

DX Legends Remembered

Don Miller, W9WNV

An Introduction by Paul Dunphy, VE1DX

How does one write an introduction to a section on Don Miller, W9WNV? The best description of Don and his impact on DXing that I ever read was written by Hugh Cassidy. It was an article he wrote some years ago entitled "I Remember Don" and it is reproduced below. Cass's reminiscences of Don Miller tell it through the eyes of a true blue DXer who lived during the period . . . through the eyes of an Old Timer who worked Don Miller from those exotic DX worlds. Through the eyes of a member of the ARRL executive who saw the entire saga unfold from all sides. No one can do it better than Cass . . . he was there and he had the insight, knowledge and interest.

When K2CD asked me to put together something of an introduction on Don Miller, I was at a loss. It seemed everything had been said, and better than I could say it. Then I began to think about my own interest in W9WNV. I had no direct experience with Don Miller. Don went QRT 10- 15 years before I got my HAM ticket and got bit by the DX bug. Yet I can rattle off tales of Don's DXpeditions, his triumphs and failures, and even a few of the details of how he obtained his lodging from 1981 until the present day. Why could I do this? More to the point, why is it that most DXers can do the same after they've been on the air only a few years? Good questions.

The answer is that Don Miller is probably the most famous DXer of all time. Was Don Miller the Babe Ruth of DXing? Or was he the John Dillinger? The answer is he was neither . . . or maybe both. Don was famous. Don was DX personified in the mid-60s. He had a public dispute with the ARRL and the DXCC desk. Some of his operations were disallowed. Others remain counters today, over 30 years later. Don made a lot of DXers happy. He infuriated probably just as many. His operations had more influence on shaping the DXCC program than any other person or event since 1945. And in spite what anyone says, the DXCC program is better because of Don. Absolutely. W9WNV made the ARRL take a step back and reassess the entire program and the accreditation criteria. And although most HAMS didn't realize it at the time, it shifted the DXCC and DXers into the limelight. For years the DXCC and DXing had been just a sideline of the ARRL. They existed for the traffic men, for the home-brew enthusiasts, for QST and the Amateur's Code. Don changed all this, and how he did it is explained below by Hugh Cassidy, WA6AUD, far better than I ever can. Cass was there, I wasn't.

All this being said, why the fascination of modern day DXers with Don Miller? Why doesn't the charisma of W9WNV go away? I think it's because there is a little bit of Don in every DXer. When we first get bitten by the DX bug, there are always the Big Guns of solar cycles past who tell us how great it was in the Golden Days of DXing. They tell of the famous DXers and DXpeditions when propagation was better than it was during any solar peak we are likely to ever see again. Sometimes we look at charts and plots of these past cycles and wonder why this is so. Time often embellishes memory, but who are we, the newly minted QRPers, to suggest this to those with DXCC totals we can only dream of?

During this reminiscing of DXing, the topic of W9WNV always comes up. Stories are told of how Don could listen to a ferocious CW pileup for 30-45 seconds and then 5NN four or five stations in rapid succession. And Don could do this for hour and hours at a time, while camped out on some obscure rock or volcanic outcropping with the water splashing at his ankles. Who of us, with DXCC totals between 100 and 200, wouldn't want to have

been around in those glorious days when Don Miller handed out all these new ones to the deserving? For that matter, don't we envy those who actually accompanied Don on those operations? And we are always curious about why the ARRL picked W9WNV's operations to scrutinize. There were lots of other DXpeditioners of the day. Why was Don different? Were there politics and infighting going on? Surely this was not the case, for are not all amateurs honest and don't they follow the Amateur's Code . . . if not, they wouldn't be amateurs.

And when we ask what happened to Don, the answers are vague. There are hints that he ran into serious legal problems in the late seventies and early eighties. However, not everyone tells quite the same story and usually only part of it is known. Since it is not really amateur related, I will not discuss it here . . . other than to say Don Miller is currently serving time in a California prison and rumor has it he will soon be eligible for parole. There are those, myself included, who hope this is true and that we too may get a chance to work Don from some rare and exotic DX location.

All activities have their heroes and villains. Don Miller was one or the other, or both, in the eyes of the Old Timers. Whatever the truth is, the stories of W9WNV and his exploits add to the lure of DXing. Even though most of us weren't there, in a way many identify in some way with Don. Can the entire story of Don Miller ever be told? No. Too many years have passed. Many of the players of the day are no longer around. Stories with opposing viewpoints are told by those who were. Some of them are presented here. There are a couple of DX Bulletins of the day written by Don Miller himself. There are the articles by Hugh Cassidy and in another section on the web page, there is a West Coast DX Bulletin with the ARRL's position on the topic. Combine these with the stories told at your local DX club, and you will slowly see that Don Miller was, and still is, one of the Eternal Enigmas of DXing. One of the Mysteries of the Ages that contribute to the understanding of DX IS!

● [Return to Don Miller Page](#)

● [Go to K2CD's Main Page](#)

Back to GeoCities [Cape Canaveral](#)