

In this short life I am learning about some of the people I have made radio friendships with! The World Wide Web makes a lot of it possible. One of these fascinating people is Steve (N2DAN) Nurkiewicz ex WA2YBR of Long Island and Florida. Steve is a silent key now but his memory lives on in many ways.

First, I enjoyed our weekly contacts on CW, Steve was good at conversation and I could tell right away he was nautical! Steve's QSL card featured his sailing vessel. He was very active in that area of life. Being a member of the Wireless Pioneer Fraternity, we were instant brothers! Steve would take the time for a chat after the weekly net, when not many others would. I enjoyed getting to know a person.

In later years I learned Steve was a machinist and hand crafted some marvelous key paddles. I filed all of that back in my memory bank. Little did I know Steve would become a cult member and adored by the cw fellows of our radio fraternity for his unique skills.

Steve S. Nurkiewicz (N2DAN) age 70 expires of cancer 21 May 1997 in Florida. A Morse code key crafter of Port Charlotte, Florida - Nurkiewicz was known by CW operators for his hand-crafted Mercury paddles, which featured a round, all-chrome design. His wife survives - 1997 W3CW

The following from Parade Magazine 22 March 1981 - **“How a son found his parents after 40 years.”** If prizes were awarded for family reunions, Stefan Nurkiewicz of Freeport, N.Y. would surely win a blue ribbon. His reunion with his parents was 40 years in the making and took the unlikely combination of Polish-American friendship, luck and a father's singular determination to see his son again.

The dramatic meeting between Nurkiewicz, a 54 year old machinist and his 80 year old father marked the end of a tragic separation that began in war-torn Poland of 1939. At first glance, the ruddy-faced bespectacled Nurkiewicz is the average American. He married the girl next door, has two handsome children, an attractive waterfront home and a successful precision machine shop he and his wife built together “by working until 2 or 3 in the morning.”

But Steve is no ordinary American. He was born near the Polish border with the Soviet Union in 1926. Thirteen years later, his father Zdzislaw, a dashing cavalry commander, would lead his men – armed only with sabers and lances – into the battle against invading Nazi troops. Stefan parted with his heroic father on that day, 2 Sept 1939. Just two weeks later, Russian soldiers, crossed the border 10 miles away to claim a huge expanse of eastern Poland. Thousands of frightened Poles, including Mrs. Nurkiewicz and her children, were rounded up and herded into railroad cars for a torturous three week trip to a hellish Siberian exile.

Within the next two years, two of Stefan's younger brothers died of malnutrition and illness. Then a sympathetic doctor, pitying the family's misery, allowed him to join an army of Polish exiles fighting for the Allies. He was sent to Tehran for training, then fought in Allied campaigns in the Middle East, North Africa and Monte Cassio, Italy, where he was wounded. Continued

After the war, not knowing if his parents were still alive and unable to return to his Soviet occupied homeland, Stefan emigrated to Brooklyn.

The story might have ended there if it hadn't been for a wartime photograph (taken for a Polish magazine called Parade) of the teenaged soldier Stefan and a 47 year old veteran who had become his unofficial guardian. It was published in Polish newspapers and later in a book in which the repatriated Zdzislaw Nurkiewicz and his wife Jazefa excitedly recognized their son and began the long search to locate him.

The elderly calvary soldier had miraculously survived the German destruction of the Polish military. But he had become an enemy of the Soviet controlled government for having dared to fight the invading Russians. He evaded the authorities for a while, but eventually the secret police caught up with him. He was tried as a "bandit" and sentenced to death. But the sentence was commuted to 15 years in prison. Meanwhile, Stefan's mother scrubbed floors in Poland to feed herself.

In Brooklyn, Stefan was raising a family and establishing his successful business. "I really thought they were all dead," he recalls. "I gave up hope and gradually it helped me to forget. The Germans destroyed the Polish Army and getting my mother out of the Soviet Union would have been like squeezing water from a stone."

Then a chance encounter in New York City in 1977 set off a bizarre chain of events. Stefan had read that a touring Polish orchestra was in town and being a musician himself (he plays bass) he decided to drop by for a drink with his countrymen. I then gave them my business card and told them to give me a call if they were ever in NYC.

Steve's acquaintances did better than that. Months later, when the troupe returned to Poland, the card was passed along to Kazik Nurkiewicz, a violinist friend of the symphony musicians who was also the keeper of the Nurkiewicz family tree and who happened to be Stefan's cousin. A letter was sent immediately to the American's business address. "I'm writing in the name of your father. If you're the man we are seeking, this would make your father extremely happy." But problems reared up again, the machinist had moved, his home and business. The undelivered letter was returned to Poland.

Undaunted, the elder Nurkiewicz, now released from prison and full of hope for the first time in 15 years, wrote to the same address, that note, too, was returned. But the old stubborn calvary commander wasn't going to give up. His next letter was given by the postman to a former business associate of Steve's, who offered to deliver it by hand. So on 6 December 1979 a trembling Steve Nurkiewicz opened the following letter and read the neat Polish script. "Dear Sir, I'm seeking one named Stefan Nurkiewicz, born in 1926, if you are the person I'm seeking, please answer..I would like to close my eyes in peace."

Shouting to his wife Terry, Steve ran to phone the man at the return address. But 40 years of separation wasn't going to be breached so easily. The only phone in Adzislaw "Nurkiewicz's town" was the post office and it took a week to set up the call. Continued

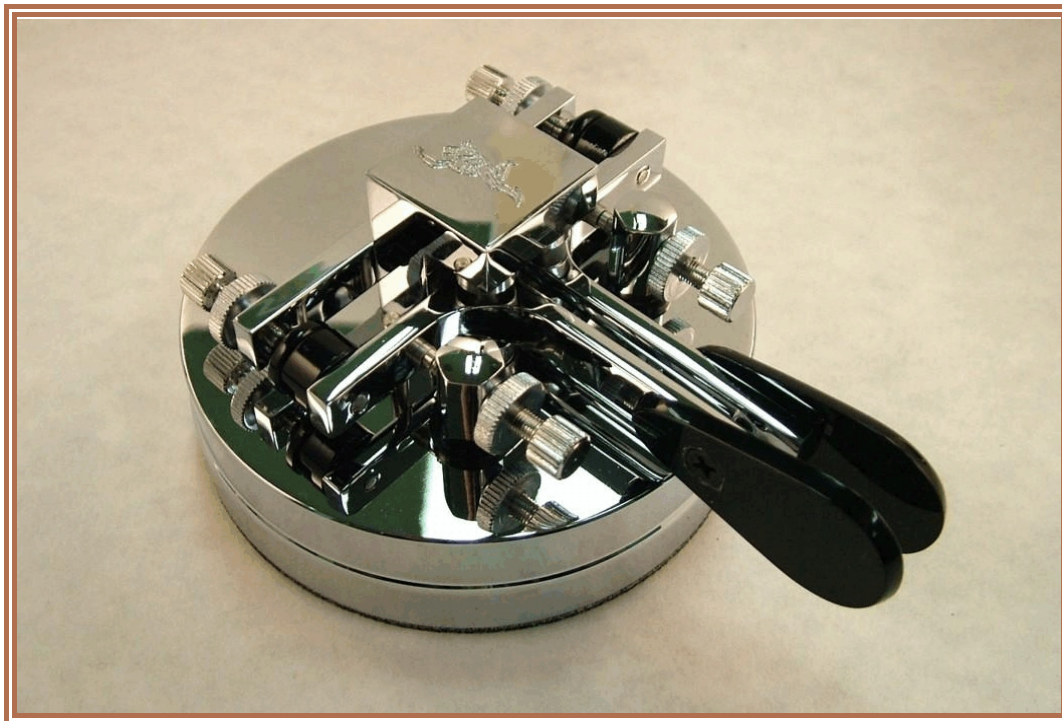
The night before, neither Steve nor Terry could sleep. At precisely 6 a.m. the phone rang, “Stefan?”..”Father?”.. How are you?

There was still a trace of doubt in Steve’s mind. Quickly he thought of a reassuring question. “Father, what was the name of your horse?” Ogien (fire), came the immediate reply. – Then an old woman’s voice came on the crackling transatlantic line. “My knees buckled and I almost fell to the floor,” says Steve. I never expected my mother to be alive too! But he recovered long enough to shout, “Mother!” Save the Christmas tree – we’re coming to Poland!

Two weeks later, after some visa troubles had been cleared up by friendly Polish Embassy officials in Washington, a joyous Nurkiewicz family flew to Krakow. Finally at the airport, says Steve, “I walked down the long path and saw a stout gray haired man with a cane. I had mixed emotions. I didn’t know this man. But I ran to him and said, “At last, Dad!” We all cried.

The Nurkiewicz’s two week stay in Poland produced other surprises, Stefan had a 30 year old brother, born after the war, he’d never heard of and his older brother, Zdislaw, was alive and well in Russia. The 14 days and nights were filled with endless rounds of talking and Polish vodka.

Last June, Stefan brought his parents to America for a 10 week visit. “The first thing my father wanted to see was the Statue of Liberty,” recalls Nurkiewicz, with a trace of pride in his voice. Two weeks after his return to Poland last September the elder Zdislaw Nurkiewicz expired, finally knowing what became of the 13 year old boy he left behind when he went to war. End – For those of you that missed it earlier, Steve (N2DAN) was the man who made my set of Mercury paddles as well as those for many others of you. --John Paul/AB4PP



Mercury, N2DAN’s Pride and Joy!

Continued

In our conversations over the air, N2DAN never mentioned his pride and joy and I was not sure what he did for a living. Our chats were always neutral ground and we enjoyed each others skill in the Morse code. In later years I learned Steve expired & knew nothing of his heritage. W8SU

N3HQB - Several years ago, I made the pilgrimage to Steve's shack in Port Charlotte for an eyeball and now own S/N 0152. During his retirement, Steve kept improving the design, experimenting with different threads, paddle materials, cork base ring and applied all of this experience from a life's work as a machinist and a top cw opr. The result is a genuine cw tool. Keeping up with the cw keyboards was impossible with other paddles, but a pleasure with the N2DAN Mercury. This was a beautiful, heavy chrome plating, smooth operation, precisely adjustable, right height off the operating table. Base is so heavy it rides my center console for cw mobile. God is probably using one. Bless you, Steve. Aug 2002

KI6YN - I bought my Mercury in 1991, serial number 126. It was everything Steve claimed it was. It is solid and responsive. I've read reviews about copies that claim the original had temperature problems, no way have I experienced that. My paddle has remained precie without readjustment for over 10 years of heavy use. It is a thing of beauty and a fitting memorial to a great craftsman. If one becomes available, buy it, you will have endless hours of pleasure using it.

K8XF - After reading K4TWJ's book in 1991, I decided to get something better than the Bencher that I was using for years. After returning home from the high seas, I called Steve 2DAN and after a landline QSO decided to purchase a key. It was well worth the wait and expense. Very smooth sending, heavy chromed round base, top notch machining magnetic tension adjustment. What a sports car of a Paddle...Since N2DAN expired I have noticed many pretender to the Paddle Palace. This shows that his creation is a popular item to imitate. Glad to have an original item. I wonder if the others can hold a candle to the Masters creation? Mike K8XF 2001

AI2Q - "Dan" was a neighbor of mine for quite a few years when living in Freeport Long Island. He only worked CW & we used to have some great QSO's cross town occasionally. I'll always remember him because he used to compliment me on my bug fist, saying he would never make me a Mercury paddle because I was preserving the art of correctly using a bug! After I visited his old world machine shop at his house, I asked him why he didn't farm out some of the work so that he would be able to make more Merc's available to the fraternity. He told me he did just that and was dismally disappointed. He said the workmanship and quality assurance on certain parts he contracted for was abysmal. For that reason, he elected to hand craft all mercury paddles – for ever more! I thought you would like to know about this conversation I had with the late – and great – Steve N back in the late 1980s. I'll miss him, his FB fist and his great insight about the musical "ring" of certain call signs. His QSL card is on my wall. AI2Q Alex Kennebunk, ME Apr 1998.

In your writers research, others have come out with great workmanship but not to equal the precision of N2DAN. Those competitors are "The K8FF-- NORCAL Paddle" "The Hensley Paddle" "The March Paddle" & believe it or not Bencher came out with the Mercury, supposedly bought the copyrights from N2DAN's estate. I am looking in that now in hope that one might be available.

Authors note; After completion of this article, I ordered the Bencher Mercury Paddle from Milestone Technologies - Colorado, which is in stock. Thanks to N2DAN, I finally have one. 16 Nov 05