FIELD DAY REPORT FOR 2020

June 27-28 2020

By John E. Gercken, AA9UF

Field Day this year started out as normal as any other. My brother, Glenn, N0PNQ, from St. Charles. MO, came on Friday We went out for supper at Los Zarapez restaurant in Mahomet then when we got home, we got started at setting up the canopy shelter for the generator. The wind had kicked up to 15+ mph, making it difficult to manhandle the canopy cover. Once we got it in place, we used a lot of bungee cords to keep it all together. We also added extra support ropes to the corners. We decided to not install extra tarps on the west and south sides of the canopy until Saturday morning because the wind was too strong.

I was up by 5:00 am, putting the final touches on getting the ham shack ready. Glenn was up by 6:00 am. After breakfast and coffee, we set about installing two tarps, one on the south side and one on the west. Once those were in place, we brought the generator over to the site with our old "Yellow Goat" lawn tractor. The Yellow Goat is an old Cub Cadet tractor that we no longer use for mowing. It is strictly for hauling stuff from one place to another. I built a removable tongue for the generator which is very handy.

The rest of the day until lunch time was spent just shooting the breeze with Glenn since I had not seen him since Field Day last year. Oh, we chat on the phone every weekend but it is just not the same as one-on-one conversation.

The weather on Friday was quite pleasant but the wind was awful. On Saturday it was much calmer with the wind at only 4 mph in the early morning hours. The temp had gotten up to 86F by 11:00 am with the humidity at 77% and rising, making the temp feel like 94F. It is going to be one of those "buggery hot" Field Days.

Fortunately, Glenn and I don't take our gear out of the house anymore since he sold his pop-up camper a few years ago. It had seen better days. So, I built two complete ham stations in my basement Man Cave. Each has its own MFJ-2990 vertical. It has worked out well for us. We can enjoy the cool comfort of the basement with no bugs to bother us. I have a complete set of band-pass filters so we won't cause each other cross-band QRM.

Glenn worked the 40 (7 MHz) meter band using PSK31 mode and I worked 20 (14 MHz) and 15 (21 MHz) meters using PSK31 and RTTY. The 80 (3.5 MHz) and 10 (28 MHz) meter bands were totally dead throughout the contest. I did manage to work a whole 4 stations on the 6 meter band (50 MHz). I was hoping for a lot more activity. I could hear voices at times but they were buried in the noise floor so badly that they were not understandable.

We heard from a lot of different sections of the country but the northwest and southwestern states were not coming in at all. Usually, we here them during the morning hours on Sunday but not this time. It was a struggle to get the ones we got. There was no shortage of stations to contact but with so many transmitting at once, the interference was difficult to deal with. It is a good thing that we don't need to physically hear the signals in order to make contact. We let our computers do that and they decode it.

Saturday night we were running out of stations to contact because so many decided to give up for the night. We shut down the stations and generator at 11 pm. At one point Saturday night I was having a lot of trouble staying awake, so I got a small steel stool and sat on it at the desk. It kept me from falling asleep because it was uncomfortable and I knew I had to stay awake or risk falling off. The Stool Of Punishment paid off.

We were both up by 5:30 am Sunday morning, grabbed a quick breakfast and set about making more contacts. I topped off the tank on the generator and checked the oil. I checked 10 and 15 meters again and found a few stations on 15 to work. Nothing on 6 meters at all.

We shut down at 11:30 am because we could no longer find any stations that we had not already worked. So, after lunch we tallied up our scores and re-checked the logbooks. No, we do not keep paper logs. We use a program called MixW 3.02.105 which receives and transmits many different forms of digital signals, plus it has a good logging program. I have used this program for over 25 years. MixW is interfaced with our radios via an electronic controller. We can tell the radio what to do totally from the computer.

In total, we made 207 contacts. I made 104 and Glenn made 103. When we compute the final score, we get credit for doing certain things such as using 100% emergency power, using social media such as Facebook to generate publicity, submitting our score online and copying the official W1AW Field Day Message via digital mode. These are worth an extra 100 points each added to our score.

Every year, we try to beat the previous year's score. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we don't. Many factors come into play and that is what makes Field Day both a challenge and fun. When things go wrong, sometimes you need to think of ways to work around them. Being able to think on your feet is a good skill to have.