Comment:

To: Federal Communications Commission
Subject: Elimination of 5 WPM code requirement for Amateur Radio Licenses
Date: October 15, 2005
From: Doug Vernier, K0DV

This is a comment in opposition to the Commission's proposal to eliminate the code requirements of amateur radio licenses.

To the point the code requirement is unnecessarily difficult, let me says that I was 8 years old when I passed the code for the Novice Exam. I was tutored by a neighborhood gentleman who went by the name of Smitty. He worked nights as a jazz musician. Smitty held the general class license, and at the time, general class license amateurs had to pass a 13 WPM code requirement. I would walk to Smitty's house after school where he would send me Morse code until I learned to copy it at the required speed of 5 WPM. His gentle spouse brought me cookies while we were working. He told me that when he was studying to become a ham he would listen to W1AW and after copying through an entire transmission he would rush to his mate of 50 years and show her page after page of his copy. He was very proud of himself for the skill he picked up in his later life. He liked the rhythm of Morse code, sent with a straight key, because it reminded him of the swing and sway of his music. He remarked that, "You can always tell one guy from another because of his fist." I'll never forget the kindness and the enthusiasm for amateur radio that Smitty displayed to me.

Amateur's Radio's International Morse Code is a skill that is still an essential ingredient and should not be eliminated from FCC licensing. Learning to copy code takes a dedication which can be akin to a "right of passage" into the hobby. It sharpens the skill of listening which is still important to radio operators and when the code is sent by hand it promotes a physical coordination between the hand, the ear and the mind.

Those who say it is no longer practical in a world of digital computers that can talk to each across great distances a million times faster than Morse code miss the point. Today the code is not about efficiency, it is about remembering radio's rudimentary roots. To the individual it is about developing a skill that can be fulfilling and that continues to be useful in Amateur Radio. The code hasn't gone away, just listen to the lower frequencies of the 40 and 20 meter band and you will hear amateurs from around the world sending code. While it is not uncommon for people in foreign lands to be able to speak more than one language, the majority of people in the U.S. can speak only English. By eliminating code this same monolithic "distinction" would soon apply to the

U.S. radio Amateurs who are code deficient. While the rest of the world carries on the code tradition, in the U.S. it languishes.

The code is a rounding skill, perhaps parallel to one of the ingredients of a good liberal arts education. It is a measure of ability that can separate those who possess theory by rote. It is not hard to learn the code; it just takes some persistence which is an important trait in itself. If eight year olds can learn the code, it cannot be described as a road block to becoming a Ham. Please think twice before you eliminate this important provision of Amateur Radio licensing.

Doug Vernier