

# The NEWSLETTER

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Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA  
North America - North East

**THIS  
IS GREAT  
ANTENNA  
TIME!**

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# Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS...

First it's me in and out of the hospital and now it's been Walter's turn. He woke up in the wee hours of a Saturday morning in mid-September with severe pain in the right side of his lower back. He managed to dull the pain with some pain killer pills the doctor had given me for the early days of my foot surgery recovery, until he knew one of his daughters, who lives nearby, would be awake and could drive him to the hospital emergency room.

Yes, we both know about self-medicating with someone else's pills. However, with pain that bad, and knowing what the pills were for, we took the chance.

The doctor on duty took one look at him, rushed him off for an x-ray and a scan, and as soon as the results were back, jabbed him in the backside with a needle loaded with some type of pain relief stuff (the name of which Grandma can't remember nor likely not pronounce if I could). Walter said it was like having a wave wash over him when the drug took effect a few minutes later. A wave of almost instant relief!

Next, the specialist doc came to see him and talked with Walter about what would be happening later that morning. He was scheduled for surgery as the stone was too large to pass on its own or to break up with ultrasonics. Told him, if all went well and he was a good boy, he would be out of the hospital in a couple of days. Somehow they got to talking about what Walter did, and that got around to ham radio. Seems the doc was a ham as well, but hadn't

had much time up to now to really be active. Said he was thinking of getting back into it as golf wasn't really his thing. He and Walter made plans to meet in a couple of weeks.

The operation was a success and Walter was released after the two days promised. He says he is "a little tender around the edges".

I can sympathize with that.

First time that I've ever seen Walter not interested in playing radio.

**Yes, we both know about self-medicating with someone else's pills.**

**The operation was a success and Walter was released after the two days promised.**

## TECH AND OTHER STUFF

The key base plate and Navy knob skirt I ordered from [Milestone Technologies](#) arrived in the last week of July. The tracking info on the USPS web site stopped after showing it had cleared Canada Customs on the 22nd of July. Guess the border must be more secure than I thought, or more likely the US and the Canadian computer systems don't "talk" with each other yet.

The parts were packed individually in a standard brown padded shipping envelope. The base comes with two sets of two brass (or brass colored) 6-32 machine screws. One with slotted round head, the other with flat. It only took a couple of seconds to remove the key from the old wooden base and fasten it to the new aluminum one.

There were a couple of small bare metal spots on the key frame where the black crinkle finish had gotten nicked over the years, so I touched those places up with a black Sharpie marker.

Looks pretty spiffy, doesn't it?

The new base has four small round plastic pads for each of the under-side corners. There was a slight but annoying wobble when I used the key on my desk. I

solved that by moving the two pads in from the rear corners towards the center to form a sort of three legged arrangement. Problem solved. If this happens to you and you don't want to

move the pads, level the problem one by sticking a layer or two of small pieces of sticky tape or paper on the bottom of the low pad.

The skirt is installed by unscrewing the existing knob, placing the skirt over the threaded hole in the lever, and fastening it in place with the knob (without over tightening). Pretty simple.

Some keys may have a fiber washer between the knob and the lever. If that is the case, install it between the



knob and the skirt.

To my way of thinking, the addition of the knob skirt coupled with the new, lower height base makes for a much nicer feel when sending. I had originally wondered if the lesser weight of the aluminum base would let the key slide around when operating. It turned out to be a non-problem as the base pads seem to have a slight "grab" making them "stick" to the table.

The feeling of whether or not a key is "good" is very much a personal thing. Just look at the different styles on the market. Some folks like the higher handles, the British or Swedish style, while others prefer the lower, North American model.

While I was making these changes I thought I might as well replace the cord and plug. The original one was the standard in its day - a

1/4" mono phone plug.

Now, the trend is to

1/8" (3.5mm). I had

already ordered in a few

[6' cables with a mono plug](#) of the new size molded on one end, to have on hand for projects, so it was a simple matter to shorten the cable portion to a more reasonable operating position length, add a pair of spade terminals, along with some shrink tubing and connect it to the key posts. If I want to use it on older rigs, then I have a 3.5mm female to 1/4" male adapter that I can employ. I could have made an adapter cable but the cost for the two connectors and wire were more than an adapter, not even counting the time required to make it.

These simple changes make my old key nicer to use. Many of the keys of this J-38 style can be modified in the same way using this base and knob skirt. The web site shows another slightly less expensive [metal base](#). Take a look on-line, or contact Marshall Emm, the owner, for further details.



DurhamRadio.com

## PIXIE TRANSCEIVER KIT

The [PIXIE Transceiver](#) is not about to drive any of the current crop of HF transceivers from the market. Nor any of the QRP ones either. Even at the price on eBay of \$4.89 plus \$0.99 shipping from Hong Kong, sales probably won't make much of a dent in Elecraft's or Icom's or Yaesu's or Kenwood's bottom line.

The eBay description has been translated into English, possibly by computer, with somewhat confusing results, very reminiscent of the old Japanese radio manuals. For example, "Beautiful metal case not only for item considerably, and can effectively shield nearby interference." As far as I can tell, the kit does not even come with a case!

## Specifications:

Power supply: DC 9V-14V

Antenna: 50 ohm, unbalanced

Receive quiescent current: 10mA @ 9V

Transmit power: 0.8W @ 9V, 1.2W @ 12V

Frequency range: launch 7.023MHz, receive 7.023-7.026MHz (7.023MHz crystal)

Mode: CW

At 800 mW output, this is not something you will likely be using to be the first one to break a DX pileup.

However, if you are into QRPP, it may be of interest to you. Be aware that some on the QRP-L e-mail reflector have mentioned problems with getting it to work. It seems that Chinese manufactured rigs are having growing pains.

A North American source showing up on-line for the Pixie kit is

[HSC Electronic Supply](#) in California. Their kit comes with 40 and 80 meter crystals and chokes for both bands, for the price of \$14.95. Slightly less output power at 300-400 milliwatts at 9 volts.

One web page suggested replacing the transistors that come with the kits with metal cased versions of the [2N2222](#) or [2N5109](#). You have to be careful not to use replacements so "hot" that you cause the final stage to self oscillate on frequency or produce spurious outputs on other frequencies. While the 2N2222 should be fine, the 2N5109 works into the UHF range. Take care that you don't get a QSL from the FCC.



## IDIOM PRESS

Last month, I mentioned their SCAF audio filter as a possible substitute for the New England QRP club's discontinued NESCAF unit. According to Idiom's web site, they are not accepting any new orders and their business is for sale.

## PHIL SALAS AD5X

You might recognize the name or call sign from articles published in the past in QST Magazine. Phil has a website with lots of simple construction projects, and equipment reviews. Good stuff on there! Check it out at <http://www.ad5x.com/>.



# ANNUAL MEETING

The Executive of the Mercury Amateur Radio Association - North East have set the date for the annual meeting for the 24th of October at 9 am. This will be held on Skype (audio only), as was last year's.

To minimize last minute scrambles you are encouraged to check your Skype set up for proper operation. In the event you do not have Skype loaded on your computer you can download the application at:

[www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

Skype requires that you exchange calling credentials between the connecting parties. Exchange credentials with "tarheelcharlie" the host for the conference call.

Please note that credential exchange is a Skype mandated process. This apparently mitigates unwanted callers rattling your cage. It is nice to avoid the telemarketers and solicitors. If you wish to use Skype to directly contact other MARA ops outside of the Conference Call set up, you will need to exchange credentials with each operator, not just the Conference Call Host.)

If you have not used Skype before then use the following procedure to set up for the conference call.

1. Launch the Skype application.
2. If you have not already created your own "UserID" then do it now.
3. Under your UserID in the upper left corner of the Skype application there is a label called "Search". Click on it. "Search" will disappear. Your cursor will blink in the location where the word "Search" appeared initially. Type in the UserID "tarheelcharlie" but exclude the quotation marks. Then press "Enter"
4. Within a couple of seconds you should see "tarheelcharlie" appear below the search field with an avatar of an evil looking cat with bat ears.
5. Click on the "tarheelcharlie" in the Search results listing with your mouse.
6. You will be presented with a label approximately in the middle of the Skype interface at the top. Just below tarheelcharlie's UserID you should see a text string with "tarheelcharlie is not in your

contacts". Right below it will be a blue oval with white letters "Add to Contacts". Click on the blue oval button.

7. You will be presented with a rectangle that encloses text saying, "Send a contact request", and "Hi tarheelcharlie, I'd like to add you as a contact". Another blue oval encompassing the text "Send" is right below. Click on the blue oval.

8. At that point the request will be sent to me and I will respond by approving you for contact.

9. I recommend once you receive verification of the "Contact Request" credential exchange that you initiate a call to me. In general I am up at 3 AM and leave the house by 4 AM. Normally I return to the house by 4 PM and remain up till 8 PM. During the weekends call anytime.

If you do not want your UserID published among the MARA users please let me know. In general as a user exchanges credentials with me I publish the user's id with their callsign for other MARA ops to add to their list of potential contacts. This is not a requirement and your privacy will be respected by NOT PUBLISHING your contact info if requested.

During the interim if you already have a UserID and have exchanged credentials consider calling into the Saturday Morning Post MARA Net Skype Conference Call held weekly. Looking forward to hearing you. It starts up at 07:30 AM Eastern Time.

73

Chuck WD4HXG

## ELECTION OF OFFICERS

There are six directors of the Mercury Amateur Radio Association - North East in total, two coming up for election (or re-election) every two years, falling in the odd numbered years. These terms last for a period of six years. There are two positions open this year

Barry, N2PCT, has responded that he will not be offering for re-election. Dave, N3GRH, who was filling the remainder of a vacant position, has indicated that he will re-offer for a full six-year term.

In addition, Bob N3TS, has found it necessary, for health reasons, to step down from the office of President. His term would have expired in 2017. Anyone filling Bob's

shoes will do so until the annual meeting sometime in 2017.

So, as the Secretary of MARA - NE, I am looking for persons interested in placing their name on the ballot for one of the two positions of director, their term going from this year until 2021, or for persons wanting to place their name on the ballot for the position of President, that individual's term going from the present until the annual meeting in 2017.

If you are interested in filling one of these positions, please e-mail me directly at [ve1vq@eastlink.ca](mailto:ve1vq@eastlink.ca) as soon as possible. Please send me a *very brief* synopsis of your life, including your amateur radio career. We don't need to know your church achievements, or even whether or not you are active.

Please remember that to be elected to office you must be a member of MARA - NE (no dues required), must hold a current Amateur Radio call sign (General Class or higher, or the equivalent if you live outside of the United States), and be a member of a unit of the LDS Church in the North East Area..

Dave  
VE1VQ/VA6NS

# DI-DAH-DI-DAH ♪

**E**arly spring in Atlantic Canada can be (and usually is) coldish, wet, and miserable. While the springtime with the new green growth is my favorite time of the year, the fall is when I like to think I do my best work on antennas.

The heat of summer has gone and the cold of winter has not yet set in. The leaves have dropped from the trees making it easier to string support lines and wire through the tree branches using your favorite slingshot or air-powered antenna launcher. Along with the leaves, the flies and biting critters have hopefully left us as well.

Late fall can be tricky. You never know what will happen weatherwise from one day to the next.

Winter is a good time for using [EZNEC](#) or [4nec2](#) antenna modelling software while tending the fire and keeping warm.

Perhaps you prefer another time and season for hanging wire in your back yard. Could be, you believe the old saying that the colder the temperature the better the antenna performs. Keep on believing if that gets you doing something radio radiator wise.

As for me, I'll take this time of the year. Anybody know where I put my antenna analyser and my jacket?

Until next month,  
VE1VQ

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Nobody cares if you can't dance well.  
Just get up and dance."

*Dave Barry*