

Another kind of telegraphy

I should have know then that somehow I was, well, different.

Growing up in a city the size of Chicago, the opportunity to visit fire stations were many. As classroom trips or just a way to kill time while your parents shopped or visited nearby, each visit made you more the expert, more aware, more appreciative of the sights and sounds of your heroes at work.

Yet, while the other kids climbed on the hook-and-ladder, or slid five feet down the poles after being boosted up by a congenial fireman, I just stood there. I stood and waited...for the telegraph. It was magic. I guess part of the fascination was the ability of the burly firefighters to decipher a *foreign* language...and non-verbal at that!

This article is dedicated to all my ham friends. To those who lived in large cities and shared similar experiences, and to those to whom sounding the alarm was banging on a triangle on the back porch or ringing the church bell. Enjoy.

"If you pick up the telephone receiver in this town you may, or may not, get a dial tone. If you get on a subway you may, or may not, get stuck in a tunnel for an hour. The wall socket in your apartment may, or may not, contain electricity. The city's air may, or may not, be killing you. The only real sure thing in this town is that the firemen come when you pull down the handle on that red box." (From the book *Report From Engine Company 82* by Dennis Smith, NYFD.)

The first Fire Alarm Telegraph was installed in Boston, Massachusetts in 1852. The first alarm recorded was on April 26 of that year. At one time, almost every city with a fire department used these systems. Recently, due to the spread of 911 and especially E911, these systems are disappearing.

What's so interesting about Fire Alarm



Telegraph systems? Well, a couple of things. First, box alarms are probably the only 19th century technology that is still in everyday use. It's in use because, simply, it works. No VLSI chips, no routers, no ISO 7 layer model. Just a clockwork wheel that breaks a circuit. Here's what happens when you pull the box to report a fire.

All the boxes in a neighborhood or even a town are on the same circuit. When you pull the hook, the switch trips a clockwork motor. The motor turns a notched wheel. The notches break the circuit. The notches on the wheel are arranged to send a pattern of signals to the Fire Alarm Office.

For instance, Box 5111's code wheel has 5 notches, a space, another notch, space, notch, space, notch. The spring eventually unwinds and to this day, one can hear fire companies being ordered to "wind box 1511" ... Each time the circuit is broken, a relay that had been held open by the box circuit closes causing a bell to ring and a paper hole punch register to start.

Once the box is received at the fire alarm office, it is retransmitted over "house circuits" to the fire houses where

Note: See the president's column for important meeting information.

Feedline

Feedline is a member-supported publication of the Cary Amateur Radio Club and is published monthly. Deadline for submissions is the second Thursday of the month.

Editor: Tom Klimala, KM4LB
1545 Seabrook Avenue
Cary, North Carolina 27511

Cary Amateur Radio Club

The Cary Amateur Radio Club meets on the fourth Thursday of the month, **7:30 p.m.** in the lower level of the Christian Life Center of White Plains United Methodist Church. The June, November, and December meetings are held off-site. Call for location of those meetings.

Next Meeting: September 25
!!! 7:00 pm !!!
1997 Officers

N9CGD	Tom Doligalski	481-1236
	President	
N4AJF	Lee Swanson	467-8128
	Vice-president	
K4IWW	Will Harper	467-0224
	Treasurer	
N4UE	Herb Lacey	467-9608
	Secretary	

HerbLacey - N4UE

Meeting Report

July 17, 1997

Meeting called to order at 7:31 p.m., by President Tom, N9CGD. Introductions.

Treasurer's Report: Will, K4IWW,
Savings: \$174.93
Checking: \$848.61
C-O-H: \$518.00
Total: \$1,541.54

Pres., Tom, N9CGD, to appoint a Nominating Committee for the October election.

CARC Christmas Dinner is scheduled for Thursday, December 4. Details to come.

Tom, KM4LB, SWAPFEST Czar, used the bulk of the business meeting to handle last minute details for the 'fest.

Will, K4IWW, Field Day Czar, reviewed the final numbers from the recent Field Day. We have a fair chance of winning our class. Still, we could have done better. The weather was great in this part of the country!!!

n4ue

TomDoligalski - N9CGD

Our September meeting will be held on Thursday, September 25, 1997, at the White Plains Methodist Church. **Please note that the meeting time has been moved up to 7:00 PM:** we will be starting the business portion of the meeting one half hour early to allow for additional time for the meeting program, which will be presented by personnel of the **National Weather Service and be about Skywarn training.** We hope to get a big crowd at this meeting, so please mention it to all your friends!

JanAvinger N4UTT

Tom, KM4LB, reports receiving a QSL card from one of his CW contacts, Jim, W5AB. The card was for a QSO in 1988! Jim apologized for the delay (movers had mis-packed his QSL's) and ended with the postscript "I am 91 now."

W4FNB is recovering well from his surgery. He sends his thanks to the club for the plant we sent to cheer him up.

Tom, N9CGD has upgraded to Advanced Class in his quest for /AE. Congrats OM! Alright. Who's next?

And, not jaded by his newly-acquired status, Tom has supplied the following report on CARC member's behavior at the Shelby Hamfest.

Quite a number of Cary hams attended the Shelby Hamfest August 30-31. This reporter believes that this was the biggest Shelby in recent memory: there were so many tailgaters that some had to set up on the racetrack again! Most of the Cary group tended to "hub" around the tailgate operation of N4ELM and KB4HG, who had a nice large tent set up in the infield.

N9CGD, K4IWW, and AB4S all bought new Yaesu VX-1R handi talkies. These are about the smallest HTs I have ever seen (although the Alinco dealer had a demo version of their forthcoming "credit card size" 2M HT that must be seen to be believed!).

At noon on Saturday, Cary club traffic handlers AB4W, K4IWW, W2CS, N2YL, and N9CGD all attended the NC traffic handlers get-together at the Western Sizzler.

Bob, K4HA traded his Alinco DX-70 HF rig for a used Kenwood TS-830 and cash: Bob is looking for a narrow CW filter for the radio now. Lee, N4AJF, bought a used Yaesu VHF/UHF all-mode radio.

Saturday evening the group all went to our favorite Shelby restaurant, Satter-

About our Club

Worth Repeating

fields, where W2RML bought several orders of fried pickles (a Cary club ritual!).

In summary, a great time was had by all. Don't miss it next year!

N9CGD

Thanks for the news, Tom!

KM4LB harmonic report: Amy is studying in Sevilla, Spain after stops in Madrid and Toledo. She is a junior at UNC.

While Amy is in Spain, her brother is in pain. Marine recruit, Lee, suffered a stress fracture in his foot during boot camp. He was on crutches for two weeks and off them for three before being reassigned to a new platoon to finish his last 19 days of training.

See ya!

Not just for hams...



The Skywarn training being given at our September 25 meeting is open to anyone interested in being a severe weather spotter. Your spouses, harmonics, co-workers are all invited.

Tranceiver Advertising Terminology

Ever been impressed with all those features touted in the ads for radio equipment, but been unsure as to what exactly was meant by some of the claims?

Here's a primer that will help you figure out what is really being said.

ALL NEW - The plugs, jacks and connectors aren't compatible with anything, else on the market.

ADVANCED DESIGN -- Upper management doesn't understand it.

BREAKTHROUGH -- We ignored everything we learned in developing the previous designs.

NEW -- It comes in different colors from the previous version.

DESIGN SIMPLICITY -- It was developed on a shoe-string budget.

EXCLUSIVE -- We're the only ones who have the documentation

FIELD TESTED -- Manufacturing doesn't have a test system.

FOOLPROOF OPERATION -- We eliminated almost all of the controls.

ENERGY EFFICIENT -- Almost immeasurable power output - you'll need a linear to work any one but your next door neighbor.

HIGH ACCURACY -- But the display only shows 3 significant digits to keep the cost down.

FUTURISTIC DESIGN -- The mold for the plastic case got screwed up - that's why it looks so weird.

IT'S HERE AT LAST -- We've released a 26-week project in 48 weeks.

MAINTENANCE FREE -- It's impossible to fix.

MEETS QUALITY STANDARDS --

The on-off switch almost never breaks. We haven't checked the rest of it yet.

PERFORMANCE PROVEN -- The breadboard worked really neat.

REVOLUTIONARY -- The knobs go round and round.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED - We'll send you a replacement unit if you don't like it.

STOCK ITEM -- We shipped it once before, and we can do it again, probably.

UNMATCHED -- It's almost as good as the competition.

UNPRECEDENTED PERFORMANCE -- Nothing ever had as many out-of-band harmonics as this unit.

YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT -- We Finally got one to work.

CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY -- Designed around a bunch of free samples from a salesman. He claims the production units will work just like the samples.

ISO-9000 CERTIFIED -- We have *NO* idea what this means, but our competitors claim they meet it, so we probably do too.

MIL-SPEC -- From the folks who brought you \$600 toilet seats.

MODERN SUPPLIERS -- The IC in the RF output stage is sole source from a supplier in Bangladesh.

Reprinted with permission of ham Radio Online Magazine, available for free on the Internet at <http://www.hamradio-online.com>.

Things you don't want to hear during surgery. via the ARNS

With the emphasis on outpatient surgery, more is being done with local anesthetic. Here are some things you wouldn't want to hear while going under the knife.

Better save that for the autopsy.

Accept this sacrifice o lord of darkness.

BO BO! Come back with that. Bad Dog!

Wait a minute, if this is his spleen, what's that?

Hand me that....uh...thingie.

OOPS! Anyone ever survive 500mg of this stuff?

You know, there's good money in kidneys. Hey this guy's got two of 'em.

That's cool. Now can you make his leg twitch?

Damn! Page 47 of the manual is missing.

She's gonna blow. Everyone take cover.

What do you mean you want a divorce?

Don't bother. I think it's sharp enough.

Did this patient sign the organ donor card?

This patient already has had some kids, am I correct?

Sterile-Shmeril. The floor was mopped.

And now, we remove the subject's brain and place it in the body of the ape.

Someone call the janitor. We're gonna need a mop.

TomKlimala KM4LB

Swapfest Info

Here's your Czar's report on the 1997 Midsummer Swapfest.

We sold more tickets than either of the previous two years.

We made more money than last year.


No one was injured.

it is received on a recording device like the one in the picture. The firefighter "on the watch" copies the number, then pulls the running card corresponding to the box.

In Chicago, I remember the ticker enclosed in what can be described as an upside-down aquarium. The tape would stream out of slot into a wastebasket. On a really fortunate visit there would be a tangle of tape to take home.

On almost every visit the teletype would clatter indecipherable (to me!) messages of disasters in progress. The reason for this is that all telegraphs in one area of the city copied all alarms being sent. In the earliest days of the telegraph, firemen would have to copy each transmission to make sure they didn't miss an alarm for their station. A later improvement was a series of contacts and wipers that would decipher the particular station's code and sound an alarm bell.



8646	5 + 1		<u>MANHATTAN BRIDGE</u>						 BROOKLYN				
	CL3M		AT BROOKLYN TOWER - LOWER LEVEL * Dispatcher shall notify Chief of Unique response.										
ENGINES			LADDERS		SPECIAL UNITS	CHIEFS	Covering / Relocating Units Engines		Ladders	Covering Chiefs			
207	206	224	9	7	*	110	*	M6	B31		B2		
15	17					6	18	R2	B1 D11	204-207 21-17	26-9 211-224	8-18	D10
6	55	10	28			1				14-6	39-55	9-1	
33	24	5	18			15				271-33 54-18	22-5 240-24	21-6	
3	210	16	226			11				310-210 228-226	214-16 232-3	2-11	
5	ZONES		CIRCUIT 177		PRECINCT	ADMIN. CO.	NEAR BOXES	ENTRY BOX 340	ORDER	DATE 7/15/77			

The running card for FDNY Brooklyn Box 8646, c.1977 is courtesy of Ed Schneider, FDNY, retired. Note that each line corresponds to an "alarm". This is where the terms "first alarm", "second alarm", etc come from. Each box has a different amount of resources assigned to it depending on the what is located nearby.

Rocky Mount North Carolina is the nearest city with an operating box alarm system. Most municipal fire alarm telegraph equipment was and still is manufactured by the Gamewell Fire Alarm Telegraph Company. The Gamewell Company still exists and still provides equipment.

(This article was compiled from manufacturer and usenet webpages.)

TomDoligalski - N9CGD

Ham Radio Internet

During the last few weeks I've tried to keep a list of interesting internet URLs that hams might find interesting. A really nice site that features wiring diagrams from most radios to most TNCs is <http://prairie.lakes.com/~medcalf/ztx/wire> which sure came in handy when my PK900 hiccuped and I had to press my Paccom HandyPacket into service! Many hams in the local area enjoy transmitter hunting. A really nice transmitter hunting web page can be found at <http://www.swcp.com/~ab5p/foxbunt.html> and features a lot of comprehensive links (as well as more spe-

cific information about transmitter hunting in Albuquerque, NM, where the page is located).

I travel a lot for business and <http://www.artscipub.com/repmain.html> is an online repeater listing by state that can come in very handy! A similar site at http://www.perconcorp.com/db_srch.htm allows you to search for local police and fire frequencies, and sure came in handy during our summer trip to the beach! A local web site with lots to offer is <http://www.acs.ncsu.edu/HamRadio/> which, among other things, features the Bill

Pasternak (WA6ITF) Amateur Radio Newline updated every week. Of course, the ARRL also has a similar newsletter which can be read at <http://www.arrl.org/arrlletter/> and is also updated weekly.

Speaking of local sites, <http://www.cs.unc.edu/~nick/hamfaq.htm> is the home of the Research Triangle Amateur Info page. Really an online Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list, the site has information about local club activities, repeater lists, packet information, local ham-related businesses, nets, and ham classes and exam opportunities. Another local site of interest is <http://users.aol.com/nchamfest/index.html> which features a listing of North Carolina hamfest information.