

February 23

“It is traditional for members of the ARRL Board of Directors to gather informally on the Thursday night before a Board meeting. No corporate business is conducted; there is plenty of time for that over the course of the following two days. Sometimes there is a specific topic to be discussed. At other times the Board members simply share what they are hearing from members in their respective divisions and their insights as to what is going on in Amateur Radio and the ARRL.”

Prior to the January Board meeting there was a specific subject on everyone’s mind. What would happen — and more to the point, what *should* happen — on the effective date of the FCC’s Report and Order in WT Docket No. 05-235? There were some great ideas put forward.

Here’s some background. At 12:01 AM EST on Friday, February 23, more than 200,000 Technician licensees who do not have credit for the Element 1 Morse code exam will gain new privileges. They will join Novice and Tech Plus licensees in being able to operate at up to 200 watts output in the following bands: SSB phone, 28.300-28.500 MHz; RTTY and data, 28.000-28.300 MHz; and CW, 3.525-3.600, 7.025-7.125, 21.025-21.200, and 28.000-28.500 MHz.

Some Technicians have been waiting for this moment for a long time and are prepared to take advantage of these new privileges right away. Many others are not yet equipped for HF operation. Those of us who are HF-ready and who count Technicians among our families, friends, and acquaintances have a great opportunity to share our stations and our knowledge on February 23 and in the days and weeks to follow. As individuals and through our local clubs, we should invite these fellow radio amateurs to join us and to experience the world of HF. Ten meters isn’t exactly hot right now — we’re at the bottom of the sunspot cycle — but the band is great for local communication and can generate some pleasant surprises with openings to South America and other continents as well as around the United States and our neighboring countries.

Change always is a bit unsettling and involves some risk, but the ARRL Board members who shared their ideas that Thursday night all viewed February 23 as a great opportunity. There are many licensed amateurs who had lost interest, but whose enthusiasm now may be rekindled. There are many prospective amateurs, not attracted by VHF-only privileges, for whom the Morse requirement no longer serves as a barrier — or an excuse.

Among the ideas to surface that Thursday night were the following **suggestions for local clubs**: Organize a **10-meter net**. SSB is the obvious place to start, but consider organizing something for **RTTY and other data modes** as well — slow-speed CW, too, for that matter. If you have a 10-meter rig and a computer, all it takes to try some digital modes is an interface, some software and a bit of help from someone who’s done it. Devote some of your **meeting program** time to explanations of **how to get on the band, what to expect, and how to operate** so as to blend in. Ask your volunteer examiners to **schedule exam sessions** as soon as possible after February 23. Finally, **sponsor General licensing classes**.

For most Technicians as well as for many prospective amateurs, what’s most exciting is that General and Amateur Extra licensees no longer require a Morse exam. Thousands of Certificates

of Successful Completion of Examination (CSCEs) already have been issued for Element 3 (and some for Element 4, the Amateur Extra written exam element). If you hold a CSCE for Element 3 that was issued on or after February 24, 2006 and before February 23, 2007 you *must* visit an exam session and file an application for a General license before the CSCE expires! Then — and only then — you may begin using General privileges. Just remember to add “temporary AG” or “/AG” to your call sign until your new license is issued.

A word of advice to new Generals: don’t be in too much of a hurry to set boundaries around what interests you. General privileges offer the opportunity to explore *every* amateur band and operating mode. Tune around, and listen to what’s going on at different times of the day on each of the bands. Do the best you can optimize your antennas; there’s a wealth of information available to guide you. The greatest barrier to the enjoyment of Amateur Radio is the lack of an effective antenna. If you can’t have one at home, ask a friend to let you visit their station or equip yourself to operate portable from other locations.

If the spirit moves you, plan to go on to an Extra Class license. Not that you must in order to enjoy Amateur Radio: In the 160, 60, 30, 17, 12 and 10-meter bands, General and Amateur Extra privileges are exactly the same. Just 500 kHz of the amateur HF spectrum is off-limits to Generals. On the one hand, that’s less than 14% of the total below 29.7 MHz; on the other, it’s prime “real estate” for chasing DX.

As these new HF operators join us on our favorite bands, we old-timers need to set a good example and to be patient, welcoming and positive. Let’s all remember how little we knew when we got started, and honor those who helped us along the way by doing the same for others. Being an “Elmer” — a mentor to newcomers — is one of the finest traditions of Amateur Radio. If you’re looking for ideas, visit www.arrl.org/mentor.

Let’s also remember that the VHF and higher bands are just as useful and attractive as ever. If the prospect of busier HF bands is unappealing to you, perhaps it’s time to explore the higher frequencies.

Finally, keep in mind that just because someone is new to HF doesn’t mean that we can’t learn as much from them as they can from us. The code requirement has kept many technologically sophisticated people off HF. Talk down to them at your peril!



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