

*How Do I...?*

**An Occasional Series**



**This week: Operating CW –  
Straight Key Century Club (SKCC)**

CQ SKCC! CQ kindred spirits! The Straight Key Century Club (SKCC) encourages the use of manual telegraph keys by all hams, whether experienced CW operators, rising CW Stars or wannabees. I've been a CW enthusiast since the beginning (1967), and still prefer the Vibroplex bug to make quick CW QSOs in pileups, to savor long CW ragchews, and to check-in with by-now familiar call signs. After discovering the SKCC activity events in 2014, I became SKCC member #11705, and would like to share why checking the SKCC frequencies remains part of my daily CW radio fun!

**\* "YES, CW is for ME!"**

The running theme of these Operating CW articles, this mantra covers the many reasons for my continued, enthusiastic SKCC activity. Oh do I remember anxiously tapping the manual key while checking Morse Code and Q-signal cheat sheets in those first Novice QSOs! Then the speed and head copying picked up and the pencil stayed down. Nowadays, it's fun to patiently work the slowest stations in the SKCC band segments to help erase their jitters! Or, are YOU the one getting your CW up to speed and at QSO comfort level? Rest assured that, on the SKCC frequencies, you can concentrate on your fist and having real conversations. It's that kind of environment.

**\*Why SKCC?**

SKCC is one of several member-based organizations that promotes CW. What drove me to join SKCC, particularly? Every single one of my first QSOs with SKCC members was welcoming. Using the word "fun," all encouraged me to join with the other SKCC kindred spirits. I did, and they were right!

SKCC emphasizes advancing operators' CW proficiency by contacting fellow members individually or by jumping into the regularly scheduled activity events. The club offers incentives for contacting its members, including a permanent indicator of proficiency on your member ID#. SKCC was formed in 2006 and now has 23,000+ CW aficionado members worldwide. I joined in 2014 as #11705, achieved "C"enturion (11705C) status and am now a "T"ribune (11705T) working on "S"enator, all by just having fun contacting members far and wide, friends old and new.

It seems you can always find someone to start a QSO in the SKCC band segment. During poor propagation periods, this is still true. What a thrill, on a "dead band," with 100 watts and a vertical, to follow CQ SKCC with a solid 339 QSO!

### **\* The SKCC Organization**

Membership, currently at 23,000+, is available to licensed hams worldwide, operating manual telegraph keys, at no cost to join. SKCC puts out a digital quarterly newsletter (80+ pages, color photos, great mix of subject matter). The website (see below) provides everything you'll want to know about the organization.

### **\* SKCC Website**

The very robust SKCC website (<http://www.skccgroup.com>) is packed with information - activities, awards, membership and resource materials. But beyond that there are sections for the rising CW stars who want to understand how this mode works, as well as how to use it.

- "Getting Started" addresses SKCC membership and then goes on with "CW Beginner's Corner" and "Morse 'Elmers'" resource sections.

- "Activities" lists the range of on air events, which are technically contests, I guess, though the emphasis is always on making quality QSOs to promote the hobby and have fun.

- "Awards" focus on contacting SKCC members and "advertising" the group to other hams. An incentive to me are the achievement levels (Centurion, Tribune, and Senator) based on contacting SKCC members in certain numbers and at certain levels (C/T/S).

- Other sections focus on "SKCC Community" (links to the group's presence online with a members' sked arranging site plus social media like groups.io, Facebook, Twitter); "Member Services" (including the "Learning Center" and "Files and Downloads" for SKCC items such as SKCC event logger software, and the quarterly newsletter); and Members' Blogs (indexing a handful of personal sites).

### **\*My first SKCC Adventure - The K3Y Annual January Event**

I'd often heard CQ SKCC just above my usual haunts in the General portion of the CW DX areas, but didn't jump in until the January K3Y event (K3Y = KEY get it?). It was confusing, because one after the other, that same call would appear from different US

call areas (ex. K3Y/1, K3Y/6) or even be referenced by a DX station as "the K3Y station." That event got me hooked though, once I realized this annual January SKCC event involves a set schedule of operation from each area and is posted on the SKCC website. In my last serious effort (2018), I nearly got all 19 K3Y stations, except for Asia, Africa & Oceania. Besides simply listening for SKCC stations, maybe one year I will step up to operate a timeslot as K3Y/3!

••• —•— **(SK = End of Conversation)**

I'll be on the air with my good ol' Vibroplex Champion bug, having some fun times with SKCC activities and leisurely QSOs, especially with those getting up to speed. Would you care to join us?

Let me hear you say these words: ***"YES, CW is for ME!"***

John Luthy  
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