

The Texan

Newsletter of the Texas NTS CW Net (TEX)

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Hello TEX'ans! It has been one entire year since I took over the reins of TEX as of the first of this month. Looking back, I think we have come a long way in building up net participation and a new sense of camaraderie. Thank you all for your support and encouragement.

As we go into the second year, it is customary to look ahead and think of new ways to improve the net's operation. I am hoping that y'all will have some ideas along those lines. Please pass them along via E-Mail or radiogram. You are the lifeblood of TEX and should have a voice in how it operates.

As you know, I was gone for half the month of July. I again want to thank Floyd, N5EL, for his excellent support as assistant net manager in keeping things running smoothly and collecting / passing along all the NCS reports. I was up to date with all the happenings during that time, thanks to Floyd, who did an amazing job including QNI each and every session during the month as well as handling the majority of the DFW traffic in my absence. I also want to thank the rest of you for jumping in to pick up my NCS and liaison slots while I was gone as well as supporting the net with your QNI. Special thanks to Rodney, W5DY, Jack, W5TFB, and Doug, KA5KLU, for their help.

Notes for August:

I will again be traveling for a week this month to take my wife to a special event in Birmingham, Alabama. We will be gone from approximately the 15th to the 22nd or so (driving, so times approximate). Again, as you have been, please give Floyd a hand in keeping TEX running smoothly during that time. It is times like this that I wish I'd put a mobile setup in the car, but since we don't travel (by car) all that much I never expended the effort (or expense) to do so. I'll have E-Mail access (assuming the hotels support it) and will take my VHF/UHF radio, but no HF (sigh).

NTS Topics:

The switch back to 3643 for the 7 PM net appears to be working satisfactorily. While signals are sometimes down a bit, they are still copyable and we are not plagued with the skip zone that still exists on 40 at that time.

Floyd sent in an interesting excerpt from the 1938 ARRL handbook concerning what were called “Rubber stamp messages” at that time. Déjà vu. The current “book” messages seem to fit that category, but notice how our attitudes have changed over the intervening years. Without the current “book” traffic, we’d be all doing the QNI / QNX dance with very little to do in between.

Note also that 1938 pre-dated the National Traffic System as we know it. They used “trunk lines” and informal scheduling to move the messages rather than the specifically timed NTS networks. As such, this is interesting reading of a historical nature, but it is also full of facts that remain true even to this day. Here is an excerpt of the (almost 70 year old) text:

“Rubber-Stamp” Messages: The handling of traffic must be either fun or constructive, interesting work. Because multiple-address (rubber stamp) messages mean much drudgery for little accomplished they cannot be handled effectively in a hobby like amateur radio.

Obviously, a station in handling a rubber-stamp message has to exert only a small amount of effort in receiving the text and signature once. Then by handling the address to different points *en groupe* a large number of messages (?) can be received and transmitted with little time and effort. The League’s system for crediting points for messages handled (and except for any *extra* delivery credit) is based on giving one credit each time a *complete* message is handled by amateur radio, i.e., one credit for each originated message, one credit for each delivered message and two credits for each relayed message (one credit for the work of receiving it and one for the work in transmitting it). *Only every message handled BY RADIO with a complete preamble, address, text, and signature shall be counted, except in the case of deliveries, each mailed, telephoned or otherwise delivered message shall count “one delivered” regardless of handling in “book” form (with text sent once only).*

Ed: Note that the method of counting traffic has changed over the years. Currently, one point is allowed for each message addressee, regardless of whether it is book or other traffic.

Reporting: *(This has changed significantly with the advent of the STM rather than just SCM, so it will not be copied. Note you should send in a station activity report to your Section Traffic Manager each month near the beginning of the month – that is Don, AC5XK for south Texas and Carolyn, KC5OZT for north Texas).* Continuing with the handbook text...

Operating on Schedules: Traffic handling work can be most advantageously carried on by arranging and keeping a few schedules. The message “hook” can be cleared in a few minutes of work on schedule and the station will be free for DX or experimental work. The Route Manager (*now called Net Manager*) is very frequently able to help in arranging schedules. Write your S.C.M. (now SM) and through him get lined up with

your R.M. Ed: *Note that the STM is the focal point for traffic now, not the Section Manager.*

The Five-Point System: To make our relaying more systematic the “five point system” of arranging schedules was proposed and has worked out very nicely in many cases. After getting the station in good operating condition, each station’s operator arranges to work four stations, one north, one east, one south, and one west. These directions are not exact but general. The distances are not too great but they must be distances that can be worked with absolute certainty under any conditions.

Traffic Handling Develops Skill: The dispatch of messages makes operators keen and alert. The better the individual operator, the better the whole organization. Proper form in handling traffic, getting fills, and in general operating procedure develops operators who excel in “getting results”. Station performance depends 90% on operating ability and 10% on the equipment involved, granting of course that station and operator are always interdependent. Experience in message handling develops a high degree of operating “intelligence”.

Message handling leads to organization naturally, through the need for schedules and cooperation between operators. It offers systematic training in “real” operating. It leads to planned, useful, unselfish, constructive work for others at the same time it represents the highest form of operating “skill” and enjoyment to its devotees. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of traffic handling in training operators in the use of procedure – and in general operating reliability. The value of the amateur (as a group), in case of local or national emergency, depends to a great extent on the *operating ability* of individual operators. This ability is largely developed by message handling.

Practice in handling traffic familiarizes one with detailed time-saving procedure, and develops general skill and accuracy to a higher extent than obtained in “just rag-chewing” or haphazard work. This work provides a definite aim. Message handling is a vital link in guiding the interest of operators to the point where many accept additional responsibilities in the Signal Corps organization. The interest amateurs show in these services is directly reflected by a full measure of appreciation and important backing by Uncle Sam whenever amateur rights are threatened with encroachment of any kind. Message handling work represents an advanced form of amateur operating activity in which all amateurs sooner or later become interested.

Ed: *This last section is still as true today as it was those 70 years ago, don’t you think?*

Some Pictures from Charlie, W5GKH

Charlie sent in some more pictures this month in response to my plea for inputs. While they don’t exactly deal with ham radio, they are interesting, so I am happy to share them with y’all. Charlie’s explanation is also included. Please send in your own pictures and anecdotes to share with other TEX members in this newsletter.



This one was taken in the late 40's in Laurel Mississippi when I was employed as a seismograph observer (operator). The piece of equipment I'm "working on" is a dual seismic amplifier. The usual maintenance was changing tubes or replacing 45 volt B batteries. The usual procedure was to remove the instrument from the panel in the truck and place it on your lap. If you were a bit careless when your pants were sweaty or wet with photo developer and fixer, those batteries would give you a pretty good jolt.

In the second picture, I

was about 11 or 12 years old and a member of the Cliff Drescher Cowboy Band. Cliff was also my teacher and later when I was trying to earn a living as a professional musician in Houston, he played 3rd alto to my lead alto in the band at the old "Ranch" nightclub. I am sitting in front on the right.



Thanks, Charlie, for some good pictures. Just one question – what was the axe used for in your maintenance activities on those seismic amplifiers???

Brass Pounder's League (BPL)

I received a forwarded E-Mail from Jim, KB5W, the chairman of the NTS central area staff. There is some talk of changing the BPL (an acronym that has unfortunately become more associated with that awful power line noisemaker than traffic). My own opinion is to leave it alone. If you have comments or suggestions, please send them to me and I'll pass them along to Jim.

Hi Rob and Jim,

I would like to suggest we talk with our staffs about recommending the elimination of the BPL, at least as it has become today. I have talked with one of my staff members who concurs. I feel how we count our traffic for BPL has become a very grey area and BPL has lost its meaning. I personally have counted traffic sent via CW and voice nets, but not digital traffic (which is included in my digital report) and not what goes via the internet. However it becomes more and more difficult to keep track especially now with the use of Telnet. In addition, many have complained about those who load up the system with book ham-to-ham traffic in order to make a show of numbers. I don't think all do so for that reason, but suspect there are some who do. The PSHR has a category

for handling of messages with a limit of 40. This gives credit for those who handle traffic without giving special recognition for initiating great volumes.

Perhaps BPL could be revamped a bit and credit given for actually "pounding brass", ie messages sent via CW. Possibly this would encourage CW participation. What you guys think?

73, Marcia KW1U

TEX Net Topics

The following shows the current NCS and liaison station assignments. We still have 3 open NCS slots, one early and two late. I made minor adjustments to backups, but the schedule is pretty much the same as last month. Please consider filling one or more of the open slots on a regular basis.

TEX CW Net Weekly Schedule

Local	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
NCS #1	W5DY	KA5KLU	K6JT	AC5Z	Open	AC5Z	W5GKH
Backup	W5GKH		N5EL	K6JT	W5DY	W5DY	
NCS #2	W5GKH	KA5KLU	K6JT	Open	N5PWG	Open	W5GKH
Backup			N5EL	K6JT	K6JT	W5DY	
RN5 #1	W5GKH	KA5KLU	W5TFB	K5UN	K5UN	W5TFB	W5CU
Backup					W5DY	KA5KLU	W5GKH
RN5 #2	W5GKH	KA5KLU	W5TFB	K5UN	K5UN	W5TFB	W5CU
Backup					W5DY	KA5KLU	W5GKH

TEX/1: 3643 (7143 backup) at 19:00 local; TEX/2 3643 at 22:00 local
 RN5/1: 7045 (3650 backup) at 19:30; RN5/2: 3650 at 21:30 local
 CAN: 7052 (3670 backup) at 20:30 local

RN5 Backups: W5DY, N5EL, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, K5RG, W5TFB, K5UN, AC5XK
 NCS Backups: W5DY, N5EL, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, N5PWG, AC5XK, AC5Z

Statistics:

This month Floyd, N5EL, had a "clean sweep" with QNI for 62 out of 62 net sessions! Rodney, W5DY, had the next highest with 52 (84% !!). Jack, W5TFB, with 41 (66%) edged out Pat, KD5TXD, who had 39 (63%). While the rest of you may have had fewer QNI, your participation is very important and appreciated. Again, thank you all for your continued support and for carrying on just fine without me for half the month. The complete list of stations and traffic totals is shown in the following table. Traffic was down a little from June, but still was respectable, averaging about 4 per net session. Net time averaged a little over 15 minutes per session.

TEX Net Statistics (July 2006)

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
W5CDX	Wads	0	8						
*		8							
AC5CI	Homer	8	8						
		0							
W5CU	Sam	5	9		5				
*		4			4				
W5DY	Rodney	22	52	4	1	6			
		30		3	3	4			
N5EL	Floyd	31	62	5			16		
*		31		3			16		
W5ESE	Scott	8	9						
*		1							1
W5GKH	Charlie	9	18	6	5	4			
*		9		9	5				
K5GM	Pete	1	2						
*		1							
K5JRN	Si	4	7						
*		3							
K6JT	Steve	12	27	3			12		
*		15		9			15		
K0KJ	Eric	3	5						
*		2							
KA5KLU	Doug	7	11	5	4	2		1	
*		4		4	4				
N5NVP	Jim	1	6						
		5							
N5PWG	Jay	0	4						
*		4		3					
K5RG	Ken	5	18		1				
*		13							
W5TFB	Jack	23	41		7				
*		18			8				
KD5TXD	Pat	20	39						20
*		19							19
W5UFK	Ken	8	11						
*		3							
K5UN	Lee	7	14		7				
		7			7				
AC5XK	Don	4	4			2		4	

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
*		0							
AC5Z	Bert	23	23	8	1				
*		0							
Totals		378		62	62	18	59	5	40
				100%	100%	29%	95%	8%	65%
QTC 1		124	231						
QTC 2		107		Sessions:		62	100%		
Time 1		497	970						
Time 2		473							

TEX Roster

Call	Name	Location / Notes	Call	Name	Location / Notes
KF9AS*	Megan	Dallas	KA5KLU	Doug	San Antonio
N5BA	Brian	Houston	K5KV	Benny	Star
W5CDX	Wads	Crowley LA	W6LFB	Jim	Denton
AC5CI	Homer	Caldwell	WA5MUF*	Bill	Watauga
W5CU	Sam	Edmond OK	KB5NJD	John	Duncanville
NV5D	Martin	Allen	N5NVP	Jim	Leesville LA
W5DY	Rodney	Goliad	N5PWG	Jay	Pasadena
K5EJL	Joe	Austin	W5RCP	Ron	Houston
N5EL	Floyd	Temple	K5RG	Ken	Houston
W5ESE	Scott	Dripping Springs	N5SIG	Randy	Huntsville
W5GKH	Charlie	West Columbia	KC5T	Bob	Houston
K5GM	Pete	Austin	W5TFB*	Jack	College Station
KB5IZO	David	Irving	W5TV	Tom	Nacogdoches
KJ9J	Newt	Pharr TX (winter)	KD5TXD	Pat	Kingsville
K5JRN	Si	Denton	W5UFK	Ken	College Station
KD5JSS	Dennis	Temple	K5UN	Lee	Leonard
K6JT	Steve	Plano	KS5V	Ed	Bulverde (SA)
KA5KAB*	Carl	Baytown	AC5XK	Don	San Antonio
KØKJ	Eric	San Antonio	AC5Z	Bert	Nacogdoches (Lufkin)

* Stations with unknown or not working E-Mail addresses.

Operating:

There has been a bit of confusion over how to handle outgoing RN5 traffic on the late (10 PM) session of TEX. So I'll discuss that this month along with my recommendations.

First, a refresher on NTS for those who may not be all that familiar with it. As you know, the NTS runs on a timed cycle. The intent is for outgoing traffic from Texas to be collected on the local nets (e.g., the DFW net or TTN) and brought to the early session

of TEX, which is officially known as a “section net”, even though we cover 3 actual ARRL sections. DFW early net meets at 6:30. From the 7 PM TEX, out of state traffic goes to region net 5 (RN5), which meets at 7:30 PM. On RN5, traffic is passed to other stations in our region (TX, OK, AR, LA, MS, AL, TN, and usually FL).

Any traffic outside of those states is routed to the Central Area Net (CAN), which meets at 8:30 PM. There are representatives on CAN from the Eastern Area (both incoming and outgoing) and Pacific Area (outgoing only) via Transcontinental Corps liaison stations. There are also representatives from not only RN5 but also the Ninth Region Net (9RN) and Tenth Region Net (TEN). Traffic is routed to the 9RN or TEN liaisons for the states (and provinces) of IL, IN, WI, KY (9RN) and KS, IA, MO, NE, ND, SD, MN, MAN, SASK (TEN). For other states and provinces, Eastbound traffic goes to the TCC station “Charlie” and Westbound traffic goes to the TCC station “Echo”, who then have schedules with their counterparts (station Kilo and Golf, respectively) outside of net operation.

Incoming traffic from the East or other CAN regions is routed to the RN5 representative on CAN, who takes it to the second session of RN5 at 9:30 PM. Finally, the TEX representative brings the Texas traffic to late TEX for relay / delivery. Local nets (such as DFW late at 10:30) meet after that for local distribution. That then ends the TCC cycle for the night. There is also a daytime NTS with DCAN and DRN5, but those are a different cycle.

So why do I describe this? Because clearly there is no “path” back into NTS from the late TEX session until the next day. Outgoing (from TEX) RN5 traffic must thus be held overnight. That does not mean you should not try to move it on late TEX, only that there are some restrictions and cautions.

First of all, the RN5 liaison on TEX is supposed to collect outgoing RN5 traffic and take it to the early RN5 session. He may receive incoming traffic from other region 5 states as well. On the late session, it is all incoming from other states / regions. When he checks into late TEX, those incoming messages are listed. Since the RN5 liaison station is only obliged to cover RN5 for that night, he should NOT be given outgoing RN5 traffic that would force him to either bring it back to TEX to re-list it or to take it to RN5 himself, something that he did not “sign up” for when volunteering for the particular liaison slot. Of course, he may volunteer to take it for handling in some manner the next day, but NCS stations should NOT routinely call on the RN5 liaison station to take outgoing messages from late TEX.

But we often have RN5 traffic on the late session, primarily the “service” messages back to W1GMF or N1IQI for traffic we received on the early session and delivered. So what is a late TEX NCS to do with listed RN5 traffic? My suggestions are enumerated below, in order of priority:

1. Look on the duty roster. If the RN5 liaison for the next day checks in, give the traffic to him to hold for RN5 the next night.

2. If W5TFB checks in, ask the listing station if the traffic is for W1GMF or N11QI. If so, Jack can probably take it for delivery on the Hit and Bounce Net, which he frequents each morning.
3. If Wads, W5CDX checks in, ask if he will take the RN5 traffic. Wads goes to the daytime RN5 net nearly every day, so that would expedite the messages on their way.
4. If none of the above, ask for a volunteer to take the traffic to hold for the next day (assuming anyone who volunteers intends to QNI to early TEX).
5. Failing all the above, ask the listing station to hold it for the next day.

A little complex, but certainly workable. Those are the steps I take myself when deciding what to do with a listed RN5 message on late TEX when I'm the NCS. I will often take the traffic (option 4 above) to hold if nobody else comes forward. Note that for option 5, if the listing station knows he won't be able to make the net the next night, try once again to ask for someone to take it to hold if you can't do it yourself.

Asking for and providing message fills

From the earlier excerpt of the 1938 handbook, I was reminded that we have some relatively new operators on TEX who may not be familiar with the best way to ask for message fills when receiving (or respond to them when sending) traffic. I'll give a little information here to hopefully help out with that. Note that these are my own opinions based on years of operating CW traffic nets – I did not check the Public Service manual (which you can download from the TEX website).

As the transmitting station, if you have full breakin (i.e., you can hear the other station between each character or at least between words), send "QSK" before starting the message. If you have a long Tx/Rx hang time and may not be able to hear a break between words, do not send "QSK" (or send "No QSK"). Receiving stations, do not try to break a sending station unless they prefix their transmission with "QSK".

If the sending station has QSK, it is best to stop them from transmitting by sending a string of dits as soon as you realize you have missed something, for example in a deep QSB fade (which happens quite often these days). When they stop transmitting, send the last word you received correctly and they should repeat that word and continue with the rest of the message. If they can't be broken (perhaps your signal is marginal or their QSK is not "real" QSK), then you may have missed several words. Don't try to break them again. Start copying from wherever they are and use the following procedures to get fills after they finish the message. When you are unsure about a word when copying, underline it to remind you to go back to ask for a fill. Underline blank spaces if you think there are missed words.

The prosigns of interest are "AA" (all after), "AB" (all before), "WA" (word after), "WB" (word before), and BTWN (between – or just spell out between). Also useful are "ADEE" (addressee – name of person), "ADR" (address), "CFM" (please confirm), "PBL"

(preamble – the part of the message from NR through date), “SIG” (signature), and “TEL” (telephone).

Examples of using these follow:

- a. For a single missed word, use “word before” (WB) or “word after” (WA) followed by the word you copied OK. For example, “WB thanks” (if the text was “many thanks”) would yield “many thanks” from the sending station.
- b. If you think you got it but aren’t completely sure of a word or string, for example the phone number, send “CFM TEL xxx xxx xxxx”. If you are confirming a word in the text, it is better to just ask for WB or WA and let them send it again.
- c. For more than one word missed in the text, use “BTWN”. For example, if you think you missed something between “happy” and “hope” (in the text “happy birthday Jake and hope you have”, you could send “BTWN happy and hope”. The sending station should send “happy birthday jake and hope”, i.e., including the first and last words you sent to them.
- d. For elements of the address, it is best to just ask for major parts to be repeated, such as “ADEE?” or “ADR?” or “ADR City?” or “zip?” or “tel?”. It is common to confirm the telephone number, though (i.e., “CFM xxx xxx xxxx”).
- e. For elements of the preamble, use their name, e.g., “CK?” or “Place origin?” or “stn origin?” or “date?”.
- f. For a significant part of the preamble or preamble and address, use “AB word”, where “word” is the first thing you think you got OK. For example, if you tried to break on the station of origin and the sender did not stop sending so you picked it up on the addressee’s last name (e.g., Smith), you could send “AB Smith”, to which the sending station should repeat the entire preamble, starting with NR and ending with “Smith”.
- g. For a significant amount of the last part of the message, use “AA word”, where “word” was the last thing you received OK. For example if you missed the last word of the text and signature, send “AA love” (assuming it said “love you bt SIG”). The sender should send “love you bt John” (where John is the signature).

There are obviously other variations and examples. After looking through all those, do you also (as I do) get the impression that having QSK is the way to go? While many rigs have “real” QSK (notably Ten-Tec), the majority have only “VOX keying”, where there is a fairly long delay in switching to receive after the last character. That may be desirable under noisy conditions but is generally deadly to efficient CW traffic handling.

Until next month, 73,
Steve K6JT