

How do I?

An occasional series

This week: Field Day, contesting and random operating thoughts

After Field Day a group of us from the K3IEC Field Day crew discussed what worked, what didn't work and what we can do to improve. Some of our thoughts may well apply to your radio shack.

1. Know thy radio! Sure, you have a brand new super duper KenIYea1000 with every bell and whistle you could possibly want. But do you really know how to use it? Or every time you want to adjust something you need to get the manual out? Doesn't have to be a new radio, just new to you or maybe an old favorite that doesn't get used much. The point is if you are spending more time looking at the book than operating, maybe you need more practice!

I am lucky. I have a decent radio in the shack and radio I can dedicate to portable use. It is inconvenient to set up the portable radio in the shack, but if I set up on the porch or other location, I can attempt remember the controls and menu options so when I need it, I do not have to keep looking at the book!

2. What should you expect to achieve? If your antenna works best on 80 meters, you may have a less than satisfactory QSO rate (contacts per hour) in the early hours of Field Day, but wait until dark and it could be your time to shine! If you are able to cover multiple bands, either with one or several antennas, you can hopefully make contacts regardless of what band is %open+. Starting on 20 or 40 meters (or even 10 or 15 meters) then gradually moving up to 80 meters may net you more contacts and increase the fun level!

3. On Field Day a %clean sweep+- working every ARRL section - is an awesome accomplishment. But if you cannot sit still for a long time, have family or household responsibilities and know you can operate for only a few hours, you may need to lower your expectations. The point is to have fun, not generate stress!

4. Get on the air! It's almost funny. People spend time studying for the license exam, taking the test and getting licensed, then they do not get on the air. Sure there are lots of things the wonderful world of ham radio has to offer, and I'd freely admit I never intended to buy a radio and get on the air, but it is fun! I have learned a lot, found a relative or two and have made friends in multiple states through the magic of amateur radio. Other people have different interests. See <https://www.radioclub-carc.com/resources/> for more articles on the Many flavors of ham radio operators.

5. Glenn K3SWZ probably does this instinctively. Keep track of what you hear. It's 1800 GMT on Field Day. You hear stations Calling CQ Field Day. LISTEN! Hear the exchange they give; how loud are they? How clear are they? How well can you hear the stations replying? Most portable Field Day stations are running 100 watts. This year the Class D Home stations were the most popular class. Some of them have amplifiers and very

good beam antennas and can get out a powerful signal. If you are hearing them, and cannot really hear other people answering, and most importantly the station calling %GQ Field Day!+ isn't hearing them, they probably will not hear you either. Some call stations like this %alligators+all mouth and no ears! They are really frustrating to work! But with patience it can be done, if not now maybe later. If you are having trouble hearing and have another antenna, try it!

George AF4JH is one of the net controls (NCS) for the Virginia Fone Net (VFN). George lives in Lorton, VA and uses either a Butternut vertical or his Carolina Windom wire antenna depending on conditions. He starts by listening to an offshoot of the net called the %Free Loaders+who start a smaller net 30 minutes to an hour before and %hold down+the net frequency until the net control for the VFN takes over. Gary K4RFD is the typical Free Loader NCS and his QTH is in Florida. If George can hear him well on the Windom, that is what he uses for the VFN. If the Butternut is better he uses it. Sometimes he cannot tell and checks in with Gary on one and switches to the other.

6. Study the station calling CQ. It's Field Day and I hear K3IEC calling CQ. I will not click the push to talk (PTT) button on my headset. I will LISTEN! Before I make any effort to answer the CQ I will attempt to get the call and the contest exchange that station gives out. That way when I do call them, all I have to be sure of is they got my call and my exchange and I get a QSL or 73 or something to acknowledge they got mine. Makes it a lot easier for both. Then once I have that information I LISTEN to the timing. Some stations seem to hear the FIRST reply, some hear the LOUDEST, some hear the LAST, it depends. I try to be where they are listening. If I am too fast, they may have stopped talking but didn't release the PTT switch and they never hear me but hear two or 3 calls after mine. If I wait 2 or 3 seconds I may be lost in the herd, but at 4 seconds I am the only station they hear. Does it always work -- no, but it works a lot of the time. My call, KB3PQT is not a good one for contesting. It is a not only a lot of syllables, but Andy AF3I can say *Alpha Foxtrot 3 India* in the time it takes me to get to *Kilo Bravo 3 Pawpaw* and I still have *Quebec* and *Tango* to go...I used to get very frustrated and thought about changing my call sign when I upgraded to General class license. I planned to change when I got my Extra class license but I did not want a *Quebec* or a *Papa* in the call and the next available AG3 calls were getting awfully close. I asked many folks, including AF4JH and they seemed to think I should keep it. There are not many KB3 calls on the air. Most seem to have left the hobby or changed calls. And in contesting sometimes my KB3 stands out from the chorus of *Kilo*, *November* and *Whiskey* calls replying. I dropped the *watt* from *Kilowatt* as that saves a syllable and many operators seem to hear it as KWB3??? and they know that is wrong. Some operators struggle with the *Papa* and *Quebec*. They seem to hear *Alpha* and *Kilo*. Not sure why but then I encounter them I use *Portugal* and *Queen*, That sometimes works and sometimes I get lectured on the use of proper phonetics. Some days you just cannot win and that operator misses a QSO to log.

In short-PATIENCE!

7. Andy AF3I calls this **BIC**- Butt In Chair. That's right, you cannot become good at something unless you practice. I know... Ham Radio is a hobby. Work and Life come first. For me, %radio season+is November 1 through mid-March. That is when I do most of my operating. But by checking into the Virginia Fone Net 10 or 15 days a month and the Cumberland Amateur Radio Club 2 meter net on Sundays at 1900 local time, on 146.490 MHz FM Simplex, I keep the cobwebs off the radios and out of the brain!

8. This goes with knowing thy radio, but if you use a computer, outboard sound card, etc with your radio, know how it works! Windows 10 updates seems to wreak havoc on USB port settings at times. Keep a list of what works and expect to have to do some corrections after a Windows 10 update.

9. Let the internet be your friend. Check for updates to the radio related programs for your computer. Join the email reflector for ;popular programs such as WSJTX or FLDIGI through groups.io. Your radio may have a specific users group. Not only will you stay informed, you may learn about operating opportunities such as special event stations you may not have known of otherwise.

10. Consider a computer based log program and computer assisted transceiver (CAT) control. Computerized logging (see elsewhere in this series) is the gold standard for testers. CAT control can be tricky to set up, and radios over about 15 years cannot use it, but for newer radios such as the Kenwood 590SG, the Icom 7300 and the Yaesu FTDX-3000, CAT control is easy to set up and use. It is really cool to have the log software track the band and mode as you track up the QSOs and watch the ;points climb on the computer screen!

In short! PRACTICE!

Catch ya on the air!