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Amateur Radio

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CQ

COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY

AUGUST 2001

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ICOM Founder and President Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA. See exclusive *CQ* interview, p.22

U.S. $4.99 / Canada $6.99

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THE RADIO AMATEUR'S JOURNAL

His vision brought us the first digitally tuned transceiver, the world's most popular 2 meter handheld, the first all-in-one HF/VHF transceiver, and the most advanced ICOM transceiver to date. Meet "Mr. ICOM," Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA.

CQ Interviews:

"Mr. ICOM" – Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA

BY SAM VIGIL,* WA6NGH

On a recent trip to Japan I was able to arrange an interview with "Mr. ICOM" himself, Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA, President and Founder of ICOM, Inc . My XYL, Eve, KF6NEV, and I were met at Osaka's modern Shin-Osaka Shinkansen bullet-train rail station by ICOM's Osamu Nakamuta, who guided us through Osaka's elaborate subway and train system, first to our hotel and then on to the ICOM headquarters building. The modern, six-story building is absolutely dwarfed by two massive Yagi arrays, including Japan's first installed Force 12 C49XR tribander.

Meeting Mr. ICOM

Shortly after our arrival, we were ushered into Mr. Inoue's sixth floor office, strategically located just below the two Yagi arrays. He lives and breathes ham radio, down to a JA3FA tie clip and a JA3FA monogram on his shirt sleeve. A fully equipped ham shack is adjacent to his office, complete with an all-ICOM setup (*what else?—ed.*) from an IC-706 MKIIG to the latest IC-756PRO. During an enthusiastic interview Mr. Inoue discussed the history of ICOM, his personal and business philosophies, and his view of the future of ham radio in Japan and the United States. Due to the difficulty of translating Japanese into English without "losing something in the translation," most of what follows is a report of what Mr. Inoue told us, rather than direct quotes. Directly translated answers to some key questions are in the sidebar of excerpts from *CQ*'s interview with JA3FA.

Born in Kyoto Prefecture in 1931, Mr. Inoue became interested in ham radio as a teenager in the 1940s. After ham radio operations were again permitted in Japan in 1952, he became licensed as JA3FA. In 1954, at age 23, he started a medical equipment business, INOUE Seisakusyo. In 1964 he founded INOUE Electric Manufacturing Co., Ltd. It was there that he built and sold his first commercial amateur radio, the all-transistor FDAM-1, a 1 watt, 6 meter mobile transceiver. Over 200 units of this first rig were sold, and followed by 3000 units of an upgraded version. In 1978 the name of the company was changed to ICOM Incorporated (short for Inoue Communications).

Mr. Inoue's business philosophy, from the very start of his company, has always been "Technology first, the money will follow." He was greatly influenced in this by meeting the late Arthur Collins (of Collins Radio), who gave him this advice: "No matter what, keep perfecting your technology. If you perfect your technology and make good products, you will always get business. Forget about unnecessary things and strive to exist by your technology."

The ICOM Building, Osaka, Japan. The antennas on the roof make it easy to find! (Photos by Eve Vigil, KF6NEV)

Although Japan now has over 1.35 million hams (out of a total population of 126 million), the most of any country in the world, this total is down from a previous peak of 2 million. Mr. Inoue attributes much of the loss to the use of cell phones

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ICOM Engineer Yoshitaka Iiboshi, JA3LOQ, and company President Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA, with ICOM FDAM-1 six meter transceivers. The FDAM-1 was ICOM's first amateur product.

Sam Vigil, WA6NGH, and the ICOM IC-2(A) HT.

ICOM President Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA, and an ICOM Computer System.

Past and present: The ICOM FDAM-1 and ICOM 910 transceivers together.

and the internet by young people. He believes that the challenge for ham radio will be to convince young people that ham radio offers a unique set of intellectual and scientific challenges not available from commercial forms of communication.

The ICOM Company

ICOM is a diversified business, with Amateur Radio, Land Mobile, Marine Products, and Computer Divisions. ICOM's line of amateur radio equipment is still the company's main business. In fact, the majority of key employees are hams. The Land Mobile Division supplies handheld and mobile rigs to commercial and government users all over the world, including the United States. The Marine Products Division manufactures a diversified range of equipment, including marine radar sets, GPS-equipped mapping systems, and of course, VHF and HF transceivers. ICOM's Computer Division manufactures a full line of desktop and laptop PCs which are sold in Japan through independent dealers and "Soft Island" computer stores. Although presently there are no plans to sell the computers in the U.S., ICOM will be marketing its Wavemaster spread-spectrum wireless LAN systems in the U.S. in the near future.

Mr. Inoue attributes the success of ICOM's diversified product lines to the RF and digital design experience gained from the development of the company's amateur radio products.

ICOM's Past and Ham Radio's Future

After our interview in Mr. Inoue's office we were taken to the ICOM showroom/museum on the first floor. All current ICOM equipment, commercial and amateur, is on display, as well as every ham rig that ICOM has ever produced. In the museum Mr. Inoue pointed out key amateur radio products in the history of ICOM, including the IC-710 transceiver (the first digitally tuned ham rig); the IC-2(A), the world's most popular amateur HT; the IC-706, the first all-in-one multimode HF/VHF rig; and ICOM's latest, the IC-756PRO. He also introduced us to longtime ICOM employee Yoshitaka Iiboshi, JA3LOQ, the engineer who actually assembled the first ICOM radio, the FDAM-1, in 1964.

Eve and I were then invited to join Mr. Inoue and members of his staff in a traditional Japanese dinner at one of his favorite restaurants in Osaka. Over great food, beer, and sake, we discussed his vision for ICOM and for the future of amateur radio. Mr. Inoue sees that his role as a ham radio manufacturer is to "facilitate human-to-human

JA3FA Interview Excerpts

The following are excerpts from *CQ*'s interview with ICOM Founder and President Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA:

CQ: What was your formal education? How did the courses that you studied contribute to your success in the electronics and radio industry?

JA3FA: I graduated from Yamato-Koriyama High School. I studied electronics and radio technology on my own with my friends to obtain my amateur license. This self- training was the basis of my success in my current radio business.

CQ: Were you surprised by the popularity of your first product, the FDAM-1 six meter transceiver?

JA3FA: Yes, I was surprised by the success of the FDAM-1. The product's good reputation gave us the opportunity to make the final decision to become a radio communication equipment manufacturer.

CQ: Why did you choose that design as your first product?

JA3FA: The FDAM-1 had the newest electronics and mechanical design. We studied the development of it under our concept of good appearance and easy production. Because it was difficult to economically mass produce a plastic or diecast molded case in those days, we went with a simple stamped aluminum case.

CQ: What are your favorite modes of operation? What is your favorite style of operating?

JA3FA: SSB is my favorite mode of operation. Ragchewing and DX are my favorite styles of operating. I enjoy having worldwide communication and making new friends worldwide.

Sam Vigil, WA6NGH, interviews Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA.

CQ: What is your personal vision for the future of ham radio?

Mr. Inoue: I believe that ham radio will exist forever, as it is one of the best hobbies in the world, and it helps to spread our dreams and our visions. Ham radio is also helpful on the educational side for breeding excellent electronic engineers. . . . (Technically,) I think that both digital and analog will coexist in ham radio.

CQ: What can you tell *CQ* readers about your ultimate transceiver project?

Mr. Inoue: My goal is to produce a radio transceiver with the best specifications ever, and to make it available to hams at a reasonable price. It will combine both analog and digital signal processing.

communications." He still sees ham radio playing a unique role that commercial communications systems such as the internet and cell phones cannot. He feels that it is essential that we continue to attract young people into amateur radio so that they can enjoy and benefit from learning about technology the way that he was able to as a young ham. His current personal project, which he sees as the capstone to his ham radio career, is the development of the ultimate ICOM HF transceiver, which he says will extend RF digital signal processing capabilities to a level never before available to radio amateurs.

More Than Just Technology

During our visit to Japan we were almost overwhelmed with technology, from the lightning-fast Shinkansen bullet trains to the ubiquitous tiny cell phones (about half the size of typical U.S. phones) that everyone in Japan seems to use. Our visit with Mr. Inoue put a human face on Japanese technology. His passion for amateur radio as an enabling technology for communications on a human level is contagious. He truly believes that communications technology can help bring people together.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Mr. Tokuzo Inoue, JA3FA, for sharing so much of his time with us on our visit, to Mr. Osamu Nakamuta for acting as our escort and translator when required, and to other members of the ICOM staff, including U.S. National Sales Manager Ray Novak, KC7JPA, for their assistance.