Johnson County Radio Amateurs Club, Inc.
P.O. Box 93
Shawnee Mission, KS 66201

FEEDBACK

September 2021

Hambone and Contest Code

A Hambone Story by Jaimie Charlton, ADØAB

"Boy, Unck, I don't see how you guys work CW contests!" exclaimed Hambone as he shared an afternoon coffee with his uncle Elmer at the Classic Cup sidewalk cafe in Kansas City.

"Well, hello Elmer, Hambone, fancy meeting you here," greeted the friendly voice of Professor Erlenmeyer Flask as he jogged to a stop outside the low barrier separating the restaurant from the city sidewalk.

"It's great to see you too, Early," replied Elmer. "Why don't you join us?"

"Thank you, I will."

Agile as he is, professor Flask did not jump the barrier and grab a seat. He went through the café and joined Elmer and Hambone at their table.

Elmer continued, "Hambone was just telling me he tried working the CQ CW contest last week and well, I'll let him say what happened."

"I was saying I tried that CQ contest and only made a couple of iffy contacts. I couldn't figure out what those guys were saying or wanted me to say. I don't see how or why they do it."

"Contesting is not for everyone," explained Elmer. "There are hams who greatly enjoy the hobby and contribute to it, but never work a contest. Then there are others like Professor Flask and myself who get hooked on contesting.

"There's lots of reasons hams compete in contesting which is really called radiosport. But for me, it's a matter of personal accomplishment and self-improvement. Of course, in a CW contest you have to be able to send and receive Morse code, the faster the better. But there's more, you have really know how to operate your station."

"That's easy," said Hambone. "Everybody knows how to operate their radios."

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SEPTEMBER MEETINGS

Sept 10 *–TBA*
Sept 24 *– DX Engineering*

The Johnson County Radio Amateurs Club normally meets on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month at 7:00 PM at the Overland Park Christian Church (north entrance), 7600 West 75th Street (75th and Conser), west of the Fire Station.

Much of the membership travels to the Pizza Shoppe at 8915 Santa Fe Drive for pizza buffet and an informal continuation/criticism/clarification of the topics raised at the meeting ... or anything else.

Leave the church, turn right (west) on 75th. Turn left (south) on Antioch. Turn right (west) on Santa Fe. Pizza Shoppe is just past the Sonic on your left.

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A publication of the
Johnson County Radio Amateur Club, Inc.

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The Ensor Farm and Museum (and Ham Shack)
18995 W 183rd Street, Olathe, Kansas
Photo by Charlie Van Way, NØCVW

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The public service events that were canceled in 2020 are catching up with us in September 2021. There are events on every weekend this month and some of the events canceled from last spring are now set for a date this fall.

The 145.29 repeater was a topic of discussion throughout last year. The cell tower site that housed the repeater underwent major facility work. Although we don't have any commitment as to timing, we understand that the emergency power will be upgraded.

This year's Ensor auction will occur on Saturday, October 23. Look thorugh your shack for items to donate for sale. Vince, KEØCGR, will be heading up the raffle again this year. See details —and get your tickets—on the club's web page.

Speaking of Ensor, our Club provides tour guides in October. Please sign up for one of the Saturday or Sunday slots.

– Bill Gery – KA2FNK

Johnson County Radio Amateurs Club – August 13, 2021

Meeting Date: Friday August 13, 2021. The meeting Started at 7:00 PM.

Attendance: Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this Meeting took place online using Zoom Video Conferencing. 28 were present.

The Minutes from the July 23, 2021 meeting were read and accepted unanimously.

The Treasurer's report was read and accepted unanimously.

Old Business:

- We welcomed all 1st time visitors to the meeting.
- Repeater Update – Bill Brinker, WA0CBW reported that the 440 Repeater went off last week, but he was able to revive it remotely. All others are working fine.
- In-person meetings at the church are still on hold.
- DX Engineering will present the program during the second club meeting in September.
- The Ensor Auction is on for Saturday, 10/23/21. Donations and consignments are being accepted. The 10/22/21 club meeting will be held at the Ensor. It is possible for campers to camp overnight at the park.
- Preparations are being made to have a raffle on the last meeting in September as well as two more during the auction.
- October will be the JCRAC's turn to help out at the Ensor, we are looking for signups.
- New Member Committee proposal has been submitted to the Board will be reviewed soon.
- Jeff Darby - KS0JD reported that the Santa Fe Trail Amateur Radio Club will be sponsoring an event at the Ensor in September.

New Business:

- None.

Reports:

- 6 m – NR.
- 10 m SSB Roundtable – 5 participated on August 12 and 5 participated on August 5.
- 40m SSB Roundtable – 6 participated including a Wisconsin contact on August 11 and 5 participated on August 4.
- Fusion Digital 440 net – 14 Check-ins on August 11 and 14 for Check-ins on August 4.
- 2m Wheat Shocker net – 17 Check-ins on August 12 and 14 Check-ins on August 5.
- HF Activity – NR.

Announcements:

- Kill Creek Events August 14 and 21. See Bill Gery, KA2FNK for more information.
- Hawk 100 September 11-12. See Bill Gery, KA2FNK for more information.
- Summer Breeze September 12. See Herb Fiddick, NZ0F for more information.
- Bike MS September 25-26. See Herb Fiddick, NZ0F for more information.
- Buffalo Bill Century Ride September 18. See Ray Erlichman, K0RSE for more information.
- See Larry's List for upcoming Events.

Business meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM.

Program:

The Program was an exciting program on the art of troubleshooting by Tom Wheeler, N0GSG. It was well received as indicated by lots of discussion.

Minutes taken by Jaimie Charlton, AD0AB.

Submitted by Ted Knapp, N0TEK Secretary.

Johnson County Radio Amateurs Club – August 27, 2021

Meeting Date: Friday August 27, 2021. The meeting Started at 7:00 PM.

Attendance: Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this Meeting took place online using Zoom Video Conferencing. 25 were present.

The Minutes from the August 13, 2021 meeting were read and accepted unanimously.

The Treasurer's report was read and accepted unanimously.

Old Business:

- We welcomed all 1st time visitors to the meeting.
- Repeater Update – Bill Brinker, WA0CBW reported all are working fine.
- In-person meetings at the church are still on hold including the 1st meeting in October. Our next in-person meeting will be October 22 at Ensor which is the Friday before the Ensor Auction.
- The Ensor Auction is on for Saturday, 10/23/21. Donations and consignments are being accepted.
- The Santa Fe Trail Amateur Radio Club is holding a Special Event Station at the Ensor Museum on September 11th recognizing the 30th Anniversary of the passing of Loretta Ensor. The Special Event Station will be using Loretta's call sign of W9UA. The event is from 10 am to 4 pm.
- Preparations are being made to have a raffle on the last meeting in September as well as two more during the auction.
- October will be the JCRAC's turn to help out at the Ensor, we are looking for signups.

New Business:

- None.

Reports:

- 6 m – NR.
- 10 m SSB Roundtable – 7 participated on August 26 and 4 participated on August 19.
- 40m SSB Roundtable – 5 participated on August 25 and 6 participated on August 18.
- Fusion Digital 440 net – 12 Check-ins on August 25 and 13 for Check-ins on August 18.
- 2m Wheat Shocker net – 15 Check-ins on August 26 and 12 Check-ins on August 19.
- HF Activity – Slovenia on FT8.

Announcements:

- Hawk 100 September 11-12. See Bill Gery, KA2FNK for more information.
- Summer Breeze September 12. See Herb Fiddick, NZ0F for more information.
- Bike MS September 25-26. See Herb Fiddick, NZ0F for more information.
- Buffalo Bill Century Ride September 18. See Ray Erlichman, K0RSE for more information.
- Kansas QSO Party August 28-29.
- See Larry's List for upcoming Events.

Business meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Program:

The Program was a presentation on "What I have learned using Radio Mobile software" by Bill Gery, KA2FNK.

Submitted by Ted Knapp, N0TEK Secretary.

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"Actually, they don't," added Flask. "Most hams know how to diddle the knobs on their transceivers and make a QSO on the average day. But contests are different. During contests the bands are crowded and interference is everywhere. That's when it's vital you know how to set your RF gain and bandwidth and whatever DSP and noise filters you have to get your receiver's best performance. I've heard hams with pretty upscale equipment complain that the band was just too congested to operate. But I bet at least part of their problem was their transceivers were not set up correctly."

"I just turn the RF gain all the way up. That way I can hear even the weakest stations."

"Many hams do just that," added Elmer, "and it's wrong. Too much gain is a bad thing, especially on the new software defined radios, and almost any RF gain is too much in most HF contests. I usually run 6-8 dB attenuation.

Anyway, besides just being fun, contesting helps us become better operators. Not only does it help us improve our communication skills, it helps us improve our stations. And we can tell how well we're doing by how many contacts we make and how high we score in the various contests."

"That said, the big question is, 'How do we raise our scores?'" added professor Flask.

"I know, I know!" shouted Hambone waving his hand in the air.

"Put your hand down, Hambone. We're not in class. How do you think we can raise our scores?"

"Oh yeah, sorry. Send faster."

"Yes, that will help," mused Flask. "But I assume by send faster, you mean completing your exchange in the shortest possible time."

"Yeah, yeah, you got it. I send faster by speeding up my bug."

Elmer smiled as Flask continued, "Let's say that you can accurately send 20 words per minute with your bug. Do you agree that's a little slow for the big contests?"

"Yes," replied Hambone. "That's why I speed up my bug. I'm not sure how fast I get going, maybe 25 or even 30 words per minute. I have to be careful, though. I get going too fast for some of the other operators and they ask me to repeat."

"Let's think about that. By speeding up your bug you are really only speeding up the dots. Dashes are still made by your fingers. Many hams, when they try to send fast, just run their dots, dashes and words together until they are unrecognizable. You know something's wrong when you get asked for repeats even when signals are strong."

"I don't see how a repeat is a problem. It happens to everybody," countered Hambone.

"It's a problem because it slows both you and the other guy down. Let's say you're trying to send at 30 words per minute. But because your fist is sloppy, the far end asks for a repeat. Your effective rate just dropped to 15 words per minute. Accuracy at a medium speed is better than slop at a high speed."

"A good friend and amazing operator, who I will call Bob, told me a great way to improve my accuracy," said Elmer. "He said to load one of those CW decoding programs into my PC and send to it. If it can read what I send, my fist is good. If it can't accurately read my fist, I've got a problem. I should look for what letters and groups I screw up and practice those.

"When I first started doing that everything was gibberish. I blamed the software because I couldn't believe I was that bad. But I was. It took a lot of practice to get so it could read my fist."

"Gee, Unck, I didn't know you had to practice, I thought you were born knowing code."

"Nobody's born knowing code, we all had to learn it and learning it is hard."

"You can say that again," added Flask. "Most people start out wanting to learn code but, get discouraged before they actually make any contacts. The problem is you must learn 26 letters, 10 numbers and a punctuation mark or two before you can do anything."

"Okay, so, what's the easiest way to do that?"

"Oh, I don't know, do you, Elmer?"

"Well, I know there's a ton of stuff published on learning CW and it seems there's even code groupies praising and championing various methods. Apparently, different folks respond best to different methods but, there's no one 'best' method that I know of. In the end, as you said, everyone must learn 26 letters etc. before they can make their first contact. After that, you increase your speed and your contest scores by practicing and learning the best procedures."

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"What procedures are you talking about?" asked Hambone.

"Your uncle and I each have our own style of operating, but there are a few things that all good contesters have in common. The most important is to read the rules. Besides telling you how the contest is scored, it also tells you what the *exchange* is. That is very important."

"Exchange, what's that?"

"The exchange is what each operator sends to complete the QSO and count it as a contact."

"Don't you always send an RST and your name or something?"

"No. Each contest is different. Some just want your RST and state. Others want your name and a serial number or grid square. The rules tell all, so read them ahead of time."

Elmer jumped in, "How you deliver the exchange is also important. Remember speed is important because, generally speaking, the more QSOs you make during the contest, the higher your score will be."

"I know, Unck. That's why I always send my call and name twice. I want to be sure the other guy gets it right."

"Don't do that, it takes too long. A good rule is don't repeat anything unless asked. That means don't repeat your call when answering a CQ and don't repeat any info unless asked.

Also, in fast contests, don't even send such things as 'DE, GL, 73, BK or any other prosigns or Q signals. Don't precede your signal report with the letters 'RST'. Just send 5NN and go on."

"But Unck, that seems unfriendly and what if the guy's signal is really weak? 5NN would be a lie."

"It isn't. In big contests like those put on by CQ and the ARRL, it is all about speed. The 5NN just tells the listener that data follows and the speed to expect. It really has nothing to do with his signal.

On the other hand, in more casual events, it's perfectly okay to use some friendlier abbreviations and even chat a bit, if the other guy is so inclined."

After selecting a chocolate glazed with sprinkles from a newly arrived plate of fresh doughnuts and taking a bite, professor Flask added, "That's right. Even when you're doing S & P, er, search and pounce, that you don't send the caller's callsign."

"What's search and pounce?" asked Dude, Hambone's younger brother who arrived at table just in time for the doughnuts."

"Good morning, Dude. I'd like you to meet Professor Erlenmeyer Flask, he teaches electrical engineering at the college," said Elmer.

"It's nice to meet you, sir."

"Dude is my other nephew, he's still in high school, but is planning to take up engineering," said Elmer.

"It's nice to meet you, Dude. I look forward to having you in my classes," responded Flask with a big smile on his face. "Are you a Ham, too?"

"No, not yet. But I'm working on it," replied Dude.

"In answer to your question, searching and pouncing is a tactic for making contacts. It is what you are doing when you are tuning around the dial looking for stations calling CQ. The tuning around is the searching and answering the CQs you find is the pouncing."

"That makes sense," said Dude.

Elmer added, "The other main tactic is called running a frequency or park and bark. That's when you sit on one frequency and send CQ and wait for someone to answer you."

"So, which is better?" asked Hambone.

"A good contester uses both. I like to start out park and bark and work every station I can. That's because it seems many guys start out S & P so it's easy to work a lot of them. When I've worked everyone I can, I switch and S & P. The idea is to get those other stations that were running frequencies at the same time I was. I usually open up the bandwidth so I can hear stations who aren't zero beat with me."

"Whew, it sounds awfully complicated," sighed Hambone.

"It's really not but, it can be confusing until you understand all the abbreviations," said Flask as he grabbed a napkin and started writing. "I'll explain them, but first, here's a sample contest QSO.

I'm running a frequency – that is, I'm calling CQ - and you're searching and pouncing when you discover me. I'll be station ABC in Missouri and you'll be station XYZ in Kansas. Our exchange will be RST, State and power. I will be running a kilowatt and you will be running 600 watts.

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1 Flask: CQ test CQ test ABC

2 Hambone: XYZ

3 Flask: XYZ ENN MO K

4 Hambone: ENN KS 6TT

5 Flask: TU CQ test ABC

Line 1, notice I started by sending a 2X1 call. That is, I sent CQ twice and my call once. Of course, I could also send 2X2 or 1X2. The more traffic there is, the shorter should be your CQ. The word *test* means I'm in the contest and not looking to rag chew.

Line 2, is very important. You send your call only once on or close to my frequency.

Line 3, I respond with what I heard your call to be along with signal report, my state and power level.

If I got your call sign wrong, you correct me by sending it again instead of your exchange. Don't send your exchange until I correctly repeat your call.

Line 4 is your exchange. Some operators, like me, begin this line with 'TU' or thank you as a courtesy. Others don't because it takes a little extra time.

Line 5 is how I end this QSO. I thank you and then immediately launch a CQ to attract the next station. You do not transmit anything more on my frequency. Don't say 73, or GL or anything.

One variation here is that when working someone you know, or have worked many, many times before, you may hear or send a fast 'dot dot' after the TU. This acknowledges that you recognize each other."

"I sort of get it," said Dude. "The K in line 3 is short for kilowatt, but I don't see the other stuff."

"Those are cut numbers. They are shorter forms of the real digits. The 'E' means five but, you will also hear the number 5. The 'N' means nine. You will seldom hear the actual number 9. In line 4 there is no cut number for '6' so, it is used as is. The 'T' means zero so 6TT means 600. Other cut numbers are: A=1; U=2; V=3; B=7; D=8. There are no cuts for 4 and 6."

"I still think it seems kinda harsh," said Hambone.

"It does," replied his uncle. "But think about it. If you cut the length of your exchange in half, it's like doubling your speed. To be successful in contesting, otherwise friendly hams must adopt a warrior mentality. After all, it is a battle. There is some discussion as to which is the best way to identify yourself when calling CQ and working a pile-up.

Some operators, like me, send their call after every QSO. Others self-identify after every two or three QSOs. The problem with that is a passing S & P may not wait to hear your call and you both miss a QSO. On the other hand, if you have a pileup, who cares?"

Just remember, keep it short and accurate and you will do fine."

"Come on, Dude," said Hambone getting up from the table before the bill arrived. "I want to practice so I can burn up the airwaves in the ARRL contest this weekend."

"It was nice to meet you, Dude," said professor Flask.

"Me, too" replied Dude as he ran off.

Turning to Elmer, Flask continued, "I didn't want to say anything, but I heard Hambone on the air last week. He was terrible. Everybody he tried to work asked for repeats.

Do you think he'll take our advice and do better this weekend?"

"Not a chance!"

>> JCRAC FEEDBACK <<