

# K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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## QSL Twists and Turns

*Games of the XXII Olympiad*

*Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL*

Most hams follow the time-honored admonition not to discuss sex, politics or religion on the air. But sometimes reality intrudes, as was the fate of the QSL cards accompanying this article. The cards commemorate the 1980 Summer Olympic

Games (Games of the XXII Olympiad) held in Moscow and other cities in the U.S.S.R.

Following the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, President Jimmy Carter declared the United States would boycott the games if Soviet troops were not withdrawn by a set date. The troops remained, so as of March 21, 1980 when the official announcement was issued, the United States, joined by 64 other nations, boycotted the games. This followed the boycott of the 1976 Summer Olympics by nations opposed to New Zealand's participation ("...because it still had some sporting links with South Africa.") and preceded the boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics by the U.S.S.R. due to stated security concerns.

### Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Isn't amateur radio supposed to be educational and broadening? Then these cards certainly fill the bill and propel curiosity to fill in the blanks even if it takes, in this instance, a dilatory quarter of a century.

The four cities depicted on these cards hosted the preliminary and quarterfinal soccer tournaments, and sure enough carry a legend (based on transliterating the Cyrillic alphabet) denoting *futboli*—soccer. Thanks to researching a few Web sites, I've identified

the structures on the cards. Here are the objects pictured on the cards followed by the sports venues where soccer matches were played: Moscow, apartment blocks in the Olympic Village, Grand Arena; Minsk, column in Victory Square, Dynamo Stadium; Kiev, equestrian statue of Bogdan Khmel' nitsky, Republican Stadium; and Leningrad, Rostral column located on the old St. Petersburg Bourse, Kirov Stadium.

Aside from the Moscow card, it seems these examples were originally printed to depict various landmarks and only later, with the addition of the Olympics logo and soccer legend, did they celebrate the Summer Olympics Games. According to a Wikipedia article: "The emblem consists of the Olympic rings, parallel lines in the shape of a pyramid—resembling lanes of a stadium, and a five pointed star which serves as a reminder of the Soviet Union."

*"futboli"*

There's much Olympics Games memorabilia and regalia found on the 'Net, but these cards are not amongst them. All but one of the cards acknowledges QSOs completed in 1981 except the card from Minsk—that one is from 26 October 1980.

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# Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Is "34" the Answer?

Vern Weiss, W9STB



Main operating position at W9STB. Note absence of any microphones!

This should be difficult for me to admit publicly, but I have a problem.

A survey of my logbooks indicates I have operated CW exclusively for over 12 years and mostly CW since becoming a ham in the mid-1960s. I love the mode. I cannot put my finger on why I have always loved CW, but I do. Perhaps it is the melding of the cognitive along with the manipulative. Phone operation always seemed like

talking on the, well, uh... *phone!* And I learned how to dial a phone and have been talking on one since I was five years old or so; so phone operation hardly challenges me. Because no special skills are necessary, phone operation became tedious very quickly. I should also come clean with you and admit I have a plaque above my shack door stating, "Through this door passes both ham radio operators and phone men," so you can see I readily admit I am not much of an advocate for phone operations.

*"Novices aren't the only ones with an 'accent.'"*

## AKA QSO Somniferous

I am baring my soul about a recent problem: This is no exaggeration; I have fallen asleep four times during QSOs in the last three months. In fact, one of those times I was sending! The QSOs were so excruciatingly boring I was lulled to sleep. One time I woke up just to hear the guy turn it over to me and I had no idea what to comment. When the mundane content of one of my QSOs caused me to nod off, even the painfully slow code speed was not enough distraction to keep me from slumber. The station I was working was an "Extra" class and why I needed to count to three like one does when playing a waltz in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time between each dot or dash is a mystery—letter "A" was "dit-2-3" "dah-2-3." When I regained my lucidity I had no idea what I had sent or what we were talking about.

What has happened to ham radio QSOs?

Why have they become so painfully boring?

Does anyone remember Lewis McCoy's brilliant "Your Novice Accent?" In this *QST* article (later distributed as a leaflet by the ARRL in a membership packet mailed to all new Novice licensees), Mr. McCoy chided Novices for their sophomoric patterns and habits he noticed on the air. He listed many, but the one that stuck with me was new hams' insistence on repeating everything, e.g., "R R R FB BRUCE FB ON UR QTH AS MOLINE ILL MOLINE ILL ES TNX FER RST 589. FB VY FB- OK ON UR JOHNSON XMTR FB. OK ON UR DOG HAVING JAUNDICE," and on and on.

Lew, a superb operator, pounded into beginners proper protocol and technique. He pounded into us that "R R R" was unnecessary... one "R" was sufficient. He pounded into us that tail-ending (which at that time was illegal) was wrong. Now tail-ending is everywhere. Guys send their call once and I guess I am supposed to infer they are calling me. Uh-uh. It doesn't work that way. So I ignore it. If you want to call someone, YOU CALL SOMEONE. I've noticed most of these superhams (as I call them) fire their call off at a much higher speed than you are using when calling CQ.

Obviously, contrary to Lew's 1960s article, Novices aren't the only ones with an "accent."

## The Awakening

Getting back to my problem. I am sound asleep, but wake up startled knowing I cannot endure another moment of this meaningless exchange of non-information. So I decide to spice it up. I tell the guy my XYL just walked in the room in a bathing suit, nothing sordid or off-color that might trespass on his delicate moral righteousness. I just want to elicit something other than discussion that has turned over and examined every aspect of the high temperature today being lower than it was yesterday. Three exchanges! Over and over. OK, OK, already, I get it. Your high today was 45. Your high yesterday



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was 50. Maybe I should sked this guy tomorrow in case the high drops back down into the mid-40s. I want to follow up on this.

Sigh.

Does anyone know if there is some book that provides a scripted format for QSOs? It seems like the last few years most every QSO defaults to the following:

1. RST
2. QTH
3. NAME
4. RIG
5. MY AGE HR...
6. I'VE BEEN A HAM...YEARS
7. 73, HPE CU AGN TNX FOR GRT  
QSO BLAH BLAH BLAH

I concede Items 1, 2 and 3 are standard protocol. But the MOST anyone seems to be willing to say anymore are items 4, 5, 6 and 7. Perhaps at some point some of this information might come out, but does the book *Now You're Talking* tell newcomers this is all they're supposed to say?

### Kick Starting a QSO

Some of the most interesting QSOs I have are on the occasions where I work a ham who, like myself, owns several interesting keys. It all started several years ago when I mentioned I owned a McElroy Marbelite bug. The guy I was working asked if I could switch over to it. My primary key is a 40-year-old Vibroplex Original I got new at Trigger in River Forest, Ill. (Yeh, I know. We've all got stories, don't we?). As a result, my Original fits my hand like a very comfortable pair of shoes fits my feet and, after 40 years of pounding its contacts, I feel I have mastered it. So I plug in the McElroy. It is an understatement to say my fist was horrible. My S's, H's and 5's all sounded like 1970s Russian over-the-horizon radar pulses and lasted just as long. BUT WAIT! That isn't the point of my story! The other guy plugged in HIS McElroy Marbelite and was equally terrible. Next up was my Lionel J-37 and he countered with one of his oddball keys. I cinched the deal by switching to another key and offering to send him a \$50 bill if he could tell me what I was sending with at that moment. All he knew was that my fist sounded choppy as if being sent by a hand key in which the spacing of the contacts was too great. Alas, he never guessed it was a

*"Deer at the  
Billabong."*

plastic Boy Scout signaling set (You know, the brown plastic toy telegraph key that has the buzzer and the light bulb and the Morse code molded onto the top?) We had a grand time. It was a superb two-hour QSO. I've worked him twice since. And I have no idea what his age is or how long he's been a ham. I don't think he's ever told me his rig either.

Have you ever noticed people of achievement are often more interesting to talk to than those who have attained nothing extraordinary? This isn't always the case, but often seems to be. Though this is purely a subjective opinion, this writer believes "interesting-ness" deteriorated as testing requirements softened and were eliminated. Is it not more interesting to discuss vegetables with a gardener than a grocery shopper?

### Time to Stand Proud

CW operators seem to be cowed and perhaps fearful of "not being liked." PBS did a series entitled "Deer at the Billabong." (Billabong is an Australian word for a pool or water hole.) In one piece of footage a mother doe and her fawn are drinking from the water. Suddenly comes a crocodile that grabs the fawn and disappears. When this happens the mother doe stops drinking, looks startled and after the crocodile leaves, resumes drinking. We have endured many attacks on our particular love in amateur radio. CW has been under fire continually ever since the early 80s when "question pools" replaced a comprehensive FCC examination and Morse testing became a multiple-choice quiz. It was then that the character and timber of the once proud ham radio operator began its slide to where I feel it is today. Over time, we CW operators were out-shouted and made to feel unworthy alongside those who possessed no value of the CW craft (or its place in the "rite of passage" toward an amateur radio license).

Have we CW operators become the "Deer at the Billabong?" Have we become beat down and our once spirited QSOs have lapsed into sleepy two-ways that

Have we CW operators become the "Deer at the Billabong?" Have we become beat down and our once spirited QSOs have lapsed into sleepy two-ways that

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W9STB's Underwood No. 5 "telegrapher's mill" typewriter was used by a Western Union office in Wyoming around 1910.



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# A Spooky QSO with WVNA

*Mental Telegraphy in a Bygone Age*

**Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD**



Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell  
(Vinegar Joe)

Burma was falling to the Japanese. The battle for India was going badly in the summer of '42. Washington's only direct contact was a tenuous shortwave link over the pole. Our end was bolstered by commandeered commercial facilities on Long Island, controlled by landwire from the War Department Message Center, station WAR (see: *K9YA Telegraph*, September 2005, pg. 5). The DX end was said to be a few hundred

watts to a low Vee manned by a lonely Signals detachment operating out of an aircraft shipping crate on the outskirts of Karachi. Even on good days their signal left much to be desired.

The valley of the Potomac was a steamy oven. I showed up on my WAR mid-watch with hopes for a low-stress assignment after a sweaty day of fitful napping. The WDMC's air conditioning comprised a bunch of buzzing fans near open windows. Monitor loudspeakers blared their usual barrage of static. Not a promising situation, especially the knot of high brass hovering near the Karachi bay. Routing clerks, shaking their heads, rushed back and forth from the nearby closely guarded Code Room.

## Morse Nut

"Got a real treat for you, NK," said the duty sergeant. "Go see what you can do with WVNA. He knew I was a ham-Morse nut, but there were seasoned veterans on hand who could operate rings around me. I donned a sticky headset and winced at the ghostly echoes from India. My first line of copy went something like J-XQ-GI-E RB--A. An officer near my ear said "Crypto wants solid five-letter groups. Type in what you think the missing characters might

be." MIGHT be? No wonder the experts had thrown up their hands. Guesswork is a big no-no for trained communicators.

## Keep At It

As a comparative novice, I had no such ingrained inhibition. I could easily let my fingers do the walking. What little I could make out from the human fist at the other end and was a rhythmic 15 words-per-minute. Soon I was grinding out solid cipher groups as ordered. If they were inaccurate, so be it. Strangely, after a page or two, I really didn't care. I was more concerned with the itchy perspiration dripping down my neck. A code clerk dashed in to say "Keep him at it. His stuff is breaking down." I kept at it, and kept on keeping at it.

My belief, in retrospect, is that we were filling in missing parts of an urgent dispatch signed by old

Vinegar Joe himself. WAR ordinarily suspended a circuit's operation until a crippling ionospheric fadeout cleared. Apparently this dire traffic had to get through NOW. Years later I alluded to the eerie episode in ARRL's journal, *QST*. This brought response from the late Bob McGraw, W2LYH, a superb radioman, to the effect that he had been handling RCA's mammoth receiving arrays and the landline to WAR at Riverhead that night. He logged the WVNA circuit as unusable. Regrettably, I've never encountered anyone claiming to have operated at old WVHA.

Not long ago Duke University and other academic centers seriously investigated possibilities of the paranormal. Their results, so far as I know, are inconclusive. The subject is a mysterious mishmash of weirdly complex variables. At present I can't imagine much research underway—in that direction. Yet, the time may come when ESP breakthroughs relegate today's communication marvels to the status of quaint dinosaurs. Count me as a convinced believer. Too bad my own brainwaves are going QRP. ■

*"...signed by  
old Vinegar  
Joe himself."*



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# The Tikker Receiving System

*A Transition from Damped Wave to CW*

*Joe Medsker, K8LKC*

During radio's early days there was a constant battle to improve receiver performance, which continues to this day. We are always trying to obtain better sensitivity and selectivity along with the other features a receiver needs. There is no exception to this rule. There came a time when the damped wave of spark was replaced with tube oscillators for transmission and this caused receiving problems that needed solving. One solution to the dilemma was the "Tikker."

Some early radio amateurs used crystal set receivers. These came in a number of varieties and they worked quite well for the reception of spark or modulated signals. Don't sell the crystal set short: with a proper antenna well matched to the set, they are capable of remarkable performance. A double-tuned set here with a 278-foot end-fed wire; well matched to the input, has received many AM broadcast stations from all over the U.S. In Michigan, I can listen to stations all along the east coast from Maine to Georgia and as far west as Texas. This is not a simple toy receiver! Early amateurs with spark rigs ran upwards of five kilowatts, or even higher, making DX contacts possible at times.

With all this hype about the crystal set, they fall flat when it comes to receiving continuous waves or CW. The spark was replaced with the vacuum tube for trans-

mission and this produced a continuous wave. This RF carrier is certainly picked up by the crystal set, but with no modulation it is impossible to hear anything as audio coming from the headphones. The modern way would be to inject a local oscillator signal to beat with the incoming signal and produce an audible note. This is what we now call a direct conversion receiver.

If you think of a crystal set as a high frequency half-wave rectifier, you can see the output would be none other than pure direct current. A voltmeter in place of the headphones will confirm this. It stands to reason pure DC will not produce an audible signal. One very clever device chops the DC going to the headphones to produce a readable signal. This was done with a small, high-speed electric motor spinning a wheel. This little wheel had a very rough edge or had a large number of notches filed into it. A brush wire contacted the edge of the wheel and was put in series with the headphone output from the receiver. When a pure DC signal was picked up it would be chopped very fast and produce a tone.

*"Don't sell the crystal set short..."*

I tried this out on 160-meter CW signals and it really works. The only problem is all CW signals are chopped the same and QRM becomes a problem with more than one station at a time! Nevertheless, this "Tikker receiver" as it is called, helped some early amateurs remain on the air until they could afford a vacuum tube receiver. ■

*Joe, K8LKC, was licensed in 1957 and remains an active ham. He began his electronics career in the Air Force working as a Radar Technician. He obtained his First Class Radio Telephone license and after discharge, spent 20 years as a broadcast engineer. He left broadcasting to work as an instrument shop repair technician for Upjohn Pharmaceutical Co. and retired in 2003.*



*Joe, K8LKC, (wearing hat), Demonstrates his Tikker at a Local Ham Radio Club*



**K8LKC's Homebrew Tikker**



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convey no meaningful, inspirational, educational, helpful, interesting or yes, even humorous thought? Have we lifted our heads from the water long enough to see that, indeed, things have changed, but cata- tonically we just go back to drinking?



A Photo of G5BD Hangs on W9STB's Shack Wall

I speak for myself here, but a ham radio that has become so complacent as to not exchange anything substantive is not something upon which I wish to waste my time.

Am I missing something here? Would it be correct to assume that a licensing procedure, which has become less meaningful, causes the essence of the hobby to become less meaningful? There, I've said it and shame

on me for thinking unkind thoughts!

If we wish any shards of this hobby to continue we need to find a way to break out of the stale crust of meaningless and shallow QSOs (which lead to stale friendships and relationships). We need to start *communicating* again.

There may be no one. But is there is anyone out there who has found, like me, unsatisfying QSOs piling up and would crawl over glass to actually *communicate* again? Perhaps we should establish some sort of calling frequency for guys who have become bored with shallow and meaningless QSOs.

The organization, FISTS, has been successful establishing 3.558 MHz as a calling frequency. I cannot remember calling CQ on 3.558 in the last 10 years and a response coming from someone other than a FISTS member.

### Spirit of '34

Over time, I have watched my little corner of ham radio shrink. It has shrunk down to just a few frequencies where some other guys like myself tend to hang out. A frequency that new and old hams that subscribe to the traditional values and tenets

of ham radio can share would be a blessing for anyone tired of forgettable QSOs. Dare I say that too many newbies have little regard or respect for amateur radio heritage? We could use a spot where guys can hang out who remember the humbling experience of sitting before an FCC examiner in an FCC testing room, sending code and receiving code, letter perfect for one minute. How wonderful it would be to find someone who might help you with something technical. There needs to be a place where traditional hams can find refuge and talk to kindred souls who are discouraged with a hobby that exhibits growing dissatisfaction and emptiness and seems to exist only for the purpose of making newcomers feel welcome.

I happen to like the original specifications of the Communications Act of 1934. It was a well-designed document that contributed immensely to the substance and honor of amateur radio. Unfortunately it was disposed of in just the last few years.

Perhaps we should establish a calling frequency we could call "34" (in honor of 1934 document).

So gentlemen and ladies, here is my proposal: Let's establish a calling frequency for hams seeking others who embrace traditional values. My suggestion is "thirty-fours." (1.834\*, 3.534, 7.034, 10.134\*\*, 14.034, 21.034 and 28.034 MHz).

\*Yes, I know "1934" would be more appropriate but I fear it would break from the pattern of using an easy-to-remember offset from the lower band

edge, so 1.834 might cause less confusion.

\*\*Obviously the 30-meter band begins on a frequency that is other than a centesimal number, so a certain degree of imagination is used to accommodate my proposal for that band.

### The Joy of Wonder

Wouldn't it be nice to focus in on calling frequencies that might provide an opportunity to hook up with genuine, seasoned ham operators, many of whom have been around a while and actually have something to say?

Such a plan would enable you to reel-in some experienced people who also long to fraternize with

"THE Don  
Wallace?"



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others of experience; and, coincidentally, may be as tired of shallow QSOs as you are! It might even be therapeutic to discover other hams with whom you can beef about what has been going on and who share your frustrations.

A few nights ago I copied two CW stations working each other. Dutifully, one had reported being a ham for over 50 years and the other for 12 years. The 12-year ham reported that he was running a Super Duper Pro Mark III with DSP. The 50-year ham responded by stating that he was using a Collins 32V-1 once owned by Don Wallace. *One owned by Don Wallace, W6AM!!!!*? THE Don Wallace? I was fascinated. I wanted to hear every dit and every dah generated by a transmitter once operated by a world-renowned ham and electronics pioneer like W6AM. I felt transported back in time. The auditory nerves in my ears were being treated to a rare gift. The 50-year veteran then sent "BK TO U." The 12-year ham, clearly unimpressed and unmoved by what he had been told, prattled on about his DSP rig and then signed off. It is too bad there is no radiotelegraph prosign for "ho hum" because he could have used it to express his nonchalance. Does nothing "get through" to these people?

We who love CW are clearly in the minority. American Morse landline telegraphers have established Morse dial-ups and Internet connections to practice their craft and keep their "itch" scratched.

Thankfully, as yet anyway, we need not resort to such an alternative.

### Sepia-Toned Qualities

In my shack I have a copy of a picture that was published in *QST* magazine many years ago. I had a photo lab enlarge it and add sepia to the original black-and-white half-tone to create a warm, vintage look. The picture is of G5BD, a one-armed, one-legged British ham in the 1930s. In the picture, G5BD is sitting at his rig with his only hand on the telegraph key and his only foot pedaling a foot-powered generator. The picture evokes pathos and visitors to my shack are often curious as to why I would display such a pitiful picture.

On the back of the picture I have copied the original verse that accompanied G5BD's picture when it appeared in the magazine. The verse is this:

*Radio's rugged ranks of the thirties  
Enlisted chaps like G5BD  
Who never sat around wringing his hands  
About contributions and countries lists  
Or griped about slow factory service  
On his chrome-trimmed Superduper Mark IV  
OM G5BD, with only one arm  
Couldn't wring his hands anyway  
And had bigger problems to lick  
Other things he had a-plenty  
Were guts and that old ham spirit  
So G5BD worked DX...  
And had a ball.*

When Pete Seeger philosophically wrote, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," he answered indirectly that they have withered with time. I am not here to imply we can reverse the ravages of time on our hobby or its participants. But I sure would like to find someone who doesn't put me to sleep. ■

*Vern Weiss, W9STB, resides in the northwoods of Wisconsin near Minocqua. Licensed as a snout-nosed kid in the mid-1960s, he operates exclusively CW (mostly on 80-meters) and splits his operating time between short wave listening, repair/restoration of vintage equipment and chasing his beautiful redhead wife around the house. W9STB is a commercial pilot and currently a training captain for an airline.*

*Vern's previous articles have been published in CQ, 73, Worldradio and Ham Radio magazines.*

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### CONTINUED - SUMMER OLYMPICS FROM PAGE 1

Note the Moscow card originated from shortwave listener, UA4-Ø91-15Ø, Andre, using a "10 tube" receiver and dipole to copy my RST 549, QRP QSO with DL3HC on 10-meters. I like to think he was working toward entrée to his radio license. (See: *K9YA Telegraph*, March 2004, pg. 6)

Stateside, the United States' philatelic entry, a series of commemorative stamps, postcards and envelopes were drafted into the boycott when Postmaster General William F. Bolger ordered them removed from the nation's post offices.

*For another discussion about QSL cards "with a story to tell" see: K9YA Telegraph, September 2004, pg. 1. ■*



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# Cartoon Caption Contest

Dan Pond, NØTK, Takes Home All the Marbles!

**WE HAVE A WINNER!**

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

## Ham Parodies



### NIPPER HEARS HIS MASTER'S FIST

By Dan Pond, NØTK

## Honorable Mentions

"UP! UP! HE'S LISTENING UP!"

AI, VE3FZ

"WHAT WROUGHT DOG HATH?"

Scott, W8UFO

"I DIDN'T KNOW BOB BARKER WAS ON THE RADIO!"

Steve, KB9YPC

"FCC SAYS GROWTH OF AMATEUR LICENSES AMONG DOGS TOO LOW AND AWARDS THEM FULL PHONE PRIVILEGES ON ALL BANDS AND A CHEW-TOY."

Vern, W9STB

"THIS WILL JUST ABOUT FIT ON DAVID SUMNER'S HEAD."

Charlie, AG4YO

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