Spark-Gap Times

Published By

The Old Old Timers Club

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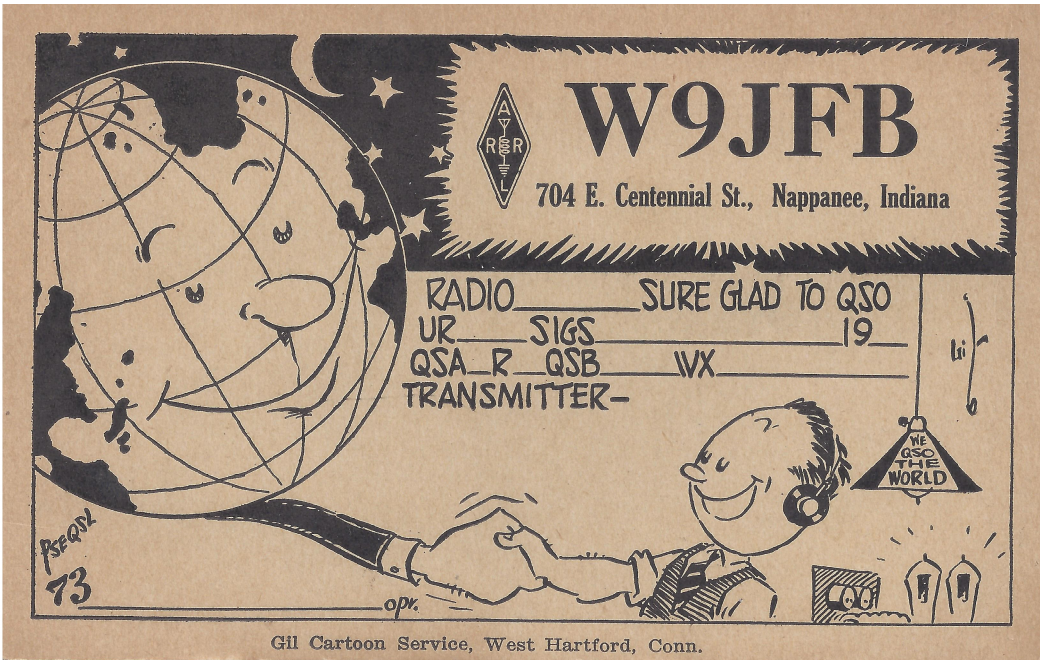
SEE PAGE 15



OLD OLD TIMERS CLUB

NEW domestic member $26. ($10 initiation + $16 yearly sustaining fee).
NEW International member, $28 ($20 initiation +$18 yearly sustaining fee).

Note that the Initiation fee is a one-time fee to new members. These fees include receiving the Spark-Gap Times via email or via the OOTC website.

Renewing USA members $16 yearly, $18 Canadian and foreign. These fees include receiving the Spark-Gap Times via email or via the OOTC website.

If you wish to receive the PRINT Spark Gap Times the additional fee is $6.00 yearly for USA members, including Life Members, and $7 yearly for Canadian and foreign members, including Life Members.

Life Membership dues: Under age 70-$250.00. Ages 70-89 $150.00. 90 and above—Free. Note that Life Membership dues do not include the print Spark-Gap Times. The $6 yearly fee must still be paid for the print copy.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT. You are eligible if you had two-way wireless communication 40 (or more) years ago (eligible on Jan 1 of the 40th year) OOTC recognizes your first two-way communication by Amateur, commercial, CB or military operation. Provide proof if possible. If never ham licensed but had eligible 2-way communication, you may also join.

OOTC wishes to have extended information about each member, activities and background. This information becomes a permanent and important part of your record as a member of OOTC, making it possible for us to publish you life work and experiences. Information is saved in OOTC archives. We would a photograph. Send a biography and/or story suitable for publication in the Spark-Gap times on separate sheets of paper, or via email attachment to our Secretary

The OOTC, which started in 1947. is solely interested in the history of radio, particularly Amateur Radio, and anyone has had experience with two way wireless communication 40 or more years ago is welcome to join and contribute their communication stories to the organization. We have had more than 4600 members over the past 70 years.

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SOCIETY OF WIRELESS PIONEERS

"SOWP"

As many of our members know, the Society of Wireless Pioneers was founded in 1968 and by the early 1970's had over a thousand members. In order to obtain membership, the applicant had to be a professional "brass pounder" at some period in their lives. This included commercial telegraph, or maritime telegraph, military or government CW operation, transportation services, particularly railroad. In short, if one ever received a paycheck for operating CW, they could be members.

The organization fell on hard times in the 1990's, and merged into the California Historical Radio Society, in Berkeley, in 2013. In the 1970's and early 80's, SWOP produced a wonderful historical publication named "The Sparks Journal". These are available for internet viewing by going to the home page of "The Caliifornia Historical Radio Society", find the "history" tab, and go down the list to "Society of Wireless Pioneers" which should take you to the journals.

I have taken several articles from "The Sparks Journal" in this issue. The below article is from the SWOP Newsletter of January, 1972

THE TAFT KEY

In 1909 President William Taft was given a special telegraph key to be used to signal the opening of the 1909 Yukon-Alaska-Pacific Exposition. The key was presented by George Carmack, the man who first discovered gold in the Yukon Territories. The Key was made of solid gold and was adorned with 22 solid gold nuggets that were found by Mr. Carmack. The key was mounted on a piece of Alaskan marble. This key, which known as the Taft Key, thus became the official telegraph key used by 7 different US Presidents to signal the opening of various events around the country.

Following the 1909 ceremoney, Taft gave the key to the White House Chief Telegrapher Edward Smithers, who continued to use the key until his death in 1939, when the key was given to Smithers' widow.

The Taft Key was last used by a President in 1962 when the key was loaned to President John Kennedy to signal the opening of the Seattle World's Fair. In 1999 the grandson of Smithers, Thomas Quinn Jr., donated the key back to the White House. I understand that the Taft key is currently on loan to the Smithsonian where it is on display. (However, your editor could not find it in the Smithsonian listings). It may now be part of the White Historical Association collection.

Tnx Telegraph Keys.com

SEE PICTURE NEXT PAGE--

TAFT KEY

BRASS POUNDING ON WHEELS

CW OPERATING ABOARD THE PRESIDENTIAL TRAIN 1942-48

Charles Clemens, Jr K6QD (sk)

From SWOP Newsletter. January 1972

"...back in the summer of 1942, I was working my shift at WAR in Washington, when an officer walked up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. He told me to go back and back my clothes for a trip to a warm climate. That was how I started as the first CW operator attached to the White House. I learned that the White House had a Signal Corps detachment that now had the task of providing communications on a continuous basis, between the Presidential train and the White House. I believe this was the first time that this had been attempted in the United States. The Washington end was to handled by the army communications center WAR, and the local end by the train assisted by relay stations when necessary along the way.

The Presidential communications car was "Old 1401", built in 1914 as a "combined" car. This meant she was half baggage storage, and half passenger. Inside, seats had been removed and two operating tables installed on each side. Each position had a new Super Pro receiver and a BC-342 receiver. The transmitter was a BC-447 which ran about 700 watts. Clearnace requirements for

railroad cars prohibited using a real antenna. Ours was a wire inside an insullating tube mounted on standoffs about six inches above the metal roof of the car. We later changed this to a copper tube of the same size with much better results.

My first trip was from Washington to New Orleans. I was supposed to contact a number of Army stations along the way, none more than a couple of hundred miles from our route. Results were poor, so we decided to contact WAR in Washington direct. Successful contacts were made from New Orleans and all the way home. Our frequencies were from 3 to 17 MHZ. We next accompanied the President on his swing around the country visiting miliary basses and aircaraft plants. Again, we were able to contact WAR in the eastern half of the country, and WVY (San Francisco) or WYD (Seattle) continuously. In fact, our volume of traffic was so high that it was necessary to pick up an additional message clerk in Seattle to handlle the paper work.

I worked 6 years on the Presidential Train, traveling with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman in the US, Canada and Mexico. We logged well over a hundred thousand miles. “Old 1401” now had a small operating room, a code center, a small bunk room with four bunks and two BC-339 teletype 3KW transmitters. We also had a BC-610, a 500 watt AM transmitter, two Western electric teletype converters, and one teletype printer. Oour power came from two 25kw diesel generators.

Today (1972) the old 1401 has been retired and the President's car—Ferdinand Megellan—is also gone. The small detachment of Signal Corps operators at the White House has grown to the White House Communications Agency. Their responsibilities have grown a great many times over. But I'll bet they aren"t having any more fun working assignments today than I did when old 1401 was my home on wheels.

I WALK THE WATERFRONT

Henry W. Dickow (SK)

From SWOP Newsletter, January 1972

In the early days of wireless, I walked the San Francisco waterfront from Pier 1 to Pier 50 almost daily, carrying with me a bottle of distilled water, a huge metal ring containing dozens of keys to open the doors of wireless cabins on ships, a hydrometer and a test meter.

The distilled water was for replentishing the liquid thirsty storage bateries used for the emergency transmitters on shipboard. The keys not only unlocked the doors of radio rooms, but also the holders which secured the crystals used in the detectors of the receiving sets. The hydrometer and meter were for battery testing.

Who am I? My job was as a Marconi Wireless Shore Inspector. What was I doing? Checking for patent infringement. In early wireless, it was unlawful to infringe on the several patents which covered the detector and various components. Now, Amateur ops were permitted to use any kind of detector or crystal without royalty payment to the inventor. But for commercial services the price of a commercial detector ranged from $40 to $75, a lot of money in 1913. To make certain that the patented detectors were not tampered with by the ship operators, the Marconi interests put them under lock and key. Replacements, when needed, could be made only by the shore inspector, who carried the keys to open the particular locks in question.

Ship operators were strictly forbidden, under threat of dismissal, to use any detector or crystal other than the one originally supplied by the Marconi Company. Nethertheless, all operators took with them to sea an assorted lot of super-sensitive crystals of their own, which they would substitute for the lesser-sensitive Marconi product as soon as a ship cleared the dock. In later years, these self-same operators took with them the newer and vastly-improved deForest vacuum tube as a replacement for the greatly inferior crystal detector.

My duties included a search of the wireless room for "bootleg apparatus". I was instructed to report my findings, if any, to my supervisor. A seasoned offender myself while at sea, I consistently overlooked any infractions of unenforceable rules. Each morning after reporting for duty I scanned the list of ship arrivals and departures from the pages of THE GUIDE, a daily newspaper devoted to maritime news. My boss then handed me a nickel which would pay my street car fare to the port. I was a familiar figure to the security guards at the piers; they recognized me by my jug of water and the brass ring with its many keys. One of the guards greeted me regularly with a "Hello, Saint Peter".

….My job as a Marconi Wireless Inspecor was exciting if only for the reason that I was able for the first time to meet many operatotrs I had known previously only throough contacts over the air. Somehow I managed nicely on my $60 monthly pay. A modest lunch could be had a few doors from the Marconi shop at 20 cents. Pleasant days to remember....

SILENT KEYS

 # 3628 K7FP Frank Piskur, 99, Seattle, WA. Licensed in 1938 as W7JCX and also held W9GLU. OOTC Director for District 7, Life Member OOTC.

#2379 W3IUW, Daniel Child, 100, Merced, CA. He was active in the "Old Goats" net for over 50 years. Licensed in 1940. OOTC Life Member.

#2550 DL1NP, Juergen Bennoehr "Ben", 95, ex-DL1GM and DL0EA, Ben was the founder of the OOTC 40 meter net in Europe. He was an OOTC Life Member.

#2772 W1TTY, Horace Schermerhorn, 92, East Sandwich, Mass. first licensed in 1951 as WN1TTY. Ensign in the Naval Reserve during WWII. Member of Cape Cod and Islands ARC, Barnstable (MA) ARC, and the Falmouth (MA) ARC.

#2827 DL1VU, Karl Hille, licensed in 1949, Germany WWII telegraph operator

32858 HB9JAL, Karl-Heinz Gratzer, 93, Switzerland. Licensed in 1947

#2897 DL6GX Alex Grams, 95, Germany, first radio operation in 1950

#3086 W4VS, William Owen, 83, Bristol, TN, first licensed in 1952 as WN4YAU. Navy Veteran, serving as a pilot completing 125 missions in the 1950's. He was a 33rd degree Mason of the Knight York Cross.

#3199 NU2P, Robert Garrett, 93, Chenango Bridge, NY, WWII Pacific area radio operator, licensed in 1966 as WB2VSS

#3229 W3FZV Philip Battey, 81, Casa Grande, AZ, one of the first Novices licensed in 1951 as WN4TFX/W4TFX.. Active CW contest operator and DX'er. His father was W1UE/W4IA who worked at ARRL in the mid 1940's.

#3395 DL7PH Herbert Koehna, Germany, licensed in 1955,

#3811 W2GOB, Saul Davidson, 99, Sun City, AZ. Army Signal Corps in WW11. First licensed in 1932 as W2GOB in New Jersey. Retired from Bell Labs.

#4205 W1PD, Edward Anders, 93, Oscola, Florida. First licensed in 1955 as WN1FGD. Retired from Massachusetts as a dam engineer, 33 degree Scottish Mason.

#4336 WA9BXB, Richard Breckinridge, 69, USAF Vietnam war, retired La Grange Park (IL) Deputy Chief of Police, first licensed in 1962 as WN9BXB.

NEW MEMBERS

#4679 Loren Barrett, KG7KA, ex-KA6OMZ, licensed as Novice in 1950's.

#4680 Paul Dickey, N6JOX, California, 1953 Air Force radio operator, Ham license 1976 as WB3CXV

#4681 James Sohn KF6NY,. Licensed in 1970 as WN6OWQ. Joined OOTC as life member.

#4682 Kenneth Spiegel KD2DZZ. Licensed in 1975

#4683 Phillip Simila, W3TOS, licensed in 1969 as WN3MLI. Ex-WA3MLL, WD9BHX. Active QRP CW, and an ARRL registered instructor teaching ham radio classes.

#4684 Mike Rhodes, W8DN, ex-WA8NBO licensed 1964

#4685 Keith Dutson, NM5G, licensed 1977 as WD5DXL, Also held VP8DXL

#4686 Paul Trotter, AA4ZZ, licensed 1975 as WN4CJA. Active VHF contester

#4687 John Carlisle, K8TUR licensed in 1960 as KN8TUR. First Phone commercial license

#4688 Richard Maylott W2YE, licensed in 1954 as K3HYS. Ex-W3EZK, W4LMJ. Active contester and Dxer. QSL manager of the Fourth call area with 2-letter prefixes. W2YE was his father's call.

#4689 John Simmons, NI0K, first licensed as WB4SIK in 1970.

#4680 “Bud Hippisley” W2RU. First licensed in 1954 as KN2KIR. Ex-K2KIR, K1WJD. 60 year Manager of the National Traffic System Eastern Area CW Net (evenings). Active contester.

#4681 John Lehman, K8PJ. Licensed as WD8JPA in 1977.

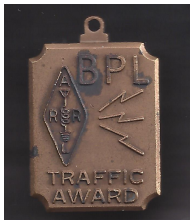
DAYTON HAMFEST--2017

Well, the hamfest is no longer in Dayton, but everyone seemed to have a good time despite the rain. The flea market seemed to be smaller, and this may have been because of the rain. OOTC Secretary WB4FDT set up a OOTC table inside (next to the QCWA table) one of the large tents, and there was some small amount of rain water soaking in on the floor, but nothing serious. OOTC got 9 new members and we got some good publicity, The following folks signed our membership list at the hamfest:

K9UTQ	WB4ZDU
WD8QWR	K1GGI
K4SC	AF1E
WB4ADF	KD2DZZ
W5QZ	K3RC
K3IN	W3AZD
WB3ANE	W2YE
W3TOS	W8KNO (OOTC Treasurer)
NM5G	N8HGL
WD9HBC	NI0K
K8TUR	WD8E (OOTC Acting President)
AA4ZZ	

ARRL AND A HISTORY OF TRAFFIC HANDLING PART 2

(continued from last issue)



BPL MEDALLION

Messages with destinations beyond that Region were to be collected by another volunteer (rep) whose assignment was to bring it to the Area net at 8:30 p.m. local time. Again, traffic staying within the Area was to be passed between the appropriate Regional Net representatives during the course of the Area Net session. Following the Area Net, “late” Region Net sessions would meet to distribute inbound traffic to representatives of the various Section Nets. Most, but not all, Section Nets then met — generally around 10 p.m. local time — to receive and distribute the incoming traffic to destination stations present in that net. While the NTP in “full-up” mode called for all Sections to hold a “late”

Section Net meeting at 10:00 p.m., Hart made it clear in the formal proposal to Handy that he understood population densities, levels of traffic interest, and other local factors might make that an unattainable ideal. The proposal also indicated flexibility in allowing multiple contiguous Sections to come together in a single Section Net and in determining the exact coverage areas of the Regional Nets, especially wherever a call area straddled two time zones.

As originally announced, the NTP had four Area Nets, corresponding to the four time zones covering the 48 states. (Hawai'i and Alaska were still a decade away from attaining statehood.) Also in the original plan, westbound traffic headed to another Area was relayed by a designated representative from the originating Area Net to the destination Area Net. Thus, by the end of the evening, there could be as many as three direct check-ins (from Eastern, Central, and Mountain Area Nets) for the Pacific Area Net. If propagation or time constraints made it impossible for the designated inter-area rep to meet the later Area Net, alternative routings — including the use of the trunk lines or out-of-net schedules — were encouraged, to avoid delaying the relaying and ultimate delivery of traffic.

Then, as now, eastbound traffic posed additional challenges; in an all-evening sequence of origination and inter-Area relay, delivery of eastbound traffic was guaranteed to require an extra calendar day. For eastbound traffic, the NTP called for out-of-net schedules agreed upon by the two stations involved in each specific schedule.

The original proposal included the Maritime Net (despite local time being one hour earlier than Eastern Time) in the Eastern Canada (Regional) Net and the U.S.'s Caribbean possessions in the Fourth Regional Net. It further suggested that representatives from the Alaska and Hawai'i Section Nets check directly in the Pacific Area Net (PAN), which Hart described as "the National Net covering all of the U.S.A. and possessions, and Canada."

Somewhere between creation of the September '49 QST text and a progress report in the November Traffic Topics column two months later, "NTP" became "NTS" — the National Traffic System.

Although in principle a representative from one Area Net could move traffic to another Area Net by directly checking into the destination Area Net, in practice this didn't work very well because of propagation and time zone differences — especially in the case of eastbound traffic or when trying to check into the Pacific Area Net from the east coast or vice versa. Consequently, inter-Area traffic within NTS became the purview of its Transcontinental Corps — a group of volunteers whose free time and station capabilities allowed them to operate across multiple time zones. Transcontinental Corps (TCC) assignments included a mix of out-of-net schedules and direct check-in to destination Area, Region, and Section nets, as appropriate.

TCC differed from the trunk lines in at least two important ways: TCC operators from anywhere in their Area could perform any TCC function for their Area — and they could participate only one day a week, if they so chose; and TCC operators were empowered to move traffic between the Areas through a structured set of schedules between counterpart operators in two different Areas or with direct QNI to another Area Net if propagation supported it. In short, TCC functions were analogous to the role played by Boeing 747s and other long-range wide-bodied jet transports today.

From the very beginning, NTS's greatest strength as compared to the trunk lines was its reliance on representatives, coupled with a logically structured system of tiered nets, that together eliminated the need for the "iron-man" traffic handler and made it unnecessary for traffic handlers to know where

specific relay stations were located. Only within the destination nets (usually Section Nets) did the net control station need to have a good grasp of the local geography and the locations of the net members. Only in the Section Nets (and later the Local Nets) was iron-man participation of any value. As a result, an individual amateur could perform a valuable contribution within NTS by serving as a representative at any of three different levels of the System with no greater time commitment than just one night a week, if s/he so desired. Ultimately, a far greater number of interested amateurs could — and did — participate meaningfully in NTS than in the trunk lines that existed in 1949.

NTS was introduced as a supplement to the trunk lines that had been reactivated after World War II, and the ARRL made it clear from the outset that the trunk lines and the various wide-area or local nets could continue independent of NTS. (In time, these all became known as "independent" nets.) Of course, many states or ARRL Sections already had nets that were essentially tailor-made for the role of Section Nets within the NTS structure; in virtually all instances, these nets quickly became part of the new System without changing a thing beyond identifying a representative to the Regional Net each evening. From the standpoint of a traffic handler in a typical Section, NTS wrought few, if any, changes to traffic handling within the Section; rather, NTS brought a systematic umbrella for freeing the average Section Net participant from having to worry about getting out-of-Section messages to their destinations, along with far more opportunity for growth "up the ladder" and participation in long-haul messaging than the trunk lines provided.

Despite its obvious advantages, the start-up of the fledgling National Traffic System in 1949 and subsequent years was not without considerable birthing pains. There was, of course, some resistance on the part of some long-established trunk line participants, including a W2 and a W5, each of whom attempted to convince his respective Director to shoot the System down. But the biggest problem was ionospheric propagation during the early 50s: NTS was announced and began operations during a sunspot minimum!

In post-war USA, radio amateur interest in message handling peaked in the long, cold, "what else is there to do?" winter months. But during the sunspot minimum of the early 50s those same months brought long skip to 80 meters when the MUF dropped below 3.5 MHz many evenings. Because of the relatively short distances involved when passing traffic at the Section and Regional levels — especially in the Eastern Area — most evening traffic nets met on 75 or 80 meters. The early net reports from two of the first managers of the Eastern Area Net are peppered with comments about "horrible band conditions" and stations that couldn't be copied many evenings. No such problem affected the 160-meter band, but the confusing and disheartening patchwork of clear frequencies and allowable powers for U.S. and Canadian hams as a result of LORAN requirements there, in conjunction with the paucity of available gear and the size of antenna structures needed, meant that few hams were able to receive on that band, and even fewer able to transmit!

Another start-up problem was a direct consequence of the relatively light population density of most states and provinces in the Mountain time zone in its early years (and, to some extent, even today). The planned Regional and Area Net structure for the Mountain time zone got off to a rocky (dare we say "Rocky"?) start, and was soon abandoned because it was largely unstaffable. Mountain state Section and Regional Nets were melded into the Pacific and Central structures, as geographically appropriate.

In its first few years, NTS operation was generally only on weeknights, with an occasional weekend session in support of a large fconvention, fair, or other event of widescale interest. However, in November of 1954, the Eastern Area began regular Saturday operations, and by 1958 ARRL's Communications Manager (still Ed Handy, W1BDI) reported to the Board of Directors that NTS was

officially operating 365 days a year.

In 1954 the ARRL Board of Directors ordered a BPL“Traffic Medallion” to recognize consistent BPL (Brass Pounders League) totals in public service message handling. Then, as now, any amateur could receive this medallion after receiving three BPL awards. BPL certificates are given when an amateur's reported traffic total (the sum of originated, received, relayed, and delivered messages) for one month is 500 or over, or for 100 originations alone. T he Traffic Medallion — usually called the “BPL Medallion” — has the call sign of the recipient engraved on the reverse.

[Part 3 next issue)

Of all slang words from tongue or pen, the strangest are those of the wireless men”

I don't know who wrote the above, but the old timers did have a languuage of their own, some of which still can be heard on the bands. How many of these can you match up correctly?

1) stick	____ lost knack or style of sending
2) pump	____ open core power transformer
3) boomer	____ semi-automatic key
4) coffin	____ headphones
5) rock	____ pencil
6) bug	____ rectifier
7) mill	____ straight key
8) slop jar	____ crystal detector
9) pig	____ tuning coil
10) glass arm	____ nomad telegrapher
11) spike	____ crystal
12) cans	____ power transformer
13) lump of coal	____ spark gap
14) rock crusher	____ vertical antenna
15) bird cage	____ typewriter

OOTC Cash flow statement 2016

Treasurer W8KNO has provided us with the 2016 cash flow statement. The statement, which would take up several pages, has been simplified.

Opening Balance January 1, 2016: $22,846.88

Income for 2016—Includes sustaining membership dues, life memberships, dues of new members, SGT postage, donations and bank interest: $4,566.60

Expenditures: SGT printing, postage, office supplies, data base maintainance, organizational maintainance, Dayton hamfest table, taxes: $5228.68

Ending balance December 31, 2016: $22,184.80. This represents a loss of $662.08 for 2016.

OOTC SSB NET ON 7231 KhZ

A reminder that the OOTC SSB net meets thursdays on 7231 KhZ on 1:30 pm eastern time. NCS is OOTC treasurer W8KNO

OOTC SSB NETS IN GERMANY

Many OOTC members don't realize the OOTC has a Chapter in Germany. The German group is now running two OOTC SSB nets in Germany. Both meet on tuesday, 0800 local time on 3.624 and at 1100 local time on 7.150 kHz. Net control of both nets is DJ2AB. There no longer is a 20 meter or 80 meter OOTC CW net there.

GERMAN VET REMEMBERS GENERAL PATTON

Albrecht Englert, DL1SX, OOTC #3377 was the subject of this article from the November 13, 1987 issue of "Frontline" the 3RD Infantdry Division newspaper, in Germany, and was the subject of a second article from "The Stars and Stripes" on August 14, 1994. Albrecht was licensed in 1993 and is active today on the OOTC nets in Germany. The following is taken from these two articles:

Albrecht was 18 years old when he joined the German 19th Army Staff Headquarters in 1942 as a Funker (morse code telegraph operator). He recalls times when messages from Patton's Third Army were intercepted and he was awakened at night to pass the messages up to higher headquarters. Sleep became a luxury after the allied invasion of France and many tdimes three to four hours a day was the norm. "Sometimes, hot coffee was poured on soldiers ears to keep them awake" he said.

Albrecht is the author of a unique history of the German 19 Army that scholars use today. He said the germans had plenty of warning from agents that an invasion was coming, Before the invasion, German radio operators morsed reams of pages to keep the airwaves filled with messages to keep the Allies busy decoding and translating the fake messages. The key was to include a short notice "only for Practice" so their fellow Germans knew to ignore these messages.

When the invasion started he was stationed in Avignon and could hear the bombardment. On August 19 or 20, his unit was ordered to get out of southern France and retreat to the north. At the war's end, Albrecht was with the 11th Panzer tank division and the 19th Army in Czechoslavakia. With no fuel to get back to Germany. Eventually, they would have been captured by the Soviets. However, the Panzer division and the 19th Army, some 16,000 men, were rescued, yes rescued, by American General George Patton. Patton was sure the United States would be fighting Russia before long and in that fight the US could use a Germany Division. Patton donated 133,000 liters of fuel to the the Germans, so they could return to Bavaria. Albrecht., never a prisoner of war, simply released himself from the service and went home.

On General Patton's 100th birthday anniversary, the 11th Panzer division laid a wreath at his grave in Luxemburg in Gratitude for Patton's chivalrous act. The wreath read "out of Enemies became fridnds". Albrecht now lives in a 300 year-old house built by his ancestors, almost on the banks of the Main river. He still gets involved in all the events he can to promote understanding between Germany of the United States.

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HOW I MANAGED TO FAIL A FEW HUNDRED HAMS TAKING THEIR CW EXAM OR WAS THAT SO BAD ?

By WB4FDT, OOTC Editor

Its been exactly 40 years since I left the FCC Amateur and Citizens Division. During those years while I worked for the Commission, I was first a license examiner and later a law Clerk. This story is true, at least as I remember it.

In the amateur and Citizens Division there were several electronic engineers (EE). Some were hams and some weren't. Most engineers didn't know the code. One day in 1976, one of the EE's came to me as said “We are in the process of changing the Ham CW 13 wpm exam, from a 5 minute copy, where the applicant has to write down one minute correctly, to that of a 10 question examination”. I believe it was a fill in the blank type. The applicant would now listen to five minutes of a common amateur QSO, where the ham would give his Call, name, QTH, RST, power etc. At the end of the 5 minutes, the applicant could look at his copy and fill in the 10 blank answers. I believe 70% , or getting 7 of the ten questions right, was the passing rate.

There was a problem however. The Commission couldn't use just any callsign. It might already be in use, or on reserve, or someone might receive the call while it was being used on the exam. So our Engineer figured he would avoid problems if he used the call signs of the FCC staff. So he came to me and asked if he could use my call on a CW exam. He also asked if I would make up a 5-minute QSO for the exam, using my call. So, I wrote a QSO something similar to this:

“R R R de WB4FDT. Thanks for the call. Your signals 569. Name here is Pip, and the QTH is Arlington, Va. Antenna is a vertical with 8 radials. The weather is cool but sunny. The age here is 22. and I have been licensed for 10 years. So how copy?”

The Engineer liked it and said he would use it. I heard nothing more for 5 months. Then one day, our Engineer showed up. “Phil”, he said, “I'm sorry but I've had to pull your 13 wpm CW examination. After we used it for several months, we found that while nearly all of the CW exams had a failure rate of about 35%, yours had a failure rate of over 55%!

So I took a look at the exam I had written and then it dawned on me. Without meaning to, I had a written a very difficult CW exam, and I was surprised that my collegues hadn't noticed it.

First of all my call WB4FDT is very difficult to a newcomer, its a long call, and the applicant might interpret the “B” as a “6” or the “DT” as an “X”. The “569”was difficult, the “6” is always a problem. Most importantly, I used my nickname, “Pip” instead of Phil, and that also wiped out a lot of the applicants. “Arlington” QTH was long, and “Va” could be confused with an “SK”.

Well, I didn't think much more about it and never asked how often my CW test was used. I left the Commission a few months afterwards to start my own business. However, sometime later I was operating in a phone contest, using my call, and guess what.? Someone popped up and said “I know you! I'll never forget that call! It was used in the CW exams at the ARRL Philadelphia Convention! It was the hardest CW exam the FCC ever used!

40 years later, I still get an occasional comment about my call being on the FCC exam....and now that I'm older and taught college for 12 years, I think now that just maybe a tough CW exam wasn't such a bad thing.....

ANSWERS TO TELEGRAPHY SLANG

Stick---pencil pump—straight key boomer—nomad or traveling telegrapher
coffin—open core power transformer (often housed in a wooden box)
rock—crystal bug—semiautomatic key mill—typewriter slop jar—rectifier
pig—power transformer glass arm—operator loses knack of sending
spike—vertical antenna cans—headphones lump of coal—crystal detector
rock crusher—spark gap bird cage—tuning coil

PHILIP GILDERSLEEVE ”GIL” W1CJD, HAM CARTOONIST

It would be nearly impossible to find a ham who hasn't seen one of “Gil's” ham cartoons. From the early 1930's to the 1970's, a span of 40 years, Gil created more than 1500 cartoons, QST covers, and designed hundreds of QSL cards. Gil also created the character “Jeeves” a british butler and friendly companion, whose master was never seen in the cartoon. “Jeeves” appeared in the “Hows DX” column in QST

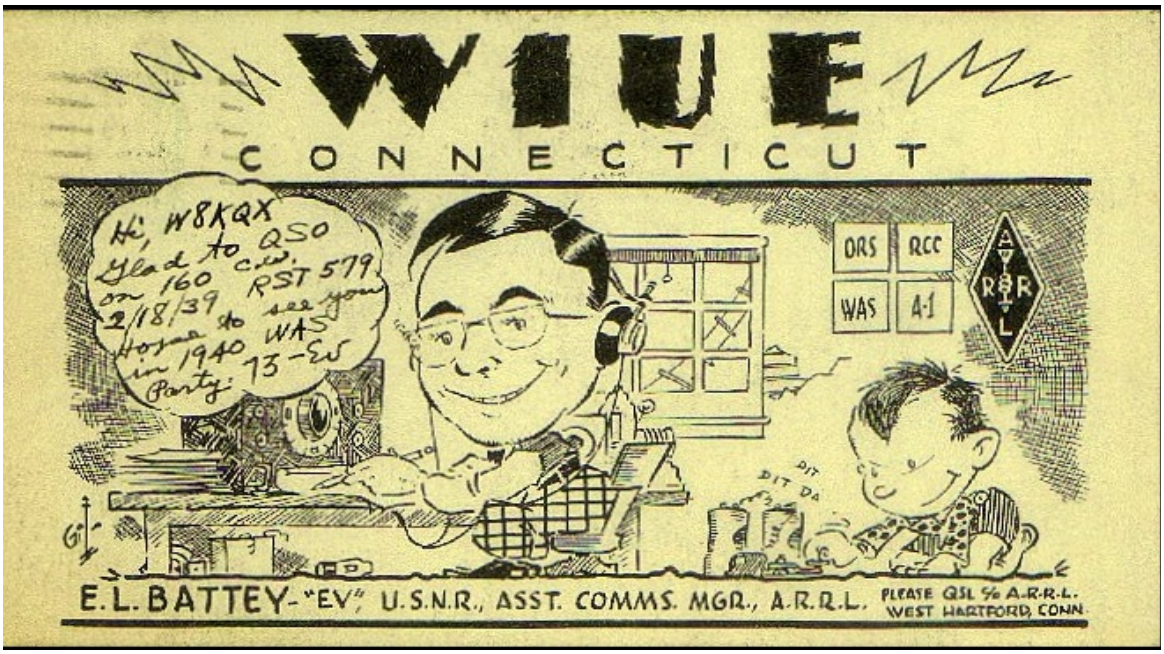
Gil had worked as a radio operator on merchant ships. He had won several awards for high speed CW reception and could transmit 60 wpm in Morse Code. In 1940 he began working for the local paper in Portland, CT, as a county and later city editor. He also drew cartoons for the paper and some trade publications. He also served in the Volunteer fire company wnd was captain of Fire Co 2 for nine years, and was on the Board of Education for 8 years. Gil passed away at the early age of 58.

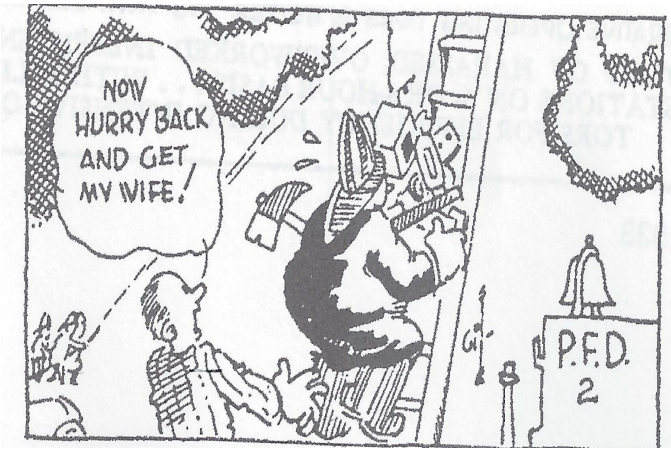
In 1986, the ARRL printed “The Gil Cartoon Book” of Gil's cartoons and in 2007, printed a new book titled “Gil, A Collection of Classic Cartoons from QST”. This book is still available from the ARRL for $15.95 plus shipping.

While researching this article I discovered that Gil had drawn a QSL card for Ev Battey, W1UE/W4IA when W1UE was working at ARRL HQ. The QSL showed Ev and his small son Phil. W1UE/W4IA was OTC member #788. His son Phil, W3FZV, OOTC #3329 is in among our Silent Keys in this issue of the SGT.

One of Gil's QSL creations is on our front cover. A second QSL on the next page is a W8DED Print on the bottom of the card dated 1951. This QSL certainly looks like a Gil Cartoon, with the round oversized face of the character, with a vest and plaid pants, which Gil used frequently in his cartoons. I also note the QSL is from Connecticutt The third Cartoon is my favorite Gil cartoon.

W1ODC
HELLO PID
UR 28 SIGS WERE
EASILY QSA 1 R 9 WITH
GOOD MOD. WHEN QSO
JANUARY 23RD 1951
I WAS USING LYSCO MODEL 600
35 WATTS INPUT
PSE QSL
TOM DEKAY EX: W5OCI
35 BUTLER STREET
COS COB, CONN.
W8DED PRINT


W1UE
CONNECTICUT
Hi, W8KQX
Glad to QSO
on 160 CW.
2/18/39 RST 579
Hope to see you
in 1940 WAS
Party: 73-ES
ORS
RCC
WAS
4-1
DIT DIT DA
E.L. BATTEY- "EV", U.S.N.R., ASST. COMMS. MGR., A.R.R.L.
PLEASE QSL % A.R.R.L.
WEST HARTFORD, CONN.


NOW HURRY BACK AND GET MY WIFE!
P.F.D. 2