

**HOW IT ALL STARTED—THE NTS
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(COURTESY AUGUST 1974 QST)**

Although THE NATIONAL TRAFFIC SYSTEM first went into operation in 1949, this was by no means the first ARRL-organized venture into organized traffic handling. In fact, as most of us who have done our homework on ARRL history know, organized traffic handling was the basic reason for the founding of ARRL.

But let's not go into all that, because it's all in "TWO HUNDRED METERS AND DOWN". Suffice it to say that "Trunk Lines" existed in the teens and twenties and became really widespread in the thirties, right up to the advent of World War II. By that time, however spot frequency network operation was starting to take hold, and the concept of Trunk Lines was approaching obsolescence. That is, instead of consecutive schedules along the points of the Trunk Line, which had become standard procedure, several stations would meet on a spot frequency and find that some of the TL points could be bypassed. Then other stations off the points of the trunk, hearing the hubbub, would offer coverage of another city, and would be accepted into the growing group. First thing you know, here was a loosely-organized regional net, not a Trunk Line in the traditional sense at all.

This gradual demise of the Trunk Line concept was interrupted by the late 1941 unpleasantness and was not resumed until 1947, when reorganization commenced from headquarters under the supervision first of W1JMY, then of W6JQB, who became "National Trunk Line Manager" (and sorted DXCC cards) and W1QMI. Traffic men, after the first blush of getting back on the air following the long wartime hiatus, rushed to join in the reorganization, and soon the Trunk Lines were "in business" again.

But things were not quite the same. The rigid pre-war "iron man" requirement that all participants be ORS appointees and able to operate every night (except weekends) started to break down. The immediate-pre-war conditions shortly prevailed again, and the so-called Trunk Lines started to become spot-frequency nets, with

tentacles extending far off their prescribed routes and often into another line's "territory" and the threat of hodge-podge soon became apparent. Complaints from newcomers started to arrive at headquarters that the TL concept was obsolete. Independent nets started to appear in increasing numbers, some of them including former trunkliners disenchanted with the old setup. Efforts by headquarters to hold the Trunk Lines together became increasingly difficult. Something had to be done.

Cherished traditions die hard, and Trunk Lines were among the most cherished by many old-time traffic men of the day. When the league, in 1949, embarked on the establishment of a National Traffic System entirely different and separate from the Trunk Lines, the procedure was cautious, exploratory, tentative. First a survey was conducted to determine the amount of support from traffic leaders, then a QST article ("new traffic plan" QST sept. 1949), then correspondence to line up leaders, and finally a shaky start of operation on Oct. 1, 1949. The Trunk Lines continued, and headquarters continued to support them; but they were not pushed, as NTS was, and gradually their members shifted their operation to NTS nets until the ARRL Trunk Lines eventually faded away. A few continued to operate independently but were "Trunk Lines" in name only; actually they were spot frequency nets, similar to the new NTS nets.

In the first few years of its existence, the infant NTS survived what must have been one of the worst sunspot nulls in history. Winter and summer, conditions on 80 meters were consistently described as "horrible." In wintertime, the muf dipped so low that often the band was completely dead during the evening hours when the nets operated. In summer, QRN added to the woes. But NTS adherents hung in there, and when sunspots started to reappear in sufficient numbers to re-establish "normal" conditions, more traffic men joined in. Not until then did it become an established and recognized fact that NTS was here to stay.

The sixties were the "heyday" of NTS. Propagation conditions were generally good, participation was high, pride in a "tight organization" was great. Long before the advent of ARRL Advisory committees, "Area Staffs" of NTS were formed to assist the ARRL

Communications Manager in administration of the extensive system. (actually the Pacific Area Staff was formed experimentally in 1952, but similar staffs in Eastern and Central areas were formed more than a decade later). Managership posts at the region, area, and TCC levels became sought-after by traffic men, and held on to when acquired, sometimes for more than a decade.

Not until the turn of the 70's and the advent of voice-operated monitoring nets and other phone nets on the high frequencies did NTS start coming under fire as a possible-inept and obsolescent amateur public service. Most such nets operated daytimes and many of them were highly successful in obtaining prompt delivery of traffic, but all were independently organized and appeared to prefer to remain that way. Since NTS was primarily designed to operate during the evening hours when most amateurs are available, and since there appeared to be a sizable contingent of amateurs who operated daytimes but preferred NTS connection, a "Daytime NTS" was set up for trial and is even now in operation on that basis. As in the original NTS, the going is slow and tough, and although conditions don't seem to be as bad as they were in the early fifties, they are bad enough.

Mode? Well, it always seems to be a basis for controversy, but NTS was never set up specifically with one mode in mind, has never been exclusive in that respect and still isn't—and that includes both the daytime and evening contingents. True, in the beginning NTS seemed to attract mostly cw operators, almost exclusively so at regional level and above, and most if not all evening operation at such levels is now conducted by that mode. Conversely, the net NTS (Daytime)—NOT a different system—is getting its start on the phone bands. But in principle, the NTS selects the mode to suit the need, within availabilities. It will use the best mode for the purpose of traffic men capable of using that mode are available. If not, it will use the mode in which traffic men are available. This is the only practical way to run a traffic-handling system.

In conclusion, here are some calls of early pioneer in NTS. How many do you recognize, and how many are still around? W1BVR, ,W2s LRW CLL PRE, W3GEG W4'S ANK BAZ NNJ, W5GZU W6's CE JZ

W7's CZY FIX WJ, W8's NOH SCW UPB YCP, W9's CBE TT, W0's AUL
BE HMM IC SCA ZJO, VE's 2GM 3ATR 3BUR 3GL.---W1NJM