

From the Editor

Welcome to 2019! I hope your contesting season is off to a great start. The big CQ WW contests came and departed without much cooperation from the Sun. The January RTTY Roundup will add FT8 as a contest mode, which could attract a new generation of testers. We have included a propagation update from Carl Luetzelschwab, K9LA, who suggests we may be at the nadir of the current sunspot cycle. I had hoped Carl would give us a more optimistic approach, but that was not in the cards. Speaking of the Solar Cycle, we have an update on the Solar Eclipse QSO Party (SEQP), which occurred in August 2017, by Nathaniel Frissell, W2NAF, of the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Frissell and his team of young testers achieved an amazing feat, and I hope you enjoy their report!

Finally, I want to welcome Howard Michel, WB2ITX, who became ARRL Chief Executive Officer in October, heading the Headquarters staff in Newington. He brings a wealth of engineering, radio and organizational knowledge with him to the job.

A Moment of Reflection

The contest community lost two great testers in the waning weeks of 2018. Many have worked the Rev. Paul Bittner, W0AIH, whose photo is on our cover. Paul died tragically on October 31, 2018, while working on one of the more than 50 towers in his contest station antenna farm. Paul was known around the world for his collegiality, friendly smile, and infectious love of contesting. He was the quintessential ambassador for contesting, and it was heartwarming to see tributes pour in from all over, celebrating and honoring Paul. You can read some of those tributes in this issue. I also want to thank Bob Wilson, N6TV, and Scott Neader, KA9FOX, for the photos, and Val Hotzfeld, NV9L, for a stirring YouTube tribute.

I also want to pay tribute to Terry Gerdes, AB5K, another accomplished tester and engineer. Terry was on his honeymoon in Belize when he died suddenly. Terry had recently moved to V31 with most of his gear, towers and antennas, with plans to get married and build an off-the-grid contest station. Terry was an EE grad from the University of Arkansas and had many interesting jobs over the years, including an assignment tracking missiles in the Marshall Islands, where he operated with a V73 call. He also had worked with Garmin and in a variety of roles in the Austin,

Texas, area, including FlexRadio Systems and Dell Computers. He had an impressive tower farm near Holland, Texas and performed contract tower work, including much of the recent work for NR5M. AB5K may have been best known for development work with the *N1MM Logger+* and his ubiquitous AB5K cluster software. He was among a handful of hams to solve integrating the cluster system with the internet.

Contest Etiquette and New Testers

How did the ARRL November Sweepstakes go for you? I only operated four hours on the SSB weekend, but I read reports of many who worked the contest pair. Some enjoyed SS, while others found it challenging. I read on a contest reflector of the frustrations experienced by the SS veterans. Some issues may have been attributable to poor propagation while other likely reflected new operators not totally familiar with the flow of SS.

All of this is common across many contests and it reflects the need for more basic contest education, contest operator mentoring and greater club involvement. It also suggests we have more new testers in the SS, which is good! I know that seasoned testers get a bit irritated at the "slowness and mistakes of newbies," but let's all exercise some patience. We need to help newbies reach the next level, so they can compete and challenge us next year. Please work with anyone locally you know who wants help. Encourage them to attend Contest University (CTU) on Thursday, May 16, 2019, at the Crowne Plaza in Dayton or a regional contest training forum closer to home. I believe contest-oriented sessions will be held during the International DX Conference in Visalia in April 2019. Truth be told, all of us can improve our skills and stations.

What about Casual Testers?

Speaking of casual testers, I had the opportunity to be interviewed on the No Nonsense Amateur Radio podcast about radio contesting, *NCJ*, and the future of digital contesting. You can listen at these links if you are interested: www.kb6nu.com/no-nonsense-amateur-radio-podcast-8-contesting-with-scott-k0md-editor-national-contest-journal/ and <https://nononsenseamateurradio.com/episode-8-contesting-with-scott-k0md-editor-national-contest-journal/>.

I found the questions informative and

helpful with regard to understanding what a new ham thinks about contesting and what a more experienced ham who dabbles in contesting thinks of our activities. Both indicated a strong desire to do more contesting but also expressed some trepidation that we might not welcome them into the fold.

I assured them that the testers who read *NCJ* would gladly welcome them and be delighted to work them. Thanks to Dan Romanchik, KB6NU, and Tom Parish, KB5RF, for the interview opportunity and for their promotion of contesting and ham radio in general.

Should *NCJ* be doing more to draw in casual and new testers? Should we offer shorter contests that attract the less proficient? How about a QRS Sprint contest designed for those whose CW skills are at 25 WPM or slower? Should we offer FT8-only contests? I'd love to hear from readers about these ideas and issues.

Are We Sprinting Yet?

Did you like the new CW Sprint report format? I received a few emails about it pointing out we omitted the Top 10 boxes, which was inadvertent. Our apologies. The posting on our website, ncjweb.com, includes these. The Top 10 boxes will be back in the next results report. We plan a more expanded write-up online (see ncjweb.com) in addition to the print version in a later *NCJ* issue. We also want more photos of your Sprint activities. Send your photos to Jim George, N3BB, for consideration. Sprint participation was at 300 or so operators in September. Can we increase it for the Winter CW Sprint?

You can help by recruiting one new participant. One new entry per current participant would raise participation to 600 entries, which would be a contest record or near record. If we cannot get to 600, how about 450? Second, you can join a club team and compete against other club teams, within your club and across the US and Canada. The CW Sprint team of Tree, N6TR; Jim George, N3BB; Pat Barkey, N9RV, and Ward Silver, N0AX, are working to make the contest more interesting and appealing. We will have online certificates for the Winter contest, thanks to Bruce Horn, WA7BNM, and with support from Steve Ford, WB8IMY, and the ARRL staff. See you in the Sprint!

Real-Time Contest Scoring and Live-Streaming

There is interest in real-time contest

scoring among radiosport enthusiasts. What will it take for us to make this routine? Why are we one of the few competitive sports where the winners are not known for weeks to months after the competition ends? It would be exciting to see our results move with rapidity like true sporting events.

The D4C team brought contesting to a new level during the CQ WW CW event with live-streaming. Kudos to them for this transparency. I am not sure what role live-streaming will play or how it will help beyond the “wow” factor. Nonetheless, it is an interesting advance in contesting.

New Contest Skill-Training Tools

How many of us remember the saying, “If you can drive a car, you can do SO2R,”

as narrated by “The Locust,” Rick Hilding, K6VVA, on the great video series produced by the NCCC on how to learn SO2R? The NCCC has many great contest videos and presentations on file (www.nccc.cc/webinars.html) for contesters and non-contesters. Much of what we do in contesting is “three dimensional,” so to speak. It is better taught in person or on video than by lecture or reading. I am asking the readership of *NCJ* to join us in developing new resources for contest training — resources such as YouTube presentations, TEDx-like talks, recorded lectures such as those at CTU, where newbies and non-newbies can brush up on skills or learn how to do something new. Wouldn't it be great to have the NCCC or another club full of talented, top-tier contesters develop a video on how to do the *NCJ* Sprint, using the technology

we have available today to record it and reproduce the patterns needed for learning the tactics? The use of left and right audio channels, and split-screen along with expert narration is what made the NCCC SO2R video series so instructional. How about it, contest community. Can we come up with some 21st-century resources to help contesters grow and master new skills? Let me know if you're aware of such resources that we and others might be unaware of.

That is all I have to say from my QTH near Lake Wobegone. Thanks for reading and CU on the air!