K9YA Telegraph

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Tony Hancock

"The Radio Ham"

The Social Radio Amateur

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Those of you with long memories for the obscure may have been fortunate enough to have viewed late night television screenings of British comedian Tony Hancock's films, "Call Me Genius" and "The Punch and Judy Man." Hancock, still revered for his BBC radio and television shows of the 1950s and 1960s, maintains a devoted following nearly 40 years after his early demise in 1968, at age 44.

One of his radio shows featured a celebrated skit entitled, "The Radio Ham" where Hancock, as Amateur Radio operator, fumbles a maritime distress call. In the script there is a line about the protagonist Ham having friends all over the world, but none in his own country. There is some debate whether Hancock was himself a Ham, but no matter, his writers were simply restating a common misapprehension: Hams are solitary figures ensconced in their basement lairs speaking jargon to similarly embedded recluses in remote corners of the Earth.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As any active operator knows, there are enough attractions and distractions in our service to keep us out of our "lairs" and off the air for extended periods.

In addition to the ubiquitous and organized Hamfests, club meetings, special event stations, auxiliary duties, conventions and emergency drills there are the informal, and often more enjoyable, ex temporaneous events like local ops meeting for a weekday luncheon or weekend gabfest.

Occasionally, a memorable conversation springs from a chance meeting after catching sight of Ham Radio license plates on a vehicle or the telltale handie-talkie bobbing on a belt line. Just such an encounter led me to a more than 25-year membership in a local radio club after calling attention to the 1x2 call plates on a gentleman's Cadillac. Mentioning my license had arrived that day, he invited me to a club meeting that evening at a nearby bowling center. Previously, I had no clue the club existed, but this chance encounter was my first brush with the great good will inherent to our service.

"You guys Hams?"

Talk of rigs, antennas, DX and QSOs wafting into the air over the restaurant table where a group of Hams are seated will attract the errant op surely as stink bait is irresistible to a catfish. "You guys Hams?" "Sure, have a seat." When that magic happens, all the code / no-code fuss and other intramural hassles are forgotten in a flurry of welcome.

Regrettably, one thing has changed over my 27 years as a Ham — the now rare impromptu meetings that once inevitably followed first-time QSOs with locals. Call it a sign of the times, lives scheduled to the brim, or whatever, but more likely than not most Hams of a "certain age" still enjoy long term friendships engendered from those ad lib meetings. It is time to make time to return to this worthy tradition.

There is some solitary behavior I do eagerly anticipate as autumn heralds winter and brings those long, dark, good to be inside, nights with my rig parked on a now quiet(er) 160- or 80-meters and socializing in a hearty ragchew. ■

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Hey! Hey! It's a Mon-Key!

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

N4XY photo

Mon-Key

The Mon-Key I'm writing about is not a wild animal. It is about the Mon-Key, the first commercial electronic keyer ever offered to Hams. Introduced in 1948, it was my first experience with an electronic keyer. Previously, I operated with a good old Vibroplex Bug. I guess the Bug gave me the bug to try something new. Nothing was available for Hams until 1948 when I saw one advertised in QST for $29.99. It was kind of pricey for me then as I was only 17- years-old, but I had to have one. I sold off some of my equipment to raise the money and purchased one. It was a very impressive device, built on a heavy plastic base with a cast aluminum cover except for the keying device which resembled today's keyer paddles and had a clear plastic cover over the built-in keying mechanism with the paddle protruding from the plastic cover. The unit featured an on/off switch, sidetone and speed controls, with a range of 8- to 45-wpm. Overall measurements were 11" long and 4-1/2" wide. It utilized three tubes in the circuit design.

The MON-KEY was manufactured by the Electric Eye Equipment Company in Danville, Illinois. The company, now called Hurletron Altair, and located in Libertyville, Illinois, is a manufacturer of high-tech printing equipment.

Their logo was kind of ominous looking to me: a skinny bald monkey with a satanic looking face that bore a marked resemblance to the Nazi SS death's head insignia. It was intertwined with the Mon-Key name and made me wonder about the designer's past political affiliations.

The keyer operated on AC/DC power and featured a resistor line cord — some feature! Because of that, 110 VAC appeared on the chassis and would give you a quite a jolt if you touched it carelessly; that is why it had a plastic cover over the keying mechanism. Somehow, I managed to shock myself a few times anyway. In my case, I got some RF burns off the metal case too.

Learning to operate the Mon-Key was relatively easy. Unlike modern electronic keyers though, the dashes were not self-completing and required you maintain a good rhythm, but it was a lot easier to learn than today's iambic keying. You could hear the relay clicking noisily away while sending. It employed a multivibrator circuit that triggered a relay tube; activated a small, sensitive relay; and created the dots and dashes.

"Somehow, I managed to shock myself a few times anyway."

A local Ham has a Mon-Key in his key collection, and provided the opportunity for me to try it again. I found it highly undesirable and clunky to use. Modern electronic keyers provide many additional features such as a wide speed range, weight adjustment, pitch and volume controls, as well as automatic memory message capabilities.

The Mon-Key electronic keyer was just another step in the never-ending progress of Amateur Radio equipment and our great, ever changing, service. ■

Controversial Mon-Key Logo

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A Wild Night on CW

Ursine Intruder Interrupts DX

Paul Signorelli, WØRW

Last night there was a 20-Meter contest on with lots of strong European stations coming in so I took my Elecraft KX-1 out in the backyard to try for a few.

I was outside walking around just after midnight when I worked Alex, YL2KO, Latvia, on 14,060. This was my first European contact on 20 whilst being peripatetic (pedestrian) mobile. I was hand holding my KX-1 and had my eight-foot whip and a drag wire trailing behind me on the grass.

While calling another station, I saw a big black hulk in my driveway, heard claws rasping the cement and almost dropped the KX-1 as I dashed for the door. I was trying to figure out how to get inside the door with the eight-foot whip tied to my body, as it slammed shut, locking me outside.

The big black bear was only 10 feet away. I had to awaken my XYL to let me back into the house. She went to the wrong door not knowing what was happening outside.

The bear was scared away by the clanking noise of my new antenna's capacity hat, a pie pan, and ran the other way back up the driveway — whoosh!!!

The adrenaline rush of working Latvia while pedestrian mobile QRP is nothing compared to having a bear walk up on you while you are working DX in the dark.

I think I will leave the midnight (zombie) operation for winter time when the bears are hibernating. . . .

Paul, WØRW

Just life in the city — Colorado Springs, Colorado.

" ...I saw a big black hulk in my driveway..."

Ursa Update: the bear was back in the yard on 8/31/04. I got the QSL card from YL2KO, but he never heard the rest of story.

The local TV crew was out interviewing a lady who had seen the bear and during the interview the bear came back into her yard. The TV crew got great pictures of the bear. ■

MORSE TIPS & QUIPS

"PRACTICE MORSE CODE WHILE DOING SOMETHING ELSE"

WØRW/P at 10,500' ASL
Near Cripple Creek, Colo.

First QSO

Paul Friedman, ABØSI

Paul Friedman, ABØSI

I got my Ham ticket about three years ago. I am somewhat dyslexic which makes Morse interesting. I also have some nerve damage which makes it particularly interesting to use a paddle; the nerve path to my thumb is quite a bit slower than the one to my index finger.

When I was studying for the exams, I had no interest in code, therefore, I learned it the easiest way for me to pass the test. At 5-wpm/15 Farnsworth, I can count the dits and dahs and translate. This, of course, is exactly the wrong way to learn code; it is a great way to pass Element 1, however.

RANT STARTS HERE:
There is something seriously stupid about a test that encourages the student to do things the wrong way. I would happily support a Morse test at 10- or the old 13-wpm, but 5-wpm is, I think, worse than no test at all.
RANT ENDS.

The friend who got me interested in ham radio, K3IMW, lives about 2,000 miles from me, so he could only nudge me towards CW remotely. Earlier this summer he built the "Puff & Sip" paddle for me that was in *QST* several months ago. His name for his modification is S & S (Spit and Suck). I no longer had the nerve damage excuse.

I joined FISTS (Nr. 11089) and requested a "Code Buddy." Now, that is a great idea.

I used several programs to begin learning thecode.IfoundG4FON'sthemost useful; **http://www.aa9pw.com/radio/morse.html** is also helpful.

Another friend, K7CCC, and I were trading e-mails about the Olympics, beer, hellschreiber and other matters of earth-shattering importance when I happened to mention that I was attempting to learn Morse. He mentioned he had finally done so himself and *insisted* on a sked. Without him pushing, heaven only knows when I would have actually tried to use Morse.

So, last night, we banged out seriously poor code to each other. It was fun and easier than I expected. I had pre-planned what I was going to say and had a script written out. My partner in radio pollution threw this out the window by starting the QSO with: "ABØSI de K7CCC = HAVE BEER, WHAT U DRINKING? = KN" — for some reason I hadn't scripted in advance for that.

At any rate, it was fun and encouraged me to keep working at it. The following seems to work for me. Whether it works for you or not, I can't say, but for your consideration:

" Slashes should be outlawed."

1) Study code at 10-wpm actual, with 17- or 18-wpm characters. This is fast enough that my slow brain *cannot* count characters, translate and write them down without losing the next character.

2) Use muscle memory. Different people learn in different ways. Writing the letters as I hear them, even if it is just a repeat of two or three letters, helped me. Sending code also seems to help, but this is a double-edged sword. I find myself counting characters, for the numbers at least, which is a Bad Thing.

3) Frequent short sessions work much better for me — 10 or 15 minutes, six times a day, did me much more good than several hours straight.

4) Most QSOs, unless your partner is K7CCC, follow a fairly standard format — at least for the first few exchanges. I find it *much* easier to send from a written

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Your Shack

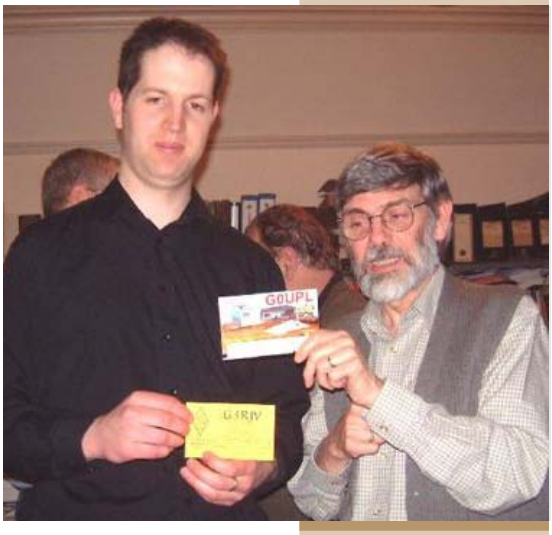
Hans Summers, GØUPL

Greetings from the GØUPL shack in the countryside just south of London, England. Here is a place where no commercial rig has ever set foot, ruled by a strict all-homebrew policy. This is the tale of an unusual amateur and his unconventional station.

The story begins with my earliest memory of my father's homemade valve (tube) communications receiver bringing the sounds of the world into our living room. My own homebrew career began on my sixth birthday, in 1977, when my father presented me with a crystal radio kit. With a few feet of wire strung across the living room, I listened in endless fascination to the whispering voices of local broadcast stations in the tiny earpiece. At about the same time my maternal grandfather, a lifelong railway electrician, gave me a 4.5V battery, switch, flashing (bi-metallic strip) bulb and an old bakelite buzzer. With two such strong family influences my lifelong love of all things electronic became unavoidable.

The following childhood years were spent accumulating a mass of all manner of electronic junk; happily dismantling, constructing and experimenting for hours on end; supplemented by learning from the many technical books available at the local library.

Shortly before university graduation I happened to find myself sitting in a lecture next to the chairman of the Amateur Radio club. We got talking and he conducted a tour of the club shack and the impressive triband beam on the roof of the 13-storey electrical engineering department. Despite many further visits to the shack they never did manage to sign me up as a member, but I was sufficiently enthused to obtain my license a few months later in early 1994.



Hans, GØUPL, with George, G3RJV

My number one passion remained homebrew, and my firm commitment to myself was to have my first QSO on a homebuilt station and never operate a commercial rig. Well of course, life intervened: I got a job, got married, and generally had very little time to spend playing radio. Eight years passed before I finally built my station and had my first ever QSO. My transmitter is a one valve crystal controlled 80-metre CW design using an ECL82 triode-pentode (U.S. equivalent, 6BM8) with up to 10 watts output, but mostly turned down to 5 watts QRP. Subsequent modifications added 40-metre capability and a bank

Continued - See GØUPL on page 7

CW Forever and Ever

Jim Hatherley, WA1TBY SK

You must have, at times, thought into the past,
Where some things go out, while others last.
What comes to my mind is the Old Morse Code,
That has weathered the storms from any abode.

To talk with one's fingers is surely an art,
Of any info you care to impart,
In most conditions the signals get through,
While the same about phone is simply not true.

Those dits and dahs cut through the trash,
Of nearby noise or lightning's crash,
To the sensitive ears of the ham receiver,
Who records this data with ardent fever.

He knows he's doing something unique,
(in such poor conditions, that's quite a feat!)
To roger the message that came off the air,
These brass pounders sure do have that flair.

They say Morse ops are a dying breed,
But don't despair, there's always that need,
That when conditions get rough for the new automation,
Be rest assured there'll be need for your station.

CW is dying? believe it never,
This mode will be 'round for ever and ever,
But one thing is sure, that we really need,
Is to relay our knowledge to the younger breed.

To carry the torch, long after we're gone.
To send Morse Code through the air like a song.
When at last, Silent Keys pull that final lever,
We can rest in peace, it's CW forever.

First QSO - continued from page 6

script than off the top of my head. So, script it out. You know, the usual: GE OM, NAME, RST, QTH, RIG, ANT, POWER — followed by HW CPY?

5) When sending, don't worry about your mistakes. They are usually quite obvious. If you are trying to send NAME IS LRED, FRED, the person at the other end is going to figure out which one is correct. He/she/it will undoubtedly figure it out even if you just send LRED. I quickly noticed that receiving a string of dits, hurt, rather than helped, my copying.

6) Slashes should be outlawed. I have a perfect record of never copying a slash correctly. I am lobbying both Bush ahd Kerry to outlaw this symbol in Morse code.

7) Ignore paragraph 6. Don't worry about using all the prosigns, Q-codes and funny stuff. It will come with time and practice, I am sure, but I find it much easier both to send and receive if they are kept to a minimum. I bet this is true for most beginners.

8) Get on the air. Most people, and Hams who might or might not be people — depends on your definition — really don't care how well or poorly you send or copy code. They might not want to have a QSO with you, but neither are they spotting you on the DX Clusters so the world can laugh at you.

9) Start with a sked. Knowing your victim helps. You know the callsign. You know the name. You know your victim knows you are a beginner.

10) When you miss a letter in copying, try to just skip over it. Easier said than done, but training yourself to concentrate on what is being sent now is important. This has been the hardest part of the entire process for me, so far.

11) Enjoy it! It's supposed to be FUN! I am working hard on improving my accuracy and speed. I have also been informed by a reliable source in HV-land that patiently working a newbie is worth 10 years off purgatory. The chief rabbi of Jerusalem offered similar comments;duly adjusted for theology, of course. I am awaiting word from the Dalai Lama and certain members of the Iranian government on this issue.

I hope to work you on CW soon! But NO slashes! ■

GØUPL - continued from page 7

of four relay-switched crystals, covering 3.558, 3.560, 7.010 and 7.030 MHz. The 3.558 and 7.010 crystals were produced using the ancient art of "penning": painting the crystal surfaces with ink to lower the frequency a few KHz.

My receiver is solid state utilising a Huff Puff stabilised VFO, direct conversion Tayloe switching detector and polyphase audio network for opposite sideband cancellation, followed by various audio filtering options. It has an inbuilt clock and 8-digit frequency counter, both also homebrewed. Currently operating on 80/40-metres, I plan to turn this receiver (eventually) into an all-band HF CW/SSB transceiver.

By March, 2002 I had all but forgotten Morse. That first QSO with Larry, G4GZG, was a shaky but triumphant affair over the magnificent DX of 12 miles. I subsequently discovered that I had mislabelled the forward/reverse power switch on my homebrew ATU/Power meter and was therefore transmitting almost all the power into the ATU coil. Once fixed, I made many friends on 80- and 40-metre CW across Europe. Best DX to date is Yuri, RW3DIP, and his son Ilya, RW3DIO, operating a homebuilt 50 watts rig from Moscow.

Even after two years and 515 CW QSO's the thrill of every contact using my all-homebuilt QRP CW station never diminishes. The little ECL82 glows as strong as ever, though the careful observer may discern the slight tint becoming apparent in the glass envelope.

Here at GØUPL, the spirit of homebuilt Amateur Radio is alive and flourishing. Long live homebrew!

For much more information, visit my Web page **http://www.HansSummers.com**. ■

K9YA Code Practice Nets

Fast Net

Every first Wednesday of the month, 7.137 MHz (+/- QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (0000 Z, Thursday). 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 (+/- QRM) at 7:00 P.M. (0000 Z, Thursday). 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.