

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Each month one of our members is randomly selected and asked to share their ham radio biography with all of us. Questions or comments should go to Paul, KD2MX.

DISCLAIMER: Any views expressed in this section are those of the submitting member and may or may not be those of the NAQCC or its officers.



**RICHARD DODD, K4KRW, #1815**

I have been a licensed ham since 2001. I had been intrigued with radio most of my life. At times we had neighbors who were hams. We always had shortwave radios. My grandfather had a nice Zenith Trans-Oceanic that I loved playing with. I participated in the CB craze in the mid 70s.

I finally got my Technician license 2001. But, I was really interested in HF and CW so I didn't initially use it. Finally, in 2005 I buckled down and passed the 5 wpm code test and passed the General test. My Elmer (Dave K8ZK) talked me into buying a Yaesu FT-897D. I built an 80m Carolina Windom and I started having fun. I got my Extra in 2006 and decided to change my call sign to K4KRW as my original call sign (KG4PBG) absolutely had to be said phonetically on the air to be understood.

Early on I really had no idea where ham radio would take me. Initially, I enjoyed playing on the HF bands and I found that my CW skills gradually improved enough that CW became my main operating mode. I did play some with PSK-31 until the macros took over. I did do a small amount voice operating too.

In 2006 my elmer Dave and I decided that we'd launch a weather balloon with ham gear and cameras on board, track it and recover it. We had followed online some other groups doing this and thought it would be fun. Our first balloon went to 72,000 feet and traveled over 100 miles down range. What a blast. It was like running our own little NASA. We used APRS to track the payload. We got some great pictures and the picture from 72,000 feet is on my QSL card. Here is that picture:



After that launch we ended up assisting a professor at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte's Geology department with their 'SkyMiner' remote sensing project. Over the next few years we launched four more balloons.

The biggest coincidence with a flight happened with SkyMiner 3. We launched it into marginal weather because it was our last launch window. The semester was about to end and the students needed to fly their payloads. It took 15 minutes for the balloon to get to 8000 feet. This would normally happen in about 5 minutes but it got caught up in a rain storm. The balloon finally made it to 75000 feet, popped and then crashed right across the state line into South Carolina. The recovery crew knocked on the door of the house on the property where the balloon had landed. It turns out that the homeowner was a retired NASA engineer who had worked on the first weather satellites. He had plaques where he had worked on the Apollo missions. What a day.

This picture was from the Launch of SkyMiner 4.

SkyMiner4 was a perfect flight. It happened on a perfectly clear Carolina blue sky day. I remember looking up and following that tiny white dot. I could see it with my bare eyes when it was at 80,000 feet. I even saw it pop. When it disappeared I looked down and sure enough the APRS telemetry showed it descending. That was amazing.



Since then I have mostly been operating QRP, working on my CW skills and building and collecting radios. My first build was a KD1JV Appalachian Trail Sprint IIIA which is a four-band rig that fits in an Altoid tin. I built that radio in the winter of 2006. It got me hooked on QRP. The following April of 2007 I was welcomed into NAQCC as 1815 by John K3WWP.

My favorite rig that I've built is a Wilderness Radio Sierra. What a sweet little rig. It is just a joy to use. I have all of the band modules. My first ever Alaska contact was when I had just finished aligning the 10 meter band module. I was running a screaming 500 mW and I ran across an Alaska station. I could not believe he heard my little signal.

The picture at the top of this article is me using my Sierra at Sunset Beach, NC in 2012. I am on the beach and the antenna is an end-fed wire running up a kite string. What fun. Nowadays I use my KX3.

My favorite QRP kit that I bought used is an Oak Hills Research OHR-500. It is a very close second to the Sierra. It has a crazy quiet receiver and a good strong audio amp that will drive a speaker well. It is nice not having to change band modules. But it also doesn't have as many bands as the Sierra. I also wish it had the Sierra's bandwidth knob. But everything that is there works very well.

Another special rig that I built is a Software Controlled Radio from the March 2016 QST. It has a VFO made from an Arduino and a DDS. I write software for a living so I decided to write my own software to control the radio. I added a lot of functionality including a menu system, RIT, selectable positive or negative receive offset, automatically varying tuning increment, voltage display and a switchable CW filter. I also integrated some CW keyer logic I found online. It turned out really nice and I ended up winning in the homebrew transceiver category at Four Days in May with it in 2017. I made a video where I demo the rig. Just search for K4KRW on Youtube or click here: <https://youtu.be/cLA14vGqYcE>

My most whimsical rig is a Four States QRP Group Bayou Jumper with the Souper Upper accessory board. It is a 40-meter rig and is rock bound on transmit and has a regenerative receiver. It is surprisingly very usable. It puts out a solid five watts and everything about it is just fun. I have six crystals for it. Here is a picture of my Bayou Jumper.



My best rig is a KX3. What an absolute wonder. The more I use it the more I admire it.

My latest work to improve my station is a new 80-meter doublet. I love making antennas. For my home station I have only ever used 1 antenna that I didn't build myself and I won that one at a hamfest.

My best paddles set is a Begali Pearl that my friends badgered me mercilessly into buying at Dayton in 2017. I later bought a Begali Blade straight key. They are both wonderful. I also have a nice Bencher BY-1 with custom wood finger pieces by Gregg WB8LZG. I won the finger pieces from NAQCC after the 2015 160-meter sprint where I somehow managed two contacts on my 80-meter dipole.

The best thing about ham radio is the friends I have made. My elmer Dave and I are still very close. There is a group of hams that meet pretty regularly on one of the local repeaters in the morning. We are all techie types and love talking about whatever project we are working on at the time.

At hamfests, the thing I enjoy most is seeing friends I don't get to see all of the time. Sometimes I'm lucky enough to get to put a face with a call sign like I did when Charles (W2SH) stopped me at Dayton the first year I went (2017).

I absolutely love operating in the NAQCC sprints. NAQCC is definitely my favorite club and the sprints are the favorite thing I do on the air. I run into many of you regularly and I enjoy every contact. I have even operated the NAQCC sprints from a beach house at Sunset Beach, NC while on vacation. Three times I have used an end fed sloper running from the top of the house down to a palm tree near the ground. It worked great.

As for the rest of the information. I'm 57 years old. My dad was an Air Force pilot who flew KC-135A aircraft (and many others). He passed away last August. I was a boom operator (inflight refueling specialist) on the very same planes my dad flew on except mine were then KC-135R models and had shiny new CFM-56 high bypass fans (86 to 90). I graduated from Campbell University in the metropolis of Buies Creek, NC in 1992 with a degree in Mathematics and a minor in Computer Science. I live in Charlotte, NC with my wife of 24 years, Emma. I have three wonderful daughters. I have been writing software in one form or another since 1980. I have proudly been a total geek since forever. Thank you for your time and I hope to run into you on the bands.

