

NARS NEWS



The Northwest Amateur Radio Society

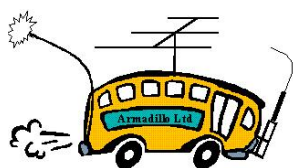
Houston, Texas

August 2009



August Meeting

Power Line Noise



The July meeting topic of discussion was intended to be "Power Line Noise Identification and Resolution" which I will address in a moment; but first let me thank Chuck NO5W for stepping in at the last minute and providing NARS with a very helpful and informative talk on The Texas QSO Party. If you intend to be a participant in this year's event you will be well advised to begin preparations as soon as possible. Don't wait until the weekend before and try to install radios, antennas, grounding straps, power sources and so on. You'll be overwhelmed before you know it and end up plagued with other problems down the road.

Chucks talk covered the "when" and "where" aspects very thoroughly with an emphasis on planning and execution. The "how" aspects such as what type of antennas to use and grounding strap placement are open for discussion. Help is available so don't be shy. The eyeball QSO time before and after the club meeting is an excellent time to ask questions.

After last months misfire, NARS will be graced with the presence of Mr. Jeff Hoke from CenterPoint Energy. Jeff will tell us how to locate and report sources of power line noise. I wouldn't say power line noise is a rare occurrence as it does happen occasionally. Problems such as a cracked insulator or loose clamp can create havoc for radio operators as well as others. CenterPoint Energy has a proactive program in place that allows Jeff and others to actively investigate and bring resolution to problems caused by power line noise. Remember CenterPoint Energy is as interested in stopping power line noise as we are.



NARS would like to thank CenterPoint Energy for allowing Jeff the time to address our meeting and look forward to meeting Jeff in person. I've invited Jeff to be our guest at the pre meeting dinner at Hasta La Pasta. Hopefully he'll be able to attend.

73 -- Tom -- KD5EIJ

Important Dates

Friday, August 21st, 7:30 PM

General Membership meeting,
Cypress Creek Christian Community Cntr,
6823 Cypresswood Drive

Saturday, August 22nd, 8:30 AM

VE License Exam Session
Tomball Community Center
S. Cherry & Market streets
(just South of Main)

Tuesday, August 25th, 7:30 PM

Board of Directors meeting
Ponderosa Fire Station
17061 Rolling Creek drive.

Wednesday Lunch Bunch - North

Sweet Tomatoes Aug 19th
BJ's Aug 26th
Marco's Sep 2nd
Spring Creek Barbeque Sep 9th
Pei Wei Asian Diner Sep 16th
Luby's Cafeteria Sep 23rd

Wednesday Lunch Bunch - West

Café Express Aug 19th
Princes Hamburger Aug 26th
Fajita Willies W. Little York Sep 2nd
Fajita Willies W. Little York Sep 9th
Fajita Willies W. Little York Sep 16th
Fajita Willies W. Little York Sep 23rd

Wednesday Lunch Bunch - Medical Center

Jason's Deli Aug 19th
Buffalo Grille Aug 26th
DJ's Old Timey Hamburgers Sep 2nd
Marco's Mexican Bar & Grille Sep 9th
Silver Palace Chinese Buffet Sep 16th
Pappas Barbecue Sep 23rd

Draggers Lunch Bunch

11:00 am, Aviator's Grill, Hooks Airport

Notice: NARS membership dues are \$20 per year, renewable on anniversary.

Deadline for articles to appear in the newsletter is the last day of this month.

BREAKFAST

at Denny's

7720 Louetta Road

Saturdays

7:30 AM

President's Corner

August - 2009

The Hurricane season is quiet so far but we are still training for the big one. At the Austin Summerfest this month, I attended an ARRL meeting that the Emergency Preparedness & Response Manager, Dennis Dura, K2DCD, from the ARRL headquarters talked about the new training program that will replace the level two and three courses. He said they will be web based and they will try and offer them free if they can get some grant money. We have been asked by the ARES group to complete the home study FEMA courses and now they will become required courses to take to qualify for the new ARES identification badge. He also talked about the MOU that we have at the national level and how they have been updated. Some of the national groups that help out during times of need are also asking to have a more formal MOU with the ARRL so they can help with manning emergency radio station operations to support their group. I know that our local ARES group is updating MOU with local emergency coordinators.

I also ran into some of the Hams that work the MS150 ride to Austin and had a good visit with them. We all were talking about that last one with the shorten ride and how we are preparing for the next one.

It was good to see a few of our members there also enjoying the many seminars, swap tables, radio deals and the DX luncheon. One of our members was hard at work drumming up support for the Texas QSO Party. Our NARS member Chuck Sanders, NO5W, had a table with the TQP posters.

Do you have a topic to pass on to a director at the next meeting, lunch or breakfast? Would you like to volunteer to do a program? Please let us know what you would like to see at the monthly meetings.

VE Session Notice

Eddy Reynolds - K5WQG
NARS VE Session Manager

Saturday, July 25th VE Test Session Results at Tomball Community Center:

We had 2 candidates.

Please welcome to the hobby:

Harold (Shorty) Moyer - KF5CKN who passed element 2 to get his Technician license (and is now advertising for a famous fried chicken place).

And congratulations to Ralph Diguilio - KF5AHC who passed element 4 for Extra.

Ralph just got his General in May - good job Ralph!

Special thanks to the VEs in attendance for their time and hard work:

- Sarah Connell - W0HXO
- Keith Dutson - NM5G
- Martin Rogoff - N5GPS
- Jerry Seay - KE5PUT
- Bob Walworth - N5ET

The next session will be held on Saturday, August 22nd at 8:30 a.m. at the Tomball Community Center, located at the corner of Market St. & S. Cherry St.

Parking is in the rear (south side) of the building. The entrance is on the S. Cherry St. (west) side of the building.

Remember, the fee for 2009 will increase from \$14 to \$15.

**There are two great articles in this
month's edition!**
... read on ...

Exit 68, I-45 North
267 Cypresswood Drive
Spring, TX 77388

800-471-7373
281-355-7373
Fax: 281-355-8007

Houston Amateur Radio Supply, Inc.
George DiLetto, KD5ORW
President

www.houstonamateurradio.com

E-Mail: houstonamateurradio@prodigy.net

Fun With the PicoKeyer-Plus

Part 1

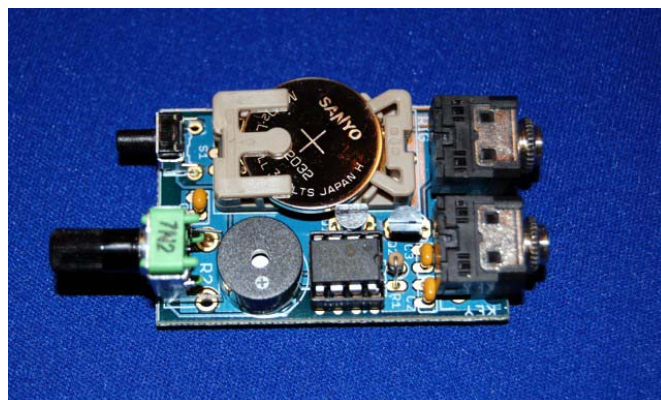
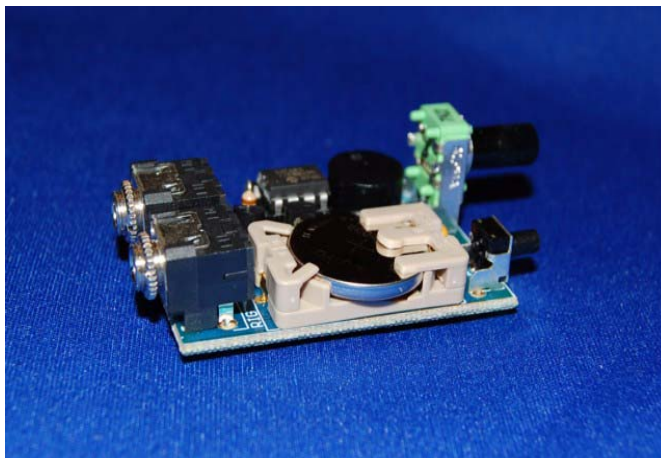
Larry Kendall - K5END

New, “no-code” licensees are hungry for CW. It would appear that dropping the Morse Code requirement has done more to encourage CW than not. Maybe it's because “code” is no longer something one “has” to learn, but is instead perceived as one of the many facets to explore within this most versatile of hobbies (consider Tom Sawyer's fence project.)

An external keyer is a handy thing to have for CW or code. Among other advantages, it allows quick changes between radios without having to navigate through menus or dig out the radio manual. Moreover, it provides an easy way to practice sending (junk mail makes good practice fodder.) The keyer market offers several choices, all good in various ways. Of those, the PicoKeyer-Plus is a good choice for many applications, including a good “first” keyer. At the size of a matchbook and a cost of \$18, this easy kit from <http://hamgadgets.com/> is very hard to beat. I ordered a couple of these after meeting the owner, Dale Botkin-N0XAS at the Dayton Hamvention. Check the manual from his web page for the details. This keyer has four programmable memories and a complete menu for programming the keyer to the user's preferences. The PicoKeyer-Plus would also make a great backpacking or mobile keyer. (Aside from the keyer, I am impressed overall with Dale, his business ethic and his Company. His MK-1 keyer is my personal favorite. Orders always arrive within a few days and he is very user friendly. I've pelted him with quite a few emails with questions on this or that, and he has always responded promptly with the answer.)

This kit could not be easier to assemble. Between the time I opened the package until I had a working keyer was around 25 minutes, and that includes at least 10 minutes spent looking for my roll of solder. Anyone who can read and solder can put this kit together without any

trouble. I lifted these images of the assembled kit from Dale's web page.

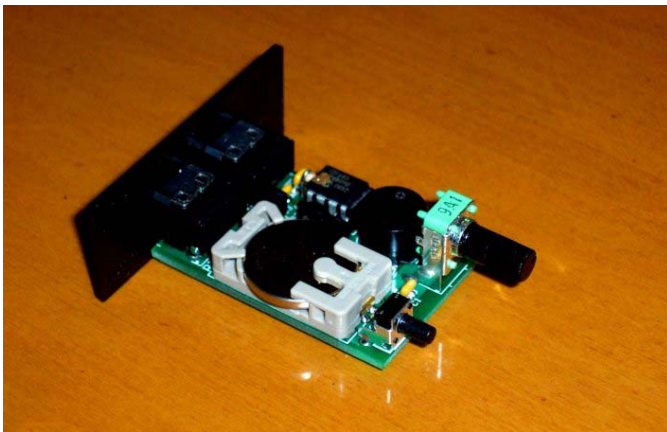


He offers a suitably-sized project box for this keyer for \$4.50. Contained in the PicoKeyer-Plus assembly instructions and manual is a template for drilling holes in the box ends to fit the jacks, speed control and menu button. As they say, “measure twice and cut once.” That is applicable here. He recommends checking for fit all the way through the process. I would go a step further and suggest measuring the template with calipers and comparing this with the actual jack spacing. My printer may have enlarged the pdf image a bit, and it was enough to displace the holes a millimeter or so. I used a small round file to enlarge the holes a little to accommodate the offset.

Fun With the PicoKeyer-Plus

Part 1

For this reason I recommend soldering the second jack after fitting both jacks to the holes and tightening the panel nuts. If the spacing is not far off this will work fine and prevent strain on the jack solder points. If you've missed the spacing by more than 3/64" you may have some filing to do. In the worst case you may have to spend another \$4.50 for a new box, but that is unlikely. Here is the kit I built, with one end of the project box drilled and fitted for the jacks.



There is a hardware configuration option for using the on-board battery (included) or using an external power supply. Dale recommends using the on-board battery and I couldn't think of a good reason not to. The expected lifetime of the battery is sufficient to forgo the hassle and expense of using a wall wart.

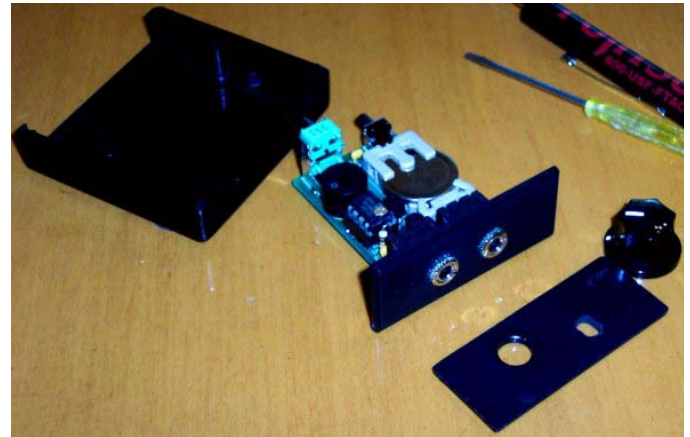
The instruction manual recommends installing the components in a particular order and using tape to hold the components in place as they are soldered. I

did this a little differently, more or less installing the "boxy" components in order of their height so that I could press the assembly flat against the table during the solder process and ensure a good fit on the pcb.

I installed the components in this order.

- 1 8-pin DIP socket
- 2 battery holder
- 3 speaker
- 4 axial/radial components, resistors, capacitors, etc.
- 5 solder only one of the jacks, either the key input or output to the rig, and insert the second jack into the board without soldering it, yet.
- 6 menu push button
- 7 speed potentiometer

When the jacks are fitted properly to the holes drilled in the project box and the panel nuts are tightened securely, solder the second jack.



I grabbed a small knob from my collection of odds and ends to make turning the speed control pot easier.

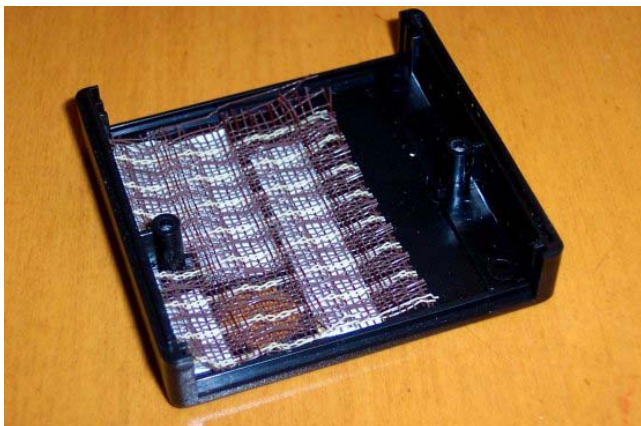
A consideration you don't want to overlook is that installing the keyer in a box will isolate the user somewhat from the speaker. The manual suggests the tone pitch can be raised or lowered with the menu to find a more or less acoustically-resonant frequency for the best volume. I decided to use a 7/16" Forstner bit (with masking tape to protect the surface of the box) to cut a clean hole in the box above the speaker.

Fun With the PicoKeyer-Plus

Part 1



A bit of surplus "Fender Tweed" speaker grille cloth with some good quality, very thin, double-sticky tape and PRESTO, we have an effective and low cost "speaker grille."



Now it's time to use it. You can read the manual, and you should, so I won't iterate it for you. However, I do want to call something to your attention. This keyer can do the so-called "MCW" mode. The next part of this project is to configure the PicoKeyer-Plus to do just that. Look for this configuration procedure in the next article.

73 DE K5END, Larry Kendall

[Editor's note] This is a two part article written by Larry Kendall - K5END. Larry will publish the second part of his article in the next NARS news - September 2009.

Watch for next month's conclusion!

Summer Radio @ Amateur Radio Station W5LAB

*Lollie Garay - KD5WZM
Redd School station W5LAB*

The LABRATS radio station, W5LAB, was on the air during summer camp at Redd School this year. Although the ionosphere was not conducive for reception, we managed to get in some contacts. Students in grades 4-6 learned about amateur radio: how radios work; how to speak on the air; and how it is used in everyday life.

Our NARS mentor Jerry Whiting KB5VGD also worked with our middle school students during our elective Electronics Class in July helping them learn electronics fundamentals, the mechanics of electronic technology and tools, and building alternate energy source vehicles. A LOT was learned in the casual ambiance of summer camp! Thanks to Jerry for volunteering his summer time!



Soldering ...



On the air...



and wire stripping were favorite parts of the Electronics Class!



... then writing out QSL cards for our QSOs!

Continue to the next page

Summer Radio @ Amateur Radio Station W5LAB - cont

Lollie and Jerry lend a helping hand in constructing wind powered cars.



The Redd School Radio club was developed over 5 years ago under a project called LABRATS (Learning About Research And Technology through Science). The Radio Club is one of several components of this after-school project that also includes Aeronautics, Robotics & Engineering, Astronomy and GirlScience. LABRATS was created and is managed by Lollie Garay, KD5WZM, science teacher at Redd School. The LABRATS project has partnered with several community organizations and professionals including the Northwest Amateur Radio Society (NARS), NASA, UH CORE and Rice University's Rice Space Institute. Students in this

program are immersed in active studies in electronics, aviation, design & engineering principles, force and motion/energy applications, and technology. Redd School is a privately owned, fully accredited PreK-8th grade academic institution, was established in 1969. The Redd School Mission statement reads " Education at Redd School is just the beginning of the learning odyssey. We align curriculum, technique and assessment with the needs of each child so that a firm foundation is established to continue on that odessey for the rest of their lives...". More information on the school at www.reddschool.com

Welcome, Congratulations, and Condolences

Welcome new members Robert Kendall K5RLK and Kyle Atkins KE5SWK

NARS Resource List

General Help:

Bill Stietenroth K5ZTY
281-893-3901, k5zty@juno.com
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Deral Kent K5WNO
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281-251-4301, fitz6@swbell.net

VHF/UHF:

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PC Programming and Operations:

Keith Dutson NM5G 281-351-7683,
keith@dutson.net

Building Electronics & Kits:

Mark Tyler K5GQ
281-587-0256, k5gq@juno.com

Interference (Basic Advice):

Terry Myers KQ5U
281-443-6042,
tmyers1031@sbcglobal.net

Card Checking for Awards:

Bob Walworth N5ET - DXCC
281-292-2221, rwalworth@charter.net

Brian Derx N5BA - WAS, VUCC
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H O Townsend K5CX - WAZ
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Chet Farley KG5YF

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Send address, phone, email and other
changes to:

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Houston, TX 77090-0387

NETS

10-Meter Ragchew: Mon 8:00 PM,
28.444 MHz Coordinator: Open

2-Meter Wednesday Night: 8:00 PM,
146.06/66 MHz, Coordinator; Jerry
KB5VGD

WEB SITE

URL: <http://www.w5nc.org>
Web master: Bill Buoy N5BIA
281-370-3510, n5bia@arrl.net

NARS REFLECTOR

NARS@mailman.qth.net
Coordinator: Keith Dutson NM5G
281-351-7683, keith@dutson.net

TEXAS QSO PARTY

Coordinator: Chuck Sanders NO5W
936-273-6930, no5w@consolidated.net

VE SESSION (ARRL) Manager:

Eddy Reynolds K5WQG
reynolds_eddy@yahoo.com

REPEATERS (KA5AKG)

2-m: 146.06/146.66 MHz Tone: 141.3
70 cm: 444.375/449.375 MHz Tone: 103.5

MEETINGS

Monthly General Membership

Third Friday each month at 7:30 PM
Cypress Creek Christian Community
Center, 6823 Cypresswood Drive

Saturday Breakfast

Denny's, 7720 Louetta, 7:30 AM

Wednesday Lunch 11:30 AM

Various locations (Info on 146.660 and
listed on front page in Important Dates
column)

NARS NEWS is published monthly by
the Northwest Amateur Radio Society
Send all articles and materials for the
newsletter to:

Editor: H. O. Townsend - K5CX
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Northwest Amateur Radio Society is a
Special Service Club affiliated with the
American Radio Relay League
ARRL Club No. 2120