

Sierra Signals

Sierra Foothills Amateur Radio Club
Auburn, CA
An ARRL Special Service Club

<http://sf-arc.org>

January 2007

P.O. Box 1005, Newcastle, CA 95658

“New World Order”

(Reported by Casey, W7IB)

Well the other shoe finally dropped and the FCC finally announced the elimination of Morse code as a license requirement for all classes. This comes close on the heels of the so-called Omnibus R&O which has already gone into effect. I say “so be it”, these are the rules that we must live under and *that* is simply that!

I do however have some concerns as to the way that the FCC issued this latest rule-making. I thought it was done very sloppily and without much forethought, or at least it appeared that way. They issued the initial “announcement of the Report and Order and an Order on Reconsideration” (WT Docket Nos. 04-140 and 05-235) on December 15th and I, for one, found the selection of words



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RESOURCES

REPEATERS

145.430 (-0.6 MHz/PL 162.2)

440.575 (+5.0 MHz/PL 94.8)

223.860 (-1.6 MHz/PL 100.0)

CLUB NET

Thursdays, 7:30PM, K6ARR/R

145.430

CLUB MEETINGS

Second Friday of the month,

7:30PM at the Library, 350

Nevada St, Auburn CA

CLUB BREAKFAST

Last Sat of the month at Susie's

Café, Cirby at Riverside, Roseville

– 8:00 AM

NET CONTROL OPS

Dave Jenkins, WB6RBE

Gary Cunningham, KQ6RT

Joe Sylvia, KF6OQY

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regarding Tech and Tech with Code privileges, and the kind of “take it or leave it” commentary on the 80 meter cw band both confusing and disturbing.

It seemed to take two or three clarifications of the Tech privileges to finally get one that resembled meaningful language. Combine that with the total *lack* of consideration (in my opinion) given the “Request for Reconsideration” on the 80 meter cw band edge, and it feels like the FCC is still sort of in

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2007 Calendar of Events

(Operating Events in Italics)

[Dates are local unless otherwise indicated]

<i>Jan 6-7</i>	<i>ARRL RTTY Round-UP</i>
Jan 12	Regular Meeting
<i>Jan 13-14</i>	<i>No. Amer. QSO Party-CW</i>
<i>Jan 20-21</i>	<i>No. Amer. QSO Party-SSB</i>
Jan 27	Club Breakfast
<i>Jan 28-29</i>	<i>CQ 160m CW</i>
Feb 9	Regular Meeting
Feb 24	Club Breakfast

We encourage members to receive Sierra Signals via email to save the Club the cost of reproduction and mailing

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Forty Years Ago At The SFARC

(Reported by Gary, KQ6RT)

January 17, 1967

Met at home of Dick Lund. Four members - Carl - Jim - Sage & Dick + one visitor - Jerry Murch. No formal business. Cake and Coffee served.

Dick

73,

Gary, KQ6RT

New World Order

(Continued from front page)

their "own world" where the Amateur Radio Service is concerned! It is becoming clearer to me that those at the current FCC have little concern, and maybe even less caring about how their rule-makings affect us in the amateur community. Additionally, I'm not sure that the folks "pushing the buttons" in that organization even know much about us or what we "do". After all, other than those among us who occasionally pay for a "Vanity" call sign, we don't produce any revenue (\$\$) for them at all (and by the way, they don't even get to use any of the monies that we provide- it's simply dumped back into the "General Fund.")

I am, however, fairly certain that they see the spectrum that we occupy, especially that in vhf and uhf, as "fertile fields" that can be sold at auction to the highest bidder and make them heroes to whatever administration is running the show! This certainly would give them "hero" status in the revenue grabbing US government system. Only time will tell.

So, is this the "New World Order" for us? Or, do we, as voters and constituents, have any kind of control of our federal agencies and services? I personally think that we should rally our fellow amateurs, and our friends, to make them aware of the situation. Then, take action accordingly by writer our congressional representatives and the ARRL regulatory people and let them know what we think - this is a democracy! Will it do any good? Will it change the "New World Order"? I don't know - it'll certainly make me feel better. How about you?

Casey, W7IB

Contesting

(and other musings)

(Reported by Fred, K6DGW)

Not all contests are equal or are equally fun, but January affords us a really unique line up of four really fun events, one for each weekend:

ARRL RTTY Round-Up: [6 Jan 1800Z - 7 Jan 2400Z]
www.arrl.org/contests/rules/2007/rtty.html

No. American QSO Party-CW: [13 Jan 1800Z - 14 Jan 0600Z] www.ncjweb.com/naqprules.php

No. American QSO Party-SSB: [20 Jan 1800Z - 21 Jan 0600Z] www.ncjweb.com/naqprules.php

CQ 160m CW: [28 Jan 0000Z - 29 Jan 0000Z] www.cq-amateur-radio.com/awards.html

RTTY RU: This is probably the premier domestic RTTY contest. It's an all contest-band event, and RTTY activity will be extremely high. There is an aggregate club competition as well, where all club members' scores will be aggregated to compete with other clubs. Our local contest club, NCCC, is going to try and reclaim the "Gavel" from the Potomac Valley RC this year, and we'd love to have you as a member and to be able to contribute your score to our aggregate total. Dues (nominally \$24) are optional, just contact me for further info.

If you are going to get into this contest, be sure to hit www.arrl.org and check out the new FCC RTTY sub-allocations. They have changed with the last R&O from the FCC, and will be in effect for the contest. They're color coded - not good for monochrome folks like me, but I do have a chromatic wife.

NAQP: Next to the Calif. QSO Party, these are my favorites. There are two sets, one in the winter and one in the summer. Each set has a CW, SSB, and RTTY contest on separate weekends. The exchange is "a name" and your state or province. Doesn't have to be the name your Mom and Dad gave you, however "Maximillian" is probably a bit long! Code speeds in the CW tend to be somewhat laid back, as is the general feeling for the whole contest. For 2006, I was "Skip," the nickname my combat team gave me. I've been through kids and grandkids names, maybe I'll go back to one of the names Mom put on my birth certificate this time.

CQ 160: Note, this one is 1600PST on Sat, 27 Jan to 1600PST on Sun, 28 Jan. Topband noise levels are down because of winter, and this one is worth a try. Look for JA's, other Pacific Rim, and VK's in the early morning just before the sun comes up here.

SPEAKING OF THE SUN: Our nearest star is always active. We are at the nadir of Cycle 23, however in mid-December, a very large, active sunspot appeared on the limb (left edge as we view the sun), and began belching various sorts of things. The "stuff" tends to go straight up or nearly so, as seen from the sun, so at first it missed us, but as the sun rotated, we began to see several X-class X-ray flares (big!), and other assorted atomic debris. It had effects on both HF and VHF propagation, some predictable and most not ... just reinforces how little we still know about this.

AND FINALLY, 500Kcs LIVES: Amid tons of nostalgia several years ago, the USCG and USN ceased guarding 600 meters (500Kcs), the International Marine Distress frequency. Well, we hams are nothing if we are not enterprising. A group, under ARRL sponsorship, have obtained an experimental license under FCC Rules Part 5. The primary call sign is WD2XSH, and they have an allocation from 505 - 510 KHz to experiment with. They have various beacons on the air, and

since most current HF transceivers include general coverage receivers that will make it to 500 KHz, they are starved for signal reports. www.500kcs.com will get you the poop. These kinds of experiments by hams have led to allocations for new bands. Who knows, one may come from this experiment. Some of the beacons are straight CW, some are QRSS – dots and dashes last minutes, v e e r r y s s l o o w, but computer software can then integrate that signal over time and pull it out of random noise that is 10 dB or more above it. If you want to listen, you'll need to be inventive. Try plugging in the center conductor of your antenna, but leave the shield of the coax disconnected. Try tying them both together and plugging that into the center conductor of your antenna jack. And, not all radios have the same sensitivity at this frequency.

Best wishes for the new year,

73,

Fred K6DGW

December Meeting Minutes

(Reported by Leslie, K7NYE)

The December meeting of SFARC was our annual Christmas Party, held at the United Methodist Church in Newcastle on December 8th. The party was attended by approximately 50 members of SFARC and their guests. The spirit of Christmas was apparent with all who attended, with warm camaraderie, Christmas music and laughter permeating the hall. It was agreed that members and guests believed it was one of the "best ever" parties for SFARC. There was ample and delicious food prepared with loving hands, as well as a variety of tempting desserts, which were appreciated by all who sampled the treats. A special thanks go out to Debbie Cunningham, KF6LXN and Gary Cunningham, KQSRT for making arrangements for the use of the church hall and being there to support the event from start to finish. Also, thanks to Pat Simmons for the carving of the turkey, as well as all of you that lent a hand for set-up and clean-up. It was greatly appreciated!

In keeping with the spirit of the season, our outgoing President, Casey, W7IB, presented several members of SFARC with certificates of merit, acknowledging their special contributions to the club during 2006. Two of the members received a very special award, Chuck Minton, KG6FFK and Jettie Hill, W6RFF. Both gentlemen were acknowledged for their leadership and other exceptional contributions to ham radio, SFARC and ARES.

We look forward to seeing you all in the New Year and to a healthy, happy and prosperous 2007!

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie
Secretary

K7NYE

Nye

Fall Colors in New England

By Richard Kuepper

Kerry and I vacationed in New England in the fall of 2006 and the colors were amazing. We started our coach tour in Boston after spending the night at the Omni Parker House, the oldest continuous operating hotel in the US. We toured Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, and Massachusetts.

We explored Arcadia National Park and traveled to the top of Mount Cadillac but I could not raise anybody on the radio.

We then traveled to North Conway in New Hampshire. We were supposed to go up to the top of Mount Washington in the White Mountain, but it was snowing. I was looking forward to talking on my handi-talkie to at least three or four states from up there, but no luck. By the way, Mount Washington is the highest peak in New England (6288 feet) and the wind has been clocked at 231 mph. LL Bean likes to test their coats up there. Oh well, I probably would have lost my radio with that kind of wind.

Returning to Boston after our 7day tour we headed up to Jan KC6LIX and Greg Huttula's KC6LOE home for the night. Greg is a past president of SFARC. We had a great visit with them and Jerrie K6GKR, Jan's mother. Jerrie was our sunshine lady for many years with SFARC.

The following day, Monday was my most memorable day of the trip. We drove to Newington, Connecticut and had a very nice tour of ARRL headquarters. Our tour guide, Roy was very knowledgeable about the history of ham radio. There are a lot of old radios to see. I was very interested in the lab where new radios and equipment are tested. Wow, it is first class. We then saw racks of radios that are used to send the bulletins and CW practice. They were behind glass so I couldn't touch them, dam.

We met many of the managers and staff. Roy then asked me if I wanted to operate W1AW. Why yes I said that would be fun, without trying to look over anxious. Well it was great. I never dreamed I would be using W1AW to call CQ. Headquarters had just finished putting up new antennas, so when I asked for a signal report, the response was, W1AW always has a great signal.

The rest of the trip was spent out on Cape Cod. Needless to say it not quite as exciting as ARRL and my chance to operate W1AW.

If you ever have a chance to go to Newington you will enjoy ARRL headquarters and of course operating W1AW. It was a chance of a lifetime.





Is CW Going Die?

(Reported by Fred, K6DGW)

The Facts: The FCC issued a press release on Fri, 15 Dec that they are issuing a Report and Order very soon to:

Eliminate Morse code tests (Element 1) for examinations for all classes of license;

“Grandfather” existing Technician licensees into the same privileges as the Tech-Plus licensees (i.e. opening the Tech+ CW sub-bands on 80, 40, 15, and 10 meters). Essentially, all Techs become Tech+. OK, the press release language is just a tad ambiguous but that’s what it looks like.

It’s just a press release, and the details will be in the R&O. It will become part of the Part 97 rules 30 days after the FCC publishes it in the Federal Register. Don’t look for rapid action on that, however. It is very likely you won’t see it in the Register until sometime after all the holidays, so the earliest effective date will likely be sometime in Feb 2007 or later. Note: CW was and still will be a legal emission type on any amateur band, anywhere your license class gives you permission to transmit. This R&O only removes the exam requirement.

The History: Since international cooperation in the regulation of radio began many decades ago, there has been a long-standing requirement that all licensed operators on frequencies below about 30 MHz have proficiency in the International Morse Code, as demonstrated by passing a sending and receiving examination. It was left to each country to decide how fast, for which classes of license, and how to structure the exam. Indeed, even the license class structure is left up to individual countries.

A few years ago, amid both cheers and wailings world-wide, the ITU met and removed that requirement, leaving it all up to each country. Many countries dropped the CW exam immediately. The FCC studied it, thousands commented, many more thousands discussed it on the air and on email reflectors, and the FCC opened a new study. Now it appears it will finally happen.

The Rationale: Originally, the rationale for a code test went something like: “The LF, MF, and HF spectrum, other than

broadcasting, is used internationally for long-haul communications. Early on, it was almost universally on CW. Other modes (e.g. RTTY) crept in with time, but Morse was still a major mode as late as 1960. Safety Of Life At Sea, flight safety, and other critical needs thus suggest strongly that any operator using that spectrum should be proficient in Morse Code.” And so we all were, or at least all were when we passed the examination. The US Coast Guard, US Navy, other Navies, and all coastal marine stations monitored 600 meters (500 KHz), all ships had at least one proficient radio operator and an alarm system that would go off if it detected a Morse code SOS on that frequency, and the like. In the US and maybe elsewhere, the Amateur Service was seen as a pool of qualified radio operators for military service and indeed, many served in WW2, Korea, and Vietnam.

Then we approached the end of the 20th century and things changed. Marine communications moved to satellite circuits, new digital modes and protocols were developed, GPS showed up and any ship or aircraft anywhere could find out where they were, by themselves. The military stopped using Morse code in favor of the newer, more easily encrypted modes. Coastal Marine stations had no traffic and closed, CW-proficient operators disappeared from ships and finally, the unthinkable -- [Gasp!] -- the US Coast Guard and the Navy quit monitoring 600 meters a few years ago. In fact, there is an Amateur experimental license for 600m tests by selected stations underway now. <www.500kcs.com> We may end up with a new band there someday, which is ironic. It was amateurs who investigated and proved the usefulness of “200 meters and down” when we were banished there some 80+ years ago to clear “the long-waves” (the only useable frequencies) for commercial service.

The Likely Reality: Let’s consult history. In the very early 50’s, the Novice license was created, said by some OT’s at the time to be the downfall of the hobby. It was good for a year, non-renewable, with restricted CW operating privileges on 80, 40, and 15, and AM voice on 2m. You either upgraded to General or Technician, or you were off the air in 12 months. Restrictions included crystal control transmit and a max of 75W plate input power. Transmitters were really cheap (two tubes would do ... actually 1 tube and a selenium rectifier would do), often home built from parts found at the numerous WW2/Korean War surplus shops. The Novice was to be the end of ham radio according to some. What really happened?

A couple of NCCC members have scanned the ARRL Sweepstakes logs in the club’s database. If you’re not familiar with the exchange in SS, it looks like a radiogram header, and for the “check,” you send the last two digits of the year you were first licensed. Thus, it’s a great statistical resource. There are a huge number of operators with checks from the early 50’s through the later 60’s. They are now close to my age, and nearly all got into ham radio through the Novice license in the teens. For a long period of time, we lowered the mean age of amateur radio by a huge amount. Ham radio did not die as forecast, in fact it flourished.

We also had a band then between what is now 12m and 10m called “11 meters” (you were looking for something more creative?). 11m was an industrial band where induction heating equipment, diathermy medical gear, and all sorts of

similar noisemakers operated. We could operate there too. Virtually any emission type that was legal anywhere for hams was legal on 11m, just stay inside the band limits. You could do RC model control there, you could transmit unmodulated carriers, you could work full duplex – don't laugh, my teen friends and I did. Then, the FCC created the no-test Citizens' Band, kicked us off of 11m, and put CB there, and the wailing began. That service blossomed amid great and very vocal fears that they'd slowly get 10m, and eventually all ham bands. Although there was some encroachment into the bottom of 10m for awhile, what there is now (not much) is from Mexico, and we're still waiting for the dire consequences to happen. On the other hand, a lot of CB'ers got tired of 11m and joined the ranks of licensed hams.

People starting at the Novice then would sort of split – some going on to General and Extra for HF operation with higher speed code tests, others going to Technician for VHF and UHF operation with a 5 WPM test, and the rest disappearing. Six meters was highly underused in the mid-50's, and so the FCC granted phone privileges on 6 to the Techs amid great and vocal wailing that this would expand and slowly contaminate the HF bands with slow-code Techs. "6 phone today, 10 phone tomorrow." We're still waiting for that to happen too, however it did populate 6m, and may have saved it for us.

In the later 60's, the ARRL conceived of "Incentive Licensing," where there would be more rungs on the licensing ladder and incentives for upgrading (i.e. higher class = more spectrum), and sold it to the FCC. I can't tell you much about the run-up to IL as I was on the other side of the planet at the time, and it was, or was just about, law when I finally returned home at the end of 1967. However, I came home to great and very vocal wailing that it would spell the death of ham radio. Generals were angry that they had lost spectrum. A few Extras played BGOTB (Big Guy On The Band) and camped in "their" and the new Advanced segments, running down everyone else. As some upgraded to Advanced, they pushed the Extras down to their "own" segments, and we became more and more stratified. It was all said to be awful and would lead to the demise of our hobby. Unlike the first hugely successful Novice license, incentive licensing doesn't seem to have done a whole lot positive for ham radio, but in defense of many who supported it, it did seem to be a good idea at the time, I guess. However, last time I checked, ham radio is alive and well and we're still waiting for the awful to happen.

Not that long ago, a proposal was put forth to remove the code test from the Technician class exam. It was seen as a barrier to new, possibly younger people entering the hobby by some. On the other side, fears were that removing the code test would just dumb down the ranks, and VHF/UHF would become a giant CB playground given the now ready availability of HT's and other radios. Great and vocal wailing ensued, but the FCC finally did it. What we got were a whole lot of new hams (a few young), increased club membership, and greatly increased usage of our VHF and UHF bands via repeaters. That usage likely has been a factor in resisting commercial encroachment, and we're still waiting for the "CB invasion."

Around the same time, all code speeds were lowered to 5 WPM amid more great and loud wailing. We had self-proclaimed "20 WPM Extras," "10 WPM (or was it 13?) Extras," and "5

WPM Extras" dubbed "Extra lites" by a mean-spirited few. However, despite the carping, HF activity picked up, DXing and contesting saw an upswing, VE licensing classes and sessions became more full, and the bottom didn't fall out of ham radio, quite the opposite. (You're probably breaking this code by now J).

What's Going To Happen With No CW Test? If history is any indicator, and it very often is, probably very little – maybe nothing. A large number of hams who passed code tests, have gone to HF AM and SSB and live there pretty much 100% of the time which is just fine. There are a large number of hams world wide who pretty much stick to CW. Except for VHF/UHF FM, I'm one of them. The reason I usually give is loss of hearing in war, but in truth, it would be my choice even if I could hear. A goodly number will gravitate to VHF/UHF FM and be very happy, and more power to them too. Some will slowly disappear ... sad, but then this is a hobby and one gets to choose their hobby. This has all been happening for a long time, and it will continue ... code test or not.

When you think about it, we've pretty much been without a CW requirement for quite awhile. 5 WPM is only 25 characters in a minute – a little more than one every 3 seconds. Yes you have to learn 36 characters and a handfull of punctuation, but as a VE, I've seen people copy down the dots and dashes, translate them visually after the sending stops, and pass the test (as they should) and so far, ham radio hasn't crashed and burned nor is it showing any sign of doing so. The difference between 5 WPM and no WPM isn't really that big, and the original needs for the Morse code requirement for HF privileges have clearly changed and diminished a lot. CW will continue on the ham bands as long as Field Day CW Q's are worth 2 points and SSB Q's one point, the FCC just decided it doesn't need to be part of the exam.

We do have some larger problems to deal with. Our Nation was confronted by two back-to-back major disasters recently in the Gulf states, we had people ready to communicate, and governmental agencies who couldn't communicate who were either oblivious or uninterested. That in itself is a huge problem. Spectrum encroachment from commercial interests, especially in the UHF and low microwaves is a continuing problem. We have a cadre of really crude people -- some known as "pig farmers" -- on 75 and 40 who are not a credit to our hobby, and we need to do something about it before someone does it for us (and inevitably, to us). As was true when a 13 yr old became KN6DGW, the mean age of the ham population is now going up at close to 1 year per year again. That's a problem if we want our hobby to enrich the lives of those who follow us as much as it has enriched ours. Dropping Element 1 just really isn't in the same league with any of these, and it isn't going to cause ham radio to suddenly tank. Trust me.

73,

Fred K6DGW

Check = 53

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Newcastle, CA 95658

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**SIERRA FOOTHILLS AMATEUR RADIO CLUB
2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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Phone Number: _____ Application: (Circle One) New Renewal

Member Dues: Circle Amounts That Apply. Applications (for new members only) received in the middle of the year will be pro rated. Contact the President or Treasurer for exact rate.

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Miscellaneous Donation:	\$ _____	Christmas Donation:	\$ _____
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