The Texan

Newsletter of the Texas NTS CW Net (TEX)

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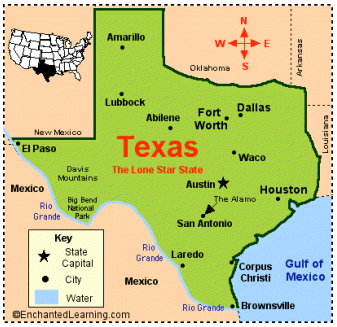


October 2006

Hello TEX'ans! We have a real treat this month – some pictures and narrative from Rodney, W5DY, when he was working the oil fields in Kuwait in the 90's, putting out all those horrendous fires. But first, some "up front" items.

Rotten Skip!

Those of you who regularly check into the late TEX net have noticed several nights recently where it seemed like nobody was around. Not so – instead, the skip zone was more than 400 miles, making it impossible for any of us to hear any others. A couple nights during the last week of September, the band was completely out for the north to south Texas path. Wednesday, my NCS night, I could hear only Rodney, W5DY, and then only after he "woke up" his "big dog" KW amplifier. He could not hear me at all, nor could either of us hear Jack, W5TFB, who later reported he was there.

The conditions on 40 meters are worse, as evidenced by a test Rodney and I made the following night. We could hear each other on 80, weakly, but nothing at all on 40.

About the only thing we can do under the severe skip conditions is possibly go to 160 meters. I fear the skip will become very long and frequent this winter during the sunspot minima (my memories of traffic net activity in the 80's during the minima then, were that skip was over 400 miles nearly every night on the late southern California net session). Rodney and I plan to test 160, although my antenna is poor there, the next time 80 is "out". What we need to know is how many of you who regularly (or even occasionally) check into the late session have 160-meter capability? Please E-Mail me back if you could support operation there at 10:05 or 10:10 PM on 80 meter long skip nights. Just hit "reply" to the message telling you there is a new newsletter ready.

Activity Level:

I've noticed a distinct dropoff in activity this past month, both on the early and late nets. Perhaps it is the new TV season (?) or perhaps I have insulted you in some way and you're just mad at me (?). If so, I apologize and hope you will again return to TEX to help keep it one of the best section / state CW nets in the country.

Rodney had this note for those who may have been keeping quiet recently: "Hey there, it's been awhile since hearing you check in on TEX. Clean the dust off that key, oil it up and get it working again. I look forward to hearing you. 73, Rodney, W5DY, assistant manager, Texas CW Traffic Net."

Travel

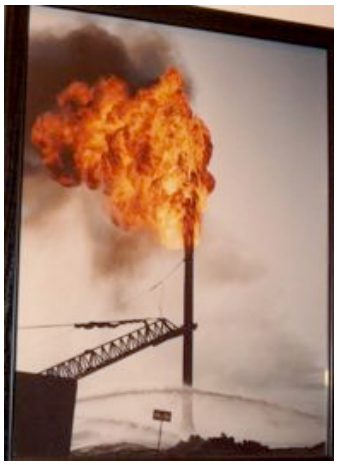
It is again time for me to make the long trip to California to help out my ageing, housebound parents. I will be in Sacramento from the 9th through the 18th. During that time, NCS stations please send your reports to Rodney, W5DY. I will make other arrangements for my TCC and NCS duties to be covered during my absence. I'll have E-Mail (but only via dial-up) access while away.

Our Main Feature Story

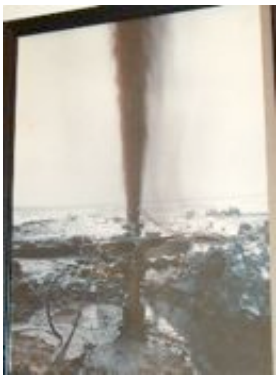
Rodney, W5DY, provided the following for your reading pleasure…

In 1991, I took a sabbatical from running fishing tools in the oilfield to go to Kuwait and put out fires. My younger brother, Rick Baker, had been in the oil well control business since 1968. He was employed by Wild Well Control to go to Kuwait in March, 1991 (when the firefighting started). In July, the company went to 3 teams in country instead of 2. He got them to call me to go to work for them. I arrived in late July. At that time, they didn't know it, but they were already almost half through with all the fires (650). The fires were being controlled faster and faster as time went by. It's as if we were learning a method in our madness, so to speak.

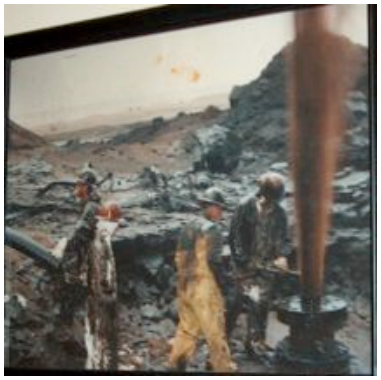
I am proud to have been a part of this historical event. Never before, and probably never again, will such as this happen. Also (and not many people know this), Red Adair (The Red Adair Company), Coots Matthews, Boots Hansen (Boots and Coots) and Joe Bowden (Wild Well Control) would never be seen together, and actually didn't like each other (gung-ho, macho thing). I once saw a picture of the four of them side by side, a rarity. Wish I could find out who has that one!! The day I arrived, upon going to the mess hall for supper, I talked to all 4 of them. They couldn't believe that

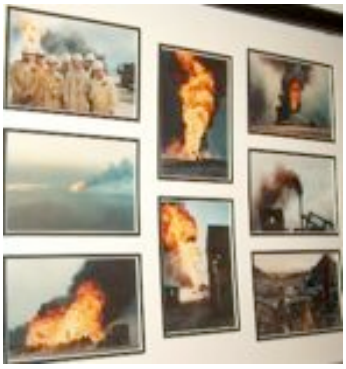


I was there, and gave me a lot of hullabaloo over it, too (2 Bakers at the same time?, give me a break). That was a memorable evening, to say the least.



The next morning the work began for me. From July until early November, my team controlled 22 fires. The smallest well was burning about 5,000 barrels of oil per day, and the largest about 42,000. The smaller fires, we controlled in just a few days. The larger ones took longer. The biggest one took 11 days. That is the one we put out a week ahead of schedule, saving them approximately $1,000,000 per day, and the President of Kuwait Oil Company promised each of us either a Rolls Royce or $50,000, whichever we preferred. Haven't seen either one yet!!





The last well to be controlled was my brother's. They capped it on November 6, 1991. Just over 8 months to do a job that was at first considered to take 2 to 5 years.

73, Rodney, W5DY

Thanks, Rodney, for a great narrative and "exclusive" for the Texan!
← From Rodney's "wall" collection of Kuwait photos.

TEX Mailbox:

I received a note from Sis, WD8DIN, who is the editor of the Hit and Bounce Net "Traffic Call" newsletter. She has put out another issue, which was quite interesting. There was a "chapter" from a book by George Hart, W1NJM, who you "old timers" will remember as the "father" of the NTS ("developer" might be a better term). I asked about it and she obligingly sent me a couple of the first chapters for use in *The Texan*. I have E-Mailed the one who supplies her with them for permission to publish here, but since I've not received a response yet, the "series" will have to wait for another month.

Scott, W5ESE, reported that he agreed with my comments last month about digital NTS. Scott runs only Unix (Linux) systems, so he is also "left out" when using the AirMail program and WinLink. He also commented on the August ARES E-Letter where use of the standard radiogram format was criticized. Scott made some good points in rebuttal to Rick Palm, K1CE, the editor. Look for some of Scott's points in an upcoming issue, which you can access via http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/ares-el/ . Scott also

mentioned that he has a 3 hour daily commute, which makes him somewhat irregular in checking into TEX.

Doug, KA5KLU, reports that he has been very busy. He writes: "I've been writing and not able to get on the radio much. I still mess with Pactor, but not on the scale I used to. I have a second book that is in the process of going to print. Probably be coming out by the first part of next year. I've been working on a third book in my 'spare' time. The second book here will be called: Isla De Blanca – the history in the book is true. The characters and story are fiction. I like to take history and make a story of it."

We certainly wish Doug success with his next book. If you haven't read his first one, Wahnayah, I can highly recommend it. It is available at http://www.publishamerica.com http://www.Barnes&Noble.com and www.Amazon.com.

We had a check-in from Bill, WA5MUF, in Watauga this past month after several years' absence. Bill is an old-time TEX member. In fact, he sent me a paper copy of "The Texan", dated September, 1993. I'll share some of its content with you in another issue, but it is noteworthy that besides Bill, Jack, W5TFB, Bert, AC5Z, Pete, K5GM, Eric, K0KJ, Ken, K5RG, and Charlie, W(D)5GKH are on the roster. Also noteworthy are the QNI and QTC counts. For August, 1993, there were 437 check-ins, compared to our 386 that month and QTC of 213, compared to our 228. For September, 1993, there were 373 check-ins, and 218 pieces of traffic were handled. Compare that to our statistics this past month, listed later in this newsletter.

TEX Net Topics

The following shows the current NCS and liaison station assignments. Thanks to Lee, K5UN, for taking the late Thursday NCS slot. He's been doing a great job there this past month. Thanks also to Jack, W5TFB, for taking alternate on the late Saturday NCS slot to fill in when Rodney and I both have other commitments. We now have all slots filled!! That is a first in over a year now. Thank you all.

TEX CW Net Weekly Schedule

Local	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
NCS #1	W5DY	KA5KLU	K6JT	AC5Z	W5TFB	AC5Z	W5GKH
Backup	W5GKH		W5TFB	K6JT	W5DY	W5DY	
NCS #2	W5GKH	KA5KLU	K6JT	**K5UN**	N5PWG	**W5DY**	W5GKH
Backup			W5DY	K6JT	K6JT	**W5TFB**	
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: 3650 (7045 backup) at 19:30; RN5/2: 3650 at 21:30 local
CAN: 3670 (7052 backup) at 20:30 local

RN5 Backups: W5DY, N5EL, W5GKH, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, K5RG, W5TFB, K5UN
NCS Backups: W5DY, N5EL, K5JRN, K6JT, KA5KLU, N5PWG, W5TFB, K5UN, AC5Z

Note that both RN5 and CAN have moved back to 80 meters for the winter season.

Statistics:

This month Rodney, W5DY, had the most QNI with 45 (75%) and Pat, KD5TXD, came in next with 38 (63%). Jack, W5TFB, was out for a week due to first having eye surgery and then having to go to the hospital due to complications. Thankfully Jack is back home now and recovering. Floyd, N5EL, was able to make a few sessions, but he is still not feeling very well.

The complete list of stations and traffic / liaison totals are shown in the following table. Traffic was down quite a bit from August, averaging 2.5 per net session. Net time averaged a little over 12.6 minutes per session, down about 2 minutes from August. As mentioned in the early part of the newsletter, check-ins were down quite a bit as well, averaging only 5.3 per net session.

TEX Net Statistics (September 2006)

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
W5CDX	Wads	0	6						
*		6							
AC5CI	Homer	25	25			1			
		0							
W5CU	Sam	3	7		2				
*		4			4				
NV5D	Martin	1	1						
		0							
W5DY	Rodney	19	45	4	2	6		2	
		26		2	3	5			
N5EL	Floyd	2	4						
*		2							
W5ESE	Scott	11	12						2
*		1							1
W5GKH	Charlie	8	16	4	6	3			
*		8		8	5	1			
K5GM	Pete	2	2						
*		0							
K5JRN	Si	2	2						
*		0							
K6JT	Steve	25	54	5	1		25		
*		29		8	1		29		

			total	NCS	RN5	TTN	DFW	CTTN	TSN
Call		QNI							
K0KJ	Eric	3	3						
*		0							
KA5KLU	Doug	6	11	5	5	2			
*		5		4	4				
K5KV	Benny	2	2						
		0							
WA5MUF	Bill	0	1						
*		1							
N5NVP	Jim	1	3						
		2							
N5PWG	Jay	3	8						
*		5		5					
K5RG	Ken	3	9						
*		6							
W5TFB	Jack	17	25	4	5				
*		8			5				
W5TV	Tom	1	1						
		0							
KD5TXD	Pat	21	38			3			21
*		17				1			17
W5UFK	Ken	5	6						
*		1							
K5UN	Lee	8	16		8				
		8		3	8				
AC5XK	Don	1	1			1			
*		0							
AC5Z	Bert	18	18	8					
*		0							
Totals		316		60	59	23	54	2	41
				100%	98%	38%	90%	3%	68%
QTC 1		90	149						
QTC 2		59			Sessions:	60	100%		
Time 1		431	756						
Time 2		325							

As mentioned last month, thanks to Scott, N7NET, we have the following piece from James Fitzhugh, W5VL, in San Antonio. Scott originally published this in his QNC newsletter back in 1992.

My Early Years of Ham Radio

by J.V. Fitzhugh, W5VL, San Antonio, Texas

Seventy years ago Spark Gap transmitters and Galena crystal receivers, with their infamous “cat whisker” tuning were the heart of early stations appearing on the 200-meter band.

Before the development of vacuum tubes, receivers consisted of only a few major components:

1. A large, wire coil with a narrow strip from which the insulation had been removed. A sliding, shorting bar, capable of contacting the bare strip at a given point, enabling the operator to change the electrical value of the coil.
2. A smaller coil capable of providing loose or tight coupling with the larger coil.
3. A Galena crystal.
4. A piece of small-gauge spring steel wire called the “cat whisker.”

By moving the cat whisker about the surface of the Galena crystal, a sensitive area could eventually be located. For a time this was the only method for capturing and amplifying radio frequency signals.

When a ham turned on his spark transmitter he began transmitting before the motor, which turned his rotary gap mechanism, had reached operating speed. This caused the sound of his signal to increase, creating a rise in the tone as the motor revolution increased. During a QSO the operator might choose to switch off the power to the motor, causing the frequency of his signal to diminish, giving his transmitted signal a melodic quality.

Crystal receivers of that era had little selectivity. When an operator tuned in a station of his choice, numerous other stations were also heard. The sound resembled an orchestra tuning up prior to a concert, at first one station changed tone, then another, and still another by switching their motors on or off. It is regretful that recording equipment was not available during that period.

Electrical grounding of equipment was no less important then it is today. However, the task was accomplished in a much simpler fashion. Radial grounding wires were not yet in use. Instead, a single wire attached to a metal rod that was driven into the soil was sufficient for receiving purposes. Many amateurs attached their grounding wires to the plumbing. While this was satisfactory for reception, grounding the transmitter in such a manner often dispersed radio frequency interference over a larger area, creating problems even more difficult to solve.

My Spark transmitter was of the “open” type. By not enclosing the sparking area I allowed a very loud arcing noise to escape the sparking area. It often made exploding sounds and I was very fortunate not have had complaints from my neighbors.

Eventually, I went to the home of a friend who demonstrated his transmitter, which was enclosed. Also, he had a darkened glass in the front of the enclosure, allowing the operator to watch the spark without dazzling his eyes. I found both features an improvement over my spark system.

I was only twelve years old at the time and knew very little about the equipment I was operating. I was unaware that RF was finding its way into the motor windings of my rotary gap. After a few weeks the motor began to hobble, and I was unable to keep it running smoothly. After removing the motor housing I could see splattering of solder everywhere, indicating that RF had ruined the field winding. The defective motor curtailed my spark activity, but I continued receiving.

When radio was very young there were no commercial broadcasting stations operating on the 200-meter band, but in engineering circles the possibility of voice transmission was a serious consideration.

Fleming had created a diode-type tube. Doctor Lee DeForest followed, shortly after, with a vacuum tube featuring the first control grid. That signaled the end of the spark era, although several years passed before all spark usage was eliminated.

Apparently, one of the first experimental voice broadcasts took place in Schenectady, New York, for the purpose of testing the public reaction. One night I nearly jumped out of my chair when a human voice came over the code frequency to which I was listening.

Soon, broadcast stations were operating across the country, and amateurs shared the band with them. The arrangement resulted in total chaos, with the hams taking the larger part of the blame. Tense discussions between Congress and the amateur radio operators resulted. The subject became so heated that amateurs were on the verge of losing transmitting privileges entirely. Had it not been for Herbert Hoover, the Director of the Department of Commerce, and pressure from the American Radio Relay League, we might have lost our amateur privileges altogether.

The Federal Communications Commission (Federal Radio Commission then) came into existence in the early 1930s. With it came rules and regulations. Eventually, the 200-meter band was given over to the AM broadcasters, where they remain to this day.

Thanks again, Scott, for sharing that piece of our history from one who actually experienced it.

The following is an updated TEX member roster. NCS stations please note the more recent entries so you can greet them by name when they check in. If you were previously listed on the roster but you are no longer there this month, just check in once in a while and you'll be right back on it.

TEX Roster

Call	Name	Location / Notes	Call	Name	Location / Notes
N5BA	Brian	Houston	K5KV	Benny	Star
W5CDX	Wads	Crowley LA	W6LFB	Jim	Denton
AC5CI	Homer	Caldwell	WA5MUF	Bill	Watauga
W5CU	Sam	Edmond OK	N7NET	Scott	Allen
NV5D	Martin	Allen	KB5NJD	John	Duncanville
W5DY	Rodney	Goliad	N5NVP	Jim	Leesville LA
N5EL	Floyd	Temple	N5PWG	Jay	Pasadena
W5ESE	Scott	Dripping Springs	K5RG	Ken	Houston
W5GKH	Charlie	West Columbia	KC5T	Bob	Houston
K5GM	Pete	Austin	W5TFB*	Jack	College Station
KJ9J	Newt	Pharr TX (winter)	W5TV	Tom	Nacogdoches
K5JRN	Si	Denton	KD5TXD	Pat	Kingsville
KD5JSS	Dennis	Temple	W5UFK	Ken	College Station
K6JT	Steve	Plano	K5UN	Lee	Leonard
KØKJ	Eric	San Antonio	AC5XK	Don	San Antonio
KA5KLU	Doug	San Antonio	AC5Z	Bert	Nacogdoches (Lufkin)

* Stations with no E-Mail capability.

Operating:

As I write this, it is Sunday night, October 1, and the 10 PM TEX net just ended. I heard only the faintest of signals there, but in checking with Rodney (via E-Mail), he reported that Sam, W5CU, Charlie, W5GKH, and he were all there. He could hear both of them, weakly, but Charlie could not hear him. Nobody could hear me. As stated right at the top, this is going to happen more and more now. Please respond to the request for determining who might have 160 meter capability. We will most likely need to use it or we may be forced to abandon the 10 PM net until conditions improve again (who knows when that will be?).

I have no specific “tips” this month, but I’d like to reiterate the distinction between QSP and QNB, as I’ve heard them misused a few times. QNB is used when asking for someone to relay a station’s transmission that you cannot hear, mostly by the NCS. It is also used when assigning a relay station to help move traffic between two other stations during net that cannot copy each other well enough to do it without help. QSP is used to indicate you can take a piece of traffic for relay to either the destination, to another net or to another outlet that can be used to move it along.

For example, if the NCS hears someone sending but it’s too weak to make out the call letters or traffic list, he would ask for a QNB. If a piece of traffic is listed for Ft. Worth, which I cannot directly call myself, but for which I can use a local digital BBS for someone to move it to the DFW VHF traffic nets, then I would QSP that message.

Until next month, 73, Steve K6JT