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Bugs ?

Menasco Radio Club Today at 10:26 AM

To

Glen Ellis

then you agree that the "deaf CW ops" on the air don't need a modified version of CW that is someone else's idea of what is fun to send ??

The Banana Boat Swing and Other Distinctive 'Fists'

"CW Notes With Character", by George F. Franklin, W0AV

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Back in the thirties, when I got started in ham radio, every CW signal had at least two, sometimes three, characteristics, not all of which could be described by using the RST system. Incidentally, RST then maxed out at 559, not 599 as now; easier to manage in those days.

First of all, there was the "fist", i.e. the operator's manner of sending. The old pump handle straight key was pretty much the standard, and predominated on the bands.

Next in popularity was the Vibroplex, commonly known as the "bug", with manual dashes and "automatic" dots. Here was where the individual sending style really came into play.

There was the sea-going sparks sporting his "banana boat roll", with the exaggerated dash length. you could easily visualize "sparks" holding on for dear life in his shipboard shack as the vessel slowly listed from port or starboard. Once acquired, the BBR was usually retained even after sparks returned to dry land; it was a badge of distinction, so to speak.

Of lesser popularity, but even more distinctive, was the style of an operator using a classic "sideswiper" key. The dots and dashes were both made manually by horizontal movement of the blade to which the finger grips were attached. The resulting CW, though eminently copyable, has to be heard to be appreciated as it defies word description. Yes, there are still a very few OT's on the bands using sideswipers, but they are most certainly a vanishing breed.

No discussion of fists would be complete without mention of the so called "Lake Erie Swing", which originated with bug using marine ops on ships plying the Great lakes. The LES was characterized by the very generous use of dots, usually much faster (relatively) than the dashes. It made for a somewhat fluttery, whimsical style of sending, not unpleasant to copy once one got the hang of it. This style was later adopted by many airline and police CW operators, with equal success.
