

METERS Field Day

Computer Logging Primer

INTRODUCTION

Computer logging. Yes, we'll be using it for Field Day. I'm guessing you have one of two reactions...either joy or fear. To be sure, the thought of computer logging makes many people apprehensive and that's understandable. That said, there's nothing to fear: you're neither going to destroy the computer nor ruin Field Day. Furthermore, we will be using a very straightforward logging product, and this document is your introduction to that software. The idea is let you give you some reference documentation beforehand. Armed with this and some practice with the trial version (more about that later), you should be an expert by Field Day!

What this is and what this isn't

This *is* using a computer to keep a Field Day log. Nothing more, nothing less. In the past, you've written the other station's exchange (Call, Class, Section) on a piece of paper. This year, you'll type it on a computer. It *is not* using a computer to interface with/control the radio, it isn't requiring us to become networking experts (we have people that'll handle that), and it isn't changing how we operate. *We're only changing our logging from writing to typing.*

Why?

Several reasons. First, it makes reporting considerably easier. Secondly, as you become familiar with the software, it'll make you operate more efficiently. The software helps prevent stations from operating on the same band/mode and it quickly tells us if we have "dupes" (duplicate contacts). No more searching through dupe sheets that have become increasingly soggy in the overnight humidity...the computer tells you you've already worked a station so you don't hear the disheartening "KC4EM, you're a dupe".

Why am I reading this?

To learn how to use the software. This document already assumes some familiarity with operating Field Day. If you have questions about that, ask someone familiar with Field Day and we'll fill you in. We'll mention some basics about Field Day, but there's obviously more to know. The important thing is you really don't need to know that detailed information to learn this software.

Enough, already! What program are we using, how do I use it, and is there any way I practice with the software before Field Day?

We will be using the Field Day Contest Log from N3FJP (<http://www.n3fjp.com/fieldday.html>). You can download and install it on your computer. You'll be in trial mode (unless you decide to register it for \$9) so you're limited to 30 contacts, but that should be enough to get a feel for it. How do you use it? Well, that's the rest of this document.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Anatomy of a Field Day Contact

The goal of Field Day is to contact other stations. What constitutes "contacting" another station? Exchanging some information. For Field Day, we exchange Call Signs, Operating Class, and ARRL Sections. Two of those should sound familiar. The other, Operation Class, is something created entirely for Field Day (it is *NOT*, and has nothing to do with, your license class). Suffice it to say it's a number and a letter, such as 23A, 2F, or 1D.

There's one other piece of information to add to that puzzle...the ham band on which we're operating and the mode we're using. For Field Day, the mode is one of three: Phone, Digital, or CW. The band is, well, the band: 160m, 80m, 40m, etc.

The Software

First, don't worry about starting/setting up the software for Field Day. We'll handle that.

Let's look at the screen. There's a lot of information here. That can be intimidating. Fortunately, you don't need to worry about most of it. (Sure, it's cool info, but it's not what you absolutely need to use the program). The first figure is a screenshot:

The screenshot shows the N3FJP's ARRL Field Day Contest Log 4.2 software interface. The window title is "N3FJP's ARRL Field Day Contest Log 4.2" and the URL "www.n3fjp.com" is visible. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Recent Contacts:** A table with columns: Rec, Call, Class, Sec, Date / Time, Bnd, Mode, Country, Initials.
- Score Statistics:** A panel on the right showing: Total CW Contacts (0), Total Phone Contacts (0), Total DIG Contacts (0), Total QSO Points (0), QSOs / Hr (Last 20 min) (0), and QSOs / Hr (Last 60 min) (0).
- Call, Class, Section:** Three input fields for logging a contact.
- Possible Duplicates:** A section with a "Clear" button and a checkbox for "Any Portion".
- Grid:** A grid of call sign prefixes organized by region: 1 (CT, RI, EMA, VT, ME, WMA, NH), 2 (ENY, NNY, NLI, SNJ, NNJ, WNY), 3 (DE, MDC, EPA, WPA), 4 (AL, SC, GA, SFL, KY, TN, NC, VA, NFL, VI, PR, WCF), 5 (AR, NTX, LA, OK, MS, STX, NM, WTX), 6 (EB, SCV, LAX, SDG, ORG, SF, PAC, SJV, SB, SV), 7 (AK, NV, AZ, OR, EWA, UT, ID, WWA, MT, WY), 8 (MI, WV, OH), 9 (IL, WI, IN), and 0 (CO, MO, IA, ND, KS, NE, MN, SD). A "Canada" section includes AB, NT, BC, ONE, GTA, ONN, MAR, ONS, MB, QC, NL, SK.
- Band and Mode:** At the bottom, "Band: 15" and "Mode: PH" are selected. Other bands like "KC4EM", "3A", and "TN" are also visible.
- Time:** The bottom right shows "10:05:21 PM" and "02:05:21 UTC".

Lots of info, isn't it? Let's take another look with the important areas highlighted:

This screenshot is identical to the one above, but with a red box highlighting the "Call", "Class", and "Section" input fields, the "Possible Duplicates" section, and the "Band: 15" and "Mode: PH" controls. A green box highlights the "KC4EM", "3A", and "TN" band selection buttons at the bottom of the interface.

Note the highlighted sections. The one in green is important because it's a reminder of our callsign, class, and section. You'll never really interact with this, you'll just look at it to remind yourself of what to say on the air. (Field Day has a way of making us forget who we are at 2 AM).

The red section is where we'll do our work. Let's zoom in on that:

The screenshot shows a software interface with a top navigation bar containing three blue buttons labeled 'Call', 'Class', and 'Section', each with a white input field below it. Below this is a large red rectangular area. Underneath the red area is a 'Clear' button. Below that is a blue header bar with the text 'Possible Duplicates' and a checked checkbox labeled 'Any Portion'. The main area below the header is empty. At the bottom, there are two blue boxes: 'Band: 15' and 'Mode: PH'.

First, we need to focus on the band and mode boxes at the bottom of the screen. Right now, we're set up for 15 meter phone (i.e. sideband). If you need to change to another band or mode, you can just click in those blue areas and it will change. For the sake of our example, we'll keep it at 15m phone.

TIP: When you change the band, look in the blue box immediately under the Call/Class/Section boxes. It may warn you that another computer is already on that band. There's a way to tell what mode they're using but our Field Day is simple enough that we can just ask the other person. We're probably going to have 3 stations so coordination/conflict resolution is pretty easy.

The top row is where we'll do our work. That's where we enter the contact information. Remember, we enter the info about the station we're contacting here.

TIP: The tab key is your friend. Using the touchpad to navigate between fields can be a pain. If you simply click in the white box below "Call", you can begin entering contacts by typing the callsign, pressing tab, the class, tab, the section, followed by pressing enter. Your contact is logged and your cursor is back in the "Call" field. No need to keep clicking in each field!

Let's say we work a station that gives us the exchange:

"WHISKEY ONE ALFA BRAVO CHARLIE TWO FOXTROT WESTERN NEW YORK".

Immediately, the new Field Day operator may be overwhelmed. The first few times you hear an exchange it can be hard to separate things into call, class and section. It won't be long until your brain translates that to "W1ABC 2F WNY"

MORE TIPS:

- *Make sure you know your phonetic alphabet.*
- *Become familiar with ARRL and RAC (Radio Amateurs of Canada) Sections. Yes, our friends from the Great White North participate in Field Day. They just don't sweat as much as our SFL friends (What's SFL? Look at the different ARRL sections and you tell me!)*
- *The Logging Software actually lists all of the sections...you can look over there for reference. You can also just click on the section name and it'll fill in the "Section" field. (My preference is just to type it because that's faster for me.)*
- *What if someone outside of the US/Canada contacts you? Their section is "DX". In 10+ years of Field Day I think I have encountered this once. So, not really common. Which makes it a great trivia question. You're welcome!*

So what does it look like in the program?

The screenshot shows a software interface with three input fields at the top: 'Call' containing 'W1ABC', 'Class' containing '2F', and 'Section' containing 'WNY'. The 'Section' field has a red 'New!' indicator. Below these fields is a large cyan rectangular area. Underneath the cyan area is a 'Clear' button. Below the 'Clear' button is a section titled 'Possible Duplicates' with a checked checkbox for 'Any Portion'. At the bottom of the interface, there are two buttons: 'Band: 15' and 'Mode: PH'.

If you press Enter, it'll show up in the table at the top of the program screen (look at the original picture) and the Call, Class and Section fields will be cleared out.

That's basically it. You just type the call, class and section and press enter. ***IT REALLY IS NOTHING MORE THAN TYPING THE EXCHANGE INFO RATHER THAN WRITING IT DOWN!***

Of course, the other issue is duplicates. Again, using the Reader's Digest Condensed Version of the rules, you can only contact a station once on a given band/mode. So W1ABC can only be worked once on 15 Phone. (We can work them again on 15 Digital, 15 CW, 20 Phone, 20 Digital, etc., so we can work a station many different times. But only once per mode/band combination).

That sounds like a daunting task. Now we have to scroll through this list of tons of calls to make sure we don't have a duplicate, right?!? That's even worse than looking through a stack of soggy dupe sheets. BUT WAIT...One of the great features of this software comes to the rescue. Let's say someone else is working on 15 phone later during Field Day. They hear a great signal from W1ABC and think it'd be great to work them. So, they (or their logger) begins filling in the contact info...

The screenshot shows a software interface for logging contacts. At the top, there are three input fields labeled 'Call', 'Class', and 'Section'. The 'Call' field contains the character 'W'. Below these fields is a large cyan rectangular area. Underneath this area is a 'Clear' button. Below the 'Clear' button is a dark blue header for a 'Possible Duplicates' section, which includes a checked checkbox for 'Any Portion'. The main area below the header is cyan and contains the text 'W1ABC'. At the bottom of the interface, there are two fields: 'Band: 15' and 'Mode: PH'.

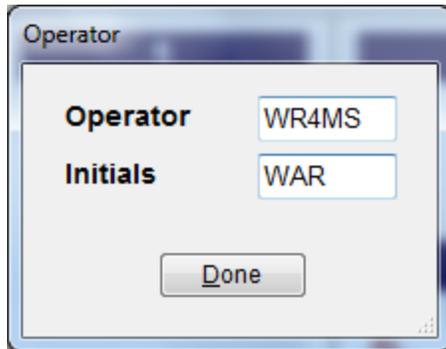
WOW! We typed only one character of the callsign and the software (in the bottom blue box) starts listing possible duplicates. W1ABC shows up. We immediately know we've worked them and we should find someone else. No wasted effort trying to call them, and no embarrassing moment when we call them and they tell us "Hey buddy, we've already worked"

OTHER FEATURES

That information is enough to get you going. Actually, it's all you need to successfully work Field Day. There are a couple of features of the software that make it easier to use or give you other information. Let's check into those.

Setting the operator

It's not really required to know who did what contact, but it's nice to know. It helps the scorer to know who to talk to if they have questions. It's really simple to enter this. Just click on the "Operator" menu at the top of the screen and fill in the box that appears:



The image shows a small dialog box titled "Operator". It contains two text input fields. The first field is labeled "Operator" and contains the text "WR4MS". The second field is labeled "Initials" and contains the text "WAR". Below these fields is a button labeled "Done".

Letting the software work for you

Believe it or not, those of us that work on computers and write software are actually trying to make life easier. There's one great feature of this program...Remember how the software knows if we're about to make a duplicate contact? Obviously it can do that because it knows who we've worked. It uses this information to "fill in the blank" if we operate a station later (on another band/mode, of course). If you enter a callsign, you might notice the Class and Section automatically populated with data. This is the software trying to be friendly. Remember, we can contact a station many times over Field Day (the only restriction, again, is we can only contact them once on each band+mode combination). If we've already worked them on 80 meter CW and are now trying on 40 Digital, that's fine. And, since their class and section cannot change during field day, the logging software already knows what those values are. So, it's nice to us and fills them in.

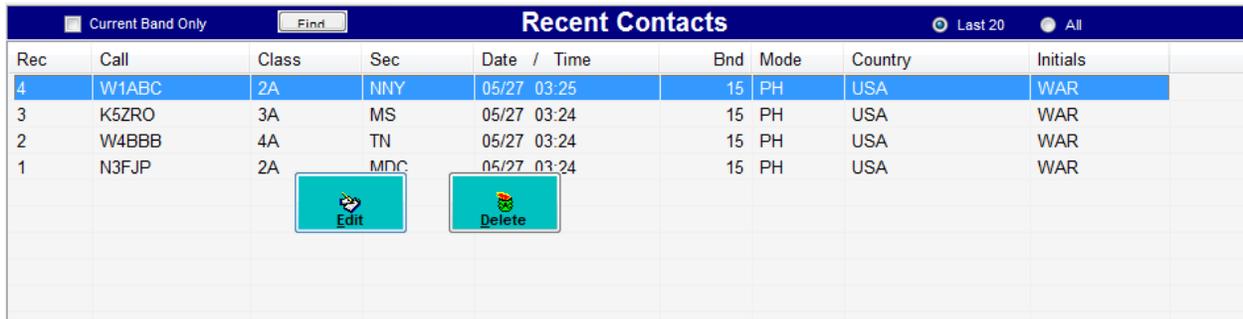
Setting the band/mode via the menu

If you look at the menu bar, you'll see two menus: "Band" and "Mode". You can click on those menus and select your band and mode if you don't want to click in the blue boxes. I prefer clicking at the bottom of the screen instead of using the menus, but again, whatever works for you.

Editing and Deleting Contacts

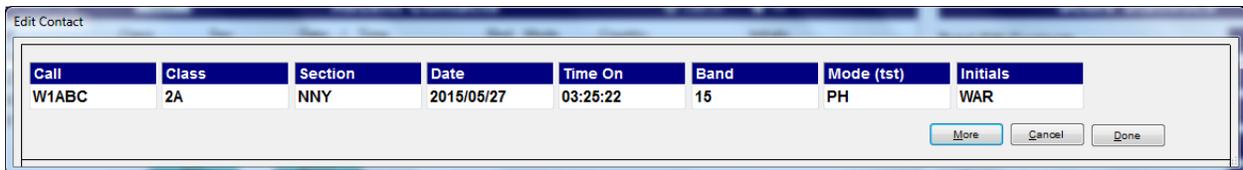
Yeah, we all make mistakes. Sometimes we press Enter before we realize that mistake. Sometimes in computing, that's bad. With this logging program, it's no big deal.

For example, assume we made a typo on the section for W1ABC and entered NNY (Northern New York) instead of WNY (Western New York). Just find the entry in the list at the top of the program (it should be at or near the top, because the program puts the newest contacts at the top of the list). If you simply single-click on the contact, you'll be given the choice to edit or delete it.



Rec	Call	Class	Sec	Date / Time	Band	Mode	Country	Initials
4	W1ABC	2A	NNY	05/27 03:25	15	PH	USA	WAR
3	K5ZRO	3A	MS	05/27 03:24	15	PH	USA	WAR
2	W4BBB	4A	TN	05/27 03:24	15	PH	USA	WAR
1	N3FJP	2A	MDC	05/27 03:24	15	PH	USA	WAR

If we click "Edit", we have the ability to change things:

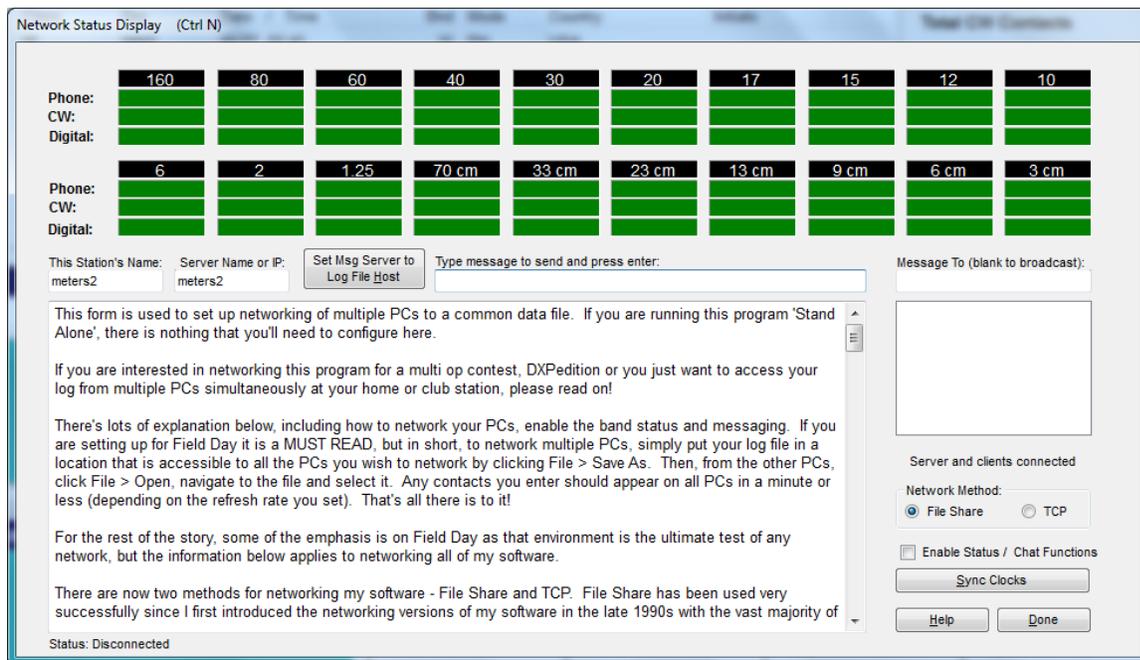


Call	Class	Section	Date	Time On	Band	Mode (tst)	Initials
W1ABC	2A	NNY	2015/05/27	03:25:22	15	PH	WAR

Just correct the error and click "Done". Voilà!

Finding who is operating where

Remember I said that when you get the “Careful: Someone else is on 15 m” that you could find out where they were? If you click the Network menu, you’ll see a visual depiction of who is on what band/mode. The one below is not very useful, because I’m the only computer and haven’t set up networking for the program, but the other stations will be red (unoccupied bands/modes are green as shown below). You can also message other stations (well, their logging computers) here. **Just don’t click in the “Network Method” box.**



FINAL THOUGHTS

1. Fear not! This *really* does make life easier. No, seriously, it does. No kidding.
2. Become familiar with the ARRL and RAC sections. No, you don’t have to memorize them. But, it’s good to have a working knowledge of them.
3. Download the trial version and practice, practice, practice! (If you enter 30 contacts, just delete some or start a new log via the File menu.)
4. If you have questions, ASK! Email me (I use the ARRL email service, so just add my call sign to @arrl.net).