THE AMATEUR

The Amateur in You, Part 2

What have you been pondering?

Brief history of the VE program

If you've received your amateur radio license in the last dozen or so years, the process likely went like this: You studied for the exam using an online tool that contains all the exam questions, answers, and detractors, then you visited an exam session location (or sat for a remote exam), passed the exam, and within a few days, you became part of the ham radio family when the FCC posted your call sign on the ULS.

But, it hasn't always worked that way. At one time, one had to study the material so well that, no matter what question the examiner threw at you, you were required to answer it reasonably well enough to demonstrate not only your understanding, but your Morse code proficiency. And that examination had to take place at an FCC field office, which for some was quite the trip, or for many, simply inaccessible.

The VEC

Prompted by budget cuts, a reduction in force, and a surge in applicants, the FCC was forced to offload its examination administration to private groups. On 13 September 1982, the Communications Act of 1934 was amended by the enactment of Statute 97-259 (section 104.4.A), which permits the FCC to accept the services of non-governmental organizations to prepare and administer amateur radio examinations.

This paved the way for the government to establish the **VE** (volunteer examiner) **program**, starting with VECs (volunteer examiner coordinators), organizations that can accredit VEs and process examination results in behalf of the FCC. At the time of this writing, there are fourteen VECs in the US, the largest of which are the ARRL-VEC and W5YI-VEC. Other well-known VECs include the Laurel VEC and Anchorage ARC VEC.

The NCVEC

With the formation of VECs, the non-profit coordinators had to agree on exam pool formulation, to satisfy the requirements set forth by the FCC. They established an association called the NCVEC (National Conference of Volunteer Examiner Coordinators) to create policies on which exam questions are presented for each license class.

Today, the NCVEC maintains collaboration between the FCC and the VECs, and publishes the exam question pools for each license class. Each question pool is compiled by the QPC (question pool committee), a sub-section of the NCVEC, and revised every four years.

The volunteer examiners

Once a person applies for accreditation through a particular VEC, their staff examines the recommendation made by the local VE supervisor (called either Session Manager or Contact VE), examines the viability (age, license, history) of the VE candidate, and informs the VE candidate of the successful accreditation. A successful VE candidate is at least 18 years old, holds at least a General Class license, and has never held a license that has been revoked or suspended.

The exam session

As dictated by Part 97.509, the VE who administers the exam must not be related to the exam candidate, must observe the exam candidate during the entire exam, and three VEs of the appropriate license class must certify that the exam candidate had passed the exam. And "appropriate" means a General VE can only test a Technician candidate, an Advanced VE can test a General or Technician candidate, and an Extra VE can test any candidate.