

8/18/2023

Greetings All,

This is a story of success and failure. This is also a "lessons learned" missive.

First, and foremost, thank you all who helped make this event possible. Your involvement was greatly appreciated.

Gowen Thunder is in the books. I can testify it was a busy four days and the story of the event is a saga. Set up was on Thursday and it was hot and bright. As an FYI, it rained every day briefly and the wind on Friday and most of Saturday was brisk. Our booth had two tables, one for the radio stuff and one for the Legion stuff, all put under the Department of Idaho pop-up canopy. On the radio side, we had a remote operated IC 7610. The remote part was facilitated by a Starlink satellite system. If you looked at our set-up, all you could see was a computer, a Starlink modem and a StarLink dish behind the canopy up 12 feet. Initially, power was supplied by a marine deep cycle battery powering a pure sinewave inverter. Notice I said initially.

On the Legion side, we had a great deal of literature to hand out as well as small flags, Constitution books, pinwheels, and patriotic glasses. We also handed out gun locks. The Post 113 Auxiliary along with members of Post 113 made the pinwheels on the spot and passed them out.

Friday was "Military Family Day". There were a few thousand people and the Thunderbirds along with an F-35 and a biplane did a show as they practiced for Saturday and Sunday. The nice quiet crowd gave us the opportunity to work our gear and get the kinks out...at least that was the plan. If you think I'm leading up to something, you're right. At that time, we were using only 100 watts of HF power.

Saturday was activity on a whole different level. Not a few thousand, but around 50,000 people. The lines at the food vendors were typically one hour! The pinwheel and funny glasses supply went quickly. The radio and Starlink worked as we talked with several stations in CA, WY, CO and NV. Bill Solt (N7OCV) and I worked the ICOM station now set at 500 watts. Caleb Moose, W4XEM, and his wife Katie, K4WXN, came and set up their Elecraft station for a while. Others were on tap for Sunday like Ron Giuntini, KB7GK, Scott Kaufman, KJ7TKL, and Jonathan Hoffmeier, KE0JRH. Things worked well Saturday until...the battery died. No power, no station or Starlink.

David Hunter, N7MKY, and his wife Annette, KK7AJY, brought out two more batteries and another inverter on Saturday after the initial battery died. That alone was an ordeal. While waiting for the replacement batteries, we tried using a hot spot to run the radio. There were so many dropped packets that the remote link to the radio disconnected.

The batteries arrived and that got us on the air again, but it was not long lasting. After about a couple of hours with the new power system, the power again went out. Appreciate that it takes many minutes to up to a few hours to get the Starlink online and settled, providing smooth internet service. It appeared that between the computer and starlink we were drawing too much current for the inverter.

I mentioned the sun was bright. So bright in fact that the screen on the computer was completely washed out. Despite our best efforts, we had a difficult time looking at the screen to monitor the radio. The other thing about an airshow is the planes flying around are noisy, hence the name Gowen Thunder. So noisy that if a plane was going by, which happened a lot, speech and hearing was impossible. In spite

of all that, we managed to work stations. When we left for the evening, we decided to power the system not with a battery on Sunday but with a generator. Brilliant!

Unbeknownst to us, at around 2300 Saturday evening it again rained, a lot, and the wind blew, a lot. The wind was about 50 MPH across the ramp area. There was also thunder and lightning, just for extra entertainment. Our canopy became airborne, fitting for an airshow but not for a canopy. Because the connecting wire for the Starlink was attached to the canopy, both the canopy and the dish hit the dirt, so to speak. Some good Samaritans stood the dish back up after the storm. We weren't the only ones who took a hit. Five other canopies wound up in the drainage swale and broken up. When I arrived at 7 AM Sunday, everything was soaked.

Needless to say, booth operations for Sunday became impossible. Upon examination, the dish was damaged beyond repair. The canopy frame was completely destroyed with virtually every plastic part broken. At that point we salvaged what we could and packed up.

Lessons learned (so far):

1. Use a reliable power source to provide the needed power like a generator.
2. Don't attach a line to an antenna to the frame of a canopy that is not absolutely secured.
3. Use a sun shield for any computer or device that will wash out when lots of light hits it.
4. Hot spots are not reliable enough for smooth remote operations. There was a portable AT&T tower set up just for the event. It was not enough for 50,000 people at the event. ICOM remote software and from experience, FLEX remote software requires a smooth internet connection with few dropped packets.
5. Bring food and water for people working the booth, in this case contrary to what we were told we could do. Taking care of people has a priority.

There will be more lessons as time goes on, but this is a start. By the way, we have several pinwheels if someone wants one.

73

Rich