

NCJ Interviews: Lloyd Cabral, KH6LC

Lloyd Cabral, KH6LC, has been providing testers with CQ zone 31, ITU zone 61, and Pacific Section contacts since 2004. In this issue, he provides insight into contest activities from the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where everything is DX. — Fred Regennitter, K4IU

NCJ: Lloyd, how did you get started in amateur radio? Who inspired you?

KH6LC: Like many, I started as a teenager [in California]. A neighbor had a Hallicrafters S-77 that he used to listen to the ball games. I'd go over often to play with his son and noticed the receiver. He said I could listen to it, but I had to wear headphones so I didn't drive the family crazy. Signals were a mix of AM and SSB in the mid-1960s. I soon discovered small black areas on the dial, an inch wide at the most, labeled "Amateur." I'd spend hours listening to that receiver. One day I heard a kid about my age. He stated that when school started up, he'd be going to a high school near my junior high, and that was one year I couldn't wait for school to start. Once school started I hiked up to the high school and headed straight for the Electronics Room. I asked the teacher if he knew who WB6OKE was. He introduced me to Robert Harris (now W6FV) who became my Elmer and a life-long friend. One day the S-77 died, and Mr. Fox offered it to me. Yes! Replacing the ballast tube brought the set to life, and I had a receiver. My first transmitter was a 40 meter 10 W oscillator I built from an article in *Popular Electronics* using TV parts. Antennas were dipoles. Once I upgraded to General I acquired a Viking II and a beautiful Hallicrafters SX-28A that I'd love to have today. I used that setup all through high school, mostly rag chewing on AM. As far as inspiration, I read an article in *QST* about W6AM, a popular ham in Rancho Palos Verde, California, who held an open house each summer, and all were invited. I had a new 1967 VW bug and decided I'd drive myself down from Fremont, California, my first solo road trip. I was blown away by all the rhombics and all the Collins gear in the shack. Don Wallace and his crew were most gracious hosts and made this kid feel very welcome. Years later, I never failed to thank Don when I'd see him at Visalia.



KH6LC and one of his antennas.

NCJ: When did you realize you wanted to play with radios at the “pro” level?

KH6LC: My high school years were spent rag chewing on AM. After high school, I dropped ham radio in favor of girls, motorcycles, and cars, in that order. In 1972 I moved to Santa Cruz for a job with Pacific Bell. I bought my first home, got married, and settled into a long career. I also put up a tower with a TH6 and a 402BA. I joined the Santa Cruz County ARC where I met Dave Rowley, N6RZ (then WA6UZA). We became close friends. Dave was a great CW op and was what I would call a serious contester. You can add intense to that. He invited me to operate with him and his friends, but first I had to sharpen my almost non-existent CW skills — which I did. The most influential thing Dave did for me was introduce me to the NCCC.

In the mid-1970s it was standing-room-only meetings, pizza, and good times. It was a hoot. The NCCC was a gathering of enthusiastic, fun people who were more than happy to share their knowledge and help you with your station if it meant getting more contacts into a NCCC log. Everyone was a lot younger back then, which helped. I learned a lot from those NCCC members and many are good friends to this day. I don’t consider us playing at anywhere near a “pro” level. I’m a retired telco employee, so I’m not rich.

I retired and moved to Hawaii in 2004. I put up two towers and some large M2 antennas. Then a few years later I added

two more towers and more antennas. All the towers are permitted. What this station is about and what I’m about, is gathering friends together for a fun weekend of playing radio. There are only a few requirements. They have to like CW, and play well with others. We all enjoy the camaraderie, good food, and good beer. That said, when it’s your turn to operate and you enter the shack, the nonsense stops, and it all becomes a somewhat serious endeavor. At our age, we all know why we’ve gathered here and what we’re supposed to be doing. There’s also an expected level of competence.

Ops spend good money flying out to join us, so there’s an expectation that everyone’s tuned up and ready to play. No spending half the weekend coming up to speed. Everyone is great about helping and encouraging others to perform and improve their skills. Big egos and whiners are not tolerated.

Yes, I have four towers and a bunch of good antennas, but most anyone can put this stuff up with a few extra dollars, some properly zoned real estate, and a bunch of good friends. When people look at all the towers and antennas, I always like to remind them that I don’t own a boat. This station is mostly 1980s technology, *auto-nothing*, manually tuned everything. We use an AL-1500 on each band. Why? Bought used, they’re cheap and cruise along all weekend at 1500 W. But the biggest reason is that we can repair them ourselves. The cost of shipping anything

to/from Hawaii is a real killer. We like to keep things simple and straightforward. Everything is labeled, and all cables are tagged. Years of working in a telco central office will make you do that. We have spares of everything, including amps on roll-around carts, ready to be swapped out in minutes when necessary. No matter what level you’re playing at, it better be fun. Remember this: First or last, a check is never arriving in the mail. What we’re really about is having good fun with friends, all doing the best we can, sharing good times and making memories.

NCJ: In general, how is propagation different in Hawaii compared to the US mainland?

KH6LC: We don’t hear many strong local signals out here. The West Coast is about 3,000 miles away, and those are the closest stations we hear. New England is almost 6,000 miles out, the eastern Caribbean about 6,500 miles, and Japan about 4,500 miles, so propagation needs to be fairly good for us to do well.

One major difficulty for us is the difference in time zones, which is up to 6 hours for New England, so stations on the mainland have changed from daytime to nighttime bands and vice versa long before it is possible for us to do so. We’ll be having fun working stations on 20 meters, then you guys all switch to 40 and we plod along on 20 and wait. It’s the middle of the afternoon out here. Europe is often difficult for us, because propagation paths have to pass over the pole and through the auroral zone. Think big antennas and tubes with handles. Just kidding.

NCJ: How do these differences affect your contest strategies for international contests? For domestic contests?

KH6LC: We pay very close attention to the gray line. The farther away you are, the more important that becomes. Contest strategy is the same for us as for everyone else. Be on the right bands at the right times and keep the pedal mashed to the floor.

NCJ: Do the unique band plans in your region affect contest strategies?

KH6LC: Typically just on 40 meters. We’ve heard that SSB operators will sometimes find it advantageous to operate split, with a receive frequency up in the US mainland band and a transmit and receive frequency down around 7.080 or so. We don’t operate much SSB.

NCJ: Can you characterize/contrast the on-the-air operating behaviors of operators in the various regions of the world?

KH6LC: I could, but it probably wouldn’t be a good idea. Good or bad we work them all. The goal is to get them all into



KH6LC by his station console.

our log as quickly as possible and move on.

NCJ: What are some annoying operating habits that you have experienced?

KH6LC: Intentional or careless interference and excessive dupes are troubles we all have to face. It would speed things up if people would pay closer attention to the instructions of the operator. Partial slows everyone down. *Listen, listen, listen!*

NCJ: What is one message you would give to the contest community?

KH6LC: Do everything we can to get younger people interested and involved. Been to a convention or radio club lately? The average age is frightening. But ham radio is a hard sell these days. This station participated in ARRL Kids Day for 10 years. We'd have up to eight kids operating on 20, 15, and 10, adult coaches at each position, and provided a nice breakfast and lunch for everyone. In those 10 years, we had exactly one kid get his license, and I don't believe he's ever used it. Hats off to Tim, K3LR, and all the work they do getting young people into that station. We need more of that. When I was in high school in the mid-1960s, every high school in the area had an amateur radio club and a station. That seems to have gone away.

NCJ: What suggestions could you make to the contest community that would help the hams at the KH6LC superstation?

KH6LC: First, calling KH6LC a superstation is an insult to the likes of K3LR, W3LPL, KC1XX, K9CT, PJ2T, KH6YY, NR5M and many other *true* superstations. We're small potatoes. If you really want to help KH6LC, try turning your antennas to the west once in a while and ignore those other pesky KH6 stations calling you. Just work us.

NCJ: What is your favorite contest mode? And why?

KH6LC: That's easy. CW for sure. I consider it to be an art form, much like playing music. CW can be a wonderful display of operator skill and finesse. We operate a little SSB but I find SSB contests quickly wear me out. I don't have the patience for it. I've tried a little RTTY and JT65, but compared to operating CW it's like watching grass grow. To each their own.

NCJ: What are your favorite contests? What do you think was your best contest to date?

KH6LC: We enjoy all the 160 meter contests. We haven't done exceptionally well there lately, but we're currently working to improve our 160 transmit and receive capabilities. We did better years ago with a vertical and beverages. We



An aerial drone photo of KH6LC.

have work to do on 160. We all enjoy the ARRL CW, WPX CW and CQ WW CW. The ARRL CW weekend is our biggest event of the year. We're a MM in that one, made possible by friends who fly out to join us.

We turn it into a big party. Our benchmark is PJ2T and seeing how close we can stay to them. We've had Gene, KB7Q, join us a time or two. What's nice is the 48-hour contests end at 2 PM, so there's plenty of time for cocktails and a nice BBQ on Sunday. We've had as many as 16 people sitting down for dinner. It's a good party with good friends. For the CQ WW CW we've been a M2 for years, mainly due to a lack of operators. It's been the regulars, Curt, AH6RE; Rob, NH6V; Stan, AH6KO, me, and anyone else we can scare up. Basically an M2 with four old guys. Speaking of old guys, we really miss having Fred, KH7Y, out here. Our local competition is Alex, KH6YY's beautiful station on Oahu, KH6J. Like us, getting enough ops to properly staff their station is often a problem. We both have the hardware, we need bodies. As far as our best contests, we had good results in the 2016 – 17 ARRL DX CW contest, the 2009 and 2012 WPX CW contests along with a string of decent results in CQ WW CW from 2010 thru 2012. My favorite state QSO parties include CQP, 7QP, the Washington State Salmon Run, and the Hawaii QSO Party which desperately needs more local participation. I think all

KH6 stations will agree that the deepest, endless pileups we've ever experienced were in the 2014 ARRL Centennial Celebration, regardless of the mode. That was big fun.

NCJ: What makes your contest station so effective?

KH6LC: It's several factors, primarily this being a very quiet QTH. We're about a mile from the water but when you climb a tower it seems we're right on it. Barring any electrical storms, we usually hear quite well. We always seem to work a good number of QRP stations if that's any indication. Another big factor is having the station fully set up and tested well before any contest. We usually try to have things set up and tested a full week or so before a contest. Then the day of the contest comes around, you turn everything on and half of it isn't working properly.

Software problems, high SWR, noise. What happened? Having enough good antennas and equipment certainly helps along with the flexibility to use that equipment to its full potential. That said, it always comes back to the operators. They perform the magic, they make it all happen. A good operator has the skills to kick butt using an ARC-5 and a Sky Buddy.

NCJ: What do you think you could do better or differently at KH6LC?

KH6LC: We should probably spend more effort on station maintenance between events, but we're all getting older, tired, and lazy. We need to get a few more

antennas in the air, which becomes an issue of labor and money. We also need another SixPak and another Stack Match. A few K3s would be nice too. Donations gladly accepted. We accept PayPal. Just kidding. Guest ops often bring their K3s. If we had more ops, we'd like to use two radios on a band at times. We have the hardware and have dabbled with it some but we need practice. Again, it basically comes back to the shortage of operators out here.

NCJ: What's the weirdest thing that has occurred during a contest at KH6LC?

KH6LC: Like many, we've worked DX at times when a path just didn't seem feasible. Some of it was blatant abuse of a remote here in KH6 by European stations. That problem went away thank goodness. We also had a guest op who loaded up a 77SX into an open port on a SixPak. The SixPak was burnt to a crisp but the old 77SX didn't flinch. I'm lucky the house didn't burn down. All the switching is done in the garage, so he couldn't smell the burning. I have that SixPak framed

and mounted in my shack as a reminder to always check for RX band noise and TX SWR when changing bands. It's a great conversation piece, if nothing else. Remember, nothing is automated here. Being old school, we get to twist all the knobs.

NCJ: Do you get used to being a celebrity ham?

KH6LC: Fred, you've got to be kidding!

NCJ: What do you like to do outside of contesting?

KH6LC: I've always enjoyed traveling and do as much as I can afford. I've been to some interesting places in the world and still have a few on my short list. Besides radio, I've had a lifelong passion for vintage motorcycles, mostly BMW twins and Ducati models. I still do quite a bit of riding, both here, on the mainland, and in Europe. I have European rides planned for 2021 (IOM TT) and 2022 (Italy WRTC). I spent about 10 years road racing a 1965 Lotus Seven at tracks up and down the West Coast. I learned a lot, and met a bunch of wonderful people who were as

passionate about their vintage cars and racing as we are about our radio.

What I have to do outside of contesting is keep this jungle hacked back so it doesn't take over my life and this 4-acre property. I know it sounds easy, but this stuff grows 24/7. You can almost hear it growing.

NCJ: Any final thoughts?

KH6LC: For me, it's always been about people. I might not remember scores, but I certainly remember many of the characters we've come across in this hobby. Most have been great people who've taught me a lot and others who've helped me a lot. Life is easier with good friends, and I've been blessed. As far as on the air, it's the old reminder to *listen, listen, listen*. That can't be stressed enough. Always lead by example, so being courteous and respectful to others is a given. After 54 years it's still hard to imagine a hobby that would give me as much pleasure and enjoyment as this one has.