

First Contact

I heard something on the 40 meter CW band the other night that I have not heard in a very long time. I answered a CQ from a station and he sent back "QRS OM, THIS IS MY FIRST CONTACT." I was blown away! In this world of No Code licensing, there was actually a ham who made the decision to take his first foray into the ham radio world just like we did it in the old days, pounding brass on 40 meters. Well, you can be sure that I cranked back my speed to a reasonable 5-7 WPM and had a nice long ragchew with this new ham. During my thirty plus years at the key (oh sure, at the mic sometimes, too), I have had the distinct honor of being able to be First Contact for quite a few folks.

I still remember my first contact like it was yesterday. Come to think of it, it occurred on a hot July day only a few kHz from where I worked the ham I mentioned above. I sent out a shaky CQ with my "Deluxe" Radio Shack Hand Key. (It had ball bearings and everything!) My transmitter was a second-hand-or-more Heathkit SB-400 with the matching Heathkit SB-300 receiver. Very high style for a Novice operator back in those days. All this classy gear was feeding a 40 meter dipole no more than 20 feet off the ground strung between two shaggy Swamp Maples in my mother's back yard.

I sent CQ a few times and then I heard "WN2GHA DE KA3EXO GE OM BK." I must have jumped three feet straight up in the air. Now what?! What do I do?! Somehow, I got my heart back in my chest and my head screwed on straight and worked my way forward to have my first QSO with "Pete" Peters. He was running a Heathkit HW-101, also to a low-strung dipole. He was very patient with me and gave me lots of fills.

A few days later I got that *first* QSO QSL card in the mail. I was a very happy puppy. And the rest, as they say, is history. I have

books full of QSL cards from hams all around the world, but that first contact is still etched in my mind. I know it is the same for the rest of you folks, regardless of if it was CW, phone or even a digital mode. You never forget your first contact!

Now I know some of you folks reading this column are new to amateur radio and are getting ready to make your first contact. I would like to give you a little advice from someone who has been there. I also have a few words to say to you experienced Ops about how to help new folks when you hear them on the air. There are two sides to any First Contact and a little bit of forethought can make the experience great for the hams on both ends of the signals.

❖ Your First Time on 2 Meters

I will start here, because the majority of newly minted hams will more than likely have their first on air contact through a local repeater system. To avoid making this a white knuckle experience, let's go over a few basics.

The first thing you will want to do is make sure your equipment is working properly. Assuming, for a minute, that you are using a "handi-talkie," make sure your battery is fully charged. While it is charging, *read your manual!* You will want to make sure you understand the basic operation and frequency control settings. More than one ham's first attempt to talk on 2 meters was thwarted by having the Frequency Offset setting in the wrong position. Instead of keying up the repeater, you end up 600 kHz in never never land (and possibly out of band).

Okay... All charged up and read up? Good! Tune to a local active repeater and *listen, listen, listen!* Pay close attention to the operating practices and style of the folks on the machine. Listen to see how people acknowledge each other and how new people enter the conversation. Normal procedure is to accept new calls during breaks in the QSO. Listen to the way folks accomplish this.

When you are ready, all you have to do is key the mic and drop your call. For instance, at a break in the conversation you might simply say, "THIS IS N2EI, NAME IS SKIP, GOOD EVENING," and that should get you into the mix.

Or, perhaps you will hear a lone call such as, "THIS IS WB2KKS LISTENING." You could respond by saying, "WB2KKS, THIS IS N2EI, NAME IS SKIP, GOOD EVENING."

Once the conversation begins or you are invited into the group, do not be afraid to let folks know this is your first time on the air. I am confident that once folks know this is your first contact, they will be happy to work through the contact with extra care and consideration. If you err in some way, you will receive some manner of correction. Take this in the spirit it is given. Folks want to help you be the best ham you can be.

Don't forget to ID at least every 10 minutes. When you are done, be sure to acknowledge and thank everyone in the contact. Don't forget to sign off correctly with "N2EI, CLEAR." Good radio practice is always the order of the day.

❖ Phone HF First Contact

Technician Class folks can operate phone in the 10 meter band. Here, the most likely way to get going would be to answer another station's CQ call. You might hear, "CQ CQ CQ, THIS IS WB2KKS CALLING CQ AND STANDING BY." Your response would be "WB2KKS, THIS IS N2EI, GOOD EVENING. HOW COPY? OVER."

Assuming you can hear one another (unfortunately a big assumption at this all too long Solar Minimum), the conversation will proceed from there with exchange of Frequency Report, QTH, and Name. You might want to make yourself up a 3x5 card with this basic exchange on it to use as a cheat sheet to get you through those first nervous moments.

Again, good manners and operating procedures will go along way. Never be afraid to ask for help.

❖ CW HF First Contact

Okay, so let's say you may be a freshly licensed ham, but you have the urge to kick it off Old School like that ham I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Technician Class folks can operate on the 80, 40, and 15 meter HF bands using Morse code now with no code test requirement. Good on you and welcome to the CW world!

Let's start with where to hang out. I would suggest listening in around the F.I.S.T. CW Club calling frequency 7.058 and 3.558 kHz or the Straight Key Century Club calling frequency 7.055 and 3.550 kHz. You have heard me men-



Uncle Skip's First Contact

tion both of these organizations in past columns. I suggest these as good First Contact locations, because both organizations have a stated goal of helping new folks develop as CW operators. While you will be welcomed anywhere in the band, these folks are standing by waiting to help you out.

Before you “go live,” you will want to practice a bit with a code oscillator to get the feel of your key and get a good sense of your sending speed. Also review the more standard “Prosigns” used in CW operation:

- QRL? = Is this frequency in use?
- K = over
- BK = back to you
- SK = clear

Listen for a clear frequency and send “QRL? DE N2EI” a few times to make sure nobody is using this spot on the band. Only then should you send CQ. Most folks send a 3x3 call: “CQ CQ CQ DE N2EI N2EI N2EI K.” Stop and listen for a good 30 seconds or so before resending. If you are using a separate receiver or your transceiver has Receiver Incremental Tuning (RIT), check up and down a few kHz to make sure somebody isn’t calling back a bit off your signal. Your sending speed will be a clue to how fast the other station will usually come back to you, so be sure to take it slow at first. If you need to send QRS (send slower) don’t be afraid. Most Ops will be happy to crank it down to have a QSO with you.

If, instead, you are responding to another station’s CQ, your usual response will be something like: “WB2KKS DE N2EI N2EI N2EI K.” Even experienced Ops aren’t always as ready to hear someone come back as you might think. Sending your call several times gives everybody a chance to get organized for what is to follow.

❖ Notes to Experienced Ops

Now for you experienced Ops: *Remember your first time!* I still recall how nervous I was and how much I really appreciated the kindness and patience that Pete KA3EXO showed me during my First Contact.

That new ham is looking to you for guidance into the greatest hobby in the world. Show them your best skills. Lead by example. That goes for second, third, etc. contacts as well. Helping new hams become good hams is our duty and responsibility to the hobby.

Also for you experienced Ops who have the honor of helping a new ham out with his or her First Contact, while it is a general rule that folks do not exchange QSL cards for routine repeater contacts, I think a true First Contact deserves a card exchange at the very least. But there is an even better way to acknowledge a new ham’s first on air experience. Web on over to www.arrrl.org/FandES/ead/award/certificate/Icontact.html and fill out the form to have the ARRL Issue a First Contact Certificate. You will be giving that new ham his or her first piece of “wallpaper.” And the experience will never be forgotten, thanks to this fine commemoration.

❖ On the Ham Bookshelf

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS IN RF DESIGN
By Wes Hayward W7ZOI, Rick Campell KK7B
and Bob Larkin W7PUA
ISBN# 978-0-87259-923-9
ARRL Order # 9239
\$49.95
The American Radio Relay League
225 Main Street
Newington, CT 06111-1494
www.arrrl.org/shop
1-888-277-5289

For many years, the book that gave aid and comfort to dedicated home builders and experimenters was *Solid State Design for the Radio Amateur*. That book was put together by Wes Hayward W7ZOI and the late great Doug DeMaw W1FB. You should see my copy! The pages are worn thin and covered with solder burns.

But, as good as this book remains, it became very long in the tooth in terms of technology since its 1977 first edition. So hams dedicated to design and experimentation were pleased to see *Experimental Methods in RF Design* come along in 2003. This book updated the work of Wes W7ZOI and Doug W1FB, acquainting a new generation to newer technologies to build great amateur radio projects. At the risk of repeating myself... You should see my copy! The pages are worn thin and covered with solder burns. Get the picture?

So here we are in 2009. Technology has moved on a bit further. But thanks to the work of Wes W7ZOI, Rick KK7B and Bob W7PUA, we did not have to wait 26 years for an update. This “Revised First Edition” of *Experimental*

Outer Limits continued from page 59

Voice of KAOS- TV show audio, rock music, and political discussions are heard here. (voiceofkoas@gmail.com)

Voice of Spike- This new pirate features classic novelty music by Spike Jones. It claims to be the only such radio station in the world, either pirate or licensed. (None announced)

Voice of the Runaway Maharishi- This veteran drug advocacy pirate is back on the air. (Belfast)

WBNY- Commander Bunny’s clandestine station parody of the Rodent Revolution has evolved into perhaps the most influential pirate on the air today. (Belfast and rodentrevolutionhq@yahoo.com)

WEAK- The new version of these veteran pirate radio call letters is still active. The old WEAK from Leonard Longwire was also active on New Years Day. So, we have two pirates using the same call letters (now using weakradio@gmail.com)

WFUQ- The semi-profane emphasis of this rock music pirate is not a typo. (None)

WMPR- This mysterious and widely heard “dance party” techno rock pirate is still active. (None, known to only QSL occasionally at the Winter SWL Festival)

WNKR- Western North Kent Radio, an active Europirate, continues to get North American pirate relays of its programming. (winkrsw@gmail.com)

Wolverine Radio- Rock music is their normal format, but sometimes they feature other genres. (None)

WTCR- The musical fare on “20th Century Radio” still varies, with tunes featured from all decades of the last century. (Belfast)

❖ QSLing Pirates

Reception reports to pirate stations require three first class stamps for USA maildrops or \$2 US to foreign locations. The cash defrays postage for mail forwarding and a souvenir QSL to your mailbox. Letters go to these addresses, identified above in parentheses:

UNCLE SKIP'S CONTEST CALENDAR

RAC Canada Day Contest
July 1 0000 UTC - 2359 UTC

MI QRP July 4th CW Sprint
July 4 2300 UTC - July 5 0300 UTC

FISTS Summer Sprint
July 10 1700 UTC - 2100 UTC

North American QSO Party RTTY
July 15 1800 UTC - July 16 0600 UTC

CQ Worldwide VHF Contest
July 18 1800 UTC - July 19 2100 UTC

RSGB IOTA Contest
July 25 1200 UTC - July 26 1200 UTC

Methods in RF Design brings hams an up-to-date resource for the workbench. Every aspect of radio design is covered in detail and explained by the authors in a manner that informs and teaches.

As I said about the original edition, if a ham was to work through the information and was to build the projects presented in just the first chapter of this book, they would possess a body of knowledge that would put them head and shoulders above many hams on the air today. And just think, there are 11 more chapters chock full of information that build on these basics. I can’t wait to wear this copy out like I did the earlier works. Highly recommended!

Have fun folks! I’ll see you on the bottom end of 40 meters. First Contacts always welcome!

PO Box 1, Belfast, NY 14711; PO Box 109, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214; PO Box 146, Stoneham, MA 02180; and PO Box 293, Merlin, Ontario N0P 1W0.

Some pirates prefer e-mail, bulletin logs or internet web site reports instead of snail mail correspondence. The best bulletin for submitting pirate loggings with a hope that pirates might QSL is now the e-mailed *Free Radio Weekly* newsletter, still free to contributors via freeradioweekly@gmail.com. A few pirates will sometimes QSL reports left on the outstanding Free Radio Network web site, at <http://www.frn.net>. The *ACE*, a formerly widely read print bulletin, now has a good loggings section and a valuable archive of *Free Radio Weekly* issues at www.theaceonline.com/

❖ Thanks

Your loggings and news about unlicensed broadcasting stations are always welcome via 7540 Highway 64 W, Brasstown, NC 28902, or via the e-mail address atop the column. We thank this month’s valuable contributors: Brian Alexander, Mechanicsburg, PA; Dave Balint, Wooster, OH; Artie Bigley, Columbus, OH; Jerry Berg, Lexington, MA; Rich D’Angelo, Wyomissing, PA; Ragnar Daneskjold, North America; Gregory L. Dome, Onalaska, TX; Bill Finn, Philadelphia, PA; Harold Frodge, Midland, MI; Captain Ganja, Belfast, NY; William T. Hassig, Mt. Prospect, IL; Vashek Korinek, South Africa; Kracker, Belfast, NY; Ed Kusalik, Camrose, Alberta; Chris Lobdell, Tewksbury, MA; Leonard Longwire, Belfast, NY; Greg Majewski, Oakdale, CT; Larry Magne, Penns Park, PA; Bill Matthews, Columbus, OH; C. E. Mental, Chelmsford, MA; Ed Moor, Chelmsford, MA; Don Moore, Davenport, IA; Mike Rhode, Columbus, OH; Lee Silvi, Mentor, OH; and Joe Wood, Greenback, TN.