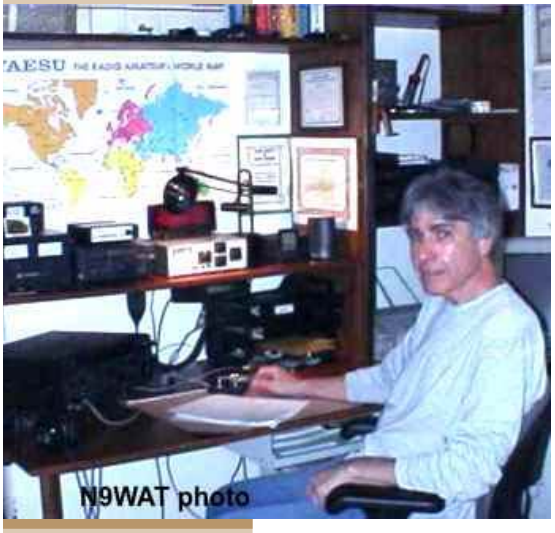
K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club — Volume 1, Issue 5, May 2004



Make A Joyous Noise

Keep The Bands Alive with Mr. Morse's Music

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

There's something awry on our HF bands. No, I'm not referring to QRMing, splatter, BPL, slims, frequency rustlers, coronal mass ejections, or many of the other things that perplex, or threaten to perplex, our life on the air. What I speak of here is that there is something missing, a dependable something we used to be able to rely on. That "dependable something" was CW operation from special event stations. As an inveterate CW operator who regularly checks the ARRL Web site's calendar of proposed special event stations I know there are plenty scheduled every weekend, even some scheduled operations during the week, but over the past few years it is increasingly difficult to work these stations on CW. You're right, in the grand scheme of things, it's not a big deal, but there are some certificates and special QSL cards I would like to have, and I would like work them on my favorite mode — simple as that.

"...there is no shortage of CW operators."

Where's The CW?

Most listings on the ARRL Web site's page for special event stations do not mention CW operation and/or frequencies. Of 56 U.S. and DX special event stations for the period February through April 2004, only 14 (25%) specifically indicate CW operation — that's a woeful number. Ironically, many of these commemorative operations honor persons and events where Morse is integral to the very essence of their memory, and this is simply inappropriate. Recent "Morse-less" events included those celebrating Ham Radio and broadcast pioneers, inventors, and nineteenth and twentieth century happenings where Morse communications played an important role; from veteran aircraft and museum ships to battle memorials and reenactments. But it's not all gloom because, bucking the trend, and unannounced, a special event CW operator will appear, ephemerally, for the tenacious few persistent enough to "finger drill" a hole in their rig's tuning knob while repeatedly patrolling .025-and-up — if you are in the right place at the right time.

Now, listen most any weekend to the 10-through-80, wall-to-wall, CW contesters keeping our HF bands buzzing. Clearly, there is no shortage of CW operators, but this doesn't translate to them doing their thing at special event stations.

So, the on-air experience points to plenty of CW ops, but only a blessed few are willing to volunteer for special event station duty. Plus, the anecdotal evidence indicates many radio clubs no longer have members capable, or more tellingly, willing, to operate CW for special event operations. This means that for many clubs Morse is rapidly gaining niche skill status; it can no longer be assumed that every licensed Amateur Radio operator has a practical, working knowledge of Morse, or is willing

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The Morse Mouse

A New Type of Keyer-Paddle

Stanley Shure, W9GXJ & Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

Morse Mouse

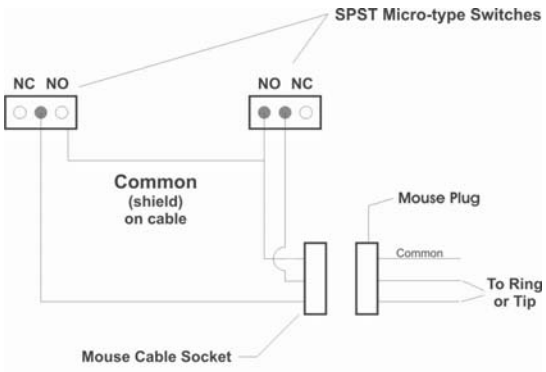
Want to try something different in a Keyer-Paddle? Try the "Morse Mouse." It is a modified computer mouse, preferably the two-button type, but the three-button version will work as well. But I'm getting ahead of myself, I stopped by my pal Stan's, W9GXJ, house and saw him playing with a computer mouse. Curious, I asked him what he was doing, his reply: "I've made a hand key out of it." I suggested, "That thing would make a neat paddle for an electronic keyer. Let's use one button for dit and one for dah." Stan promptly rewired the mouse as a paddle. It takes some practice to acquire the skill to use it, but it is not difficult and is fun to operate. The first part of this article covers the construction, and the second part describes the operation of the Morse Mouse.

"It's a great weekend project."

Part I
Construction of the Morse Mouse
By Stanley Shure, W9GXJ

First, obtain a two-button computer mouse for conversion to a code paddle for your electronic key. If a three-button mouse is obtained, the third button is not used.

Step one is to remove the mouse ball and bottom screw or screws. (Note: some units have a rectangular plastic strip covering the screw holes that first must be removed.) Lift off the top cover. Now remove both wheels and set aside. Remove the circuit board with its cable. On the back side of the circuit board, remove the traces that go to the two micro-type switches and to the cable socket by scraping with a small pen knife or rotary tool.

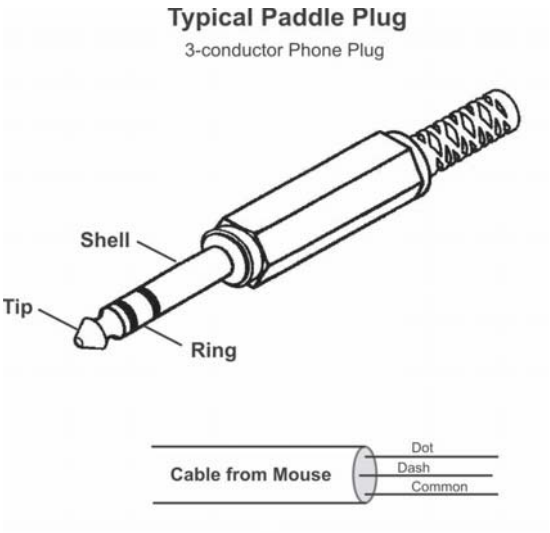


Note: You can also wire the mouse cable directly to the switches.

Determine the common, and normally open, contacts on the switches using an ohmmeter. Cut off the mouse plug that goes to the computer, but leave about four inches of cable attached. This cable contains a shield wire and some colored insulated wires; salvage all these wires from the four-inch cable. Some of these wires will be used as jumpers on the mouse circuit board. (See wiring diagram.)

All parts necessary for construction of the Morse Mouse will be taken from the original mouse except for a new plug to fit your keyer. Pick out two colored wires and the shield in the mouse cable (your choice). Wire jumpers from the circuit board cable socket to the two switches you are going to use. Check wiring wih an ohm-meter after completing wiring changes.

Wire the ring and tip contact of a stereo plug to match your keyer's requirements. The shield, or common, goes to the plug shell.



Note: Ring and Tip connection may be reversed to swap dit/dah paddles.

Under the Hood — Note Cable Reversed

Make It a Simple Modification

Using your own cable and plug, solder them directly to both micro-type switches, as per the diagram. (Some mouse units use SMT components, so take care when soldering. Use a low wattage soldering iron and very thin, high quality solder.) Plug the mouse into your keyer and operate.

Morse Mouse in Action

Part II
Operating the Morse Mouse
By Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

Completing the Morse Mouse, I hooked it to my electronic keyer and tried to send with it. I made a lot of mistakes at first as it is a new skill to learn. We had put the dit key on the left and the dah key on the right. I found this kind of awkward for me, so I had Stan switch the dit to the right side.

I also turned the key around from the conventional position, so that the buttons now faced me — this requires that the cable exit

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K9YA Code Practice Nets

Fast Net

Every first Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (plus or minus QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (2400 Z). Check in, exchange FISTS numbers or hang around for a chat. The Fast Net is called at 20+ wpm.

Slow Net

Every 2nd, 3rd and 4th Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (plus or minus QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (2400 Z). Check in, exchange FISTS numbers or hang around for a chat. The Slow Net is called at 10-wpm, but speed will be adjusted to that of the slowest operator.

Old Man and the CW

Don Burman, KB9WBM

Don Burman, KB9WBM

Early 2000, the journey begins. The kids are off to college, and for some reason the boyhood interest I had in Amateur Radio returns.

As a youngster I had both positive and negative opinions about Hams. The neighbor two doors down was kind enough to provide unintended "audio dubbing" for "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Smothers Brothers," so I did not look on Hams favorably. Later, in the '60s, I found myself in the basement of a merit badge counselor's home earning some scout badge. This counselor happened to be a ham and after we completed our badge business he turned on his rig and we listened for a while. He explained a little bit about radio.

"I no longer see CW as a means to an end but as an enjoyable mode..."

The seeds had been planted, but they lay dormant for many years. Not knowing any Hams, living on a small treeless lot in Chicago, and believing that the knowledge and cost of ownership were out of my reach, I forgot about radio until just before 2000. I work with computer networks and the issues related to the much hyped "Millennium Bug" got me thinking again about communications without infrastructure.

Was Ham radio still around? A lot had changed since the '60s and the Internet offered a new way to learn about radio licensing, equipment and antenna needs. I studied and earned my no-code Technician license in April of 2000.

I followed the same path I am certain many before me followed. I bought a used HT and began to explore the world of VHF and local repeaters. Some experimenting on simplex, but most work was on the MAC repeater in Niles, Illinois. My first QSO was with Dave, W9LYA, while driving to work one day. He was patient with a newbie and made a nervous new operator feel welcome. (Thanks, Dave.)

A couple of months on VHF, here and there, and summer arrived. My wife is adamant that we will NOT have an antenna on the house so HF seemed out of my reach. VHF repeater work had run its course and my time in the car was usually spent on the phone working so I did not have the time I had hoped for to continue my exploration of VHF. Other summertime activities distracted me and I began a dormant period after that summer.

Fast Forward — Late 2003

I got interested in upgrading to General and delving into HF. I began to investigate stealth operation and thought I could operate HF with indoor antennas in an upstairs bedroom vacated by my grown sons. Code study began with the ARRL CDs, but I found I was memorizing the lessons rather than really learning Morse.

I tried several shareware programs and settled on NuMorse Pro. It helped pull me through the knothole for several reasons.

First, since I was listening to random five-character groups, I really had to learn the characters, I couldn't guess at completing words.

Second, the concept of using mnemonics to associate sounds with characters helped, but also slowed any increase in my copying speed.

Third, I was able to use my train commuting time to practice code drills. The ability to drill for a

couple of shorter periods a day on the train helped me learn faster.

While preparing for the Element 1 test and the General written, I resolved to learn from other Hams first hand. I got involved by tuning in to the weekly MAC (K9YA) Slow Net, attending their monthly meetings, but most importantly, meeting them for breakfast on Saturdays. Their patience in helping an aspiring HF operator and their genuine interest in answering questions inspired me to continue my quest for an HF ticket, although CW seems, at this point, a means to an end.

January 24th, 2004 — I get the ticket!

I've already bought my rig, a tuner and an indoor stealth antenna. I've been listening for a while as a SWL on my HF rig, but mostly pick up nets and longwinded ragchewing sessions. I'm a bit reserved on entering HF. I realize my signal may reach a bit farther and am mindful of respecting others by developing good operating practices and protocol. I try a CQ or two on SSB, but don't have any luck. I'm not really sure I know how use the rig and become concerned my stealth setup may not work even though I've read it should.

I begin dialog with Mike, N9BOR, and we set up a sked for me to practice CW on the air and see if my rig actually gets out. I had tried monitoring the K9YA Slow Code Net, but found my slow is REALLY SLOW compared to the net.

I'm not ready for prime time but on February 9th, I complete my first HF QSO with Mike on CW. I'm pleased with understanding and being understood. I begin to believe CW may be more than just an obligatory test on my way to HF and SSB. With my stealth setup I learn to appreciate how CW may be my best hope for DX. I also found that for me it was easier to get a response to CQ on CW than SSB. Almost every CW QSO I had was a pleasant experience and most operators were very gracious in slowing down to help me out. These folks really seem interested in encouraging others to learn code.

There are great resources for new HF Hams like me. I highly recommend AC6V's CW Operating Aids resource page: **http://ac6v.com/morseaids.htm**.

Also helpful was information on the Morse Express site **http://www.morsex.com/** and **http://www.qsl.net/wb3gck/morse.htm**. Mike offered lots of practical advice and recommended I look at the FISTS CW Club site **http://www.fists.org**.

While I've learned a lot, I realize there is so much more to learn. Perhaps that's why I am really enjoying myself lately. Learning is exciting and I find concepts discussed months before become evident when I experience them first hand. An important lesson I've learned is there are a lot of Hams willing to take the time to pass along their experience and knowledge, you just have to listen and learn.

Stealth Antennas

Lately, I've been attempting SSB contesting on the weekends with some CW QSO practice on weeknights. At first I was intimidated and felt I was failing if I didn't copy every character perfectly. I now see CW more as a language than an alphabet and am having fun learning a new language. I would not expect to understand every spoken word when conversing in a foreign language, so I don't focus on what I miss or miscopy in a CW QSO. If I get the essence of the QSO, and they seem to understand me, I'm satisfied.

I'm gaining some speed and (I think) a better fist with each QSO. Nothing builds skill or confidence better than practice and I need to get more practice. So, my next step is to engage a FISTS Code Buddy (**http://www.qsl.net/w9em/**). This will keep me on task with regular practice and may allow me to help give back a bit by offering practice to another.

Oh, yeah, the stealth operation DOES work. I've reached Hams on six continents. With my setup and the current solar cycle, CW is my best bet in enjoying DX HF work. I no longer see CW as a means to an end but as an enjoyable mode all by itself. I'll continue to experiment with both SSB and CW and hope to increase my speed well enough to be comfortable on the K9YA Slow Net and one day join the Fast Code Net.

Continued - See OLD MAN on page 7

Beep, Beep!

How to Make your Cell Phone Ring in Morse code

Steve Wolfcale, N9WAT

N9WAT's Morse-Phone

If you have been in a public place recently chances are you have heard a few cell phone rings. If you take a commuter train everyday like I do you will hear a wide variety of rings, which are all somewhat annoying. New generation cell phones come with a range of ring "tones" that vary from Beethoven to the "Chicken Dance." For my new phone, I wanted a unique ring that would alert me but yet not be obnoxious to fellow travelers. Fortunately, the new cell phones allow you to download customized ring tones.

I upgraded my venerable last-generation Star Tac for a Nokia 3589i. Nokia provides software allowing you to download rings, synchronize your phone to your computer's address book, and various other utility functions, all of which are a free download. You do need a PC-to-phone data cable, which I purchased from a Yahoo store vendor. I then downloaded the software and started to test the system. I was not able to get the download function to work so I performed a Web search and soon discovered some disappointing information. It seems that Verizon, my wireless carrier, sells a service called "Get it Now" allowing you to download ring tones over the air—for a fee of course. Seems they did not want people downloading all their ring tones and graphics over a cable (free) connection so they had Nokia disable that feature if it detects a 3589i phone. Fortunately, my research also turned up the fact that third party software vendors have products that work fine for downloading files to your cell phone and one everyone seemed to like was the Mobi MB Mobile Media Browser from Logo Manager **http://www.logomanager.co.uk**.

I was able to quickly download the software after completing the online purchase for a very reasonable price. The software itself couldn't be more simple, it basically makes your phone look like a Windows folder so you can drag and drop any file you want into the phone and simply hit the delete key to remove a file from your phone. The software automatically detects the USB phone cable and type of phone connected. The next issue was what to use as my ring. I wanted something absolutely unique, but soothing to the ear and nothing could fill that bill better than my own call sign in Morse code!

"I wanted a unique ring that would alert me..."

My first thought was to use one of the Morse code training software packages to record a wav file and then convert it to the "polyphony" MIDI file required by the phone. After spending an hour or so with one of the major training packages I was not able to get the recording function to work so I went back to the Web for another option. I soon ran across CW MIDI from NAT Radio **http://www.natradioco.com**. This elegant little program converts text files to CW in MIDI format and is currently available for free. This saves the step of converting a wav file to MIDI format. After some consideration and tests, I decided on the following ring:

CQ N9WAT N9WAT N9WAT DE NOKIA NOKIA K

N9WAT N9WAT N9WAT DE NOKIA NOKIA K

NOKIA SK

Converting the text file to MIDI was a snap using CW MIDI and I then used the free Nokia Sound Converter utility to convert the regular MIDI file

Continued - See BEEP BEEP! on page 7

BEEP BEEP! - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

to a "Scaleable Polyphonic" MIDI. A few seconds later I had the file on my phone via Mobi MB and I then set the default ring to use the tone.

That was a few weeks ago and the ring has worked out very nicely. It is always a pleasure for me to hear and it doesn't seem to bother my fellow commuters, in fact a couple of people have asked me if that was Morse code. I felt I needed one thing to top it off and that was a custom graphic. I couldn't locate one in my collection so I asked Mike, N9BOR, and he was able to provide a nice CW graphic which I then downloaded and set as my phone's wallpaper. Now if only Nokia would take a hint and make a phone that sends the caller ID number in CW, then I would know if I wanted to take it out of my pocket or not. ■

MM - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

from the other side. I found this method worked much better for me. I practiced with the Morse Mouse for a few days and then had nerve enough to try it on the air. I have had numerous QSOs with it and found it to be a lot of fun. It certainly is an inexpensive project as computer mice can be picked up cheaply. I bought one for $3.00. You might even have one laying around in your junk box. It's a great weekend project. ■

Amateur Radio Military Appreciation Day

May has been named Military Appreciation Month by the U.S. Congress.

The Ft. Wayne Radio Club (Indiana) requests that Amateur Radio clubs and individuals join us on May 29, 2004 to commemorate Amateur Radio Military Appreciation Day (ARMAD) in a display of support for the men and women of the U.S. military. We ask that Amateur Radio Clubs and operators in the United States and around the world set up stations in public areas to contact those now serving in the military, and veterans for 4-6 hours. We ask that family members of military personnel and the general public be permitted to express their appreciation to our troops via third-party HF, VHF, UHF, Echolink and IRLP. This would be a great morale booster for those on the front-line and at home.

So, spread the word and submit any ideas to Emery McClendon, KB9IBW, special events manager, at [**kb9ibw@netzero.com**]. ■

JOYOUS NOISE - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to put that skill to work for the greater good.

What Can We Do?

Volunteer as a CW operator for local groups' special event and club contest stations.

Put your own CW special event station on the air. Celebrate a local radio club's anniversary or your own birthday!

When you hear a special event station using CW give them a call, whether you were looking for them or not. Let's make sure special event planners don't give up on CW due to a perceived lack of interest.

Contact event sponsors (available on the ARRL Web site's special events page) and request CW operation.

On the air, make a special effort to thank special event station ops for making Morse available. ■

OLD MAN - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

and one day join the Fast Code Net.

I'm glad to have passed Element 1 and hope that one day Morse will be an issue that unites rather than divides Hams. I understand that I'll always be a General (or, one day, Extra) "Lite." I only had to pass a 5-WPM exam and there is concern Morse will be dropped entirely from HF privilege requirements. I can't worry about that as I can't control it. Instead, I'll focus on striving to develop good operating skills and improve my CW copy and transmission skills.

Who knows, with enough practice, maybe one day I'll actually be good at this. I know I'll continue to have fun along the way! ■

CORRECTION

April 2004 - ***ANT HR IS FLAG POLE — HW CPY?*** The article incorrectly states that the Force 12 Flag Pole Antenna includes a flag. ■