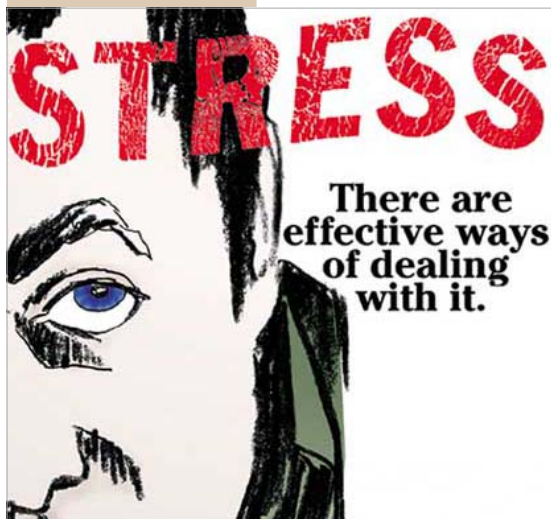


K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

Volume 1, Issue 11, November 2004



Misery and its Company

*On-Air Tests Prove Morse is Good for You —
The Nonpareil Stress Reliever*

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

After hearing yet another heated discussion about CW operators' "elitism" on a local two-meter repeater it set me thinking about that reflexive statement.

Morse or not "get" a license conveying HF privileges, it is a simple matter of do *or* die. Then again, they can wait — interminably — until, maybe, the United States follows some other countries down the 100% code-free path to Amateur Radio.

A GOOD THING

*Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL
Editor*

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Layout*

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Art Director*

Experiments performed decades ago revealed human test subjects could withstand stronger electric shocks than they could manage when alone, if they believed another test subject in the laboratory was receiving a shock of the same amplitude. This was true even when the other subject received no shock at all, but merely faked a reaction.

*"...the shared
brotherhood of
the key..."*

Now, I'm greatly simplifying this landmark research and its findings, but its essence does lend itself to a Ham Radio analogy: Morse misery, whether actual or feigned, loves company and spawns epithets like: "I can't learn, I've tried;" "Ham Radio is dying out because of this diehard Morse attitude;" "It's ancient technology, why should I learn it?" and the evergreen, "They (insert favorite insulting term for OTs here) want everybody to suffer, just like they did." After listening to an ongoing litany of these lamentations it is not surprising that many General Class aspirants never get past the "thinking about upgrading" stage.

What these complainants don't get is the simple truth that every Morse operator, at every skill level, even in this 5-wpm era, suffers the same "slings and arrows" in learning code. The difference is that those who succeed know they have to get on with "getting"

Perhaps the Morse requirement is a good thing if only to help maintain decorum on the bands and to provide a simple, no computer needed, alternative to the disharmony that exists on the voice modes. Yes, I have heard unkind, unidentified comments on CW, primarily during the feeding frenzy known as a DX pile-up. There, the frustrated, the disheartened and the

Kilocycle Kops vent an occasional two- or three-letter insult, the kindest being, "LID."

But, I have never overheard, been the subject of, nor have knowledge of a genuine curse fest on CW. I think it may be a matter of simple mechanics: it is just too much effort to berate your fellow Ham using Morse. Then again, maybe it is because you have to think of what you are going to say before transforming your words into Morse characters, and that brief pause is censor enough to inhibit most ops from sending nasty text. Or, CW is so bandwidth efficient, that it is easier to slide your ongoing QSO up or down band a couple of hundred hertz, than to start a slugfest with a purposeful or inadvertent QRMer. Finally, could it be the shared "brotherhood of the key" that

CONTINUED - MISERY ON PAGE 7



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The K1EL WinKey & DXbase 2005

A Winning Combination

Chuck Guenther, NIØC



K1EL WinKey at
ARS NIØC

Like many amateurs who started as Novices in the late 1950s, my first CW keyer was a military surplus J-38, purchased for a dollar at Walter Ashe Radio in St. Louis. Within a span of four years, I used a Vibroplex Blue Racer, a Mon-Key (an early keyer that did not feature self-completing dots or dashes), an Eldico keyer,

Vibroplex Original and a Hallicrafters HA-1 W9TO keyer. My interests were DX-ing, Contesting, CW traffic handling and QRQ ragchewing. Sometime during the mid-1960s, one of my buddies, W0DCP, built a CW keyboard and was sailing along at speeds around 70-wpm. He left me in the dust as I was trying to control the "TO" keyer at 45-wpm. I have always loved to listen to machine-perfect Morse, but never tried a keyboard because I never learned to touch type — my "search and pounce" typing speed has always hovered around 25-wpm.

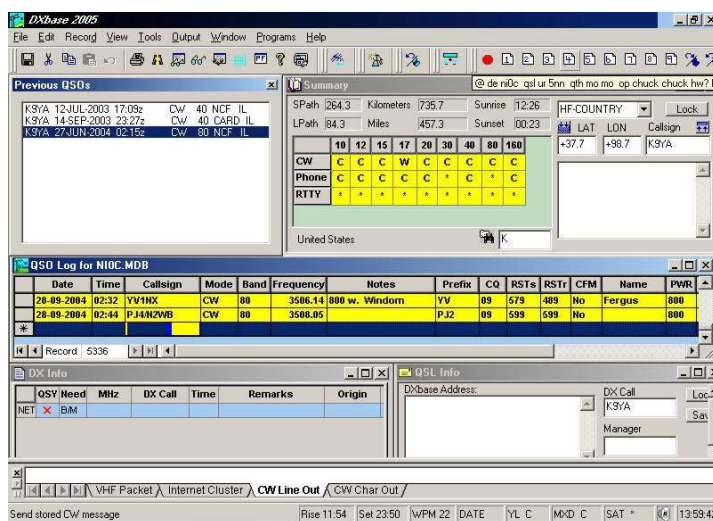
Thus, I have probably never been able to send code as fast as I could receive it. In recent years, I have been content with the built-in keyer in my Kenwood TS-850S, controlled with a vintage Brown Bros. BTL, a dual lever paddle. By using pre-recorded messages, I can send my callsign or a short CQ with the push of a button on the Kenwood RM-1 remote keypad. Because the operating desk is rather small, I have used small laptop computers with the latest versions of DXbase [www.dxbase.com] for logging, rig frequency and mode control and viewing Internet cluster spots.

When I upgraded to DXbase 2005 earlier this year, I discovered it had new features for sending CW using the new K1EL WinKey keyer [www.k1el.com]. As I read the DXbase help files and the WinKey manual (available at the K1EL Web site), I realized this would provide me a quantum leap in CW sending capability. So, I ordered the WinKey kit (includes the K1EL chip, associated parts and PCB) and my adventure began.

In fact, the K1EL WinKey is the most exciting development in an electronic keyer since the W9TO design of the 1960s; and it works beautifully with my favorite logging program. Other logging programs, such as N1MM and Starlog also support the WinKey.

This little jewel provides the following features:

- Manual CW — iambic A or B, Ultimatic, or semi-automatic paddle modes
- Keyboard sending — character or line output
- Standard messages — stored by your logging program — sent at the click of a mouse



Screenshot shows contents of CW message No. 4
(upper right/hand part of screen)



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- Separate Key and PTT outputs with programmable lead-in and tail delays, for keying an amplifier

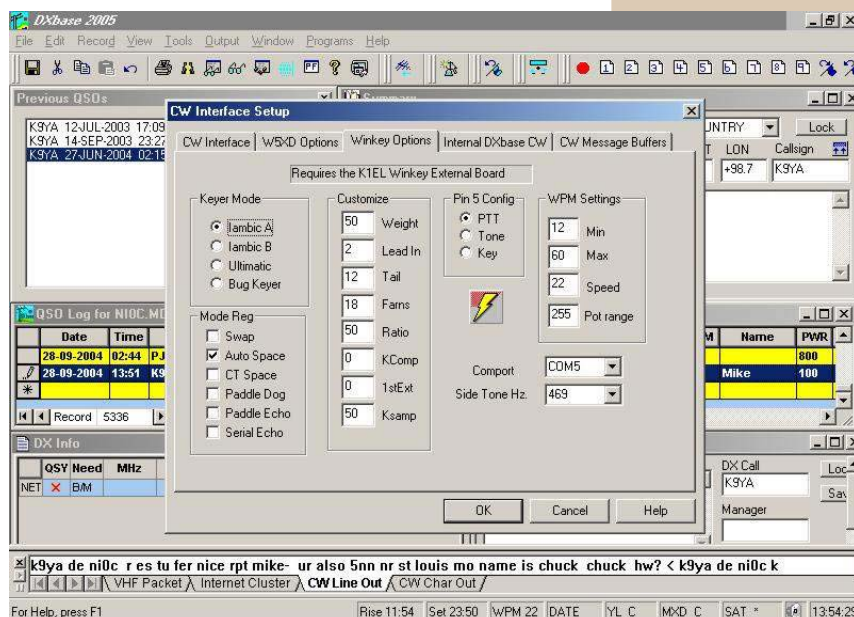
All this is available from a \$30.00 kit; you provide your own enclosure. Power is obtained from your computer serial port. My keyer is connected, via a Belkin F5U409 USB to serial adapter, to a USB port of an HP Pavilion N5210 laptop running Windows ME. It all plays perfectly. The WinKey PTT output is used to key my Ameritron AL80-B amplifier. A 20 ms lead-in delay and 120 ms tail delay seem sufficient to avoid excessive relay chatter and “hot-switching” of my non-QSK amplifier. When I need to tune the amplifier, I simply reprogram the keyer for semi-automatic paddle mode, and push the “dah” lever of the paddle — a few mouse clicks is all it takes. I find the Ultimatic to be the best paddle mode for my fist, while I enjoy using the pre-recorded messages for routine sending of my callsign and CQ, etc. I am still shy about using the keyboard on the air; but I am thrilled to have the capability within my logging program.

DXbase provides a novel feature worth mentioning. By putting the @ symbol in a stored message, the outgoing message will insert the callsign of the station you are working from the QSO log window. It will do this only once per message, a second @ symbol will be sent literally as “@.” I hope a future version of DXbase will also provide for picking up the actual sent RST from the log — that would be icing on the cake.

Although the keyer kit comes with a potentiometer for manual speed control, this control only works after initial boot-up of the computer, before DXbase is loaded. The logging program takes over speed control; adjustable in one wpm increments up or down from the default speed setup by the user in DXbase. If you close down DXbase, the keyer is disabled until you either re-open the program or reboot the computer.

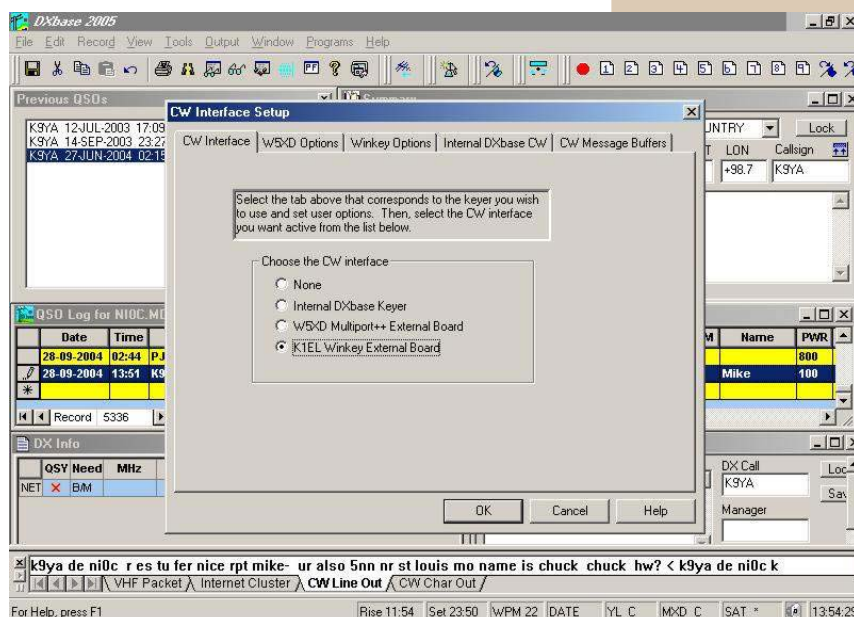
After assembling the WinKey kit, I had some problems getting it to work, and for several days I didn’t know if it was a hardware or software problem. It turns out the serial port on my laptop was not working, hence my need for the USB/

Serial adapter. I received patient and courteous help from both Steve, K1EL, and Jack, AA4LU,



(Scientific Solutions, DXbase) in troubleshooting this problem. I recommend this wonderful keyer and the DXbase 2005 logging software to CW ops who want it all. ■

K1EL WinKey Setup



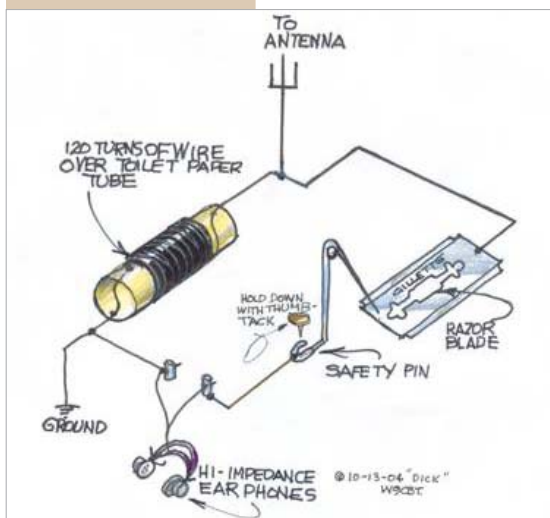
DXbase CW Options

Chuck Guenther, NIØC, is a member of the Mississippi Valley DX & Contest Club, FISTS CW Club and QCWA.

The Cutting Edge of Ham Radio

How a Gillette Blue Blade Led Me into Amateur Radio

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



Fox Hole Radio Schematic

and broadcasts from Axis radio stations. The article said the foxhole radio, also known as a “razor blade radio,” could pick up radio signals without batteries, using only a few basic parts, namely, a double-edge razor blade, a safety pin, copper wire wrapped around a toilet paper tube, a length of wire for an antenna, a simple ground and a pair of high-impedance earphones to hear the signals. I was incredulous, I didn’t believe you could listen to a radio without some form of power, but this battlefield receiver works like a crystal set.

The Popular Mechanics article provided instructions to build the nifty device. To make one for myself, my first stop was the bathroom medicine cabinet where I “borrowed” one of my father’s Gillette Blue Blades — I was too young to shave. I emptied the roll of toilet paper in the bathroom and kept the cardboard tube. The safety pin came from my mother’s sewing box.

I had to go to the hardware store and purchase some copper bell wire, thumbtacks and a pair of inexpensive earphones. I used a small block of wood for the base and fastened everything together with thumb tacks. It was quickly assembled, and then I tried it out. Lo and Behold! I heard WJJD in Chicago! Unbelievable!

We Hams all have a story to tell about how we got our start in Amateur Radio. Mine began after reading an article I saw in a 1946 issue of Popular Mechanics magazine entitled, “How to build a Foxhole Radio,” which was something GIs in WW2 did to entertain themselves on the front lines to pick up music

Later, I added refinements that allowed me to tune in two or three additional stations.

I include a schematic of the basic foxhole radio in this article, but because there are so many good, detailed construction articles available on the ‘Net, should you want to build one, I recommend you go there for further details. Just enter “foxhole radio” into a search engine and you’ll get plenty of information.

NOW, FOR THE REST OF THE STORY

I was happily listening to my little radio a few days later when Wham! a tremendous signal came through the earphones calling someone in the Philippine Islands! The signal was very, very loud, much louder than WJJD. He identified himself as Amateur Radio station W9QLA in Chicago; which turned out to be coming from an adjacent building. My curiosity was too much for me and I had to know who and what was creating these strong signals that were being broadcast around the world. I went up on our roof to string up a better antenna and glanced over at the roof next door and saw this beautiful tower

and three-element rotary beam all constructed out of wood, except for the elements and right out of the 1946 edition of the *Radio Amateur’s Handbook*. Now, I was doubly impressed, particularly when I saw it turning by itself in different directions.

*“About a year-
and-a-half later
I became a
licensed Ham...”*



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CONTINUED - CUTTING EDGE ON PAGE 7

Blowin' in the Wind

Rod Newkirk, W9BRD

The earliest encounter with my lifelong recreational obsession happened in the 1930s in Chicago when I was eleven. I took a forbidden shortcut through an alley to McPherson grade school, on the lookout for interesting trash.

A broken box of postcards and photographs caught my eye. They bore large and mysterious lettering such as W9XYZ, 8ABC and NU5RG. The pictures showed happy kids with strange contraptions. I pocketed a dry handful in the falling rain. Robert Hicks, our class brain, said they had something to do with Ham Radio — an untimely silent key? A few years later I, too, began assembling a prized QSL file. My treasure trove now fills three drawers of an antique highboy.

Should I hope for its eventual, more dignified, demise? Tidy cremation, perhaps? No — on further thought I'd rather have its remnants fascinate some young future radio amateur poking around in an alley. ■



Artist's Rendering

Mailbag...

This is a great little newsletter and does something for FISTS as well. I would guess that it keeps someone very busy bringing it up to date every month, HI.

Dan Keefe, KS6V
Vista, Calif. USA

*You folks do a wonderful job! Very professional!
CW - It's still magic !*

Steve Johnson, Neb. USA

Spectacular work! Thanks so much for giving us a peek, and for including us in the context.

That ancient W9BRD QSL brings back days of innocence and wireless excitement. A friend had just landed a new job in an engraving shop and needed something to practice on. Dunno what ever happened to the plate, darn it.

You triggered another reminiscence which I'm submitting herewith. Ham traditions risk being trampled by "technology" unbridled, so maybe we can give QSLing a little moral support.

Rod Newkirk, W9BRD/VA3ZBB
Ottawa, Ont. Canada

Got my new newsletter today and just wanted to say what a great job you guys have done. It looks and reads like the highest quality professional publication.

I enjoyed it very much.

Bill Ross, K6MGO
Marina Del Rey, Calif.

Morse Tips & Quips



BUG Nite

Michael Babineau, VE3WMB



The author's 1948 Eddystone S689 Bug, believed to be one of only five hundred manufactured by the Birmingham, UK-based Stratton and Company, Ltd., later to become known as Eddystone Radio.



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A question often asked is why would anyone still want to use a Bug? Why use one-hundred-year-old mechanical technology to send CW when there are electronic keyers and Morse keyboard programs that allow the almost effortless sending of near W1AW-perfect code? Rich, WB9LPU, may have answered this

question best in a discussion on the Brasspounders Yahoo! group: brasspounders@yahoogroups.com. He compared Morse sending to writing and typing. A handwritten note, while not as perfect as a typed note, can be still be very legible and it conveys something personal about the writer, as does Morse sent by mechanical means such as a Bug. The typed note, analogous to electronically sent Morse, is nearly perfect, but it is not very personal. It is this personal aspect of mechanically sent code that appeals to many Bug and straight key users.

There is no denying that using a Bug is a challenge, but a properly adjusted instrument in the hands of a skilled operator can produce wonderful sounding code. The sender somehow feels closer to the code as they have almost complete control over its timing. It is like the code is part of them, an extension of their thought processes projected by simple mechanical switches and a weighted vibrating arm. There is a certain Zen-like appeal to this and perhaps there also a certain element of nostalgia involved. It is thus not surprising that many Bug users also operate vintage radio gear.

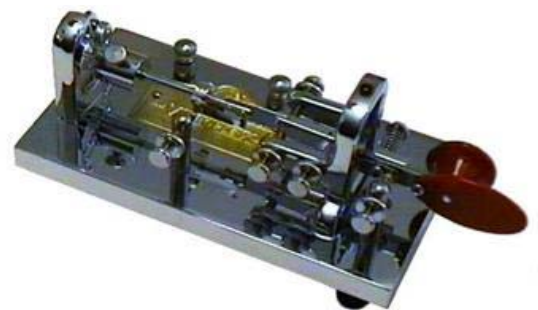
It was this appeal that brought together two hams, Brad, K4RT (formerly N3BF), and the author, to form a group called BUGS. A chance online meeting

resulted from reading each others' "Soapbox" postings for the 2003 ARRL Straight Key Night. We exchanged e-mails and lamented the lack of a similar event targeted at Bug users, and this is what sparked the creation of BUGS and a monthly event called BUG Nite.

The purpose of BUGS is to foster the on-air use of semi-automatic mechanical keys, otherwise known as Bugs. The group currently does not have a Web page, but exists online in the form of a Yahoo Group called Morse Bugs: morse_bugs@yahoogroups.com. Anyone with an interest in the use of Bugs is welcome to join. BUGS sponsors the casual monthly activity night called BUG Nite, on the last Monday of each month running from 23:00 UTC to 04:00 UTC on Tuesday. The purpose of BUG Nite is simply to encourage Bug users to get on the air and make contacts with other Bug users. The recommended frequencies are 50 kilohertz up from the bottom of each band on the 80-meter, 40-meter and 20-meter bands. Participants in BUG night are encouraged to call, "CQ BUG." Beginners and old-timers alike are welcome to join us. ■

Michael Babineau, VE3WMB was first licensed in 1980 and originally held the callsign VE1BXR. In the early 1980s he worked the world with two watts on CW using a Heathkit HW-8 and a rotatable full-wave loop on the 15 meter band. After almost 25 years as a Ham he still feels that CW is magical and especially enjoys operating portable from the great outdoors with his Elecraft KX-1.

His other Ham Radio interests include experimenting with antennas, casual contesting and collecting and using vintage Bugs. He lives in Ottawa, Ont. with his wife, 18-month-old daughter and three cats.



By now my curiosity reached a fever pitch. I had to meet the person responsible for sending out these signals and finding out more about what was going on. I could see where the cables from the antenna led to and went over to the next building, up the back stairs and knocked on the door. I was a little afraid as I thought the guy might tell me to get lost. The door opened and this tall young guy, probably around 21, said, "what can I do for you?" I explained I lived in the next building and heard him on my foxhole radio and was curious to know what he was doing. To my surprise, he introduced himself as Sy Passen, W9QLA, and invited me in to see his Ham shack, which was packed with Ham equipment. Sy had a homebrew kilowatt transmitter that was set into a six-foot-high relay rack along with a great looking Hallicrafters SX28A receiver and numerous other pieces of equipment beautifully organized. Wow, I was really impressed. He had another Ham Radio operator over who was his close friend, Art Bierman, W9OIG, and also Sy's lovely girlfriend, Lita (later to become his wife). The three of them were very cordial to me (as they explained many of Amateur Radio's intricacies.) Even Lita was encouraging.

I expressed an interest in learning more about the service and they suggested I buy two publications from the ARRL: *How to become a Radio Amateur* and *The Radio Amateur License Manual*. I went down to Allied Radio on Jackson Boulevard in Chicago — a mecca for radio amateurs at the time — and bought the two booklets that gave me the basic information I would need to know. About a year-and-a-half later I became a licensed Ham with the old class B license, now called the General, which was one of the most exciting times of my life — I was 16-years-old.

My friendship with Sy and Lita continued over the years, and a couple of years ago Sy became a SK. He was my Elmer who gave me good Ham Radio advice over the years. I still think of him often and the many conversations we had. I have had the opportunity to help encourage other young people to start off in Ham Radio and help keep our service going strong. I have enjoyed Amateur Radio for over 57 years and still find it exciting and challenging. ■

You can contact the author at syldes2@aol.com.

restrains most CW ops from retaliating against even the most egregious of Morse miscreants?

No matter why, the conventional wisdom is that the vast majority of CW operators are civil operators and that operation on the CW "subbands" is a more pleasant, more relaxed and more rewarding experience than is too frequently the case on the voice modes. ■

www.k9ya.org - HELP!

The Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club recently acquired the k9ya.org domain. Presently, we have it pointing to our Web site on a QSL.NET server. Unfortunately, this server has become extremely slow. It is making access to our Web site difficult and even impossible in some cases. For example, QSL.NET blocks access from South America.

If a *K9YA Telegraph* reader can provide us with Web hosting services, it would be greatly appreciated. Please contact us at k9ya@qsl.net.

What's Your Story?

Do you have an interesting Ham Radio story to tell? Do you want to report an operating event or club activity, illustrate a technique, recount a memory of the "Golden Age of Amateur Radio," describe a construction project, or express an opinion? If so, the *K9YA Telegraph* invites you to share it with an elite group of interested and active Hams worldwide.

Not sure of your writing skills? Not to worry, the *Telegraph's* staff will edit your manuscript; the important thing is to get your story out there. When possible, and appropriate, photograph(s) to accompany your article significantly enhance content.

See www.k9ya.org for the *K9YA Telegraph's* Author's Guide or contact us at k9ya@qsl.net.

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NEXT MONTH: Special "Centerfold" Edition