

'Rag Chew'



The official newsletter of the Straight Key Century Club

The official newsletter of the Straight Key Century Club

Volume 4 Issue 6

December, 2014

Minimum Required Power De AF2Z

Ever wonder how much output power you'd need in order to be heard by a particular station? Here is an easy way to estimate it. The following simple formula takes into account the propagation conditions between the two stations. You will need to know the other station's output power and his background noise level.

But before doing the actual calculation we can make an educated guess. Let's say the other station is transmitting 100 watts and his signal level at your location is 5 S-units. Also, the noise level at HIS location is 3 S-units. From experience we can be pretty confident that 25 watts would be enough to reach him. But would 10 watts? Or 5 watts? Proceed as follows:

1. Note the other station's signal strength on your S-meter and subtract his reported local noise level from this figure;
2. Raise 4 to the numerical result obtained in step-1;
3. Divide his output power by the result in step-2.

Example. His output power is 100 watts and the receive noise level at his location is 3 S-units. His signal strength at your location is 5 S-units. Here is the calculation:

$$\text{min pwr} = 100/4^{(5-3)} = 100/4^2 = 100/16 = 6.25$$

So, you would "theoretically" need about 6 watts of output power in order for the other station to hear you under current conditions.

Note that if the noise level at the receiving station increased by just one S-unit you would need 4x this amount to get through, or 25 watts.

This estimate assumes like propagation in both directions; antenna receive/transmit reciprocity; same S-meter calibration for both stations. "Minimum power" is the amount required to match the receiving station's noise level, so we might expect to use more than this in order to communicate easily.

So far I've found this to be a pretty good estimate. A recent example: I copied a station who was running 80 watts; he was about S6 on my S-meter; he reported an S3 local noise level. The formula says that 1.25 watts would be the minimum required from my transmitter. I had actually contacted him with 1.7 watts for which he gave me an RST of 319.



Computer Logging

This would be a disaster! Not that it couldn't happen to your computer keyboard but the chances of carelessness might be less with a keyboard. The SKCC homepage under "Member Services, file and downloads" will take you to the AC2C SKCC Logger. This program can be used for the SKS, the WES and as a general logging program (yes, SSB too). Check it out, rig control and

the program is continually being upgraded and improved. Oh yes, it's free too!

"Urb LeJeune" W1UL

There is an old saying in the computer field, "you only loose data that isn't backed up." There is also another old saying which states, "if you haven't had a computer crash, you will." If you're operating a Windows machine you have the capability of automatically scheduling a batch file as frequently as you like. Run a backup from your logging program to a thumb drive every minute if you like.

There is a program called xxcopy that will synchronize two file. It's xcopy on steroids. It can be a bit daunting to set up.

When backing up don't put your backup files on the same device that holds you log files.

An Interesting Key

Rich K8UV SKCC 2250T, works at a "radio museum" (cool!) in the Ann Arbor, Michigan area and sent along this picture of the museum's most recent acquisition.



"The history that came with it says it is Japanese, circa 1925. On the brass arm are the words Isama Isozaki. Assuming this is either who made it or owned and used it. Odd is the way the cord is located, on the front of the key? Its a good sized key and works very well and could easily be used as a straight key today."
de K8UV

QSL's – An important part of Ham Radio Curtis Gidding, KC9UNL SKCC 8667T

I had just finished making a nice CW contact to Maine and was entering the QSO information into my computerized log. As I finished, I started to reflect back to the time when I had received my Novice license in 1968. It was sure different. I had a Heathkit HW16 CW transceiver and a very modest dipole antenna at about 15 feet high. With that setup, I was just happy to make any contact and was elated by working a station in Maine. As I entered the information into my ARRL logbook and addressed the QSL card, I hoped that I had gotten the station's address correct from over the air. I was really limited on funds and could not afford the then very expensive Amateur Callbook. With this limitation, you had to hope that you had copied the CW correctly and the address would allow the QSL to be delivered.

The years passed and with several relocations, the large accumulation of QSL cards was lost. I regret that I did not keep them but have started collecting cards since getting relicensed in 2011. QSL cards can form the history of your amateur operating and can hold many good memories. Bob Green, W8YYZ, has made it a project to try to preserve the history of QSL cards by using the web site, www.oldqslcards.com. If you haven't visited this site, be sure you make it point to check it out.

Today, we live in a world of technological advances. There are ways that you can find the address and lots of information on any radio contact via www.qrz.com in a matter of minute of a QSO or during the QSO. You can enter the contact into several different forms of computerized logs if you choose to use these new technologies. However, remember that the final courtesy for the QSO is a QSL Card. This means that you can send (1) a regular printed QSL (2) confirm the QSO via LOTW or (3) send a card electronically via www.eqsl.com.

The thing to remember is that confirmation is a sign of courtesy to your fellow amateur radio operator. Even if you don't care whether you get a card or not, it is the sending of the card that extends that courtesy. When you send a QSL via mail for a CW contact to a non-member, maybe you can spend the first class rate and include a fact sheet on FISTS.

I love receiving those QSL cards but don't know what to do with them when they outlive their attraction. I guess I will donate them to Bob Green or whoever is making an attempt to preserve the history of our great hobby. Whatever the case, just remember to extend the final courtesy and QSL!



Another P5 Pirate!?!?

Every week DXers are assaulted on the bands with a "new" P5 (North Korea) operation "popping up." The DX philosophy is "WFLW"... Work First, Worry Later! These "P5" weekly operations take up huge bandwidth with pileups because P5 is the number 1 most needed country for DXers world wide. On very good authority your editor has a picture of the latest P5 pirate shown here operating "somewhere" off the coast of North Korea! Shame on this "Slim!"

9J2BO Zambia, Brian, SKCC 9892

Greetings from Lusaka, Zambia. I am Brian Otter. I operate about 99% CW. I live on a 9 acre plot in the city of Lusaka with power lines on two sides of the property.

I was born in Lincoln, England in 1945.

I came to Zambia from Teacher Training College in 1966. I came on a 3 year contract with the Zambian Government to teach secondary schools. After 48 years, I am still here.

I finally passed my 12 wpm morse code test for my amateur license in 1973 just before the Zambian Government stopped issuing licenses for several years. Having struggled to pass the morse test, I was determined to operate CW and not lose the use of the code. I came on the air with a World War II RCA AR88 receiver and a Heath DX-40. My antenna at that time was a G5RV. Although, I have a SSB transceiver, I prefer to operate CW most of the time. I operate mostly on 40, 30, and 20 meters at around 0400-0500 UTC before going off to work and from 1300-1600 UTC in our afternoons after I have knocked off from work.

My main transceiver is a TS440S with an Icom 706 MKIIG for back up. My antennas are a Nagara Triband 3 element beam for 10, 15, and 20; parallel dipoles for 12 and 19 meters, sloping dipoles for 30 and 40 meters, inverted dipoles for 80 and 160 meters and a 4 element yagi for six meters.

In 1977, I was honored to be invited to become a member of the First Class CW Operators Club, FOC. I joined the SKCC in November, 2012. For the most part, I avoid contests and pile ups. I QSL via my QSL Manager, G3TEV.

I have a small collection of keys but three are constantly in use. A Bencher single lever paddle, Lionel J-36 and an East German version of the Soviet Flame Proof straight key.

Some bad practices that I hear on the air:



Stations that decide to operate split frequency and do not check their receive frequency for other signals.

Stations that do not give my call sign when calling me. How am I supposed to know that they are calling me.

Stations that do not give their name and qth.

Stations that call me before I have signed "SK"

Stations that come back to me faster than I am sending

Stations that send faster than they are able to send good code. This makes them repeat information. Accuracy is more important than speed.

Modified Paddles

How many keys and bugs do you have; have you ever thought about “personalizing” them? For “collectors” this might be sacrilegious but if you use and enjoy your key/bug why not make it “personal?” There are many beautiful and exotic woods available that be added to



the paddle side of a bug and if you “happen” to use a lathe then even the “knob” can be made “personal.” You can always return the key/bug to its original form!



Unknown Movie History...the Real Story!



“ THIS IS 1967 AND 3W IS ON THE MOST WANTED LIST...GET THAT BIG VERTICAL UP ON THE BEACH AND YOUR RIG FIRED UP, NOW! “ “I JUST LOVE THE SOUND OF CW IN THE MORNING”

Via Rich K8UV

WANTED: N3JJT FOR IMPERSONATING OM 4!



Public Service Bulletin: Be on the lookout for N3JJT. He is wanted for impersonating OM4. He was heard on or about August 2nd 2014 transmitting the call sign: WS8KCC, and using the name of OM4. If you happen to hear OM4, or any number related to “OM”, for example, OM 1, 2, 3 or 3.5, please copy down their information. Once you have their information, put it in your contact log. Fill out a contact card with the information, and send it to OM1. He will be glad to acknowledge your card. Good Luck!

How the day went: I decided to take the KX3 out to the park and operate portable. Ken, N8KR,(OM1), and Ted, K8AQM,(OM2) told me I could use the call WS8KCC, and OM4 if I wanted to do so. WS8KCC is the club call for the Ohio Michigan Radio Club that was founded by Ken and Ted. So, I went out on August 2nd with the idea I had at least 4 hours before weather was going to move in to the area. Well, that did not happen. I had only about 2 hours with set up and tear down. We logged 3 Qs in the book for the morning. It was a nice test on the 7ah battery with the KX3. I was also checking out my new hitch mounted mast support for my antenna. My two friends, Tony, KD8BBK,SKCC 2443, and Mike, KD8ENV came along to share the fun. Tony called CQ a few times, and Mike gave the KX3 a go on SSB. A good time, even though our time was cut short due to a thunder storm that moved in to the area. That’s it from here...73..

Scott N3JJT 255T



KD8BBK and Mike, KD8ENV.
Which one does not know code?



Tony KD8BBK at the key.

W1AW/8 in the SKCC Areas

During the past year the ARRL has been celebrating its centennial birthday with operations from all fifty states as W1AW/n, I'm sure you have heard them and some of you may even have been "W1AW/n" very similar to our own K3Y/n operation. Don KD8SKO, SKCC 10953T, and K8AQM, SKCC 1629T ran a two hour W1AW/8 two station operation strictly in the SKCC areas of the band (40 and 20m). Our operation is pictured below and was at the K8AQM shack. The goal was to take W1AW SKCC 6707C, and bring it to "6707T" as well as give other SKCC stations a chance to work W1AW.

We didn't quite make enough C and T QSOs to reach the needed 50 QSOs **BUT** with the help of Bill WB2SXY, SKCC 2244S and Rich W4RQ SKCC 8699T who also operated as W1AW/2 and W1AW/4 respectively, we were able to merge our W1AW logs and reach the required goal of 50 C and T QSOs. W1AW is now SKCC 6707T thanks to the efforts of three stations! Bill and Rich provided more than enough C and T QSOs from their logs to fulfill the needed T requirements...thanks guys!

Each state and US possession were active for two one week periods throughout the year with activity in cw, ssb and digital modes and on all amateur bands. It was not a contest but rather like our K3Y, a birthday celebration operating event.



Left to right, K8AQM and KD8SKO



Don KD8SKO on 40 meters



Ted K8AQM on 20 meters

Road Trip 2014

The following documents our road trip from Tallahassee, Florida to Cape Cod this year, as well as some of my thoughts to improve my portable / mobile operation running 3 watts on cw. By putting this together, I hope to open a dialog with others and who have experience using QRP in either mobile and or portable operation. During this years month long vacation I had a chance operate QRP while mobile, and while at a fixed location such as down by the waters edge and from a mountain top, wait, there are no mountain tops on Cape Cod. There may be a few high sand dunes, but no mountain tops for sure.

The Village of Onset, Ma is really not on Cape Cod, but is located just off of Route 6 and is known as the Gateway to Cape Cod. If you look at a map of SE Massachusetts you will see the water way known as the Cape Cod Canal. The first bridge over the Canal is the Bourne



Cape Cod Canal and Bourne Bridge leading onto the Cape.

Bridge. Prior to the Bourne Bridge is the little town of Buzzards Bay and just prior to that is the Village of Onset, Ma. Ok, now that you have some idea as to where I was located, let me get back on track.

In order to operate QRP I had to run 5 watts or less. For those who operate less than 1 watt it is known as QRPp. At the outset, let me make it clear, I am not an expert when it comes to QRP

operation or antennas. The following is a record of my experience looking for a QRP radio, as well as an attempt to operating QRP on this trip. When I mention QRP, for me, I am talking about cw only. Although there are many QRP SSB stations on the air as well, I no longer operate SSB, as a few years ago I decided to only operate cw. Prior to leaving Tallahassee I had a chance to operate QRP using a borrowed K1 by Elecraft and my Windom antenna at my home location, (QTH). By the way, I use the term location, as opposed to QTH. As I had expected, the K1 was a pleasure and easy to operate. I also had to learn when and where to operate QRP CW. By that I basically mean, I did not want to mix it up with the folks running 100 watts or more. I found that when 20 meters seems like it is dead, at around 02:00 UTC, I can usually and make some contacts.

Since I had returned the K1 was now on the hunt for either a K1 radio. I knew I was only going to really narrowed my search down a time to ask questions of those who to get some ideas on what might be buy.



Elecraft K1 QRP radio

back to its owner, I or some other QRP operate CW, so that little. It was now operated QRP and a good QRP radio to

As expected, everyone had good ideas and recommended various radios. One question I had for myself was, did I want to build a kit or buy something ready-made. I also went onto the Internet and started searching on YouTube. Once again I found as many different opinions as there are QRP radios. I did take a good long look at the You-kit, HB1B QRP radio, which I finally decided to buy.



HB1B QRP Radio

I purchased the HB1B with the internal 18650 lithium battery, the battery charger, and the external wall wart to power the radio when operating from inside my home location or from any location where I could get AC power.

The HB1B has very good selectivity, the IF filter is adjustable from 400hz - 3khz, and it has plenty of audio output to drive my ear buds. There isn't a speaker so I would need head phones of some type. The radio also has RIT, ATT, a built in cw keyer, 30 memories, and switching between hz, and khz for receiver tuning is a breeze. I really have to say the radio is very easy to operate.

The radio covers 3.5-4.0, 7.0-7.3, 10.1-10.15, and 14.0-14.35 mhz. As you can see, it covers the full range of each of the four bands. The HB1B only receives SSB, it does not transmit an SSB signal, and actually operates much better than I had expected. Again, operating from my home location with the Windom antenna I have been able to work various stations throughout the US running 3 to 5 watts.

After 5 months of operating, and one week prior to us leaving on our trip, the HB1B developed a problem. That meant the IC706MKII would have to be used in the 5 watt cw mode.

Running the ICOM in 5 watt mode was not going to be a problem while driving up the east coast. The problem might turn out to be the lack of a good wire antenna such as I have at my home location. Although I had been using ham stick type antennas mobile in the past, I was usually running 100 watts. Running 5 watts was going to prove to be a challenge with a much lesser antenna. I sometime call mobile antennas, a compromise antenna. Likewise you never know what propagation was going to be like as you drive along the road.

We drove north stopping in Washington DC for three days. Obviously, I did not do any operating, as site seeing and resting were the orders of the day. From DC it was onto Dartmouth, Ma for a few days, then on to Cape Cod and our rental in Onset, Ma. On this part of the trip 5 watts was not getting the job done during the early afternoon hours on 20 meters.



Icom IC-706MKII

We spent two weeks in Onset, Ma and the contacts mobile running 5 watts were few and far in between, although I was able to make several contacts mobile running 100 watts. The difference was obvious, the lesser antenna with 100 watts did the trick. It was further obvious that I needed to put at least a half wave wire up when operating from any fixed location while running QRP.



View of Onset, MA

Our location in the Village of Onset, Ma was ideal, 100 feet from the salt water of Buzzards Bay, I couldn't have asked for a better location. I tried several times to make a 5 watt contact on 20 in the middle of the afternoon with little to no



Home we rented for two weeks in Onset, MA

results on some days. One afternoon we drove 30 miles west to the Westport, Ma town beach, once again an ideal location.

The land sits on the eastern edge of Westport, and juts out into the Atlantic. Next to the beach is Gooseberry Neck which at one time housed a WWII lookout tower. From the beach you can look directly east at Cuttyhunk Island, and beyond to Martha's Vineyard Island. Again 5 watts yielded very little, until I pushed the power up to 100 watts then the contacts became easier. On this trip, running 5 watts with my mobile antenna in the afternoons in 20 meters did not yield very many QSO's.



Looking back on everything, it becomes obvious, the words antenna, antenna, antenna are important. Yes a good location is important, but running 5 watts or less, without a good antenna, does present a larger challenge. I am now looking at a few wire antennas to use when I operate portable the next time. One that I am currently considering is an end fed half wave wire antenna. The drive back home running 5 watts was basically the same as the drive up. It was a challenge running 5 watts and in motion at highway speeds. I also have to make it clear that when I am at the key I am not driving, those days are long gone. Walking and chewing gum seems to be a challenge these days.

Why an end fed half wave wire, well for one, the ease of erecting it. You can hoist it up in a vertical, horizontal, or "L" configuration, some are fed with coax and a matching transformer, while others are a single wire with a counterpoise. In either case, I will need some sort of tuner. There are many pros and cons for each antenna. There are also many discussions on, "do end fed wire antennas require a counterpoise or not."

When I arrived home to Tallahassee, the package containing my HB1B had arrive. I am happy to say, the HB1B is running flawless. Although I have a TS480SAT sitting beside it, I prefer to use the HB1B on 20 and 40 meters. Don't ask why, as I really don't know. On QRP I have worked several states mainly AZ, OR, WA, NV, as well as the mid-western and

southern states. All I am running is 3 watts to a WINDOM that is in an inverted V configuration. At its highest point, maybe 20 feet up, with the ends at 10 foot off the ground.

Well, there you have it. Another road trip is in the books for this year, while having fun operating mobile and portable. No matter what power you use, get out and operate, it's more fun than you think. Operating QRP and from a portable location can be a challenge at times. Don't forget a good wire antenna.

What about next year. Well, if we decide to rent a condo some place, it will be quite impracticable for me to have a 32 foot long wire hanging down from a balcony. I could use a Buddistick or a Ham Stick type antenna and try to attach it to the balcony railing in either a vertical or horizontal configuration, but again it would be a compromise antenna. In either case a counterpoise and tuner will be necessary.

A question that comes to mind is, what are the differences between the Buddistick and the Ham stick type antenna? Well the obvious one is cost. The Buddistick could cost from \$200.00 to \$400.00. The Buddistick requires me to change a tap and locate the sweet spot for each band. The Ham stick type antennas are under \$40.00 each, but that means I would have to carry one antenna for each band I wanted to operate. Both antennas can be set up in either vertical or horizontal configurations. When all is said and done, I could still have a compromise antenna.

Operating portable at the beach or in an area where there are no trees, the use of a Jackite pole, MFJ fiberglass pole or any other pole to support the wire antenna will work really well. For portable operation, I also plan on trying a large mag mount on the roof of the van using a ham stick, with and without a counterpoise. That will raise the ham stick up about another 4 feet and I will be able to use the van's roof as a ground plane. As we know, antennas are affected by their surroundings, verticals have a low angle of radiation and they are omnidirectional. The idea is to put the ham stick up as high as possible. I also want to keep the antenna away from the metal body of the van, by moving it from the rear of the van to the roof. I will try both horizontal and vertical dipole and non dipole configurations at various heights.

I also want to try a half wave antenna in vertical and horizontal configurations, with and without a counterpoise. Likewise a half wave antenna fed with coax and a matching transformer. Here again, the lower the antenna is mounted to the ground, < 1/4 wave, the higher the takeoff angle. This would be good for close in stations but not for distance stations.

Well, I have several months to work on it prior to our next trip.

73 es c u on the radio!

TKS, 73, Art W1FJI



K3Y.....or P5 Pileup?

Jeremy KD8VSQ 13072, was bored at work one day so made this little cartoon.

There are so many possibilities here: P5 pileup, most recent W1AW/n pileups WES or SKS and of course, any of the pileups found this January for K3Y/n!

The SKCC Florida Connection . . De N8KR/4



Spending time /4 in FL during November and December always presents new opportunities to connect with fellow hams . . . especially SKCC members. Last year I contacted a couple of members directly and paid them a personal visit. This year I decided to sell some stuff at the Tampa Hamfest and to look for members there. So Saturday morning, December 13, I set up my flea market space and it wasn't long before SKCC member, Kyle – N4NSS showed up. Anyone who wears a hat that says, “without CW it’s just CB” must be an SKCC member And I was right! Kyle lives in St. Pete, just a bit south of Tampa, and is SKCC # 3595. Kyle uses a

station radio.

It was early in the morning and the temps were still cool so gloves and a coat were common until the sun brought the temperature into the 60's. It wasn't long until I spotted another CW op: WB4YAL. John had a CW key on his hat so I stopped him and we chatted for a bit. He lives in Ocoee, FL and has a Yaesu FT-1000mp V as his main station. John told me he was an SKCCer and gave me a number he thought was his. Well, I did some research on the SKCC site and discovered that he was NOT a member so I “bullied” him to become a member (via email) so that this article would be legit! So John joined and I personally welcome him as a new member #13147. I look forward to working him. I enjoyed chatting with him!



Joe, KA4WJB was next to wander my way. He looked at the stuff on my flea-market table and picked up my key hmmm, another member??? I was correct. Joe is from Ocala, FL and is almost exclusive CW! He uses a Century 21 as his main radio. Not quite QRP but a healthy 40 watt radio. Joe was soft spoken and very enjoyable to talk with. Joe is SKCC member #1389.



After a run of “4’s” at my table, I finally found a fellow “8!” Originally from Michigan, Mike – K8NS – is now residing in Port Orange, FL. Mike is very active in SKCC events and is #10580T. After a short chat and learning about his Icom 7410, he revealed his former Michigan life and his friendship with our editor, Ted – K8AQM. I just knew he must have known Ted because he walked around the flea market with a cigar in his hand! Mike had a table of goodies for sale down the row from me.

Ed... I didn't know Mike enjoyed cigars too! No wonder I like that guy! Mike also uses a "hole-in-the-wall" TAC bug too, my favorite!

While Mike was the first call I recognized, the next character had a familiar SKCC name: RIP! I saw the name on his hat and immediately knew I had discovered another SKCCer! It was a delight to chat with AA4HT #3352T, especially since we both use a Kenwood TS-590S. While we had a nice common topic, we talked about SKCC activities and mentioned that he was looking forward to the K3Y event in January. Rip is from Lakeland, FL – the preseason home of the Detroit Tigers. That gave us even more to talk about. It was nice to have a face with the call and the name!



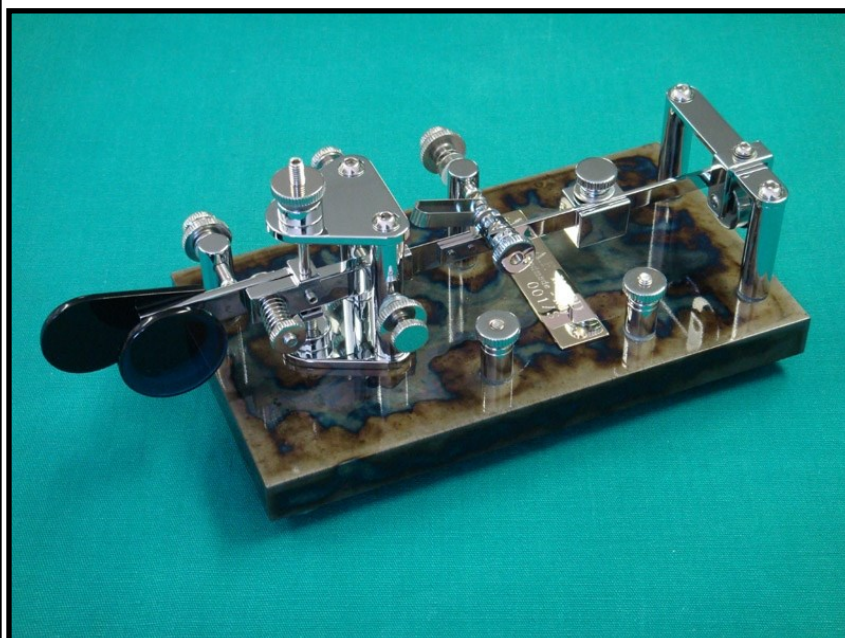


Last on my list of SKCC visitors is the guy whose call is a palindrome: AJ4JA. I guess you could be dyslexic and still have his call correct! Al, SKCC member #8005 is from New Port Richie, Florida. Al will operate qrp with his HW-8 or run a bit more power with his TenTec Scout. He, too, spoke about the upcoming K3Y event so I know we'll be hearing him on next month.

Another great time in Florida meeting members of the SKCC family! So now I prepare for the migration back to Ohio early in January. I guess the Toledo Hamfest will be the next SKCC face-to-face gathering for me!

Now This Is A Restoration!

Here is a very snazzy looking J-36 bug. The J-36 is the WW II bug and was made by both Burnell and Vibroplex. Rich K8UV SKCC 2250T sent this along with the following:



“Custom built base made from military tank AR plate and ceramic coated. All parts chromed and given serial #001/S “

I have a J-36 (Burnell) and it has a black crinkle finish base....nothing like this one! What a beauty this one is!

How does one get “military tank AR plate ceramic coated?”



Old Radio Magazines on Line

Mark NU8Z SKCC 11237, sent this along:

“Here is a link to tons of old magazines that are now on line. Many I have never heard of, but lots of the old standbys.”

<http://www.americanradiohistory.com/>

SKN

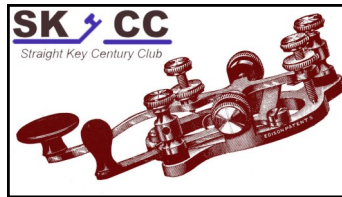
The following is an excerpt from a published piece found on the web. This pretty much explains what “SKN” is all about.

“For decades, during the first 24 hours of January, hundreds of amateur radio operators have participated in the annual ARRL Straight Key Night (SKN). I am always impressed, when reading the online soapbox (www.arrl.org/soapbox), by the number of participants who either select a favorite key from their collections or decide to put numerous keys on the air. From J-37s and J-38s to old military keys to a wide variety of homebrew masterpieces, the sound of CW rises from the static, frequently combining with vintage radios, recreating the magic atmosphere that so many of us remember from the days of our youth. Just as it’s possible to identify a beloved song by hearing the first few notes of the melody, experienced SKN participants will often recognize the rhythm of a fist on the air and instinctively recognize it as belonging to some old friend with whom they have shared on-the-air memories over the years. That is part of the joy of the event — having fun with old friends in an annual reunion of syncopated rhythms of “dits” and “dahs.” In 2013, 188 participants from 48 states, provinces and countries submitted logs totaling over 1500 contacts for SKN.” — K3SEW

But there is so much more to SKN! Many stations pull out their favorite old rig and the bands come alive with “chirps” and drifting signals. It is a chance for those of us who qualify as Old Timers to remember our days (dazes?) of separate receivers, bandspreads and tuning to find that faint signal calling us. The filtering on the old receivers was somewhere around 3 KHz or more and most of the filtering developed between our ears! For the younger group of operators you can learn what is history to us and if you’re lucky to have an “Elmer” you just might have them set you up for the next SKN with a classic rig and try your hand at our “history.” We in SKCC “know” how to use a straight key and for us SKN could be about the gear! For this one day I’ll put aside my K3 and Alpha, grab my 1937 TAC bug and fire-up my Johnson Challenger (60 w CW), run with three crystals and get the National NC-303 warmed up! I hope to catch you on the bands but you may have to tune for my rock-bound reply to your CQ!

73.....K8AQM 1629T

From Zero to Senator



My return to Amateur Radio this past Spring has been enriched in a most wonderful and unexpected way. And it all started that very first evening when I fired up my long dormant Icom 735 on a delightfully active 40 meter band up around 7050 kHz, and then a guy asks me for my [SKCC](#) number.

Say what?

“I see you’re already a member”, the station continued, but I honestly had no clue what this SKCC number was, or how I could possibly have one, as I’d been away from Amateur Radio for nearly two decades. Undaunted, the station proceeded to ‘remind’ me of my SKCC number. “You are SKCC 11062”, he advised, and so I thanked him for this number, whatever it was, and we proceeded to have a pleasant CW conversation.

At the conclusion of our contact, curiosity aroused, I searched the web for SKCC in hopes of discovering more about this strange number that I had apparently already acquired somehow. And there it was, the [Straight Key Century Club](#).

I learned that the Straight Key Century Club was an organization of Morse Code enthusiasts with a focus on doing it by hand – sending code like they did it in the old days, with a straight key, bug or cootie. Membership was free, I read, and the group offered a multitude of operating achievement awards, all also free of cost. A search of their membership revealed that, sure enough, I had been issued my personal number the previous year. But how could this be possible, I wondered?

And then I vaguely recalled having heard about SKCC from a vendor at the Birmingham Hamfest the year earlier. I must have visited this website back then, I surmised. This is the sort of group that would have revved my motor as I fashion myself a bit of a Morse preservationist, and I likely checked them out in hopes of one day returning to the air. And I must have perfunctorily requested a number too, even though I wasn’t on the air at the time. Not surprising that I had completely forgotten, though, as life around here is pretty complicated these days. You see my two wonderful granddaughters, ages 6 and 3, live with us now, and it’s a glorious but hectic three-ring circus most of the time.

And with the mystery of that SKCC number now solved, I read further about the group. And I learned of the advancement opportunities within SKCC. By exchanging my SKCC number with other members, all the while using a handkey or bug, a member could become a Centurion after 100 such contacts. And there was even more after that. Hey, this sounds like a lot of fun, I thought. After all, I was just back on the air after a too-long absence, had an abundance of handkeys that had also been silent for far too long and a modest station not really suited to contest-

ing or DXing, so this seemed a wonderful way to shake the rust off a long inactive fist.

And so it began.

I learned of the monthly [Weekend Sprints](#) conducted by SKCC, and of the [2-hour Straight Key](#) event each month as well. I found those operating events a joy to engage in, without the frenetic pace of most contests and with no pressure to perform – just pure unadulterated Morse Code pleasure. And my number of SKCC contacts swelled, as did the number of new on-air friendships. And my paper log soon grew unwieldy.

Keeping up with all those SKCC contacts quickly taxed my flagging memory but I luckily found a wonderful logging assistant. Listed on the SKCC website were computer logging programs designed especially for making sense of a growing number of SKCC contacts. Even better, these wonderful programs would generate applications for the various award offerings once the necessary requirements were satisfied. And so I downloaded one of the programs, the amazing [SKCC Logger](#) from AC2C, and installed it on the Linux machine at my new operating desk. Within minutes of configuring and exploring the software, I suddenly knew what the computer logging fuss was all about. This program was absolutely spectacular! Not only would it keep an unfailing record of who I had worked, but it would populate the log with information on each new SKCC entry, including name, QTH and SKCC number. In a word, it made keeping up with my all SKCC contacts *easy*. Now I could concentrate on *making* contacts, and leave the logging to my new assistant, and so I did.

Within fairly short order, my new computer logging assistant reported that I had amassed 100 contacts with fellow SKCC members and could now apply for the [Centurion Award](#). And so, on May 25th of this year, I became the proud holder of a Centurion endorsement to my SKCC number and was able to append the letter C to my exchanges. Woo Hoo!

OK, so what's next?

Studying the SKCC website, I learned that the next level of advancement was known as Tribune. All those folks I had worked who appended the letter T to their number were proud holders of Tribune status, and so I set my sights to join them.

And within a week or so, on May 31st, I found myself the beaming new recipient of my very own Tribune endorsement. Why this is no step for a stepper, I thought. Casual operating during the evenings, and on 40 Meters mostly, had earned me this advancement within SKCC. Onward and upward to the next level! But then reality hit me squarely in the face.

The ultimate advancement within SKCC was known as Senator. Of the nearly 13,000 members of SKCC, less than 90 had made it that far. And for good reason, too. This wasn't something that could be quickly conquered but would take persistence and tenacity instead. I calculated there were maybe 800 or so members with either a Tribune or Senator status, and I would have to work almost half of them en-route to Senator. This might be do-able, I thought, for folks with multi-band capability. And especially for those with big-gun antennas on the upper bands for whom DX contacts were a breeze, but I had only 40 ... and a modest dipole hidden in the trees of our twin-home condo complex. And 40 was almost useless during the daylight hours, and I still worked too, without all the free time it must surely require to ever reach

Senator level. And almost before I started my quest for S, I had nearly talked myself out of the attempt altogether. It seemed nearly impossible.

But I continued to enjoy the warm fellowship with my brothers and sisters in SKCC, relished many a rag chew re-living exciting Novice days, and my contact totals continued to creep ever closer toward that un-achievable level of Senator. And along the way I learned of the secret aids that had helped many who went before me. I discovered the [CW Clubs Reverse Beacon Network](#), some sort of unfathomable sorcery that magically scans the airwaves for callsigns, and then displays those who are members of the esteemed SKCC (or other organizations). And I also found a handy online scheduling site that catered to similarly minded folks on a quest for S, a website known as the [K3UK Schedule Page](#).

And with a steadfast commitment, made possible only with the loving and enthusiastic support of my wife, and with the genuine encouragement of fellow SKCCers too numerous to list, the goal of Senator drew ever closer. And finally, on October 13th, I cleared the next to the last hurdle – an achievement known as TX8. That meant that I had worked 400 unique members of SKCC who held Centurion or higher endorsement and had only one remaining dash now to reach the pantheon of SKCC membership – the noble Senator endorsement.

Thank heavens for my AC2C logging assistant, I thought to myself time and time again, for it enabled me to know within a moment whether I had had the pleasure of a QSO previously or was initiating a first-time contact. Like an accountant's accountant, the AC2C SKCC Logger never had a senior moment and was never on coffee break, but could tell me with certainty just exactly where I stood with the various SKCC achievements. And most importantly to me at the time, my logging assistant kept account of the steadily dwindling number of contacts needed for my Senatorial quest.

So I studied the requirements again for this final push toward a goal that had truly seemed beyond reach, and soon learned what was needed. Another 200 contacts were required, and with only Tribune or Senator stations too, *but I could work folks I had previously worked prior to reaching TX8.*

And so I continued on, enjoying Amateur Radio with the same zest I felt as a kid, operating most mornings for a contact or two, band permitting, and then again in the evenings after dinner and nighttime prayers with the granddaughters tucked safely in bed. My wife was well aware that I was drawing closer to an unthinkable conquest. When I would return from an evening stint on 40, she never failed to ask, "Any new numbers?" And she was quick with a congratulatory hug whenever I had added to my total, and an even longer hug whenever I formed a zero with my hands.

And many of my wonderful friends within SKCC knew I was on the final leg toward Senator, and a day rarely passed without a kind comment or vicarious pat on the back. And I leaned on my invaluable logging assistant for encouragement too, for there I could see the magic number remaining ... and sure enough it continued to grow ever smaller.

The finish line came into sight on the evening of November 3rd, and it had already been a productive day. I had sweet talked my 40 dipole into semi-resonance on 20, and had managed to work ZS6JBJ there for number 193 of the 200 contacts needed. And then 40 proved especially lucrative too as I snagged W1LIC in Florida, K7EP in Washington state, KDØV in Minnesota,

KB4DXV in Arizona and KB3CVO in Pennsylvania for number 199. The excitement was palpable, and can likely be fully appreciated only by those who've been there before. And then, as I scanned the band for number 200, I heard a smooth and strong bug fist in conversation, and I waited for his callsign, and it was K8TEZ.

I recognized the call. I had worked Larry previously and even had a mental image of the great childhood photo on his QRZ page, but I hadn't worked him in a while. And if our last contact was prior to my TX8 date of October 13, he would be the one.

And my benevolent logging assistant reported that we had previously worked on September 24th. And my mind raced as I struggled to compute whether or not that was actually prior to October 13.

Finally, flushed with the realization that this wonderful journey might be nearing its conclusion, I took a deep breath and waited. But I didn't wait long, as Larry was wrapping up his QSO. I heard a 73 from each station, and complementary dits both ways, and then I called.

K8TEZ K8TEZ de WA4FAT WA4FAT PSE K

And then nothing. Had Larry shut it down for the evening? Had he pulled the proverbial big switch?

And so I called again, fingers barely resting on the key as I was clearly shaking.

And then, in a wave of relief, fueled by adrenaline, I heard him returning.

WA4FAT de K8TEZ

GE Bill, he said, Nice to hear you again.

I tried valiantly to compose myself as I thanked him for the reply and then proceeded to explain the he was the final contact in my long quest for S. I glanced up at the K3UK schedule page to see that my friend Al, KD8DEU, who was obviously on frequency, had written "He's a T, Bill. That's 200. You've done it!"

And the rest is a bit of a blur now. I'm afraid I thanked Larry once or twice too much, and my hand never did completely stop trembling. And then I sat there at my desk, still now and with the headphones off. And I said a prayer of thanksgiving for the joy SKCC had brought to my world and for a lifetime of wonderful memories and moments in the world's greatest hobby.

And then I asked myself, "OK, so what's next?"

73,

Bill WA4FAT

Ed....Great story here, thanks Bill for submitting this!

Learning to Enjoy CW

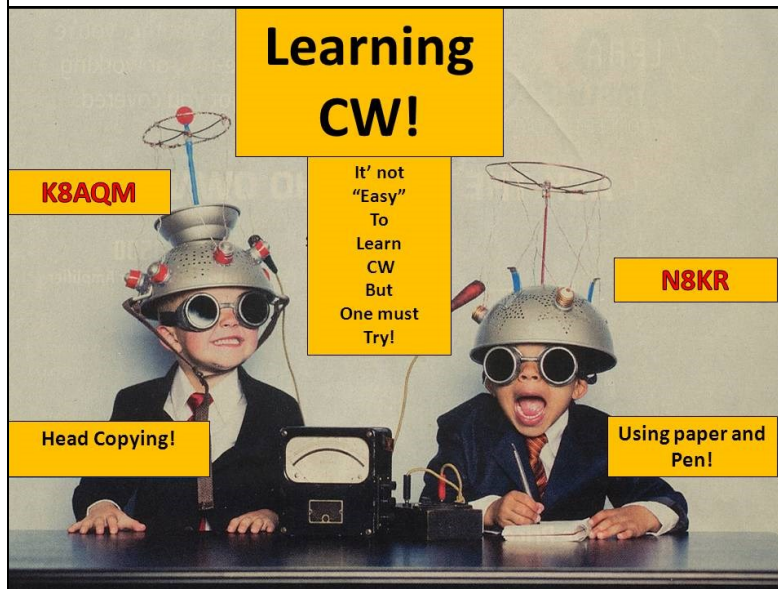
I see on the “New Member” notice on the reflector many new members who “want to improve my cw ability.” Of course there are two parts to “improvement,” sending and copying CW. Copying of course is the stickler for many and there are several approaches to this. I often read “copy with pencil and paper” or “copy using only your head, no paper”...which is right? Does it really matter? I know that at my age one of the problems I encounter with “head copying” is I can’t remember everything that was said! And then using a “pencil and paper,” I

know I’m again limited by how fast I can write what is being sent...gee, what’s a guy to do!

Like I said, “does it really matter which method you use?” I guess which ever method you use the main thing is to enjoy the QSO! Don’t think you must choose one or the other and don’t feel like you’re a failure if you can’t “head copy”...just enjoy the QSO!

Apologies to my friend N8KR...but you have to admit Ken, pretty cool cartoon!

De K8AQM 1629T



N8KR/4

Ken N8KR, sent this great pic up of his Florida QTH. You’ll catch him in all the SKCC events and generally throughout the bands. Ken is also the new SKS manager; congratulations!

Ken Writes:

Hey! Here's the current operating spot in the storage shed next to our place. Just finished phone sweepstakes with 850 qso's. Missed a sweep like many looking for a non-existent VE2 and Rhode Island! 20 was my bread and butter band and had some nice runs. (Operated about 15hours) I like the southern propagation but missed the higher and better antennas. Just have



the 20 and 40 dipoles at 30 feet. Ran the THP at 400 watts. Home made foot switch on the floor. Screwed two boards together with a fulcrum in the middle. Worked flawlessly! I picked up an artificial ground in that estate I purchased last week. Finding a good ground down here in a park full of old aluminum trailers and much rust is difficult. I was turning on and off lights and causing my Ipad and phone problems so I tried the artificial ground and eliminated all problems. I think it may be a good solution for operating in this environment.