K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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FISTS

The "F" is for "Fun" and "Friendly"

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

The mechanism of the great solar cycle grinds round with glacial slowness. Turn on the rig and HF band conditions are poor–few or no signals are heard–not surprising as we are near the bottom of the cycle. Matter of fact, we're nearing the point, as we do during every nadir, where even otherwise commonplace DX locales like DL, G and F attract pile-ups. Nevertheless, if we persevere and spin the dial up a bit from the bottom band limit, we'll find a plentitude of signals smack dab between the county hunters on .056.5 and the QRP'ers on .060—.058 is the FISTS calling frequency.

"...members cheerfully QRS or QRQ..."

FISTS?

Perhaps you are unfamiliar with FISTS—as a six-year member of the group I'm pleased to offer a bit of background information.

George Longden, G3ZQS, founder of FISTS, the International Morse Preservation Society, set forth these goals for the new organization in 1987.

a) To further use of Morse code on the bands

b) To encourage the newcomer to the mode

c) To engender friendships within the membership

In my experience, those goals have been happily met.

George also stated that: *Whilst the club is directed primarily at the newcomer with a view to fostering CW activity, it would clearly not be functional without a hardcore of veterans to encourage them. It is for this reason you will find an abundance of both categories on the list.*

Personally, I find there's a healthy mix of experienced, new and "retread" operators bearing FISTS numbers. Hearkening to the club's spirit, most members cheerfully QRS or QRQ to match the other op's Morse comfort zone. I've ceased to be surprised, but remain gratified to work the many operators who tell me they've recently returned to the air after a long period of dormancy, and the veteran, active Hams who mention they're pounding brass for the first time ever. These QSOs reveal a couple of truths: Returning CW ops' skills may be a bit rusty, but little diminished no matter their time off the air and that experienced Hams just now getting into CW are so bitten by the Morse bug they progress rapidly. Again, from G3ZQS: *The hallmark of a good operator is the quality of his/her code rather than the speed at which it is sent.*

How welcoming to newcomers are FISTS? In my experience, very. A week after joining I heard and

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If I Had a Time Machine

Daniel Meloche, W1DPM

Daniel, W1DPM (L), and Nate, N1IDX (R)

I've set the dial on my time machine to 1959. That year I turned 10 years old. We are talking about a time when manmade satellites and color TV were in their infancy and video games unknown. As hard as I try, I can't really focus on any major events in my life at that time—nothing good, but fortunately, nothing bad.

It would be nearly fifteen more years before I was bitten by the radio bug. Can you remember when it happened to you? I walked out of my house on a typical summer Saturday morning and glanced up toward "Moose Hill." I'm not sure if moose were ever seen there, but on this Saturday morning, there was something very different about the horizon. Towers with large antennas stood across the skyline of the hill. Moose Hill was at an elevation of about 1,400 feet. I was curious enough to take a hike up to the top to investigate. As I crested the top of the hill, I saw several tents, campers and one large city bus emblazoned with a civil defense logo. I grabbed the first person I could speak to and asked what was going on. He told me it was a Field Day, an operating exercise for Amateur Radio operators around the country.

I was fascinated as I walked from tent to tent listening to voices from other states exchanging reports and with the sight of someone sitting on the tailgate of a pickup truck with a long black cable going to one of the towers I could see from my house. I returned several times over the weekend and got enough information to begin my journey into Amateur Radio. Not long after that day, I would find myself sitting at a meeting of the Central Massachusetts Amateur Radio Club—the same group that will again use Moose Hill for Field Day this year.

I had received my Novice license and was building my first station. After a couple of those old Vikings and Heathkits that would sometimes drift off the table, I was fortunate to acquire a state of the art Yaesu FT-201. Certainly, there could be no more sophisticated piece of radio gear out there. I had arrived. I had passed my General Class license exam and was talking to Ham operators around the country and the world. I worked at the local post office and occasionally a co-worker sorting incoming mail would yell out, "Hey Dan, you got a card from Zambia!" I even kept a schedule with a mailman in Germany for a time.

"Hey Dan, you got a card from Zambia!"

By 1983, I had my Advanced Class license. Shortly after that, life tossed me a couple of curve balls, the radios were put away, and sadly, some were sold off. That FT-201 is still on the air today with the same guy I sold it to. One of the best aspects of Amateur Radio is that the bug that got you the first time will be back. In

Nate, N1IDX

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1994, my second grandson was born, Nathan Daniel: Daniel after my first name. Little did I know it then, but that newborn would be the bug that bit me again ten years later. I ran into an old radio friend, he asked where I had been, and I gave him the standard answer. Just hadn't had time. You know, with work and the house, and all. He told me a lot of the old gang had moved to a 220 MHz repeater and there were now two local 220 repeaters.

Well, once again, I found myself looking at new state of the art radio gear. Nathan had stopped by and while I was talking with one of my friends, he started asking questions about Ham Radio. That smoldering flame from the seventies just had gasoline thrown on it. I would have to get a low band station up and running. That old stuff wouldn't do. This was perfect. After all, it wasn't for me. I could tell the XYL it was because Nathan was interested.

I let him make a few contacts with me as control operator. That was it. He had been bitten by that same bug that got me thirty years before. Remember Moose Hill! Nathan caught on quickly and while maintaining honor role status in his fourth grade class, playing little league baseball and doing all that other 10-year-old stuff he has managed to achieve Tech-plus status. He loves CW and is well on his way to Worked All States. His goal is to have his General Class license by the end of school this summer in time for Field Day.

We both have Icom 746's and working together on a tribander Mosley beam. He has been accepted into the prestigious inner circle—the local 220 repeater. It has all come full circle. Watching his eyes when he goes to the mailbox and pulls out a QSL card he needed for a new state is like getting in that time machine. The best part is knowing I passed on this great hobby to another generation. Some quiet night, maybe 30 years from now, you will hear, "CQ CQ CQ de N1IDX calling CQ and listening for a call." When asked by that Ham operator somewhere, far away, how he got interested in Amateur Radio he'll say, "I remember it like it was yesterday, my grandfather, W1DPM, got me started." If you listen closely to the background QRM you might hear him say to a curious 10-year-old, "I'll let you use the radio in a minute." It doesn't get any better than that. ■

Nate, N1IDX

My Name is Nate!

Nate Youngs, N1IDX

Hi, my name is Nate, I am 10 years old and in the fourth grade. I go to the Wire Village School in Spencer, Massachusetts. I recently upgraded to Tech-plus at WPI College in Worcester, Mass. My grandfather, W1DPM, got me interested in the hobby and I have been enjoying it! Right now, I'm studying for my General Class license. In addition, I have been trying to get more kids interested in the hobby. I enjoy meeting new people, on CW and on two-meters. I think if more kids got interested in the hobby, it would be better. Grown-ups usually enjoy talking to young kids like me. There are so many things you can do in Amateur Radio: CW, RTTY, talk around the world and just have fun! So, I hope some young kids have learned about me, and study for their license! Hope to contact you soon. By the way, my call is N1IDX–I like the "IDX" part, Hi-Hi! [*Ed. Nate upgraded to General Class in June 2005.*] ■

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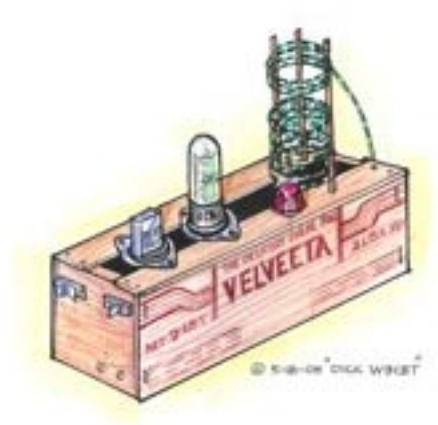
A Real Cheesy Rig

The Velveeta Cheesebox Special

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



Cheese is good, wooden cheeseboxes are even better, at least when it came to building my first home-brew rig. I had just received my license and was anxious to get on the air. I couldn't afford much as I was only 16-years-old. So, checking my 1947 *The Radio Amateur's Handbook*, I found a simple one-tube Tri-Tet oscillator circuit that looked easy to build, and it was built on a wooden chassis, no less.

I looked around for some wood and found an empty two-pound Velveeta cheesebox. It was perfect. I took off the bottom panel and cut it into two strips leaving a gap between them big enough to mount the sockets for the 6V6 tube, crystal sockets and coil. Afterward, I gave the whole chassis a coat of shellac for insulation purposes. Rather a strange looking rig, but I later found it really did work.

I drilled holes in the top of the chassis to mount the 6V6 tube and crystal sockets with screws. The plate and antenna coils were supported by three dowels mounted in the chassis top. The nice thing was that the coils were wound with #18 bell wire that simply fit in place over the dowels.

The wiring was very easy to do. I used the same bell wire for all the wiring and the coils. I even made my antenna from it. The tuning capacitor was mounted through the top panel.

Two Fahnestock clips on the end of the chassis acted as the power terminals and two screws for the key connection. So far, I was well within my budget.

I wired the unit in one evening and was anxious to try it out on the air using a power supply I had scrounged somewhere. Very few parts were involved building this little rig as you can see from the circuit diagram—perfect for a new Ham!

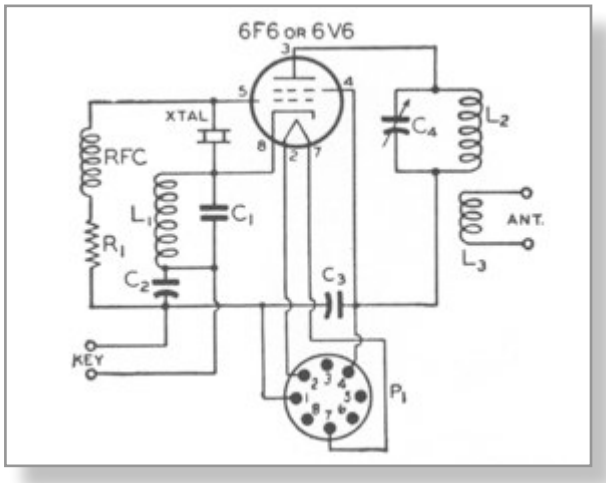
When it was completed, I immediately hooked up the power supply and antenna along with a key and a crystal for 40-meter CW. I still remember the frequency—I owned only one crystal—7037 KHz. I connected my very poor antenna and tuned up the rig using a neon bulb as output indicator.

Eureka! The bulb glowed. Wow, was I excited. My old S-20R receiver was set to the transmitter frequency as I tapped out a CQ. I had no idea how much power was getting into the antenna, but later determined it was about eight watts. It took awhile, but I finally made my first QSO, W8GBG. I was on cloud nine.

What a kick it was to assemble a bunch of junk parts and actually contact another Ham on the air. If you would like to build a unit like this for yourself, check out vintage handbooks from the late 40s or early 50s for full construction details.

"Eureka! The bulb glowed."

I will never forget my Velveeta cheesebox special. I worked around 20 states with that rig until upgrading to an Ameco AC-1 ($15.95). Those were the good old days! ■



A Real Cheesy Schematic

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Book Review

Brasspounders—Young Telegraphers During the Civil War

Herb Scarpelli, WK9O

By Alvin F. Harlow
Published by Sage Books, Denver, Colorado
159 pages; Copyright 1962

This book was originally intended for young readers from junior high to high school age. Even so, it reveals an interesting picture of the use of telegraphy during the Civil War, and of the telegraphers, many of whom were no older than its targeted readership.

These "ops" as they called themselves (sound familiar?), usually ranged in age from 12 to 22 years, who, before the war, were employed by various railroads and the few emerging commercial telegraph companies.

When war came, the Military Telegraph Service was drawn from these and other peacetime resources, and organized loosely under the Quartermaster Corps; they were not officially part of the army.

What we recognize today, as the Army Signal Corps was, at that time, preoccupied with the use of signal flags and lights. It was headed by Major Albert Myer, inventor of the "Wig Wag" system. The originator of one technology, Myer was grudgingly slow to accept the use of another; in the ensuing power struggle, he lost. Much later, telegraphy would be incorporated into the Signal Corps, but that is another story, and beyond the scope of this book.

Meanwhile, all the operators in the Military Telegraph Service (or Corps) were civilians, though some were given temporary (unofficial) military rank and pay—all shared the same risks as the soldiers.

In the book we meet a young Andrew Carnegie, future steel magnate, who had been involved with telegraphy since age 15. He was instrumental in the mobilization of the railroad, and its telegraph service, for military use. His philanthropic nature is hinted at in several stories recounted in this book.

Jesse H. Bunnell, whose skill was already legendary for sending a two-hour-long message at 38-wpm, became one of the chief telegraphers in the Army of the Potomac while still a teenager. After the war, Bunnell founded a company that manufactured electrical devices. Many of the telegraph keys made by his company are still used by Hams today.

Telegraph Battery Wagon (1864)

Some of the other young ops would go on to high positions in the transportation field, and one eventually became a manager of the Chicago Board of Trade.

> *"...subsisting on hardtack and other meager rations."*

We get a glimpse of these young men (there were young women too, though not mentioned in the book) lugging their "instrument" (key) and a coil of wire, usually on foot, through the elements from station to station, while subsisting on hardtack and other meager rations. Their "station" could be anything from a railroad terminal to some hastily improvised shelter located near headquarters.

President Lincoln was known for his vigils for the latest war news at the War Department's telegraph office in Washington. Some telegraphers in that office later related stories of those presidential visits in memoirs and interviews.

The technically-minded reader will note that, as the war progressed, so did the telegraph. Single-strand, uninsulated wire gave way to six-strand, insulated wire. There is an illustration of batteries being offloaded from a wagon; one is led to speculate how heavy and cumbersome these were.

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Mr. Murphy's Days of Glory

The Coming of His Law

Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD

Some years ago, I inherited a large batch of ancient Amateur Radio publications. They included a run of *R-9* magazines, the spirited late 1920s and early 1930s western competitor of ARRL's more conservative *QST*.

Wild west, indeed! Pacific coast hams of those days definitely made themselves an endangered species. Almost every monthly issue recorded obituaries of electrocuted amateurs and those maimed by careless antenna work. The journalistic tone and treatment depicted a general acceptance that danger was a natural component of the exciting new wireless frontier.

Photographs confirmed the reckless culture. Ham shacks were overrun by random wiring, much of it at lethal high voltages. Vacuum tube technology required menacing potentials even for moderate power. Just imagine today's high output linear amplifiers with components thrown together on wooden planks, wide open and rarely bolted down. Slightly visible placards labeled "Danger—High Voltage" were the customary limited effort toward safety.

"...that kid in the attic."

Antenna construction was equally devil-may-care, widely unimpeded by insurance and urban zoning considerations. Respectable California DX Hounds scoffed at the common eastern-style 30-foot A-mast. Their popular approach was to gather a pile of 2x4, 2x2 and 1x2 boards, a roll of nondescript wire for guying, a bucket of nuts and bolts, a saw, a hand drill, then head for the sky. In addition, for the meticulous, a "plumb bob" of twine and a padded weight.

They would often start with an 8-foot square or triangular base and commence sawing, drilling and bolting. Tower footings were of little importance beyond leveling. When they reached the 30- or 40-foot mark, climbing-struts and all, things got rickety enough to throw down some guys. From there, the structure grew narrower and flimsier to the point where ambition and courage diminished, usually around the 70-foot level. Another set of guy wires helped, but very few 100-footers appear in the literature.

In the absence of Yagis and other rotatable radiators, the fundamental horizontal wire was king. Slopers and verticals were deemed unworthy DX instruments. So was the shameful inverted-V. Hence, at least two of these monstrous beanstalks were necessary to maintain the respect of one's peers. As for painting, no mention. Why bother? Various schemes for protection of guy wire anchoring were offered, but inescapable vulnerability ensured early spectacular demise.

All this pioneering was long, long ago when the average Ham was young enough to be termed "that kid in the attic." Now our hobby is much safer and most of its participants are quite mature. (That's another story, our need for enthusiastic youth.) That unrelenting law of gravity, however, has never been repealed. This brings up the main point of this brief nostalgic exercise.

An acquaintance with a lifetime of wireless experience recently undertook routine maintenance on his rotary beam. George was newly retired, in good health, and had done the chore many times before. All equipment involved was up to specs. Nevertheless, a hitch developed while the beam was being lowered. George was back on the ground, studying the problem, when something gave way. The elements fell and struck him.

The most important lesson to be learned here is never to attempt such projects without help, even if confidant they can be easily done alone. A buddy or two likely would have urged George to stay safely in the clear. He survived the accident but the prognosis is permanent serious disability. He should have had many happy Hamming years ahead. Instead, the family reluctantly placed George in an assisted-living facility—without his beloved Ham Radio. Meanwhile, Murphy remains as treacherous and incorrigible as ever. ■

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answered a CQ from the club's headquarter station, GXØIPX, where George happened to be at the key. He came back not only with my callsign, but also with, "TNX PHIL FER YER CALL." Now that's what I call welcoming!

FISTS members do not comprise an elite, standoffish Morse clique; most FISTS are pleased to work both members and non-members. Although a number of achievement awards are contingent upon the amassing of FISTS membership numbers, FISTS-sponsored contests are open to all licensed Amateur Radio operators. FISTS numbers collected by non-members are then valid when applying for awards after joining the club.

Activities Galore

FISTS sponsor a number of low intensity and fun on-air activities including contests, nets and operating achievement awards. Awards include FISTS Rag Chewers' Club (see: April, 2004, *K9YA Telegraph*); Worked All States; QRP; Mobile; and Nightmare Alpha-Numeric FISTS Award (don't ask!).

Upon application, you can even operate using the club callsign, KNØWCW, and qualify for special achievement awards.

A variety of weekly FISTS nets offer opportunities for on-air practice and a leg-up in gathering numbers.

FISTS provide a QSL bureau that distributes, at no charge, cards for member-to-member contacts worldwide.

Want some real-time CW practice? The FISTS Code Buddy program "...matches an experienced CW operator with someone that wants to improve. They find convenient schedules and work one-on-one, on the air, to develop good operating skills and improve speed."

From the above it might appear FISTS is an awards-driven, numbers-collecting, competitive organization—nothing could be further from the truth. I have established several on-the-air friendships with members of the FISTS community that have continued well past the numbers stage. Most FISTS are looking for nothing more than a laid-back QSO, but if you also appreciate handsome shack wallpaper, it's available.

Membership is $15 annually and includes a lifetime membership number and a subscription to the club's informative publication, *The Keynote*, which incorporates news from FISTS chapters in North America, Europe and the Antipodes.

With or without a FISTS membership, you'll meet a most congenial group of CW ops. ■

FISTS: http://www.fists.org

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Many of the signals and abbreviations of this germinal period are still used today. Some examples: "U" stood for, and still stands for, "you;" "ES" for "and;" and "GA" for "go ahead." The immortal sign-off salutation, "73" was already in use according to the book.

The Morse code of this period was "American Morse" or the "Continental code" which differs from the International Morse code most Hams use.

For 21st century Hams, especially CW enthusiasts, and for those with an interest in the Civil War, Brass Pounders is a good book to launch the pursuit of such interests.

Old Abe and Morse

Back in the 1850s when Lincoln was still a circuit riding lawyer, Charles Tinker was the telegraph operator in the lobby of the Tazewell House, a hotel in Pekin Illinois, the seat of Tazewell County.

While passing time in the hotel lobby, the young lawyer expressed curiosity on "how that contraption works." He also said, "I've sent and received telegraphs, of course, but I don't yet know how it was done." After an explanation, and a brief demonstration, "Mr. Lincoln threw up his hands." "I give up. Hereafter, my respect for gentlemen of the telegraph will be most profound." ■

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K9YA Telegraph

How Many Differences Can You Find?

There are 23!

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

The Amplifier here is "HomeBrew" and running a "Full Gallon" in the Final!

Click HERE for the answers.

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