

# e4thcom-0.8.4 A Terminal for Embedded Forth Systems

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## Abstract

*e4thcom for the Linux OS (X86 and Raspberry/Raspbian) is a terminal program for embedded Forth Systems. e4thcom is now available as a **native 64 or 32 Bit application. Default is X86\_64. Recompiling is very easy.** Please read and follow the instructions given in the files e4thcom-x.y.z/README and e4thcom-x.y.z/src/README.*

## Feature List :

### e4thcom-0.8.4 :

- Baudrates greater than B115200 are supported now:

B1200 , B2400 , B4800 , B9600 , B19200 , B38400 , B57600 , B115200 , **B230400 , B460800 , B500000 , B576000 , B921600 , B1000000**

- The **#include** directive accepts longer file names now (max. 128 chars)
- Plug-in for Mecrisp-Quintus added ( **-t mecrisp-qs** )

### e4thcom-0.8.2 :

- Readline support added ( see -option **--rln** ) (see Starting e4thcom and Buffered Command Line)
- Command line buffering can be disabled/enabled with the terminal directive **\^** (see Buffered Command Line)
- Plug-in **swapforth-j1sc** added, see <https://github.com/SteffenReith/J1Sc>

### e4thcom-0.8.1 :

- recompilable native 64|32 Bit application (64 Bit support added in 0.7.0, Forth code base changed in 0.8.0)
- invers display mode supported (new since 0.6.2 : see **--idm** , default is normal display mode )
- editable command line buffer with history and tab selection ( new since 0.5.4 : see **\index** )
  - (new since 0.6.2 : [Home] [End] [Shift]+[TAB] keys supported )
- editor interface for debugging ( new since 0.5.4 : see **#edit** and **#ls** )
- data transmission via serial line (UDP network connection only with 0.5.3)
- conditional and unconditional uploading of source code
  - full- and half-duplex since 0.5.5 : see **--hdm** (option changed from **--half-duplex** to **--hdm** in 0.8.0)
  - adjustable path for source code file look-up ( new since 0.6.3 , see Uploading of Source Code Files: **-p option** )
- plug-ins (Forth Source Code files) for
  - target specific configuration
    - ▶ **anyForth**
    - ▶ **430CamelForth**
    - ▶ **430eForth**
    - ▶ **4e4th**
    - ▶ **AmForth**
    - ▶ **Mecrisp**
    - ▶ **Mecrisp-Stellaris**
    - ▶ **noForth**
    - ▶ **stm8eForth**
  - cross assembler and cross disassembler
    - ▶ **MSP430** (assembler and disassembler)
    - ▶ **AmForth** (assembler)
- loading target specific resource identifiers (register and bit identifiers) from Forth files (.efr-files)
  - path for file look-up **changed since 0.6.3** , see **Using Resource Files**

## Forth on Embedded Systems

Forths interactivity is an important advantage on embedded systems. Any simple terminal program can be used to get in touch with the system and explore its structure and capabilities.

But - as soon as the first program is written and ready for testing - an easy way to upload the source code files is missing. A tool to overcome this deficiency is the e4thcom terminal program.

## The e4thcom Terminal

e4thcom is a terminal program for the Linux OS. It sends terminal input without a local echo via serial line ( or UDP 0.5.3 only ) to the target (Forth System) and displays characters received from the target in the terminal window. This is the terminal-mode of the program.

Entering the character '#' or '\' as the first one of a new line activates the control-mode of the program. Terminal input is then not forwarded to the target system but caught until the enter key is pressed and is then interpreted as a terminal directive.

## Uploading of Source Code Files

Two terminal directives are defined for uploading of source code files. They are modelled after the corresponding words *include* and *require* from the Forth Standard and named **#include** and **#require**. Both expect to get the name of a source code file as the only parameter:

**#include** <filename> \ unconditional uploading

**#require** <filename> \ conditional uploading

Both directives can also be used in source code files, one directive per line, the rest of the line is silently discarded.

When directives are entered at the terminal, the abbreviations **#i** and **#r** can be used.

The file look-up is done at the path **cwd:cwd/dir1:cwd/dir2:cwd/dir3**. CWD is the directory, that was the active one (the current working directory) at program start. The default path is **cwd:cwd/mcu:cwd/target:cwd/lib**. The related concept is, to store

- project-specific Forth code in **cwd**
- hardware-specific Forth code in **cwd/mcu**
- target-specific Forth code in **cwd/target**
- target-independent Forth code in **cwd/lib**.

The path can be changed with the **-p** option at program start (see Starting e4thcom) or in the target specific plug-in files (<target>.efc).

## Unconditional Uploading

Source code files are read line by line and the text is interpreted as a terminal directive or uploaded to the target.

After sending a line of source code to the target, the terminal waits for the target to process the line and return with a message. If no error occurs, the next line is read from the source. Otherwise uploading is aborted with an error message.

Comment lines starting with a '\' char are not uploaded but only displayed in the terminal window. The same is true for multi-line comments inside curly braces.

When the end of a source code file is reached, the file is closed and control is given back to the calling level. Finally, when the last file is closed, the terminal mode is activated again.

## Conditional Uploading

Before uploading a file, the terminal checks, whether a word, that equals the file name, already exists in the current search order of the targets dictionary. The upload directive is ignored, if that is the case. Otherwise the file is uploaded.

After uploading a file, the terminal again checks if now a word exists in the target dictionary, that equals the file name. If that is not the case, a NOOP-Word with that name is created in the target dictionary.

With this approach, the number of dictionary entries for file names can be minimized, by using - whenever adequate - the name of a prominent word, defined in a file, as the name for that file.

## Cancelling Uploading of Source Code

Uploading can be cancelled by pressing the TAB key on the keyboard. ( before 0.5.4 ^B was used.)

*Please be aware, that the target may be in compile mode when canceling a running upload. Typing [Enter] will then bring the target back into interpret mode.*

## Data Transmission Modes

Since version 0.5.5 two data transmission modes are supported, full- and half-duplex. Default is **full-duplex**. To use half-duplex start e4thcom with the **--hdm option** (was *--half-duplex* before 0.8.0).

Up to version 0.5.3 only half-duplex was implemented (uploading a byte and waiting for the echo). That worked fine in general but was unacceptable slow with the MSP430 FR5969 Launchpad. This unit has a more sophisticated USB interface and only works with acceptable transmission speed if block-transfer is used to upload source code.

There may be targets or transmission channels, that are not capable to handle full-duplex data transmission with the selected transmission speed. Then try the half-duplex transmission mode.

## Error Editing

In e4thcom-0.5.4 the terminal directive **#edit** <file-name> [Enter] was added to open a source code file in an external editor of your choice.

If uploading is aborted with an error message, typing **#edit** [Enter] or **#e** [Enter] at the command line will open the uploaded file with the cursor placed in the line that raised the error.

The editor command is defined in the config file .e4thcom-x.y.z. Change it to your needs. Search order for the file is cwd:cwd/dir1:e4thcom-dir.

To list the files available in the current working directory ( project directory ) the directive **#ls** [OPTION] . . . [FILE] . . . can be used. It executes the Linux command **ls** ( see the ls man page ).

## Buffered Command Line

~~Command line input is no longer directly send to the target but buffered until the [Enter] key is pressed. This means it is no longer possible to send a single char to the target without a trailing CR. If you need to send a single char without a CR, enter it with a leading '\ ' char in an empty command line, e.g. \x [Enter] sends the char x to the target without a trailing CR.~~

Command line buffering can be switched OFF and ON on the e4thcom command line by entering \^ [Enter] .

Two buffer modes are supported :

- Readline support is new in 0.8.2 and can be enabled by starting e4thcom with the command line option **--rln** .
- Default is the mode that was implemented in 0.5.4/0.6.2. It's described in the following.

## Command Line Editing

The following keys are supported and expected to work on most keyboards:

[Backspace] [Left] [Right] [Home] [End] [UP] [Down] [Shift]+[TAB] clears the command line

## Command Line History

e4thcom uses an internal history buffer of limited size. Command line input is added to that buffer, throwing

out oldest entries, if required. A limited TAB completion ( TAB selection ) is supported. Pressing the TAB key displays those words from the history, that start with the first character in the command line.

Pressing [Shift]+[TAB] key removes all chars from the command line buffer.

The command line history can be extended from within source code files, using the terminal directive \index:

```
\index phrase1 phrase2 ... phraseN
```

The directive must be the first word in a line. Phrases must be preceded with two spaces as separators. A phrase can be a word or a sequence of space separated words.

## Installing e4thcom

e4thcom is distributed as a tar.gz archive. For testing or as a user without admin rights unpack the archive in a directory of your choice, e.g. in your home directory or on the desktop. You will then find the e4thcom binary and related files in a new directory named e4thcom-x.y.z.

*Since version 0.8.0 e4thcom is distributed as a native X86 64Bit application, but it's very easy to recompile it for a 32 Bit Linux OS. You will find the required information in the enclosed README files.*

Please be aware, that absolute filenames are restricted to max. 128 chars (bytes) and relative filenames (relative to the e4thcom directory or to a project directory) are restricted to 32 chars, the max. size of word names in Forth.

On the Raspberry B please use the half-duplex mode (see option --hdm) if full-duplex does not work properly (hangs during upload).

As an admin you can make e4thcom available to all system users by unpacking the archive to the /opt directory, changing owner and group with `chown -R root:root /opt/e4thcom-x.y.z` and creating a link named e4thcom in `/usr/local/bin` to the corresponding file in the `/opt/e4thcom-x.y.z` directory.

Please be aware that e4thcom users need to have **access to the serial devices**. In general this requires that they are members of the groups **plugdev**, **dialout** and **dip**.

You can check this with the command `cat /etc/group | grep user [Enter]`.

To add a user to a group you can use the command `sudo adduser user group [Enter]`.

## Starting e4thcom

To start the e4thcom terminal program, open a terminal window in a (project) folder of your choice and enter the command

```
/path/to/e4thcom-x.y.z/e4thcom [options]
```

The following options are supported:

- t** [target]      The target system to connect to. Loads the plug-in file **target.efc** from the e4thcom directory at program start. See the chapter Plug-Ins which targets are supported.
- p** [dir1:dir2:dir3]      Set the path **cwd:cwd/dir1:cwd/dir2:cwd/dir3** for Forth source code look-up. Default is `cwd:cwd/mcu:cwd/target:cwd/lib`.  
cwd = current working directory at program start
- d** [device]      The serial device, e.g. `ttyS0`, `ttyUSB0`, `ttyACM0` ... for a serial line connection  
~~or ip-address:port for an UDP connection~~ (only 0.5.3)
- b** [baudrate]      The **baud**rate for a serial line connection. Supported values are:  
B1200, B2400, B4800, B9600, B19200, B38400, B57600, B115200,  
B230400, B460800, B500000, B576000, B921600, B1000000

<b>-h</b>	Displays the terminals help text.
<b>--hdm</b>	Halve-duplex data transmission mode. Default is full-duplex.
<b>--idm</b>	Invers display mode, black or colored letters on white background. Default: Normal display mode, white or colored letters on black background.
<b>--rln</b>	Enable readline command line buffering

*The connection to a target system via a serial line is established during the program start. This may fail if the chosen device is not available or used by another process (e.g. by a modem manager). The program is then terminated with an error message. After fixing the cause of failure or waiting for the modem manager to give up, a successful start of the program should be possible.*

#### Target Connections via UDP (only e4thcom-0.5.3)

From the Forth-Tagung in April 2015 I came back with a TI Tiva Connected Launchpad with TM4C1294NCPDT, Mecrisp-Stellaris and the Ethernet driver contributed by Bernd Paysan. This made me extend the e4thcom terminal to support communication via UDP.

The terminals UDP mode is enabled by assigning an IP-Address and a port number to the -d option (see section Starting e4thcom), e.g.:

```
-d ip-address:port  e.g.: -d 192.168.2.107:4201
```

By starting two e4thcom instances, it's possible now to connect to a TMC4.... via serial line and UDP at the same time.

#### Closing e4thcom

To close the terminal enter \ **[Enter]** at the command line (in versions <0.5.4 the esc key was used.).

#### Plug-Ins

Target systems are different concerning the messages (the prompts) they return after processing a line of uploaded code.

Up to version 0.3.4 e4thcom was split in an executable file and a number of target specific image files, named after the targets. Starting with version 0.4 there is only one image file for all targets. The target specific code was factored out and is now loaded as a plug-in at program start. The plug-ins are small Forth Source Code Files. So it's easy to add support for not yet supported targets.

The current e4thcom release comes with the following plug-ins:

anyforth.efc	\ dump uploader without any error checking, only unconditional uploading with #[include] <file name> is supported
430camelforth.efc	\ generic CamelForth plug-in
430camelforth-xas.efc	\ generic + MSP430 cross-assembler and -disassembler <sup>1)</sup>
430eforth.efc	\ generic 430eForth plug-in
430eforth-xas.efc	\ generic + MSP430 cross-assembler and -disassembler <sup>1)</sup>
4e4th.efc	\ generic 4e4th plug-in
4e4th-xas.efc	\ generic + MSP430 cross-assembler and -disassembler <sup>1)</sup>
amforth.efc	\ generic amForth plug-in
amforth-xas.efc	\ generic + ATmega cross-assembler <sup>2)</sup>
mecrisp.efc	\ generic Mecrisp plug-in
mecrisp-msp430xas.efc	\ generic + MSP430 cross-assembler and -disassembler <sup>1)</sup>
mecrisp-qs.efc	\ generic Mecrisp-Quintus plug-in
mecrisp-st.efc	\ generic Mecrisp-Stellaris plug-in
noforth.efc	\ generic noForth plug-in

noforth-xas.efc \ generic + MSP430 cross-assembler and -disassembler <sup>1)</sup>

stm8ef.efc \ generic stm8eForth plug-in (new since 0.6.2)

swapforth-j1sc.efc \ generic swapforth plug-in (new since 0.8.2)

<sup>1)</sup> The cross-assembler and -disassembler are based on code from noForth.

<sup>2)</sup> The cross-assembler is based on the amforth ATmega assembler from Lubos Pekny. (Needs further testing.)

The reliability of the plug-ins depends on the targets prompts (and of course on my ideas, to evaluate them). Not all are perfect yet.

### The stm8ef plug-in (tested with V2.2.15)

uses text analysis and the control char ^BEL (07):

- 'ok^NL' or 'OK^NL' received: It's assumed that the target is ready for input. The terminal uploads the next line.
- '^BEL^NL' received: A target error occurred. The terminal stops uploading.

### The noforth plug-in (tested with noForth C/V 141218 ... 170222)

works perfect with ACK/NAK control chars enabled on the target (OK HEX 8000 TO OK FREEZE).

- ^ACK (06) received: noForth is ready to receive a new line. Terminal sends the next line.
- ^NAK (15) received: noForth is ready to receive a new line but there was an error. Terminal stops uploading.
- No ^ACK/^NAK received: noForth is busy or waiting for user input. Terminal waits for ^ACK/^NAK. Terminal input is sent to the target while waiting.

### The mecrisp plug-ins (tested with Mecrisp 1.x ... 2.x , Mecrisp-Stellaris 2.1.1 ... and Mecrisp-Quintus 0.2.9 )

use a combination of timeout detection and text analysis:

- 'ok.^NL' received : It's assumed that mecrisp is ready to receive a new line. Terminal sends the next line.
- Timeout after 'message^NL' : It's assumed that mecrisp is ready to receive a new line, but an error occurred. The terminal stops uploading.
- Timeout without 'message^NL' : It's assumed that mecrisp is busy or waiting for user input. The terminal waits for ^NL, terminal input is sent to the target while waiting.

The plugins are not perfect but work fine. It's not very likely to meet remaining ambiguous conditions.

### The amforth plugin (tested with amforth 4.9 , 5.1, 5.5, 6.0)

uses a combination of timeout detection and text analysis:

- 'ok' received : It's assumed that amforth is ready to receive a new line. The terminal sends the next line.
- '^CR^NL' received : It's assumed that amforth is ready to receive a new line but an error occurred. The terminal stops uploading.
- Timeout : It's assumed that amforth is busy or waiting for user input. The terminal waits for 'ok' or '^CR^NL'. Terminal input is sent to the target while waiting.

Again, this plugin is not perfect but works fine, as long as the strings, used for error and ok detection, are not sent by your code, while the target is still busy.

### The 4e4th plug-in (tested with 4e4th 0.34 and debug version 150925)

is based on text analysis only:

- '?^XON^CR^NL' or '?^CR^NL^XON^CR^NL' received : It's assumed that 4e4th is ready to receive a new line but an error occurred. The terminal stops uploading.

- `^XON^CR^NL` without a leading `?` received : It's assumed that 4e4th is ready to receive a new line. The terminal sends the next line.

This plugin has the following restriction:

- Error messages created with `abort"`, that need to be detected while uploading, must be terminated with a question mark.

### The 430CamelForth plug-in (tested with 430CamelForth v0.5)

is based on timeout detection and text analysis. It's not perfect but close to. An ambiguous condition exists, if the target waits for user input during uploading. Then uploading is aborted.

### The 430eForth plug-in (tested with 430eForth v4.3)

is based on timeout detection and text analysis. It's not perfect but close to. An ambiguous condition exists, if the target waits for user input during uploading. Then uploading is aborted. Error messages should end with a `'?` char.

Finally it's safe to say that the most reliable plugin is that for noForth. And it is the most simple one. In other words, it would be very nice to have an ACK/NAK option in the other Forth systems too.

## Cross Assembling

Starting with version 0.4 e4thcom comes with a cross assembler interface. A target specific cross assembler, written in Forth, can be included by the target specific plug-in at program start. Then the terminal interprets the words **code** and **end-code**, **label**, **x[** and **\xas** as terminal directives when uploading source code from files.

### code and end-code

A line of source code that starts with the word **code** is uploaded to the target and afterwards the terminals cross-assembler mode is enabled. The next lines are then assembled by the terminals cross-assembler and the resulting code is send to and comma-compiled at the target, until the word **end-code** is found in the source. Then the terminals cross-assembler mode is disabled again and the string **end-code** is send to the target. The words **code** and **end-code** must be defined in the targets dictionary but do not need to have any e4thcom related properties.

```
code led1.on ( -- )
    BIT0 # P1OUT & .b bis next end-code
```

### label LB[01,05]

Assign the targets next free code address to one of the global labels LB01...LB05, which are predefined in the cross assembler dictionary, e.g.:

```
code min ( n1 n2 -- n1|n2 )
    sp )+ w mov tos w cmp label LB01 >? if, w tos mov then, next
end-code

code max ( n1 n2 -- n1|n2 )
    sp )+ w mov w tos cmp LB01 jmp end-code
```

### \xas

A line of source code, that starts with **\xas** is not uploaded to the target but interpreted by the cross assembler (the terminals internal Forth interpreter). This can be used to extend the cross assembler, e.g. to add short macro definitions or to load a file with target specific resource identifiers, e.g.:

```
\xas MCU: name Loads the file name.efr.
```

The search order to find name.efr is **cwd:cwd/dir1:e4thcom-dir**.

**x[ ..... ]**

A new feature of the cross assembler interface was added to version 0.5. The cross assembler can be temporarily disabled to send text to the target and read a cell-sized value back. This is required to write code that needs to access data or words defined at the target, e.g.:

```
#require code

\xas MCU: MSP430G2553

\xas : dup, ( -- ) tos sp -) mov ;    \ some macros
\xas : push, ( x -- ) dup, tos mov ;  \

code base@ ( -- u )
  x[ base ] & push, next end-code
```

The **number base in the cross assembler mode** is hex. The cross assembler is case sensitive. I prefer lower case for operators and upper case for register and bit identifiers.

## Cross Disassembling

A target specific cross disassembler can be included by a target specific plug-in. Then the terminal directive **#das** (abbr. **#d**) is supported at the terminals command line.

**#das** name

Starts disassembling name (at its xt).

**#das**

Reads an address from the targets TOS and starts disassembling at this address.

## Using Resource Files

Modern MCUs have lots of peripheral modules. A host of parameters and descriptors is required to access, configure and use these modules. e4thcom can load resource data from Forth files, to be used in cross assembler definitions or to be exported to the target:

**\res**

A line of source code, that starts with **\res** is not uploaded to the target but interpreted by the terminals internal Forth interpreter. This can be used to define resource descriptors in the terminals dictionary or to load some from target specific resource files.

**\res** <single-number> **equ** name

Creates or updates the resource descriptor name (a constant) in the terminals dictionary.

**\res export** name1 name2 ... nameN

Exports resource descriptors (as unique constants) from the terminals dictionary to the target, if they do not already exist in the current search order of the target.

**\res MCU:** name

Loads the (resource) file name.efr, e.g. **\res MCU: MSP430G2553**.

The search order to find name.efr is **cwd:dir1:e4thcom-dir**. dir1 defaults to mcu (see Starting e4thcom, -p option).

## With a little help ...

Up to version 0.5.3 e4thcom did not have a command line history and did not support extended command line editing. It was intentionally designed minimalist because I used it with a GTK+ GUI called [ForthBox](#) which



added the missing features.

Recently I noticed, that the [ForthBox](#) can not be used on 64 Bit Linux Systems because it depends on the 32 Bit libvte, which is not available in the repositories of the current 64 Bit Linux distributions. So I decided not to bundle the [ForthBox](#) any longer with the e4thcom terminal. You can still use the one from e4thcom-0.5.3 ( on 32 Bit systems ) and I'll probably make the latest [ForthBox](#) version available as a separate release, if anyone is interested in.

#### **What's left to do :**

- Adding device locking to prevent concurrent device access from different processes. If another process uses the same device as the e4thcom terminal, it may snap away received chars so that the communication with the target will not work properly.
- *The problem here seems to be, that not all programs, that use serial devices, use device locking or don't do it the same way.*
- Adding more targets and cross assemblers. You can do it yourself and/or contribute. *The new plug-in structure should make it easy. The plug-in files and the cross assembler file that come with this release should be useful examples.*

#### **Annotation:**

The e4thcom distribution comes with ABSOLUTELY NO WARRANTY. It is free software under the terms of the GNU General Public License as published by the Free Software Foundation; either version 3 of the License, or any later version, see <http://www.gnu.org/licenses> .

Questions, error notes and suggestions for improvements or additional target plug-ins are welcome and can be forwarded to [firstname.lastname@forth-ev.de](mailto:firstname.lastname@forth-ev.de).

e4thcom was implemented with MINFORTH Plus, a MINFORTH derivative. *Thanks to Andreas Knochenburger for creating MINFORTH, which was a great starting point to create MINFORTH Plus.*

*Thanks to Albert Nijhof and Willem Ouwerkerk for supporting me to make e4thcom ready for noForth and for agreeing that the noForth cross assembler could be adapted to and can be distributed with e4thcom.*

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