

The Texan

Newsletter of the Texas NTS CW Net (TEX)

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Here we are in May already. The change to 7143 for early TEX appears to be working better now after a couple weeks of inconsistent results. We'll leave it there for now, but NCS stations are still urged to carefully assess the conditions and switch to 3643 at 7:05 if 40 meters seems to be poor for statewide coverage. Also, remember to have a station in another part of the state from your QTH give a call for QNI, regardless of band.

As you know, I put up a TEX website last month shortly after releasing the newsletter (<http://k6jt.home.att.net/>). I will no longer be E-Mailing the newsletters to you. Instead, I'll be sending a notice that the new issue is available on the website and you can go download and read it at your convenience. Hopefully the change will help those with slow dial-up connections and finicky Internet Service Providers or limited E-Mail client software to be able to access the newsletter.

This month's newsletter will feature a "bug" and hand key collection with anecdotes from our members. We are currently tagging Friday nights on the 10 PM session as "bug night". Those of you who have bugs are encouraged to QNI to that session while using them. Those without bugs may use a hand key or your electronic keyer, as you wish. Since Jay, N5PWG, the normal NCS always uses his bug on the net, it seemed a natural way to add a little variety (and keep the dust off our key contacts). While it takes quite a bit more skill and practice to use a bug (properly) than either a hand key or keyer, the upside is that it requires no external power (other than muscles), which may be important for emergency operation.

Before launching into the "bug stories", there are a few announcements for your information...

A published author on TEX !

Would you believe that TEX is graced with a bona fide published author? Yup, it's true. Besides being a great traffic handler, Doug, KA5KLU, has recently completed his first published novel, which is available via the web, and he is already working on a second and third! I'm sure many of you will be interested in his adventure tales. Here are some details...



Hello fellow TEX members. I am happy to report that I am now an established writer with one book available. I write novels about explorers, mountain men and in general native Americans. My first book is entitled "Wahnayah", which is Chipewyan for "Watches Eagles". Chipewyan is a tribe of Indians in North Central to Northwestern Canada. The following is a description of what the book is about, taken from my website at: <http://www.publishedauthors.net/ka5klu/>

Clede McCabe was the son of a poor Scottish Immigrant who settled on a farm in Indiana in the early 1800's. Clede was a restless young man and an only son who refused to follow in his father's footsteps. Farming would never be what he wanted to do. Seeing no other means of escape, he ran away to join the war, against his father's wishes.

Clede returned home three long years later with a badly crippled leg only to find a broken and run down farm. His mother and father both dead from the fever. Nothing left at home, he sold the farm to a neighbor and decided to go west in search of somewhere he could be alone and maybe find himself.

What he found in the far Northwest was beyond his wildest dreams. Surrounded by beauty in an untamed wilderness, he fell in love with a way of life that would change him forever.

Barnes & Noble also carries the book (ISBN # 1-4137-9552-8).

I have a second book that I just signed a contract for and should be coming out next year early sometime. The name of it is "Isla de Blanca" or White Island. That was the name the Indians gave to Padre Island. This story takes place in the mid 1500s. It involves the shipwreck of the Spanish ship "San Esteban" on Padre Island.

I'm working on a third book that I've titled "Kwaku" - Black Snake. This story takes place in the 1700s and deals with slavery of Native Americans and Africans. I hope to have this one finished by the end of the year.

Hopefully, anyone who enjoys reading adventure stories will buy a copy and try it. It will help me buy Amateur Radio Equipment. ;-) I like to write, ham, do leather craft and play guitar. I'm certainly not bored since I "retired". ☺
73, Doug, KA5KLU

Smithville Picnic is May 27th

As mentioned last month, Floyd, N5EL, will receive the Pfeiffer Pfist award at the "7290 Picnic", which will take place on Saturday, May 27, at the Riverbend Park in Smithville, just off highway 71 southeast of Bastrop. Jo Ann, KA5AZK, who is the treasurer of the

7290 net, has reserved a time slot at 3:45 for TEX to make the presentation. There is also a Barbeque following the meetings, but it may be too late to “sign up” for it. Contact Jo Ann at jajlkeith@att.net if you are interested in attending and want to partake of the BBQ. I believe the cost is \$7.00. As far as I know now, Bert, AC5Z, Floyd, N5EL, and myself will be attending from the TEX group. None of us plan on eating the BBQ, so we’ll probably find a place nearby to have dinner together. Hope some others of you who live in the south Texas area will also consider going (Charlie, Roger, Pat?), although with the price of gas, I can’t blame anyone for not wanting to travel much.

Here’s what Jo Ann had to say about it: “We usually start gathering around 9 AM or so on Saturday, but the first meeting will start at 12:30 and I have you down for 3:45 for your presentation. Dinner will be at 4:00. We have a lot of members that need to get back home before it gets too dark so we eat early. I will send you a copy of the program as soon as everything is confirmed (not yet received – Ed). We are a pretty informal bunch so even when the program is done it’s still just something to go by.”

Last Month’s Puzzle and Feedback

Last month, we had a “puzzle picture” of the Rice Owls dance band asking you to guess which one was Charlie, W5GKH. Charlie finally fessed up to being the alto sax player, third from the right, in front.

Bert, AC5Z, sent me an update regarding Harry Pfeiffer, W5CTZ, who has been a Silent Key for a number of years. He is not sure of the exact year, but it was in the 90’s. Harry was noted for having only one speed, about 15wpm, which he felt most everyone could copy if they had a General License. No matter how fast someone challenged him, he always refused to speed up! Bert was sure he could copy at least 40wpm, however. Apparently no one with the proper credentials (FCC is very picky about that) has notified FCC of his demise since he is still listed in the database.

Charlie, W5GKH, had this to add: “Harry was the first recipient of the award and I had the honor of presenting it at the 1991 picnic at Lake Whitney. Bobbie, WB5J, had the inspiration to originate the Pfeiffer Pfist award and was the designer of the trophy plaque.”

Bugs, Straight Keys and Memories

Now for our featured articles for the month. First, take a look at the “Texas Lightning Bug” owned by Floyd, N5EL, on page 5. His twin, Lloyd, N6EL, wrote a great poem, sort of an “ode to a lightning bug”, which I am pleased to share with you here...

My Old Lightning Bug Key

Radioman First Class, ‘NKA’, Navcommunit Three,
1955, Asmara, Ethiopia, near the Red Sea.
‘Communications to the Fleet’ any mode,

Our primary method, international Morse code.

Bought my old shiny 'Lightning Bug' key
And served the fleet, shore and sea.
Licensed 'Speed key Operator', 30 WPM by test,
For world communications from Africa, west.

Amateur Radio Operator, K5ELY was my call,
Licensed in Arkansas, 'Land of Opportunity' Y'all.
'Down and out', no permanent address of my own,
Floyd and Wilma shared 1400 South Washington, their home!

E2TUS encouragement to my twin to get his 'ticket',
Learning code wasn't easy but I knew he could 'lick it'.
With 'on the air' training he got it, 'K5 Old King Queen'
To become one of the best of us ever heard or seen !

K5ELY and WA4GRV 'Maritime Mobile' heard from many a ship,
Wyandott, Perry, Adams, Vesole, Dyess, Everglades, its last trip.
WB6OKC, W6PXB, N6EL, 1964 to 1986, 7204 Rosewood Drive
To Mtn. Ranch 'Bumpus Haven' where it's alive !

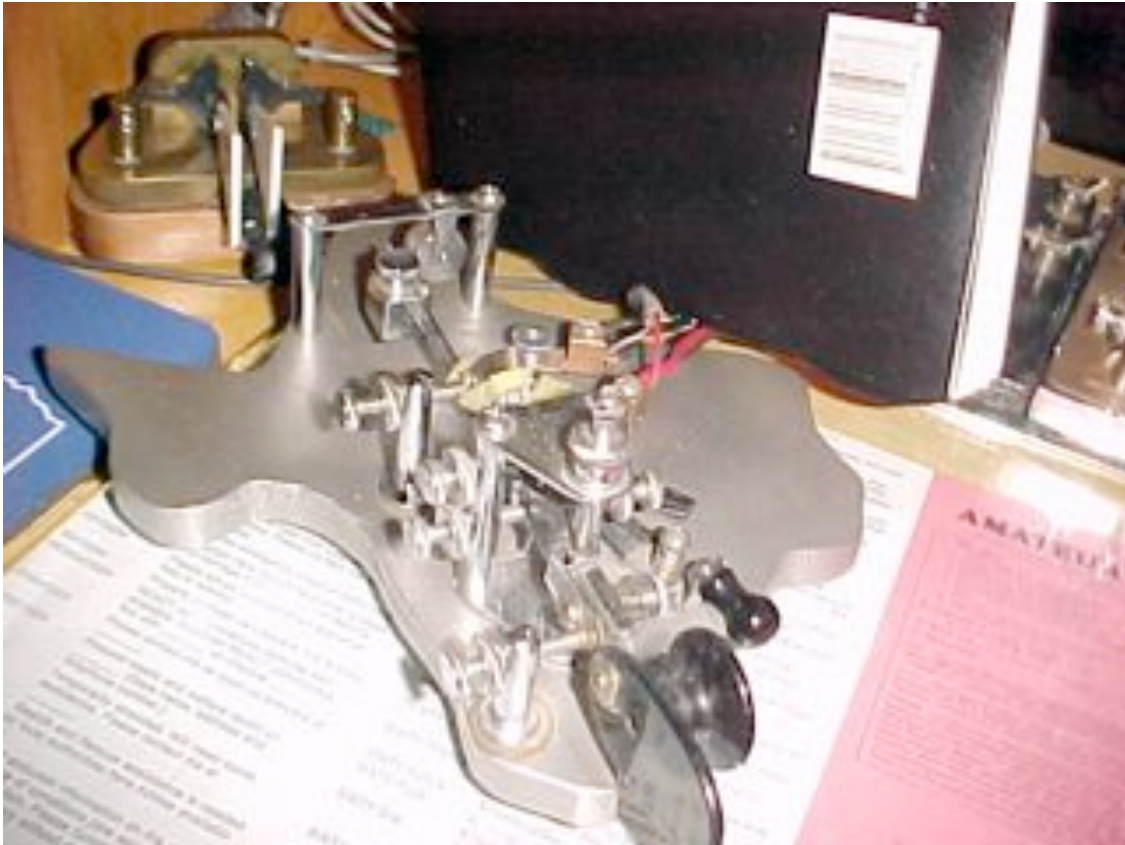
I've shared joy and sadness with my old key,
I always have it to rely on and it has me.
Primary communication now is with twin N5EL – Floyd,
High speed dots and dashes by him and me, N6EL – Lloyd.

We set our skeds by ESP, you see.
I'll be thinking of him and he of me.
Sheds confirmed by a telephone ring.
Frequency 'QRL' at 'QRQ 30 plus' our Morse begins to 'sing'.

As I'm gettin' old and the years are going fast,
I treasure more the happiness of my old key's past.
Know and understand when I become a 'Silent Key',
That this old key was the 'world to me'.

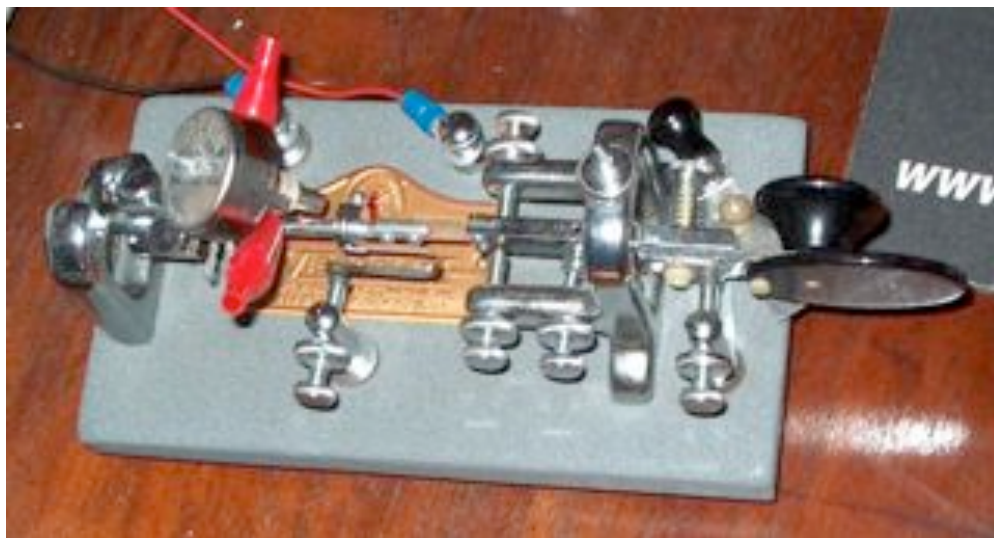
I'll be silent in the 'hereafter' but my key will never be,
'cause I've got sons WD6ACO, WD6ACQ, and WD6ACP !
They'll make 'music over the years and down the line
With that old 'Lightning Bug' key of mine !

By: Lloyd, N6EL, 31 May 1988



Quite a key, eh? Thanks to Floyd, N5EL, for permission to share his brother's poem with all of us and also the great picture of his "twin lightning bug".

Next, Rodney, W5DY, has had some trouble with his bug, getting the dots to come out slow enough to use on some of the lower speed nets. So his solution is shown below. Yes, that IS a variable resistor he has clipped to the dot arm! Yes, it DOES work!



Pat, KD5TXD, did not send a picture of a bug (although I'm sure she will eventually collect one), but she sent along the following pictures of her paddles and straight key and a very entertaining story to go with them. Pat writes...



Thought I would torture you with a couple code key pics. First one is my MFJ lambic. I have it mounted on a nice piece of oak. I routed out a place for the original feet to set down into. Recessed bolts go through the bottom to hold it in place. That way I can remove it from the base and use it with its feet if I want. This is the key I use most of the time and is the one I dropped.

When I first decided I was going to master CW or die trying I had just started being NCS on DTTN in the mornings. I haven't figured out why anyone would have a net at that time of day on 40 Meters. I don't ever remember having good band conditions. I guess it can be blamed on the sunspot cycle or whatever. We had some particularly bad days where I couldn't hear anyone... except Arley up in OKC. I had two checkins and Arley sending the clearest CW. Unfortunately I couldn't copy him at all because I let my sorry 5 wpm code fade from my mind as soon as I "passed" the CW licensing test. The day that I heard Arley, I knew that I had to master code. No self respecting NCS should be calling a net without at least being able to copy 5 wpm. I only passed the CW test by one character. Can't be much slower than that.

Husband Charles and I were visiting in Houston and Charles wanted to go to the only "ham" store in the entire city...and it really isn't a ham store. There, in the display case was a shiny MFJ lambic with pink plastic paddles. Charles tried to talk me out of buying it. It just isn't womanly to listen to one's husband when he is trying to talk you out of spending money. It was the pink paddles that closed the sale. I started checking into the slow nets and even began to follow along with what they were doing. A small miracle.

Well, I wanted to dress up my key so I got the piece of oak and worked out the routed inset area for it. It took me some fiddling to get the screw holes positioned so I could lock the thing down into the recessed area. I cut a piece of router cloth to the shape of the oak to set the whole thing on so it would scoot around on my desk. I was going along great with my pink paddles until one day my code key and oak base leaped, yes leaped, off the shelf where I kept it when I was on the voice nets. It really took a hit. The treasured pink plastic paddles broke off at the nub. The spring sprung off and assorted doodads were bent. I cried. Charles ordered replacement paddles from MFJ. When they arrived they weren't pink and they weren't for this model. I cried some more.

Charles suggested that I make mesquite paddles. I continued to bawl. He went out and sliced three really thin pieces of mesquite for me. I decided to give it a try. I managed to get two of the pieces to sort of look like paddles and about equal in size. I sanded them with 600 grit sand paper, carefully drilled tiny holes, and fiddled for at least an hour

getting teeny tiny screws and nuts positioned and tightened to hold the mesquite paddles in place. Hey, it worked!

Charles is left handed and set my key up when I first started messing with CW. My key is backwards from everyone else in the world. Dahs are my thumb and dits are my finger. Moral of this story is never let a left-handed man set up your code key.



This second pic is my Bunnell-S. The second time I went to Belton I decided I was going to look at code keys. There was a fellow there with boxes and boxes of unloved code keys. I must have looked at every single key. I jiggled every key arm and/or paddle. I asked numerous times what kind of key this or that was, sort of like pinching tomatoes in the grocery store. I finally settled on this Bunnell-S. This is a 1918 Bunnell-S. I know it is 1918

vintage because it turns out that was the only year they had S on the logo. Well, the poor thing had to be polished. It was about as grubby as a code key could be. It was truly unloved. I wasn't very sure about taking it apart. I carefully drew every screw and piece of it as I took it apart and indicated what part each attached to. All the pieces were dumped into brass polish. I polished and polished and polished. Then I started to reassemble the key. Ooops....there were little washer thingies that I had neglected to draw and indicate where they went. Fortunately Charles came to my rescue. Guys are supposed to do that. With his assistance I got the key back together in proper order and it works.

My Bunnell-S needed a base. I didn't want to use an old piece of scrap plywood from the burn pile so I sent Charles out in the brush to slice off an oval shaped piece of mesquite wood. The things Charles endures could fill a book. It had to be oval shape because the key was oval shape. He finally angled the cut just right and I approved of the oval base. I spent several days sanding the base and put about 5 coats of tung oil on it. Charles found some little rubber stick on feet for the bottom side. I strategically positioned three little feet so my key would be perfectly solid. Used the Bunnell-S last straight key night. I asked NKC and NKD if my sending was readable. They said yes, really slow but readable.

All of my QSL cards are home made. My Bunnell-S is pictured on the one shown here. I also have a very large desert tortoise, which I used for another QSL card. In case you can't read the saying on my card it says, "Keep the faith...keep the code, Baby!!!" The saying on the card with the desert tortoise is, "Slow code is better than no code." Now I

have roadrunners in the brush and if I ever get fast enough so I don't have to ask y'all to QRS, I will get a pic of a roadrunner for my QSL card.

There, you are properly tortured. 73!!! Pat KD5TXD

Thanks, Pat. I really enjoyed reading that and seeing the beautiful job you have done with your keys.

I have some more pictures from Floyd of various keys in his collection, but I'll save them for another issue. We're already past 7 pages in this one !

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. Thanks to Floyd and Rodney for helping pick those up as well as some others along the way. RN5 liaisons are still lacking on Thursday and Friday, and Don has still been having trouble making it on Saturday as well. Please consider filling one or more of the open slots on a regular basis. For now, things have been working out all right with volunteers, all of whom I really appreciate.

Note that along with TEX, early RN5 and CAN have also changed to 40 meters for the summer. The new frequencies and backup 80 meter frequencies are shown below.

TEX CW Net Weekly Schedule

Local	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
NCS #1	W5DY	KA5KLU	K6JT	AC5Z	<i>Open</i>	AC5Z	W5GKH
Backup	W5GKH		N5EL	K6JT	N5EL	AC5XK	
NCS #2	W5GKH	KA5KLU	K6JT	<i>Open</i>	N5PWG	<i>Open</i>	W5GKH
Backup			N5EL	K6JT	K6JT	K6JT	
RN5 #1	W5GKH	KA5KLU	W5TFB	<i>Open</i>	<i>Open</i>	AC5XK	W5CU
Backup				AC5XK	W5DY	W5TFB	W5GKH
RN5 #2	W5GKH	KA5KLU	W5TFB	<i>Open</i>	<i>Open</i>	AC5XK	W5CU
Backup				AC5XK	K6JT	K6JT	W5GKH

TEX/1: 7143 (3643 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: N5EL, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, K5RG, W5TFB, AC5XK, W5DY
 NCS Backups: W5DY, N5EL, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, N5PWG, AC5XK, AC5Z

Newt, KJ9J, has left us for his summer QTH in Indiana. Hopefully some of us will still hear him on CAN from time to time. He plans to return to (far) south Texas again in the fall. Perhaps this year, he'll even get a chance to improve his antenna.

Statistics:

This month the most check-ins were again by Floyd, N5EL, who had a great QNI record with 53 out of 60 (88%). Rodney, W5DY, had the next highest with 40 (67%). Those “batting” 500 or better included Jack, W5TFB, with 39 and Pat, KD5TXD with 30. Thank you all for your excellent support. Jack’s Orion is still not back from Ten-Tec. His computer is also still down with 2 failed hard drives, so E-Mail does not work.

TEX Net Statistics (April 2006)

		QNI	total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
W5CDX	Wads	2	9						
*		7							
AC5CI	Homer	9	9						
		0							
W5CU	Sam	4	7		3				
*		3			3				
NV5D	Martin	3	3				1		
		0							
W5DY	Rodney	19	40	4	5	10			
		21		1	8	4			
K5EJL	Joe	1	2						
		1							
N5EL	Floyd	27	53	4	1		4		
*		26			1		3	1	
W5ESE	Scott	15	15					1	
*		0							
W5GKH	Charlie	8	16	5	4	3			
*		8		8	4				
K5HHS	Roger	11	11	1		5			
*		0							
KJ9J	Newt	11	11						
*		0							
K5JRN	Si	4	5				2		
*		1							
KD5JSS	Dennis	1	1						
		0							
K6JT	Steve	17	43	5	1		15		
*		26		13			24		
KA5KLU	Doug	12	18	3	8	3			
*		6		3	6	1			
K5KV	Benny	0	1						
		1							
N5NVP	Jim	2	15						
		13							3
N5PWG	Jay	4	10						
*		6		4					
K5RG	Ken	3	8						
*		5							

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
W5TFB	Jack	23	39		9				
*		16			7				
KD5TXD	Pat	16	30			3			16
*		14				7			14
W5UFK	Ken	0	1						
*		1							
K5UN	Lee	13	16				3		
		3					1		
AC5XK	Don	2	3					2	
*		1		1		1		1	
AC5Z	Bert	19	19	8					
*		0							
Totals		385		60	60	37	53	5	33
				100%	100%	62%	88%	8%	55%
QTC 1		121	195						
QTC 2		74		Sessions:		60	100%		
Time 1		516	878						
Time 2		362							

Welcome to new checkins Joe, K5EJL in Austin and Benny, K5KV in Star.

TEX Net Stations (QNS)

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
K5HHS	Roger	Mathis	W5TV	Tom	Nacogdoches
KB5IZO	David	Irving	KD5TXD	Pat	Kingsville
KJ9J	Newt	Pharr TX (winter)	W5UFK	Ken	College Station
K5JRN	Si	Denton	K5UN	Lee	Leonard
KD5JSS	Dennis	Temple	KS5V	Ed	Bulverde (SA)
K6JT	Steve	Plano	AC5XK	Don	San Antonio
KA5KAB*	Carl	Baytown	AC5Z	Bert	Nacogdoches (Lufkin)
KØKJ	Eric	San Antonio			

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

Operating:

Thanks to Ken, K5RG, a complete copy of the NTS Methods and Practices Guide is available for download from the TEX website (<http://k6jt.home.att.net/>). Scroll down to the bottom of the page to find it (the last entry). When Ken sent it to me, he said: "I had compiled the document which is broken up on the ARRL web page (probably for the modem users - you just can't effectively use the Internet with one). It was initially put together by an EAN station and critiqued by the NTS staffs particularly the Chairpersons if I remember correctly. It answers all questions. The one on sending book messages was one I learned after my PAN sked of a few years back beat on me for sending them incorrectly (should ask for an acknowledgement after each addressee AR B). I thought he was wrong but sure enough that is how the NTG says it should be done."

Well, Ken piqued my interest about the book process, so I looked it up. What I found surprised me. According to page 3-26 and 3-27 in the CW section, you do NOT ask for an acknowledgment until the end of the book. You DO insert pauses to listen for a break if you don't have QSK, but that's all. With QSK, just a single <bt> after each address need be sent before the next number. So it appears that Ken was right after all, not the fellow that "corrected" him. I usually do use the "ar b" method myself, so it surprised me to read the above, too. Perhaps it was changed? Anyway, I will likely continue with the "ar b" method because it is ingrained. If you all want to use the "single <bt> method" between the book addresses, you won't be wrong in doing so. If you don't have QSK, it is probably better to use the "ar b", though, to give a chance to ask for fills efficiently.

One other thing that surprised me in browsing through the guide concerns the use of a message number following receipt / QSL of the message (e.g., "QSL nr 101"). The guide says to just send "QSL", which has been my standard practice for many years anyway. There is no need to send the message number. I did not research it further to see if the message number addition was part of the phone procedure and it was just omitted on CW, but I suspect that may be the case since you aren't supposed to say "Q S L" on voice (or any other Q signal for that matter). Since the only voice traffic handling I do is on VHF FM on the DFW area nets, where procedure is a bit looser, I've never bothered to look it up. I suppose I should. To reiterate, then, according to the ARRL guide, when acknowledging receipt of a message on CW, just send "QSL". No need to send the message number(s). Of course, as with anything else, old habits die hard.

73, Steve K6JT