The Texan

Newsletter of the Texas NTS CW Net (TEX)

** See "TSN Corner" on Last Pages **

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TEX Frequency Change

The change to 3541 for both early and late TEX seems to be working well, at least for me, now that the noise reported last month is generally higher in frequency. Charlie, W5GKH, reports that he hears a heterodyne right on 3541, so when his NCS nights come, look for him just a little below that, around 3540.7 or so. Sam, W5CU, had a heterodyne on 3552, so the change has also solved the problem for him. Furthermore, we no longer need to worry about the Mexican SSB on 3551 some nights. With current propagation, it has not been very strong, but I heard it on occasion prior to the frequency change.

As far as tracking down my noise source, I obtained a portable HF receiver from a local ham friend, Bob, K3NT, and have walked around outside searching for the source. Unfortunately, about all I have been able to find is that it seems to be coming in on the AC power lines, with radiated coupling to the antennas (I use battery power on the rig). Looks like it may be TXU's BPL system after all. More research is in process, as time permits. Noteworthy is that it was considerably stronger at Bob's QTH here in Plano than at mine.

"Late" Again?

This issue of the newsletter is coming out at a date that used to be "late". However, I believe it works better for me to work on it at this time of the month rather than the first week, so I will probably continue to publish near mid-month.

HamCom

HamCom was held last Friday and Saturday. As previously mentioned, I had some family events that conflicted with attending very much. However, I did manage to meet with Ken, K5RG, on Friday morning, and we had a very nice "eyeball QSO".

Saturday afternoon, Brian, N5BA, and Chuck/Lee, AA5J, came to where I indicated I would be waiting for any TEX members still around at 4 PM. We also had a nice chat while waiting to see if Bert, AC5Z, would join us. I had heard from Bert early Saturday morning, but he had some car trouble and needed to take care of it. So we did not see him. Brian indicated he had seen Bert earlier in the day, though.

Brian also reported that Jo Ann, KA5AZK, did another good job with the Traffic Handling session on Saturday morning. Not much was said about CW traffic handling, though, and the TEX / TSN folks who were there (N5BA, K5RG, and AA5J, as far as I know) did not have to assist her in answering questions about TEX or TSN.

Chuck and I went out to dinner after all the 5 PM drawings. It was good to be able to spend some time with him before he leaves for Arkansas. Brian had another commitment.

Field Day

The next major event (as far as ham radio is concerned) will be Field Day on June 27 and 28. TEX will meet at the usual times, but we will use 3643 instead of 3541 for both net sessions on Saturday. There may be some SSB QRM on 3643, but likely not too severe. I hope to be operating from W5ROK on Saturday to pick up any field day traffic for the new SM and/or SEC. My operating time will be limited somewhat due to caring for my father, so I may just QNI from my home station on early TEX.

W1NJM Saga

Thanks to Sis, WD8DIN, the editor of the "Traffic Call" newsletter of the Hit and Bounce Net (HBN – 0730 CT, 7042 KHz), for passing along George Hart's saga of the "early days". Here's Part 26 of George Hart's recollections, more about W1AW.

RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD HAM

A journalistic history of the life and times in Amateur Radio of George Hart, W1NJM, by George Hart, W1NJM.

Chapter 26 - The W1AW Antenna Farm

The "antenna farm" on the seven acre field back of the new building consisted of five western red cedar poles, four of them 65' high, the far pole 50' high, supporting separate antennas for 160, 80, and 40 meters and a big "rhombic" antenna 350 feet on each leg, unterminated. The rhombic was to be used on 20 meters for maximum west coast coverage and had already been tested with astounding results.

I couldn't believe my luck in the prospects of being able to operate this magnificent station and actually being paid for it. Had I had sufficient means of support otherwise, I would have operated it for nothing, even paid to do so. I remember wondering, aloud, at the time, how they got around the FCC ban on paid operators and was told that we were not paid to operate the station, only to attend and maintain it. Thus, we were not "operators" but station "attendants," the operating being miscellaneous to this. This still left some necessary interpretation of the rules, which League's then general counsel, Paul Segal, had successfully negotiated with the commission. Nevertheless, Hal and I were usually designated as "W1AW operators" and a major part of our function, especially mine, was to make contact with other amateur stations for the purpose of representing the League to its members and the amateur radio fraternity in general.

The working hours totaled the same as those at the offices in West Hartford, but not the same hours. Hal and I were to work overlapping hours until he felt that I could manage without him, each putting in 37 ½ hours a week. Once he felt I could go it alone, the hours were from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. weekdays and 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday. During the week we each worked a 6-hour shift and one of us would work every other weekend. It seemed to me like a very equitable and practical arrangement. I quickly "learned the ropes" and we started dividing the week day shifts, changing shift at 9 p.m., but Hal took the early shift so he could continue the building and maintenance program and I worked the "graveyard" shift when most of the on-air operation took place. This was fine with me for a while but I soon got weary of it.

Visitors at the new W1AW were plentiful, especially during the first few months. Hal did the lion's share of technical work, while I entertained visitors or assisted Hal at his directions. We got along well during that early period. I was accustomed to being dominated by my older brother Ed, W3NF. It was a little different with Hal, who was a couple of years younger than I, (I was 24, almost 25 when I came to W1AW) but I tolerated it. He wasn't a bad guy, but he lost no opportunity to demonstrate his superiority and very occasionally this grated. On the whole, however, we maintained a congenial relationship.

On-the-air operation was minimal during the first two weeks. I was allowed to operate the transmitters occasionally, but nothing was scheduled. We were still in the testing stages. This lasted only from August 22 to September 2, the date of the formal dedication.

Near panic had occurred on the day before when Ralph Beaudin, W1BAW, QST's assistant circulation manager, noticed the memorial plaque in the front lobby referred to Hiram Percy Maxim as "the father of organized radio."

"Shouldn't that be 'the father of organized amateur radio'?" he inquired. There were gasps from the other staff members, who had been admiring the plaque. I also had read the plaque several times and had never noticed this glaring error.

With the dedication less than a day away, what could be done? Ralph an enterprising and daring young junior executive, contacted the firm that had made the plaque, ascertained that the error was theirs and demanded that they do something about it immediately.

An overlay strip containing the missing word was hastily prepared and applied, so skillfully it was unnoticeable without close examination. After the dedication a completely new plaque was prepared and the repaired one replaced. Hundreds of people had admired the plaque containing the error but no one had noticed it until Ralph's eagle eye spotted it.

Coming in Chapter 27 - The Dedication of the new W1AW

TEX Mailbox:

Pete, K5GM, reports that he is at least back on the air, but still trying to get back to “normal” (whatever that is, per Pete) following his surgery and extended recovery. Pete also reported that he was TEX manager years ago and was interested in the chronology of managers. A bit more about that in the next item.

Pete has asked that TCC reports addressed to him at K5GM be forwarded via Winlink or E-Mail, since he has trouble with the telephone and prefers written form. *As I indicated to NCS and liaisons, please list K5GM traffic as "K5GM / DFW". I will take them to Winlink to him if he is not on the net at that time – Steve.*

Pete also forwarded some interesting observations from Bud, W2RU, the manager of EAN. I will put them in the "Operating" section near the end of this newsletter. Thanks, Pete.

Bill, WA5MUF, sent me a paper copy (all they had back then) of the TEXAN newsletter from June, 1993. Noteworthy that Ed, KS5V (now W5KNN) had just taken over as net manager. According the the newsletter, which Ed also published, he was elected (by a landslide) as NM at the 7290 picnic that year. Ed had also received the ARRL West Gulf Division Ham of the Year award at HamCom that year. A really big year for you, Ed !

A nice "spotlight" about Arley, WB5NKC, in that issue. Bob, NZ2T was North Texas SM at the time and the "outgoing" manager of TEX. Quite a lot of interesting information in the newsletter. If anyone would like to read it, let me know and I will scan the pages and E-Mail them to you (will be pretty large file attachments). The TEX roster showed W5BB, W5GKH, K5GM, K0KJ (now W9GVW), K5KV, WA5MUF, WB5NKC, WB5NKD, K5RG, and AC5Z as well as KS5V.

Scott, N7NET, disagreed with the article by Rob, K6YR, concerning "One BK does not deserve another". Scott writes: Signals are often marginal when working a QRP station. QSB doesn't help the situation. The second BK reassures me that we still have a two-way QSO going. As for wasting time... I'm doing this for fun not for saving time.
72 de Scott/n7net/qrp

As previously mentioned, **Lee, AA5J**, is moving out of the division so has resigned as TSN net manager, effective this month. Lee writes: We have purchased property in Cabot, Arkansas and will be moving there in the July time frame. We close on the property there on Jun 19th.

Sorry to be leaving, but, WE JUST HAVE TO GET OUT OF THE CITY!

Plus, I am moving back 'home' to within 50 miles of my brothers and my wife's sisters, so we are looking forward to good times with them.

Plus, Plus, I will have 200' x 200' x 1365' of wire antenna space, instead of this postage stamp in Plano. HI HI 73, Will try to join you on TEX from time to time once I get set up in AR.
Chuck (Lee on CW), AA5J

*Note: As of this writing, **Pat, KD5TXD**, has accepted the position of TSN manager. Thank you, Pat!*

Jay, N5PWG, is interested in obtaining information about any nets that use CW for emergency communication. Jay writes: During Ike, I monitored HF frequencies using phone and I was so exasperated at the QRN and weak signals that I finally called Austin emergency operations on the landline to ask if they had any CW frequencies active. The memory is getting dim, but I think that I spoke to Jack Colley. Whoever it was, Colley or otherwise, was

rather cold and told me that they did not have any CW. Since then, I have found mention of CW in the RACES operations manual.

My recollection of Ike was that hams were actually having trouble sending telephone numbers, with many repetitions needed. At that time, I thought that CW would be very useful and require very little repetition.

I think that digital modes like Pactor may even exceed CW in accuracy and performance during poor propagation conditions. However, I am closer at this time to CW; my digital equipment is not operative. Incidentally, we criticize CW on the ground that not many hams have code ability; it seems to me that the same criticism might be leveled at digital.

I would appreciate hearing your thoughts on this matter. 73, Jay N5PWG

Bill, N5BB, wrote in concerning the news about Jim, KB5W: I'm very sorry to hear about Jim. Unfortunately, my schedule (and the condition of my antenna) hasn't allowed me to participate in TEX recently. I knew Jim Leist 22-26 years ago, when I was very active on RN5, CAN, and TEX. I met him at his office in Pascagoula during a business call to his employer roughly 15 years ago. He was a true NTS hero.
73 to all, Bill N5BB

Editor's Note: The most recent news about Jim is sad. He has been moved into Hospice care. His son has passed along Jim's ham gear to another local ham and is in the process of selling the house. We pray for Jim, that he may not suffer in pain.

Pat, KD5TXD, wrote in about her local club's emergency preparedness activities. Pat wrote: (May 21) The local ham club was pretty busy yesterday morning. We had our big HUREX-2009 hurricane exercise Wednesday morning. The powers picked a Wednesday so they could have the real emergency agencies participate during their working hours. The paid folks aren't about to come out on Saturday morning for anything.

I have participated in several of these over the years. I think the first exercise I participated in I got the prize for making the longest 2 meter simplex contact when my 32 foot high copper j-pole contacted Mathis during the event. Later events had us working from the Kleberg County EOC for these drills. The fellows tinkered with antennas over the years and have our EOC pretty well set up. We have 3 HF rigs, two 2 meter rigs, and WINLINK capability in the EOC. Sad part is we can't use our radio room because the Texas Forest Service is camped out there for the duration of the drought and fire season. We had to find a new location to simulate our EOC. I spread the word that our courthouse "had been blown away by the hurricane". Fortunately, the locals know I am a bit crazy.

We initially planned on all working from the comfort of our home shacks where we could saunter over to the fridge and secure a beverage at will. Then some fool member of our club got the bright idea that we should work from the W5ZD radio room at TAMUK. So much for participating in the HUREX in my fuzzy slippers and PJ's.

We opened up W5ZD at 07:45 and got set up. I had gone over on Tuesday to make sure I knew how to switch that 2 meter rig to simplex and back again. I didn't want to be the only one stuck on the repeater not knowing which buttons to punch. The official HUREX was

scheduled to start at 08:30 so we used the first 30 minutes to run our own mini drill. We checked in on our 146.68 repeater just to see who was out there. We had 10 members who didn't have to work for a living that morning. Then NCS (me…) did a roll call of the group on simplex. We lost two who were new folks and hadn't gotten the hang of going simplex with their new radios. I sent Charles off frequency to try to help them out. They were able to check back in on simplex within a few minutes. So we had the whole crew ready for HUREX.

Two of our members were manning the Bishop EOC. This was the first HUREX that Bishop EOC participated in with their own radios. They also had state observers from Austin monitoring their participation in the HUREX event. One can worry about the two hams we sent over there as one was fanatically guarding our paint supplies at our painting party last month and the other was taking candid photos of the rest of us covered in paint. We may not know which end of the paint brush to put in the paint can, but our guys are good on the radio.

The next part of the exercise was to officially touch base with the Corpus EOC on repeater and then on simplex. W5ZD and Bishop made the contact with ease. The Corpus gang was not expecting either Kingsville or Bishop to make it. We relayed in the Spohn Hospital in Alice. We passed traffic like pros and relayed like we lived on 7290 for a lot of years. Hmmm…sounds a lot like NTS. This morning the "guardian of the paint" told me that the official observers in Bishop were asking who the woman was on the radio. Now I am worried what kind of stories he was telling on me.

City of Corpus Christi, Driscoll Children's Hospital, Aransas Pass, the National Weather Service and Kingsville all had successful results. Port Aransas and Beeville made the simplex hop. City of Driscoll, Refugio EOC, Bishop, and Aransas County made it in with relay. Bishop actually made it in direct but weak. Official reports failed to note that the hospital in Alice made it in with relay. I will have to correct them on that point.

It was a lot of fun and our guys did a very professional job… even it they can't paint worth a darn. 73!! Pat KD5TXD

Ed Note: Pat also sent in another of her excellent Book Reports, but I will save it for next month.

Pat, KD5TXD, sent in this interesting anecdote about her experience with a QRP kit and Radio Shack: QRP Project: part 1… I might have mentioned to folks that our local ham club is going to build QRP rigs as an effort to keep new hams interested in amateur radio. The project is also meant to entertain some of the old amateurs as well. I am not too sure they all realize yet that to operate these QRP rigs they will have to learn some CW.

Well, our Wild Horse Desert Ham club ordered our QRP kits and they arrived this week. Charles and I immediately dug into one of the kits to see what it looked like. This is the Small Wonders Lab SW-40+ transceiver kit for 40 meters (does 40+ indicate the age group that this toy is intended for??). The board is going to be packed with parts, lots and lots of parts.

To keep the costs down we did not order the official box for the kits. We are going to fix up our own boxes from what ever we can find for a buck or two. The instruction manual is on CD and is pretty well organized. It starts with the very strong suggestion that you get some method of magnification to use during assembly. The older members of our club can relate to

that very well. There were a few parts we needed to get from Radio Shack that weren't included in the kit such as knobs and potentiometers, coax power jack, and stereo phone jacks. I got red knobs. I like red.

Radio Shack is such a disappointment now days. Even before I got my ham ticket Radio Shack was fun. When we lived in Houston, Charles would visit Radio Shack on his way home from work every day. Really, every day!! All the Radio Shack sales people knew him by first name. It was a bit frightening. But all that has changed. It should be called Cell Phone Shack now.

One of the sales people swooped down on us as we walked in the door. I guess he expected we were there to buy a cell phone. His expression changed from one of joyful anticipation to perplexity as we walked to the back of the store where they keep the meager inventory of parts. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "what are you building?" I flashed him my best blond look, batted my eyelashes, and answered, "We are building a radio…this is RADIO Shack, isn't it?" Can't imagine why he turned around and walked away. (Yes, we got out the door without Charles needing to buy me the cute little robotic spider strategically positioned at the checkout counter. Robotic spiders come in several colors…red is good.)
73!! Pat KD5TXD

Jim, W6LFB, wrote concerning HamCom: Sorry, gang, wanted to be there - but 35th wedding anniversary with my dear and patient XYL was the 13th.
73, Jim, W6LFB

Richard, NF5B, has put out another couple excellent "Brass Pounder Quarterly" issues. They deal with traffic topics and would be of interest to all. You can find them at: http://home.earthlink.net/~bscottmd/bpq.htm although the most recent (issue 2) has not yet been posted.

TEX Net Topics

With the departure of Lee, AA5J, we now have even more open RN5 slots. Please consider filling one or more of the open slots as a regular or even backup station. We have ***16*** open NCS/liaison slots, with ***8*** open *primary* RN5 slots (all shown in **red**)! Thanks again to Sam, W5CU, Scott, W5ESE, and Rodney, W5DY, who have been filling the majority of the openings.

TEX CW Net Weekly Schedule

Local	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
NCS #1	W5GKH	***Open***	KD5TXD	AC5Z	K6JT	AC5Z	W5GKH
Backup	***Open***	***Open***	W5DY	W5DY	KD5TXD	W5DY	W5CU
NCS #2	W5GKH	***Open***	KD5TXD	K6JT	N5PWG	W5DY	W5GKH
Backup	K6JT	K6JT	K6JT	***Open***	K6JT	***Open***	K6JT
RN5 #1	W5GKH	***Open***	W5CU	***Open***	***Open***	***Open***	W5CU
Backup	W5DY	***Open***	W5DY	***Open***	W5ESE	W5ESE	W5GKH
RN5 #2	W5GKH	***Open***	W5CU	***Open***	***Open***	***Open***	W5CU
Backup	W5DY	K6JT	W5DY	W5DY	K6JT	W5DY	W5GKH

TEX/1: **3541** at 19:00 local; TEX/2 **3541** at 22:00 local
RN5/1: **7105**/3567 at 19:30; RN5/2: 3567 at 21:30 local
TSN: 3552 - 19:45 local; CAN: 7052/3552 - 20:30 local; PAN: 7052/3552/3557- 22:30 local

RN5 Backup: W5CU, W5DY, W5ESE, W5GKH, K5GM, K6JT, K5RG
NCS Backup: W5DY, N5EL, K6JT, KD5TXD, AC5Z

Note that RN5 has moved the early session (as of this writing) to 7105. Tom, K4VIZ, has stepped in as manager and asks for help in filling the NCS and liaison (to and from CAN) slots on RN5. I supplied the E-Mail addresses of all TEX RN5 liaison stations to Tom so he can keep everyone informed about any more frequency changes. If you are able to help out on RN5, by all means do so.

Dave, W4ZJY, has volunteered to take the Central Area Staff chair, at least on an interim basis. If you have NTS issues, be sure to bring them to Dave's attention (or send them to me and I will forward).

We all really miss Jim, KB5W.

Statistics:

Traffic count dropped off again this past month, but QNI improved slightly. Rodney, W5DY, with 33 (53%) again took top QNI for the month, followed by Lee, AA5J, with 27 (44%) who squeezed out Pat, KD5TXD, who had 26 (42%). Thanks to all who checked in for your support.

It was good to see Skip, now KW5AS (ex-KA8IXC), and Ken, W5UFK, check in again after a long absence.

We did not have any visitors this month but Benny, K5KV, who used to be a TEX'an but is now a Louisiana resident, joined us from his Star, Texas QTH a few nights.

The complete list of stations and traffic / liaison totals are shown in the following table. Traffic averaged 1.9 per net session (down from 2.6 last month). Net time averaged 12.6 minutes per session (compared to 13.6 last month). Check-ins averaged 5.0 per session (slightly up from 4.9 last month).

TEX Net Statistics (May 2009)

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
KW5AS	Skip	1	2						
	ex-KA8IXC	1							
N5BA	Brian	5	7						
		2							
W5CDX	Wads	1	11						
*		10							
W5CU	Sam	11	17		7				
*		6			5				
W5DY	Rodney	19	33	3	2	2	6		
		14		4	5				

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
N5EL	Floyd	22	22						
*		0							
W5ESE	Scott	21	21		7			20	11
*		0							
W5GKH	Charlie	8	16	8	4				
*		8		8	4				
K5GM	Pete	1	2						
*		1							
W9GVW	Eric	2	3						
*		1							
AA5J	Chuck	15	27	3	9				13
*		12		4	8				11
K6JT	Steve	7	36	4	1		7		
*		29		8	5		29		
KA5KLU	Doug	2	2						
*		0							
W5KNN	Ed	2	3						
		1							
K5KV	Benny	0	4						
		4							
W6LFB	Jim	1	1						
*		0							
WA5MS	Marty	2	2						
*		0							
WA5MUF	Bill	2	4						
*		2							
N5NVP	Jim	0	9						
		9							
N5PWG	Jay	1	5						
*		4		3					
K5RG	Ken	1	14						
*		13							
W5TMO	Mike	1	21						
*		20							
KD5TXD	Pat	15	26	5		15			
*		11		4					
W5UFK	Ken	4	8						
*		4							
AC5Z	Bert	15	15	8					
*		0							
Totals		311		62	57	17	42	20	35
				100%	92%	27%	68%	32%	56%
QTC 1		52	118						
QTC 2		66			Sessions:	62			
Time 1		418	784						
Time 2		366							

The roster, which follows on the next page, has been updated with Skip's new call.

TEX Roster

	Call	Name	Location / Notes		Call	Name	Location / Notes
	N5AF	Sam	Cleveland		WA5MUF	Bill	Watauga
	KW5AS	Skip	Victoria (ex-KA8IXC)	#	N7NET	Scott	McKinney
	N5BA	Brian	Houston		KB5NJD	John	Duncanville
	W5CDX	Wads	Crowley LA		WB5NKC	Arley	Oklahoma City OK
	W5CU	Sam	Edmond OK	#	N5NVP	Jim	Scott LA
	NV5D	Martin	Allen	*	N5PWG	Jay	Pasadena
*	W5DY	Rodney	Goliad		K5RDW	RD	Vilonia AR
	N5EL	Floyd	Temple		K5RG	Ken	Houston
*	W5ESE	Scott	Dripping Springs		W5ROK	Steve	Richardson (K6JT)
	W5GKH	Charlie	West Columbia		W5SBE	Larry	Austin
	K5GM	Pete	Austin		KC5T	Bob	Houston
	W9GVW	Eric	San Antonio		W5TFB	Jack	College Station
	KA9IKK	Bill	Houston	#	W5TMO	Mike	Austin
	AA5J	Lee	Plano		W5TV	Tom	Nacogdoches
	KJ9J	Newt	Pharr TX (winter)	*	KD5TXD	Pat	Kingsville
	K5JRN	Si	Denton		AI6U	Chris	Sacramento (CA)
	K6JT	Steve	Plano	#	W5UFK	Ken	College Station
	KA5KLU	Doug	San Antonio	*	K5UN	Lee	Leonard
	W5KNN	Ed	Bulverde (was KS5V)		K5WQG	Eddy	Tomball
	K5KV	Benny	Star	#	KM5YQ	David	Irving
	W6LFB	Jim	Denton	*	AC5Z	Bert	Nacogdoches (Lufkin)
	WA5MS	Marty	Highland Village		W5ZD	Pat	Kingsville (KD5TXD)

Not Capable of operating in 3600-3700 band; * Capable of 160 meter operation

Operating:

The following are observations by Bud, W2RU, who is the manager of the Eastern Area Net (EAN). They are a bit long, but I thought you all would be interested, so I have included them with minimal editing.

One thing he does not seem to realize is that many of us operate in small city-lot environments where antenna space is severely limited. Worse, many of us are constrained by deed restrictions that sometimes go so far as to completely prohibit all antennas, forcing us to use inefficient “stealth” antennas or attic antennas. My own CC&R deed restrictions say “antennas shall be below the roof”. I interpret that not as antennas restricted to the attic, but that their height cannot exceed the height of the roof. So my G5RV legs come out of the 2nd floor soffit and go down to the fences after wrapping around the eves of the house a bit. A 235 ft. “receive only” end-fed wire goes around the fence. Both are “stealth” installations.

Run high power? Impossible. With an antenna (and open-wire feedline running thru the attic) that close to the house, the RF exposure would far exceed the FCC’s regulations as well as set off the fire / intrusion alarm in the house due to the web of wire connecting to all window sensors acting as a really good antenna. If I run more than about 120 watts, it triggers the alarm.

Does that mean we should not be in NTS? Of course not! We can and should continue to do the best we can under the constraints imposed on us.

With that as an introduction, here are Bud’s observations:

As I noted in my EAN/C4 report for May, 2009, all of our monthly metrics fell despite generally fine band conditions. This has not gone unnoticed by some, and in the past few weeks more than one NCS has commented (complained?) to me by e-mail or telephone about the inexplicably high incidence of failed and unduly prolonged pairings that we are seeing on an on-going basis. I concur (because I see the same things on Wednesday nights), and I have the following observations about key factors contributing to these frustrations:

1. Signal strengths on EAN are lower than in years past, despite easy access to all sorts of tutorial materials in print and on the internet, as well as "Elmers" who can help us squeeze the "last S- unit" out of our set-ups. Remember: There should be little reason for pride on your part if you successfully pass traffic while running QRP; most, if not all, of the pride should belong to the receiving station. If you don't currently use an amplifier on EAN, please consider getting one; within a few hours, at 12:01 a.m. EDT 6/12, the potential for almost all TVI will be gone. If you're using a vertical and you live north of Florida, switch to a dipole. If your dipole is visible from the ground, beg, borrow, or steal a bow & arrow and get it up higher. If your dipole is shorter than 130 feet in length, add equal lengths to both ends until you get to 130', then take those added lengths and let them dangle down from your original dipole. If you're a senior citizen like me, enlist the help of your local club or your children or grandchildren. If your feedline is RG-58 or other lossy stuff, replace it with true open-wire line. Then match the line in the shack to your transmitter output with an inexpensive antenna coupler. You can make low-loss open-wire feedline from inexpensive electrician's wire and spacers cut from plastic water pipe, and other materials from Home Depot or Lowe's, and you can borrow the bow & arrow or invite the local sportsman's club over some Saturday afternoon. (I bought a used fishing bow from a local archery shop for $25 a few years ago.)

2. 80-meter conditions for the distances we cover on EAN and the times at which we meet are as good right now as they will ever get. We are in a prolonged sunspot minimum that carries with it low absorption and a near absence of solar blackouts and other disturbances. Our QRN so far this summer has been sub-normal. Our biggest problems right now should be with long skip in the winter months, and that is easily (or so I used to think) cured by QSYing to 160 for specific pairings. In short, if you can't hear each other on EAN on 80 these days, you'll never be able to hear each other! For hints on how to solve that, go back to point #1 above.

3. QSYing to either 160 in the winter or 40 in the summer and successfully passing traffic on either of those bands continues to be an unbelievable challenge for too many, and a major disappointment to me because you rob me of some of the tools I should have at my disposal as an NCS of the highest level of net in NTS. 40 meters quit being a "UHF" band in the 1930s, yet many of us still cannot find each other when we're sent there, even though international broadcast QRM has just about disappeared. If I send you to 160 or 40 because I believe you will have better luck passing traffic there, and you still can't hear or be heard by the other station, you probably need to go back to point #1 above, so you can do all your pairings on 80 and avoid the stress of band changes.

4. Get to know your RIT (and XIT) knob really well. Make it your friend. In particular, make sure you know how to turn RIT or XIT off, so that you're listening and/or transmitting where you think you are, relative to the net frequency or that of your pairing partner. A related problem for some is being sure you're tuning and listening in the middle of your CW filter

passbands. Invite an active CW contester or DXer over to your shack to check your RX settings.

5. The purpose of running EAN and all of NTS (and other nets, as well) all year long with non-critical message content is training; the logical expected result of training is improvement. I worry and get frustrated when I don't see better copying or sending (including increased code speed -- both sending and receiving), better accuracy, better procedures, better signals, and better representation on the part of a station over the course of a year or less. Perhaps we need to leave our "comfort zone" a bit more often. You don't get better at sending and receiving if you spend all your time at a speed where you feel you have 100% accuracy and control. You need to challenge yourself -- even if it means challenging others, as well. When's the last time you spent a few hours in a CW contest to build up your code speed? Heck, when's the last time you listened to W1AW's code practice? You will never get above 15 wpm if all you ever do is practice sending and receiving at 15 wpm. You will get to 20 wpm only by trying to copy at, say, 25 wpm. And if, after extensive practice, accurate sending with a bug or an electronic keyer paddle continues to be a challenge, the correct solution may be a keyboard, not a straight key!

6. What ever happened to letting someone know you had an "emergency" come up and won't be able to cover your assignment tonight? When I first got active in NTS, I was a teenager and any telephone call outside my own town cost a minimum of a dollar...which I had to pay back to my parents and which was worth about two hours' pay to me. But I would never have thought of missing an assignment without trying to get a sub or notifying my net manager. Today we have free (or fixed rate) long distance plans for our landline phones, we have similar plans for our cell phones, we have text-messaging, e-mail, and internet telephony. Plus a lot of you have access to the company telephone when overtime is the cause of your missed assignment. There's no lack of ways to let others know something has "come up". So where's the sense of responsibility these days?

7. Ultimately, EAN is no better than its weakest links. The idea behind nightly exercising of the system and its participants is that we all grow better with time. Unfortunately, self-improvement doesn't always come naturally, and when it doesn't, we actually have to work at getting better. As a group, we NTSers claim to be there in emergencies, prepared to provide an important public service. Yet, when I compare our apparent levels of training, effort, and discomfort with those of the volunteer firemen or EMTs in my town, I have trouble supporting that claim. I can only conclude that some of us handle traffic because it's the "niche" we've found in ham radio, not because we're committing ourselves to continually improving our emergency communications preparedness or the System's utility.

8. Despite the general resurgence in CW interest across the hobby (check the number of CW logs submitted for major contests or the number of new keyer paddles being marketed, for instance), achieving excellence in CW traffic handling does not seem to be as high a priority for many of today's NTS participants as it has been in years past. In support of that observation I will tell you that, on average, it takes us longer to pass a piece of traffic on EAN today than it did thirty or forty years ago -- despite substantially better receivers in all price ranges and higher output power limits. Excellence in CW traffic handling requires only two things: a sustained commitment to self-improvement, and a modest outlay for basic equipment. Ham radio is not an expensive hobby, compared to most; a used competition grade transceiver can be readily obtained for $350, and a decent amplifier (say, output of 500

watts or more) is not much more expensive than that. Those are one-time expenditures that can last you for 30 years or more. (In round numbers, divide 1000 by 30 years to get an average annual cost.) And the best part is that for 80 meters, the least expensive part of the equation is the antenna: a spool of wire, a spool of rope, and a spool of fishing line! Dare I say it? Go back to point #1 above for some ideas.

(Second part, in response to feedback received on the first part):

Ideally, every rep or NCS should have an "alternate" that he/she could notify with a "I might not be there because of lightning or overtime at work or ....." message; in the worst-case scenario, with low participation around a section or region to call upon, these messages could be sent to the net manager.

Ed Note: That is why we have "backup" assignments in the TEX duty roster.

Which touches on some of the other responses to my posting. I wasn't trying to identify the _origins_ of the problem, but some of you did in your replies, both here and privately. Each reply I received could probably spawn an entirely new thread about root causes. However, regardless of the many varied reasons, ham radio in general, and CW traffic nets in particular, are not of interest to as many young people as they were back when NTS was created. As a result, our "labor pool" is a lot smaller, most members of today's NTS have more responsibilities and other commitments than we did when we were teenagers, and for these and oodles of other reasons there isn't the competition for assignments that there used to be a half century ago. Those are facts that I doubt we on these reflectors are going to materially alter.

So what I was trying to point out was twofold:

1. Despite the far greater wealth of practical knowledge available to us, despite sustained technological and operational improvements in the equipment we use, our collective ability to communicate reliably on EAN has declined.

2. Based on what I hear on Wednesday night EAN sessions (including monitoring the pairings on the side frequencies), there are some things we can do to help reverse those trends. (See Point #1, etc., in my previous posting.)

And I would now add: It isn't written in stone that our performance has to slide simply because we don't have as many people to draw from. We have something that those missing newcomers don't -- experience!

Example: - I'm in the opening minutes of NCSing EAN on a winter evening near the bottom of the sunspot cycle and conditions are absolutely superb! Signals are wrapping the S-meter needle around the peg. In fact, conditions are a little _too_ good. Why? Because the MUF is very close to 3.577, absorption is minimal, and in a few minutes the MUF is going to slide right on past EAN, and down below 80 meters entirely. How do I know that? Because I've heard that particular band enhancement, just before long skip sets in, year after year at the bottom of previous sunspot cycles. So armed with that premonition, I make sure I send my pairs that are nearest each other off to pass traffic "sooner, rather than later". Occasionally mother

nature fools me but, more often than not, by following that game plan I'm able to maximize the traffic we clear before long skip wipes us out.

Again: There may not be as many of us as there used to be, but we are _experienced_, and we should use that experience to everyone's advantage.

When I entered NTS in the mid 1950s, the trunk lines were gradually ceding their status as the primary amateur radio message-handling mechanism to W1NJM's brilliant System. Back then, the economics of long distance telephony made the amateur radiogram sent across the continent an attractive alternative to many families for non-critical but useful communications. Today _all_ amateur message-handling systems are normally of little interest to a non-ham populace that can text message, e-mail, or speak to others far away for free or for zero incremental cost. Until an emergency comes along, that is.

So I don't expect the content of our day-to-day messages to be earth-shattering; during normal times, the content is secondary to the _practice_ we gain by handling them. In fact, sometimes I think we should originate messages with 5-character code groups for text, and we should send them to recipients who already know the contents so we can grade the System's performance.

Not knowing in advance the location or the nature of the next emergency, the telecommunications systems it will take out, or the backup resources available, we can't know whether the primary need will be for manually handled CW/phone radiograms, PTT voice for command & control, or digitally passed health & welfare lists -- or all of them, and other combinations as well. The best we can do is build rosters and proficiency in each mode.

I don't kid myself that manual message handling, whether by phone or CW, is politically correct these days. (Perhaps it would help if we called it NTS2000.) But It _is_ a classic methodology that can and will prove its value -- at unexpected times -- in the years ahead.

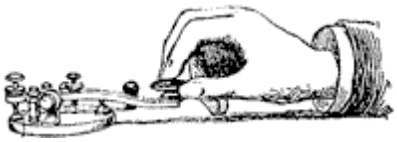
Bud, W2RU, Manager EAN Cycle 4

Bud has some very good points there, item #1 notwithstanding ;-) Hope you all have a good 4th of July holiday.

Until next month,

73, Steve

(TSN Corner starts on the next page)



The telegraph key image is courtesy of FCIT

TSN Corner

Texas Slow Net (Daily) 1945 CT 3552.0 KHz +/- QRM
http://mysite.verizon.net/ressvuir/Texas_Slow_Net.htm
Lee Mayfield AA5J (AA5J@Verizon.net)
TSN Net Manager

The daily average QNI for April was 5.21, about the same as last month (5.23).
Daily QTC in March was 1.10, down from last month (1.33).

TSN Roster

Call	Name	City	State	Call	Name	City	State
N5AF	Sam	Cleveland	TX	KD5MMM	Phil	Fentress	TX
W5AG	Arch	Lafayette	LA	WA5MS	Marty	Highland Village	TX
KD5CB	Mike	Hillsboro	TX	N7NET	Scott	Allen	TX
K0CMH	Craig	St. Louis	MO	AA0NI	Dan	Oklahoma City	OK
WX5CW	Chris	Shreveport	LA	WB5NKC	Arley	Oklahoma City	OK
W5DY	Rodney	Goliad (STM, STX)	TX	WB5NKD	Pat	Oklahoma City	OK
N5EL	Floyd	Temple	TX	N5NVP	Jim	Scott	LA
K5END	Larry	Spring	TX	W8OLO	Bob	Marengo	OH
W6EOD	Steve	Baker	FL	K9PUI	Rich	Indianapolis	IN
W5ESE	Scott	Dripping Springs	TX	N5PWG	Jay	Pasadena	TX
WD0ESF	Mike	Medicine Lodge	KS	K5RDW	RD	Vilonia	AR
WB9FLU	Bill	Columbus	IN	K5RST	Ross	Zapata	TX
AE5GT	Clint	Wimberley	TX	N0SSS	Adam	Oklaunion	TX
KA8IXC	Dan	Victoria	TX	KI5T	Wade	Walker	LA
AA5J	Lee	Plano (NM TSN)	TX	KB5TCH	Carroll	Douglassville	TX
W5JBV	Mike	Panama City	FL	W5TMO	Mike	Austin	TX
K5JE	Earl	Claremore	OK	KD5TXD	Pat	Kingsville	TX
AA5JW	Carl	Stafford	TX	AD5VC	Dana	Baton Rouge	LA
K6JT	Steve	Plano (NM TEX)	TX	KD5VGJ	Jay	Flower Mound	TX
W5KCM	Randy	Watauga	TX	KJ5XF	Tony	Austin	TX
K5KV	Benny	Star	TX	N5XGG	Joe	Colmesneil	TX
WA5LOU	Lou	Kennard (NM TTN)	TX	KM5YQ	David	Irving	TX

Welcome "New" TSN Check-ins and Welcome Back "Old" Check-ins

May: K0CMH, Craig, St Louis, MO; K5END, Larry, Spring, TX; N5EL, Floyd, Temple, TX; WA5LOU, Lou, Kennard, TX

April: K5JE, Earl, Claremore, OK; KD5GM, Louis, Deer Park, TX; WB5GFU, Al, Alamo, TX

March: WD0ESF, Mike, Medicine Lodge, KS; W5TMO, Mike, Austin, TX; KD5CB, Mike, Hillsboro, TX

February: KA8IXC, Dan, Victoria, TX; K9PUI, Rich, Indianapolis, IN; WB9FLU, Bill, Columbus, IN; N7NET, Scott, Allen, TX; W5JBV, Mike, Panama City, FL

New TSN Net Manager

Lee, AA5J is moving “back home” to Arkansas after a 36 year absence. Hopefully he will find some peace and quiet (RFI that is). Please welcome Pat Allison, KD5TXD who has graciously volunteered to serve as TSN Net Manager. Pat has been a TSN'er for some time.

Thank You to All Who Participate

Thanks to all who have checked in to the Texas Slow Net. We look forward to your continued participation in our Texas CW nets. Bring your friends who want to learn CW traffic handling. Net Control Stations will generally slow down to your sending speed. List a message to one of your friends and/or family members. Handling CW traffic is the best way to learn how to handle CW traffic HI HI.

TSN Activity Report, April 2009

TOTAL SESSIONS 31, TOTAL CHECKINS 145,
TOTAL TRAFFIC 35, BY 16 DIFFERENT OPS

May QNS

QNI	Callsign	Name	QTH	QNI	Callsign	Name	QTH
27	WB5NKD	Pat	OK, Oklahoma City	2	AE5GT	Clint	TX, Wimberley
27	WB5NKC	Arley	OK, Oklahoma City	2	K0CMH	Crait	MO, St. Louis
18	W5ESE	Scott	TX, Dripping Springs	2	W5DY	Rodney	TX, Goliad
14	AA5J	Lee	TX, Plano	1	W5AG	Arch	LA, Lafayette
12	AA5JW	Carl	TX, Stafford	1	WA5LOU	Lou	TX, Kennard
8	KD5MMM	Phil	TX, Fentress	1	N5EL	Floyd	TX, Temple
7	KB5TCH	Carroll	TX, Douglassville	1	K5END	Larry	TX, Spring
4	KD5TXD	Pat	TX, Kingsville	1	N5NVP	Jim	LA, Scott

73,
Lee, AA5J
01 June 2009