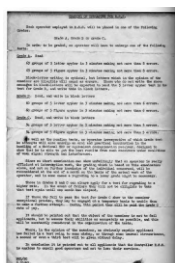


## Real Patriots: A Tribute to those dedicated Amateur Radio Operators who took it on the Chin

Receiving enemy QRP stations, dragging them out of the QRM and accurately transcribing five-letter groups was only the beginning of their challenges, a back-handed reward if you will for achieving proficiency at copying Morse at which most will only ever marvel. Although, regrettably, there is no longer a formal Morse test before being handed a Certificate of Competency and being let loose on the amateur bands, a few dedicated contemporary hams, some rather late in life, still study to become proficient at CW. Some even sit a voluntary examination to prove that they are able to copy 12 words per minute. And ‘copy’ in this context means: has the ability to faithfully write down in block capitals every letter which was sent. One hears the word ‘copy’ being used erroneously all the time by phone operators who haven’t written down a single word that has passed in their QSO, and have no intention of ever doing so.

Eight decades ago in World War 2, when the very survival of the country depended upon it, there was a completely different attitude shown by hams in Great Britain towards achieving competency in Morse code. The Radio Security Service (RSS) was intent upon establishing a ‘Y’ service to intercept enemy radio transmissions, in particular to detect signals originating within mother England, but also to validate traffic from occupied Europe intercepted by the official Y-service stations. To this end, competent Morse operators were indispensable and were being recruited from the ranks of ham radio enthusiasts whose hobby had been shut down by order of the Government for the duration. The RSS recognized that a solid Morse test would be needed to sort out the men from the boys, and simply being able to copy Morse at the mandated speed of the day in order to pass the ham Morse exam, was nowhere near good enough. The RSS established its own rules, and deployed a mechanical typewriter to produce a single-page document, dated 6 October, 1941, to clearly define those rules.



The original document defining the Grades criteria for RSS radio intercept employees may be seen full-sized by clicking on the link associated with this file. Amateur radio operators, or Voluntary Interceptors (VI), who were welcomed into the service, had to meet the same stringent criteria as paid employees - the goal was always quality over quantity - exactly the opposite of just about everything we encounter in today’s total acceptance of mediocrity and universal refusal to accept personal responsibility.

The table below summarizes the immutable Morse receiving test results called for in the document, which had to be achieved for acceptance to the three grades of personnel. The months after qualifying for a Grade were a type of apprenticeship; each VI’s performance was analyzed and either accepted as up to standard for his Grade, if not he would be demoted.

Operator Grade	Number of Letter Groups	Duration in minutes	Groups per minute	Words per minute	Allowable errors
A	69	3	23	28.75	8
B	60	3	20	25.00	6
C	54	3	18	22.50	5

Despite evidence provided by the tens-of-thousands of hand-written intercepts delivered by motor cycle courier to Bletchley Park from the length and breadth of war-time England, Bletchley Park staunchly refused to acknowledge that any of the 834 R.S.S. amateur radio operator VIs, ever took part in ‘their Bletchley style’ of electronic warfare.