

Ham 18 - Elmer fun facts

Dr. Marc & Rosemary Durham, Theway Labs, Bixby, OK © 241224

What or who is Elmer?

You can believe everything on the internet, right? The web says the term started in an article a few years ago. “The term “Elmer”--meaning someone who provides personal guidance and assistance to would-be hams--first appeared in *QST* in a March 1971.”

The internet opinion would not be entirely correct. The term may have first appeared in an article then, but that was not the first use.

We are considerably older than the date of the article and Elmer has been around at least since the 1950s from my personal experience. I realized today that I have been around doing this stuff for half-as-long as ham radio has been around. Because of the way math works, few younger than us will ever be able to say that. Whoa, but I digress.

Elmer appears to be an outgrowth of World War II, when a generation of young electronics whizzes came out of the military. Traditionally, older, experienced guys are called ‘Elder’ in religion and many cultures around the world. But young experienced guys resented the implications of being knowledgeable required the meaning of older, when they were 23 years of age. Besides, Elder carries too religious of a context. In addition, note, the British tradition below.

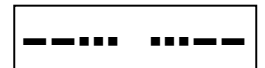
So, the morphology is that Elder became Elmer in the radio world.

Elder → Elmer

For any gentleman, those associated with British and Northeastern radio often use the abbreviation *OM* for *Old Man*. What would be the fairer gender? *YL* for *Young Lady*. In keeping with tradition, *wife* is *XYL*. Why? *Ex-Young-Lady*. Now you know.

What is 73?

73



The term means something to the effect of “Best Regards” or “Be well.”

The shortcut dates to the earliest days of telegraph when the Old West operator was sending the same messages over and over via Morse Code. Since telegraphers were working for the railroads and Western Union, they were a tight knit group, who developed standardized practices to make their job easier, with less likelihood of mistakes.

Number codes were well defined by 1857 and published in the telegraphers training manual. Western Union accepted and solidified the numeric assignments in 1859 as the “92 Code” reflecting the then highest number.

The code 73 made a slight morph from its original meaning of “My love to you.” The operators on opposite ends of the line moved the sentiment to the equivalent of “Goodbye.” That easily transitioned to the current idea of “Best Regards.” It is already plural, so only ‘73’ but never ‘73s.’

There is a code for the more emotive. Code 88 translates as ‘Love and Kisses.’

88



As an interesting side-note, one of my first-cousins and his wife were professional telegraphers for the railroad from the 1950s into the 1980s. The technology has not been gone that long.

That is the story of how language morphs over time to take on a seemingly unrelated meaning.

What is a common tool today which came out of the telegraph industry in 1857?

Mathias Klein, now some of you know the answer.

Mathias Klein emigrated from Germany to Chicago as a blacksmith. His first job was to repair a broken arm of a side cutter pliers for a telegraph lineman in the nascent communications business. Shortly afterward, the communications installer returned with the other side broken. Klein had made his first pair of pliers.

Through forging, materials, and sharpening, the Klein lineman is the undisputed premier pliers today. They are a hammer, steel cutter, and copper twister for electrical and iron workers. They are so well-respected that the design is commonly referred to simply as Kleins.

Their logo reflects the heritage.



God said:
Let there be light,
And created the electrical trade.

Electrical is a family thing.
My dad, me, my son, grandson.
Father-in-law, brother-in-law, son

Life is good. Enjoy.

