

# Freeband: Intervention in a 'Love-Hate' Relationship

Now, stick with me. This setup is a bit long, but you'll soon see the necessity.

In February, we pause the bland, windy chill of winter to decorate with hearts, roses, and other signs of Valentine's Day. This increasingly commercial holiday is a boon for florists and chocolatiers, as well as restaurant owners.

Many a romantic proposal is executed on February 14, either in a public setting or a more private one.

As relationships move further along, though, we may find ourselves in something of a 'love-hate' relationship with a significant other—a not-too-perfect mix of what we like and what we don't. Some call that a typical marriage.

Well, this month I'm not thinking about a person—rather, an activity. It's one that I don't like, but have also found something about it to admire. It's much like consideration for Attila the Hun: If your village was one of those pillaged, you might find it difficult to admire his management style.

## Outside the Lines

While Citizens Band operation beyond the designated channels has been around for some time, advances in technology have made the pursuit easier than ever.

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Back in the days of the crystal-mixing-ways of generating 23 channels, some folks worked out ways to access channels 22A, 22B, 23A, and 23B—now known as 24, 25, 26, and 27, respectively, Table 1.

Still others, with 5- or 6-channel rigs that used a pair of crystals for each channel, occupied the radio control allocations of 3A, 7A, 11A, 15A, and 19A for communications that was a bit quieter and more secluded—while possibly sending the occasional radio-control (RC) model car to intermittently take off or shudder to a halt.

Still others found ways to incorporate variable frequency oscillator (VFO) technology—also known as a 'slider'—to travel pretty much all over the 27-MHz region.

At the same time, others just re-configured amateur radio transceivers of the day to cover this unauthorized spectrum—with 100 to 500 watts of power; much more than allowed.

## And With Its Own Name

The term identifying this clandestine slice of spectrum between CB channels is Freeband, occupied by Freebanders who are Freebanding.

All of this activity was—and remains—illegal. Thus, it was with a grimace and frown when I discovered a Freeband watering hole—27.555 MHz, Photo A. This is apparently used by an international group of two-way communications enthusiasts as a calling channel.

That's much like CB Channel 11 was supposed to be:

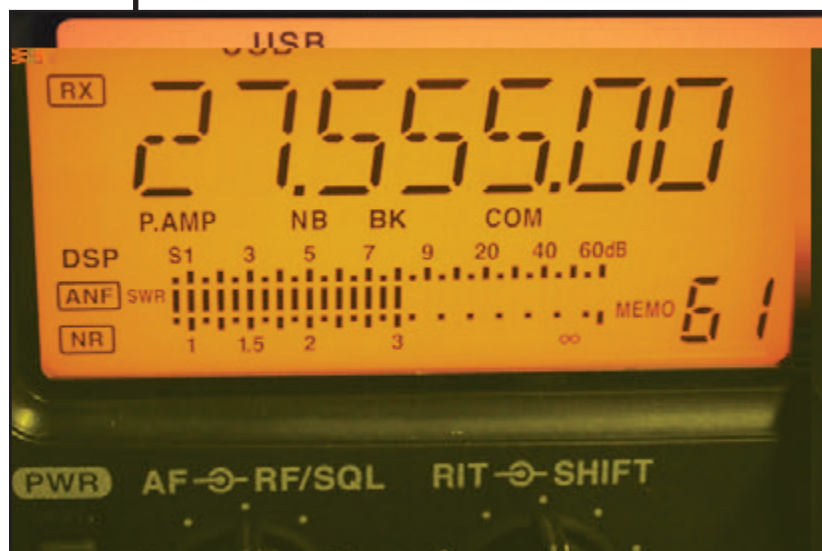
- ¥ Make a call for a contact
- ¥ When someone answers, move to another channel to talk
- ¥ You leave the calling channel free when you move to another channel to chat

With 555, you place a call and let others know you're listening 10 kHz up, 20 kHz down or wherever is presumably clear.

All activity seems to be via SSB, leaving AM behind in these activities.

## A Redeeming Value?

While I seriously frown on the whole idea of pirate operations on frequencies allocated to other services, I have to admit that in the case of 555, the channel runs in a relatively polite and professional manner—not unlike amateur radio. (**UNDERSCORE:** I'm not condoning this illegal activity. I'm merely marveling at its existence and



**Photo A.** A popular Freeband meeting place—albeit illegal—is 27.555 MHz—not a frequency allocated for Citizen Band operation. (Courtesy of WPC2CS)

dutifully reporting about it. **VISUAL:** Right now, I'm flailing myself with wet rutabaga leaves just for drawing the Freeband-amateur radio comparison. Ð WPC2CS.)

QSL cards are typically exchanged and my limited research shows there even seems to be a loosely run awards program for counties, states, provinces, countries worked, and so on.

As radio amateurs have used the Internet to enhance their interests with sites such as <<http://www.QRZ.com>>, so have the 11-meter Freebanders with <<http://www.QRZ11.com>>, Photo B . The 27.555-MHz Freeband crowd even has a

Facebook page! Several, in fact! (**VISIT:** For example, the 27.555-MHz International Frequency DX page at <<http://on.fb.me/1dwiJge>>, **Photo C.** Ð WPC2CS.)

A glance through some of the group members' pictures show impressive-looking stations.

## 27.555 Operators' Gear

What equipment are these Freebanders using? Most seem to have re-tasked amateur radio HF gear and more than a few amplifiers – many of which could produce more power than



**Photo B.** The highly-organized Freeband community has a website modeled somewhat on the amateur radio community's QRZ.com. For Freebanders, it's the QRZ11 Forum at <<http://www.QRZ11.com>> (Internet screen grab)



**Photo C.** Among several Facebook pages established by, and devoted to Freebanders is the 27.555-MHz International Frequency DX page at <<http://on.fb.me/1dwiJge>>. (Internet screen grab)

even amateurs are allowed. Others have more modest stations, based on OmportO radios that allow for multiple blocks of 40 channels, which enable Freeband activities.

Such manufacturers and sellers in the United States skirt the law by marketing them as O10-meterO ham rigs. Trust me, hams arenOt buying these, as they are too limited for our purposes and desires. Just cut the magic yellow, blue, or green wire inside (instructions, of course, on the Internet) and you are Ogood to goO with joining the Freebanders.

## FCC Enforcement (?)

While I do read about cases where someone is investigated and fined by the Federal Communications Commission N Huzzah! N for excessive power and interference, I sadly donOt see much, if anyin the way of stories about enforcement toward Out of bandO activity. Occasionally, a company like ePower Amps will be fined for selling illegal amplifiers (a.k.a. CW transmitters), but I was seeing Facebook ads for its products months ahead of the crackdown. Who knows how many they sold before that? Plus, since the inventory was apparently not confiscated, who knows how they eventually may have OdisposedO of the inventory?**IN DEPTH:** Read an FCC Citation and Order for OIllegal Marketing of Unauthorized Radio Frequency DevicesOagainst ePower Amps at <<http://bit.ly/1i9lxlpx>>. D WPC2CS.)

I guess itOs a matter of priorities. TherOs more illegal activity to go around than the Commission can address. Broadcasters and other business owners are easier targets

N high profile, with serious bank accounts. If the harmonics of some poorly-made amplifier interfere with aviation or public service, then it becomes a higher priority. If not, it seems to be ignored.

Factor in all of the other countries and agencies involved and I imagine the task of enforcement and Oputting the tooth-paste back in the tubeObecomes incredibly daunting. No doubt, thatOs what the Freebanders are counting on, too.

## Simply Put ...

For me, CB is CB and ham radio is ham radio. I have all sorts of transceivers that could be modified and used for such clandestine activity and it would technically be easy to join the crowd on 27.555 (and 26.985) MHz.

But for more than 45 years, IOve chosen to keep the two separate and enjoy each for what it is. So have most of us.

While I am duly impressed at the scale and sophistication that this activity has risen to, I have to ask why these folks donOt just channel their energies N and money N into amateur radio?

## An Invitation to Freebanders

If you are a Freebander and would like to Oclean up your actO to experience a broader world of legal communications, I think the amateur radio community would welcome you. If the thrill of working outside of the law is the most important thing, then please stay where you are.

# 27-MHz Channels and Frequencies

Designators in this listing are:

\* Class C Radio Control

\*\* Original Designator

CHANNEL	FREQUENCY	CHANNEL	FREQUENCY
1	26.965 MHz	19A*	27.195 MHz
2	26.975 MHz	20	27.205 MHz
3	26.985 MHz	21	27.215 MHz
3A*	26.995 MHz	22	27.225 MHz
4	27.005 MHz	23	27.255 MHz
5	27.015 MHz	24	27.235 MHz (22A)**
6	27.025 MHz	25	27.245 MHz (22B)**
7	27.035 MHz	26	27.265 MHz (23A)**
7A*	27.045 MHz	27	27.275 MHz (23B)**
8	27.055 MHz	28	27.285 MHz
9	27.065 MHz	29	27.295 MHz
10	27.075 MHz	30	27.305 MHz
11	27.085 MHz	31	27.315 MHz
11A*	27.095 MHz	32	27.325 MHz
12	27.105 MHz	33	27.335 MHz
13	27.115 MHz	34	27.345 MHz
14	27.125 MHz	35	27.355 MHz
15	27.135 MHz	36	27.365 MHz
15A*	27.145 MHz	37	27.375 MHz
16	27.155 MHz	38	27.385 MHz
17	27.165 MHz	39	27.395 MHz
18	27.175 MHz	40	27.405 MHz
19	27.185 MHz		

Table 1.