Update on Logbook of the World
Report to ARRL Board of Directors, January 2015

2014 represented the second year of existence of the Logbook Study Committee (LSC). Logbook continued to make steady progress in 2014. Here are a few updates for the Board on the status of Logbook projects.

The two new programmers who started in May have finished the re-write that was required to remove dependencies on the unsupported database tools that are currently in use. Testing of the rewritten version is now underway. When complete, the update will remove a major item of the "technical debt" under which LoTW has had to operate. It would also facilitate a transition to an open source database if we choose. A second hardware instance of LoTW is nearing completion. This will be both a backup and a test bed to stress test LoTW, and to check new features before they are released. This will ultimately facilitate automated regression testing.

Dave Bernstein AA6YQ has written all-new documentation for LoTW which is available on the Logbook web site, prior to login (lotw.arrl.org). This documentation includes many topics for which no written advice had been available, and also covers the new version of the TQSL utility with which users can manage their uploads to LoTW. Now that this major task has been completed, we will be making a transition to continuing support and updates at HQ. A contract resource with experience in the ARRL web environment has been identified, and a transition to that person has begun.

TQSL 2.0 and further point releases have been fully productive for some time. Recent work has been aimed at improving accessibility for users who use screen readers. In addition, code has been added that will allow local language versions of TQSL to be supported. This version has recently been released for beta test. The TQSL group is managing this carefully, so that new language versions do not overwhelm the capabilities of the LoTW servers.

Over 10 years ago, a ham started a Yahoo! mail group called ARRL-LOTW. As we have discussed before, LoTW needs an e-mail group that is independent of the ARRL.org website, since only members may join mail groups there. We are fortunate that the owner and creator of the Yahoo! group (KG0KG) was receptive to our request and has transferred the ownership of the group to ARRL. Several ARRL volunteers support the group in various ways today, and we have now added a presence from the MVP (FS&RS) department. This is important because MVP has answers and help capabilities that none of the volunteers has. Also in 2014, we have made major strides in keeping the LoTW community informed about test and upgrade outages, which has substantially reduced complaints about downtime.

The server on which part of Logbook runs was the victim of two types of cyber attacks in the last few months. These topics are not directly influenced by Logbook practices, and will be discussed in a separate IT security report to A&F.

The LotW Development Team has made major progress in reducing the technical debt which developed over the last decade. Though Logbook is not yet dug out, the Committee is starting to consider the architecture for the support of other awards. The direction the committee is taking is to provide interface methods by which other awarding organizations could query LoTW, but would maintain their own award definitions. (This differs from the WPX approach, where ARRL IT wrote the award rules, which are thus embedded in LoTW). Award organizations would presumably pay for their use of LoTW for verification. Several award organizations now

accept screen shots of LoTW output for their users to confirm award activity. We would plan to make the utility and usability of LoTW so attractive that awarders would prefer using LoTW directly, rather than through screen shots. Though recent competitive award offerings have arisen, we still believe that LoTW has sufficient status to remain the gold standard for high-quality, well-respected awards. We need to increase LoTW momentum, however, in order to avoid losing ground.

There is still work to be done. As we end the Centennial year, awards for the Centennial QSO party will begin to generate applications. At this time, award level criteria have recently been defined, hence the certificates can begin to be programmed. This will necessarily divert some resources from reducing LoTW's technical debt.

A concept arose from the LSC of a "Product Manager" who would be responsible for the overall health of LoTW, across different departments in ARRL. LoTW by its nature integrates functions that are covered within separate departments at ARRL. This means that where tasks move across functions, there is a heightened potential for missed handoffs. The Product Manager would be responsible for ensuring the completion of all tasks, regardless of whether they reside completely within a single function or require several different sorts of contribution. Students of organizational design will recognize this as a simple instance of "matrix management." The Product Manager concept is still being discussed, but the next step is to create a "Business Plan" describing how the position might fit within the 2015 Plan.

de KØGW, for the Logbook Study Committee
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