

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.



HANK RICKS, K5TSK, #10081

Thanks for providing this opportunity to share. Also thanks to all those guys who work in the background to provide the support for the nets, web site, contests, and not in the least, those who get on the air and provide the contacts. Without the CW QRPers, there wouldn't be much point in NAQCC.

I've been in and out of ham radio since junior high school, and although I've dabbled a bit in SSB and digital, CW operation has always been home ground. I had let my last Extra license lapse some years ago, but after my third diagnosis of cancer, I decided ham radio might be a good hobby to keep my mind off of that. It has been very rewarding these last four years, now going on five, with lots to learn and relearn.

One of my first purchases was a Bencher iambic paddle and my first 30 contacts after relicensing as an Extra was with that paddle. I self taught on the paddle years ago thinking the index finger would be the best to form the 'dits' and had never given a 'bug' much thought. An elmer from junior high ham class days had tried to get me to learn his Blue Racer bug many years ago, but because I sent backwards to that bug, it just didn't work.

After joining SKCC this time around, I bought the Vibroplex straight key and played a while on that, then they decided to issue awards for those who made 100 contacts on SK, bug, and cootie. OK, I'm game. Bought a Vibroplex right-handed Original, a Curt Vizkey vertical bug, and a Begali Intrepid. All right-handed bugs that I used left handed. I also got a left-handed Vibroplex Blue Racer, that I learned to use right-handed.

After joining the BUG group, I began thinking about possibly finding an old classic bug, but knew that I probably could not afford a good left-handed classic bug and wanted to send faster with my right hand. So in August 2019, I threw away my FIST and started trying to send with my fingers reversed to fifty years of doing it 'bug backwards'.

Well, it's January 2020 and I can send on my right-handed bugs, right-handed, but I'm telling you, for me, it's not been easy. I still send fragments the old way, usually at the start of a word. Dit when I really need a dah, so please be patient with me on our Sprints. I'm doing a little left-handed iambic paddle with a Begali Leonessa dual paddle, but very seldom, and I've basically lost my iambic fist after making the change.

Was it worth it??? Well, I saw on eBay a while back an old Vibroplex US Army Corp 1940 J-36 and it looked pretty good to me. I paid the price and it is really nice knowing I can finally send on that bug the way it was built to be sent on. Also, my favorite CW elmer from junior high was an Army Corp radio operator, who coincidentally joined in 1940. Who knows, maybe he was in the vicinity of that bug while training. I like to think so.

Three years ago, I decided to buy a KX3/PX3 combo, a Bioenno battery or two, and go to a primitive campground which overlooks the Ouachita River valley at Lake Ouachita for the Arkansas QSO Party. I'm not a 'real' contester by any means, but I had a blast up there for a few hours. I remain amazed at what even a pitiful CW operator can do with QRP on CW. The outstanding operators on the other end with their really neat gear make all the difference. The KX3 and PX3 remain hooked up on the front of my desk as I write this. All it takes is a minor coaxial connector change and suddenly I'm QRP.

I'm not a QRP rig builder and don't work it full time by any means, but after I was asked about the Spotlight, I went back and checked my SKCC QSO log. Turned out that since I became active in SKCC, I've managed enough QRP on that group to get the requirements for QRP1. So maybe I use it more than I think. The December QRPp sprint opened my eyes to the fact that when given a level playing field, and a bunch of good ops on the other end, even a guy like me can have a ball with 900 mw. I wouldn't wish cancer on anyone, but I'm so thankful that because of it, I returned to ham radio, CW, and now a little QRP operating.

I'm retired and tired. Spent my life as a lineman, then meter technician for the old AP&L, now integrated into Entergy Corp. I've climbed 100-foot poles, set steel towers under the old box cranes, and set aluminum towers under helicopters.

Once while hanging off the north side of the old Greenville, MS Mississippi River bridge, I had a transmission power pole set basically in my lap by a helicopter while hanging on the bridge pillar. This while I was safe-tied off to a fiberglass ladder designed to be used on wood poles, and tied to the bridge pillar with polypropylene rope. Did two of those one day. We wore the old Mae West life jackets while we performed that work above the river. No safety ropes or nets. They told us the fall would kill us, but they would get the body thanks to Mae West. That was an interesting day. I spent another ten years as distribution lineman and tasted copper more than once. I can tell you it hurts, all over. Then came twelve interesting, but comparatively boring years in metering.

Proud to be here with you folks. No big plans. I'm enjoying a quiet, mostly sedentary life with my wife and a couple good radios and several nice keys. It's a real blessing being able to be reading the mail, QRP or not. The picture was a selfie, taken at Christmas time after my 73rd birthday. The candles fit right in with the rig at that time. KX3 and PX3 sit just above the writing tablet in the picture and also a Bioenno 20 Amphour LiFePO4. Bugs sit just out of view to the right and a keyboard plus a Vibroplex straight key on the pull out drawer just below. Hope to work you soon, next Sprint. Happy to make a few relaxing contacts and touch base with fellow hams. It's always fun.

73 or 72,
Hank K5TSK

