The SKCC Centurion

Operating

By Steve Katz WB2WIK/6

Is it just me, or are a lot of operators doing stuff wrong?

I don't think it's me. Newbies are always welcome, and the more the merrier, as far as I'm concerned, so I'm not griping about newcomers. I'm griping about their operating procedures - and some of these ops aren't very "new," at all.

Here's an example: I call CQ, and somebody answers not with a routine reply but his life story. "WB2WIK you're 59 here in Detroit. I was listening to you before, but couldn't get back to you. Handle is Joe. Back to you!"

That's not a proper reply to a CQ.

Or, I answer someone else's CQ and they reply, "Yeah, the 2 station I hear ya. Back to you." That's not any kind of reply.

C'mon guys, it's not hard to do it right. If you're answering someone's CQ, use their callsign, your callsign, maybe your location, and end it. Example: "WB2WIK this is W1XYZ in Boston calling, over." Perfect.

I might not get that due to static, interference, the phone ringing or lots of reasons. If I don't, I'll ask for a repeat. "The W1, what's your full call? Go ahead." If you get a request like this, be prepared to answer the question, specifically. Like, "This is Whiskey One Xray Yankee Zulu, over." That would do it. Answering any other way is likely just wasting time.

If you call CQ and someone answers you, follow the protocol that's developed over the past century because it works: "WB2WIK this is W1XYZ. Thanks for the call. You're about 57 here in Boston, and my name is Frank. How copy there? WB2WIK this is W1XYZ."

Reasons to follow protocol abound, but here are some good ones:

• You don't know how well the other station hears you, since he hasn't given a report, yet. As such, if you keep talking there's a chance he isn't hearing any of it, and you're wasting time and bandwidth. Find out what's happening first, before starting a real rag-chew.

• You don't know if the other station understands much English (yet), so if you go on rambling a lot of what you're rambling about might be over his head. Get more info first.

• Keeping exchanges short nearly assures an actual contact will complete. Making transmissions long can result in the band dying while you're transmitting, and when you finally stop, you'll hear nothing but static. You can get a feel for the propagation over the path after a few transmissions, but can't guess at this by hearing a five-second call. Also, at first you don't know how much time the other station has. He may have 60 seconds for a quick report exchange, or might be interested in a long rag-chew. No way to know that in the first transmission.

I can't tell you how many times I've answered someone's CQ and they neglected to mention their name in the first transmission. Why is that? This didn't used to happen years ago - it's happening now.

Once the contact's really been established and each station knows the other's callsign, name and location, then it's time to explore other options. Find some common ground to talk about, and go at it.

When I first contact someone, I nearly always comment on their location, since chances are, I've been there or very close to it. "Oh, you're in Boise? Wow, last time I was there to visit HP, there was a foot of partly cloudy on my rental car and I had to dig out to leave the parking lot! How's it like up there today?" Something like that. It's a conversation starter.

A lot of phone operators like to hear comments about their modulation. Usually, I'll comment only if I think someone sounds particularly good or particularly bad. Many don't take the "bad" comments very well. Makes me think more about giving such a report, but what's the purpose of telling someone they sound good, if they don't?

I think it pays to mention your transmitter power level right away. Here's why: If your station has parity with the station you're in contact with, there's a pretty good chance you'll hear each other about the same. If you're running a kilowatt and the other guy's running QRP, there's a really good chance he'll hear you long after you lose him. I'll mention, "Running a kilowatt to a 3 element beam at 55 feet here," and wait to see what the other station says. If he's running 100W ("barefoot"), my very next transmission will also be at that level, to keep it even. If he's running high power and I don't hear him very well, I'll stick with high power, since with lower power the QSO would

likely end. But this is the reason to at least mention what's going on.

CW is another subject, but surely worthy of mention! I hear bad operating on my favorite mode (CW), too. Much more than ever before.

The age-old protocol of exchanging significant data in an abbreviated fashion and logical sequence seems to be disappearing, except with the experienced ops. In the "old days," the newbies closely followed what the old timers did, and caught on quickly to the protocol. For some reason, that doesn't seem to be happening today, and I don't know why not.

I hear people call CQ and then sign "KN." That's ridiculous, and inappropriate. I hear people call CQ FISTS who are really terrible CW operators, making me wonder what the FISTS membership really contributes. Numbers chasing?

I answer a CQ, and the other station might send "NAME HERE IS JOHN JOHN BT MY QTH IS KANSAS CITY KANSAS CITY BT YOUR SIGNAL IS 599 599 BT SO BACK TO YOU…"

Well, that's rather awful. Understandable for someone's first contact, but definitely not for their 100th or 1000th.

A way better format is: "TNX OM UR RST 599 599 HR QTH KANSAS CITY MO KANSAS CITY MO OP JOHN JOHN. HW?"

See the difference? My way gives the report FIRST, which is protocol, and for a reason. My way says "QTH," followed by the info - instead of wasting time with "MY QTH IS," (since "QTH" alone already means "my location is"). My way gives not only Kansas City, but which state, since there are two of them, side by side. Instead of saying "name here is" I just use "OP." As in "the operator here is." That's all that's needed. My way says, "HW?" which means "how copy?" instead of wasting time with "SO BACK TO YOU…" which is just silly.

I hear newbie CW ops send "R R R R." I guess that means "roger, roger, roger, roger." How many times does one need to send that? One would suffice. Or none at all would also suffice. I have to assume you're copying me, or we wouldn't be having this contact.

I also work CW operators who can't hold up their end of a conversation - even worse than on phone. I suspect this is because they're very dull people, or really can't copy me, or really can't copy code, or something. I like to rag chew on CW, and try to be interesting. When you tell me where you are located, I'll usually comment on something about it. "INDPLS, EH? CONGRATS ON SUPERBOWL VICTORY." Or maybe, "BALTO, EH? LUV THE SOFT SHELL CRAB BT IN SEASON?" "FREEPORT ME? BN TO L L BEAN STORE AT MIDNITE THR BT STL OPEN THAT LATE?" Whatever. I'll hold up my end of the conversation. Try to hold up yours; otherwise, what's the point of meeting people on the air?

Real newbies can be forgiven almost anything; but I hear a lot of people who've been on the air for months or years, still operating poorly. No excuse for that - it means they're simply not listening and learning from others on the air who are operating just fine.

Honing operating skills is key to making more contacts, having more fun on the air, and ultimately being the leader others will want to emulate.

Getting It Just Right

Part four in a four part series describing how to set up your keying devices. Parts one through three covered how to properly adjust your bug, your straight key, and your paddles. This final piece addresses Bencher paddles and keying devices.

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These instructions use simple, generally familiar examples of equipment types and are designed to help you find the adjustment that suits you best. What you are looking for ultimately is a particular feel, and that will vary from person to person. Not all keys and paddles offer the same adjustments, or even use the same terminology, but hopefully this will be enough to get you started and to illustrate the general principles.

Paddles

The popular Bencher line of paddles poses some interesting problems in adjustment, because the design is so different from more traditional straight-lever paddles. The Bencher uses a "cantilever" arm design, so that the contacts are at the front of the paddle and the movement of the contacts is essentially from back to front rather than from side to side. This design, coupled with the distinctive shape of the finger-pieces, is why the term "Iambic" is so often associated with the design of the paddle. But in fact, the Bencher is a simply a variation on the theme of dual paddles, and Iambic refers only to the keyer with which the paddle is used. Click here for a discussion of iambic paddles and keyers.
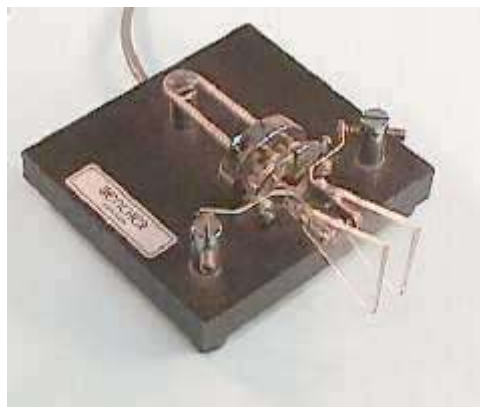
Bencher BY-1 Paddle

Adjustment of a Bencher or other cantilever style paddle is not as difficult as it looks. While the appearance is technically daunting, the Bencher is actually quite robust, and capable of adjustment in the usual ways to suit any operating style.

Naming of Parts

The parts of the Bencher need to be understood before an attempt is made to adjust the paddle. Critical parts or adjustment screws are indicated in the illustrations. The two paddle arms are the S shaped pieces of metal which have the plastic finger-piece at the front and a contact at the other end, adjacent to the two contact posts. The paddle arm is attached to the semi-circular pivot plates with a single screw which goes through the arm, and extends beyond the pivot plate to rest against the stop screw. The pivot plate rocks back and forth as the paddle is used, and adjustment consists of locating the pivot plate properly and controlling the extent of its movement. As stated, the paddle arm is attached to the front of the pivot plate with a screw that goes through the plate and controls the resting position of the plate when it is under tension from the spring. The spring attaches to a long screw that goes through the pivot plate from the upper quadrant. There is a flat spot in the threading of the screw (on the inner side of the pivot plate), where the end of the spring is attached. As the screw is moved in or out, the amount of tension is changed as the angle between the spring and the pivot plate changes. The plate moves against two needle bearings (upper and lower on each side) with the needle bearings themselves extending forward from the bearing block and the nylon bearing seat fixed in the back side of the pivot plate. There is also a "locator" screw which goes through a large, unthreaded hole in the pivot plate and screws into the bearing block. The locator screw is not actually attached to the pivot plate. The head of this screw limits the distance that the plate can move outwards if the paddle arm is moved the "wrong way." In normal use it serves no purpose, but when the arms are moved backwards (e.g. to clean the contacts) it does serve to keep the pivot plate from coming off the bearings.

The available adjustments are:

Paddle Arm Tension, the force needed to move either of the two levers from side to side. It's exerted by a long coil spring which attaches to one adjustment screw, goes to the back of the paddle and around a post, and then back up to the other adjustment screw. The two screws to which the spring is attached control the tension by changing the angle at which the spring pulls against the pivot plate.


Bearing Tension, adjustable only as a side-effect of varying the spring tension on the pivot plate. With needle bearings and nylon seats, it is essentially ignorable.

Contact Spacing, the space between the two pairs of electrical contacts when the levers are at rest (unkeyed). The contacts on the Bencher are an adjustable contact on the end of a screw going through the contact post, and a fixed contact on the end of the paddle arm. The contact spacing determines the distance the paddle arm will move when keyed.

Pivot Plate Position, the location of the pivot plate. There is really only one adjustment, namely the resting position (paddle unkeyed) controlled by the stop screw. The locator screw limits outward movement of the pivot plate when the paddle arm is moved "backwards."
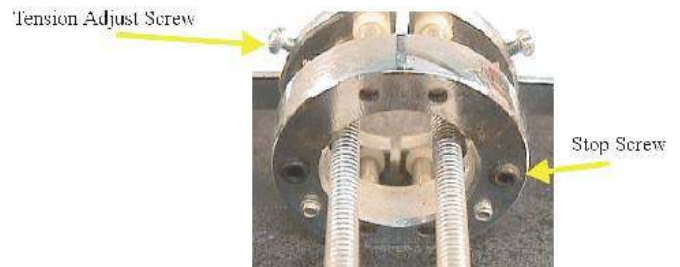
Here are the steps you will need to "set up" your Bencher paddle

1. **Open up the contacts**. Loosen the transverse locking screw (the smaller, upper one) on each contact post and then back out the contact screw until the contact itself is up against the inner surface of the post.

2. **Inspect and adjust the position of the pivot plates**. They should be perfectly parallel with the front surface of the bearing block. Looking from the side of the paddle, you should see that the tops of the pivot plates form a straight line, parallel with the bearing block. If they don't, adjust the stop screws (accessible from the back of the bearing block) until the plates line up. When the above adjustment has been made, check the locator screw to see that the head is approximately 1/8" out from the front of the pivot plate.

3. **Adjust the contact spacing**. The contact spacing determines the amount of horizontal movement when you move the finger-piece or "key" the paddle. It's entirely a matter of taste, but if you haven't used a paddle before and haven't developed your own preferences, start with about the thickness of a dime or a bit less. Adjust the contact screws until you have the desired spacing between the contacts on each side, then tighten the locking screws above the contact adjustment screws. The spacing does not have to be identical, and in fact many former "bug" operators prefer a greater gap on the dash paddle.

4. **Inspect contact alignment**. When keyed, the contacts should meet flush and not at an angle. If they do not meet flush, you can usually fix the problem by loosening the nut that holds the contact post (on the base of the paddle) and rotating the post slightly. If you cannot achieve a flush meeting of the contacts after performing ALL of the preceding adjustments, then it is probably that the paddle arm has been bent. If you find it necessary to straighten the paddle arm, remove it from the pivot plate and hold it firmly with a pair of pliers (or in a vice) and bend as necessary. You can also bend other (front) end of the paddle arm if you want to make a slight adjustment in how

close together the finger-pieces are.

5. **Adjust the arm tension**. Adjust the tension adjustment screws to a comfortable level of tension on the arm. Again, this is a matter of preference, but the general rule is to set it for the minimum amount of tension that will allow you to feel that you are in control of the paddle. There is no reason the tension should be the same if you don't want it that way. For example, if you have never used a paddle before you may find it easier to learn if tension is set slightly greater on one side or the other. It will be pretty obvious, but tension is increased by turning the adjustment screw out (counterclockwise), and decreased by turning it in (clockwise).

On Iambic Paddles and Keyers

To begin at the beginning, there is no such thing as an iambic paddle! The confusion came about in large part because the Bencher "Iambic Keyer Paddle," as it was labeled in magazine ads, was introduced shortly after the iambic keyer itself was developed, and similar names have been used by other paddle manufacturers. Many people tend to read "Iambic Keyer" as a description of the paddle rather than the device for which it was designed to be used, the "iambic" electronic keyer.

Early electrical and electronic keyers were an emulation of mechanical keying devices such as bugs, where you would press a lever in one direction to get a series of dots, and the other direction to get a series of dashes (or make them manually in the case of a semi-automatic key, or bug). The first keying devices, or paddles, had a single lever and were known variously as sideswipers, slap-keys, and paddles. All electronic keyers work this way, but a more recent development (mid 1950's) is the iambic or "squeeze keyer" which adds a level of functionality to the basic "dit OR dah" scenario.

With an iambic keyer, you get an alternating series of dots and dashes when both levers are activated at same time, or squeezed.

The term "Iambic" comes from poetry, where it is used to describe a rhythm consisting of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, as for example "Come live with me and be my love!" When you say that out loud you will easily hear the "di-dah-di-dah-di-dah-di-dah" rhythm, or in other words the rhythm you get when you "squeeze" the paddles connected to an iambic keyer. The series can start with either a dit or a dah, depending on which lever makes contact first. If the electronics in the keyer cannot determine which contact hit first (logically simultaneous), it will default to starting with either a dit or a dah and then begin alternating. Just for the sake of being complete here, if you squeeze the paddles so as to get "dah-di-dah-di-dah-dit" the rhythm is technically "trochaic" rather than "iambic," but that's trivia you probably don't need to know.

Dual paddles like the Bencher can be used with "non-Iambic" keyers, and single lever paddles can be used with Iambic keyers (although the true iambic or squeeze-key features of course are unavailable with a single lever paddle). The confusion came about because the Bencher "Iambic Keyer Paddle," as it was labeled in magazine ads, was introduced shortly after the iam-

bic keyer itself became popular, and many people tend to read "Iambic Keyer" as a description of the paddle rather than the device for which it was designed to be used.

Farewell KG7FS

Ted K8AQM

Rich KG7FS and I (Ted K8AQM) enjoy using straight keys and CW in general. Rich came to Michigan from Oregon and has found the "seven" call sign a bit of a problem when giving his QTH in the SKS, so he has applied for a new "eight" call sign and will soon be K8UV. To have a last "hurrah" with KG7FS we decided to use my station in a multi-multi effort in the May sprint. Rich ran 40m using an FT-1000mp and log periodic at 110 ft with 500 watts while I ran a K2 and 2 element quad on 20m at 70 feet and a quarter wave sloper on 80m with 500 watts.

Rich KG7FS on the left and Ted K8AQM on the right after a very enjoyable May SKS.

Conditions were rough here in southern Michigan with QRN from the horrible Midwestern thunderstorms but we managed to work through the QRN and had a very enjoyable two hour run. It was a lot of fun sending "gab" messages to each other through our use of Writelog and watching the QSOs come across from many of the sprint regulars.

We plan to do it again in the fall when conditions are better but with a bit of a twist; we'll use two old Hallicrafter's HT-37 transmitters and two Drake 2-B receivers! Make sure you have your RIT on and your bandpass open because we'll be "drifting through"! Until then K8AQM 1629c and K8UV 2250 aka KG7FS will be QRV for the next sprint hoping to work many more SKCC members.

Milliwatting

George Osier, N2JNZ

Hello All .My name is George Osier, N2JNZ and I'm a milliwatt addict. Just a bit about myself, I'm 49, married to a wonderful XYL, Lisa and a son Alex age 19. I've been a ham since 1989 and have always enjoyed QRP. Since I have worked QRP I have gotten a bit of wallpaper. Right now I'm at 133 countries worked and 127 confirmed less than 1 watt and still going.

With the popularity of QRP operation these days some hearty (or crazy) souls take the ball or go a bit further. These are the milliwatters. Using little more power then the common flashlight they seek to have fun in a whole new realm. DXCC, WAS and WAC are now possible with the advent of new rigs having the latest in filtering (DSP). ANYONE with the drive and determination to get these awards can do it.

I started on my chase in 1994 with my first mw station worked as KB2OGW, Carl in Ocean City, NJ. I used 500 mw with (believe it or not) a HW-7 as a transmitter and a DX-302 as a receiver. All mw contacts back then were on 40 meters novice which was a really wild place to learn. The QRM from BC stations is massive, but I progressed and made my first 1000 miles per watt with KE4OFN, Charlie in Richmond, VA with 250 mw on Feb. 10, 1994, with the same PRIMITIVE setup. The next step was trading up to a Kenwood TS-520 and by turning down the drive under 1 watt QSOs were a major reality. I had that wonderful rig till 1998 when I got my recent rig, a Ten Tec Argo 509. The station here has evolved only slightly since the Argo arrived. I have a Oak Hills WM-1 QRP wattmeter that can measure down to 1 mw easily which simplifies the task of serious milliwatting . Antennas are a 51 ft G5RV up 40 ft for 40 - 15 meters and a Cushcraft AR-10 Ringo vertical up 25 ft for 10 meter operation. The rigs have changed over the years with at present a Ten Tec Century 21, and a Model 290 step attenuator.

HOW TO

The most important thing to learn first is how to turn down the power. I use the drive control on the Argo and for powers under 100 mw I also use the attenuator with the drive control. The attenuator allows you to not turn the drive TOO low which might cause problems. On some rigs turning down the drive will cause the receiver to be less sensitive but with a decent signal from the other station this will not be a problem. Some rigs require fooling with the ALC controls which I myself would not recommend. Also if you have to use a attenuator you can use the following formulas:

10 db attenuation = 10 X power decrease
20 db   = 100 X power decrease
30 db   = 1000 X power decrease

Example:
500 mw = 0.500 w
minus 10 db = 0.050 w
minus 20 db = 0.005 w (or 5 mw)

Propagation

Knowing how each band should behave at a given time is one of the most important facts to know. The old motto "You can't work what you can't hear" is a given with milliwatting. Knowing when the optimum opening for your area is paramount to get under 1 watt. I know that 8 AM EST is good for 10 meters to start to Europe and that 2 PM is when it drops off here. Later at 4 PM the West to Japan and Oceania is good till 8 PM here. For each band a optimum time is needed to get to the area you wish to work so for a while at least LISTEN, LISTEN then LISTEN some more. You will have to be well schooled in propagation to find your niche in the wild world of milliwatting. The numbers you seek are the solar flux and A and K indexes. There is much info written on these numbers by some great authors which is essential reading for the budding milliwatter. Also remember that conditions that seem great for people running QRO are NOT always the best time for QRPp. You must find the small time slot for you and anticipate the best conditions for the amount of power you are running.

Myths

Most people that QRP think that HUGE pieces of aluminum in the air are the only way to go. This can' be farther from the truth. While big antennas can make the less than 1 watt job easier it is not totally needed. I have worked all my awards with my dipole and vertical and have not needed 100 lb Yagis blocking out the Sun. Once again, propagation knowledge is the great equalizer when it comes to your signal being heard. Low loss coax, good fittings and taking care when installing antennas is most important. You will see results quickly when you can optimize what you use.

Contests

People either love or hate contesting, but you will quickly find that contests are the BEST times for miliiwatting. When a contest team goes to Outer West Mongolia to run up a big score they bring ONLY the BEST rigs and best antennas and most importantly the VERY BEST OPS. Local stateside contesters also run super rigs and super aluminum farms and are looking for as many "Q"s as possible. With your tiny signal you are still a target and just as good a point as anyone else. When the pileups occur ,and they will , you have to take a clever strategy, you can stand right on the CW frequency and pound away which sometimes will get you through OR you can "slide" a bit plus or minus 1 KC. Sometimes the change in the CW tone will get the DX stations attention. Also listening to when the DX station picks up a call can tell you a lot. If he jumps to the first station that he hears or if he waits for the "buzzing" to calm then picks a call from that. Some DX stations prefer to "tail end" the pileup so they can get the whole call of the station calling them. Each station has its own rhythm and its best for you to go with what he's giving.

A great example of this is the D68C DXpedition. They went to the Comoros with one thing in mind. To work ALL stations of ALL sizes and powers. To give out the country to all who needed it. They were very successful to say the least. I worked them during the 2001 ARRL DX INTERNATIONAL with 500 mw by listening to the OP and determining when he was pick-

ing them off in the pileup. Don't be afraid to listen for 5 minutes or so to find his rhythm because odds are he isn't going to go to far for a while. The OPs were fantastic and they stuck to their game plan as much as possible so the stations calling could count on their consistency.

A good tool to keep in mind for increased success at milliwatting is DX SPOTTING. I use DX SUMMIT to keep abreast of stations coming on and I team this up with internet DX bulletins like 425DX or others that will tell the beginning of a DXpedition and their schedule for their stay.   Sometimes sneaking in and working DX is possible when you can be near the front of the line by watching the spots. But beware of the many spots that may not be from your geographic area. The DX station "7B7BB" may have 25 people putting it in the list of spots but these 25 may all be from Europe and the propagation might not even be close for you to hear it.

Bands

10 meters is the band to milliwatt when conditions are right. But with the higher bands on the decline in the next few years you will have to be a bit more creative. My favorites when the solar cycle is low are 30 and 40 meters. With the maximum power on 30 meters of 200 watts it makes a great stomping ground for milliwatters. Also 40 meters is quite good and a favorite place for QRPers. When I worked many of my states I used the Novice portion of 40 meters. During the day its quite free from broadcast QRM and all of New England and the midwest is very possible. At night its a bit tougher but it gives you good training when the 500 KW monsters are on. Your hearing becomes VERY much more selective and with rigs with DSP filtering its gets even easier.

QSLing

I find that many QRO or even QRP stations are VERY interested in receiving a QSL from a tiny milliwatt station. Once you tell them what your power is they often ask YOU to QSL them. I always QSL as a courtesy to the station that strained its ears to make the "Q". Sometimes I even make special cards for the DX station with the "QSLmaker" QSL card program and manipulate the info fields to put my power in bold letters for the DX station to display proudly.

Surprises

Most times before a major contest stations will be on a few days before flexing their muscles to see how things are working. On November 24 , 2000 a few days before the 2000 CQ WW CW I came across a VERY powerful station on 10 meter CW signing " OK / OM3BH " He was easily S9 + 40 db to my vertical antenna. So I thought I might try 10 mw. He got me on the third call and gave me the usual "599" at 1401 UTC. His name was" Rasto" and was using the station of Jiri, OK2RZ at the Ham Heaven Radio Ranch in the Czech Republic. The antenna was "6 over 6 over 6" just for 10 meters. I then went for broke and at 1422 I called Rasto again with just 4 mw. It took the tricks I mentioned before but I got through. This was my BEST Miles per Watt ever at 1,027,310 mpw. You can always count on propagation knowledge and a ton of aluminum to get you through in this case. I cherish this card and the QRP-ARCI

certificate hangs proudly on my wall. Having as much knowledge of conditions as possible will often yield MANY surprises. And Lady Luck can't hurt either.

Conclusion

If you are looking for a different challenge with a different set of rules you can go for the milliwatts contacts. If I can do it anyone can. Knowledge, determination to succeed and a true love for the journey will get you to your goals with least amount of frustration and pain. The fun is in the realization that people can REALLY hear a signal that low. And that you can be successful with little radios and little antennas. If we meet on the bands someday don't be surprised if I ask you to "turn down yer power "

QRP-ARCI Awards

QRP DXCC MIXED MODE AND BAND #144
WAC QRP SSB 10 METERS #552
WAS QRP MIXED #430

1000 MILES PER WATT (1,027,310) 10M CW #284
QRPp (UNDER 1 WATT) DXCC MIXED BAND , CW # 165 (700mw)
QRPp (UNDER 1 WATT) WAC 10M CW # 559 (700mw)
QRPp (UNDER 1 WATT) WAS MIXED BANDS CW #503 (700mw)
CQ WW WPX CW 2005 , 40m 2nd USA 3rd NA (5w)QRP

A-1 Operator Nominations

Congratulations to the following list of SKCC members who have receive nominations to the A-1 Operator Club.

AC5AM, AD0CW, K0AQO, K7QS, K7SAM, KB0BXE,KB8SLJ, KG6TWU, KI4FD, KI8U, N3GO, N7HRK, VE3FAL, W4JFA, W4WNY, W5PEH, W6EET, W7AYN, WA3SLN, WB2GTG, WB4OFT

SKCC Awards Tracker

Mark Saunders, KJ7BS, SKCC # 2240C

Don Kemp, N8BB, SKCC # 36C sent me an advanced copy of the next version of his SKCC Awards Tracker tool. I must admit, I've seen mention of the awards tracker and have actually downloaded it, looked at it, but never used it. However, since Don was kind enough to let me have an advanced copy of the tool, I thought it only fair that I should put it through its paces.

This version of the SKCC Awards Tracker functions much like the previous version with a few neat twists. First, the instructions for using the tool is located in a tab. Everything you want to know about how to use the tool is there, and you can add your own comments, shortcuts, and notes. Second, the Main tab is where the tracking occurs. The calculations on this tab are automated so once you enter the data and move away from the cell, it automatically recalculates your totals. Third, the

tabs USA, WAS, and DX automatically calculate your standings from the Main tab. The USA and DX tabs contain graphs that show how many members in each state or country and then shows your progress by state or country. That is a neat feature. Fourth, the A1 Operators tab simply lists the members of SKCC who are members of the A1 Operator club and those who have been nominated. I think that is a pretty neat acknowledgement.

Ok, I have to enter my SKCC log data into the SKCC Awards Tracker. I printed my SKCC log entries from Ham Radio Deluxe, about 200 in all, and began the task of inputting them into the Tracker. Having never used the tool, I found it rather intuitive to use, once I read the instructions and understood what to place in the cells for each type of QSO. I am an active QRP operator so my tracker has several QRPx1 (my station QRP) entries, unfortunately there are no QRPx2 (both stations QRP) entries in my tracker. I have several Centurions logged in the tracker and two Tribunes.

So, what did it take to get my 200 contacts entered, about 90 minutes, but that was with auto calculation turned on (the auto calculation feature does take a few seconds to complete). When entering your contact data into the tracker for the first time, TURN OFF AUTO CALCULATION, in Microsoft Excel as follows. On the menu bar, go to **Tools, Options** and select the **Calculation** tab, **Manual**. This turns off auto calculation and will significantly speed up your data entry task. Remember to turn it back on when finished.

Since trying the SKCC Awards Tracker tool, I not have it open along with Ham Radio Deluxe, the K3UK Interactive Sked page, and the AI4FO SKCC DX cluster. Those are my four standard tools when operating.

Watch for an announcement for the next version of Don's SKCC Awards Tracker. It will be worth your time.

Shack Of The Month

There is no shack of the month photo this month. We need your photos and descriptions of your shack.

Key Of The Month

Finn WB2UWU

So you just got out of the bathtub and went to the shack to make a few QSOs, But you miss playing with your rubber duck. So you go to Wal-Mart and get a drawer pull for $1.74 and put it on your straight key.

Maybe you do not fancy rubber ducks but do enjoy watching your favorite sports. For the same price you can get the choice of a football, a golf ball, or a basketball to mount as your key knob instead of the ducky. Although the ducky is pretty comfortable, one of the balls might be more to your liking.

I was very reluctant to modify my favorite key, the one I had to settle for since the Amplidan was just a few dollars over my budget. Note especially the clever, parts saving, design of the trunnion bearings. No tricky screw adjustments. I hope that my key modification will further the cause of CW and the use of straight keys and felt that it was necessary to show a picture of the application rather than explaining the procedure.

New Members

3094, K9MOV, Lane, Chicago, IL
3095, KC7TFL, Robert, Payette, ID
3096, K1AJ, Bruce, HaverHill, MA
3097, KN4LF, Thomas, Lakeland, FL
3098, JL8GQW, Tokuo, Hanashima Sapporo City, Japan
3099, K0FNR, Jim, Arvada, CO
3100, IZ3DBA, Jack, Palazzolo, Italy
3101, K4KJP, Terry, Fort Walton Beach, FL
3102, KE5NKL, Liz, Beckley, WV
3103, GM0WEZ, Peter, Crieff, Scotland
3104, JA0CAH, Masa, Tokyo, Japan
3105, VE2LHP, Pierre, St. Nicolas, Quebec
3106, K7CEX, Jim, Centralia, WA
3107, KB3MXM, Marty, Owings Mills, MD
3108, W6LQR, Jerry, Landers, CA
3109, JA1HAO, Tac, Tokyo, Japan
3110, HA8MT, Fero, Fuzesgyarmat, Hungary
3111, M3MGM, Nick, London, England
3112, K8NB, Noel, Stephenson, MI
3113, WO7A, Ned, Roseburg, OR
3114, KA0W, Ken, Mason City, IA
3115, KW9L, Terry, Villa Park, IL
3116, WB5UEP, Bill, San Antonio, TX
3117, VE7TTJ, David, Surrey, BC
3118, K8UOF, Frank, St. Helen, MI
3119, WI0T, Rod, St. Charles, MO
3120, YO6EX, Giurgiu, Vaslie Sibiu, Romania
3121, KD8EDK, John, Parkersburg, WV

3122, KI6IMK, Jerry, Los Altos, CA
3123, W4UXJ, Marvin, Marietta, GA
3124, K5YEF, Arthur, Plano, TX
3125, YC1RYL, Eko, Banten, Indonesia
3126, KI4SHQ, Jay, Harriman, TN
3127, KE7LOY, Brian, Twin Falls, ID
3128, N4SVA, Chris, Mobile, AL
3129, WO7A, Ned, Roseburg, OR
3130, SP5XO, Tom, Warsaw, Poland
3131, N6NQ, Jon, Palmdale, CA
3132, W9TTT, Matt, Boone, IA
3133, WA3ZBJ, Don, New Bethlehem, PA
3134, DO2LRD, Regina, Hamburg, Germany
3135, NG0K, Douglas, Omaha, NE
3136, W4EDE, Lee, Miami Beach, FL
3137, NJ0IP/DJ0IP, Rick, Oklahoma City, OK
3138, WG1L, Jim, North Weymouth, MA
3139, KW6LA, Tony, Los, Angeles, CA
3140, KB2CHY, Bradley, Rochester, NY
3141, W8VN, Dennis, Muskegon, MI
3142, W4ZY, Bob, WoodBridge, VA
3143, KC8IPQ, Bob, Medina, OH
3144, N6SL, Ben, Ocala, FL
3145, WB6SIK, Bill, Palos, Verdes, CA
3146, WB0RHJ, Jay, Sioux, Falls, SD
3147, KI4UTA, Kevin, Moncure, NC
3148, KJ1T, Kerry, Canton, GA
3149, AD5ZA, Jim, Richardson, TX
3150, KI6ATA, Sheldon, Walnut, Creek, CA
3151, K3MQ, Bob, Laurel, DE
3152, KI4ODO, Marvin, Louisburg, NC
3153, KB1PBP, Steven, Waterford, CT
3154, W3BG, Jim, Malvern, PA
3155, VE9OCR, Joe, Saint, John, NB
3156, IZ1CLB, Matteo, Genova, Italy
3157, K5BQ, Dale, Gordonville, TX
3158, K4NCG, Tom, Stafford, VA
3159, W4NLM, Joe, Palmetto, FL
3160, KG6RVF, Mike, San Diego, CA
3161, AB3ET, Patrick, Silver Springs, MD

SKCC Awards

Centurion
82, KG4FSN, 0226, Juan, Margate, FL, 1 May 2007
83, W5GXV,0654 Gene, Spring Beach, TX, 7 May 2007
84, KC2EGL, 0553 Michael, Brookville, PA, 12 May 2007
85, N1AS, 0344 Keith, Ferrisburg, VT, 12 May 2007
86, WB8LSV, 2795 Barry, Port Charlotte, 23 May 2007
87, KA8HFN, 2046, Larry, Wapakoneta, OH, 29 May 2007

Tribune
1702C, K0LUW, Russ, Omaha, NE, 24 May 2007
0847C, W4WXA, Tom, Warner Robins, GA, 24 May 2007
2417C, W6UT, Dennis, Stockton, CA, 24 May 2007
1433C, W1DV, Dave, Phelps, NY, 24 May 2007
1829C, N7EF, Don, Kent, WA, 24 May 2007
1926C, NT9K, Bill, Melbourne, FL, 24 May 2007
0118C, K8PG, Paul, Chatham, MI, 24 May 2007

20 Meter Endorsement
2417C, W6UT, Dennis, Stockton, CA, 1 May 2007

30 Meter Endorsement
0847C, W4WXA, Tom, Warner Robins, GA, 4 May 2007

40 Meter Endorsement
2099C, K2RFP, Dick, Miller Place, NY, 3 May 2007
2829C, W3MWR, George, West Chester, PA, 11 May 2007

Call For Contributions

The SKCC Centurion is looking for contributors. If you have something you think would be interesting to the member-ship, please send it to us at kj7bs@arrl.net. We can work with you to get it in shape for the newsletter. If you are willing to write a regular column, monthly or bi-monthly, please let use know. We are always looking for good stuff for the newsletter. We have been given the names of a few who your peers believe would make good contributors for regular columns, we will be in touch.

Your shack, key, and antenna farm photos are always welcome. We currently have no shack photos, and you do not want to see my shack, believe me. We have a few key photos remaining to publish, but we always need a fresh supply.

We appreciate all the email we receive from our readers with their comments, and constructive criticisms. Keep them coming, because it lets us know what you want in a newsletter.

Here are some ideas we have for future issues: APRS trackers, portable operations, operating K9SKC as guest op, grey line operations, chasing DX. Some of these will make the news letter and some will not.

There are two topics we are most interested in receiving, Field Day articles, and amateur radio license instruction. Many of us will be on FD operations in June, so let's see some articles and photos. There are at least two members who teach license classes, so some information may stimulate others to also teach license classes.

No Code Amateur Radio

What has dropping the Morse code requirement done to amateur radio. Some say it is the beginning of the end or worse. Here is some numbers we found on the ARRL web site.

	2006 1 JAN—25 MAR	2007 1 JAN—25 MAR
New Technicians	4685	6565
New/Upgraded General	945	7395
New/Upgraded Extras	775	1910

Let's introduce them to Morse code and get them involved with SKCC. Draw your own conclusions.

The SKCC Centurion

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Glendale, AZ 85304
Phone: 623-606-1976
kj7bs@arrl.net

With SKCC every day is Straight Key Night!

The Straight Key Century Club is the fastest growing CW club focusing on manual generation of Morse code. Founded in January 2006, SKCC has grown to over 2500 members in calendar 2006. Members enjoy a very active email list server, SKCC forums, monthly sprints, and a monthly 24 hour operating event. Information about the Straight Key Century Club can be found at http://www.skccgroup.com .

Operating Frequencies

These are the suggested frequencies (+or - Khz) for SKCC members to congregate and look for other SKCC members. These are suggestions only, nobody owns any frequency. Be courteous and find a clear spot.

1.820 MHz	3.550 MHz	3.530 MHz
7.120 MHz	7.055 MHz	10.120 MHz
14.048 MHz	18.080 MHz	21.120 MHz
24.910 MHz	28.170 MHz	50.090 MHz
	144.070 MHz	

Operating Events

SKCC Sprint: SKCC Sprints take place each month on the second Wednesday of the month from 0100z to 0300z (Tuesday evenings 2000 Eastern Time). Rules for participation can be found at http://www.skccgroup.com/sprint/sprint-rules.htm. For more information , contact SKCC Sprint Manager Kevin Kinderen at kkinderen@gmail.com or check the SKCC Yahoogroup Calendar.

SKCC HighER Speed Gathering: Every Wednesday at 0300z , SKCC members interested in building their sending (and receiving speed) gather around 3550 on the 80 meter band or 7055 kHz on the 40 meter band for some higher speed CW. Speeds from 23 WPM on up are typical but any speed that pushes your personal envelope is welcome. Straight keys, bugs, cooties or other sideswipers or any other mechanical key is welcome. The Gathering is NOT a Net. Pick a spot on or about 3720 or 7055 and call CQ SKCC HS at your desired higher speed.

SKCC Weekend Sprint: Every 4th Sunday of each month beginning at 0000z UTC and ending 2359z UTC. This operating event is open to all licensed amateurs. Operate as much as you can and submit your best contiguous 4-hour window for score. Periodically themes will be announced for upcoming weekend sprints. See http://www.skccgroup.com/activities.htm for more information and rules.

SKCC Member Resources

SKCC website—Everything you need to know about the Straight Key Century Club. Check back frequently as this site changes, http://www.skccgroup.com.

SKCC Yahoo Groups Email List—http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/skcc/. A moderated email list for the exchange of ideas about SKCC.

SKCC QSL Bureau—Dan Rhodes, KA3CTQ manages this free service for SKCC members. Send and receive QSL cards for QSOs between SKCC members via this service. To receive your QSL cards, you need to have SASE (self addresses stamped envelopes) on file with the SKCC QSL Bureau. Dan also says non-members can send you QSL cards through the SKCC Bureau. For more information see http://www.skccgroup.com/qsl.htm. There are currently 127 members participating.

Award Tracker—Don Kemp, NN8B (SKCC 0036) maintains an SKCC Award Tracker spreadsheet to assist members in keeping track of their current standings with SKCC awards. Don posts updates to this valuable tool in the files section of the SKCC Yahoo Groups http://groups.yahoo.com/group/skcc/files/.

The SKCC Centurion—The official newsletter of the Straight Key Century Club published monthly. The SKCC Centurion is posted on the SKCC site, in the files section of the SKCC Yahoo Groups site, and distributed via email to your email inbox. To join The SKCC Centurion email list, send an email to The_SKCC_Centurion-subscribe@yahoogroups.com with Subscribe in the subject. There are currently 190 subscriptions.

Spotting Cluster—Phil, AI4OF (SKCC # 600) has launched a spotting cluster specifically for SKCC members. Use this spotting cluster to announce your operations or to find other SKCC members to work. Point your Telnet client to skcc.matrixlist.com:7300. Login using your callsign.

SKCC Sked Page—Andy, K3UK (SKCC # 1325) maintains an interactive web page where SKCC members can arrange a meeting with other members to work towards SKCC awards or just to rag chew. Check it out at http://www.obriensweb.com/skccsked/skccsked.php.