

It Doesn't Get Much Better Than That . . .

“Amateur radio doesn't get much better than that!” Chances are you've had at least one experience in ham radio that has prompted you to think something like that or say it to someone else. Perhaps it was your first DX contact, working a rare station on the “gray line,” or getting a sought-after QSL card (remember QSL cards?) in the mail. Or maybe it was something more esoteric, such as making your first satellite contact or hearing your echoes off the moon for the first time. I had one of these moments recently, and it involved a contact from my station in New Jersey to far-away Ohio (quickly followed by another, even better one). Obviously, there's a story behind it, of frustration, friends, and unanticipated accomplishments.

Last month, in a semi-tongue-in-cheek editorial about ham radio and “mindfulness,” I used a kit project on which I was working as an example of the focus and concentration that ham radio activities often require. “You need to make sure you have the right parts in the right order,” I wrote, “place them in the right spots on the circuit board, count turns on a coil if you need to wind one, solder carefully, etc.”

I need to pay more attention to my own advice . . . especially if I'm going to become a highly paid ham radio mindfulness instructor! I finished building the kit—a RockMite II QRP transceiver—wired up all the connectors and controls, plugged in the two crystals and three ICs, applied power, and . . . nothing. No sound in the headphones, not even a click as I turned the power on and off.

I looked up the troubleshooting guide in the manual and started checking voltages on the ICs, as instructed. Except for one pin on one chip—on which the supply voltage was present as it should have been—the readings on every other pin were wrong. I re-checked my solder joints, even snapping a photo on my phone and enlarging it to show greater detail, and couldn't find a problem.

So I called in the heavy artillery, my friend, colleague, and QRP “Elmer” Richard Fisher, KI6SN. Since he's in California, I sent him phone pictures. He pulled up the manual online, and we started going through the circuit on the phone, component by component. At one point, when he was looking at the schematic and I was looking at the board (photo A), he commented that the voltage

from one of the resistors should match the voltage on the chip to which it was connected.

“That's strange,” I said. “That chip is all the way on the other side of the board.” Light-bulb moment: It was, but should it be? I went back to the manual and, lo and behold, despite my own advice to the contrary, I hadn't been mindful enough and had accidentally swapped two of the ICs when I was plugging them into the board. Luckily, they didn't get fried as a result (or as Richard said, I didn't let the smoke out!).

I swapped them into the correct sockets, flipped on the power and, miracle of miracles, there was sound in the headphones! All the voltages were now correct, everything seemed to work as it should, so I mounted the board and associated connectors, etc., in the case (photo B) and headed off for dinner.

Later on, I came back to the shack, hooked up power, antenna, etc., and did a little more testing. It was receiving very well. But was it also transmitting? I was about to hook up a power/SWR meter when I heard W8HOG calling CQ. What better way to find out if a rig is transmitting

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About This Issue – Plus a Staff Change

We continue in this issue to work our way back onto a regular publication schedule for our print edition. As a result of combining the March and April issues, we were unable to publish the CQ World-Wide DX SSB Contest results as scheduled last month. This issue features *both* the SSB and the CW results from last year's CQ WW DX Contest. We expect to return to our regular contest reporting schedule for the rest of this year and beyond. Please remember that all contest line scores are now on the web, as they have been for the past year.

All subscriptions have been extended appropriately, to make sure everyone receives the full number of issues for which they've subscribed. We thank you for your patience and understanding.

Finally, we have a staff change to announce. Katie

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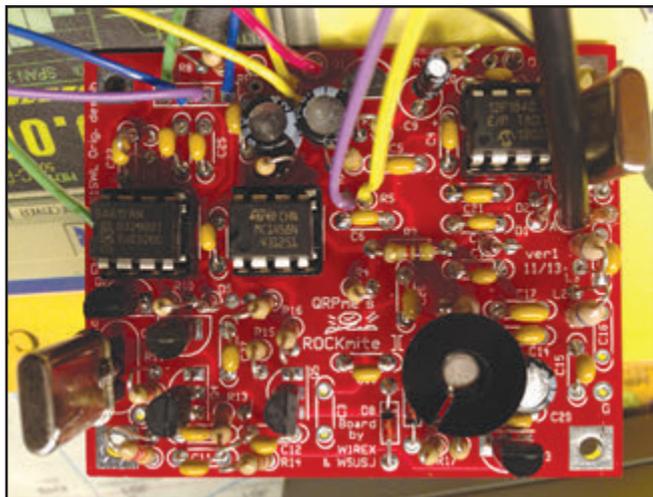


Photo A. Troubleshooting the RockMite II board while KI6SN reviewed the schematic revealed that I'd accidentally swapped two of the ICs.



Allen, WY7KRA, is our new Sales and Marketing Manager. Some of you may remember Katie from her days as ARRL Membership Manager, helping to revitalize the ARRL's staff radio club and station, and posting YouTube videos about various operating activities. Her enthusiasm for amateur radio is an asset to us all, and we are very grateful to have her as a member of the CQ family.