

St. Julians Creek massacre – Larry Haney, 2/15/2022

I went through the 'History' file in the 'Pearls' and found the following interesting information about the St. Julians Creek massacre (very large pile of R-390 and R-390As stored outside):

From: paul.courson@... (An Unsigned Note)
Date: Thu Dec 18, 1997 5:03 am
Subject: [R-390] Re: 390A from Fair Radio condx

There was a first-person account circulating nearly a year ago about these radios. The civilians involved had discovered piles of these radios sitting outdoors at a military facility, where the units were being held for processing on their way to auction by DRMO.

The discovery was in, oh, lets say August, because I remember it still being warm weather in the account, which somehow included verification that the radios had been out-of-doors since about April or May. The people approached military brass about the advantages of taking the radios under cover, thereby improving the revenue likely generated at auction.

But the officials said they had far more valuable materiel to worry about, like multi-million dollar airplane parts, etc., and that the 30 year old radios were likely to sit right where they were.
The months pass.

Around February of this year, the sad tale was written about weatherbeaten radios finally coming up for auction. Fair Radio's catalogue description, while accurate, is somewhat terse. The first-person account described radios whose lubrication no longer protected steel gear assys from surface rust; how the rainwater & snowpack had caused PTOs to seize wherever they had last been tuned; and how all the control functions including the IF racks were pretty much bound up by accumulated dirt and grime from sitting in a depot yard. I seem to remember that most if not all of the rigs viewed were missing their covers (probably for ventilation in rack mounting). I do not remember any comment regarding the meters, although I see Fair's catalogue description notes they are (now) missing. If I can dig up that story from the diskette archives, will post to the group. I think I have given a fair (no pun) capsule summary of same. Good luck. In my view, these radios -- at this point in the market -- would become interesting only if they were well under \$100/unit, considered a source of parts. For the most ambitious, perhaps they could be seen as restoration projects (better buy two to hopefully make one good one, so then you're into it for \$250 plus shipping).

I predict that five years from now, \$125 parts units will be a good deal, but not yet. We earlier had discussions here about whether Fair's proprietors, George and Phil Sellati, would favor customer walk-throughs for inspection and selection. Given the questionable condition of these units, and the relatively optimistic asking price, it might prove useful to gently ask for such an opportunity with them. Earlier, I was skeptical there would be much incentive for Fair to allocate time & personnel for picky customers to review gear that was accurately portrayed, reasonably priced, and offered in the same "as is" context as these units. Rgds.,

From: jim thompson
Date: Thu Dec 18, 1997 11:00 pm
Subject: [R-390] R-390A's from Fair Radio

There has been a lot of discussion about the condition of the subject receivers. I was one of those who personally viewed them on many occasions as they sat out in the weather over a period of nearly 18 months. Originally, there was a pile of about 2000 receivers (a guess) which were quite restorable. This, by the way was quite a sight. I have one that was completely restored and it is a

beautiful receiver. It was rescued before they were totally ruined by the weather. I was the one who wrote a rather lengthy description of the entire affair which I entitled the "St. Julians Creek Massacre." If anyone is interested, I'll republish it. In a nutshell, what you will see if you buy one of these sets are radios that have rust anywhere that metal could rust. They were piled 24 to a pallet, so if one of the top units moved, it just crushed whatever was underneath it. When they left here (Portsmouth, VA), they had the tube shields, most tubes, the ballast tube, no covers, all filters, no meters (except for one or two lots which slipped through), and most other parts. The tube shields, ballast tubes, BFO's and audio chassis (in some cases as I understand) and other selected parts were removed after they left here. Since Fair now has lots of tube shields and ballast tubes, I suppose we can guess where they went. Anyway, if you have a chance to look one over before buying it, great. You may find one that left the St. Julian's during the earlier sales and it may be restorable. The last ones to leave are definitely parts radios. I have nothing against Fair Radio. To the contrary, I'm glad they are able to make these available to us for parts. I happen to know that some of the receivers went at auction for over \$100 each, though those sold in the first auctions when for \$37.50 each. I tried to purchase just a few of them for myself and some friends as parts sources. I was not successful with any of my bids. I hope this helps with some of the questions about the condition of the sets as offered. Incidentally, they sat in the rain long enough for the paint strip across the front panel to fade and in the case of one pallet, completely wash off. The PTO's didn't turn very easily in that batch!! It is with the highest regard and respect for a milestone in radio history that I lament the loss of nearly 2000 wonderful R-390A's which after years of faithful service to our country and armed forces, were piled into heaps and left to face an ugly fate in the bowels of a scrap yard. From one who appreciates fine receivers -

From: Michael Crestohl
Date: Mon Feb 9, 1998 3:38 pm S
subject: [R-390] R-390A Radios For Sale by George K1ANX

My friend George Rancourt, K1ANX has a big pile of R-390A receivers that came from the famous Saint Julian's Creek lot in VA. He is offering them to the BA and R-390 community at \$125.00 each or 5 for \$500.00 plus shipping. This may be a good opportunity to get another fixer-upper or parts unit. George told me that last year (1997) over 1000 R-390As were destroyed by the government at Tobyhanna Army Depot in PA. This is in line with their new policy of destroying communications equipment instead of selling it off as surplus. George also tells me that he is getting a computer "soon" and will be online shortly thereafter.

He asked me to post the following: "I have a large quantity of R-390A rxs for sale. I will sell in lots of 5 or more at \$100 each. These rxs have all modules but no meters or top/bottom covers. They are not checked out as far as being operational." Please call, thank you. George Rancourt K1ANX 413-527-4304 If interested please contact George directly, not me - I am only posting this for him.

Date: Tue, 25 Mar 2003 13:50:16 -0500
From: tbigelow 'at' pop.state.vt.us (Todd Bigelow - PS)
Subject: Re: [R-390] Julien Creek receivers...

Some time ago the ol' sage Nolan gave his opinion on these radios. I believe it was based not only in his past experiences with many of these radios, but also with the work involved in restoring them to top condition. The problem was and is the degree of damage done over time and the amount of work required to restore and/or repair it. This was then compared to what you could buy a decent working or restorable example for, one that hadn't been exposed to the elements for years. To cut to the chase, Nolan figured it was just not worth the hassle to bother. Mainly because to do it right, you'd pretty much need to tear the radio down to parts (not just modules) and reassemble it, replacing many components and pieces, if you really hoped to have a reliable radio. Coils, caps,

resistors.....many items would absorb moisture over an extended period of exposure. Combine this with the many bad electrical and mechanical connections to be expected and you get the idea. I don't think his intent was ever to claim no one should bother, more that they'd be better off to use a blue striper as a parts donor for a rig in better shape. It was just a clear case of the potential time and money invested by the time you got through, what you'd likely have to replace, and would you just be better off finding a better set to start with. If you have a lot of time and access to a lot of known-good parts, and if the blue striper (name given to radios from the 'St Julian's Creek Massacre' derived from the blue stripe painted across all of the radios on the pallet) was free or really cheap, then go for it. Nolan's original post was with respect to the prices being charged for them by Fair Radio and perhaps others who were selling them at the time. He figured with the \$200+/- price, the price of parts you'd likely need to replace (many if it was one of the exposed top/front/side victims), the difficulty in finding some of the coils and other scarce parts, and the time you'd have invested you'd be better off to pay more for an example that was never exposed to the elements like that. I tend to agree from the time/cost/availability side. We're fortunate to live in a time when decent R-390As are still plentiful and comparatively inexpensive. 100 years from now a blue striper will probably be worth its weight in gold. Okay, maybe not *that* much.... Boomer, KA1KAQ

Date: Fri, 09 Apr 2010 12:47:33 -0400

From: rbethman

Subject: Re: [R-390] Where did Julian Creek receivers come from?

It is a "bit" puzzling. The term DRMO wasn't really in use when all these old gals got sent to St. Julien's Creek Annex, Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY), Portsmouth, Virginia.

Each and every military installation had a PDO, Property Disposal Office. They used to be the collection point for all the Military Units that the particular installation served.

St. J's has been a munitions/ordnance installation going back to around 1849. It changed in 1969 from its ordnance and weapons supply mission, to become an Annex to Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia. In 1977 it was transferred to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

Apparently it has been a facility that generated potentially hazardous substances include metal plating, de-greasing, painting, operation of hydraulic equipment, vehicles and locomotives, ordnance loading, ordnance testing, ordnance disassembly, ordnance destruction, pest control, maintenance of lead-acid batteries, and printing. Trash and garbage generated from the facility was disposed in on-site dumps. Wastes were typically disposed in low areas, which are wetlands. Beginning in the late 1930s, waste ordnance materials were disposed on site. On-site disposal and storage of waste created numerous sources of potential contamination, including landfills and an ordnance disposal (burning) area. Sources of potential contamination located on the facility include four landfills, an ordnance disposal area, an ordnance burn pit, a hazardous waste disposal area, a waste storage area, and a pesticide disposal area. These sources were noted because of their potential to release to the surface water surrounding the facility, i.e. Blows Creek, St. Julien's Creek, and the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River. Somewhere in all of this it ended up with the huge stacks of R-390s and R-390As that we have seen the pictures of. It "Most likely" did so due to the radioactive waste issue, regarding the original meters and the original 0A2s that developed radioactivity from use due to conditions of the gas used in their envelopes. Low level radioactive waste was buried in drums at Barnwell, S.C. It IS interesting that these radios from ALL branches of the military went to a single disposal point. I never experienced anything like that in my entire military career. Bob - N0DGN

Date: Sat, 10 Apr 2010 00:20:54 -0400

From: Glenn Little WB4UIV

Subject: Re: [R-390] Where did Julian Creek receivers come from?

There was a similar group of R390A receivers at DRMO Charleston SC. These were destroyed even further. They had a disposal "expert" determine that there was gold in the R390A receivers.

All modules were removed from the receivers and an air chisel was used to remove all connectors from the receivers. There was at least 20,000 pounds of these. These were collected in an outside storage bin until the auction.

A local scrap yard won the bid. I was able to buy a car full of the parts. The receivers were loaded by scrap crane into a dump truck. When the dump truck arrived at the scrap yard, the receivers were dumped onto the ground.

These were thrown into 55 gallon drums cut in half, attached to a front loader. These were hauled to the furnace as fast as they could load them where they were melted for the aluminum. I still salvage parts from the pieces that I got. There was nothing restorable in the lot. I wish I knew then what I know now and I would have loaded mostly IF modules. Another R390A horror story.

Date: Fri, 09 Apr 2010 20:39:43 -0500

From: Robert Nickels

Subject: Re: [R-390] Where did Julian Creek receivers come from?

I just checked and the St. Juliens Creek Massacre info is still available on the web in case anyone is wondering what we're talking about:

Pics: http://www.r390a.com/Archived%20Pages/radio_rape.html (**NOT AVAILABLE HERE**)

Text: <http://www.radioworks.com/nr390saga.html>

13 years ago this coming Sunday...lest we forget...

Larry Haney, 2/15/2022, The full text is still on radioworks (by Jim Thompson), but Chuck Rippel's site and pictures have gone to the archives. The **pictures are here now**:
https://web.archive.org/web/20090204020515/http://www.r390a.com/Archived%20Pages/radio_rape.html

Date: Wed, 18 Jul 2007 23:47:47 -0500

From: "Mac McCullough"

Subject: Re: [R-390] Fowler Industries R-390A on eBay Now

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Additionally from the St Julian's haul, I think there were 2 additional Fowlers found , George Rancourt will know for sure, as well the sn.'s and as I recall from the 98-99' era #5 had already been found and was offered for sale, look thru ER in that era, and I think it will appear listed in the classifieds, that was VERY early Ebay times and ER was the predominate medium for selling and buying of equipment like this, the HTYS was waning, if not passé by that time .. and at the time the #5 was listed, none of the others had been identified, at least publicly, and I suspect in actuality 'found' there were a lot of radios to go thru from St Julian's, many more, if you were expressly

looking for a Fowler..

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I had 465 of the St Julian sets, and I checked each one before sending them in batch's of 100 to Phil at Fair Radio, Phil bought these in lots of 100 as his sales dictated, it was my original goal to restore these individually, that was about the second biggest pipe dream I had in my life

As an index point, I paid 37.50 for a few, 65.00 for most, and in a few instances 100.00 for a few, so averaged in I was at about 60.00 ea. Now that was not the case for ole # 1 believe me.. I paid dear for that one ..but it was 1998-99 and we were entering the "false sense of economic euphoria" era... so money was little obstacle... not like now ...

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mac/mc w5mc
