



TALES FROM THE SWAMP

March 2021

Editor: Kevan Nason, N4XL

Thank you to our current group leadership.

President – Ed, K3DNE

Vice President - Dave, WN4AFP

Treasurer – Phil, NI7R

Secretary – Ed, WB4HRL

New Member:



Welcome Fred, K4RM! Fred is known to many of us in the SFCG and is a very welcome addition to our group. Fred operates from two locations.

QTH #1 – Anderson County, SC; Icom IC 7100, Expert Linear 1.3K Amplifier, Palstar HF Auto Tuner; Antennas – Hex Beam, 10 through 80M regular Windom.

QTH #2 – IC7300, 1.5 KW EXPERT LINEAR, 20-10 YAGI (2 EL/BAND), 160M WINDOM/NE BEVERAGE, 80M INVERTED L GP, 40M GP, N1MM+

Fred hosts multi team efforts from his Nancy Mountain location and several SFCG and SCDXA members have enjoyed the nice views, excellent fellowship, and great station.

From the Reflector:

- Commercial headsets are often uncomfortable after being worn for many hours. Softer replacement earpads help. Another reflector had a post suggested using Krone Kalpasmos Upgraded Cooling-Gel Ear Pads for \$15.99 on Amazon https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07JZK792S/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o01_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1 to replace those on a Heil Proset 6. N4XL purchased some and after many hours in the SCQP and ARRL DX contests recommends them. Frank, KG4IGC, also purchased a pair and Ed, K3DNE, also liked them. Kevan found he needed to trim excess material from the edge, but that was not difficult to do with a razor blade. He did take just a bit too much off in one spot and that has caused the pads to slip slightly. But after removal and pad readjustment it is working very well.
- N4XL also included a comment from another contest club that Ron, WV4P, had banned stock Heil Headsets from his station because of pain/fatigue. They went to the popular Yamaha CM-500's with the Brainwave replacement pads. All operators who use his station have been happy with those.
- SFCG operators continue to explore RTTY competition. Let's keep it up! Members exchanged help tips on using MMTTY and resetting N1MM's ini file using .ini.bak files in N1MM.
- There was a discussion around CQ WPX's category for TB-Wires. Specifically, regarding what wires are allowed. Ed, K3DNE, contacted the WPX Director and received a reply stating "We're just trying to rule out multi-element monobanders on 10/15/20 and multiple, rotatable elements on 40/80. Any antenna "less" than this is fine." N4XL noted that is a change in the WPX rules interpretation from the previous WPX Director.
- Jim, K9JDP, has made several contest entries. Thanks for being so active, Jim.
- Ed, K3DNE, received an email concerning a wide FT8 signal on 6 meters. Matt, NU4E, helped by suggesting Ed might have accidentally left his speech processor on. That cleared up the issue. Great help from club members! And a reminder to us all to always be thinking about how the hundreds of different settings available to us affect our radiated signals and other hams.
- There was active discussion and participation in the SCQP. Scott, N2OG, did very well with his portable activation of Abbeville county. Scott has been enjoying an RFI free N1MM experience with his new computer.
- The use of adding "x-" to a Cabrillo file qso was discussed in regards to including a qso in your file so the other station can still get credit for the contact without you being penalized for an invalid contact.
- Scott, N2OG, has been logging some ATNO's (All Time New One) both during and outside contests. Station improvements are really helping him. V51MH, VK, and JA on a new band.
- Ed, K3DNE, and Bill, N4IQ, have been tracking how our SFCG teams have been rising up towards the top on the Team competition lists for various contests. Thanks for the encouragement, and let's keep up the good work.
- Ed, K3DNE, received a plaque for the 2019 ARRL November Sweepstakes. Outstanding!
- Check out Scott's quote at the bottom of some of his posts. "Stay Ready so you don't have to get Ready!"

- I type his name and call so much that I'm thinking of creating a shortcut key in Microsoft Word to print that out with ALT-Z or something, but Scott, N2OG, had a bad experience with his RigExpert antenna analyzer. Apparently, he did what I also too often forget to do -- failed to ground out the center antenna pin of his coax before connecting it to the analyzer. He was unlucky that time and static electricity burned out his analyzer.
- Kevan, N4XL, shared a long list of things he does to prepare for a Full Time effort in a major weekend long contest.
- Frank, KG4IGC, reports Sarah is still having health issues but hopes to have her next surgery soon. We're happy to hear he is still participating in contests. That's a good way to help clear your mind and get away for a while.
- Dave, NJ4F, offered a free weatherproof box. Looks good for housing equipment for an outside antenna project. It is still available. Kevan, N4XL, is interested, but doesn't have a specific project in mind and lives too far away to take it off Dave's hands.
- Posting scores on the Real Time Scoreboards is helping to encourage interclub competition. Please consider doing so if you haven't yet started doing that. Doing so does NOT make you put you in the Assisted category. And you can tell N1MM to only share your score and keep your band summary information secret so it cannot help your competition know when you make band changes.
- Gary, W4EEY, came back from the near dead and posted a score for the club. Welcome back, Gary.
- Discussion of how to attach an SDR to rigs without Band Scopes is active as of the time this newsletter is being written.

Contest Tips:

K1AR Contest Tips

43 OK, not everyone has the circumstances that allow for 3 towers with stacked yagis on all bands at your station. There are more reasonable things that any contest station owner can do that don't require megabucks. And, with the contest season rapidly approaching, now is the time to implement! Consider your station from an antenna switching, external noise filtering, band changing perspective. Pay attention to some of the construction/configuration ideas being promoted in sources such as CQ Contest, the NCJ, or the Contest Reflector. There are literally dozens of low-cost improvements that you can make to your station that will improve your scores. Be aggressive; check 'em out!

47 Depressed that all you hear is noise on 9M2AX's 80 meter frequency because you don't have the 500 square miles needed for proper beverages? Don't give up hope. I've found many times that using an antenna tuned for another band can often improve your receiver's signal-to-noise ratio so that you can actually copy guys not otherwise possible. Try using your 40 meter antenna as a listening tool on 80. Different combinations may work for other bands, too!

52 Having recently moved (finally!), I've been thinking about the luxury I'll have to finally set-up that new ham station the right way. While most of you may not be moving, we're always working on new antenna/equipment projects. You don't have to be involved in major station renovations to take on that next project with perfection in mind. Attention to detail (and a little luck) is what separates winners from losers in contesting. Bear that fact in mind the next time you want to skip soldering the coax connection on a dipole or improperly weatherproof your next gamma match.

- When using ESM in N1MM you sometimes need to repeat whatever you last sent, be it your call or exchange element or other function key. The “=” key will do that. Rather than look at the Entry Window and figure out which function key to send, just press the equal key if you just want to send what you last sent again. Easy!
- Windows fonts that have a Slashed-Zero can help you avoid mistakes. The zero and the “oh” are right next to each other on the keyboard. During the last contest I mistakenly entered S5OK instead of S50K. Kind of hard to see the difference without a slash-zero font, isn't it? By using a slash zero font for my N1MM entry window it shows up as S50K if correctly entered. Some fonts put a dot in the center of a zero, as in S5ØK. Mistakes still slip through, but not as often.

Observations by the Editor:

- Some people are reporting an unusual problem with key and headphone plugs. Apparently, there is a batch of plugs with bad plastic. I'm sure you've seen that plastic ring that separates the sections of the plug from each other. That is causing the tips of the plug to break off and stay inside the plug. Reports of this happening have been received for both 3.5 mm and 1/4" plugs. I ran across this on a TS590 reflector where it was suggested it might be a Kenwood

issue, but another ham spoke up and said reports of the same issue was also discussed on the Elecraft reflector too. Think I'll wiggle the tips of my newer small plugs a bit before the next contest.

- Not contest related, but the North Augusta-Belvedere Amateur Radio Club reports people wanting to become new hams by taking a test must bring an FRN number. I'd heard mention of it possibly coming to be, but apparently that is now true. So if you are approached by someone asking how to get a license, in addition to license study and testing sites, you might also point them to <https://apps.fcc.gov/coresWeb/publicHome.do>
- February brought a fairly extensive new firmware update for the IC7300. Modifications were made to Spectrum Scope operations, added preset FT8 operation, Multi-function knob enhancements, added a Band Stacking register, and other things. *(I have come to really like a band stack register when in a contest like the SCQP that allows different contest modes – N4XL)*
- There has been some discussion about cut numbers in ARRL contests in the contest community at large. It found its way into the SFCG reflector too. During the recent ARRL DX contest I heard many variations being used for claiming 1000 watts. Kilo, 1K, K, 1KW, 1000, were all heard. The ARRL DX rules say to log the exchange as received. I had traditionally just converted them to a simple "K" in my log and have never received a penalty for that, but with all the discussion I became worried and tried to faithfully log what was sent. I won't bother from now on.

Here's what has been posted as to how the log checker handles the exchange part of the Cabrillo log:

First, the character string is read from the submitted log. Then...

- 1) Any instance of W or WATTS are removed from the string.
- 2) If the string is one character long containing K, it is transformed to 1000
- 3) Similarly, 1K and KILO become 1000
- 4) All characters are removed which are not a numeral (0-9), A, E, N, T, or O
- 5) Replacements are then made: 'A' with '1', 'E' with '5', 'N' with '9', 'T' with '0', and 'O' with '0'
- 6) If the result is 000, it is replaced with 1000
- 7) Finally, the resulting set of characters are converted to an integer value for checking against other logs.

If you plug any of the above examples (1k, K, KW, etc) you will find that the log checker replaces whatever you put into your log with 1000 – so it doesn't really matter what you type into your logging program.

- Pete, N4ZR, the RBN "King" posted this on the CQ-Contest reflector just before a major contest. So, to increase your chances of being spotted by the RBN you should call CQ lower in the bands rather than going high.

Getting Spotted by the RBN in Contests

Something worth knowing - the *default* configuration for CW Skimmer Server limits CW segments to the first 70 KHz of each band, except for 160, where the top edge is set at 1840. Many nodes are still running the default, so stations CQing above 070 (040 on 160 meters) during the contest will be less well-spotted. I have just attempted to get more RBN-ops to extend their coverage, but I'm afraid it may be a little late in the game.

N1MM+ Tips:

Interrupting messages While Operating Remotely

Some of us are doing remote operating. Dave, AFP, has begun dabbling in it. Frank, W4TG, posted this observation to the N1MM Reflector. I've included some replies.

Trying to use N1mm with Remotehams client for the ARRL DX-cw contest, we found that at high speeds (e.g. 30 wpm) CW, the leading dit or dah would get lost. For example my call, W4TG would come out sometimes as M4TG or similar. Works fine at low speed code. RemoteHams forum suggested switching to CATA1ASC method which sends perfect code even at 35 wpm. However, there is this limitation noted:

Once the function key containing one of these messages has been pressed, you can only use the Esc key to interrupt the message from N1MM Logger+ if the radio supports this capability via CAT command and it has been implemented in N1MM+ for that radio. If not, you might be able to interrupt a message in progress from the radio's front panel controls.

Anyone else using N1mm with Remotehams for CW and having that problem? Wondering if the capability above has been implemented (and if so how do I turn it on) for use with remote operations with my K3. Also, not sure where on the virtual front panel at the remote site to go to interrupt the sending.

Thanks,
Frank W4TG

Remote Ham Radio used to use this method of keying their K3's with N1MM and the Esc key did not work, and they never could figure out a work around

73, Bill KO7SS

I went back to the manual and the character on CW mode is @. The at-sign.

Assuming it is radio 1 the command would be:
{CAT1ASC @;}

Only one space in the command, before the @.
If that doesn't work remove the space before the @.

I have also been told that sending the RX; command will also kill the transmission.
{CAT1ASC RX;}

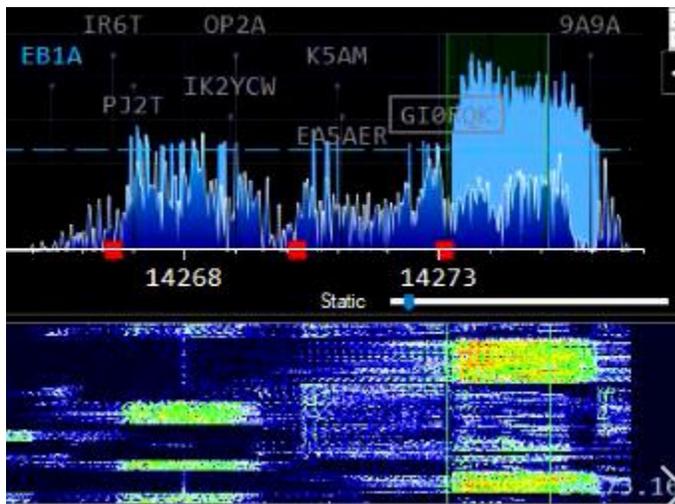
Let me know what works.

John, K3CT

(NOTE: in a later post John, K3CT, states he received a direct reply that the RX; command worked to kill the transmission with a K3. No mention was made if the @; command worked. – N4XL)

N1MM Band Scope Lesson Learned

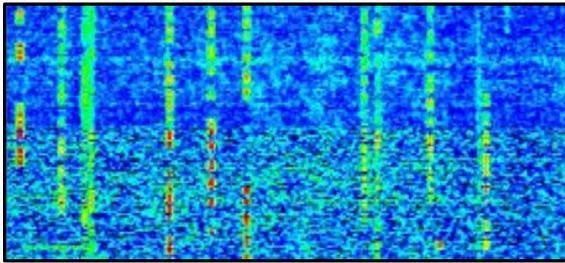
I'm relatively new to using a Band Scope so this might be old news to some of you, but it was new to me. It involves how I finally figured out how to integrate several simpler individual concepts into an effective "master plan" to ferret out weak and mostly hidden signals more quickly using the Band Scope – for SSB signals. It will be hard to describe as it is kind of a "by feel" type thing, but I'll give it a shot. The N1MM Band Scope can be hard to read on 20 meters in the ARRL DX contest, especially when using SSB.



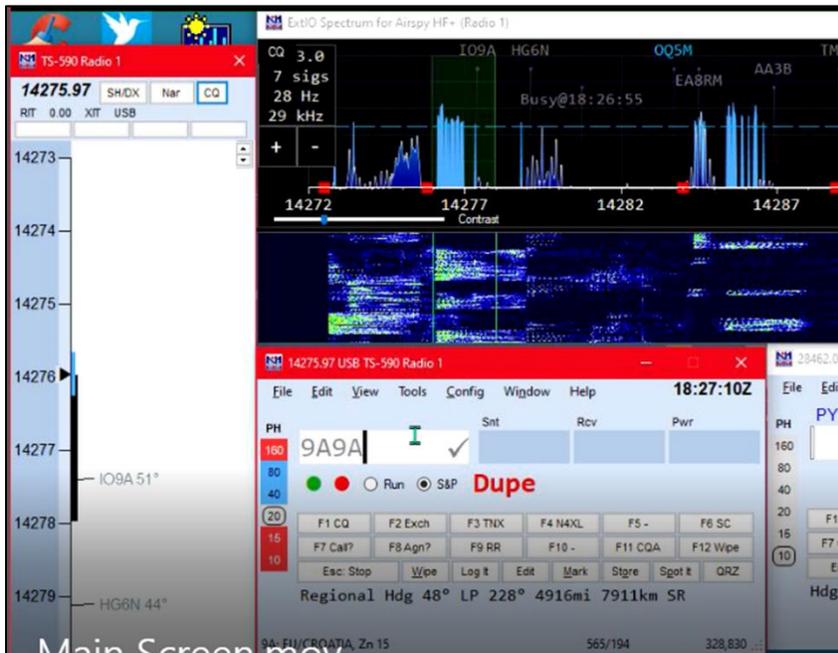
Here's a screen shot from last weekend's contest. It's a small section of the 20 meter band. Sometimes the entire band was wall to wall junk and much more crowded than this. The SSB signals were so intermixed it was very difficult to see where one signal stopped and another began. The gray call signs are ones I've already worked. I'm looking for weaker hidden ones. In the upper section, the dark blue areas represent active signals. The light blue are signals from a second or two ago. I normally prefer the decay

speed of those to be long so you will see the light blue remain for a longer period indicating an active station on the frequency. SSB signals cover a couple KHz. The signals are strongest (yellow and red coloring) near the carrier frequency and go to the right for USB and to the left on LSB. This is a horizontal rather than a vertical spectrum display.

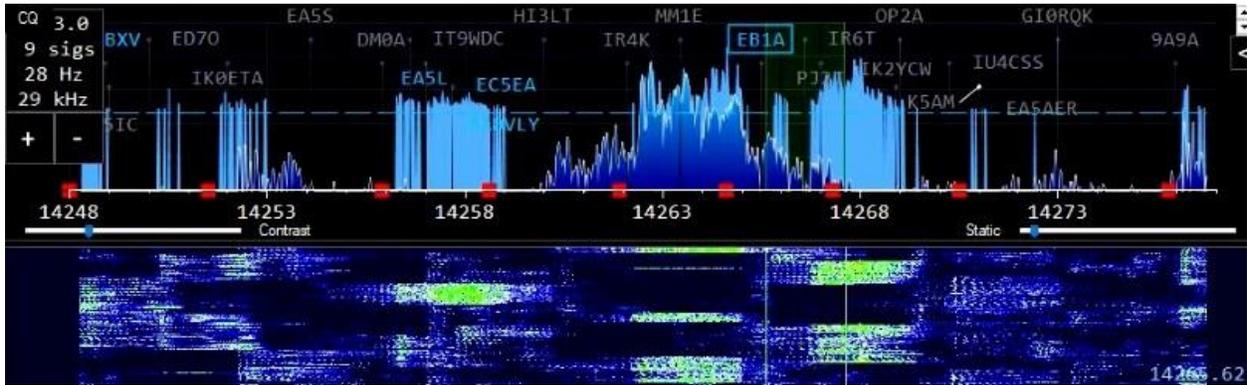
Finding a signal on a quiet band or a strong signal anywhere is pretty simple. My goal was to find those unspotted weaker signals on a crowded band.



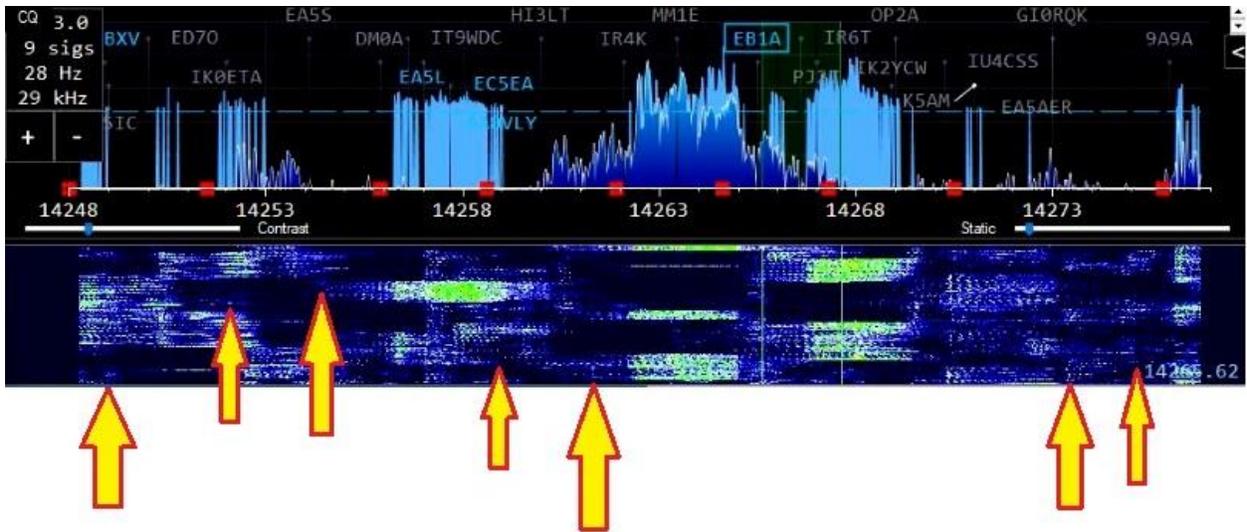
Before setting up my station to use a spectrum display, I looked at many images. Many had a light blue background showing in the waterfall display area like this image does. That choice results from a contrast preference and helps you find weaker signals. The problem with that is on a crowded band the entire screen is one giant signal trace.



Above is how my windows were positioned. As I turned the VFO I would constantly scan the spectrum display for new stations, the band map to more clearly see when I approach an already spotted station (I often found what I thought to be a new one was instead an already spotted station that had moved a bit to reduce QRM), and the entry window. If a station was spotted it would appear in the entry window as I tuned by. Sometimes I found the spotted station had moved on and a new station was on the same frequency. I would hear the new call as I tuned across the spot, then stop and work them. Or if the frequency showed no spots I could quickly determine the status by entering the call. Instead of a light blue background, I chose to increase the contrast. That caused extremely weak stations that are mostly uncopiable through the QRM to not be visible. After experimenting I was able to find a "sweet spot" that allowed barely discernable blips of weaker signals to pop up amongst the more consistent display of stronger traces. A key to picking out where a weak one was hiding was to look for repetition of apparently random blips on the same frequency at about the same time spacing as would be expected in a contest QSO.



The screen shots above and below illustrate how hidden some of the signals can be. As you look at them you might find yourself thinking “He’s full of crap. There isn’t anything there.” Or possibly “Maybe there is something there, but probably not.” I thought the same at first, but every now and then I’d pan some gold and find a new one hidden in the mess (pun intended.) That happened often enough I’ve added this “trick” to my toolbox.



Upcoming Contests: See WA7BNM webpages

SFOTA Current Leaderboard:

2021 OVERALL STANDINGS

CALL	Contests	CW QSO'S	SSB QSO'S	DIGITAL QSO'S	RTTY QSO'S	TOTAL QSO'S
1) N4IQ	33	3800	380	20	3816	8016
2) WB4HRL	46	2821	873	56	1445	5195
3) K3DNE	14	653	2561	37	824	4075
4) AC4MC	15	1711	1153	4	133	3001
5) WN4AFP	19	1668	466	0	0	2134
6) NU4E	4	1010	220	0	875	2105
7) KG4IGC	6	452	359	0	974	1785
8) K7OM	8	512	80	0	1166	1758
9) N4XL	6	1032	638	0	17	1687
10) N2OG	5	0	791	0	738	1529
11) K4QQG	3	0	849	0	0	849
12) NI7R	2	564	0	0	0	564
13) KS4YX	3	120	14	28	368	530
14) K9JDP	2	0	99	0	74	173
15) NE4EA	1	55	0	0	0	55
16) AF7T	1	4	0	0	0	4

3830 Activity:

Timestamp	Call	Class	Power	Score
ARRLDX CW				
2/21/2021	AC4MC	SOAB	HP	203,679
2/22/2021	AF7T	SOSB/40	LP	48
2/22/2021	K3DNE	SO Unlimited	HP	86,595
2/22/2021	K7OM	SOAB	HP	74,970
2/21/2021	KG4IGC	SO Unlimited	LP	81,204
2/22/2021	N4IQ	SO Unlimited	HP	171,327
2/22/2021	N4XL	SO Unlimited	LP	27,258
2/22/2021	NE4EA	SOAB	LP	4,752
2/21/2021	NI7R	SO Unlimited	HP	165,240
2/22/2021	NU4E	SO Unlimited	HP	55,200
2/22/2021	WB4HRL	SO Unlimited	HP	97,092
ARRLDX SSB				
3/10/2021	AC4MC	SOAB	HP	39,072
3/7/2021	K3DNE	SO Unlimited	HP	451,710
3/8/2021	K4QQG	SO Unlimited	HP	136,620
3/7/2021	K9JDP	SOAB	HP	18,117
3/8/2021	N2OG	SOAB	LP	111,756
3/8/2021	N4XL	SO Unlimited	LP	389,844
3/8/2021	NU4E	SO Unlimited	HP	87,780
3/8/2021	W4EEY	SO Unlimited	HP	62,010
3/8/2021	WB4HRL	SO Unlimited	HP	17,100
3/8/2021	WN4AFP	SO Unlimited	LP	54,696

Timestamp	Call	Class	Power	Score
CQ160 SSB				
2/28/2021	K3DNE	Single Op	HP	17,442
3/2/2021	KG9V	Single Op	HP	4,332
2/28/2021	N4IQ	Single Op Assisted	HP	15,732
2/28/2021	NU4E	Single Op Assisted	HP	40,527
NA Sprint RTTY				
3/14/2021	N4IQ	Single Op	HP	6,179
NAQP RTTY				
2/28/2021	K7OM	Single Op	LP	6,240
2/28/2021	K9JDP	Single Op	LP	3,108
2/28/2021	KG4IGC	Single Op	LP	23,790
2/28/2021	N4IQ	Single Op	LP	55,833
3/1/2021	WB4HRL	Single Op	LP	7,540
NCQP				
3/1/2021	AC4MC	SO Mixed	HP	1,581
3/1/2021	K3DNE	SO Mixed	HP	518
2/28/2021	K4QQG	SO SSB	HP	5,120
3/1/2021	WN4AFP	SO CW	LP	6,141
RTTY WPX				
2/14/2021	K3DNE	SOAB TB-Wires	HP	348,534
2/14/2021	KG4IGC	SOSB/40	LP	304,920
2/15/2021	KS4YX	SOAB	LP	35,451
2/14/2021	N2OG	SOAB TB-Wires	LP	433,710
2/14/2021	N4IQ	SOAB	HP	1,492,656
2/15/2021	N4XL	SOAB	LP	493
2/15/2021	NU4E	SOSB/40 TB-Wires	HP	1,339,072
2/15/2021	WB4HRL	SOAB	HP	206,540
SCQP				
3/1/2021	AC4MC	Single Op FixedMixed	HP	339,644
2/28/2021	K3DNE	Single Op FixedSSB	HP	247,920
2/28/2021	K4QQG	Single Op FixedSSB	HP	112,320
2/28/2021	NU4E	Single Op FixedSSB	HP	15,836
3/1/2021	WB4HRL	Single Op FixedSSB	HP	77,622
3/3/2021	WW4SF(WN4AFP,N4XL,N2OG)	Single Op FixedMixed	LP	717,420