(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 118 340 A

(21) Application No **8307276**
(22) Date of filing **16 Mar 1983**
(30) Priority data
(31) **8210326**
(32) **7 Apr 1982**
(33) **United Kingdom (GB)**
(43) Application published **26 Oct 1983**
(51) **INT CL³ H04Q 9/00**
(52) Domestic classification **G4H** 13D 14A 14B 14D 14G 60 NC3 **U1S** 1270 1752 2003 2145 2184 2185 2195 G4H
(56) Documents cited
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(58) Field of search **G4H**

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(54) Signal processing unit

(57) A status and control unit, which co-operates with a central station via a communications link, is controlled by a microprocessor which is programmed to operate in a functional configuration controlled by the settings of one or more parameters. These parameters may be changed by means of a message transmitted to the unit from the central station.

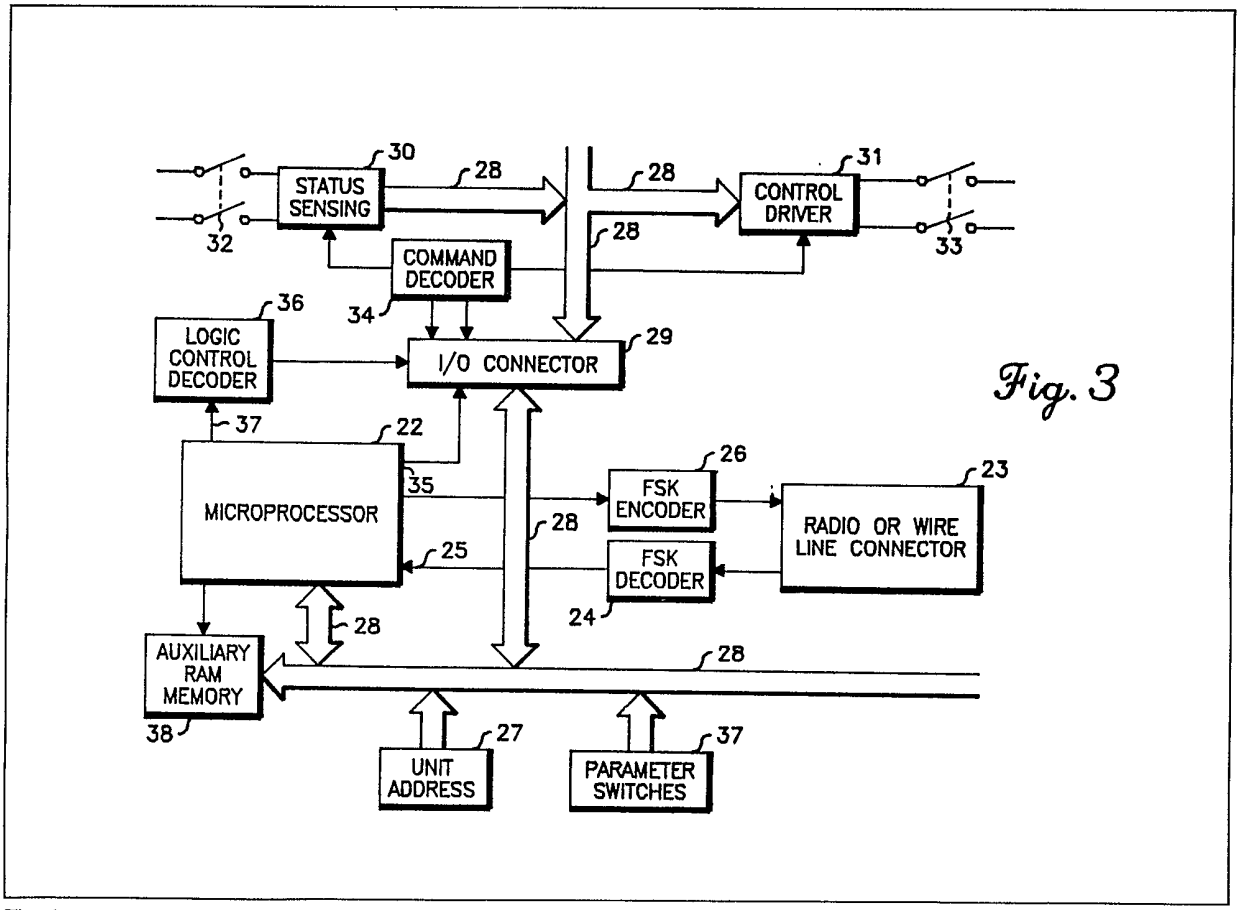


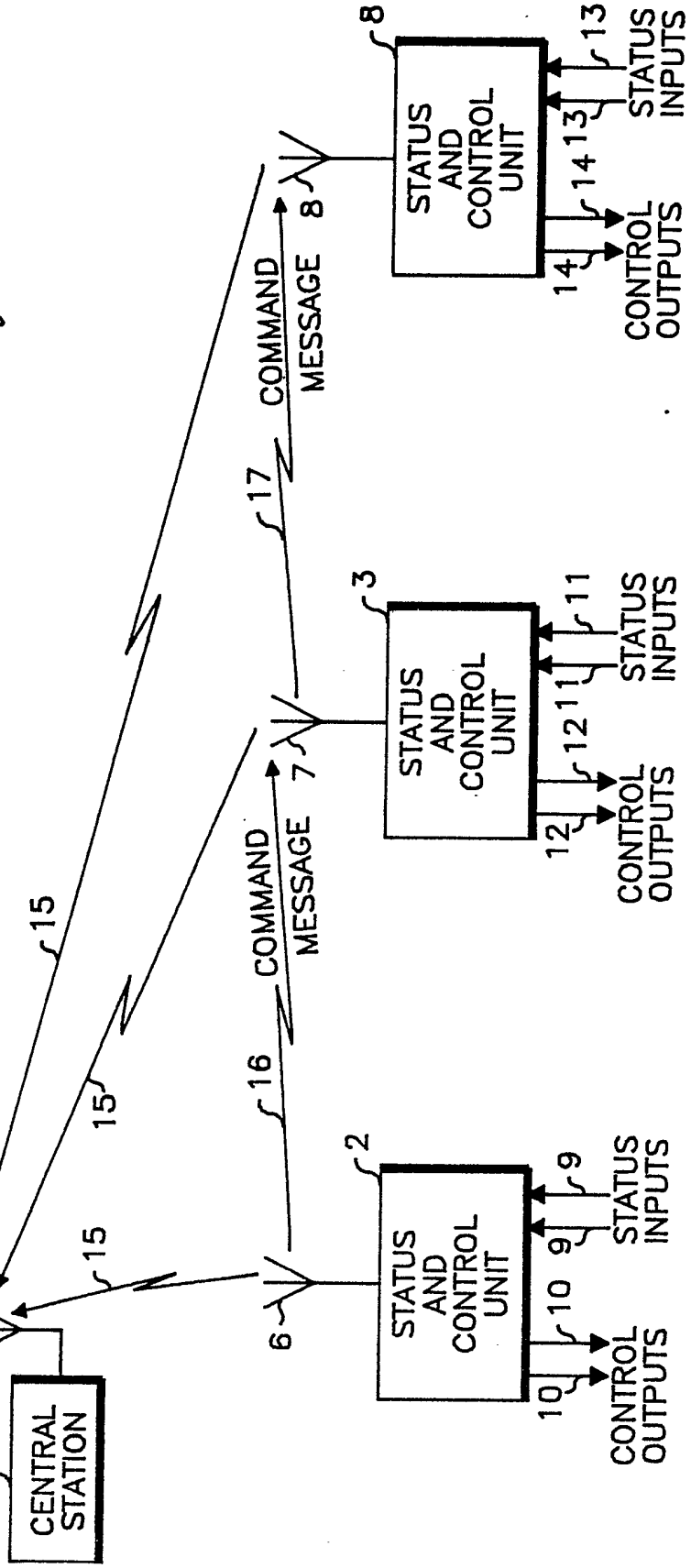
Fig. 3

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The drawings originally filed were informal and the print here reproduced is taken from a later filed formal copy.

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Fig. 1



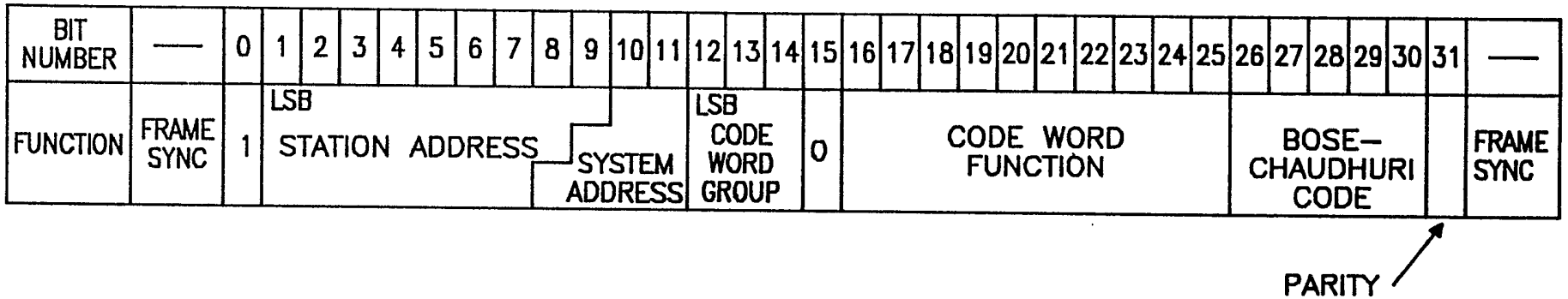
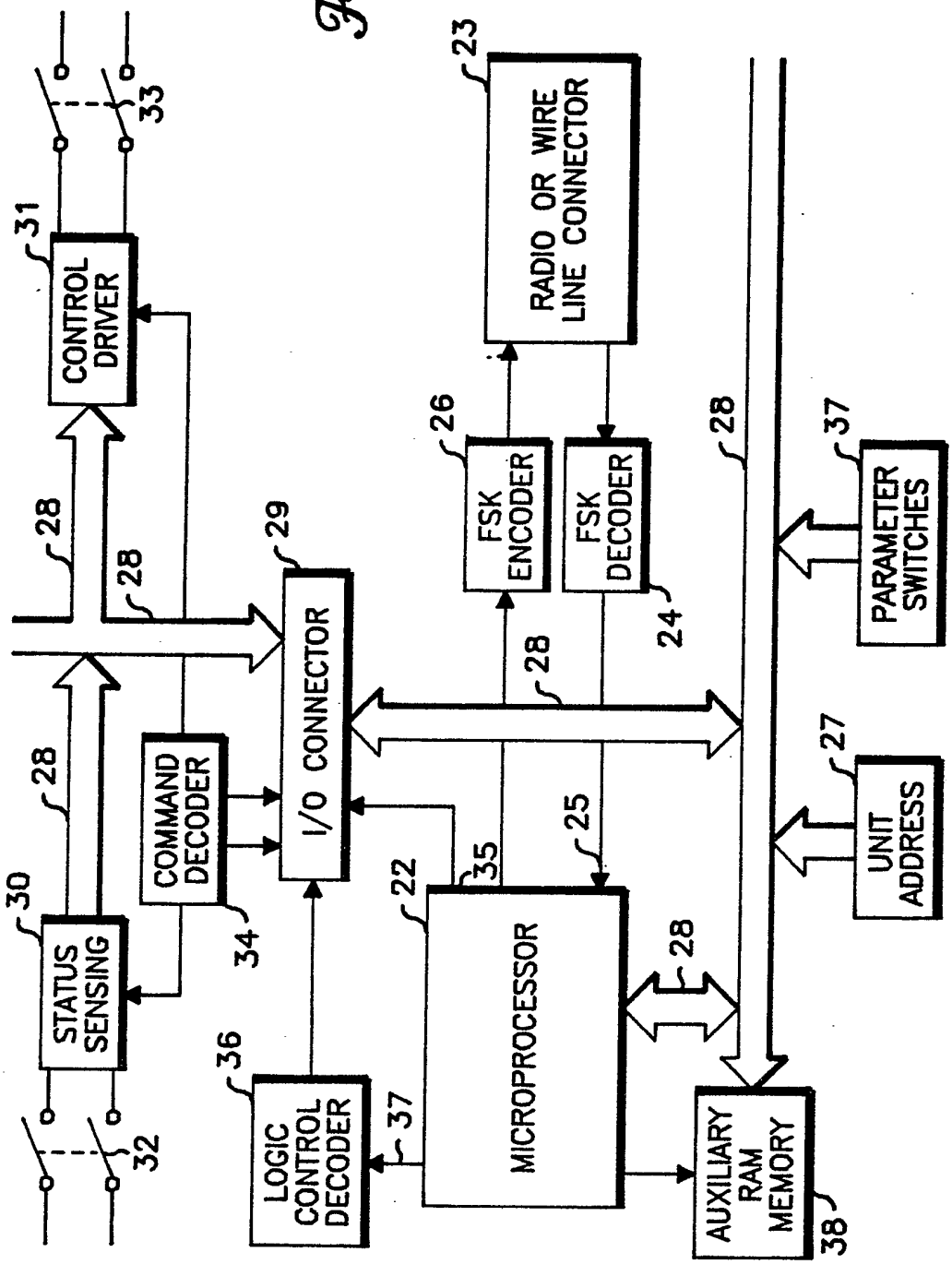


Fig. 2

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Fig. 3



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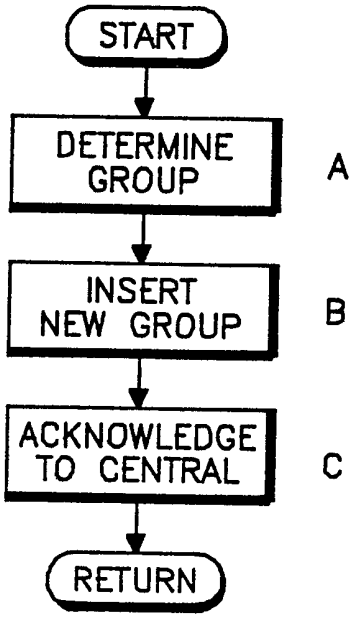


Fig. 4

SPECIFICATION

Signal processing unit

Technical Field

This invention relates to a signal processing unit and particularly but not exclusively to a unit suitable for forming part of a supervisory control system in which a plurality of such units perform monitoring and control functions under the supervision of a central station which communicates with the units via a communications link which may be a radio or wire line link.

Background art

A known signal processing unit of the above type may be a status unit, a control unit or a combined status-and-control unit.

A status unit monitors the state of one or more input signals and when a change of state occurs at a status input a message to that effect is generated and sent to the central station, the message containing an address which identifies the transmitting unit.

A control unit provides one or more control outputs at which signals are provided for remote control functions. Activation of a control output may result in the closure of a relay contract and this activation is initiated by means of a message sent from the central station to the control unit.

A status-and-control unit combines the functions of the other two types of unit.

A problem with known signal processing units of the above type is their inability to adapt to changing environmental conditions. For example, transmission may become unreliable due to transmission path deterioration.

This invention seeks to provide a signal processing unit which is more adaptable than known units and in which the above-mentioned problem is at least mitigated.

Brief description of the invention

According to this invention there is provided a signal processing unit comprising communication means for receiving message transmitted to the processing unit; processing means for controlling operation of the unit in accordance with at least one stored operating parameter; storage means for storing the at least one parameter governing operation of the processing means and wherein the processing means is responsive to a received message to change the at least one parameter whereby the operating characteristics of the signal processing unit may be changed.

The processing means may be a microprocessor operating under programme control in accordance with the at least one stored parameter.

The storage means may be a random access memory cooperable with the processing means.

Further storage means cooperable with the processing means and the said storage means may be provided for storing an initial value of the at least one parameter.

The further storage means may be one or more digital switches.

The communication means may comprise transceiving means which may be a radio transceiver or a wire line link.

The signal processing unit may include status sensing means for sensing the status of one or more status inputs.

The signal processing unit may include one or more control outputs for providing remote control functions.

A plurality of signal processing units may be provided each communicating with a central station via the communication means.

An exemplary embodiment of the invention will now be described with reference to the drawings in which Figure 1 illustrates schematically a supervisory control system including processing units in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 2 illustrates the form of code word utilized for communication in the system of Figure 1 and Figure 3 illustrates a signal processing unit of this invention in more detail, and Figure 4 is an explanatory flow chart diagram.

Referring now to Figure 1 the supervisory control system illustrated comprises a central station 1 which supervises the activities of remotely located status and control units 2, 3 and 4. The central station communicates with the unit 2, 3 and 4 by means of radio transmission from an aerial 5 which transmissions are received by the respective aerials 6, 7 and 8 of the units 2, 3 and 4.

The status and control unit 2 has a number of status inputs 9 of which two are shown and a number of control outputs 10 of which two are illustrated. Likewise the unit 3 has status inputs 11 and control outputs 12 and the unit 4 status inputs 13 and control outputs 14. The status inputs 9 of the unit 2 provide monitoring functions such as the monitoring of the water level at a reservoir and any change results in a change at the status inputs. This change may typically be a switch closure due to the water level change and may be communicated to the central station 1 by means of a trasmission 15 in digitally coded form. The central station may then send a transmission to the status and control unit 2 in the reverse direction which contains a coded message instructing this unit to provide a control output at one of its outputs 10 to operate for example a pump.

In addition the status and control unit 2 may be configured so that a change in status at any one of its status inputs 9 results in a command message 16 to the status and control unit 3 to provide an output signal at one of its control outputs. Similarly unit 3 may correspond with the unit 4 via a transmission 17.

A typical code word used for the digitally coded transmission is illustrated in Figure 2 to which reference will now be made.

In Figure 2 the illustrated code word contains 32 bits of information these bits being numbered from 0-31. Bit 0 in the present control system is always logical 1. Bits 1-11 define an address portion of the code word and identify a station for which a message is intended and a station from which a

message originates. Bits 1-9 define the actual station address while bits 10 and 11 may be used to define a system address where more than one system of signal processing units is controlled by a single central station. Bits 12-25 effectively define the information content in the message, bits 12-14 signifying one group of a number of code word groups whilst bits 16-25 further define the function of the actual code word within the selection group. Bit 15 is always zero. Bits 26-30 constitute a Bose-Chaudhuri Cyclic code which is a function of all the preceeding bits and the final bit number 31 is a parity check bit for the entire code word.

Although the communication illustrated in Figure 1 is by means of radio transmission this communication may equally well be affected by a wire line link.

A signal processing unit in accordance with this invention and which may be used as the status and control units in the system of Figure 1 will now be described with reference to Figure 3.

Referring now to Figure 3 there is shown a more detailed schematic illustration of a signal processing unit in accordance with the invention. The unit includes a microprocessor 22 typically a Mostek 3870. The processing unit has a transceiver (not shown) which may be a radio or wire line unit and signals to and from this transceiver are couples by means of a connector 23. Received signals are decoded by a F.S.K. decoder 24 and fed to an input 25 of the microprocessor 22. Similarly, signals intended for transmission from the unit are fed from the microprocessor 22 to the connector 23 via an F.S.K. encoder 26. The unit has a unique address which is set in an address store unit 27 which is read by the microprocessor from a data bus 28 to which the store 27 and the microprocessor 22 are coupled. The data bus 28 is also coupled via an input/output connector 29 to a status sensing unit 30 and a control output driver 31. The status sensing unit 30 typically formed by a number of gates, senses the status of a number of status inputs 32 whilst the control driver 31 provides control outputs to activate relays 33.

Status information sensed by the status sensing unit 30 is put onto the data bus 28 under the control of a command decoder 34 typically formed by a Motorola MC14556 which decodes commands fed from an output 35 of the microprocessor 22 via the input/output connector 29 and these commands are decoded under the control of a logic control decoder 36 which also receives signals from an output 37 of the microprocessor and which is also connected to the command decoder 34 via the input/output connector 29. The command decoder 34 is also coupled to the control driver 31 and therefore ensures that either status information or control signals for the control relays 33 is fed to the data bus 28.

Also coupled to the data bus 28 is a digital parameter store in the form of a number of DIP switches 37 and these switches are used to define a number of parameters which determine how the signal processing unit operates. The parameters are transferred via the data bus 28 under the control of the microprocessor 22 in an auxilliary RAM memory 38 which is accessed by the microprocessor via a connecting line 39.

The parameters can determine various operating modes. For example one parameter may determine whether the relays 33 are latching or momentary in operation. One parameter may determine whether the microprocessor generates a new message in response to the predetermined stimulus and another parameter may determine whether the new address for transmission is obtained by augmenting or decrementing the address of the unit concerned. Another parameter may determine the length of a trasmission burst from the signal processing unit. The above are only a few typical examples of the controls which may be excerised by setting the parameter switches 37.

Assume that a coded message is sent to the illustrated signal processing unit to activate one of the relays 33. After decoding in the F.S.K. decoder 24 the message appears as a series of marks and spaces at the input 25 of the microprocessor 22. The microprocessor 22 reads the unit address from the address store 27 via the data bus 28 and if this address matches the address in the decoded message the microprocessor will act on the information contained in the message. A command will be transferred to the command decoder 34 from the output 35 of the microprocessor via input/output connector 29, and this command will be decoded by the command decoder 34 under the control of the logical control decoder 36 and will result in the connection of the control driver 31 to the data bus 28 and the subsequent operation of one of the relays 33.

As explained above the parameters which are set into the parameter switches 37 condition the manner in which the programme which is set into the microprocessor controls the operation of the signal processing unit. For example, one parameter may determine whether the control relays operate in a latching or a momentary mode. In momentary operation the relays reset automatically after one second.

In a co-pending patent application there is described the manner in which a signal processing unit derives a message having a new address which consists of its own address modified in a predetermined manner. One parameter may be set to determine whether such generation of a new message to another signal processing unit occurs at all and if it does whether the address is augmented or decremented.

A parameter may operate to cause the signal processing unit to perform control operations, either in a check forward mode in which two identical consecutive control words must be decoded to effect control or without the check forward mode in which decoding a signal control word is sufficient to effect control. Another parameter may determine whether the length of a radio transmission from the unit is in bursts of for example, 0.55 seconds or 2.00 seconds and containing approximately 8 or 20 words respectively. This allows the signal processing unit to respond to adverse transmission conditions.

Another parameter may determine whether the unit ignores selected status inputs preventing a change of state in those inputs from initiating

transmissions or control functions. These are just some examples of operating parameters which may be set as digital values by the parameter switches 37.

Rather than being set once and for all by means of the switches 37 the contents of these switches are read onto the data bus 28 by the microprocessor 22 and into the auxilliary RAM memory 38 which thereafter is accessed via the connecting line 39 by the microprocessor 22. Once the contents of the parameter switches are entered into the RAM memory 38 operation of the signal processing unit is thereafter controlled by the contents of this RAM memory and not by the settings of the parameter switches.

Operation of the unit can now be made more flexible by reconfiguring these parameters by means of a transmitted message. A code word message may be received by the signal processing unit from a central station in the usual manner and after decoding by the F.S.K. decoder 24 is fed to the microprocessor 22. The information in the coded message may be such as to enter new parameters into the auxiliary RAM memory 38 so as to reconfigure the functional capabilities of the signal processing unit. For example the ability of the unit to generate a new message to another unit having a different address may be overriden or the length of a trasmission burst may be modified during adverse broadcasting conditions.

The values entered originally into the parameter switches 37 remain unaltered and during a start-up or default condition these values would once again be read by the microprocessor into the auxilliary RAM memory as a basic functional starting point for the unit.

Referring now to Figure 4 together with Figure 3, there is shown a typical flow chart diagram illustrating the programming of the microprocessor 22 to perform the present invention. The routine is called when a decoded message indicates alternation of one or more parameters.

As currently envisaged the parameters, initially set by means of the digital switches 37, are arranged in a number of groups. Each parameter consists of one or more bits and a group contains eight bits. In this routine an entire group is changed at one time (although the change may only effect one bit). Any parameter defined as more than one bit must reside entirely within one group to prevent a communication fault producing a partially altered parameter.

Step A - Determine which parameter group requires alteration.

Step B - Replace the old group with the new decoded group.

Step C - Send an acknowledgement to the central station indicating which group of prameters has been altered.

The invention has been described by way of example only and modification may be made without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, the invention is not limited to the specific embodiments given by may be applied to any signal processing unit whose functional operation may be configured in accordace with one or more operating parameters.

CLAIMS

1. A signal processing unit comprising communication means for receiving messages transmitted to the processing unit;

processing means for controlling operation of the unit in accordance with at least one stored operating parameter;

storage means for storing the at least one parameter governing operation of the processing means and wherein the processing means is responsive to a received message to change the at least one parameter whereby the operating characteristics of the signal processing unit may be changed.

2. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 in which the processing means is a microprocessor operating under programme control in accordance with at least one stored parameter.

3. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the storage means is a random access memory co-operable with the processing means.

4. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the further storage means is provided co-operable with the processing means and the said storage means for storing an initial value of the at least one parameter.

5. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 4 wherein the further storage means is one or more digital switches.

6. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the communication means comprises transceiving means.

7. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 6 wherein the transceiving means is a radio transceiver.

8. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 6 wherein the communication means is a wire line link.

9. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 and including status sensing means for sensing the status of one or more status inputs.

10. A signal processing unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the signal processing unit includes one or more control outputs for providing remote control functions.

11. A signal processing system comprising a plurality of signal processing unit each unit comprising communication means for receiving messages transmitted to the processing unit;

processing means for controlling operation of the unit in accordance with at least one stored operating parameter;

storage means for storing the at least one parameter governing operation of the processing means whereby the processing means is responsive to a received message to change the at least one parameter whereby the operating characteristics of the signal processing unit may be changed and wherein each signal processing unit communicates with a control station via the respective communication means.

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