

Just the Facts – ARRL Field Day 2008

By: Dan Henderson, N1ND, Field Day "Detective"

With a tip of the hat to Jack Webb... we investigate this annual phenomenon that looks suspiciously like a whole lot of fun.



Eight Boy Scouts from Troops 69, 2000 and 3000 joined NFARL for Field Day and went for their Radio Merit badge at the site. After helping put up antennas during setup, the scouts got down to business to pass their merit badge qualifications under the direction of Wes, W3WL at the rig. Pictured here are the scouts getting ready to make their first FD contacts under the eye of GA Senator Johnny Isakson (red shirt). (photo courtesy of Jeff Hattrick Photography).



Two Royse City Girl Scouts, Dezyrae Nantz and Sarah Kazlow, earned their technology badges by their contacts with North Dakota, South Dakota and British Columbia from the K5RKW FD set-up under the watchful eye of Paul, KE5RMZ, the GOTA coach



First Time Field Day Op Jason KD8ILL attempts AO-51 contact from W8SP's FD location. (J. Lemley photo)



The Radio Society of Tucson – K7RST – greeted over 150 visitors to their FD site with this information booth.



The Great South Bay Amateur Radio Club and the Town of Babylon Amateur Radio Emergency Service really let the community know they were serious about putting W2GSB on the air!



Joey the C, our resident snitch, gleaning information from the W1AW bulletins.



Our resident snitch sneaking past "Old Betsey" to bring Hiram and Percy the "maxim"um of information.

When the sunny days of June come, some people will spend countless hours throwing baited hooks into waterways hoping to snare the largest fish ever. Others will swing wildly at small, dimpled balls on green pastures known as courses trying to make pars and avoid bogeys. You will find others who will walk with a purpose, mow grass or find many other ways to amuse and entertain themselves.

But for some when the fourth full weekend of June arrives, they will eschew all other forms of recreation and entertainment to spend their time frantically throwing ropes through trees, pulling up wires and spending hours speaking into electrical devices. Perhaps some are pounding pieces of brass to make electrical impulses promulgate through the atmosphere or typing into a computer making messages that will then transmit through the ether. Tens of thousands of these perpetrators gather to partake in this annual ritual... And when that happens, I become involved... My name is Hiram... I carry a call sign.

The story you are about to read is true... No call signs have been changed because none of the participants are innocent...

It was Friday evening June 27th. I was working the weekend watch out of the Maxim Memorial Station on Main Street in Newington when we received the first notice that something might be up. It seemed that W1AW was sending out a transmission known as a "Field Day bulletin." I had heard this before and for some reason this activity always signaled the start of the rampant radio raucous reverberations occurring with this "Field Day" activity. After consulting with our chief, "the Old Man" himself, my partner Percy and I decided we had better pay close attention over the next hours, as we were never sure what to expect when this episode began.

Things remained quiet for the next few hours, but based on past years we knew that it was during this quiet time after the first bulletins that the "perps" were finalizing their plans for the assault that began for most groups on Saturday morning. And it was shaping up to be huge – in fact we ended up with reports of a record number of perps, uh, participants than ever, as more than 35,000 were apparently involved. This was going to take a lot more work than usual to handle.

We had gotten the word from our snitch, Joey C, (who was known to hang around W1AW) that at precisely 1800 UTC on Saturday June 28th the frenetic firing of electrons would begin. And so they did... Over the rest of this "Field Day" over 1.2 million contacts, known as QSOs were completed. This was an amazing number of contacts, considering that some clown known as Ol' Sol had apparently stolen all of a rare resource known as "sunspots" which made QSOs hard to come by on many bands. My partner Percy commented he hadn't seen such a caper since Claude Cooper, the kleptomaniac from Cleveland copped the clean copper clappers from the Acme School Bell Company – the famous Sgt Joe Friday case from *Dragnet*. A curious clue came from this data – the number of digital QSOs continued, their climb representing over 2% of the total contacts completed for the first time ever. They were coming in faster than a Chicago typewriter.

Morse code continues to be a popular method for these suspects to contact one another, as 41% of these QSOs were made using this time-honored method. The remaining 57% of the contacts were made using various voice techniques – with single side band being the overwhelming choice to bring about a competent conclusion of exchanges.

"The Old Man" had reminded Percy and myself that we needed "only the facts", but gathering them was turning into a titanic task. As we started deciphering the exchanged messages for clues, we realized that they seemed to be coming from all over. It turned out that participants from every US state, territory and ARRL section except the Virgin Islands, and all Canadian provinces and territories acknowledged their activities by submitting an entry report. Most were received via the www.b4h.net/cabforms website which garnered them an immediate acknowledgement of their activities as well as bonus points. Ohio and Michigan led the way with reported activities – this was truly a continental-wide escapade.

As Percy and I dug deep into the various reports, it emerged that a record number of stations were on-the-air for this year's escapade. A total of 2409 perps sent us their "paper trail" – an increase of over 3% from the previous highest number. Percy pondered if they were taunting us, tempting us to track them down. I reasoned that as with any job, when you do it right you like to see the results of your handiwork. Either way, it was the largest number of participating stations and persons ever submitted to us for this event. This fact is a key clue when considering the grand scheme of this "Field Day" adventure.



WØDK, the Boulder Amateur Radio Club Juniors held a class on building twin lead J-Poles for 2-meters during this year's Field Day as part of the new Educational Activity bonus.



NØTU had four-legged help - Peanut and Rooster - 2-pack goats who helped haul nearly 100 lbs of FD/camping gear to the mountain top for a couple of scoops of grain!



Heart of Dixie Amateur Radio Society member Deyl Dillard, KD4FD looks on as Mayor Larry Justice signs Amateur Radio Week Proclamation for W4HOD.



Cleveland County EC Susan K4ZXXN poses with VIPs, County Commissioner Johnny Hutchins, Chip Workman N4SOC of the NC State Highway Patrol and Dewey Cook, KJ4BYU, Emergency Management Director / Fire Marshal / ARRL PIO at the N4C Field Day – special call sign for the Shelby (NC) Amateur Radio Club’s FD.



W4MLN and KD4UKT welcome state Senator Steve Goss to the W4FD Ashe County (NC) ARC FD.

Joey C (our snitch) reminded us that it might be hard to track down all of the perpetrators because in the past the majority of them “went on the lam” and operated from places other than their normal comforts of

their homes. Again, Joey C was right – as it turned out 1694 of the entries claimed to be operating as either class A, B or F, which would put them out in the field. Hmm... In the field for Field Day... This could be a significant clue. As it turned out there was a website where perps could post details about their operating locations, making it easier to draw accomplices into the action. Joey C reminded us that the [Field Day Locator](#) was a new feature – and used by over 1500 participants. Seems the perps openly encouraged people to join them in this prolonged interactive communications marathons. And through my moles at ARRL HQ, I understand that this feature was so popular, it is going to become a staple for Field Days in the future. This thing had spread like wildfire.

The word on the street as that there was a change in this year's Field Day which placed a great emphasis on active learning. Seems the sponsors placed a strong emphasis on having an “educational activity” as part of the operation. This educational bonus not only allowed people to build a higher score, it seems to have been the impetus for numerous groups to “teach” perps some of the “tricks of the trade.” Percy and I thought it was strange that you would actively encourage people to learn from you and then become active doing the same type thing you promoted, but that's the way you apparently pass on this amateur radio thing. You mentor people so that they can learn and then pass on the skills to the next person While there are laws against” pyramid schemes” for money, this one seems like it was designed to do things the right way...

At 2100 UTC on Sunday June 28, the activities on the air stopped as suddenly as they had begun. As we combed the rules for clues we discovered that this was a once a year event and most stations were limited to 24-hours of operating time. So all Percy and I could do at HQ was to accumulate the several thousand incoming reports and see what sense we could make of this activity.

Things quickly came into focus as we worked on our report for the record. Apparently this “Field Day” thing was intended to test amateur radio operators and their ability to get on-the-air in less than ideal circumstances. It has been taking place for over 70 years and there doesn't appear to be an end in sight. Over 170 of these groups openly shared details of their activities with others on the [ARRL Contest Soapbox](#). Seems people are prone to “brag” about their activities during Field Day – something that can be understood after you read their comments and see the pictures in the Soapbox.

Thumbing through the “mug shots” on this Soapbox site Percy and I noticed a wide range of “types” involved... There were lots of middle aged and older people, but in lots of cases there always seemed to be a healthy number of youth involved. Hmm... start them while they are young... An obvious strategy it seems for future success. There were photos of public officials – senators, mayors, police chiefs, journalists, emergency management types, community service agency representatives, etc. Obviously there is an organized attempt to “infiltrate” city hall, served agencies and such – to co-op them into being party of this activity. But again, that's a good strategy if your goal is to have a good working relationship with those officials.

Someone floated the question of “who won” from all this mayhem... The best answer is it depends on what you believe constitutes “a win.” There are the “usual suspects” who strive every year to score more points than anyone else. Hats off to them. But the larger answer that emerged was that “if you participated, had fun and learned something, then you were a winner.” As it turns out, there are no prizes for excelling in this caper other than the pride in yourself when you achieve what you started out to accomplish. For some, that's the highest score. For others, its making contacts using a new mode of communications or learning to assemble a new type of antenna. Some get their “reward” from beating a friendly rival in the next town, while still others will be happy for having helped introduce this “amateur radio” thing to a group of newcomers. So depending on your motive for participating, there appears to be nothing but winners in this activity.

So the best Percy and I can do is surmise that this Field Day takes place every year on the 4th full weekend in June – that means that we will be busy June 27-28, 2009. And based on the results and reports we received, I think we can advise that this is perhaps the most popular 24-hour amateur radio activity in the world. Our best bet is to join in the fun – after all, if you can't beat them, join them! beat them, join them!

Just the Facts, Ma'am Field Days Stats

Year	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
CW QSOs	506,139	511,580	518,799	503,205	517,738
Digital QSOs	27,869	22,112	21,459	21,766	20,940
Phone QSOs	702,847	679,240	696,567	692,722	787,444
Total QSOs	1,236,855	1,212,932	1,236,825	1,217,693	1,326,122
Total Entries	2409	2331	2199	2212	2241
Novice/GOTA	447	467	432	396	436
Participants	35,798	34,833	32,506	33,078	33,002

Better Call For Back-up Entries by Class

Class	Entries
1A	166
2A	488
3A	337
4A	122
5A	82
6A	35

7A	15
8A	12
9A	7
10A	2
12A	2
15A	1
18A	1
23A	1
1B1	169
1B2	62
2B2	21
3B2	1
1C	53
2C	1
4C	1
1D	374
2D	15
3D	12
4D	4
7D	1
1E	202
2E	27
3E	18

4E	3
5E	3
9E	1
1F	23
2F	75
3F	43
4F	16
5F	9
6F	2
8F	2

Car 54, Where Are You? Entries by Section

Section	Submissions
AB	10
AK	8
AL	29
AR	21
AZ	44
BC	29
CO	46
CT	32

DE	6
EB	18
EMA	31
ENY	29
EPA	62
EWA	13
GA	60
IA	28
ID	11
IL	80
IN	51
KS	32
KY	32
LA	18
LAX	37
MAR	10
MB	3
MDC	47
ME	20
MI	92
MN	45
MO	55
MS	17

MT	20
NC	73
ND	9
NE	14
NFL	38
NH	22
NL	5
NLI	27
NM	23
NNJ	39
NNY	8
NTX	53
NV	8
NWT	2
OH	115
OK	27
ON	68
OR	44
ORG	44
PAC	9
PR	5
QC	24
RI	14

SB	13
SC	23
SCV	38
SD	9
SDG	23
SF	14
SFL	24
SJV	26
SK	1
SNJ	24
STX	55
SV	25
TN	55
UT	18
VA	76
VT	13
WCF	23
WI	46
WMA	13
WNY	38
WPA	45
WTX	12
WV	16

WWA	61
WY	11

Book 'Em Danno General Class Count

Class	Entries
A	1131
AB	59
AC	81
B1	53
B1B	99
B1C	17
B2	48
B2B	33
B2C	3
C	55
D	406
E	254
F	170

Book 'Em Danno Top Ten

Call	Claimed Score	Entry Class
W3AO	33,664	23 A
W4IY	21,108	9 A
K2AA	19,434	6 A
W2RDX	17,978	3 A
W9CA	17,552	3 A
W6YX	17,108	4 F
K1R	15,980	5 A
W2EN	15,088	3 F
K4LRG	15,060	5 A
W1NVT	14,754	2 A