

CW vs. Text Messaging

From the ARRL Newsletter

It may have been Friday the Thirteenth, but it was a lucky day for Morse code--and particularly for veteran CW contest ops Chip Margelli, K7JA, and Ken Miller, K6CTW. During a May 13 appearance on NBC's The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, the pair was able to pass a message using good old fashioned Morse code more rapidly than a pair of teenaged text messengers equipped with modern cell phones. The victory, which replicated a similar challenge that took place recently in Australia, has provided immense encouragement to Amateur Radio's community of CW operators, who been ballyhooed the achievement all over the Internet. The text messaging team consisted of world text-messaging champ Ben Cook of Utah and his friend Jason. Miller said afterward in a reflector posting that the CW team won fairly handily.

"Ben was just getting ready to start entering the last two words when I was done," he said on the Elecraft reflector in response to various questions he's received following the TV appearance. "I already knew that 28-30 WPM would easily keep us in front of even the current world [text messaging] record holder, and also it is the fastest speed that I can make nice readable copy on paper with a 'stick' [pencil]." Miller said it was decided he'd be on the receiving end because he wasn't distracted by the noise in the studio.

Margelli recalls that he was sending at 29 WPM. "I believe the goods were suitably delivered," he told ARRL. "CW and old guys rule!"

What the viewing public didn't know was that Margelli and Miller had, in Miller's words, "smoked 'em every time" during three pre-program rehearsals. Even so, during the real thing, when Miller raised his hand to signal he'd copied the CW message successfully, Jason's jaw dropped. None of the players had any idea of the text they'd be sending, Miller noted. The message? "I just saved a bunch of money on my car insurance."

As with many Tonight Show bits, this one involved a member of the audience, a young woman named Jennifer who predicted--incorrectly as it turned out--that text messaging definitely would top 170-year-old Morse code. She walked away with a gift of restaurant tickets anyway.

Margelli says the CW team used Yaesu FT-817 transceivers--one of his own and another owned by Dan Dankert, N6PEQ. Backup units--not needed--were provided by HRO; Margelli's wife Janet, KL7MF, manages an HRO store. They ended up using 432.200 MHz as an operating frequency in order to avoid RFI from the plethora of TV equipment in the studio and to avoid interfering with NBC's gear. They ran the little transceivers at their lowest power level and with the antennas disconnected--although they were mounted on the back of each unit--no problem given the close proximity involved. Margelli sent with a Bencher paddle.

To add a little atmosphere to the affair, NBC producers attired Margelli and Miller to look like 19th-century-era Western Union or railroad Morse telegraphers. The costumes came complete with green visors, white shirts, sleeve garters, vests and bow ties. The teenaged SMSers wore T-shirts and jeans.

Cook told Leno that he'd managed to send a 160-letter message to his friend using his cell phone's short message system (SMS)--the formal term for text messaging--in 57 seconds.

A member of the Morse Telegraph Club and a QRP enthusiast, Miller said he'd been using CW for 38 years. Margelli told Leno he'd been using Morse "for 43 years in ham radio," a phrase Leno echoed. That was the only plug Amateur Radio got during the appearance on the show's "Dinner for 4" segment. Miller says that during rehearsal, the pair had come up with a few lines to promote ham radio and telegraphy, but they were cut during the final dress rehearsal in the interest of making the segment fit its allotted time slot.

During the Australian competition in April, a Morse team consisting of 93-year-old former post office telegrapher Gordon Hill--the sender--and 82-year-old Jack Gibson--the receiver--topped 13-year-old SMSer Brittany Devlin. In that event, Hill spelled out the message in full, while Devlin used text-messaging shorthand. In that competition, held at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Hill took 90 seconds to send the message, 18 seconds faster than Devlin's message took to reach her friend's cell phone.

Miller encouraged all who enjoyed the CW-vs-text messaging segment on NBC to contact The Tonight Show to let the producers know about it--with an eye toward having the network schedule a more elaborate segment "next time." "Thanks for the kind comments from all," Miller concluded, advising "let's keep on having fun!--It is a hobby after all."

Commented Margelli to ARRL: "I completely agree with my fantastic teammate, Ken Miller. It was a lot of fun, just like ham radio, and the show also delivered an important, if subtle, message about the benefits of the 'basic' communication infrastructure that Amateur Radio provides."

Dayton Hamvention 2005 and Others

The Hamvention is now history. And it is a good history! This year was the first in 17 years that there was no rain during the 3 days of Hamvention. Yes, there were a few drops on Sunday, but not enough to concern anyone. Temperatures were comfortable with Friday overcast and Saturday and Sunday mostly sunny. The crowd was about the same as last year, but the number of empty spaces in the flea market was much higher. It appeared that only 75% to 80% of the spaces were occupied. One obvious missing vendor was Mendelsohn's Electronics. It was reported that the hamfest committee offered them the same space at a much higher rate this year so the store did not return. Benches were placed in many of the empty spots for the tired bargain hunters to rest along the way. These hunters were armed well with cash and were not afraid to spend it! Sales

were very good according to many vendors. Some said this was their second highest sales total for Dayton. Indoors, there were a few empty tables and booths. For the most part, the indoor areas were about the same as in the past. Seminars were very active, with many outstanding speakers. The FCC did not address the CW issue as we had hoped. It appears that it is still a few months away from a decision. The ARRL had an excellent area inside. Many demonstrations, talks, and exhibits were held within the ARRL area. Wi-Fi was also available. It was also available in the flea market, but slower, and not sponsored by the ARRL. Chip Margelli, the CW vs Text champion and Sales Manager for Yaesu, appeared in the Yaesu booth dressed in his CW winning garb from the Tonight Show. TCARC was well represented at the Hamvention, both in the flea market and attendees. As usual, no one from our club won anything in the final prize drawing. If you missed Hamvention, you missed another good one.

The **Springfield IL** hamfest was June 4. Attendance appeared to be down about 30% from last year, but those attending were in a buying mood. The staff did their usual outstanding job of managing the event. Springfield is talking about a major date change for next year. The **SRRC Hamfest** at Princeton was the 4th and 5th. The crowd was larger Saturday, with a bit larger flea market and the inside had more vendors on Sunday. Sales were better Saturday. Rain dampened Saturday and almost on Sunday. Overall, it was a good hamfest.

Huntsville Hamfest

August 20-21 is this year's Huntsville Hamfest. With the Space Museum nearby and other attractions like Lookout Mountain only a couple hours away, it would be an excellent family trip. The hamfest is indoors, air conditioned, with underground parking below. The Holiday Inn across the street has a \$69 hamfest special right now. Call 256-533-1400 for reservations. The hamfest web page is www.hamfest.org.