

# HAM HISTORY

*"Ham: a poor operator. A 'plug.'"*

That's the definition of the word given in G. M. Dodge's *The Telegraph Instructor* even before radio. The definition has never changed in wire telegraphy. The first wireless operators were landline telegraphers who left their offices to go to sea or to man the coastal stations. They brought with them their language and much of the tradition of their older profession.

In those early days, spark was king and every station occupied the same wavelength-or, more accurately perhaps, every station occupied the whole spectrum with its broad spark signal. Government stations, ships, coastal stations and the increasingly numerous amateur operators all competed for time and signal supremacy in each other's receivers. Many of the amateur stations were very powerful. Two amateurs, working each other across town, could effectively jam all the other operations in the area. When this happened, frustrated commercial operators would call the ship whose weaker signals had been blotted out by amateurs and say "SRI OM THOSE #&\$!@ HAMS ARE JAMMING YOU."

Amateurs, possibly unfamiliar with the real meaning of the term, picked it up and applied it to themselves in true "Yankee Doodle" fashion and wore it with pride. As the years advanced, the original meaning has completely disappeared.

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## CQ

The telegraph call CQ was born on the English Telegraph nearly a century ago as a signal meaning "All stations. A notification to all postal telegraph offices to receive the message." Its meaning was close to the present meanings of QNC and QST. Like many other telegraph terms which originated on the landlines, CQ was brought over into radio and used as a general call to all ships by the Marconi Company. Other companies used KA until the London Convention of 1912, which adopted CQ as the international general call or "attention" signal. CQ still means, literally, "attention" but in amateur radio its meaning is perhaps more accurately described by Thomas Raddell who compared it to yelling "Hey, Mac!" down a drain pipe.

But why the letters CQ? From the French, *sécurité*, (safety or, as intended here, pay attention) See:

The Ocean Liner Museum, [R.M.S TITANIC = MGY & OTHER RADIO ARCANA](#)

The traditional expression "73" goes right back to the beginning of the landline telegraph days. It is found in some of the earliest editions of the numerical codes, each with a different definition, but each with the same idea in mind--it indicated that the end, or signature, was coming up. But there are no data to prove that any of these were used.

The first authentic use of 73 is in the publication *The National Telegraph Review and Operators' Guide*, first published in April 1857. At that time, 73 meant "My love to you!" Succeeding issues of this publication continued to use this definition of the term. Curiously enough, some of the other numerals then used have the same definition now that they had then, but within a short time, the use of 73 began to change.

In the National Telegraph Convention, the numeral was changed from the Valentine-type sentiment to a vague sign of fraternalism. Here, 73 was a greeting, a friendly "word" between operators and it was so used on all wires.

In 1859, the Western Union Company set up the standard "92 Code". A list of numerals from one to 92 was compiled to indicate a series of prepared phrases for use by the operators on the wires. Here, in the 92 Code, 73 changes from a fraternal sign to a very flowery "accept my compliments," which was in keeping with the florid language of that era.

Over the years from 1859 to 1900, the many manuals of telegraphy show variations of this meaning. Dodge's *The Telegraph Instructor* shows it merely as "compliments." *The Twentieth Century Manual of Railway and Commercial Telegraphy* defines it two ways, one listing as "my compliments to you;" but in the glossary of abbreviations it is merely "compliments." Theodore A. Edison's *Telegraphy Self-Taught* shows a return to "accept my compliments." By 1908, however, a later edition of the Dodge Manual gives us today's definition of "best regards" with a backward look at the older meaning in another part of the work where it also lists it as "compliments."

"Best regards" has remained ever since as the "put-it-down-in-black-and-white" meaning of 73 but it has acquired overtones of much warmer meaning. Today, amateurs use it more in the manner that James Reid had intended that it be used --a "friendly word between operators."

The above information from [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org)

For additional information, the following links are provided:

<http://earlyradiohistory.us/>

<http://www.astrosurf.org/lombry/qs1-ham-history.htm>