



THE COMMUNICATOR

Newsletter of the TAMAMI AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

Incorporated 30 November 1984 – Venice, Florida
Mailing Address: 1419 E. Manasota Beach Rd., Englewood, FL 34223-6341
Web Site -- <http://tamamiarc.tripod.com>
W4AC Repeaters – 146.805 MHz(-), 444.100(+) both w/100 Hz PL



-- MARCH 2006 --

-- PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE --

The TARC-sponsored charter bus trip to the Orlando HamCation worked out beautifully. The driver did a fine job of getting us there and parked, and it was nice to be able to go back to the bus at any time and deposit goodies accumulated in the flea market. This was my first trip to Orlando and I wasn't prepared for the "free form" look of the vendor areas. I think I was picturing something more like the Dayton Hamvention. However, the day was pleasantly cool for walking around, and some kind of "TARC mojo" held off the rain until the bus was headed back to Venice. One of my personal highlights was a great barbecue sandwich done over a real wood fire. Ham-fest food usually doesn't score many points with me, but this was a tasty exception. Many thanks to Matt-W2EQV, Stew-W4MO, Peter-N4RD, and all who helped make our charter bus trip a success.

Over breakfast at Peach's last Tuesday, Stew brought me up to date on antenna developments at our repeater site. Stew's son, David-W4HAG, is becoming quite proficient at climbing the tower and he has now secured the apex of the HF antenna near the 200 ft. mark, with one leg extended out to an 80 ft. tower and the other running out to a guy anchor. What this means is an even better signal for all the TARC operators of the remote station. Future plans call for an additional HF rig at the site and a new arrangement which will eliminate the need for a computer in the control area.

Plans for the TARC Special Event Station K4S from April 7 through April 10 at the Sharks Tooth Festival in front of Sharky's are continuing to evolve, and it looks like we'll have sufficient "hampower" available to run a good operation.

VY 73 de Konrad-WA3RRS

-- TARC WEEKLY NETS --

Try to remember our two weekly TARC 2-meter nets. The TARC Simplex Net meets every Tuesday at 7:30 PM on 146.580 MHz; the TARC Net is held every Thursday, except on meeting dates, at 7:30 PM on our 146.805 W4AC Repeater (- 600 Hz offset and 100 Hz PL tone required). Take the time to check in and keep us updated on your activities.

-- 2006 DUES - FINAL NOTICE --

Here's the Final Reminder that your 2006 TARC dues are now due and payable. All dues must be paid before 31 March 2006 or you will be deleted from the TARC Membership Roster. Dues are still just \$15 per year, payable (to "TARC"), either at our meetings or via mail to:

Donald Gray – WD7A
761 Mangrove Road
Venice, FL 34293

-- MARCH MEETING --

Our next TARC meeting will be at 7:00 PM on 09 March 2006 in the Community Room of The Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, 601 South Tamiami Trail (Business US 41), across from the Venice Regional Health Center. After the business meeting, DARN Coordinator Bob Sullenberger-KG4VDU will provide an overview on the Diocese Amateur Radio Network and how the TARC has been assisting in its efforts.

-- NO MORSE NEWS UPDATE --

You may recall that the FCC issued a Notice of Proposed Rule Making in July 2005, proposing elimination of the Element 1 Morse code requirement for all license classes. More than 3800 comments were received by the FCC regarding this proposal. The next step would be for the FCC to formally adopt any revisions and issue a Report and Order spelling out the changes and their effective date.

"There really is no news," an FCC staff member told the ARRL. "We certainly hope to release WT Docket 05-235 sometime this year, but we're not making any predictions at this time." This person also indicated there would not be any "big announcements" at the FCC Forum at the Dayton Hamvention.

Prior to any announcement regarding Morse, the FCC wants to wrap up action on the "Phone Band Expansion" in WT Docket 04-140. This action would reallocate the current Novice/Tech+ sub-bands to expand portions of the 80, 40 and 15-meter phone bands.

(From *ARRL Bulletin* 3, 14 February 2006)

TAMIAMI AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

Minutes of the Meeting

09 February 2006

President Konrad Owens-WA3RRS called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and led the pledge of allegiance. Royce Van Norman-WB3KKN of Nokomis was welcomed as a guest, and introductions were made all around.

MINUTES – Jon Hamlet-W4ZW moved that the minutes of the January 2006 meeting be accepted as published in the February 2006 issue of *The Communicator*, seconded by Croft Taylor-VE3CT, and passed.

CORRESPONDENCE – Secretary Jack Sproat-W4JS gave a brief overview of correspondence sent and received over the past month. This included a thank you letter to Dick-KU4HA and Karen-KF4PEX Campbell for their donations of Rohn tower sections and an MFJ Data Controller; Internet updating the Club data for the ARRL web site; announcements of our K4S Special Event operation sent for publication in *QST*, *CQ*, and *WorldRadio*; receipt of notice and payment of the annual Florida Incorporation fee; submission and receipt of certified copies of our Amended and Restated Articles of Incorporation from the Florida Department of State; receipt of notices of the Orlando HamCation and the Charlotte County Hamfest.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Treasurer Don Gray-WD7A reported that the 12 January starting balance was \$5178.17. Receipts were \$27.00 from the January 50/50 drawing, \$258.50 from renewed dues, \$15.00 for new member Bob Sullenberger-KG4VDU, and \$990.00 for the Orlando Bus/HamCation, totaling \$1290.50. Expenses were \$52.50 for certified copies of Amended and Restated Articles of Incorporation, \$150.00 for brochure printing deposit, \$140.00 for wireless Internet connection at W4AC Repeater, \$745 for the charter bus, \$200.00 for HamCation tickets, \$13.58 for newsletter printing and postage, \$61.25 for renewal of Florida Incorporation, and \$7.02 for mailing membership cards, totaling \$1369.35. The ending balance is \$5099.32. Charlie Covell-W4DB moved acceptance of the report, seconded by Chuck Lingo-KA8SQE, and passed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

SUNSHINE – Konrad noted the passing of former TARC member Larry Yacobelli-W4ERN.

VE TESTING – Jack-W4JS commented there would not be a VE session this Saturday as the VEs were going to the Orlando HamCation that day.

REPEATER/TECHNICAL – Stew Haag-W4MO reported that he hopes to replace the duplexers on the 2-meter repeater in the near future. The remote-

controlled HF transceiver is workable. Arrangements have been made to purchase some used 7/8" hard line at the Orlando HamCation for the 440 MHz repeater.

Jon-W4ZW reported on the inspection tour of the repeater at the Clear Channel Communications site on 30 January. He, Stew Haag-W4MO and David Haag-W4HAG met with SERC's president, Doug Anderson, Bob Davisson-KA4BOB and Ed Palmer-K4JP. It was evident that none of the equipment furnished by the TARC was now at the site. Palmer claimed that he removed the TARC equipment and, having no response from TARC to pick up the equipment, he traded the duplexers to someone, whose name he's forgotten, for a set of 440 MHz duplexers. The TARC Micor repeater was given to someone who, being unable to get a coordinated frequency pair, returned it to Palmer. That repeater was picked up from Palmer during January. A replacement set of Model 6456/SNC 6-can duplexers will cost about \$1245 plus shipping, and the SERC is willing to assist in replacement of those duplexers. Jon will make several proposals to SERC, including our paying a portion of the cost, in consideration that the equipment had been in service for about two years.

PACKET/GATEWAY – Bob-N1RA reported that he has both computers operational as a BBS/packet gateway station on 145.610 MHz from his home.

CLUB PROPERTY – Charlie-W4DB reported nothing new since the donation from the Campbells (see above).

PUBLICITY/MEMBERSHIP – Don-WD7A reported that the printer of our brochure had encountered some delays due to labor difficulties. Don remarked that 31 March will be the deadline for renewal of TARC membership dues and all members not paid up for 2006 by that date will be purged from the roster.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR – Jack-W4JS reminded all that the Diocese Amateur Radio Network (DARN) will be conducting its monthly net operation at 11:30 AM on 13 February, and that all TARC members are invited to check in when the net moves to our W4AC repeater. DARN conducts these nets the second Monday of each month to determine both radio coverage and participation.

NET OPERATIONS – Jack-W4JS remarked that our Tuesday night simplex nets draw about eight stations and our Thursday night nets on our W4AC repeater draw about 12 participants. Volunteers for net control are always welcome.

LIAISON TO EARS – Konrad stated that he attended the 19 January EARS meeting, however, any action regarding the EARS repeater at the Newport Offices site was dependent on the pending meeting

See **MINUTES**, page 5

CURRENT/PENDING DX ACTIVITY & PROPAGATION FORECASTS

CURRENT and/or SCHEDULED DX ACTIVITY										
COUNTRY – CALL SIGN	ACTIVITY PERIOD	BEAR-ING	HF BANDS and BEST OPENING TIMES (GMT)							
			80	40	30	20	17	15	12	10
Jan Mayen – JX9NOA	Now Operative	21	23-10	08-14	12-22	14-18	15-19	NO	NO	NO
Liberia – EL2PM	Now to May	92	23-07	21-09	20-02	14-00	16-21	16-21	NO	NO
Gabon – TR8FC	Now to May	88	23-06	22-07	20-02	13-00	16-21	16-21	NO	NO
Senegal – 6W/HA3AUI	Now to 31 March	87	23-08	21-09	19-02	13-00	16-22	15-21	NO	NO
West Malaysia - 9M2/HA5TAA	Now to 12 March	352	NO	11-13	12-13	14-20	16-19	16-19	NO	NO
Vanuatu – YJ/ German Operators	Now to 11 March	262	07-12	06-13	04-14	12-16	01-02	21-22	21-22	2100
Cambodia – XU7ADI	Now to 06 Mar	349	1130	10-13	12-14	14-18	16-17	17-18	NO	NO
Rotuma Is – 3D2???	01 – 10 March	263	06-12	05-13	12-14	13-15	01-02	20-22	20-21	NO
Jersey Is – GJ???	08 – 15 March	46	23-08	21-10	11-22	14-19	15-18	15-18	NO	NO
Fiji – 3D2???	11 – 13 March	258	06-12	05-13	12-14	23-01	01-02	21-22	21-22	NO
Benin – TY???	15 – 20 March	85	23-06	21-07	20-02	13-00	15-22	15-22	NO	NO
Papua New Guinea – P29K	17 – 20 March	283	08-12	07-13	12-14	13-16	14-16	00-01	NO	NO
Morocco - CN2SD	20 – 28 March	64	23-07	21-09	19-03	13-21	16-20	15-20	NO	NO

Updated 26 February 2006, based on 22 February 2006 *QRZ DX*, and 20 February 2006 *The Weekly DX*

Note: **Time in bold** = Best Band(s) for opening; ??? = Call Sign not yet known; ++ = Phone Only; ** = CW Only; NO = No Opening forecast. Long Path bearings and opening times are underlined. All forecasts are calculated using *W6ELProp V.1.03* propagation software, available at <http://www/qs1.net/w6elprop/> by Sheldon C. Shallon-W6EL. Solar Flux and K-index vary in accordance with NOAA 27-day forecast.

-- FEBRUARY SOLAR ACTIVITY --

During February, the Solar Flux ranged from 74 up to 79, with a mean value of 76.6 (vs. 97.3 for February 2005 and 107.0 for February 2004). The A-index was ≤ 10 on 23 days.

While there were numerous days when no sunspots were visible, the general absence of geomagnetic disturbances made for good propagation during the month.

-- MARCH PROPAGATION --

During March, solar activity is expected to be at very low to low levels. No greater than 10MeV proton events are expected.

The greater than 2 MeV electron flux at geosynchronous orbit is expected to be at high levels on March 20.

The geomagnetic field is expected to range from quiet to minor storm levels. Active to minor storm periods are possible on 19 March due to effects from recurrent coronal hole wind streams. Otherwise, quiet to unsettled conditions are expected. The Solar Flux should range from 75 to 80 during March.

(From *NOAA Weekly Highlights and Forecasts, 24 January 2006* and *NOAA 27-day Space Weather Outlook Table, 24 January 2006*)

Fifteen meters will be more usable than 10 or 12 meters, with openings into both northern and southern hemispheres. The 17- and 20-meter bands will offer both short- and long-path openings into Eastern Europe, Africa, and both the Near and Far East.

The 40-, 80- and 160-meter bands will offer the best nighttime openings, however, sporadic storms will cause intermittent periods of high static.

When the Spring Equinox occurs 20 March all areas of the Earth will have equal hours of daylight and

darkness, and the gray line will run due north and south. This always makes for interesting propagation.

-- PETER I OPERATION A SUCCESS! --

While the 22-member team didn't achieve their goal of 100K QSOs, the Peter I DXpedition was a great success, handing out 87,034 contacts between 0552 GMT 08 February and 1813 GMT on 19 February. With an estimated cost of some US\$500K, this was considered to be the most expensive DXpedition ever undertaken.

3Y0X shut down in stages as operating shelters and antennas were flown via helicopter from the island to the chartered Chilean ship *DAP Mares*. Weather was unpredictable, such that five team members remained ashore one day longer than their team mates. They were flown out, but then the weather prevented removal of the remaining equipment for four more days. Finally, on 24 February, the last helicopter load arrived on shipboard, and the ship began departure from Peter I. All that was left behind was a remote weather station installed by a German organization.

All local DXers got 3Y0X into their logs, including TARC's Bob Marchese-K1NOK and Snowbird Net's Juergen Nittner-N9RD, who both worked it from their mobile stations! All things considered, it will undoubtedly be a long time before this DXCC entity is on again.

(From 22 February 2006 *QRZ DX*, Peter I Website <http://www/peterone.com> and *The ARRL Letter, Vol. 25, No. 08*)

"Do not expect justice where might is right." – Plato, *Phaedrus*, 360 B.C.

CONTESTS & ACTIVITIES

Contest/Special Event	Begin-End Times/Dates	Bands/Modes	QSO With	Exchange
ARRL International DX Contest	0000Z 04 Mar 2400Z 05 Mar	160 – 10 Meters Phone Only	DXCC Entities	R/S + State
Open Ukraine RTTY Championship	2200Z 04 Mar 0159Z 05 Mar	160 & 80 Meters RTTY Only	Anyone, Anywhere	“FL” + Serial No. (start w/ 001)
Open Ukraine RTTY Championship	0800Z 06 Mar 1159Z 06 Mar	40 – 10 Meters RTTY Only	Anyone, Anywhere	“FL” + Serial No. (start w/ 001)
North American RTTY Sprint	0000Z 12 Mar 0004Z 12 Mar	80 – 20 Meters RTTY Only	Anyone, Anywhere	Calls, Serial No. Name, State
Spanish PSK31 Contest	1600Z 11 Mar 1600Z 12 Mar	80 – 10 Meters PSK31 Only	Anyone, Anywhere	R/S/T + Serial No.
Russian DX Contest	1200Z 18 Mar 1200Z 19 Mar	160 – 10 Meters Phone & CW	Anyone, Anywhere	R/S/(T) + Serial No.
10-10 Mobile Contest	0000Z 18 Mar 2359Z 18 Mar	10 Meters Only Any Mode	Anyone, Anywhere	Name, QTH, 10-10 # if member
CLARA and Family (Canada) HF Contest	1700Z 18 Mar 1700Z 19 Mar	80 – 10 Meters Phone & CW	Canadian Ladies ARA Members and YL Stations	R/S/(T) + Name and QTH
9KCC (Kuwait) Contest	1200Z 19 Mar 1600Z 19 Mar	15 Meters Only Phone & CW	Kuwaiti Stations Only	R/S/(T) + Serial No.
BARTG (Britain) Spring RTTY Contest	0200Z 18 Mar 0200Z 20 Mar	80 – 10 Meters RTTY Only	Anyone, Anywhere	3-Digit Serial No. + 4-Digit Time
CQ WW WPX Contest	0000Z 25 Mar 2400Z 26 Mar	160 – 10 Meters Phone Only	Anyone, Anywhere	R/S + Serial No.

From March 2006 issues of *QST* and *WorldRadio*

-- REGIONAL HAMFESTS --

- 11 Mar Englewood ARS & Peace River Radio Assn. Charlotte County Hamfest, Charlotte County Fairgrounds, 2333 El Jobean Rd., Port Charlotte. TI: 147.255+; Info: Reg-K9ZKS, 941-627-9828
- 18 Mar Martin County ARA FREE Hamfest, Martin County Fairgrounds, 2616 SE Dixie Hwy, Stuart. TI: 147.060+; Info: Peter-W1MNY, 772-288-1048
- 25 Mar Gulf Coast ARC Hamfest at Ridgewood High School, 7650 Orchid Lake Rd., New Port Richey. TI: 146.670; Info: Don-KK4VK, 727-848-8000
- 25 Mar FREE Hamfest, Terry Park Baptist Church, 7024 Merrill Rd., Jacksonville. TI: 146.700 (127.3), Info: Billy-N4UF, 904-765-3230

(From <http://bellsouthpwp.net/k/kb4vol>, the Web site of Bill Britton-KB4VOL and March 2006 *QST*)

-- UPCOMING DARN ACTIVITY --

The Diocese Amateur Radio Network (DARN) will be conducting a communications exercise at 11 AM on 13 March. As they will be using our W4AC Repeater, please avoid use of EchoLink but kindly check in during that activity. Thanks!

-- TARC NET SCHEDULE --

The following schedule is provided by the TARC Net Manager, Bob Murphy-WA1UHG:

- 02 Mar (r) Jack-W4JS
 07 Mar (s) Bob-WA1UHG
 09 Mar Meeting – No Net
 14 Mar (s) Bob-WA1UHG
 16 Mar (r) Charlie-W4DB
 21 Mar (s) Dil-KB8YLK
 23 Mar (r) Bernie-W4GO
 28 Mar (s) Jack-W4JS
 30 Mar (r) Bob-WA1UHG
 04 Apr (s) Bob-WA1UHG
 06 Apr (r) Bob-WA1UHG
 11 Apr (s) Jack-W4JS
 13 Apr Meeting – No Net
 18 Apr (s) Bob-WA1UHG
 20 Apr (r) Bernie-W4GO
 25 Apr (s) Jack-W4JS
 27 Apr (r) Charlie-W4DB

Note the following:

(r) = 146.805 W4AC Repeater; (s) = 146.58 Simplex
 Remember to check into our twice weekly nets at 7:30 PM, so we'll know you're alive and kicking. Our Net Manager Bob Murphy-WA1UHG sure would appreciate your assistance as a Net Control Station. These are your nets, and the TARC is your club.

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between EARS president Matt Henry-KE4VEM. Jack-W4JS commented he had received an e-mail from Newport's legal advisor subsequent to that meeting, however, it contained only salutatory comments from Newport to Henry.

LIAISON TO QCWA – Jack-W4JS reported that 31 Chapter 53 members and friends attended the 01 February lunch/meeting at Denny's in Sarasota. Joe Thiel-WA1VNP presented a program on "Community Emergency Response Team." The March program will be a power point presentation of the 2005 European tour of Bill Schlapfer-KA2HEA, and TARC members are invited to attend.

CLUB HISTORIAN – There were no volunteers for this position.

OLD BUSINESS – Scholarship/Financial Assistance: Matt Klapp-W2EQV has made contact with both the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice and the Sarasota County School District regarding scholarship awards. At present, neither have any categories for Amateur Radio. Options were discussed, with Don-WD7A commenting that rather than try finding new candidates every year we could find one candidate and award a continuing scholarship grant to him/her as they progressed through college.

Bus to Orlando Hamcation: Matt-W2EQV gave final notice that some seats are still available, and that the bus will depart Venice at 7:00 AM and Orlando at 3:00 PM.

Sharks Tooth Festival: Konrad-WA3RRS asked for volunteers to help set up and operate Special Event Station K4S during this 07-09 April event, and eight members offered to help.

Amended Articles of Incorporation: Konrad reported that our Amended and Restated Articles of Incorporation had been received from the Florida Department of State.

TARC Christmas Party: Konrad announced that the 2006 Christmas Party will be held at the Englewood Elks Club. Peter Pesa-N4RD has made the reservation and the menu will be finalized a month or two in advance.

NEW BUSINESS – Nothing was offered.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS – Konrad reminded all of our Tuesday breakfast at Peach's and our Friday breakfast at Mel's, both at 8:00 AM.

ADJOURNMENT – A motion to adjourn was made by Dil Kay-KB8YLK, seconded by Bernie Holtman-W4GO, and passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM. There were 21 members and one visitor present.

PROGRAM – Jon Hamlet-W4ZW gave a very informative and often humorous presentation on the history of amateur radio in Russia and his personal experiences living and working over there.

Jack Sproat-W4JS
Secretary

-- DARN UPDATE & NEWS --

(The following is from Bob Sullenberger-KG4VDU, DARN Coordinator)

As I get to know more and more TARC members, the more impressed and confident I have become that the relationship between the Diocese Amateur Radio Network (DARN) and the TARC is a good fit for both parties.

During DARN's February on-air exercise, multi repeater frequencies and a simplex frequency that are in DARN's operational plan were tested by each of the five DARN Base Stations from Naples to Venice and its mobile unit currently located in Arcadia. That exercise showed both strengths and weaknesses. As a result, certain TARC members offered to troubleshoot the weakest link, which was DARN Naples—a nearly DEAD ZONE.

With my approval, and that of the ham assigned as the primary DARN Naples Radio Operator, TARC's Stew Haag-W4MO, Bob Avrutik-N1RA and Peter Pesa-N4RD drove down to Naples for a first hand look-see. Thanks to the expertise of the TARC team, the problem was diagnosed, a solution found, and recommendations for the future were provided. Success was realized because the team had the presence of mind to bring the right tools and an antenna with them to Naples. So, in summary, they climbed, they toiled, and they installed a replacement antenna. *(Ed. note: The antenna which was installed is a 4-element Yagi from the estate of Bob Retter-KD4SOJ, SK.)* Finally the TARC team reported that TARC's W4AC Repeater was heard and accessed from the Naples site. Therefore, positive strides were achieved in Naples and, with some recommended improvements, DARN Naples will be a stellar performer when and if the need occurs.

The TARC team that traveled to Naples should be saluted for their yeoman efforts. In addition, they acknowledged the appreciation of the positive attitude and helping hand rendered by the Catholic Charities Staff in Naples (and which I naturally appreciated).

So, a happy beginning is always good to report, and it's nice to be shaking hands instead of fists.

73 de Bob-KG4VDU

"Plan to be spontaneous tomorrow."

-- ADOPTING A SCHOOL --

(The following was written by John LoCicero-KD5IBY over in Metairie, LA, and presents some thoughts worthy of consideration.)

Well here we are in a new electronic revolution, computer, Ipods and video games. How can Amateur Radio compete? How can Amateur Radio survive? Kids have not interest in learning about ham radio. Ham radio is for grandpa or grandma—not for the kids. Kids have cell phones, Ipods, computers, and little time for sitting around tuning a rig to a station half-way around the world. For that matter, why learn that dit-dah dit-dah thing that's old hat? Nobody uses that anymore.

Well, like in nature when you lose once creature, you usually lose five more that depended on the fellow to keep those species alive. And technology is not any different.

The last hamfest I attended was a sea of gray and very few young folks were there. The ham club I am secretary of is also a sea of gray, with the average age between 50 and 90. Our youngest, and only young, member is 30 years old. So what are we doing wrong as a community of communication?

Maybe we need to get out there and go to grade schools, middle schools and high schools and offer our expertise, and promote our hobby to the young children and teach them about Amateur Radio, and where the technology came from for that cell phone of computer.

The ARRL has grants for schools to teach and set up ham radio stations right in the classrooms at no expense to the school or teachers. So why are we not out there promoting ham radio before it dies completely? Every club in America should adopt a school and donate a few hours of time giving these kids a chance to maybe talk to the astronauts, or to a country that they may have never even heard of. There is only a handful of schools across this great land that currently use Amateur Radio as a teaching aid in the classrooms.

The importance of Amateur Radio has been proven over and over in our communities across the country every year that has passes since ham radio came into existence. Hurricane Kartina was a good example of why we cannot let Amateur Radio pass away. So let's consider adopting a school as a club project.

-- 25TH SHUTTLE ANNIVERSARY --

Commemorating the 25th anniversary of the first Space Shuttle launch, Brevard County hams will be operating Special Event Station N4S from 09 – 15 April (1700Z – 2400Z) from the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. QSL via Carl-AA4MI.

-- TELEGRAMS ARE HISTORY --

A changing Western Union sent its final \$10 telegrams with little fanfare on 27 January 2006, ending a 155-year-old service that marked important events in the lives of millions of people around the world.

The last 10 Western Union messages included birthday wishes, a birth notice, condolences on a death, and several people attempting to make history by sending the final Western Union telegram. Discontinuing the \$10 service marked the company's last step in transforming itself from a communications company to a financial service provider.

Western Union started in 1851 as the Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Co. and became the Western Union Telegraph Co. in 1856 after acquiring several competing systems. By 1861, the company had created a coast-to-coast network of lines and would dominate telegraph transmission for decades.

Telegrams reached the zenith of their popularity in the 1920s and 30s when it was cheaper to send a telegram than to place a long-distance phone call. In the peak year of 1929, Western Union sent 200 million telegrams through a network of more than 1,400 messengers. People would save money by using the word "stop" instead of periods to end sentences because punctuation was extra which the four-character word was free.

Samuel Morse sent the first telegram "What Hath God Wrought?" from Washington to his partner Alfred Vail in Baltimore on 26 May 1844. "If he only knew," of the myriad of choices available today stated Victor Chayet, a spokesman for Western Union, now based in Greenwood Village, Colorado,

"For 87 years the Western Union telegram service has been in a long, inexorable decline," stated one retired Western Union employee. "Mercifully, the end has been reached."

"It definitely was an anachronism," remarked Tom Noel, a history professor at the University of Colorado at Denver. "It's amazing it survived this long."

(From "End of the line for the telegram" from Wire Reports, 03 February 2006 *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*)

-- RECENT ARRL SURVEY RESULTS --

"What is your best average CW receiving speed?" asked the 03 February 2006 poll. Of the 5213 respondents, the greatest segment, 27.8%, claimed 10 to 20 WPM, 1.0% claimed they could do higher than 50 WPM. However, most of the respondents, 34.8% don't operate CW.

Only 20.2% of the 2261 respondents planned to operate in the CW weekend of the ARRL International DX Contest held 18-19 February.

(From the ARRL Web Site)

-- THE SUITSAT-1 SAGA --

Probably no single event involving an aspect of Amateur Radio got more publicity than SuitSat-1. Unfortunately, the pre-launch hype greatly exceeded the results on the ground.

SuitSat-1 consisted of a retired Russian spacesuit that was stuffed with discarded clothes and with a 2-meter transmitter and antenna attached to the helmet. Also within the suit were CD photos of Roy Neal-K6DUE and Thomas Kieselbach-DL2MDE, both Silent Keys who contributed to the Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) program. The ARISS international team was able to fabricate, test and deliver a safe ham radio system via an unmanned Progress spacecraft to the ISS three weeks after the international space agencies agreed to allow the concept to materialize. The transmitter broadcast student voices in various languages, SSTV, station ID, and data.

News of this event was widespread in the media, with claims that this beacon could be received on any FM radio tuned to 145.990 MHz. SuitSat-1 was hand-launched from the ISS on 03 February 2006. As an indication of how well this was publicized, on 04 February there were well over 2 million hits on AMSAT's <http://www.suitsat.org> web site. However, reception of the signals proved far more elusive than the media coverage.

As posted on that site, ground stations were not having much luck hearing anything. As surmised by Frank Bauer-KA3HDO of AMSAT, the problem could be "the antennas, the feedline, the transmitter output power and/or any of the connections in between." Bauer further explained that "HTs and scanners won't cut it," and that 22-element yagis would be adequate for several seconds of reception. Also "do not waste your time on passes below 40 degrees of elevation." Of note, however, AMSAT calculations suggested that the transmitter was most likely putting out between 1 and 10 mW rather than the 500 mW it was supposed to produce—a loss of 27 – 17 dB.

Being hand-launched, SuitSat-1 followed the ISS orbits, flying about 1500 meters below the ISS and some 3.5 minutes ahead of the space station. Therefore, to track SuitSat-1, the pass predictions for the ISS are reasonably accurate. Immediately following its launching, no visible passes over this area were forecast for the next 10 days. Two passes were forecast for 16 February, however. The 7:17-7:27 AM pass was at 40 degrees and the 10:03-10:13 pass was at 56 degrees. While within the "allowable" elevation, no signals were to be heard on a 2-meter collinear antenna.

It is unfortunate that SuitSat-1 could not live up to its widespread publicity, such that its transmissions could be better received and recorded to be heard by school students who were intrigued by this event. That would certainly open the door to introduce those kids to one aspect of ham radio. How many of them may retain any interest at all is anyone's guess. Perhaps, "next time."

(From "Space station crew do spacewalk, throw out trash," *Englewood Sun*, 04 February 2006; "SuitSat Status 4 February," AMSAT Web Site; "SuitSat-1 Keeps on Ticking; Low Power Output Eyed as Cause for Weak Signal," ARRL Web Site, 13 February 2006; *AMSAT Online Satellite Pass Predictions*; *The ARRL Letter*, Vol. 25, No. 07, 17 February 2006)

-- LIFETIME LICENSES IN UK --

OFCOM, the UK's telecom agency has decided to issue lifetime Amateur Radio licenses and to shift primarily to on-line issuance of license documents. On 14 February 2006, OFCOM announced that licenses "will remain valid for as long as the license details remain correct or until such time as the license is either revoked by OFCOM or surrendered by the licensee." Licensees will be required to "validate" their license details at least once every five years.

In addition, OFCOM announced it will provide an on-line, web-based self-service licensing service and will issue electronic license documents (probably PDF files) which users may print out on their own. Traditional paper licenses would still be available, but at a small fee.

No effective date was given for implementation of these changes.

(From the *CQ Newsroom*, 14 February 2006)

-- GEOMAGNETIC INDICES --

We are now in the phase of Sunspot Cycle 23 when there will be no visible sunspots for periods of time. The Earth's geomagnetic field varying activity will, therefore, have more influence on propagation than will a varying degree of ionospheric ionization—which is now minimal. We keep aware of this geomagnetic activity via the K- and a-indices.

The K-index is a quasi-logarithmic local index of the 3-hourly range in magnetic activity relative to an assumed quiet-day curve for a single geomagnetic observatory site (Boulder, CO for the WWV reports). The planetary Kp comes from 13 such sites. It consists of digits 0 thru 9 for each 3-hour interval.

The 3-hourly a-index is derived from the K-index via mathematical relationship. The daily A-index is derived from the average of eight 3-hourly K-indices. Best propagation is when the A-index is 10 or less.