'Good Buddy' Radio -  
The Anonymous Mass  

By G.E. Watkins  

"Ten-four good buddy - that's a copy," these are words that are filling the air waves all across North America. The CB radio and its peculiar language has spread like wildfire across this country. Retail sales of these units (mostly mobile) have gone out of control. To the CBers there is not enough minutes in a day to get a clear channel on the twenty-three that are now available.

For those that are not aware of the term CB, it is a shortened form for Citizen Band - a communicating device with a very limited range, and accessible to most with very little cost or required skill. A CB radio is not like a ham radio or a commercial radio which you tune in your favorite rock station or news report. It is actually a two-way radio which works much like a party-line telephone system. The difference is that the CB radio works on air waves instead of telephone lines.

The CB radio was organized when the amateur radio operators (ham) abandoned the eleven meter band.

CB radio is the greatest party-line since the telephone. Not since the pocket calculator and the digital watch has an electronic device so captured the public's imagination and pocketbook.
One reason for the explosive growth of the CB is the ease in which one can get started. There isn't any test that has to be taken, technical theory is not required, and the amount of money required is relatively nominal compared to some other types of communicating systems. If you are able to turn a switch (to turn on the transceiver) and depress a microphone button to talk that is all of the technical skill that is really required to be able to communicate.

The most official act that one will perform is filling out the application form for the licence and sending it to the D.O.C. in Canada and the F.C.C. in the United States.

Another factor contributing to the popularity of the CB is that it is the most exciting personal toy ever dreamed up by the electronic engineers. Just imagine having the ability to communicate with countless hundreds while sitting in your vehicle in downtown Toronto or Montreal or New York through a gadget as small as your automobile radio. It's no wonder that the air waves are kept so busy with people calling home, work, chatting with others along the highways, campers socializing with other campers for campsite locations, boaters checking on conditions ahead and even housewives exchanging recipes etc.

Low cost equipment is also a very attractive reason for the CB's growth. The revolution of solid state equipment has dropped the prices drastically from the older tube-type units. As the solid state revolution reduced the price it also reduced the size of the units themselves. Some of the units were so bulky that half was located in the trunk of the car, the other half was mounted under the dash.

Reasonably priced equipment is not the only attractive force. When the D.O.C. created the CB band in
1962 they announced a novel policy — anyone could install and use a CB set. This relaxed policy allowed the do-it-yourselfers to install major components. Now it has been made even more simple by the manufacturers for do-it-yourself installation by the advent of hook-together components.

The greatest lure of the CB radio however is communication. From a car one can speak over a distance of about ten miles and nearly double that distance from a base station located in your home or cottage. Just imagine being able to communicate with scores of people with so many varied backgrounds throughout this very large integrated country and be able to eavesdrop on some very intimate conversations — why, Rona Barrett would have a hay-day with a CB unit in Hollywood, Calif.

The CB radio's popularity is growing so rapidly that it has been predicted by experts that it will become as common in a car as the AM-FM radio is now, which means that about ninety million units will be installed in private cars and about thirty million in trucks and countless millions in recreation vehicles.

How has the CB craze affected society? Well, first of all, the CB craze is important enough, at the moment anyway, to institute a weekly article in Toronto's largest daily newspaper, the Toronto Star. Although many articles appear, both pro and con about the CB phenomenon, it does not change the opinion of those "gatekeepers" downtown about running a weekly article.

I talked to Tom Graham, writer of the weekly article, and he confirmed most of the material that I already had for this paper.

One item that I was quite surprised to hear coming from him was that almost-professional-diagnosis of a psychiatrist, Graham suggested that the CB was making
extraverts out of introverts. This surprised me because Dr. Carole Yellin made this exact same conclusion when I interviewed her. He also mentioned that most CBers are very friendly and he illustrated this with an example of a friend that completely missed his supper because he went to the aid of a stranded CB motorist. According to Graham the friend even picked up a part required to repair the car on his way over to the immobilized vehicle and then helped to install the part.

What better way could there be of bringing that eluding community together? I feel that CBism is playing a much greater role in our communities than most people give it credit for.

Now let us look back at how the boom started. In 1973, the artificial oil shortage in the U.S. carried over to us, their northern neighbours. This had a very serious effect on the trucking business throughout North America. For one thing, the curtailment of fuel made people more aware of service station locations and where supplies were more plentiful. It also brought about the reduction of speed limits on the highways. With these two things in mind the truckers had to make a move to protect themselves against radar enforcements on the now slower speed highways. So, they began buying CB units for their trucks and before long had a network of rolling intercoms capable of warning one another of radar traps and also of keeping each other well-informed of fuel supplies and prices. As one of the largest groups to be affected by the CB the truck drivers, they and their counterparts in the U.S. have made the CB what it is today. When you ask any trucker how he feels about his unit he doesn't hesitate to say that he wouldn't go anywhere without it.

During an interview with Charles Thibault of Local 938 of the Teamsters Union it was mentioned that the
CB is an advantage to the truckers. Although there isn't any actual research by the Teamsters on this topic it was Mr. Thibault's personal opinion, formed through his personal contacts and informal interviews with those in the trucking world, that the CB contributed greatly to the safety of the driver and the driving public. By the awareness of the traffic, road conditions and weather conditions in advance the driver is able to adjust so as to cope with the conditions ahead.

He feels strongly about the abuse that the public, in general, are giving the CB. The use of foul language and the constant jibber-jabber that goes on about things that are really trivia and are tying up the channels.

The long haul drivers are often confronted with fatigue and Thibault feels that the CB is often used by these drivers to break the monotony of the road - again this is another safety feature. The speed limits on the highway have been more easily controlled because of the awareness of the different police forces and their locations.

One disadvantage of the CB is felt by the owners of the trucking companies. They feel that there is an additional cost involved in the premature life of the vehicles' battery. They also feel that there is a small safety hazard when the driver is talking on the CB instead of concentrating on the road and traffic conditions.

Now let's look at how this CB craze has affected the retail sales outlets. I suppose that one of the largest retail outlets in Ontario that specialize in CB is Radio Shack, a Tandy affiliate. The head office, located in Barrie, Ontario, informs me that for the past five years CB sales have increased steadily until
approximately two years ago, when all hell broke loose. The retail outlets were not able to keep up with some of the demands on their more popular models and of course the main office had not been able to supply their stores because their suppliers (units are made in Japan) had their supplies depleted by the great demand.

The Radio Shack stores are not the only ones affected by the tremendous increase in popularity. Canadian General Electric has also been very busy. Although they are not as popular in the CB world as some of the less expensive makes, but they do have a very important interest in the manufacture of replacement parts. Much time has gone into the CB research by C.G.E. to evaluate the possibilities of manufacturing these replacement parts for not only their own units but for various makes and models.

From a recent conversation with Don Mills, Sales Representative for A.C. Simmonds Co., the Canadian distributors for E.F. Johnson communications system, I discovered a few interesting ideas that had never quite crossed my mind. One item that Mr. Mills mentioned was that the greatest peak in the CB boom ran a very short time - he estimated from approximately January 1976 until November of that same year. During that time "they" were under extreme pressure for new products that they could not deliver because of the great demand. And that during this peak time in the U.S. in particular there were more CB's sold than there were kitchen appliances sold. Mr. Mills also stated that the CB craze is in a slump for the moment. This slump is caused by the switch over to forty channels. The forty channels have been approved but the D.O.C. are now going through the tedious job of approving the forty channel transceivers. So, everything is in limbo until that task is completed. Another item that interested me during our conversation was the fact that people are trying to outdo their neighbours with their equipment. From this, there has
been an introduction of some very expensive pieces of equipment that are of very low quality. As long as the equipment looks and sounds expensive then "they" are outdoing their neighbours' less expensive piece of equipment even though the quality could be a lesser grade.

As for Mr. Mills, he has removed the CB unit from his car and has replaced it with a much more efficient unit called UHF-SSB. This unit, somewhat similar to a CB except that it has less crowded channels, is always monitored by the D.O.C. for emergencies, has more channels available and communications are of the more intellectual type.

Another aspect of retail sales that is being affected is the promotion facet or advertising. One form of advertising is that very selective trade exposition that are given.

Mr. V.G. Taylor, assistant general manager of the Grant Smedmor Ltd., an exposition management company and subsidiary of Southam Press, has told me that there is a tremendous amount of research going into the preparation of the Electrical and Electronics Conference. Smedmor arranges the show which is an international affair. According to Mr. Taylor the show will have an increase in CB communication displays this year.

Everytime a product shows an upswing in popularity such as the CB then the research material of the Smedmor's personnel increases. The advertising and arranging of an exhibition of this magnitude requires that all persons involved with its success must be as knowledgeable of the exhibitors' product as the exhibitor himself. This kind of research sometimes means extra personnel and extra man hours to complete before as they say "showtime".

Another aspect of a CBers life is the communal
interest of all its unintroduced members. One example of this is the fund raising that was carried on by some of the CBers for a fellow CBer who had lost his house in a fire. The all-call broadcast was sent out by various parties in the area of the tragedy. A central drop point was set up for all contributions, whether they were cash, clothing or furniture. It was through the CB communications that this man and his family were able to rest somewhat easier over this past Christmas holidays and it was also through this alert that the authorities came to the assistance of the stranded victims.

Another item that has been developed from the use of CB is a patrol unit in the Buffalo, Niagara area. This unit calls themselves the Citizens' Band Radio Patrol, CBRP. They are a group of CBers that get together and voluntarily patrol the area, whether in automobiles or on foot to aid anyone that may be in distress. Distress does not always mean that a person requires police assistance - it could be something as simple as a direction to a person visiting the area. Apart from their patrol duties the CBRP have participated in various church-organized fund raising activities. Through this voluntary group the members have become more closely drawn together and all of this has directly related to that small communicating device, the citizen band radio.

This story was brought into the public's view by the Channel 7 eye witness story on December 7, 1976.

I personally feel that most people do not realize what good is actually being carried out by some of the more interested CBers.

The Ontario Provincial Police are also getting into the action of the CB world. The O.P.P. have installed CB monitoring devices in some of their detachments located in London, Woodstock, Kitchener, Milton and
Whitby are monitoring channel 9 (the emergency channel) twenty-four hours a day. According to Inspector Foss, in charge of communications, this is strictly a pilot project and the results of this will determine what happens in the future. The O.P.P. have been using CB to some extent with great success in marine applications in their summer detachments in Midland, Barrie and Tobermory.

Through the use of CB the police have been able to solicit help in locating stolen vehicles, missing persons, etc. Just think of the opportunities that are available to the police for spotting a missing item with the amount of CBs that are around.

Inspector Foss can foresee great things for the CB in the future. He feels that not only will they have CB in some of their detachments but in them all and they will also be using them in their patrol cars as another means of communication. He did mention that they are using CBs in a few of their cars already.

Citizen's Band Radio has not always been to the best of society's interest though. It has had many ill effects on society and one of them was recently mentioned in a weekend magazine. I feel that the writer of the article can explain the problem much better than I:

"Not tonight - I've got an earache

Toronto. Citizens band radios are killing marriages at an 'epidemic' rate, says a Toronto Psychiatrist. Dr. Neil Maharaj, head of Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital's alcoholism unit, has recently been seeing many women seeking help for incipient alcoholism. 'But that's not their problem,' he says 'it's their husbands' new hobby - that damn CB'. It's not only driving women to drink, it's
alienating their kids and breaking up whole families,' he says. 'The men come home from work, shut themselves up in a room with their equipment and spend the evening on the radio. Most of the marriages were solid and stable affairs of eight to twenty years duration, until CB.'

Another problem created by CB was expressed in a Toronto Star article on January 26, 1977 and I quote:

"And God spoke to Moses" said Rabbi Erwin Schild during his Sabbath sermon, but before he could continue, a voice boomed out of the public address system, 'Pull over to the side of the road'. It wasn't God speaking, Schild assured worshippers at Adath Israel Synagogue on North York's Southbourne Avenue, merely a citizen band radio on a car on nearby 401".

This kind of interference is quite prevalent in the air waves today. Last year alone there were 2,000 complaints of interference in various types of electronic equipment including some of the more common pieces of household items as: TV sets, guitar amplifiers, electric organs, record players, stereo sets, and even toasters. One of the less obvious places to receive interference is in the filling of teeth. This is only a rare occasion but there has been complaints of this actually happening.

Naturally the complaints are going to increase as the popularity of the CB increases. Ownership has jumped from 200,000 last March to more than 350,000 now and more than 50,000 reside in the Metro area. These complaints have put a tremendous strain on the D.O.C. Checking into and policing these complaints is almost impossible as W.W. Scott, director general of the operations branch of the Federal Department of
Communications, indicated when he said, "We'd have to have a whole army of people". He refers here to the problems of staffing.

After my various conversations and interviews with people in the "industry" as you might call it, I felt that I should get an impartial view from someone quite knowledgeable in various forms of personal communications. So during my interview with Dr. Carole Yellin, psychologist with the Scarborough Board of Education, we discussed some of the connotations of the peculiar language used by the CBers. According to Dr. Yellin, the friendly attitude taken by most people using CB is an internal sense to be friendly and yet not be known and involved personally. This anonymous communication allows people to express themselves openly while in the camouflage of the CB airwaves. Anonymity acts differently with each person, according to Dr. Yellin, some people will actually have complete character changes while others will not be affected in the least.

It seems that the CB has brought out, with the exception of a few carps (people that use foul language etc. on the air), the best in most people. The "good buddy" attitude seems to prevail amongst the CB world.

The "lingo" of the CBers is a prime example of reinforcement to what she had previously stated. The southern almost western-cowboy slang is representative of a friendly atmosphere according to Dr. Yellin.

The overall outlook of the CB language seems to be very friendly. Even the slang used to describe some of the more obscene or repulsive language takes on an artificial covering that completely changes the physical form but leaves the original connotation in its message. This is sometimes done for legalities over the air but it also renders the message as being much more pleasant to all listeners.
To conclude I think that some time must be devoted to the "CB lingo". The CBers have a completely different language that they use while "modulating" with others on the channel. I won't belabour this portion too long but I would like to mention just a few of the most commonly used phrases and terms:

YL = Young Lady  
Back Door = Last vehicle in a string  
Bear = Policeman  
Bear Cave = Police Station  
Camera = Police Radar  
Clean = No Smokies (police)  
Ears = Antenna  
Eighteen Wheeler = A Semi-tractor Truck  
Five-five = Speed Limit  
Four = Abbreviation for 10-4 (signing off)  
Four Wheeler = Passenger Car  
Green Stamps = Money  
Hammer = Accelerator  
Negatory = No  
Roller Skate = Small Car  
Threes on you = Best Regards  
Tijuana Taxi = Well marked police car  
XYL = Wife  
Beaver = Young girl - usually under 21

As I mentioned above this is but a few of the slang words and phrases that are used. The truckers have a glossary of their own terms that outnumber this list.

**SOURCES**