

## Darky (Command Set Radio 6440 mh) - Navigation Aids

By John W. Howland

"There were no racial overtones to the phrase DARKY. The word referred to the blacked-out English bombers that flew their missions at night and were the principal users of the Darky system."

Because of the hundreds of military aircraft flying in the limited airspace over England, Command Set radios had signal suppressors installed which normally limited transmission to a distance of approximately ten miles. Control tower radio signals were also suppressed to a ten mile range. The fact that a Command Set transmission was limited to ten miles led to the development of a navigation aid called DARKY. The entire English countryside had a network grid with circles of 10 miles radius. Each contained an observation post which monitored 6440 Kc or Kh, on the command set radio. A lost pilot looking for help had to follow a prescribed procedure. First, he had to say, "HELLO DARKY" three times. Second, he identified himself three times. Third, he stated "Are you receiving me" twice. Such a transmission might go, "Hello Darky! Hello Darky! Hello Darky! This is Army 904. This is army 904. This is Army 904. Are you receiving me? Are you receiving me? "

If the pilot followed the prescribed procedure, Darky would then reply giving his location in the clear. Should the pilot need further assistance, Darky would provide it. For example, a pilot might request course and distance to Ridgewell. Darky might then reply, "Ridgewell is 42 miles, course 135 degrees." All the pilot had to do was fly 135 degrees. If his true air speed was 120 miles per hour he would fly for 21 minutes. This procedure should have put him within range of the Ridgewell Tower.

Some DARKY stations did not have radio transmitters. These were normally searchlight batteries. If they received a DARKY request at night, they would raise and lower the powerful beam three times. The third time the light came to rest in a horizontal position pointed in the direction the pilot should fly to reach his destination.

Darky really wasn't too popular among the pilots and navigators who hated to admit they ever got lost. But it was mighty handy when the chips were down and there was no alternative.

Addendum: Reed Park from Canada reports that his father, who flew an ANSON with the RAF used a system similar to Darky while returning from bombing missions. When he spotted a ship in the moonlit waters of the North Sea, he would make an over-flight and fire off colored flares of the day shot in the right sequence (ie: red-green & green/green). In response, the ship would light a searchlight and point it toward the nearest landfall. Reed reports that, "In spite of his pride as a pilot/navigator (he was alone) his father said it was the greatest sight to see, other than the landing field."

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