TALES FROM THE SWAMP

January 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

Annual Meeting:

Our annual meeting will be held on Thursday, January 21st at 7:30pm via Zoom. I will be sending an agenda and a copy of last year's meeting minutes a week or less prior to the meeting. WN4AFP and or I (*K3DNE*) will send instructions on how to access and log in to the Zoom meeting.

The meeting will include our usual business meeting, several brief club/contest/technical topic presentations, and the opportunity for each member to give a short (2-3 minutes max) review of what's going on with their stations, recent contests, any future plans, etc.

Welcome Corner

We've two new members this month.

First, let's welcome Tom, WA2BCK. It seems the PVRC has become too big for its britches and talent is moving south. The SFCG is glad to have them! Tom's QRZ page says he's been QRV since 1965 when he received WN2UNX. He's been a contester and DXer since high school in the Buffalo, New York area. In 1979 we won the USA SOAB category in the WPX CW while operating from N4RR. Then, like some do, he took a 26 year hiatus from radio. It's hard to believe he thought starting his own Human

Resources company was more important than Ham Radio, but he finally came back to his senses in 2006.

Tom and his XYL now live in Hilton Head, SC. Unfortunately, he had to give up the towers he had while living in Virginia, but he is able to remotely operate from a Rochester, New York station using a K3S. Tom has also activated Hilton Head Island for IOTA events.

Again, Welcome Tom!

Next up is John, K4QQG, also in Hilton Head, SC. He is relatively new to the bands having been first licensed in December 2019. According to QRZ and 3830, John uses an IC7300 to feed his OCF dipole at 60 feet (*Editor's note: good radio John*). He has also recently purchased a SPE 1,500 watt amplifier and has used it with good results in 2020 during the CQWW, Sweepstakes, RAC Winter, and ARRL 10 meter contests. We'll likely be hearing a lot from John as time goes on.

From the Reflector:

- Scott has a new call sign! N2OG.
- Scott, N2OG, is going to hang antennas and asked who else wanted an air launcher. He's building his and a couple more for some group members. Bill, N4IQ, mentioned a slightly different trigger mechanism would improve its performance. Scott agreed and his plans were modified.
- Dave, WN4AFP, shared some information about the State QP Challenge certificates. Great job on that program Dave.

- Scott, N2OG, has been very active on the reflector. He sought advice on antenna tuners. Dave, NJ4F, suggested a differential-T type. Those are well thought of. Others suggested autotuners.
- Frank, KG4IGC, has made a return to the airwaves for several contests recently. We've missed you and glad you're back on the air. Thanks also for maintaining the SFCG website.
- Bill, N4IQ, noted Jeff, KU8E, of the SECC managed to get an excellent score during the Stew Perry Top Band Challenge. Some ideas of how he and John, K4BAI, might be doing it was kicked around.
- Ed, K3DNE, debuted in the RTTY game by using AFSK with his FT1000MP MkV. He plans on transitioning to FSK.
- Several Foxes had fun in the RTTY Roundup and OK RTTY contests.
- Scott's, N2OG, antenna work is paying off. He managed to snag JA on 14 MHz.
- Dave, WN4AFP, found a vintage Radio Shack computer. Created a bit of nostalgia.
- Speaking of nostalgia, Dave, NJ4F, is getting into RTTY the old fashioned way with a Model 28 RO manual teletype unit. He's looking for a ST-6 demodulator. Bill, N4IQ, mentioned his military career started by being a teletype repair technician.
- NAQP CW activity was high.

Contest Tips:

K1AR Contest Tips

34 Log checkers will usually tell you that incorrectly copied call signs is the most common mistake in contest logs. When CQing and running other stations, always repeat the call sign of the other station you are working. Even though you may be absolutely certain that you copied the call sign correctly, a repeat of the call will allow the other station to correct any possible mistakes. It's worth the time!

36 What happens when you drink coffee? You have a hard time sleeping, right? Have you ever wondered why you have trouble getting a "quality" nap the afternoon before a 48 hour contest? For me it's that morning coffee. After I stopped the Friday habit, I was able to physically prepare for the contest in a much improved way. Save the coffee for 0000Z that evening - - you'll be amazed at the results!

54 Do you suffer from a perpetual lack of organization? If so, you're like most of us. A tip learned from one of my contesting mentors, Jim Lawson, W2PV, is to document your station. Do you know what size wrenches you need when you go up the tower next time? What are the resistance readings of your rotator between pins? How is that 4 over 4 relay box constructed? The list goes on, yet a little attention to administrivia will go a long way to make you a better contester (tnx W1WEF and YCCC Scuttlebutt).

Pileup Control and the S&P Contester *by N4XL*

It was hard to bust a pileup when I first started contesting. My station then did not have the resources I now enjoy which made it even harder. Yet after studying how Running stations managed pileups things slowly began to change. Breaking through has become easier and I'm no longer surprised when my Little Pistol 100-watt station beats an operator pushing a KW into a 4 ele monobander a wavelength up in the air. Good ops know that experience can help overcome the inadequacies of a mediocre station. N6RO phrased it well in his National Contest Journal profile article, "The best of the best gained their winning edge practicing the basics over and over in numerous forgettable events, often using inadequate radios and second-rate antennas. Discovering how to overcome such obstacles are lessons never forgotten." I'm not the "best of the best", but I've found his message to be right on the money.

Some may find this simile kind of odd, but I now think of a pileup as a kind of living beast lunging back and forth at the swarm of prey before it. The Runner directs the beasts head as it tries to single out one signal from the herd. The difference from real life being the pileup prey wants to be noticed and snapped up. Those of you who have studied boxing or enjoy any of the other marital art fighting styles understand it pays to watch how your opponent moves so you can anticipate what they will do. Running radio operators have operating styles and "tricks" they like to use too. With a bit of study, you begin to understand why the beasts head moves in a certain direction. It is at that point in your growth as an S&P operator you can begin to anticipate what is about to happen and put yourself in a position to be snapped up and break the pileup.

I seek posts from successful operators talking about their experiences. In my early years I would sacrifice contest rate, and thus score, to stop and listen to how different operators ran pileups. Both good and not so skilled runners offered learning opportunities that often proved points made on the reflectors Sometimes I would stay in a hard to bust pileup far longer than I should have to try different techniques. That "wasted" contest time paid off by contributing to the higher scores I post today. Listening how others run pileups also gave me increased confidence to try running myself.

Here is a post from Dick Norton, N6AA, to the CQ-Contest reflector on July 20, 1998 concerning pileup management. It barely scratches the surface of what you might find online to help you bust a pileup. It only indirectly applies to what I talked about above, but I include it here because it was readily available on my hard drive and I wanted to give people an example of how conversations about operating techniques are available to those who take the time to delve deep into the CQ-Contest Archives. It is filled with useful information. As my skills grow, I find repeated archive visits bring new things to light. You can find the archives at http://lists.contesting.com/pipermail/cq-contest/

In closing, I'll again say the best way to learn how to bust pileups is to listen to them on the air, see what others are doing to get through, then try their "tricks" yourself until you develop an instinct of what tool should be used when. Discussions like the one below allows you, the S&P op trying to learn why the Running Beast does what it does and to better understand the problems faced by a running station so you can appreciate better what they are doing and why they are doing it.

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Subject: [CQ-Contest] Don't Try This At Home
From: mailto:ae327%40lafn.org (Richard Norton)
Date: Mon Jul 20 12:19:55 1998

Periodically this reflector is subjected to well-intentioned advice about CQ-ing stations signing their callsigns after every QSO.

Managing a pile-up by judicious callsign rationing is an advanced operating technique that, if executed properly, can squeeze a few extra contacts out of an operating period. Since small differences in operating skill rarely affect contest outcomes, many contests can be won without ever mastering such skills. In fact, most entrants are rarely in situations where such action even matters.

However, there are advantages to not signing after every QSO.

1) If you can make another contact without signing your call, the time you would have used to sign the call can simply be used to make additional contacts.

2) By keeping some potential callers off balance until they know who you are, you may be able to reduce the size of an excessively large pile-up to a size where you can copy callsigns.

3) There are a number of highly-skilled operators with small signals. If these individuals sense that you will allow their skill to get them through, ahead of competitors with bigger signals, they will stick around, trying to work you. If they sense that you are a plain-vanilla operator, signing your call every time and then working the loudest station, they will go away since they know how weak they are.

4) If you are a common CQ-ing station, many S&P'ers will call you only once. When two stations reply, and you finish the first contact extremely rapidly, and give the second station the impression that you know he was there, he may call again, even if you completely missed his callsign.

There is a downside, in that you may cause other operators to take actions that may lower your rate. Certain operators may feel that their superior stations and/or favorable locations entitle them to know your callsign where their identification skills and experience are not advanced enough to determine it, or enough about you to know whether to call, without hearing you actually sign it. They may QRM your weak, target stations by sending, "Call?" They may work you without knowing your call, which of course, is usually only bad if they are duplicates.

There is considerable skill involved in maximizing the benefits while minimizing the liabilities incurred.

The callsign-signing decision may change after every contact. Factors that may impact the individual decisions include:
1) Do you already know the callsign of another station in your pile-up?
2) How many people are tuning the band listening, and what percentage of them have already worked you? Have you made 10 or 5000 QSO's on the band?
3) What is your signal like in your target area?
4) Is your call EE5E or KH5K/JQ9YXJ/M?
5) Do you have an overall picture of what is going on in your pile-up?
   5a) Can you say something like, "There are now 5 or 6 calling, and 3 or so have been there for some time. There have been no new additions to the pile-up during the last few contacts?"
   5b) Or, can you say, "One weak guy, with a long call, has been here for a while. He sends fast and always zero beats the last station. Maybe I can sneak him through."
   5c) Or, are you simply struggling to copy callsigns, and therefore unaware of your pile-up structure?

Summary:
If you feel that the callsign should be signed after every contact, this strongly indicates that your operating skills have developed to the stage where you should indeed sign your call after every contact.

However, when you give unconditioned advice to others suggesting that they absolutely always do the same, note that you are primarily broadcasting your skill level rather than giving good counsel.

73,
Dick Norton, N6AA N6AA@CQWW.COM

Observations by the Editor:

- Don't forget to enter the number of QSO's from a contest into the Leaderboard. You have a week after the contest to do that.
- Solar Cycle 25's 11-year timer has begun. Don't forget the propagation peak happens in the first two or three years or cycle. That means things will ramp up relatively quick on the high bands of 10 thru 20 meters. Just as quickly low band propagation on 40, 80, and 160 will drop off. If you've been thinking of getting 5 band DXCC or WAS and you need contacts on the low bands then for many of us old timers now is our best shot at the ones we still need. Don't wait to improve your low band antennas.
- I've been giving presentations to my local and regional radio clubs for over 15 years. I also seek out presentations by others on topics that interest me on YouTube, Zoom, or actual club visits. Most people seem to appreciate talks, but for some reason rarely comment on their quality. Thankfully, some give feedback and help me improve. After listening to criticisms from the peanut gallery of both my own and that of other presenters, I realized feedback could be lumped into two broad categories: "I loved it and learned a lot.", or "I hated it because it was too simplistic, and I didn't learn anything." I generally tried to include information for everyone, beginner to advanced. That wider technical range gives everyone at least one new tidbit to chew on. That approach has well received.

  The "Movers and Shakers" of a club are usually the most knowledgeable and experienced hams in the group. They are often vocal and actively lead, or push, the group in the direction they want it to go. Newbies are often reluctant to speak up and show everyone just how unsure of themselves they are. We've all heard that contesters are an old and dying breed. To survive we will need to attract new blood to the sport. Starting a year ago I changed my approach and am now targeting the less experienced contesting Ham. I'm presenting basic principles instead of talking about how you might manage to squeeze out an extra 0.5 dB of gain by using a hybrid ground system for your four square or showing graphically how much better W4XYZ's dipole at 140 ft is over the one he/she has at 60 ft. Most newer hams, be they contesters or not, could care less about complex technical type things because they don't have the resources to capitalize on them or the experience to appreciate what was done. They just trying to learn the basics and are often turned off by minutia. Of course, as my talks have become more basic the experienced influential people have become more critical. I've received direct criticism and read comments from attendees on the SFCG, DDCC,

and DFW Contest Group reflectors. That type of criticism wasn't unexpected, but it is slightly disappointing.

However, offsetting those comments are numerous unsolicited requests to present to clubs in SC, GA, ID, and even to a group in England. I've also received several private emails from both newer and longtime hams expressing their gratitude for the lower-level talks with many saying they now understand concepts that have been somewhat murky. Some even thank me for being so approachable and ask my opinion on things they want to try. Unfortunately, since I'm not a technical expert I often have to say I've no idea but it sounds like a fun thing to experiment with.

There are two important "Observation by the Editor" take away points from that tale.

Experienced people should talk about things that seem obvious because some readers have never heard the basics before. If we want new blood, we need to help Elmer new Hams into contesting and with shack technical details. Examples of simple but unknown things. One local area Extra class licensee had no clue what was needed to build a dipole. No one had ever shown him how. Another local ham commented he was going to buy a new headset because his wouldn't work with his computer and asked what I used. While talking I discovered he did not know about electret and condenser elements. That prompted writing a presentation on microphones. During the presentation I found several others shared his thought that all microphones are created equal and was asked to give the talk to a different club too. Unfortunately, that lack of experience is common.

The second take away is people should speak up and ask about whatever it is they don't understand and want to learn more about. Who among us knows everything? Seems to me if that were the case there would be no need to reeducate the workforce due to mass layoffs. There are undoubtedly many other people out there that have the same questions you do. Speak up. Ask how things work. You will probably take some crap now and then from mean spirited people who want to poke fun at you, but there are plenty of us old timers who are willing to help. Speak up and learn more about our shared hobby.

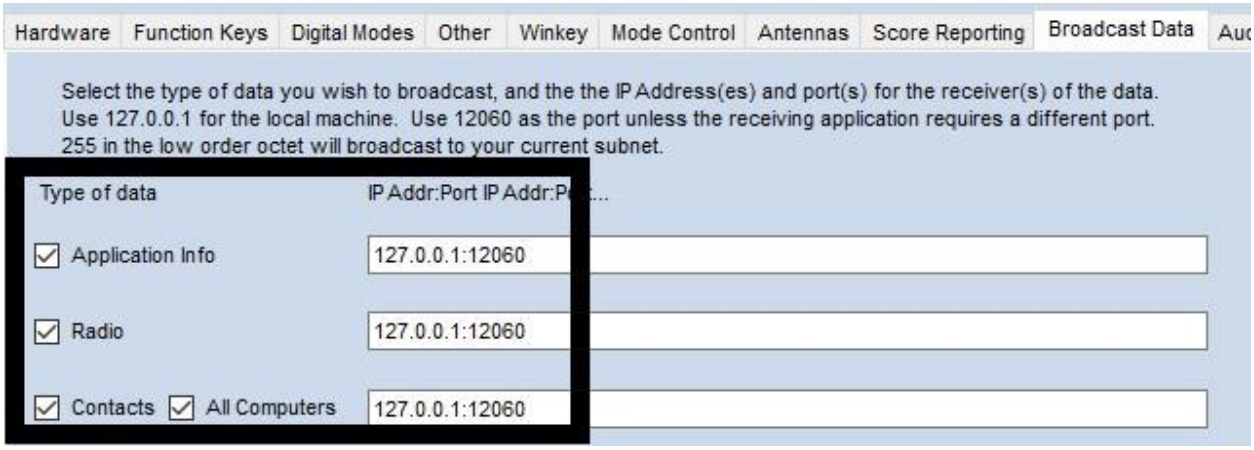
N1MM+ Tips:

It was recently asked on the reflector what general logging programs are being used by our SFCG members. Some of us, including your Editor, are using Log4OM. My HF activity is almost exclusively contest related and I hadn't looked at Log4OM's capabilities in years. It was only used now and then as, well, a general logging program. I had never delved deep into its features. The reflector query led me to take a closer look at the program. Turns out there is a completely revamped Version 2 which does a couple things that might supplement contest operations even though N1MM is primarily used. Probably works with other contest loggers too, but I'll stick with N1MM as that is what I know.

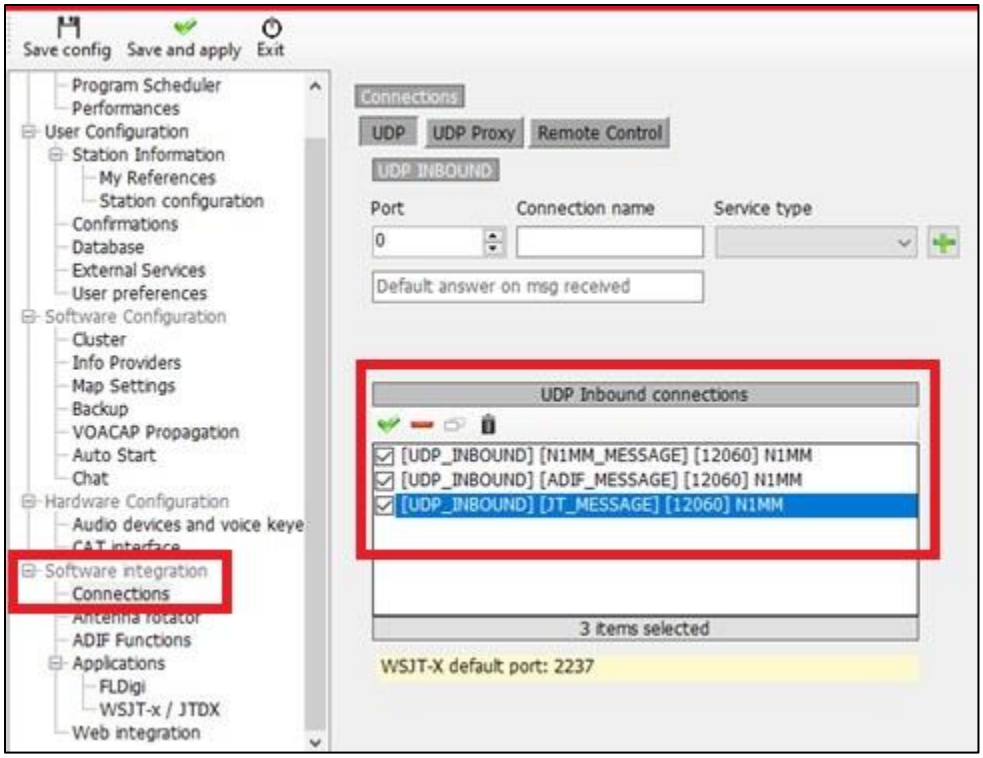
Many of us like to have all our qso's in a single searchable database. N1MM splits the database into contests making it difficult to see how many times I've worked K3DNE but dumping all the contests into Log4OM makes that search easy. It happens automatically when I enter Ed's call. Log4OM can also automatically update LOTW, ClubLog, and others for you. It appears you can even have Log4OM automatically update your webpage or QTH.com site with a near real time copy of your log.

Previously, I had been exporting my contest logs into an ADIF file and then uploading them into Log4OM and LOTW. That worked, but there is an easier way to get N1MM Q's into Log4OM. With both programs open you tell Log4OM to read UDP packet broadcasts from N1MM. It took me less than five minutes to set that up. Now, every q I enter into the N1MM entry window automatically appears in my Log4OM general log – and contest contacts automatically flow to LOTW and ClubLog, and would to my website too if wanted.

Log4OM version 2.11.0.0 came out a couple days ago. The new user manual describes how to integrate the two programs. Essentially, you tell Log4OM to not poll your radio. This is done on the Program Configuration CAT interface tab. Then go into N1MM's Configurer and have it begin broadcasting qso data. See below. Those of you using a program that is supported with OmniRig might be able to leave rig polling enabled, but OmniRig apparently doesn't work with N1MM. But that's another story.

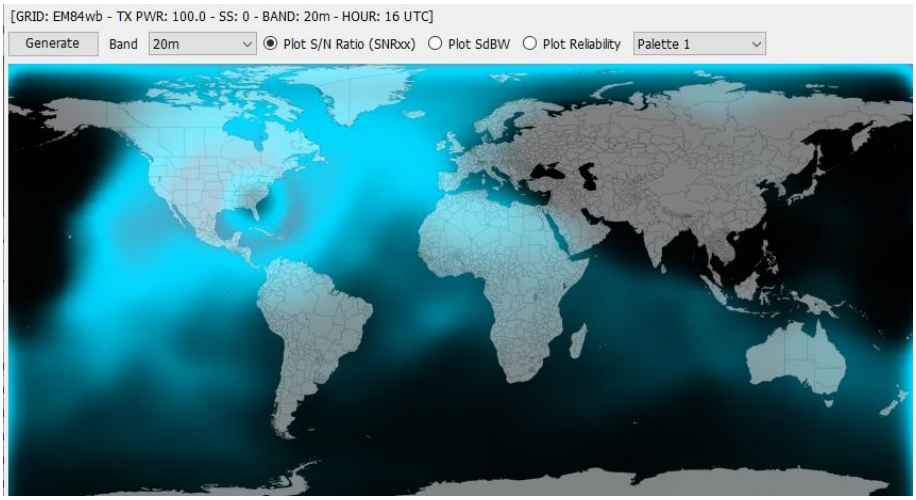


Next, go to the Log4OM Connections tab (see below) and tell it to monitor the N1MM broadcasts. Then close and restart both programs.



I haven't used it in a contest yet but did run a quick test by logging a few N1MM q's. They appeared in Log4OM within a couple seconds of logging the q in N1MM. You can also manually delete a q sent by N1MM to Log4OM if needed. Such a case might happen if you had to correct a contest q.

A second feature of Log4OM I have begun to explore is a replacement for IonoProbe. IonoProbe is a propagation prediction program showing a visual display of where band openings should be happening based on current solar conditions and your station's power and antenna options. It was particularly useful to me when operating unassisted, but also helped me find stations that had not yet spotted, such as sometimes happens with long path routes. IonoProbe is no longer as useful as it once was because our government has stopped producing real time solar data in the digital format used to generate IonoProbe maps. You now must manually enter solar activity every hour to keep the map current. However, Log4OM seems to have possibly filled the gap. Below is a screenshot of where the 20 meter band should be open for me as of the hour I am writing this article. I can verify it is at least somewhat accurate as I was monitoring 20 meter DX while writing this and heard Germany, Scotland, and Malta making active q's to the US. Whereas IonoProbe did an automatic query for solar conditions it is a bit more manual with Log4OM's version. After selecting a band of interest just as was done in IonoProbe you must now also hit the "Generate button". Log4OM then retrieves the solar data for you and produces a map as shown below. Some fine tuning of acceptable signal levels is still needed on my part, but once those have been determined and set, they should remain constant.



I'm looking forward to seeing what else the Log4OM team has come up with in version 2.

Upcoming Contests: See WA7BNM webpages

SFOTA Current Leaderboard:

Jan-14-2021

Current Leaderboard

2021 OVERALL STANDINGS

CALL	Contests	CW QSO'S	SSB QSO'S	DIGITAL QSO'S	RTTY QSO'S	TOTAL QSO'S
1) N4IQ	11	1771	0	0	1475	3246
2) WB4HRL	10	806	0	56	299	1161
3) N4XL	1	774	0	0	0	774
4) K3DNE	2	176	0	0	323	499
5) AC4MC	2	488	0	0	0	488
6) WN4AFP	2	395	0	0	0	395
7) KS4YX	1	0	0	0	368	368
8) K7OM	1	0	0	0	341	341
9) N2OG	1	0	0	0	146	146

2021 INDIVIDUAL MODE STANDINGS

CALL	CW QSO'S
N4IQ	1771
WB4HRL	806
N4XL	774
AC4MC	488
WN4AFP	395
K3DNE	176

CALL	SSB QSO'S

CALL	DIGITAL QSO'S
WB4HRL	56

CALL	RTTY QSO'S
N4IQ	1475
KS4YX	368
K7OM	341
K3DNE	323
WB4HRL	299
N2OG	146

3830 Activity:

Timestamp	Call	Class	Power	Score
NAQP CW				
1/10/2021	AC4MC	Single Op	LP	34,117
1/10/2021	K3DNE	Single Op	LP	15,312
1/10/2021	KG4IGC	Single Op	LP	26,250
1/10/2021	N4IQ	Single Op	LP	133,392
1/10/2021	N4XL	Single Op	LP	130,806
1/10/2021	WB4HRL	Single Op	LP	30,600
1/11/2021	WN4AFP	Single Op	LP	43,032
NCCC RY-Sprint				
12/25/2020	N4IQ	Single Op	LP	184
1/8/2021	N4IQ	Single Op	LP	224
OK RTTY				
12/20/2020	KG4IGC	SOAB	LP	38,528
12/21/2020	N4IQ	SOSB/20	HP	305
12/20/2020	WB4HRL	SOAB	HP	3,553

RAC Winter				
12/20/2020	WB4HRL	M/S	HP	14,552
RTTY Roundup				
1/4/2021	K3DNE	SO(A) RTTY	LP	23,579
1/4/2021	K7OM	SO RTTY	HP	22,440
1/5/2021	KG4IGC	SO(A) RTTY	LP	40,560
1/4/2021	KS4YX	SO RTTY	LP	23,184
1/6/2021	N2OG	SO RTTY	LP	8,322
1/4/2021	N4IQ	SO(A) RTTY	HP	150,520
1/4/2021	WB4HRL	SO(A) Mixed	HP	21,300
TBDC				
12/27/2020	N4IQ	Single Op	HP	1,101

Guest Article:

Maybe next time

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73 es QRT de N4XL