

By Dan Henderson, N1ND

Straight Key Night 2000

As the clock counted down to Y2K, this was a night to remember!

In this day of “modern technology” it is sometimes hard to remember when life was a bit less complicated. Labor saving devices have certainly reduced the “workload” for society. I don’t know many who would give up their dishwashers, washing machines or power lawn mowers to revert back to scrubbing dishes by hand, cranking clothes through wringers, or spending hours pushing old spinning blade mowers across acres of yard.

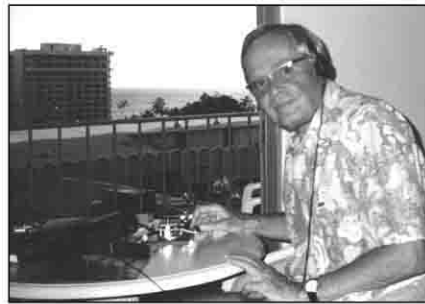
“High Tech” permeates ham radio as well. When you inventory the typical ham shack today, you will find pretty much the same laundry list of equipment. An HF transceiver, VHF/UHF equipment, books, antenna switches and the ever-present personal computer (for performing a myriad of duties from logging and operating packet to whiling away a few hours playing *Freecell* while trying to bust the latest DX pileup)—all standard.

But in many shacks, at least on New Year’s, a strange piece of gear will appear. Hundreds of operators put aside those new-fangled electronic gadgets and reach into their secret storage places and pull out odd contraptions. Some will be simple; others more complex. But all are the same in basic principle: two conductors insulated from each other but with the ability to be pressed together to complete a circuit and cause a “Continuous Wave” of radio energy to be released from the transmitter. On this day many operators are seemingly transported back in time and participate in what we know as Straight Key Night (SKN).

A Special Celebration

SKN 2000 took on a special meaning. Whether you viewed January 1, 2000 as the start of the last year of the second millennium or the first day of the third millennium, hams with a passion for CW and an appreciation for the nostalgic took to the airways and completed thousands of QSOs. An examination of the logs showed several hundred different call signs of operators who participated.

If one considers good CW as a “symphony for the ears” then the bands were alive with stirring melodies. Fifty-seven different



W6AQ/KH6 pounded brass as the surf gently pounded the beach at his Hawaii home during Straight Key Night 2000.

“maestros” were nominated by their peers for having the “best fist” in SKN 2000. After the chorus of suggestions subsided, **John Riles, WA3WNK**, of Duquesne, Pennsylvania emerged as the “Best Fist.” Quite an accomplishment when you consider a jury of your peers is always tough.

It was equally difficult for the orchestra of operators to select the “best score” (Most Interesting QSO) of the 24 hour event. Forty-three “composers” were recommended by their peers in this category. In another very close contest, three operators emerged tied for the honor in the eyes of the other operators. Congratulations to **Brian Roberts, K9VKY**, of Fombell, Pennsylvania; **John Hall, W5ETK**, of Dallas, Texas and **Carl Volker, NW3H**, of Mohrsville, Pennsylvania for participating in the top-ranked “Most Interesting QSO.”

Artisans who can “turn out” a large volume of good work are to be admired. In that vein, special kudos go out to **Margaret Putnam, WP2T**, of Elgin, Illinois who produced 56 quality QSOs during the 24 hours of SKN. This is quite a feat, considering that the normal SKN QSO is more than a quick signal report, name and QTH exchange. Runners-up in this were **Ronald Clark, K3SEW** of Northumberland, Pennsylvania; **Robert Sechler, K3PX**, of Middle Island, New York and **Charles Nevel, W3KSO**, of Pocono Summit, Pennsylvania. They all completed over 30 QSOs during SKN.

The time of Arthur Clarke’s landmark book *2001 A Space Odyssey* looms before us as we look ahead to the next annual gathering of Brass Pounders. We’re not certain

if the contacts of the 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium will be a space odyssey. But modern technology will make contacts with shuttle astronauts or the inhabitants of the international space station commonplace soon. Perhaps contact with extraterrestrials may be on the horizon. But we are certain that at 0000 UTC on January 1, 2001 anyone interested will be able to venture nostalgically back to the simpler times via the harmony of sounds on the air during SKN 2001.

Soap Box

The *only* radio event I look forward to more than SKN is Field Day. SKN’s casual operating style and ragchew QSOing has far more appeal than other contests. (N8KC)... **K5HPF** told me he had made Y2K changes to his rig. All 1999-Ω resistors were changed to 2 kΩ for the occasion. (KG4DUF)... A real nostalgia trip when working stations running vintage gear (NQ4Q)... Nice to see many of the ops firing up the ‘boat anchors’ for this event (VE7SL)... Stations were using a lot more of the band segment. Not so crowded. SKN is definitely kick-back, low-stress CW (W6SGJ)... Had to reduce SKN activity this year because of involvement in Y2K net. Looking forward to next year’s SKN and working more stations (WOHXL)... No Y2K bugs here. Just a sore arm after all the diis and dahs were hammered out on my old Speed-X key (WA0VQY)... The shack smelled of hot wax and heated mildew from the HRO-5 and a variety of Heathkit transceivers were added to the day’s effort (K9VKY)... When everyone is fast asleep, I put on my headphones and talk to the world on CW—something I can’t do on SSB for fear of waking the household (WA2ELW)... I used 10 different straight keys during the event, changing every few QSOs. Each was connected to the transceiver via a 1/4-inch plug via an antique cast brass/bronze jack with “Thos. A. Edison, Inc” inscribed in the casting (K3PX)... During the QSO with LA7SKN, civic authorities here began a New Year’s fireworks display. Air bursts and loud! Be alert. Sometimes the best filter is between your ears (K9LCK)... My brother W4AGI and father W5KL and I have worked SKN for over 25 years. I doubt if many “ham” families can equal that (W4YE) [Both sons now hold call signs previously held by Dad—Ed]... I am not aware of any other event which honors operators of the past who have enriched this hobby, which I recently adopted (KC0FMA)... Had no Y2K problems here in Dallas, but I had my 2 kW gas-powered generator ready just in case. I wasn’t going to miss SKN! (W5ETK)... One of my QSOs was with Fairbanks, Alaska where the temperature was -53° F. At that time here in Honolulu it was 80° F. I wonder if that 133° temperature spread is an SKN record? (W6AQ/KH6)

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