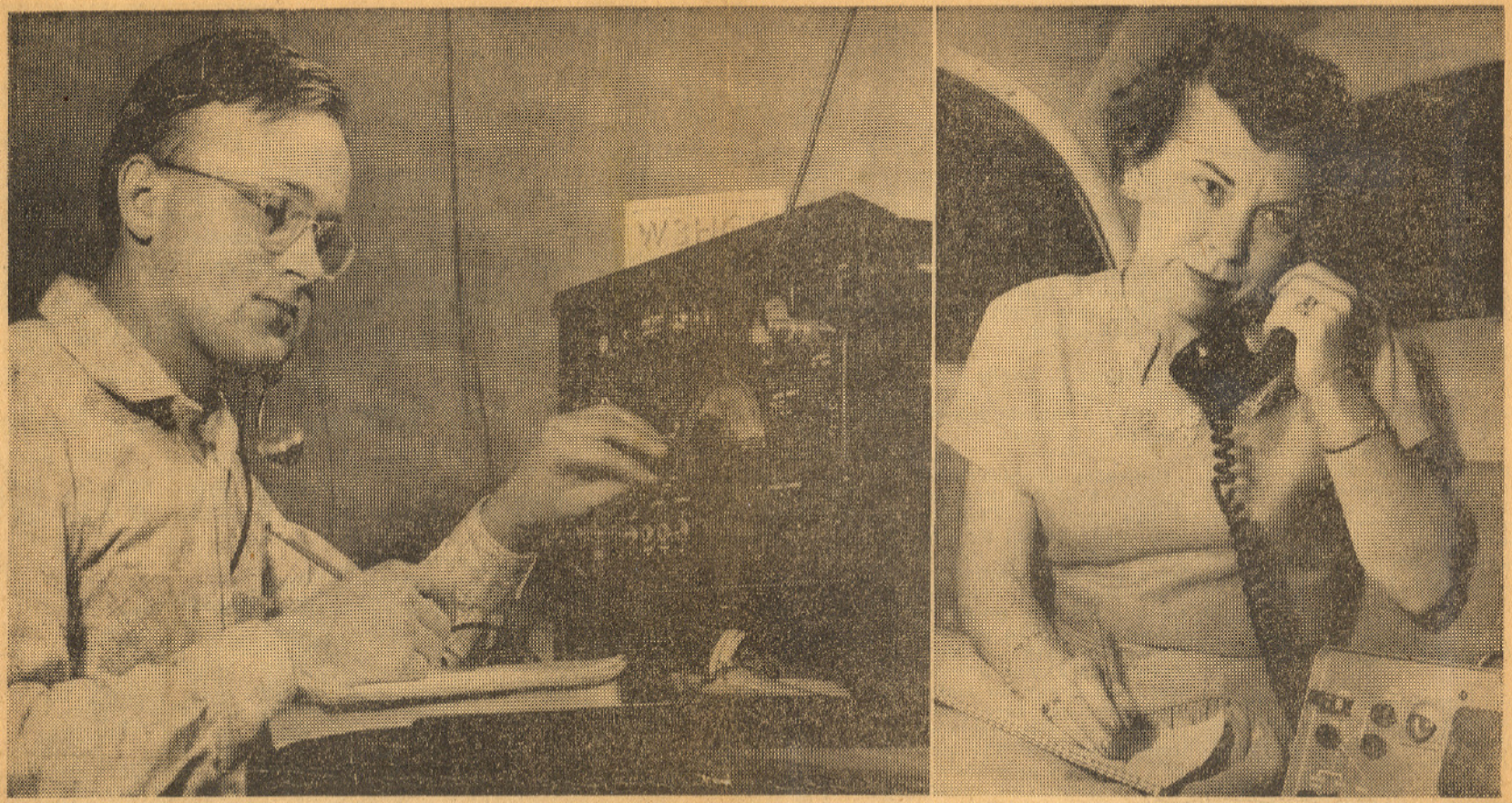


HAMMING IT UP—Here are two of the Lehigh Valley's 500 amateur radio operators, or "hams", who aid Civil Defense. They are Ira Kerschner, whose call letters are W 3 AZR, broadcasting from Control Center, and Mrs. Elsie Oberdoester, W 3 ICQ, taking a message in a car.

Lehigh Valley's 500 Radio Operators

They're 'Hams', But They're Pros at Public Service

There are hams and there are "hams."

This is about "hams" — amateur radio operators and hobbyists. About 500 of them in the Lehigh Valley help guard your safety.

They serve in Civil Defense organizations, in National Guard and reserve units, as independents on call when needed. One of the most important services of Lehigh County Civil Defense, the communications division, is staffed largely by radio "hams."

In the Lehigh Valley, and all over the world, "hams" have been credited with saving life and property in times of emergency. Because of their hobby, they are able to link isolated or stricken areas with the outside world, bringing speedy help when and where it is most needed.

Lehigh County Civil Defense leaders recognize the value of "ham" operators. They had first-hand opportunity to see them at work during the 1955 floods. Accordingly, the Lehigh Valley Amateur Radio Club was urged to join the Civil Defense organization.

Chartered in 1928

The club was organized and chartered in 1928. There was no clubhouse. Members met in private homes. As time wore on, interest in the club diminished — but interest in radio continued.

Then came the post-World War II Civil Defense program — and an opportunity to reestablish the club. It's going strong now.

There are regular meetings, where new ideas on radio techniques are discussed, at the Lehigh County C.D. Control Center, 1201 Sumner Ave., Allentown. Club meetings, at 7 p.m. every Friday, are open to all who are interested.

Growing Enthusiasm

The 500 "hams" in the Lehigh Valley are a handful of the more than 200,000 registered amateurs in the world. About 140,000 of these are in the United States.

Back in 1917, when the United States entered World War I, there were only 6,000 amateur radio operators. They were quickly sought out by the armed services, and 4,000 were inducted for World War service. More than 25,000 "hams" served in the nation's armed forces in World War II, and thousands more did important civilian work for the government.

The Old Days

Lehigh County amateur operators recall that following the hobby in the early days of the club wasn't easy.

A "ham" had to be a radio technician of ability in those days. He couldn't go to a store and buy a transmitter or receiver kit. For one thing, kits weren't available. The price would have been prohibitive. For instance, a transmitter crystal that can be had for $2 today was priced at $25 in 1928. And in those days they had to be able to take 13 words a minute in code.

Today, radio is no more expensive than other hobbies. The amateur ranks, as a result, are swelling.

U. S. Testing

To become a radio amateur the hobbyist must first pass several examinations. Uncle Sam won't issue licenses until the applicant proves he can operate and care for apparatus, observe laws and regulations affecting radio amateurs and send and receive code.

There are four classes of licensed amateurs: novice, technician, general (or conditional) and amateur extra.

The Lehigh Valley Radio Club recently started classes for young men and women interested in obtaining licenses. The classes will be taught radio law, theory of electronics and code.

The club hopes some day to enlist all Lehigh Valley amateurs for Civil Defense service. The selling points: fun, self-improvement, service. "Hams" say "hams" can do much to erase barriers of nation, race, color, creed.