

Notable Ham Operators + Ham radio in movies and TV



Tino Zottola, VE2GCE

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Agenda

- Some Notable Amateur operators
- Ham radio appearances in movies and TV shows
 - Have some fun poking at the plot holes.

Famous and Notable Amateur operators

Saint Maximilian

Early Life

- Born 1894, Poland, Raymond Kolbe. Joined Franciscan Order as priest, taking name Maximilian

Visionary

- 1930s, Kolbe envisioned using radio to spread religious teaching beyond printed publications.

Niepokalanów Radio Project

- Began building radio station at his monastery, Niepokalanów
- Working hands-on with equipment and antennas. Planned call sign was SP3RN.

Hands-On Experimenter

- Kolbe studied radio theory and electronics himself.
- Encouraged fellow friars to embrace modern communication technology.

World War II and Martyrdom

- Nazi invasion halted project. Kolbe was arrested for helping refugees, including 2000 Jewish people
- Was imprisoned at Auschwitz in 1941.

Ultimate Sacrifice

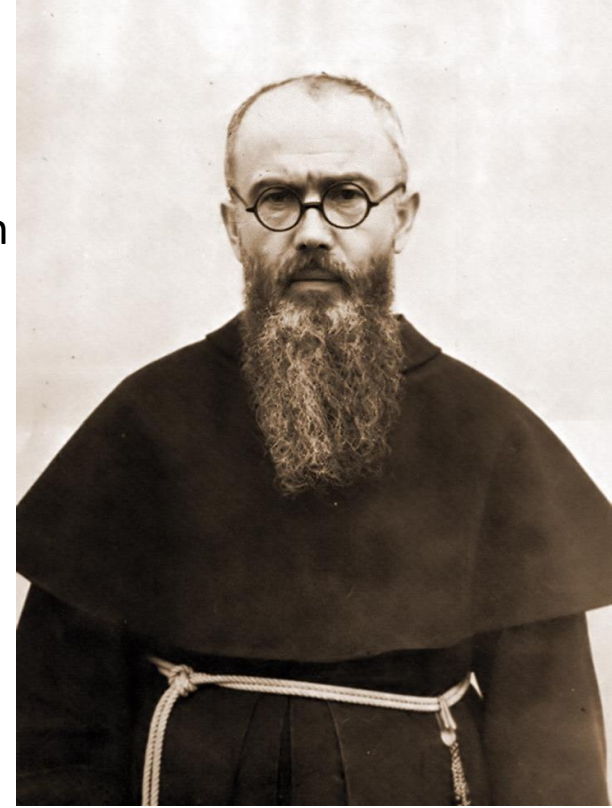
- Volunteered to die in place of prisoner Franciszek Gajowniczek, who had a family.
- After weeks of starvation, Kolbe killed by lethal injection.

Canonization

- Canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1982
- Kolbe is remembered for combining technical curiosity, communication outreach, and humanitarian service.

Legacy in Amateur Radio

- Patron saint of amateur radio operators.
- SP3RN is used symbolically by Catholic amateur radio groups and for special events.



Marlon Brando

Cinema Legacy

Towering figure in 20th-century film

- *On the Waterfront*
- *The Godfather*
- *Apocalypse Now*
- *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

Brando the Amateur Radio Operator

Call Signs

- KE6PZH
- FO5GJ

Operating Style

Frequently operated from his private island in **French Polynesia**

Valued ham radio as a place to escape fame and “just be himself”

Used the pseudonym **Martin Brandeaux** for privacy

In the Ham Community

Remembered for making regular QSOs

Maintained antennas at his Hollywood Hills home

Enjoyed the anonymity, technical challenge, and camaraderie of the hobby



Walter Cronkite

Broadcast Legend

- Known nationwide as “**the most trusted man in America**”
- Iconic broadcast after John F. Kennedy assassination

Ham Radio Involvement

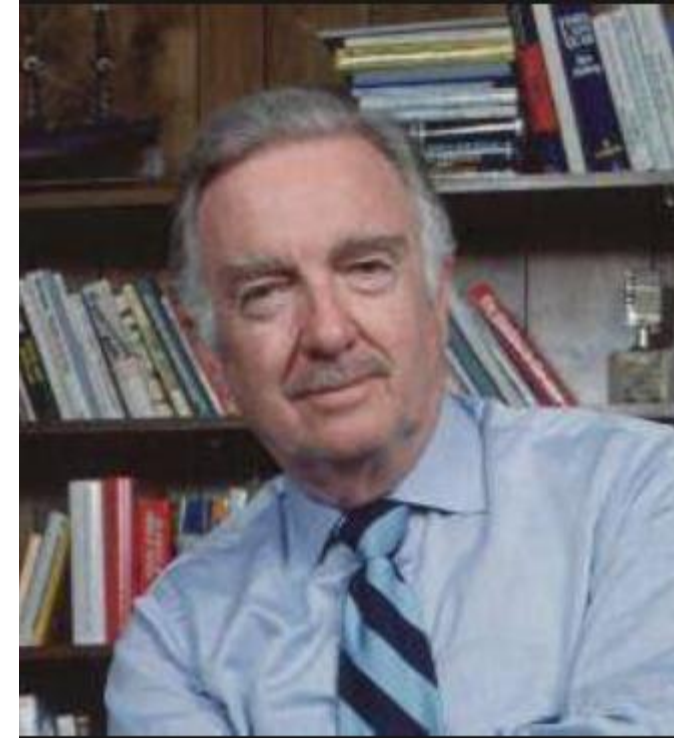
- Held the callsign **KB2GSD**
- Became licensed later in life, encouraged by CBS colleagues
- Approached amateur radio with the same curiosity and dedication that defined his journalism

Contribution to the Ham Community

- Narrator of the ARRL’s 2003 film ***Amateur Radio Today***
- Highlighted the role of amateur radio in:
 - Emergency communication
 - Public service
 - Scientific and technical exploration
- Featured examples such as the **2002 Western U.S. wildfires** and **9/11 response**

Legacy Among Operators

- Remembered as a genuine, active ham
- Learned Morse code, got on the air, and engaged with operators worldwide



Barry Goldwater

Political Career

- Prominent U.S. Senator from Arizona
- **1964 Republican presidential candidate** running against Lyndon B. Johnson

Amateur Radio Legacy

- **K7UGA** — one of the most iconic call signs in U.S. ham-radio history
- **Lifelong Operator:** Active in amateur radio from youth through his entire political career
- Interest in radio aligned with his service as a **pilot** and **comm officer** in U.S. Air Force Reserve

Advocacy

- Supported legislation protecting amateur radio frequencies
- Promoted emergency communications and public-service use of ham radio

Humanitarian Impact

- His Arizona home station to help Vietnam War soldiers make **phone-patch calls** to families
- His station handled **thousands** of calls, many personally by Goldwater
- Provided a vital morale boost long before modern communication technology

Enduring Legacy

- After his death, **K7UGA** was preserved as a memorial call sign
- His equipment is displayed at the **Barry Goldwater Memorial Amateur Radio Station** in Arizona



King Hussien (Jordan)

King Hussein of Jordan: Ambassador of Amateur Radio

- **Iconic Callsign**
- Operated worldwide as **JY1**, one of the most famous callsigns in amateur radio
- Known simply as “**Hussein**” on the air—never using his royal title

Active and Down-to-Earth Operator

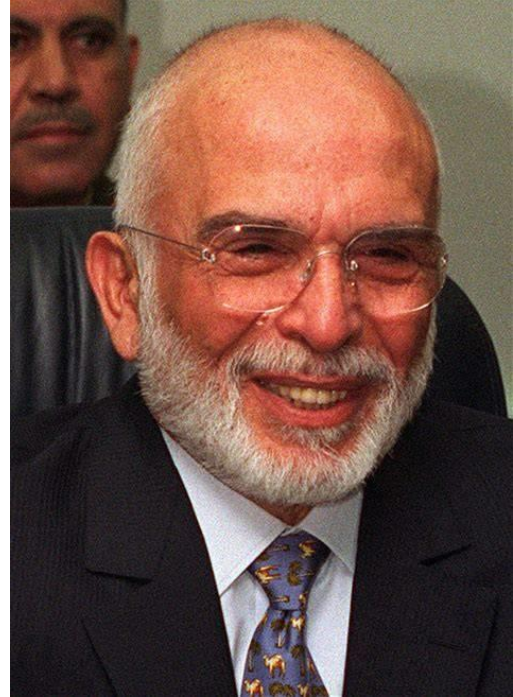
- Regularly got on the air whenever royal duties allowed
- Beloved for his friendly, approachable operating style
- Many hams recall memorable QSOs with him across the bands

Global Operating Activity

- Made contacts while traveling internationally
- Operated as **EP1JY** during a historic visit to Iran
- Worked pileups from the **cockpit of his own aircraft**

Symbol of Goodwill Through Radio

- Participated in events promoting international friendship
- Notably joined the **1995 Israel–Jordan** joint operation on Mount Nebo
- Remembered as a unifying figure who used radio to build global connections



Steve Wozniak



Early Interest in Technology

- Co-founder of Apple and a key figure in personal computing.
- Deeply involved in amateur radio before his tech career, using callsigns WV6VLY and WA6BND.

Ham Radio Foundations

- Licensed as a teenager, Wozniak built transmitters and experimented with circuits.
- Ham radio developed his technical, problem-solving, and communication skills.

Shift to Computing

- Mid-1970s, he focused on computers and envisioned affordable, user-friendly personal computers.

Apple I (1976)

- Designed entirely by Wozniak, Apple I was a single-board computer and Apple's first product.

Apple II and Beyond

- The Apple II became one of the first mass-market personal computers.
- Wozniak's ability to simplify complex systems helped shape Apple's user-focused technology.

Legacy

- Known for his humility, Wozniak has continued pursuing education, philanthropy, and technology.



List of Famous Amateurs (from ON7FD website)

Singers and Musicians

KD4WUJ	Patty Loveless	Country singer
W4CGP	Chet Atkins	Singer-songwriter, guitarist
WB4KCG	Ronnie Milsap	Singer
WB6ACU	Joe Walsh	The Eagles
WN3OQW	Jim Croce	Singer-songwriter
KC1MJ	Tom Scholz	Founder of Boston
KA7EVD	Donny Osmond	Singer (The Osmonds)
W2JOF	Cliff Richard	1960's British Singer

List of Famous Amateurs

Actors and TV Personalities

K4LIB	Arthur Godfrey	Radio & TV broadcaster
KD6WUS	Hugh Downs	TV game show host
KK6OTD	Tim Allen	Actor, comedian. Home Improvement, Last Man Standing
KC6IWA / N6YOS	Priscilla Beaulieu Presley	Ex-wife of Elvis Presley
KD6OY / KQ6KA	Gary Shandling	Comedian

List of Famous Amateurs



World Leaders and Politicians

EA0JC	Juan Carlos	King of Spain
VU2RG	Rajiv Gandhi	Prime Minister, India
WB2AQC	George Pataki	New York Governor

Miscellaneous

N6NHG	Kevin Mitnick	Famous hacker
UA1LO	Yuri Gagarin	Russian cosmonaut
W6ZH	Herbert Hoover Jr.	Son of US president Herbert Hoover and former ARRL president

Amateur Radio in TV and Movies

1960s TV Shows

Munsters "If a Martian Answers, Hang Up," (1965).

Herman using the callsign **W6XRL4**

Mistakenly believes he has made contact with the planet Mars, unaware that He is actually intercepting two local children playing with walkie-talkies.

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ World War II **BC-654** transmitter/receiver could be used for 40/80m AM/CW
- ✗ Call sign is bogus (like phone numbers shown in TV and movies)

Trivia:

- Fred Gwynne was a radio operator 3rd class in the US Navy during WW2
- He played judge in movie My Cousin Vinnie (1992)



Gilligan's Island First Episode (1964)

Castaways arrived on uninhabited island

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✗ Skipper uses unpowered **tuning unit** from WW2 military aircraft radio U.S. Army Signal Corps BC-375 transmitter.
- ✗ Packard Bell **AR-851** Portable AM operates on different band than BC375 HF frequencies
- ✗ Building/fixing radio transmitter would be simpler than fixing boat.



The Americans: FX TV Series (2013-2018)



Americans is a Cold War spy drama set in **1980s Washington, D.C.** It follows two **KGB officers posing as an ordinary married American couple**, Philip and Elizabeth Jennings, who secretly carry out espionage missions for the Soviet Union while raising their children

The image features actress **Polly Lee** playing the character **Joan**, a blind KGB signal intercept operator

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ Various American radio equipment from 1950-1970s
- ✓ Sending Intelligence via SW transmissions to Moscow

Dr. No (1962) James Bond



😊 No need explain the premise of this or other James Bond films.

- Bad guy plans to take over world or destroy key asset.
- James Bond (007) sent alone to neutralize threat



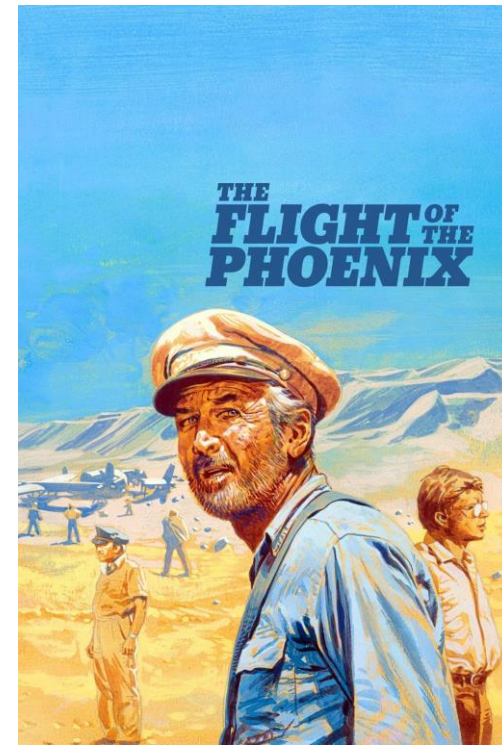
Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ British Embassy features typically UK 1950-60 equipment
 - **K.W. Electronics Vanguard** transmitter on left
 - **Eddystone 840A** receiver on right
- ✓ MI6 Communication Room features numerous UK 1950 high-performance **Racal RA17** receivers

Trivia: Bad guy, Dr. No (Joseph Wiseman) born in Montreal.



Flight of the Phoenix (1965)



- Cargo plane crashes in the **Sahara Desert** after a sandstorm and survivors stranded with little water and no working radio.
- Pilot **Frank Towns** tries to keep the group alive while they wait for rescue.
- Aircraft designer **Heinrich Dorfmann** proposes a dangerous plan: rebuild wrecked plane into a smaller aircraft.

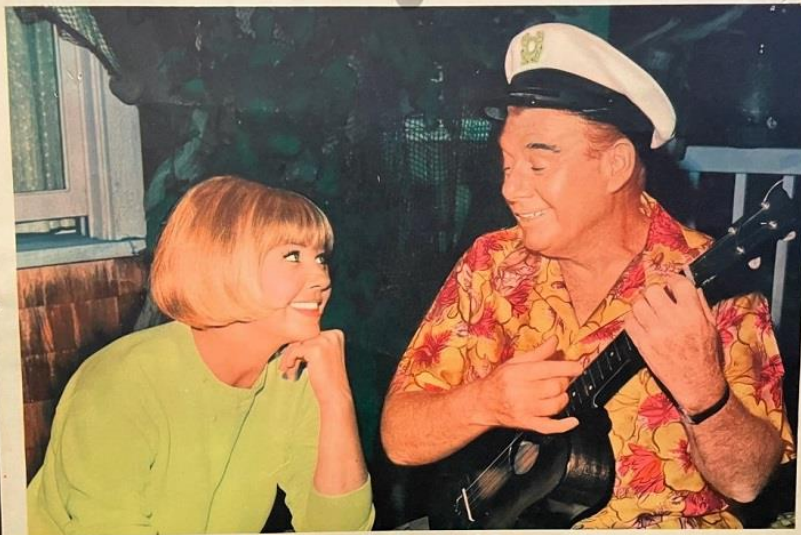
Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ Various American radio equipment from WW2: ART13, BC348 and command set
- ✗ Obvious Question: Why not try to fix one of two transmitters than rebuild an entire aircraft ?

Trivia:

- Jimmy Stewart was experienced pilot who flew 20 combat missions as a B-24 Liberator pilot during World War II.
- He continued serving in the **U.S. Air Force Reserve after the war** and was promoted to **Brigadier General in 1959**.

Glass Bottom Boat (1966)

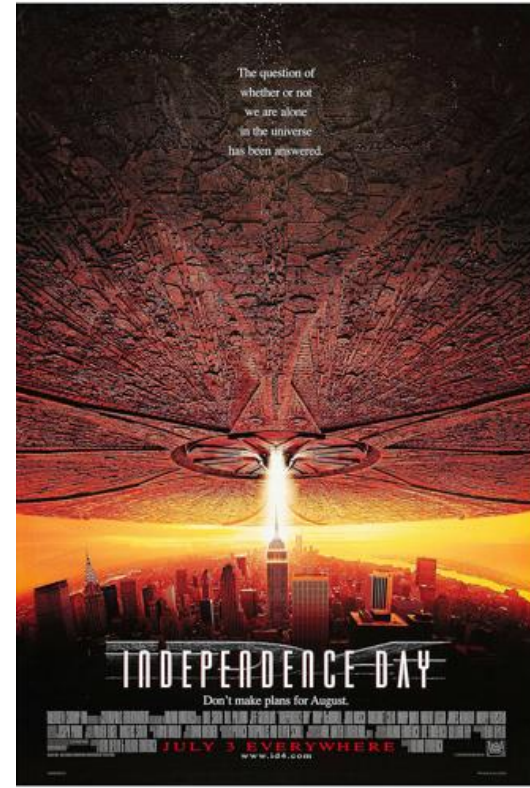
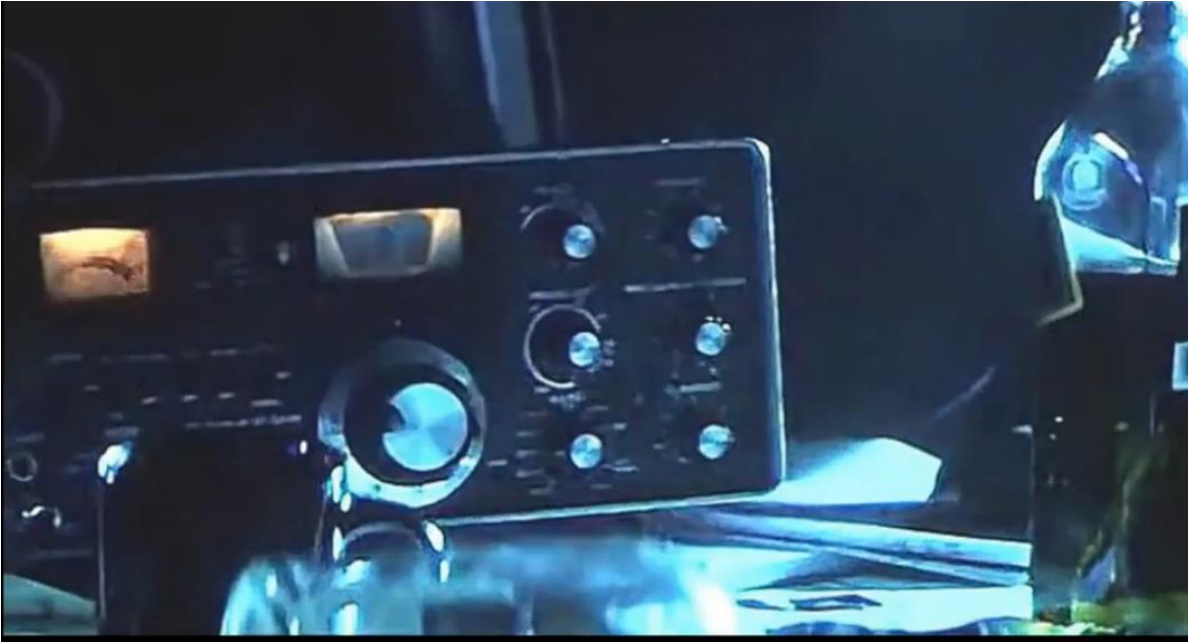


- **Jennifer Nelson (Doris Day)**, a widow working at an aerospace research company, meets **Bruce Templeton**, a wealthy inventor and the company's president.
- Bruce becomes interested in Jennifer but is convinced that she may be a **spy** trying to steal information about his secret aerospace research.

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ **Main Transceiver:** Jennifer is using a classic **Collins KWM-2** transceiver
- ✓ **Radio purpose:** Marine communications. Collins KWM-2 can be modified easy for HF marine bands.

Independence Day (1996)



- **Alien spacecrafts arrives on Earth** and positions itself over major cities around the world.
- Aliens launch a devastating attack, destroying cities and causing millions of casualties.
- **President** tries to coordinate the U.S. military response as humanity struggles to survive.
- Invading aliens deploy an orbital EMP that completely wipes out all modern global satellite communications and digital networks, human survivor bases around the world are forced to fall back on resilient, analog, tube-based tech.

Ham Radio Plot details:

- X Heros uses **Yaesu** FT101 radios. Radios are partially tube and would not be fully EMP resistant
Better choices would have been Collins, Drake or Heathkit radios from the 1950-60s
- ✓ Movie does excellent depiction of using amateur radio during crisis events when core infrastructure is destroyed.

Contact (1997)



Dr. Ellie Arrowway (Jodie Foster), a scientist searching for extraterrestrial life, spends years monitoring skies for signals from intelligent civilizations.

Image shows young **Ellie** at bedroom desk with early obsession with space and communications.

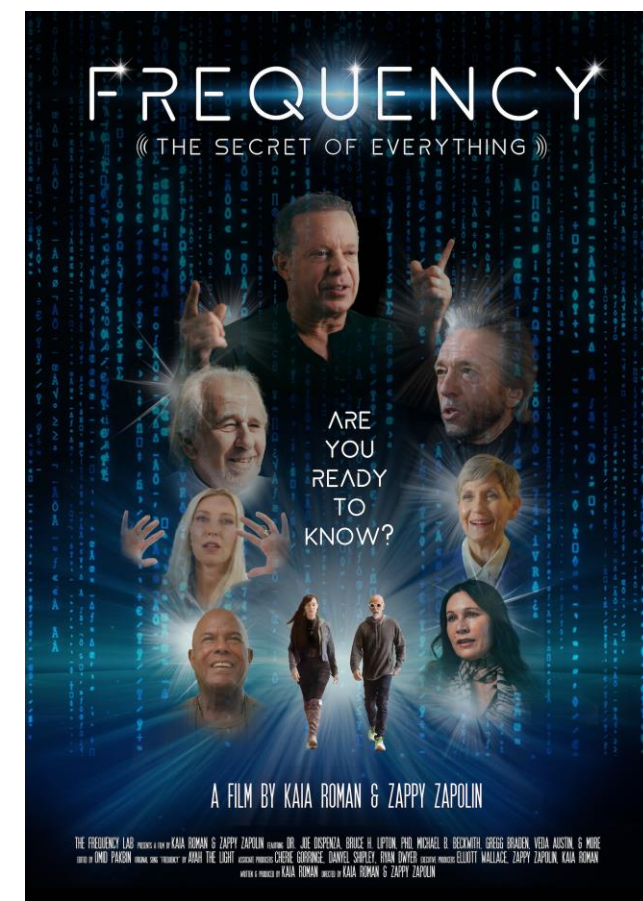
She is operating a vintage amateur ham radio setup under her father's guidance.

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ **The Main Transceiver:** Young Ellie is using a classic **Collins KWM-2** (or KWM-2A) HF
- ✓ **The Call Sign:** Using legit call sign **W9GFO** on the 14.2 megahertz frequency.
- ✓ Movie does excellent depiction of amateur radio as gateway activity to STEM careers for young people



Frequency (2000)



- **John Sullivan**, New York detective, discovers that old radio can communicate with his father, **Frank**, who died 30 yrs earlier.
- However, changing history creates new consequences, including a series of **unsolved murders**

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ **Main Gear:** Open chassis with glowing tubes sitting on desk is a **Heathkit SB-301 receiver** or **SB-401 transmitter**
- X Hollywood gimmickry always has tubes glowing super bright orange + add 100-watt incandescent bulb for more light
- X Obvious Issue: I have not been able to contact anybody from past with my vintage radios

The Bank Job (2008)



- Terry Leather crew plans to break into the bank's vault by tunneling into it from a nearby building on Baker Street
- They successfully reach the vault and steal cash, jewelry, and valuables from the safety deposit boxes.
- The crew soon discovers that some of boxes contain sensitive material connected to powerful and dangerous people.

Ham Radio Plot details:

- ✓ Bank robbers are using walkie-talkies (27 Mhz) to communicate between the vault tunnel and their rooftop lookout.
FT101 Radio could tune to 11 meters
- ✗ Local Ham eavesdrops on crew communicating by walkie-talkies using **Yaesu** FT101E/EE .
Radio released in 1975 by Yaesu, movie set in Sept 1971.

Questions ?