

SPARC GAP

St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club

July, August, September

BALLOON GOES UP ON FIELD DAY 2001



By PHIL GULICK KG4IGX
SPARC GAP Editor

During the London Blitz of World War II, the Brits used to say that when "the balloon went up," another air raid was on its way.

The balloons proved errant rascals in the fickle weather, but John Stark KU4BT (below) looks serene and satisfied with his Metro CW setup.

Photos by Mark Farr N9MIU

Well-Traveled Big-Wigs Visit 21 FD Sites, Very Enthusiased

Visiting the Pinellas Field Day site were **Dave Armbrust AE4MR**, West Central Florida Section (WCF) manager, and **Paul Toth NA4AR**, assistant section manager. They had just completed a 747-mile round trip of the Field Day sites in the 10 WCF counties.

"We did 21 different sites, ate way too much and met some very fine people," Toth noted. "We discovered a diverse set of Field Day sites, ranging from the small in physical size and people to the combined club sites in Charlotte and Pinellas counties.



"We also found that some sites focused on the emergency communications training that Field Day calls for, while other sites emphasized the contesting portion of the days. We are very enthused about the support Field Days are bringing and the presence for the first time of **Big**

Stick (K4WCF) enhanced our coverage and aided the participants in slow scan TV and other modes."

Toth also noted it was the wettest Field Day ever in many locales, but that the hams coped well with the elements.

No one could remember wetter field days anywhere.

By Phil Gulick KG4IGX

Well, the balloon went up -- and down -- several times during the 67th annual Pinellas County Field Day 2001 at the Bay Pines Veterans Memorial Hospital on June 23-24.

And, like the hardy folks of Merry Ol' England, the Field Day participants were in for a number of "air raids," compliments of a low pressure area in the Gulf that dumped tons of rain onto the site and rattled tents, equipment and nerves with lightning. Fortunately, no bolts struck the encampment, but rains soaked the grassy grounds so everyone walked around in squishy shoes or bare feet.

Unfortunately for the **Boy Scouts Radio Network** operators, the balloons they planned to launch for a possible balloon-to-balloon contact refused to obey the Scout's Law -- we're not prepared!

"We wanted to float them up about 190 feet with a long-wire antenna end fed to an automatic tuner here on the ground, but the winds did not

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Rains, 'Bolts Don't Stop Intrepid FD Troopers



Punching the clouds
SPARC'S 20-meter tower.

Photo by Mark Farr N9MIU

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cooperate," said chief balloon operator **Dan Johnson W4BNC**. "The first time on Saturday, the winds carried the balloons over the bay and we couldn't get them high enough."

The balloons presented Johnson and his assistant balloon handlers with more unpleasant surprises Sunday. Another attempt to launch sent the balloons about 75 yards across the street from the site into the third-floor façade of Building 37, housing the Metro headquarters. That was not exactly conducive to good conductivity. The balloons got so tangled in the structure it took nearly an hour for the beleaguered balloonists to untangle them and bring them to ground.

Thus ended the Great Balloon Caper as Johnson and his disheartened



SPARC SHARPIES AT WORK, WELL, SOME ARE!

Donn Davis N4KII, Bob Burke KC4SXO, Fred Luneburg KF4FCW (standing); Dee Turner N2MNC and Bob Wanek N2ESP.

Photo by Mark Farr N9MIU

cohorts packed up and left early Sunday.

Errant balloons and terrible weather aside, this was another successful Field Day on a site used last year in much better weather. Clubs participating were the host **Metro Repeater Association, Clearwater Amateur Radio Society (CARS), the St.**

Petersburg Amateur Radio Club (SPARC) and the **Boy Scouts Radio Network**. More than 150 hams participated in setting up antennae, transceivers and portable power generators under a veritable tent camp. They braved the driving rains to observe the national field day exercise to test the readiness of ham operators in emergency situations. The common Field Day call sign was **W4TA** in honor of SPARC member **Bruce "Blackie" Blackburn**.

"We certainly could have had better weather, but I think everyone operated well despite that," said **John Stark KU4BT**, Metro president and Field Day coordinator. "We had more catastrophes this year than last, but that's what this is all about – meeting and dealing with such calamities."

Some clubs were on site Friday night with various equipment, although Field

DATE LOG - 2001

SPARC meeting - First Friday every month, 7:30 p. m. Red Cross Headquarters, 818 Fourth St. N.

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

Next class session: July 11, 6:30 p. m. Red Cross Headquarters.

SPARC REPEATERS, WEB SITE, OTHER REPEATERS

SPARC repeaters: 147.06+ - 224.66+ - 444.475+.

Web site: www.qsl.net/W4GAC - Webmaster Dee Turner N2MNC

Metro repeater: 147.360+127.3. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 7:30 p.m. Radio room open 9 a. m.-2 p.m. Mondays thru Fridays. Phone 398-6661X4383.

CARS repeaters: 146.970-, 224.940-, 444.150+, 444.450+.

Egypt Temple Amateur Radio Assn. repeater K4FEZ, Tampa: 147.345+.

WCF Section Net - Sundays 7:30 p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 9 p.m. at 145.430+ & 442.950+(100Hz) sub-audible tone required).

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Big Tents Baffle Even The Extras ! "Uh, It Fits Here?"

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Day did not officially begin until 1400 Zulu Saturday.

Freddie Luneberg KF4FCW reserved the SPARC site with his camper and off-loaded two big generators, using his small-engine expertise to get an older, cranky one running Friday night.

CARS big trailer was already manned by **Mike Murdock K4NW**, **Dave Loibl N3QLD**, **Tom Dye III AB4EZ**, **Phil Petsonk N6MLY** and **Paul Knupke KR4YL**. By late afternoon, CARS had established more than 200 QSOs on 20-meter SSB and CW, with many Canadian QSOs and two fleeting, unlogged contacts with Russian stations. One vexing problem CARS



Mike Murdock K4NW mans the neat CARS setup under a large canopy that sheltered everyone who worked the station or stopped by to chat. A couple of Russian stations whizzed by, but no QSO.

Photo by Phil Gulick KG4IGX

management encountered was the complexity of setting up an eight-pole tent. "Ah, that long pole goes over here...ah, naw, maybe it goes over there ... well, let's see??"

The well-equipped and manned Scout trailer also was on site overnight and by early Saturday morning, Johnson had the usual gourmet feast ready while

his operators warmed up the rigs. **Dan Hawthorne AI4ET**, **Ken Larrison W4KEN** and **Jim Lemke KD4KSI** were among the hams working 10-meter SSB and wrestling with the balloons. Packed into and outside the compact trailer were all manner of transceivers operating through a three-element, 10-meter beam; two-meter and HF verticals and a centerfed dipole.

John Townsley AE4GB brought his beautiful motor home down from New Port Richey and early on set up his satellite station. "We'll try contacting Echo 20 and 29 satellites when they pass later tonight," he noted. He was working amateur TV and two-meters and 440. Townsley eventually contacted the satellites and drew a crowd watching them crawl along their flight paths on the monitor.

Metro set up shop under the pavilion near the bay, grounded a 20-meter, end-

fed Zep in the water and draped a 40-meter dipole over a tree. Its corps of accomplished code operators went to work on CW contacts. By nightfall Saturday, they had logged more than 500 QSOs. Operators included **David Trewin KR4U**, **Scott O'Keefe N4RI**, **Ken Larrison Jr., W4KEN**, **Stephen Allen AF4PK** and Stark, among others pounding the keys.

Heavy showers and nearby lightning suspended operations Saturday morning, but soon the hams were back at it, erecting antennae, unloading gear and plugging in transceivers, PCs and other devices to enhance their operations.

"Rah, rah field day!" shouted **SPARC president, Donn Davis N4KII**, as he and **Mark Farr N9MIU** pulled onto the site around noon with the club's portable 20-meter tower



Boy Scouts Radio Network's Dan Johnson W4BNC takes a break from his culinary and ballooning chores.

Photo by Phil Gulick KG4IGX

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Around the 2001 FD sites

The CARS camp featured huge canopy tents, a motor home and an eager crew of operators (top and left).

Metro's setup under the pavilion (below left) was nearly weatherproof and the center of gravity for hungry hams, family, friends and visitors.

John Townsley AE4GB brought his motor home (below) down from New Port Richey and set up his satellite homing station. The antennae were temporarily attached to the rear of the motor home. Late Saturday, his monitor revealed the passes of two satellites and contact was made.

Photos by Mark Farr N9MIU and Phil Gulick KG4IGX





A Succulent Porker By...

Udo Visintini KF4KUL's a BBQ artist, too!



... And a sentry on guard ...

Bill Zulas KG4HPM guards frequencies in the SPARC setup.

Photos by Mark Farr N9MIU

A Happy Kids' Day ... By The Gracie of ...

By ANN SHAVER WH2E

It was like the saying, what would you do if you gave a party and nobody came? The invitations were printed and sent, the refreshments were plentiful, the hosts and hostesses were enthusiastic.

But for a while, no one under the age of, oh! never mind!, was at W4GAC. While most of us sat around cursing the darkness, to pull out another cliché, **Grace Harris, KG4CTG**, lit the proverbial candle.

Grace simply went out, rounded up some neighborhood kids, brought them to the station, and introduced them to the magic of amateur radio.

To paraphrase our president, **Donn Davis N4KIL**, "Rah, rah, Grace!"

There's no question about it -- we had done all the right things to prepare for Kids' Day. **Phil Gulick KG4IGX** sent invitations to



Grace
Harris
area

organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, and the like. SPARC members did their part on the nightly net. The event was announced every night and at club meetings.

The possibility of DX was emphasized -- **Norm Martin AG4BI** and **Nick Martin N1CKS**, would be vacationing in Virginia that weekend and they assured us they'd make every effort to contact GAC. It would seem no other lures were needed! But just to make sure there was something for everyone, **Mark Farr N9MIU** and **John Stark KU4BT** stocked the station with cold soft drinks.

Everything was in place -- except fresh, young kids eager to make friends

with other kids around the nation.

In truth, **Cedric Harris KF4ZCG** was burning up the bands, but Cedric is so experienced none of us thinks of him as a kid. And that's when Grace went into action.

She brought back an 8-year-old of her acquaintance, Dallas. Dallas was a quick study, but he doesn't seem to have the innate killer instincts of a contender. John patiently eased him along, though, and eventually Dallas had a good QSO with someone who had recently visited Treasure Island.

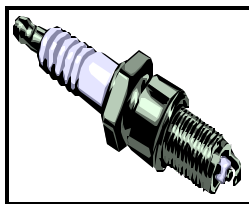
Most SPARC members have a Pavlovian response around a PTT. We also know how to phrase responses to maximize the chances they'll be understood.

Not Dallas -- he needed a lot of coaching. As John observed, "Others don't realize that what we do really isn't easy even though we make it look that way." Words of wisdom from a dedicated brass pounder!

Did we have fun at Kids' Day? Absolutely! Were we able to talk with Norm and Nick even farther away than Palm Harbor? You bet! But the purpose of the event is to interest youngsters in amateur radio, and we did that, too.

After a while, Grace took Dallas home. When he told his brother and sister what a great time he'd had, they demanded a turn, too. So, Grace brought them back to GAC, the event lasted well past our scheduled 6 p.m. cut-off and everyone considered it a success -- except for Mark who stayed at the station and ended up missing dinner that night.

But, that's another story!



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

Mailing
Address
Goes
Here

SPARC meetings are the first Friday of every month at the Red Cross Headquarters, 818 Fourth St. N. at 7:30 p. m.

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Balloons Go Up On 2001 Field Day ... And The Rains Came and Came!

FD 2001 Huge Success Despite Storms

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and beam. Usually, the gear arrives around 11 a. m., but Davis and Farr spent the morning loading huge gear boxes and checking the alignment of the tower's rotator, which proved quirky last year.

An army of SPARC hams assembled and attached the beam to the tower, then manned guy wires as Davis cranked it vertical. An SWR meter showed an acceptable reading, so Davis cranked the tower up to its 40-foot height.

Meanwhile, Farr supervised the crew setting up the eight-pole canopy tent, which turned out to be incorrect, but even better than last year's setup. "Hey, where does this long

pole go? ... no, I think it goes here ... well, ah, no, let's try it over there." Shades of CARS! Finally up, the tent stood several feet taller than last year, a boon for six-footers, who didn't have to duck. "A cathedral ceiling in the boondocks," joked **Ann Shaver WH2E**.

SPARC operators on the 20-meter rig included **Cedric Harris KF4ZCG**, **Norm Martin AG4BI** and his son, **Nick K1CKS**, **Dee Turner N2MNC**, **Grace Harris KG4CTG**, **Bob Wanek N2ESP**, **Shaver** and **Luneberg**. They had logged in about 200 contacts before nightfall Saturday.

Food was plentiful and delicious under the pavilion and at the Scouts' site. **Udo**

Visintini KF4KUL once again provided the deep-fried turkeys that have become a tradition, like Thanksgiving, at the Field Days. **Udo** also barbequed a pig.

Visitors to the site included **Gifford Mead N4XRB** and **Dr. David Coleman KD4E** of the **FL-3 DMAT**, or Federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team. These front-line units provide medical care where medical resources have been destroyed or overwhelmed in a disaster.

More rain interrupted sleep early Sunday morning, and about two hours after breaking camp at 1400 Zulu Sunday, the clouds pulled away and the sun broke through.

Metro QSO Report
SSB 40-14
SSB 15-193
SSB TOTAL 207
CW 80-45
CW 40-84
CW 20-231
CW15-149
CW 10-1
CW TOTAL 511
CW POINTS 1,022
SSB PTS 207
GRAND TOTAL
1,229