

Let's Meet Sporis Cornelius, YO4DW

Article written by Nini Vasilescu, YO3CCC, and originally published on Radioamator.ro on February 7, 2019.

I first met Cornelius by chance about 15 years ago. I was walking along a street in Bucharest (opposite Timpuri Noi Square) with Mr. Nelu, YO3BAA. We were heading towards the apartment building where his youngest daughter lived when we noticed someone waving at us.

I looked at the man, but I didn't recognize him, so I assumed he was waving at someone behind us. However, there was nobody there.

As we approached, he said:

"Don't worry if you don't recognize me. I recognized you from the photos you take at various amateur radio gatherings. I'm Cornelius, YO4DIJ (later YO4DW). My parents live here, but I live in Constanța."

After we parted ways, I said to Mr. Nelu, YO3BAA:

"See, Mr. Nelu, what it means to become famous? Hi!"

YO3CCC: When and where were you born?

YO4DW: I was born in Bucharest on October 11, 1956.



YO3CCC: Did you have any particular hobbies when you were in primary school? Did you attend any of the activity clubs at the Pioneers' Palace, as was customary back then?

YO4DW: My first encounter was also my first disappointment. During our Pioneer years, we were encouraged (in practice, required) to attend one of the activity clubs at the Pioneers' Palace.

At the time, I enjoyed making various shapes out of thin plywood (linden wood) using a fretsaw. I was actually quite good at it, and my teacher decided I had artistic talent, so she sent me to the arts and crafts club, or something along those lines. There, we would take sheets of cardboard with various

drawings on them, apply bone glue with a brush, and sprinkle some kind of colored sand over the surface to produce a "work of art."

When I arrived at the Pioneers' Palace, the people responsible for assigning us to the various clubs asked why I wanted to join the arts club, considering I was the only boy there! I asked whether I could do something else, because I really didn't want to be there.

That's how I ended up at the door of the "Radio Club," run by instructor Nicolae Bătrâneau. He listened to my story and told me he would immediately speak to the administration. He returned 30 minutes later and explained that, although he was willing to accept me beyond the already approved number of students, the administration had refused.

That doesn't mean I actually knew what the Radio Club was all about (I no longer remember its exact name), but I was willing to do almost anything to escape the smell of bone glue and the pointless gluing activities that bored me terribly.

Eventually, after two months, I pretended to be ill and allergic to the glue fumes, and managed to escape the burden of that compulsory club.

YO3CCC: It's a pity you didn't get the chance to join the Radio Club, which I also attended between 1965 and 1968. How did you first learn about amateur radio and radio communications?

YO4DW: In 1979, after graduating from the military section of the Mircea cel Bătrân Naval Institute in Constanța, I was assigned, as a young naval officer, to serve as Head of Communications and Navigation aboard the seagoing diving support vessel *Emil Racoviță*, based in Constanța.

At that time, I was required to inspect and countersign the radio operators' daily traffic logs, both radiotelegraphy and radiotelephony. In reality, my checks were merely a formality, and I signed them without really knowing what I was looking at.

I knew absolutely nothing about Morse code, although I had a solid technical understanding of the receivers and transmitters installed aboard the ship.

The chief radio operator was Senior Chief Petty Officer Stoinescu Iancu (R.I.P.), a man with a wealth of experience, an outstanding radiotelegraph operator, and an excellent teacher.

I spent many hours every day in the ship's radio room, listening to radio traffic. I had even begun recognizing a few Morse characters, particularly the numerals.

One day, while we were at sea, he told me that the main transmitter had stopped working. It was a serious problem, as our scheduled radio traffic session was approaching, and he had no idea how to fix it.

In fact, it was a trap, designed to find out what kind of commanding officer he had!

I switched on the transmitter, observed its behavior, and, thanks to the many nights I had spent in the radio laboratory at the Naval Institute, where we practiced troubleshooting simulated faults, I located the problem within ten minutes. The transmitter was operational again and ready for use.

That was the moment when my subordinate and I made an agreement: whenever something broke down, he would consult me and we would solve the problem together. In return, he agreed to teach me Morse code.

YO3CCC: And did you learn Morse code?

YO4DW: Indeed I did. Within six months, I was able to copy radiotelegraph traffic, transmit actual messages on the air, and receive weather reports for the western Black Sea area.

Towards the end of 1980, Senior Chief Petty Officer Stoinescu came to my office and asked me to join him in the radio room. He had come across some unusual CW and voice transmissions that did not follow the communications procedures we were familiar with. Everything being transmitted was in plain language and easily understandable.

We consulted the documents governing radio frequency allocations in Romania and discovered that those frequencies were allocated to amateur radio.

We then set out to find out who these radio amateurs were, what regulations governed their activities, and whether there was an amateur radio club in Constanța.

YO3CCC: Who were the first radio amateurs you met?

YO4DW: One afternoon, Senior Chief Petty Officer Stoinescu and I turned up at the door of the radio club on Grivița Street.

There we met Radu Bratu, YO4HW, along with three other radio amateurs: Marcel Iordănescu, YO4AB (SK, then holding the callsign YO4AVR), Mircea Rucăreanu, YO4SI, and Corneliu Făurescu, YO4AUL.

Radu was rather surprised to see two military sailors, in uniform, turning up out of the blue and wanting to become radio amateurs on the spot! Hi!

With patience and tact, he asked us both a number of questions, showed us around the club, and gave each of us a recommendation signed by two licensed radio amateurs, so that we could apply for an amateur radio receiving licence.

He also told us that we were welcome to visit the club at any time during the opening hours posted on the door, ask questions, and, once we obtained our receiving licences, become members of the Constanța County Radio Club.

We received our licences from the postal authorities within two weeks (our backgrounds were fairly easy to verify...).

I was issued the SWL callsign **YO4-2514**.

The rest followed naturally over time.

YO3CCC: When did you become a fully licensed amateur radio operator, authorized to transmit as well as receive?

YO4DW: As I mentioned earlier, I started out as an SWL, with the callsign YO4-2514, which I received in January 1981.

From 1981 until October 1983, I listened to amateur radio traffic, particularly CW, using the equipment aboard the ship (an R-250M receiver).

I kept an SWL logbook, sent out and received SWL QSL cards, and eventually completed the required 500 reception reports, supported by the corresponding QSL confirmations.

When I presented them at the club, Radu, YO4HW, appreciated the thoroughness of my records and the knowledge I had acquired. He entered us for the examination to obtain a Class III amateur radio operator's certificate, authorizing both transmitting and receiving.

YO3CCC: Did you have the callsign YO4DW from the beginning?

YO4DW: I passed the examination, and on December 25, 1983, Radu Bratu had the honor of opening the envelope containing my first transmitting licence, with the callsign **YO4DIJ**.

I kept that original callsign from 1983 until 2008.

Meanwhile, encouraged first by Radu, YO4HW (SK), and later by Marcel Iordănescu, YO4AB (SK), I began participating in national and international CW and SSB contests, gradually achieving better and better results.

Once I started contesting seriously, especially on CW, I noticed that the final letter of my callsign, "J", was frequently being missed or copied incorrectly.

After discussing the matter with Marcel, YO4AB, and Cornel, YO4NA (who had previously held the callsign YO4DIH), I went to ANCOM in 2008 with an application and supporting statement endorsed by the Romanian Amateur Radio Federation (FRR).

With the official callsign register in front of us, we checked several possible callsigns that I believed might be available.

I was also concerned about avoiding callsigns that had previously belonged to radio amateurs who had made history in our hobby and sport.

Beforehand, I had consulted the FRR and Vasile Ciobăniță, YO3APG (SK), a man who knew an astonishing number of callsigns by heart, along with the operators to whom they had belonged.

As luck would have it, the suffix **DW** was the first on my list, and it was approved.

A month later, I received my licence with the new callsign.

YO3CCC: What equipment did you start out with as a radio amateur?

YO4DW: At the very beginning, I had no equipment of my own for listening to amateur radio traffic, so I used the receivers aboard the ship.

Between 1983 and 1987, our vessel underwent a major overhaul and modernization at the shipyard in Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

There, I had the opportunity to meet a radio amateur who built all his own equipment: Constantin Dumitrescu (Costi), YO7BI (SK). He was well known and highly respected among homebrewers and operators alike.

I sought him out and met him in 1984, after Radu Bratu, YO4HW, had discreetly helped me find out where he lived.

His home was easy to identify: it was a high-rise building in the town center, with a five-band cubical quad antenna installed on the roof, visible from quite a distance.

We became very close friends.

Seeing how passionate I was about radio, he helped me build my first regenerative receiver. I also sought his advice on which transceiver to buy and what kind of antenna to use.

In 1986, he purchased a Russian-made **MF-090 transceiver**, rated at 40 W (using a GU-19 tube in the transmitter stage), on my behalf. That was the rig with which I truly began operating on the amateur bands.

Over the years, other transceivers followed: the ICOM IC-735, Yaesu FT-897D, ICOM IC-775DSP, and ICOM IC-756PROIII.

YO3CCC: What antenna or antennas did you use when you first became a radio amateur?

YO4DW: My very first antenna was simply a random length of wire that I used with my regenerative receiver.

Later, I used an inverted-V antenna that tuned well on 40 and 15 meters, and I kept using it for many years.

Over time, I also used 40- and 80-meter dipoles, a five-band cubical quad (which was destroyed one winter night by freezing rain combined with strong winds), a delta loop for 160 meters, and a KLM KT-34A tribander.

YO3CCC: Do you operate CW, or do you work exclusively on phone?

YO4DW: As I mentioned, I learned Morse code aboard the ship, but I didn't have the confidence to get on the air for QSOs or contests.

That changed one day at the club, when only Radu, YO4HW, and I were present. Radu was supposedly dozing in his office chair, and I asked permission to switch on the ICOM IC-720 transceiver to listen to the bands.

I turned it on and started listening on 20 meters, which was the busiest band at the time.

Without even realizing it, I began writing down what I was copying and talking to myself, amazed at what I could hear.

Soon I was speaking aloud, repeating the messages I was copying, as though I were completely alone with my headphones on.

But I had forgotten about Radu, who suddenly became curious about what I was muttering.

After a few minutes, he tapped me on the shoulder and said, very seriously:

"Gudu, you've got an ear for CW that very few people who come through here possess. You really do know Morse code! But how are your sending skills?"

He then had me make a few QSOs on 20 meters using the club callsign **YO4KRB**.

I was clumsy, my sending speed was low, but I managed to get through the contacts reasonably well.

He advised me to keep practicing.

That was when I built my own adjustable-speed mechanical bug key and acquired a straight key manufactured in Bacău.



YO3CCC: Have you participated in amateur radio contests?

YO4DW: I started entering both national and international contests, initially mostly on SSB, but also on CW. Through regular operating and practice, I gradually developed a real passion for CW contesting. After Radu passed away, Marcel Iordănescu, YO4AB (SK), took me under his wing. He encouraged me to participate in CW contests, listened to my operating, and constantly supported me.

I continued at a modest level until the day when the team preparing for the IARU contest on 20 meters CW, consisting of Cornel Radu, YO4NA, and Tiberiu Tebeică, YO9GZU, realized, just a few days before the contest, that they had no backup station for 20 meters CW in case technical problems occurred at Cornel's QTH, where the main station was located.

An even more pressing issue was the lack of a Search & Pounce (S&P) operator for that band.

I joined the team out of necessity, and I felt truly honored. I had never dreamed of operating alongside such outstanding CW operators, both highly experienced testers.

We interconnected our logging systems, and everything worked perfectly.

During the contest, the power went out in Cornel's neighborhood for about 40 minutes. I received a phone call asking me to take over the frequency and start running stations.

Although I was a little nervous at first, I managed quite well. I was copying callsigns accurately, I was already comfortable using the computer, and there were plenty of stations on the band, even though it was Sunday morning.

When they called to tell me they were ready to take over again, I almost regretted having to stop running. I had really started to enjoy it!

As an S&P operator, once the initial hours of activity have passed and most of the multipliers have been worked, the pace slows down. You eventually get tired of constantly clicking around the N1MM bandmap and spinning the VFO dial back and forth, hoping to find another station to work.

From that moment on, I was regularly invited to join the IARU contest team, operating exclusively CW on 15 and 20 meters, primarily in the S&P role.

I teamed up with Piti, YO7UP, and Doru, YO7DAA, on 15 meters CW; with Cornel, YO4NA, and Tibi, YO9GZU, on 20 meters CW; with Dan, YO9FNP, and Sorin, YO9SW, on 20 meters CW; and with Doru, YO7DAA, and Marius, YO7FB, on 15 meters CW.

I can confidently say that I have participated in nearly **450 national and international contests**.

I enjoy running stations and holding a frequency during a contest.

I have never set myself a specific score or ranking target. What mattered most to me was participating and becoming known as an operator.

Whether I succeeded in that respect is something only those who have worked me in many contests can say.

I did have a specific goal in a few national contests organized by the Romanian Amateur Radio Federation (FRR), when I set out to become a national champion in one of the categories.

I managed to achieve that several times in recent years, both as an individual competitor and as an operator of the club station **YO4KCA**.

YO3CCC: Who were the first radio amateurs you met?

YO4DW: The first were Radu Bratu, YO4HW (SK), Marcel Iordănescu, YO4AB (SK), Mircea Rucăreanu, YO4SI, and Corneliu Făurescu, YO4AUL.

Later, during several visits to the Radio Club, which was usually quite busy on Tuesdays and Fridays, I met Olimpiu Dumitriu, YO4WO, Dan Popana, YO4CPQ (SK), Gheorghe Moldoveanu, YO4ASV, Stelică Limona, YO4FM, Silviu Moldovan, YO4NF, Mihai Dorobanțu, YO4CBT (SK), and many others.

YO3CCC: From which portable location did you operate during VHF/UHF contests?

YO4DW: I operated portable during the 2017 Romanian National VHF/UHF Championship (C.N.U.U.S.) from a hill near Crucea, in Constanța County.

I'm not particularly enthusiastic about VHF/UHF operating.

YO3CCC: Are you interested in amateur radio awards and QSL cards?

YO4DW: In the beginning, I was in a race against time to log as many SWL reception reports of two-way amateur radio QSOs as possible, fill out QSL cards, and send them through the Radio Club.

My goal was to reach the required 500 confirmed receptions, each supported by a physical QSL card that I could present at the Radio Club.

I received a great many return QSL cards, which I kept for a long time even after obtaining my transmitting licence.

Once I became a licensed transmitting amateur, I continued sending and receiving QSL cards through the Radio Club. I carefully archived them, hoping to accumulate the 150 DXCC entities required for membership in the **YO DX Club**.

I continued doing so until the centralized QSL bureau service was discontinued.

After receiving my YO DX Club certificate and with the introduction of **LoTW (Logbook of The World)**, I started keeping only one or two physical QSL cards for each country, as valid confirmations for DXCC purposes.

I switched to LoTW and essentially started collecting confirmed DXCC entities on each band all over again.

In 2013, I fulfilled the requirements and received the **5-Band DXCC (5BDXCC)** and **DXCC Challenge** plaques.

I now have **8-Band DXCC (8BDXCC)**, and I'm still working, although progress is slower, towards adding new DXCC entities on 160 meters.

I currently have around 180 awards, but I don't keep a particularly detailed record, and I wouldn't necessarily describe myself as an award collector.

YO3CCC: What additional antennas are you planning to install?

YO4DW: For several years now, I've been using an ICOM IC-756PROIII transceiver, and I'm very pleased with it.

I believe my current antenna setup meets my operating needs on all HF and VHF/UHF bands.

At present, I use a dual dipole covering 80, 40, and 17 meters; a 162-meter delta loop for the 160-meter band; a Yagi for 50 MHz; and a KLM KT-34A tribander for 20, 15, and 10 meters.

For the periods when I stay in Bucharest, I have an ICOM IC-7100 transceiver and a multiband balcony antenna built by Mitică, YO9FNJ, which performs surprisingly well and efficiently.

I also intend to build another dual dipole for the 30- and 12-meter bands.

YO3CCC: Do you enjoy operating digital modes? Why?

YO4DW: I've always had a particular affection for CW, especially contest operating.

Over the past year, however, I've had to spend a great deal of time in Bucharest, where my operating location is quite challenging.

I'm behind the RIN Hotel, between two apartment buildings facing each other, on the third floor of an eleven-story building.

Because of these conditions, I've been operating almost exclusively, about **95% of the time, on FT8 and RTTY**.

I occasionally make a few CW contest QSOs, mainly during daylight hours.

In the evening, once the streetlights come on, the noise level jumps from S2–S3 to **S9+20 dB!**

I suspect the culprit is some cheap, poorly manufactured Chinese LED lighting equipment installed on a streetlight less than five meters from my antenna.

A photo album accompanying this interview [can be viewed here](#).

The last seven photographs in the album were taken by me between 2009 and 2013, when I used to meet Cornelius at the Romanian Amateur Radio Federation (FRR).

I'm going to give him quite a surprise, as he hasn't seen those photographs until now!