

# KH2D on Morse Code .....

## HISTORY OF CW IN HAM RADIO, THE BRIEF VERSION.

Morse code. CW. Charlie Whiskey, as some of the old guys call it. For years, ham radio operators have communicated with each other using Morse code. Dits and dahs. Simple, but effective, means of communications.

Morse code has always been one of the testing requirements for amateur radio licenses. The higher the class license you wanted, the faster you had to be able to copy Morse code.

Hams with a beginners license (Novice) were allowed to operate on a few HF bands in portions referred to as the 'Novice Bands' after passing a five word per minute Morse code receiving test.

## THE NO CODE TECHNICIAN LICENSE

Then, a few years back, somebody, doesn't really matter who, decided there was not enough growth in amateur radio, and that Morse code was keeping people out of the hobby. They decided we needed a license class which allowed hams to operate using a microphone on the HF bands, without taking a Morse code test, and hence the 'No Code Technician' class license was invented.

The No Code Technician, did, indeed, start a rush of people wanting to join the ranks of amateur radio. No Code Technician class operators were given phone operating on VHF, phone privileges in the six meter (50 mhz VHF) band, and with the Novice Enhancement a few years back, a 'TECH PLUS' (5 wpm code) also got the ten meter (28 mhz HF) bands.

Only two problems with this. One, six meters is a band where you have to be very, very patient (or very, very nuts) to operate - it 'opens' very sporadically, and you may have to listen for three months before you hear anybody to talk to. Wow, that's exciting, huh ? Two, ten meters, on the other hand, is a band where world wide propagation with low power is available - during the peak of a sunspot cycle. During the bottom of a sunspot cycle, you may have to wait eight years before you hear anybody you can talk to, with the exception of the guy who lives about 3 miles up the road. Even more exciting.....

## NOW HERE WE ARE IN 1998

In the 90's, and in the United States, most people are impatient. Somebody along the way coined the phrase 'THE NOW GENERATION'. I can't really blame anybody for not wanting to buy a radio and wait eight years to get to talk to somebody with it, eight years is a long time.

Use to be, the people who came into ham radio got there because of either an interest in electronics, or a fascination with the 'magic' of radio - communications with no wires. Problem with the No Code Technician license is it didn't seem to attract too many of these kinds of people. It seems to have attracted a lot of people who aren't really sure why the heck they have a ham license. It seems to have attracted a lot of Dick and Janes, who wanted to keep in touch with each other with a 'radio' and wanted to find something for their two kids to become involved in - and it seems to have attracted a bunch of people from the NOW GENERATION.

Decide which group you belong in, and read on to figure out what to do.

## DON'T KNOW WHY YOU HAVE A HAM LICENSE ?

Well, then don't expect me to know why the heck you have one either. Tear it up. Do not pass go. Don't collect two hundred dollars. Hit the bricks, you're outta here....

Still reading ? Take this simple test. If you answer YES to any of the following questions, you are here for the wrong reasons too:

1. Do you live on a sailboat and use ham radio for your normal regular communications ?
2. Do you work for a large religious organization and were you encouraged to get a ham license in conjunction with you missionary work ?

Ham radio is NOT a replacement for an INMARSAT terminal or a commercial radio on a sail boat. If you think you are going to run into a reef one day and then call somebody on the ham bands to come and save you, you are a fool. You probably know as much about ham radio as you do about sailing. Do yourself a favor. Get rid of the radio AND the boat.

Twenty meters is NOT God's replacement for the telephone system. By conducting your church business on the ham bands you are breaking the rules. Granted, you won't find too many people who will confront you about it - who wants to take a chance arguing with God - but you will find a few. You found me. Don't dare bang on my door and explain to me how I should live, when you can't even follow a few simple rules.

#### WHERE ARE DICK AND JANE ?

Lost. They thought ham radio was a cheap replacement for a cell phone. Neither Dick nor Jane were ever really interested in electronics, or the 'magic' of radio, or God Forbid, this Morse code stuff. They didn't realize that EVERYBODY on the local repeater could hear them talking about honey do this and honey don't do that. They didn't realize that the two kids would be subjected to the conversations of dirty old men. They didn't realize that everybody with a ham ticket isn't a 'nice guy'.

What should you do if you fit into the Dick and Jane category ? Proceed directly to the nearest hamfest. Sell all the handy scratchies (HT's). Tell the two kids that God canceled ham radio. Forget about ham radio. Somebody misdirected you here. You should have never been here in the first place. We are very sorry, please contact your local VE team and see if you can get your \$ 6.25 back. Go collect Huggy Bears.

#### AND WHERE ARE THE NOW GENERATION ?

Angry. The Now Generation of No Code Technicians can be subdivided into two basic groups - a) Angry And Not Interested In Ham Radio Group, and b) Angry But Really Interested In Ham Radio Group.

Why is the Now Generation of No Code Techs ANGRY ? Well, that's easy to explain. Somebody else has something they want, and they can't have any, unless they are willing to expend a little effort to get it, like everybody else who has it did. They don't want it LATER - they want it NOW ! And what, pray tell, IS it that they want - NOW ? They want to operate on HF, on ALL the HF bands and they don't want to use this MORSE CODE stuff, they want to use a MICROPHONE ! So what are they doing about it ? They are bitching, they are whining, they are crying, they are complaining, they are thinking of hundreds of reasons why they a) can't learn Morse code and b) why they shouldn't have to learn Morse code.

#### GROUP A - ANGRY AND NOT INTERESTED IN HAM RADIO.

You got a No Code Tech License. Well good for you. Any monkey can pass a written test if you give him the answers to all the questions and enough time to study. Interest in electronics ? No ? Interested in the magic of radio ? No ? Oh, you really don't know, huh ... Well, stop wasting your time crying to get on HF - if you get there, you'll be as out of place and confused about what to do as you are on the VHF repeater. You already wasted money on the HT, don't bother wasting any more on HF gear because we got enough used stuff flying around now, and we don't need you to add to it.

What should you do at this point ? Back up two paragraphs and read my advice for Dick and Jane. Hit the bricks. Don't look back. You made a mistake. Don't compound it. Now's your chance to exit stage left. Do it.

#### GROUP B - ANGRY BUT REALLY INTERESTED IN HAM RADIO.

Congratulations ! If you are in this group, you are a lot better of then the guys in group A. But you still have a lot of problems. All the old ham guys make fun of you, right ? They call you terrible names, like NEWBIE or GEEK or TECHIE, right ? Really hurts your feelings, because you are really interested in this ham radio stuff, and you really just want to be 'one of the guys', right ?

Well, here is my advice for you. First off, if you have a friend or friends who started in ham radio when you did, and they fit into group A above, dump them. You have enough to deal with right now, you don't need any advice from some loser with an HT that doesn't have the same interests as you do. You are different from them. You are really interested in ham radio. They are excess baggage you don't need right now.

Second of all, you have to realize a few things. You aren't an idiot, even though hanging around with your friends from group A might make you think you are. Being the NEWBIE, the GEEK, the TECHIE is all part of the program. Twenty five years ago, when my friends and I were starting in ham radio, we were the LIDS, the KIDS, and the SPACE CADETS. But we lived through it. You will too.

There are two basic things you can do about this Morse code stuff:

One: You can petition the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. to change the rules so that you can get on HF without taking a code test.

Two: You can do what you have to do to learn Morse code, upgrade your license and become involved in a very enjoyable hobby that will go with you wherever you go the rest of your life.

Those are your ONLY two options. Hanging around with the losers from group A isn't going to get you anywhere. Whining, crying, bitching, complaining isn't going to get you anywhere.

You MUST change the way you think. You have been hanging around with a bunch of bozo's so long, listening to what they say, reading what they write, that you have convinced yourself that you are STUPID. Too STUPID to learn the Morse code. It's too HARD to learn. You can NEVER learn Morse code. Baloney. ANYBODY can learn Morse code. Little children have learned it. Handicapped people have learned it. But before ANYONE can learn it they have to have one thing - the DESIRE to learn it. You are really interested in ham radio, you have to convince yourself to turn that INTEREST into the DESIRE it takes to do what you have to do.

#### YOU'VE DECIDED YOU WANT TO LEARN CODE

Before we get started on the code learning thing, there is something else you have to do that is very important. Go to your local ham club. Meet all the old farts you hear on the repeater, the ones that call you GEEK and NEWBIE and TECHIE. Listen to them talking, and find a few that are talking about HF. From this group, pick the oldest, meanest, nastiest old fart out of the bunch. When the group starts to thin out, approach this guy and tell him you are a new ham, tell him you are really interested in ham radio, and tell him you need an Elmer. Nine chances out of ten, he'll volunteer for the job. If he

doesn't, you need to find an old fart who is meaner than he is. If he does, he'll be your most valuable resource and a constant source of things that will never cease to amaze you.

Back to the code. How do you learn the code ? I don't know. I imagine different things work better for different people. I can tell you how I learned code, but let me precede the learning advice with something. When I got interested in ham radio, I wanted a ham license SO BAD I could TASTE it. I didn't care what I had to do to get one, I knew I was going to do whatever it was. I NEVER for, one minute, stopped to think about how much of a pain in the ass it was to learn Morse code - I was too busy learning it. I NEVER, for one minute, tried to figure out how to get around learning Morse code - I was too busy learning it. I NEVER for one minute thought about whether I liked Morse code or I didn't like Morse code - I was too busy learning it.

I learned Morse code, to start with, with tapes and street signs. Jammed the tape in the tape player in the car and listened to it driving back and forth to work every day. When I got to the point where I had the letters memorized, I started reading street signs and sending them to myself inside my head with Morse code. Probably a good thing nobody ever pulled out in front of me while this was going on, but luckily, they didn't.

And then I passed the five word per minute test. I had already purchased the radio, already made the 40 meter dipole, cut for the Novice band, already had it all plugged in, hooked up, and ready to go. Back then, you had to have a piece of paper in your hand before you could key the transmitter - no instant gratification from the FCC list on the internet, so I waited what seemed like a hundred years, and the license came.

OK, you're thinking, you passed the five words per minute. But then how did you increase your speed to thirteen and then to twenty ? I didn't. The speed increased itself , thru the MAGIC of radio.....

Once you have a license, the fastest way to get better at Morse code is very simple. You use it. You get on the radio, and you talk to other people using Morse code. Just like a baby increases his language skills by talking and listening to other people talk. Just like a baby increases his ability to walk by trying to walk.

My first contact with my new ticket was with a lady named Alice, WA4RRR, about 700 miles away. I was so excited I almost fell out of the chair - here I was talking to someone with a piece of wire hanging in a tree !! As a novice I made about 900 contacts using CW, while I was studying the theory for the rest of the written tests I needed to pass. When it was time to take more tests, I didn't have to worry about the Morse tests, they just took care of themselves.

#### WAS IT REALLY WORTH THE EFFORT ?

For me, there is only one answer to that question. Yes. Learning Morse code wasn't any easier for me than what I imagine it would be for most people. But I didn't let the fact that I had to learn it get in the way. Do I use only CW on the radio today ? No, I use CW, SSB, SSTV, PACKET, RTTY, FM, and whatever else ham radio has available. In the last 14 years, from the island of Guam, I have made CW contacts with over 36,000 other ham stations all over the world. Is CW the BEST mode for making contacts ? I don't know. The high tech guys say that some digital modes are much faster, and much more efficient than CW. Those are done by machines, CW is done by people. Can you really compare the efficiency of a computer to a human ? I don't know. But I can tell you this. On the days we go down to the beach and sling a wire up in a tree, I can make ten contacts using Morse code when the guys using a microphone can't make one. What's my code speed today ? I'm comfortable at 30 wpm, can do contest exchanges at 35 to 40 wpm, and can copy call signs at 48 or 50 wpm according to my computer and a program called PILEUP. Did I ever do anything to build up my code speed ? Yes, I worked 36,000+ stations on HF using CW.

#### WHAT IS KH2D's POSTION ON NO CODE HF LICENSES ?

I don't have a position. I think it will probably happen some day. If it does, I won't lose any sleep over it. If the rules change and a lot of people suddenly wind up on HF, I doubt most of them will be happy with it because they will have missed out on a lot of information they need to collect along the way. I think they'll be lost, confused about what to do, and eventually there will be a lot of radios that don't get turned on anymore. Kind of like being dumped off the bus in the middle of downtown Tokyo when you don't speak Japanese.....

Go to the zoo. Get a monkey. Take the monkey to the hospital. Dress the monkey in a white coat, put a stethoscope around his neck. Put a wallet in his pocket full of business cards that say 'DR. MONKEY. BRAIN SURGEON'. Put the monkey in the operating room. Come back in a week, and see if he has done any successful brain surgeries. No ? Why not ? Because on his way from the zoo to the hospital, he didn't gain any of the knowledge or get any of the tools he needs to be successful.

Nobody can predict the future, except those guys with 900 numbers, and I can't talk to them because 900 numbers don't work from Guam.

I think probably I'd feel sorry for the no code HF hams. I know a guy who has had a license for longer than I have. A tech license. He has the money, the time, the interest, and whatever else it takes to really enjoy ham radio. He wants to be 'one of the guys' really bad. He feels left out. He feels bitter. He's constantly coming up with reasons why all the other hams around him should stop what they are doing, and come back down to his level and do things with him. I watch him trying to convince everyone that he's having a good time, but if he's fooling anybody, he's only fooling himself. I have nothing behind me but fond memories and funny stories from my twenty five years of ham radio. He has twenty five years of feeling left out and bitterness behind him.

All because he couldn't muster up the desire to do what he needs to do. Can you ?

73, Jim KH2D

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