



TALES FROM THE SWAMP

June 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

From the Reflector:

- Scott, N2OG, is actively working to speak CW. He started a discussion about how people use their paddles.
- Despite marginal conditions, Ted, K7OM, and Bill, N4IQ, enjoyed the King of Spain EA DX CW Contest.
- Dave, WN4AFP, reminded us that DX is picking up with the increased number of sunspots by working AH6AA and 3D2AG a few days before the CQ WPX CW contest. Propagation during most of the WPX was very good.
- It was pointed out that several club members did very well in the nationwide standings for the ARRL 10 meter contest.
- Dave, WN4AFP, lost his contesting partner and friend, Snowflake. Although not reported on the reflector, Kevan, N4XL, also lost a friend a few days later. He had to put down one of their cats, Happy, due do heart trouble.
- Scott, N2OG, announced he is planning to attend Dayton Hamvention next year.
- Scott, N2OG, is seeking help attaching an AGC circuit to his Ubitx radio.
- Congratulations, John! K4QQG upgraded to Extra. Watch out Leaderboard!
- Ed, K3DNE, forwarded an email that the 13 Colonies event is looking for operators.

Contest Tips:

K2YWE Contesting Best Practices	
Best Practice	Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try moving frequency a bit if you don't seem to be heard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often receiver bandwidths in a crowded band are set very narrow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send only the missing or wrong part when correcting your call or exchange (the FILL). • For example, the response to K3? would be "ABC" (several times if necessary) not "K3ABC" since the K3 wasn't in question. • Similarly in SS if the query is for your Check, don't send the entire exchange over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time you spend sending known information is wasted. • You may squander a clear interval or QSB peak on resending known information. • The time spent sending known information may be a missed opportunity for the Fill to be heard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If another station calls CQ on your freq and fails to respond to your QRL-QSY message, carry on for a while to see if he leaves. But, don't do this for very long. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even though he is not hearing you, if you are being heard by others he may not get many responses and might give up after a few minutes. • No one likes to waste time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable call sign correction in your software. This will send the corrected call as part of your goodbye message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stations want assurance that you have logged them correctly. This will keep them from asking QSL? and possibly save your from a mistake.

K1AR Contest Tips

29 We say it every year. It's late May and there's over five months before the CQ WW SSB Contest. The next thing you know, it's October 15th and your 3-el 40 Meter beam is still resting on saw horses. Be up to the challenge. Make this the summer that you get an early start on your outside antenna projects!

51 Preventative maintenance is not in the vocabulary of most hams, but it is a critical success factor to contesters. Our sport doesn't allow the clock to stand waiting during a contest while we solder a gamma match connection that really needed attention during the summer. Don't waste an opportunity to solve problems before they happen. With summer temperatures at their peak, take the initiative to put that climbing belt on and ensure your scores are maximized this fall!

53 This month I offer more of a safety tip than operating advice for contesters, but take a minute to read on. Contest season creates situations that make contesters do crazy things. I've spent more time on icy towers or climbing in treacherous winds than I'd care to recall. Do yourself a favor and remember that a key to doing well at contesting is to stay safe and alive. Be enthusiast, but also be smart this contest season. We'd like to work you next year, too!

Article:

Excerpt taken on 6/11/2021 from Greg Ordy, W8WWW, web page called – Opinions on Low-Band Operation.

<http://www.seed-solutions.com/gregordy/Amateur%20Radio/Experimentation/LowBand.htm>

(Editor comment: Although this subject comes up fairly often, Greg's last sentence in the article struck a such a strong chord with me I decided to share his viewpoint with you. Kevan, N4XL)

Does a dB Matter?

One of the questions that I believe all amateur radio operators must answer for themselves is: *does a dB matter?* The dB (decibel) is an interesting word in that it has two primary definitions. One is a mathematical definition, and the other is a subjective definition. The subjective definition is that one decibel is a *just noticeable difference* between two signal levels. In terms of power, the mathematical definition says that you have a one dB reduction in power when you reduce a given power level from 100 percent down to approximately 79.3 percent. To be very practical about it, if I had a 100 watt transmitter, and started to reduce the power while transmitting, I should have to get down to 79 watts before a listener believes that that have heard a difference in signal strength.

As we go about building our stations, there are many places where we make decisions that will influence the strength of our signal. Obviously the power output of the transmitter defines an available power level. On the way to the antenna, we go through some sort of transmission line, which will introduce loss. At the antenna, our choice of antenna begins to matter. What type is it (dipole, Yagi, vertical, etc.)? How high is it? What objects are nearby? What is our local terrain? Are we behind a mountain? What are the characteristics of the soil in our area?

Usually, we can reduce loss (or increase gain) at any step in the process by spending more time and/or money. For example, we could spend more money on a lower loss transmission line, and perhaps save that one dB. Does it matter?

If we operate on 40 meters with some regional friends, and all signals are 10 dB over S9 with a background noise level of S3, we appear to have many more dB than we need, if the goal is to stay above the noise level. How many more contacts are we going to make if we increase our strength by exactly one dB? How many less will we make if our signal is reduced by one dB?

I think it is entirely possible to construct an argument that says that one dB does not matter. If you can save some money on transmission line, and only lose one additional dB, perhaps that's a sensible trade-off. If you don't want to take the time to tune up your transmitter, and you are putting out only 80 watts, not 100 watts, perhaps that doesn't really matter. If it would take another hour of standing in the rain to get the end of the dipole up another 20 feet in the air, and if that would only make a one dB difference in the signal level, perhaps you should just go inside and get out of the rain. After all, one dB is, by definition, the *just noticeable difference*.

I believe that if all that was involved was a single dB, one absolute dB, my personal answer would be that a dB doesn't matter. I find, however, that this question is more about my attitude and philosophy towards paying attention to details. When put in those terms, a dB does matter. If one is not careful, one dB can lead to two. And two can lead to three. And at three dB, we have thrown away half of our

transmitter power, or half of our received signal. Now, that seems just wasteful to me, even if I'm already 20 dB over the noise level.

So, my own personal answer to the question: *does a dB matter?*, is: *yes, it does*. What I really am trying to say is that I want to be aware of the detailed operation of my station, and I will spend time, effort, and money, to reduce loss and increase gain. Sooner or later, a set of small improvements can and do make a difference.

If I look out at my buried transmission line going to my tower, and figure that it would take several afternoons of work, and \$150 (USD) to replace it with a cable that would have 1 dB less loss on 10 meters, I might decide to just skip it, after all, it's just one dB. But if next year I would increase the height of my tower, I could pick up a second dB (in certain circumstances). Maybe in the third year, I could replace the antenna with one with just one more dB of gain. Taken one at a time, all of these changes are just one dB, and maybe one dB just doesn't matter. But the combined result is significant. I will be able to make more contacts, work more DX, dig out more weak signals, and enjoy all that goes with a more capable station. It may take years to get enough time and money to make all of the changes, but it places the emphasis on the journey, not the destination.

Member Input:

(Items provided to the Editor for newsletter publication)

Scott, N2OG

The YXL and I are packing my radios and we are headed to Colorado for two months. And the third month hitting National Parks such as Yellowstone, Glacier, Tetons and Rocky Mountain NPs.

I will be active with the POTA group and hopefully some SOTA as well. SOTA depends on getting a Yaesu 891 which I am looking for. None are available new at the moment. And of course contesting if time permits. I will be challenged to get a good antenna in Colorado and on the road but looking forward to learning more about antennas. We will be home by October 4th.

I had a contact I would like to share with the group. Nothing new, but I practice and use this a lot in contests. When answering a CQ in a pile up, I always mix up my timing of the call and speed at which I say my letters. Last night I got picked out of a good size pile up and got a 4/4 signal report. I know it was by my listening to who he was picking out that got me noticed.

Kevan, N4XL

Dozens of Amateur Radio operators have had an influence on developing my Ham career by kindly sharing their knowledge and experience. Some have done their Elmering directly, but most have no idea how much their internet postings, informative web pages, YouTube and Contest University videos, and books have helped me. Several years back I began a conscious effort to "give back" to the Ham community by giving club presentations. Lately that has evolved into Zoom presentations that have been viewed by hundreds of people around the world.

My relative lack of technical expertise has resulted in the criticism that my talks have been too simplistic. That hasn't discouraged me because that is true – for them. Those that have said so are at the top of our hobby and are looking to squeeze the last few drops from the orange. My target audience is primarily Hams, newly licensed or old curmudgeons, who do not have piles of spare dollars to put into radio.

The point is there are thousands of hams that are hungry to hear about practical and effective tips that can help them. Not to pick on anyone, but although talks about how to get 1.4 more dB from an antenna by using analysis software or on how much better a dipole works at 120 ft than it does at 70 ft have their place, such presentations do not really help the average ham. Most Hams will never build our own Yagi's or have an opportunity to hang a wire that high in the air. They just want to do better with what they have and develop a deeper understanding of our hobby than what they picked up while studying for their license.

Many of you reading this are very good at something Ham radio related. Do like I have done. Give some of your knowledge back to our community. Help people become better hams and contesters. Write an article for the newsletter. Prepare and give a club presentation. Take a new ham under your wing or encourage an old one to discover there is more to contesting than saying "59 SC". Not only is it very satisfying, but it will also help keep your mind active. I guarantee you will learn something new during the process that will help your own self out too.

Observations by the Editor:

- Propagation prediction has been an almost mystical art. The best practitioners often benefit from their knowledge by adding many hard to get multipliers to their contest score or catching that DX band opening many others missed. Jose Nunes, CT1BOH, has discovered a real time method for identifying band openings using FT8 spots and near real time ionosode data available on the internet. It is cutting edge technology and likely to be a game changer just as the proliferation of spotting networks like the RBN and VE7CC have been. He presented "There is nothing magic about propagation. In search of MUF isolines" to the 2021 Contest University. Video is available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-esob7BPtc> starting at minute 5 hrs 39 minutes. It so impressed the CTU organizers they have invited him to give a more in depth talk to next year's Propagation Summit.
- If you are thinking of SO2R or just want to understand more about the mechanisms of how two radios close together cause interference and how to combat it (as in a local ham or Field Day operation), then check out W2VJN's book "Managing Interstation Interference". It has been made free via PDF download at http://www.vibroplex.com/techdocs/INRAD/MII_W2VJN.pdf

- If you have a microHAM Mk2R+ from around the 2012 time frame, please be aware you may have a potential issue with the optocouplers causing loss of communications. See my posting to the CQ-Contest reflector for details. I do not know if the issue affects other microHAM products or not. <http://lists.contesting.com/pipermail/cq-contest/2021-June/126824.html>
- A recent QSO Today podcast featured Tree, N6TR. Besides being a great contester, he wrote the logging Program TR Log for DOS. He keeps a DOS capable computer in his shack and rather than migrate to a Windows based logger he still uses TR Log for contesting. Many Hams loved his creation and hated Microsoft when changes to Windows made it non-functional. Tree mentioned he is working with some people, and it is possible TR Log may be reworked later this year and become Windows compatible.
- Randy Farmer, W8FN, uses tabbed tie wraps to identify cabling throughout his station. He prefers tabs on the outside of the tie wrap catch hole. He also advises avoiding Sharpie markers due to fading, instead recommending label maker printed labels. He is meticulous about documenting his station with drawings and uses the same nomenclature on the labels as he puts on the drawings. That greatly aids in correctly identifying station wiring amongst the rat's nest many of us have behind our operating desks, on grounding panels, and on our antenna feedlines. Various colors are available, but he provided this link for standard white wraps:
https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004FUWWF2?psc=1&ref=ppx_pop_dt_b_product_details

N1MM+ Tips:

Setting up a User Defined Contest (UDC)

- Many less popular contests or events are not directly supported in N1MM. However, users can create their own overlay file for the N1MM database. The 13 Colonies special event is an example.
- Setup instructions and many already created UDC's are available on the N1MM website at <https://n1mmwp.hamdocs.com/manual-supported/contests-setup/setup-udc-contests/>
- UDC's are downloaded as Zip files and should be extracted to the \Documents\N1MM Logger+\UserDefinedContests directory
- The downloaded UDC files also have instructions such as this:
Files to be used should be copied/extracted to
....Users\username\My Documents\N1MM Logger+\

Sec(tion) files to....\SupportFiles
UDC files to....\UserDefinedContests
Call History files to....\CallHistoryFiles

If SECTION file required,
When setting up Click on the 'Import Section List' Button (lower right, if no button, check the Section file is in the correct folder)

On the Associated Files tab, set Call History File to; 13 COLONIES_Call_Hist.txt
Don't forget to enter YOUR Sent Exchange info

- N1MM must be restarted after installation.

Function Keys

Many people think there are only 12 Function Key Messages (FKM) available for each operating type of Run or S&P. Actually, all 24 FKM's are accessible at any time. Using the control key combination of CTRL+Fx will use the FKM for Fx used by the opposite operating type. The "x" in Fx should be replaced by the number for whatever Function Key you are trying to access. Some people fill F1 through F6 of both operating types with the normally used messages for whichever type, and fill F7 through F12 of the S&P type with other messages they might want to use when running. That gives them a total of 18 easily accessible FKM's when running.

Other methods for even more programmable keys are available. Programmable or gaming keyboards have extra buttons that can easily be used. The free program AutoHotkey allows for remapping any key of a standard keyboard to perform macro operations. Interface boxes like the microHAM devices have internally stored message slots that can be filled. And many radios, such as the TS590, has CW and Voice message storage that can be accessed through N1MM+.

The Help Menu

Clicking on the Help menu in the Entry Window brings up some helpful things (pun intended!)

- Key Assignments: A shortcut to the N1MM+ manual section about shortcut keys
- N1MM Logger manual (User installed *pdf required)
- Contest Rules for this Contest: Opens contest website
- WA7BNM Contest Calendar
- Bug Report Form
- Feature Request Form
- Open Explorer on User Files Directory: Quick way to get to your N1MM User files
- Report Score to 3830

Alternative to CLEARIT Macro

Using RIT while running is very helpful, but on many rigs the RIT knob is small and it takes a bit more of your attention to find than the Big Knob does. Some run operators like to operate split while running and use the big and easy to find main VFO knob to tune in calling stations. Since they don't use RIT the CLEARIT macro has no effect. However, under the Config menu is the option to "Reset RX Freq to TX when QSO is Logged (Run & Split)" for those situations.

I have used that option but prefer another method to tune RIT that does not involve reaching over to the rig for either the big or little knobs. When running and RIT is activated you can use the keyboard up/down arrow keys to adjust RIT. One reason for my choice is how you handle calls that you do not log. Say someone calls and you copy part of the call sign. You adjust the big VFO trying to copy them, but QSB or QRM prevents completion of the QSO. Since you did not log the contact, the frequency is not reset using the option above and you must both clear the

partial call sign and reach over to reset the VFO knob. However, with CLEARIT in the F12 WIPE Function Key slot you both clear the Entry Window and reset the RIT with the push of a single key and your hands are still on the keyboard ready for the next stations call.

Upcoming Contests: See the WA7BNM webpages

SFOTA Current Leaderboard:

Jun-13-2021						
Current Leaderboard						
2021 OVERALL STANDINGS						
CALL	Contests	CW QSO'S	SSB QSO'S	DIGITAL QSO'S	RTTY QSO'S	TOTAL QSO'S
1) N4IQ	64	7593	776	254	3984	12607
2) WB4HRL	91	5122	1082	56	1518	7778
3) K3DNE	34	1012	4454	51	824	6341
4) WN4AFP	44	4072	1132	0	0	5204
5) AC4MC	23	2040	1319	4	133	3496
6) N4XL	9	2059	1089	0	17	3165
7) KG4IGC	14	632	974	0	1374	2980
8) K7OM	17	1124	80	0	1656	2860
9) NU4E	4	1010	220	0	875	2105
10) N2OG	8	108	896	34	738	1776
11) K4QQG	24	0	1512	0	0	1512
12) NI7R	2	564	0	0	0	564
13) KS4YX	3	120	14	28	368	530
14) K9JDP	3	0	208	0	74	282
15) NE4EA	1	55	0	0	0	55
16) AF7T	1	4	0	0	0	4

3830 Activity:

	Call	Class	Power	Score
EU PSK				
5/25/2021	N4IQ	SOAB-12	HP	1,241
Hamvention				
5/22/2021	K4QQG	Single Op	LP	10
King of Spain CW				
5/17/2021	K7OM	SOAB	HP	4,680
5/16/2021	N4IQ	SOAB	HP	16,849

	Call	Class	Power	Score
KyQP				
6/6/2021	AC4MC	SO Fixed	HP	1,850
6/5/2021	K4QQG	SO Fixed	LP	121
6/8/2021	WN4AFP	SO Fixed	LP	4,640
WPX CW				
5/30/2021	K3DNE	SOSB20 TB-Wires	HP	118,326
5/31/2021	K7OM	SOAB	HP	214,871
5/31/2021	KG4IGC	SOAB TB-Wires	LP	408,948
5/31/2021	N4IQ	SOAB TB-Wires	HP	1,896,496
5/31/2021	N4XL	SOAB	LP	1,413,908
5/31/2021	NU4E	SOAB	HP	278,317
6/2/2021	WB4HRL	SOAB	HP	10,935
5/31/2021	WN4AFP	SOSB40 TB-Wires	LP	863,040

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73 es QRT de N4XL