

Funny Noises
by
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Standing By for Y2K!

How many Extra Class amateurs does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Three. One to screw it in and two to stand around complaining about how easy it is. Joke, folks.

I'd much rather talk about operating, and a recent event was a rediscovered pleasure with an ironic twist. Last Friday evening, while the TV carried wall-to-wall coverage of New Year's celebrations around the world and a "monitoring watch on the Y2K situation," I was participating in Straight Key Night, for my money one of the grandest traditions of amateur radio. Evidently it was newsworthy, but for all the wrong reasons! This is what "The Denver Post" had to say on New Year's Day 2000 (page 3A if anybody's checking)...

"As the millennium finally reached Denver hours later, Marshall Emm sat down in front of his ham radio and sent midnight greetings by the old fashioned method of a telegraph key, the New Year's Eve tradition of U.S. amateur radio fans. Tapping away with one of the oldest forms of world-wide communication, Emm learned that the newest forms of worldwide communication were still working just fine."

Amateur radio fans??! Ohhhh-Kaaaay.

That small paragraph was distilled from TWO ten-minute telephone interviews with the reporter, and like a bad batch of moonshine bore little resemblance to the expected product. To start with, most of us with Amateur Radio licenses can count, so we know the millennium won't reach Denver for darn near a whole nuther year. But people love round numbers, and are loathe to let facts get in the way of a good party, so that one's a dead duck until somebody finds a way to make money from the Real Millennium— which I predict will happen around July.

What was a little more disappointing was that I had gone to great lengths to explain how amateurs all over the state were standing by in case they might be needed for emergency communications, and I even put him in touch with our SEC and fellow CQC member N5LPZ. In the first interview, on Thursday, he had asked what I would be doing, and I was quite clear on the fact that like any ham I would be available for emergency communications if needed. I told him I had no specific plans other than a quiet evening with my family and a bit of brass pounding. When he called me on New Year's Eve I told him that I had spoken with guys on the East Coast and none of them had reported any problems. Which was true, because the subject never came up. I had several very pleasant chats which included the customary wishes for a HPY NEW YR. And one HPY Y2K. But no HPY NW MLNMs.

But I think he did unwittingly catch just a hint of the true spirit of Straight Key Night, which is an annual expression of the Fellowship of the Key. It's a Fellowship that links all Morse operators everywhere, from any era, going right back to old Samuel FB himself. It's sad that it no longer links all amateur radio operators, but that's progress for you. The "old fashioned method of the telegraph key" is still pretty darned effective, and I think it will be around for quite a while— possibly even into the NEXT MILLENNIUM!