

Louis Varney, G5RV

LOUIS VARNEY, G5RV, inventor of the aerial that bears his call sign, died peacefully at his home in Burgess Hill, West Sussex, on 28 June 2000. He was 89.

Arguably the most famous name in amateur radio today, his interest in the subject dates back to his early scouting days. At the age of 16, Louis had the Artificial Aerial Licence 2ARV and, with his friend Jack Hum, 2AJJ, he experimented with crystals of galena, zincite and bornite in LC circuits with a cat's whisker, obtaining a feeble oscillation. The results of their joint efforts were submitted to the Postmaster General of the day, and they were then awarded their full licences of G5RV and G5UM. Louis remarked: "Had we had a better knowledge of Physics, we might have invented the transistor some 18 years before the Americans". As it was, this was left to Bardeen, Shockley and Brattain at the Bell Laboratories in 1948.

He was born on 9 June 1911 into a talented, middle-class family. His schooling began in Golders Green and Hendon, where he became a Boy Scout, earning his Signaller's badge and building his first crystal set at the age of 11. He used to listen to radio amateurs on the 440-metre band.

He left school at the age of 17, becoming an electrical apprentice. After two years, he was invited to attend interviews with the Chief

Engineers of the BBC and of the Marconi Company, and decided to accept a post with the Marconi Company in Chelmsford. Within three years he became Chief Instructor, and by 1941 he became Chief Technical Assistant to the Chief Engineer. He left the Marconi Company during the war, and accepted a Commission at Hanslope Park, being responsible for the installation, calibration and maintenance of all SCU3 HF direction-finding systems in the UK.

Returning to the Marconi Company after the war, he worked at the Great Baddow Research Laboratories before being posted to Caracas, Venezuela, on company business.

In 1960, he left Marconi for work with the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) on a multi-European defence communication project.

The world-famous G5RV aerial dates back to 1946, when his back garden in Stony Stratford was barely 100 feet long. During the intervening years, manufacturers have reaped the financial rewards for selling their G5RVs, while Louis never made a penny from it. He has been satisfied with radiating a good signal from his own three aerials – a half-size, a standard, and a double-size G5RV. Would he use anything else? Louis was always too much of a gentleman to comment.

Over the years, Louis lived in or visited some 75 countries, and has held about 55 call signs. He was a



(Photo G0WGP)

founder member of the First-Class CW Operators' Club and of the Radio Amateur Old Timers' Association. He was a member of the Radio Society of Great Britain until his death, serving as a member of Council in the 1960s, and having an unbroken membership of 74 years.

His funeral was held at the Woodlawn Crematorium in Brighton, on 4 July. The RSGB was represented, and the funeral was attended by radio amateurs from many countries. Such was the esteem in which he was held by all who knew him, either personally, or via the medium which was his life – amateur radio. Our thoughts and sympathy are extended to his family at this difficult time.