

SPARC GAP

St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club

July, August, September 2003



Up she went Down she came!

Thunderstorms, rain and high winds played havoc at the annual SPARC-Metro Field Day at Bay Pines Veterans Hospital on June 28-29, 2003.



**For more
On Field Day
2003
See
John Stark's
Complete
Story
Starting
On Page 2**



FD Hams Meet Adversity With Grins & Grit

By JOHN STARK KU4BT

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." Charles Dickens.

We had the best food ever! We had the worst weather ever!

Herb, Peter, Udo, (WE4HD, W4GTO, KF4KUL) and all their helpers outdid themselves this year at the combined SPARC/Metro Field Day June 28-29 at the Bay Pines Veterans Hospital grounds.

The Field Day feast started with wings from Jim, KG4JSZ. These got us started in setting up our antennae and rigs. Then, for the main meal, we had grilled ribs cooked by Peter and deep-fried turkeys, a favorite, by Udo. I got to show off my skills with a meat cleaver, while working off a little anger about band conditions and section events.

We had many different kinds of pasta salads and some things that looked suspiciously like fruits and vegetables, which I avoided. For dessert, we had gourmet cheesecake. Late-night snacks, which we sorely needed after Mother Nature's violent display, were cold cuts, bread and leftover turkey. Jeff, KF4GGW, showed up before the crack of dawn with donuts and fresh-brewed coffee, which kept me going until the relief operators arrived.

Around 09:00, we had a huge breakfast of scrambled eggs, bread, sausage and grits, deliciously prepared by Herb. The event finally winding down, we had a lunch of hot dogs, hamburgers, and baked beans. By this time, I could barely eat anymore and had to settle for only one cheeseburger.

Our Technical Setup:

SPARC was running with its usual Field Day combo: Donn's, N4KII, 40-foot tower and the three-element beam on 20-meter SSB, the famous SPARCO generator and a Kenwood rig (TS-870) supplied by Neil, K4NHL. They also had a VHF rig set up for six meters, using a quad donated by Ed, WV4ED, and run by Paul, KD4YDY.

Down at the Metro site under the pavilion, Dave, KR4U, had his excellent rig and antenna up. For the second year in a row, those operators lucky enough to work this setup experienced ham radio heaven in that they were able to work every station they heard, having to call them only once. This set-up consists of a homebrew vertical antenna for 20-meter CW, which is pretty much just a 17-foot, 1-inch aluminum pipe with a half dozen radials that double as guy wires. The



John Stark KU4BT found great success on CW before and after the storm hit.

rig is a beautiful Ten-Tec Jupiter using deep-cycle marine batteries. This was dedicated to 20-meter CW. Dave was using a set of Vibroplex paddles, the biggest they make.

Our second CW rig was brought by Roger, K4SHI, and was the same one we used on the K4E expedition. We originally had it hooked up to a hamstick dipole, but, in the rain, the SWR became jumpy. We temporarily hooked it to a Tar Heel screwdriver antenna on the back of Ken's truck while we looked for a better solution. Well, Neil had brought along an extra G5RV. Ken pulled it up into one of our favorite antenna trees using a fishing pole and I brought out the tuner that I had included in my Field Day supplies for just such an eventuality.

This was the setup we used for the rest of the contest, first on 15 meters, and then on 40 meters all night long, and then back to 15 meters during the last part of the event. I operated this rig and used my Code Warrior Jr. magnetic paddles, which is the smallest key from Vibroplex. Ken took turns operating one rig, or the other, or logging. A new feature at this year's Field Day was all-computer logging. It was reasonably successful, except for a few weather-generated problems.

We also had one other rig in the pavilion. A TS450 from Herb, WE4HC. This rig was hooked up to a 40-meter Windom hung in our other favorite antenna tree. It was to be used for daylight 40-meter SSB, but fate had more in store for it. Peter also operated SSB

from his RV using an ICOM-706.

Now, we were prepared for bad weather. We had tarps and a whole roll of visquine, divided into two halves. We were prepared, but we weren't quite ready for what Mother Nature threw our way.

Mother Nature Strikes!

It had been a beautiful day. We had a little rain and wind, but nothing severe. After sunset, 40-meter SSB dried up and I moved my rig (ICOM-706) from 15-meters down to the 40-meter band. Kenny and I alternated running the rig, or logging. Dave was quietly accumulating 20-meter QSOs.

About 22:30, Ken had to leave. That left me, Dave, and my grandson, Bill, who was napping in the pavilion. A very mild light rain was falling on the water.

Suddenly, without any warning, we were hit with gale-force winds and sheets of rain driven so hard that we might as well have been out in the open instead of under a roof.

We jumped up and covered the equipment, stating with Dave's station, as it was directly facing the storm front. Covering the equipment was easy, but keeping it covered was another thing entirely. The wind was so intense that the tarps and the plastic blew up and tried to take off like hot-air balloons. They seemed to take on a life of their own. I distinctly remember seeing the white plastic wrapped around Dave like a malevolent python. It wrapped around his head and I thought he might drown because of the intensive downpour.

With Dave and Bill both holding down the covers for all they were worth, I picked up the ice chests and set them on the plastic, followed by the fans, and the storage tubes. Finally, Dave and Bill moved a table and set it down on the plastic too, and that finally did the trick. I took the other roll and wrapped an end around the other operating station's table legs and covered the ICOM-706, tuner and the computer. I laid the heaviest things remaining on it. We then moved to the 450, which was toward the back of the pavilion, but was still being hammered. I emptied some plastic bags out and bagged the rig and the power supply.

During this short period, we were freezing to death and half blind from the rain. We were soaked to the skin immediately and Dave and I, who wear glasses, could not see at all. As soon as the rigs were as secure as we could make them, we ran for the vehi-

(Continued on page 4)

Field Day 2003—Metro's Dedicated Operators!



Dave KR4U (above) works CW on Metro's 20-meter antenna (below right). Three Hawaiian contacts were among his QSOs. George W3BL (below left) talks through a QSO on Metro's 40-meter hamstick diapole (above left). The rains sent the hamstick into a tizzy, so Metro threw up an G5RV antenna.

Photos by Phil KG4IGX



Herb's Breakfast Is A Delicious FD Treat

(Continued from page 2)

cles. Dave ran for his van, and Bill and I made it to our car. We climbed in, I had a big beach towel on the back seat, so we took off our shirts and dried off. Since I had on shorts, they weren't too bad, not too much to get wet.

We made it to the car at 2200 and it was 45 minutes before the lightning, rain and wind let up enough that we could run into the building. We found the survivors of the SPARC tent already there. I found out that the tower antenna had been knocked down and was resting in a tree at about a 22-degree angle to the ground.

Dee, N4GD, and I kept looking out the window checking on the weather. I was determined to get back on the air!

Teamwork Beats Adversity!

Finally, at 01:30 the rain was still coming down, but the wind had died down.

Bill and I made it back to the pavilion and uncovered the ICOM-706 and the TS-450 and powered them both up, being careful because of all the water. The ICOM was ready to go, but I had to retune the G5RV. I was again logging contacts, but without the computer, which would not run until after daybreak. Paul, KD4YDY, from SPARC, came over and I asked him if he wanted to work a little 20-meter SSB using the 450 and the 40-meter Windom. He said sure, so we tuned it up, switched filters and he started logging QSOs on paper also.

The 20-meter vertical, the 40-meter Windom and the G5RV all survived the terrible weather with no damage, so had all of the HF rigs. I logged about 80 40-meter CW QSOs after that and Paul logged about 50 20-meter SSB QSOs.

Around sunrise Dave and Kenny showed up, relieved me for a little bit, and put the



Dee N4GD and Freddie KF4FCW dig in as Herb WE4HC (below) cooks up his usual fine breakfast fare for the troops at Field Day 2003 at Bay Pines.

Photos by Phil KG4IGX

Jupiter back on the air. By then, 20-meter SSB activity had died. After the sun came fully up, the SPARC boys pulled the antenna out of the tree themselves, using muscle power, set it up straight, and went back on the air. The antenna suffered a little damage, but still got out good. We didn't need the fire department, or rescue personnel.

After the sun was fully up, 20 meters awoke and Dave and Ken had one giant run. I switched back to 15 meters and logged a few more QSOs on that band. We continued until 14.00. Tear down was uneventful.

And that's the story of the worst weather ever at our Field Days.

We may not have all the appointed Section officials, we may not all have the weather training, and we may not have all of the high-dollar rigs and 70-foot towers, but we have what counts: The technical know-how, the operating skill and courage to survive Mother Nature's KO punch and keep on communicating.



Volunteers make a difference!

SPARC HELPS WHITTED APPRECIATION DAY

By KEN HOPKINS WA9WCP

Members of SPARC participated in the "Airport Appreciation Day" at the Albert Whitted Airport in St. Petersburg on, March 29. The special event was to help save the airport, under consideration for closure and possible sale to developers for condominiums.

Yuck. It was a fun day with war birds, jet fly-overs, etc. We used 2-meter-equipped ham volunteers to coordinate, provide safety and crowd control.

Albert Whitted Airport in downtown St. Petersburg is under intense pressure from groups within and outside of city government, who covet this valuable land. Condos, commercial buildings, expansion of USF, are all some of the proposals to utilize the land now occupied by runway 6/24.

We contacted Coast Guard lieutenant Brian McLaughlin, who had volunteered to manage security and safety. A



Part of the Albert Whitted Airport Appreciation Day was a show of War Birds and other aircraft types. Here, Lt. JG. Brian McLaughlin, U. S. Coast Guard, and Beck Hopkins KA9ECFE, Ken's wife, tour the flight line.

Photo by Ken Hopkins WA9WCP

SPARC members' efforts were much appreciated

unit of CAP volunteered some cadets to help manage the crowds as well as a unit of St. Petersburg police cadets. Brian needed communication with these cadets as well as providing adult leadership for them and the SPARC volunteers were recruited for that role.

Due to the current war effort, the threat of terrorism was considered a real possibility and contingency plans for evacuating the airfield were established.

Since the event ran from 0700 to 1600 hours, two shifts were established so that none of our volunteers would be too burdened, standing out in the hot sun all day. In addition, we received permission to have two radio-equipped motorcycles on the airfield to act as

"runners". Race, KF4WRL and Bill, WZ4GW were enlisted for that role. Eventually they were also put into service escorting aircraft around the field.

Mike, KG4IYB, offered the use of his portable emergency base station and antenna. "OK, Mike, you're Net Control". His equipment worked flawlessly.

Since Brian was not a licensed amateur, we needed a "shadow" for him to stay in communications contact. Beck, KA9EFE, was chosen based on her previous experience and high energy level. "I'd take a bullet for you, Brian," she said.

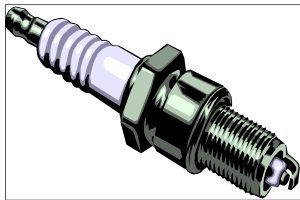
It was a picture perfect Saturday with an estimated 8,000 attendees. Communications between the event organizers and the various volunteer groups was flawless thanks to the help of SPARC volunteers.

"We couldn't have done it without

you," was a constant remark. There were no accidents, nor incidents, and everyone enjoyed a fine air show and a beautiful day.

Thanks to the following 21 hams from SPARC who generously volunteered their time and energy:
KG4TGY, KF4FCW, KG4IYB, W4NHL, AG4QX, NP3R, WZ4GW, WB2SUN, KG4PMC, K4SHI, WA4EEZ, KG4HGP, WB2LEZ, KF4WRL, KG4BUA, N4NSS, N2ESP, KG6PSZ, N2MNC, KA9EFE, and WA9WCP.

**SPARC
MEETS
FIRST FRIDAY
EVERY MONTH**



**SPARC GAP
ST. PETERSBURG
AMATEUR RADIO
CLUB
PO BOX 4026
ST. PETERSBURG, FL
33731-4026**

Mailing
Address
Goes
Here

In This Issue...

John Stark's KU4BT Field Day report; Ken Hopkins WA9WCP on Appreciation Day.

DATE LOG - 2003

SPARC meetings - First Friday every month, 7:30 p. m., 818 4th St. N, St. Petersburg.

Testing sessions - Fourth Monday every month, Gulfport Senior Center.

License classes will resume in September 2003 at the clubhouse.

Melbourne Hamfest, Sept. 13.

Chester's Tailgate Party, Sept. 27, 7 p. m. to ?.

Tampa Bay Hamfest, Dec. 6-7, Manatee County Civic Center. Admission \$7.

AREA REPEATERS & SPARC WEB SITE

SPARC repeater: Nightly, 6:30 p. m., 147.06+, 224.66-, 444.475+.

SPARC Web site: www.qsl.net/W4GAC - Webmaster Dee Turner N4GD.

CARS repeater: Wednesdays, 8 p. m., 146.970-, 224.940-, 444.450+.

Metro repeater: Mon-Wed-Fri, 7:30 p. m., 147.360+, 127.3.

WCF Section Net: Sun 7:30 p. m., Mon, Wed, Fri 9 p. m., 145.430+ & 442.950+(100Hz).

SPARC'S 2003 OFFICERS

President - Donn Davis N4KH 527-9636

Vice-president - Dee Turner N4GD 548-7474

Secretary - Grace Harris KG4CTG 894-1447

Treasurer - Susan Dillon KD4FEZ 302-0611

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Bill Zulas KG4HPM

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Phil Gulick KG4IGX 392-3481

PIO & Newsletter Editor

Ken Hopkins WA9WCP 525-8411

Special Events Co-ordinator

ARTICLES FOR SALE FROM SPARC

**Mosley TA-33 triband
beam \$150**

**Cushcraft 5-element, 6-
meter beam \$150**

**Sections (2) Rohn
tower, tilt base, house
bracket, flat top for
thrust bearing \$60**

Push-up pole \$10

**Call Dee N4GD
at 548-7474**