



NCDXF newsletter

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Summer 2014

FT5ZM – Amsterdam Island and the anatomy of a DXpedition

Ralph Fedor, KØIR



THE TRAVEL, LANDING, EQUIPMENT, QSO distribution and total, and stories of the FT5ZM DXpedition have been well covered in other publications and presentations. In brief, our international team of 14 met in Fremantle, Australia, where we received a warm welcome by local VK6 DXers. We boarded the RV *Braveheart* and landed on Amsterdam Island nine days later. The hospitality shown us by the French team stationed on Amsterdam was unparalleled and we made 170,000+ QSO's during our stay. In a nutshell, that's the story of FT5ZM.

But what made this DXpedition tick? What was its foundation? What was the skeletal framework holding it together and keeping it healthy? What was the planning process, the quality control, and the means employed to try and achieve the best outcome? Let's have a look at the process.

Of scope and scale

It is my opinion that a DXpedition leader or planner must, first of all, realistically define the scope and scale of a DXpedition. This is job-one, to be done before recruiting team members, seeking sponsors or making public announcements.

Scope defines the breadth of our activities — where we are going, what permits are required, how we will get there, what shelter will we have, how will our food be supplied, what equipment will we need, how will power be



provided, what bands will we work, what modes we will use, what antennas will we erect, how we will interface with the outside world, and how we will return home.

If the scope of our activities is too grandiose, too complex, has too many focal points, involves too many people, is too expensive or too helter-skelter, it will exceed the finite resources avail-

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The 14-member FT5ZM-Amsterdam Island DXpedition Team (from left): VA7DX, N2OO, VE7CT, K9CT, UA3AB, WB9Z, K4ZLE, N6HC, FM5CD, EY8MM, KØIR, K4UEE, LA6VM, HK1R.

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From the President's desk



I NEED TO START MY FIRST LETTER AS President of NCDXF with a huge tip of my DXpeditioner's SPF 100 hat to my predecessor in this role, the incomparable Rusty Epps, W6OAT. Rusty is amazing! He has been everywhere, he knows everyone, and he remembers everything. He has his fingers on the many pulses of Amateur Radio and delights in creating opportunities to introduce people from one world of the hobby to people from a different world of the hobby. If it has to do with DXing or contesting, Rusty has experience with it, opinions about it, ideas to make it better, and abundant energy to see those ideas through. All of us, none more than I, owe Rusty a million TUs for his decades of leadership and support of NCDXF. Although Rusty has now left the NCDXF board, he still remains our valued advisor — I have been calling him often.

Your Foundation finds itself in pretty good financial shape thanks to the generosity of contributors like you (Thank you!) and to the careful financial stewardship of our Treasurer, Don Greenbaum, N1DG. Contributions large and small for the six months ending 30 June 2014 added up to \$54,000. While every contribution counts, there are two I particularly want to call to your attention. First, the K9W Wake Island 2013 DXpedition was such a success and was managed so responsibly that they returned \$7,500 of the \$10,000 we had granted them. Second, to our surprise and delight, the Southern California DX Club presented us a \$12,000 check at the IDXC 2014 banquet in Visalia. Come to IDXC 2015 if you can. On the outflow side, it has been a quiet time for DXpedition proposals. Since the previous newsletter, we have made a large grant to FT5TA, a small grant to 3CØBYP, and a small educational grant. We also provided significant support to WRTC 2014 because the world's best DXpeditioners were there to compete, referee, judge, support, spectate and plan DXpeditions. The third quarter has started with a \$4,000 contribution from the Northern California DX Club (*see pg. 14*).

An interesting and distracting part of my job is that I now hear rumors of DXpeditions in their earliest planning stages. This is useful because it allows me to look beyond the present to estimate what proposals we will receive, when, and for how much. I can tell you that talented DXpedition organizers are working on some big projects for 2015 and 2016. And I'm sure there are several I haven't heard about yet. I believe NCDXF will have what it takes to help them be successful, assuming our contribution rate holds up. That's what I meant by "pretty good financial shape."

Looking farther ahead, I don't believe we will have what it takes to help Southern Ocean DXpeditions be successful during Cycle 25. The costs of high-latitude work, especially the hiring of ships and crews, continue to skyrocket. This, plus increased regulation, not to mention the potential opening of southern places to oil and gas exploration, all threaten to price DXpeditions out of the market. So, I have a goal of doubling our current endowment to \$2 million well before the Cycle 25 peak. We can get there through estate giving and tax planned gifts. I am delighted to tell you that the board has elected Craig Thompson, K9CT, as a director and Craig has agreed to serve as the lead for the Cycle 25 Endowment campaign. Expect to hear from him.

We are trying an experiment with the newsletter. After we clear our current backlog of articles, we will publish a new issue just as soon as any DXpedition report is received. That's so you can get the news fast. You'll get an email whenever a new issue is ready, with a link to the issue on the website, www.ncdxf.org. Issues will be of whatever length is necessary and with lots of images. Please let me know how this works out for you.

73 and good DXing,

Tom ND2T

The Antonelli Shelter, our operating site approximately 2.2km from the base. Because of the distance from the base, shifts here lasted 24 hours.



able to the DXpedition and produce, at best, a mediocre outcome. Or, more likely, the DXpedition won't happen at all. On the other hand, if the scope of our project is too limited due to less-than-adequate equipment, too little time dedicated to the DXpedition, inadequate band or mode coverage, not enough adequately prepared team members, or an inadequate infrastructure, the outcome is also destined to be mediocre.

Scale is a numbers parameter – how big of a ship will we require, how many stations can we operate, how many team members do we need, how many antennas should we have, how many generators are necessary, how many days of activity should we allow, how many shelters do we need, how much food and supplies should be appropriated, and, the biggest item of all, how many dollars will this cost.

These two parameters, scope and scale, are interrelated and planning calls for a realistic scope of activities and then, keeping things in scale, or within budget. If we let our ego or grandiose thinking drive plans out of scale, we find we can't recruit team members able to bear the financial burden and there won't be enough supporting clubs, organizations, businesses or philanthropists out there to make the DXpedition possible. This scope/scale analysis must be done in the early stages of planning, before going public, and before soliciting team members or contributions from sponsors. Bringing forth a plan that is out of scale discourages potential sponsors and good team members. It also raises eyebrows in the

informed Amateur community whose members see failure from the get-go.

Bringing forth and clinging to a plan destined to fail also becomes an obstacle to a better approach with a greater chance of success and hence may delay or prevent activating an entity. There is also the risk of souring approval agencies when they are constantly hit with requests for permits for DXpeditions that never materialize.

FT5ZM pushed the envelope with a total budget of \$450,000. We need to remember that DXpeditions are missing one key element that helps bring things into scale: profit. In the business world, you can be rewarded with profit by increasing scale; not so with DXpeditions. There is simply a point where you hit the wall when increasing the

scale and though we were not at that point with FT5ZM, we could see it on the horizon. Our approach was to present a realistic plan, scope and scale, to the governing authority of Amsterdam Island, Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises in order to obtain permission to land and conduct a DXpedition, then select "good" people as team members, and, finally, communicate our plans to DXers and sponsors. It worked.

Team member selection

When the scope and scale of the DXpedition have been established, permits secured and transportation arranged, then, and only then, is it time to solicit team members. With your homework done, you can present potential team members with a sound



FT5ZM team members about to sail from Fremantle, Australia, aboard the indefatigable Braveheart and begin their 9-day sail to Amsterdam Island.



Left: WB9Z running the pileup during the cold night shift at the Mataf site.

Right: Nodir, EY8MM, who engineered our 160 Meter operation.

Below: VA7DX and UA3AB working the pileups at the Antonelli site.



plan, a realistic time table and cost estimate, and a high probability that the DXpedition will actually happen. They are not held in limbo and perhaps missing other opportunities while you try and sort things out.

I cannot stress this enough: the DXpedition team is the most valuable and important resource of the DXpedition. A team member can make you wish you were dead, or save your life; make the team members gel into a cohesive unit, or tear the team apart; become a lifelong friend, or someone you choose never to associate with again; work in harmony with everyone, or isolate themselves and follow their own agenda; be haughty or humble, or become a team millstone or help the team achieve a milestone. Choosing team members is, I think, the most important part of DXpedition planning. The team is everything and any creditable leader will choose team members carefully and wisely for the team members ARE the DXpedition.

Individual team members contribute differently, but in the properly selected team, everyone's contribution is of value. One team member may make more QSOs while the other keeps the generators running, enabling those QSOs. Good team members spot needs and take care of them without being asked. They are aware of other's needs, space and feelings. No one expects another team member to carry their baggage or clean up after them. Good team members are perhaps best described as low impedance individuals. They are not prone to sparking and arcing and are not difficult to match with the rest of the team.

I've not mentioned the quality of "good operator." Being a good operator is important, but that importance is dwarfed by the qualities I've advocated above. A good operator who is not a team player is not an asset.

How about new people on a team? We've tagged them with various names, some of them indicating that they are somewhat lesser human beings, but how about if we just regard them as "underdogs?" And, let's recall that it is the underdogs who come up with new ways to accomplish things, find new solutions and innovations, test perceived wisdom, and somehow find ways to see around corners.

If we always do what we've always done, we always get what we've always got. New people, underdogs, free us from that trap. They can bring the winning combination of new imagination and logic to the team. Let's give them a chance, bring them along, and not label them with unsavory titles, which may dangerously divide and segregate the most important resource you have: the team.

Divine right vs. data

King James I of England and King Louis XIV of France were the poster children of the Divine Right of Kings. Their word and their decrees could not

be questioned by their audience. They were accountable to no one and were not to be challenged.

In years past, DXpeditioners exercised their own brand of divine right. They decreed, "We worked everyone," or "No signals were coming through," or "The band never opened to the West Coast." In the extreme case, they even decreed where they were on their DXpeditions. And we, their subjects, their audience, accepted their decrees as absolute, sometimes clinging to them, unwilling to believe they were not true.

Thankfully, those days have passed and we now live in an age where data makes DXpeditions accountable. Propagation prediction programs, such as K6TU's, which we used on Amsterdam, tell the audience and the DXpedition the time and frequencies when openings are likely to occur. Club Log confirms our contacts and QSO distributions. Antenna and terrain analysis programs tell us the truth about our antenna planning and effectiveness. Testimonials and tradition are no longer automatically in the equation and it is no longer possible to hide behind flamboyance and boasting. We now make judgments based on data, if we have the courage to look at it.

Who are we and why are we here?

Our team members knew the answer to that question when they stepped ashore on Amsterdam Island. We all knew we were there as one team with one mission: to conduct an Amateur Radio DXpedition and be the best possible guests on this island.

We had no secondary agendas and no competing interests. We were not bird watchers, penguin counters, mountain climbers or divers. Our work time was devoted to the DXpedition. Our free time was for sleeping, photography, hiking or socializing with our hosts. But we never lost sight of our primary mission and had no unrelated interests competing for the limited resources on the island. It was all about Amateur Radio.

Should DXpedition plans be vetted?

In my opinion, if a DXpedition is soliciting contributions, yes, they should be absolutely and vigorously examined, their data evaluated. The Amsterdam Island DXpedition was vetted by NCDXF Director, Glenn Vinson, W6OTC. Our financial projections, transportation, team membership, equipment and operating plan were all very appropriately scrutinized before any dollars came our way.

It's also my opinion that the vetting process should be expanded. A vetting agency's board is likely made up of creative and knowledgeable people with the ability to see weak spots, potential areas of improvement and whether the DXpedition's plan meets the needs of today's DX community. The additional input, guidance and even criticism from members of the vetting body would improve DXpeditions and benefit the DX audience. I've mentioned NCDXF, but other major financial and equipment sponsors may deserve a stake in

the vetting process as well.

But any credentialing body stepping into this arena should be aware of the responsibility and obligations of people doing the vetting. They need to be data-based individuals, not a "good ol' boy" network. Their role on a vetting board needs to be an active and involved one; they cannot simply have weight and occupy space. Their make-up should resemble a pyramid, with its base downward, having more numerous new, actively working and innovative people making up the base of the pyramid and fewer older and long-term members at the top offering their wisdom and guidance. What should not happen is an inverted pyramid with its apex downward, consisting of a few new folks and numerous old timers comprising the larger, top-heavy base. It's an unstable business model, discourages innovation and is prone to collapse.

Is failure an option?

DXpeditions are not funded by government grants, large corporations or individuals with limitless wealth. Keeping a DXpedition to scale may force us to use less reliable options, and, as a result, we can build a "house of cards." If one card becomes unstable, the whole project could topple despite our best efforts. There are times when things just fall apart and we fail. When this happens we must hold ourselves accountable, return whatever donations we can and then realize that, in this instance, failure may be the best we can do under the

circumstances and the only crime here is blaming someone else.


On the other hand, beginning with and touting a plan that is destined to not only fail, but hamper the more genuine efforts of others, is an ethical indecency. That being said, Amateur Radio is a hobby; we are not the keepers of the moral compass of others.

Success

Was the Amsterdam Island DXpedition successful? It's not my call. It's not my place to pontificate and declare success. That decision rests with two entities. First of all it rests with the DX community and our sponsors. Did we meet their expectations? Secondly, it rests with my team members. Did they feel that their experience was worth their investment and did they feel that they were valued as contributing individuals and treated fairly? If the answer to either question is "No," then there was no success.

How does it end?

The end product of FT5ZM resulted from the collective efforts of the team members. If there is credit due, it belongs to the team members – all of them. It does not belong to any one individual and not to an organization. Everyone ended the DXpedition as their own person, ready to start anew, and not put into the box of group, club, or organization.

For me, it was a good ending. I could not have asked for better people than those who made up this team. 



K4UEE and N2OO watch Amsterdam Island fade away as the Braveheart departs with the team and begins the 9-day sail back to Australia.

NCDXF Board elects Craig Thompson, K9CT, as Director

AT THE 29 JUNE 2014, MEETING of NCDXF's Board of Directors, Craig Thompson, K9CT, was unanimously elected as a Director.

Mr. Thompson was first licensed in 1967 and earned his Extra Class license in 1971. He has enjoyed contesting and DXing for many years. Mr. Thompson is on Honor Roll Mixed and SSB and is one short on CW. He is an active participant of the DXCC Challenge with over 2,800 confirmed and holds DXCC on 160 through 10. He is actively pursuing DXCC on 6M and 2M, is a member of the A-1 Operator's Club, and has WAS on 160M through 2M and 5Band WAZ.

Mr. Thompson began building a contest station in 2011 where he operates M/2, M/S and SO2R for all major contests. He enjoys inviting teams to the station to operate and invites newer Amateurs to the station to learn about DXing and contesting. He is the President of Society of Midwest Contesters.

Mr. Thompson began his DXpedi-



tion efforts in 2007 and has been a team member of TI9K, K4M, PJ7E, NH8S, 3D2C and K9W. His operations at K4M, NH8S and FT5ZM earned DXpedition of the Year awards. Mr. Thompson is a member of two teams for prospective DXpeditions in the upcoming years

that should be significant.

Mr. Thompson has served as the Chairman of the NSCA Educational Foundation and was on the board of the Farmington Education Foundation. Both have been very successful in fund raising, including estate planning. He has served on many boards and committees, including elected school board member. Currently, Mr. Thompson is the treasurer of the CW Operators Club and is also the treasurer of a DXpedition group that activated Swains Island and Wake Island.

Professionally, Mr. Thompson founded Thompson Electronics Company in 1980 and remains as CEO and sole stockholder. The company has about 40 employees and has many customers throughout Illinois. Mr. Thompson no longer works full time at the company but still leads the direction of the company.

In addition to his duties as a Director, Mr. Thompson is most interested in helping NCDXF develop a legacy program for significant contributions through estate giving and tax planning.

~ Kip Edwards, W6SZN



DXPEDITION LENDING LIBRARY

NCDXF has a number of VHS/DVD videos and Microsoft® PowerPoint presentations on CD-ROM available for loan to organizations wishing to show them at their meetings.

There is no charge to use the programs in the **FOUNDATION'S** library, but clubs borrowing materials are responsible for postage in both directions. To view the complete listing of programs available for your club's use, visit our website, www.ncdxf.org, and click on "Videos."



The primary mission of NCDXF is to provide necessary financial support for well-organized DXpeditions to the rarest, most difficult, most expensive DXCC entities. We do this with funds contributed by DXers worldwide.

CONTRIBUTIONS NCDXF relies heavily upon the generosity of its members to fund various projects. We urge each member to consider making an annual contribution of US\$50 or its equivalent in foreign currency. However, we do not wish to exclude anyone from the **FOUNDATION** for financial reasons. If \$50 is not within your budget, then please give what other amount you can. Naturally, we welcome contributions in excess of \$50! NCDXF is an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and all contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law for U.S. taxpayers. Send your contribution to: **NCDXF**, P.O. Box 2012, Cupertino, CA 95015-2012, USA. You may also contribute and order supplies online via our secure server, visit www.ncdxf.org/donate.

TLØCW – a one-man DXpedition to the Central African Republic

Rudi Klos, DK7PE

IN SEARCH OF “WHERE NEXT” FOR a DXpedition, I regularly survey active DXers for their needed lists on the top band, 160M. Bernd Koch, DF3CB, one of the top DXers in Germany, reported the Central African Republic (CAR) as the last one missing from the African continent. If Bernd needed the Central African Republic (TL) on 160 Meters I could be sure that many others needed this one, too.

Research and preparation

My first investigation showed that Chris Arroman, TLØA, was the only active Amateur in the CAR. He had a very good signal on the higher bands; however, he didn't operate CW and not at all on 80M and 160M. The last 160M operation out of TL took place some 14 years ago, by Alex, TL5A (PA3DZN).

Jan Harders, DJ8NK, visited Chris in 2010 and activated TL in RTTY for the first time. Chris works for the French group AREVA, but unfortunately, he left the country a few weeks before my planned arrival in Bangui, CAR's capital.

I processed and forwarded an

Amateur Radio license application to the Telecommunications Ministry (ART) in Bangui, which was approved in a timely manner. However, I would only get the license if I transferred the equivalent of US\$260 in local currency to the National Bank in Bangui. My bank in Germany advised me that the handling charges would be almost as high as the sum to be transferred, so Chris, TLØA, kindly loaned me the money for the license fee. The next day I got an email from Bangui with an attached PDF of the TLØCW license.

The biggest problem for a one-man DXpedition today is luggage weight limitations, so I had to ask, “What equipment do I take?” and “With or without linear?” Each extra pound must be paid for and the price varies,



depending on the airline, between €30 and €50 per kilo! It soon became obvious that a future one-man DXpedition with a 23-kilo luggage allowance will not allow for carrying a linear without paying huge sums for excess baggage.

Getting there

My flight from Germany to Rome went smoothly, except that in Rome, I was told my luggage could not be loaded onto the Addis Ababa flight; I had to travel to Bangui without any luggage. Great news! I had a license, but no radio; you can imagine my disappointment.

Arriving in Bangui, there was no need to go to the baggage claim, but because it was a very small airport, there was no way around it. By chance, I spotted my blue bag with the telescoping poles. How was this possible? If a part of my baggage arrived, could it be that, maybe, the rest of my baggage also arrived? After a few minutes, I had all three pieces. The information in Rome was simply wrong, putting it mildly!

Through Chris, I had arranged for a driver and vehicle for transportation to the hotel, but nobody was there. Later, I learned that the driver was delayed due to an accident on the road. Consequently, I had to pass through the controls by myself, but what was much more stress-



The Oubangi River with the hotel in the distance.

ful was the horde of taxi drivers who were tearing at my luggage from the carriage. There were loud discussions and pulling on the suitcases; everybody wanted to drive me to my destination and by the span of the fares offered, they expected to have a solvent customer. Finally I yelled, "STOP! I will be picked by AREVA," which made them put the suitcases back. AREVA is the biggest employer in the country and obviously they have at least a little respect on them.

I waited and waited, hoping that my driver would still arrive, but no such luck. After about 20 minutes, the taxi drivers lost interest in me, and it was then that I asked the most serious looking driver, in broken French "Combien?" (How much?) The answer was "\$6," and I said "Allez!" Thank God it was in the middle of the day! The taxi driver took me with my entire luggage to the Oubangui Hotel.

The hotel was a big, 12-storied building, directly on the side of the Oubangui River, looking over to the Democratic Republic of Congo, just on the other side of the river. Unfortunately, all the hotel's balconies faced south; there weren't even windows facing north. Then there was a hill, which rose about 300 meters north of the building up to an elevation of more than 600 feet.

The work begins

The 75 kilos of luggage had to be carried up to the 12th floor because the lift was out of order. This became quite challenging due to high humidity and the 30°C temperature, which made me exhausted.

I still had daylight and I wanted to tie down at least one 160M sloper right from the top of the building to the north. The manager sent the house electrician to help and, before sunset, the 160M sloper was fixed from an apex of 40 meters down to the water's edge of the Bangui River, ready to use.

By then I was hungry, but the hotel's kitchen was not the best. I limited myself to chips and a beer.

I checked the bands and 30M was wide open, but, after almost 30 hours without sleep, I was unable to run the



pileups without falling asleep. I had to take a 30-minute power nap. I tuned the transceiver to 1825, listened to the noise and slept. Around midnight I woke up because I heard some signals coming through. I jumped to the station and called CQ. It started with RW2A and very soon W4DR appeared in the pileup to be the first NA station calling, followed by many US/VE stations. The conditions were extremely good and, in the course of the night, I easily worked W6 and W7 stations on the West Coast of the USA. I was impressed! How come the conditions were so extremely good?

The Internet was very slow and only temporarily available in the hotel lobby, 12 levels down, but the first e-mails confirmed that we had really loud signals into the USA and Japan.

Bernd, DF3CB, gave an essential reason for these outstanding propagations. My operation on 160M was during a very strong Aurora activity that must have led to this unusual propagation. I remember similar effects some 20 years ago in Brazzaville, Congo.

The following days, 160M conditions returned to normal, but all signals out of Europe had a typical pole flutter on all bands. I tell you, a pileup with hundreds of EU stations having such a special sound is a real challenge.

The heat in the room was unbearable at night, but I left the window closed, as there is a real malaria danger in Bangui. The risks right down on the river

should not be underestimated. Did I mention, that the A/C was out of order? It was the same with the TV and phone. It became clear that the good old days of the former Sofitel Hotel were long since gone.

What concerned me much more was the electricity. Every single minute there were very short power outages and these failures became apparent in the form of a short chirp in my signal. Those outages were so short, however, that my power supply compensated, but there were times the power went out for minutes and, sometimes, even an hour. I hoped my IC735 and the ACOM 1010 would get over this without major problems.

After two days, and some sleep, a routine arose. The station works, the antennas did well and, finally, I found a decent place to eat in the center of Bangui. By the way, it was not advisable to walk around in town away from the main streets. If I needed to walk somewhere, I would do so only during daylight hours and without any valuables. Even a cheap watch, I was told, was better left at the hotel.

Beyond the radio

There is no real sightseeing in Bangui, except for the ostentatious concrete monuments built by former President Bokassa. I admired them as I passed by in a taxi. I'd rather have taken pictures of the hustle and bustle in the streets, but that was not recommended.

Before I left for Bangui, I announced myself by email to Mr. Weinstabel, the German Embassy representative in the country. The embassy was closed down some 10 years ago and Mr. Weinstabel is the only representative of Germany and Austria left in CAR. Through him,

Scenes from the streets of Bangui.



I saw a little of the town and took some pictures. I never would have done that alone.

All bands were open and I could check the bands, up and down, just like I did in the old days. Soon the first stations reported a “full house” with nine bands contacted. I realized that the “European wall” was more impenetrable than ever and I knew countless Japanese and American stations were calling in vain. With European signals of S9 plus 30dB, they did not have the slightest chance to be heard. “Please QRX EU” gave me time for one or two QSOs and then the first “When EU?” was heard. I needed to find a more

worked, right? Though the path was almost three times longer, in between were only vast amounts of water.

The south-facing balcony allowed me to install my Jumper Beam which looked precisely in Japan’s direction and, later, into the W6/W7 area. Unfortunately, the hotel absorbed signals around 50dB. The first weak JA signals came, fluttered over the South Pacific, they got louder and some were well over S9. Excellent!

In the afternoon, I moved the beam to the LP W6 and W7. Some signals were very loud but no real pileups resulted. I worked one station, then the next, with pauses in between.



Driving through Bangui.

Winding down

The next day, I pointed my Jumper Beam to the north using the fire escape ladder to fix it to, and I worked up to 160 to 180 QSOs per hour. On the morning of 2 November the pileup on 80M ended while the solar noise increased. W8CCI was the last station worked before the aerials needed to be taken down. Only the electrician had roof access, but I dared not walk on the thin corrugated sheet roof. I wound up my aerials and coaxial cables then packed the station in air cushion foil. About midday I departed to the airport.

There was still a small challenge that awaited me at the airport. I was told that Jan and Paul had to leave some of their equipment behind when they left the country and it took months to get it back. By chance, Ms. Becker, a German lady I had met through Mr. Weinstabel, was booked on the same flight I was to Addis Ababa and gave me a lift to the airport. She said that the policemen in the capital know her very well and, with pride and a mischievous smile, she told me that policemen call her the “Madame of Bangui.” I am convinced that they have the highest respect for the “Madame” because she knows most of the ministers in person.

Having her by my side, knowing the people and speaking the language was good for me. I had too much luggage and the security people discovered odd cables and devices in my suitcase, but it was no problem for her. She explained everything to the security personnel, with a little smile, and they even apologized for asking. I was impressed! 🌐

XZ1J DXpedition to Myanmar

Paul S. Ewing, N6PSE

OPERATING IN ASIA IS A UNIQUE experience. Asian operators tend to be more polite and well disciplined, particularly the Japanese who make up the majority of Asian operators. When you ask Asia to stand by so that you can work remote areas, they tend to adhere to your request and stand by very well.

In contrast to the well-disciplined and polite operators, Asia is a truly noisy and often difficult place from which to operate; the manmade noise level can be quite high. Our main nemesis on the bands was the dreaded “Chinese radar” which would suddenly appear and sweep through the bands, literally destroying the ability to hear our pileup. There were several times where we had to literally abandon a large pileup and a band with good propagation because the Chinese radar suddenly made us deaf.

We also encountered Asian taxicabs and fishing fleets on 10 Meters from neighboring countries. I’m sure our pileups had no idea how difficult it was at times to discern the call signs from the many sources of noise and QRM.

Myanmar

Myanmar is one of those strange and

mystical places. The people are serenely quiet and gentle. Instead of the continual honking horns of cars, buses and scooters, in Yangon you hear the chants of monks and the muted clangs of small ceremonial bells.

In 1989, the military government changed the names of many places dating back to Burma’s colonial period, so Burma became Myanmar and Rangoon became Yangon. Good things are happening in Myanmar and reforms and democracy are taking hold. In 2011 the military junta was officially dissolved following the 2010 general election and a civilian government was elected. Their new government wants good things for their people and our leader, Zorro Miyawawa, JH1AJT, sensed a potential opening for Amateur Radio.



Getting the license

You might say that Zorro, JH1AJT is a determined man. A successful businessman, philanthropist and humanitarian, Zorro made approximately 10 visits to Myanmar over a four-year period to gain permission to bring a multi-national DXpedition team to activate Myanmar as XZ1J. Myanmar had not been activated in over a decade and was just coming out of a 50-year military dictatorship.

Zorro is the founder and CEO of SEISA and the Foundation for Global Children. After their successful efforts in Bangladesh culminating with the very successful S21YZ DXpedition, Zorro set his sights on Myanmar.

Zorro’s first mission was to establish programs that nurture IT technicians and trainers, provide support for medical and education programs, provide water purification equipment and improve personal hygienic programs by providing education and training for physicians, nurses and public health workers.

They formed a joint project with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. These contacts led to Zorro’s involvement with the Ministries of Health, Communications and Information Technology.

Soon, Zorro received permission to carry out a demonstration operation as XZ1Z. A few months later, Champ



The XZ1J team pauses for a team photo.



Peter, PP5XX; David, K3LP; Rafael, PY2NDX, and Paul, N6PSE, enjoyed a visit to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda (top left) and the Shwethalyaung Reclining Buddha.

Muangamphun, E21EIC, joined Zorro and conducted a brief CW operation also as XZ1Z. These brief demonstration operations gave the government the confidence to approve a major DXpedition and to activate Myanmar on all modes and bands as XZ1J.

Being an avid DXer and DXpeditioner with previous DXpedition experiences in Eritrea, Yemen, Ethiopia, Kenya, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Cambodia, Zorro recognized the significance of Mount Pleasant in the hills just north of the Myanmar capitol of Nay Pyi Taw.

Mt. Pleasant rises to approximately 1,600 feet above the valley. The Mount Pleasant Hotel would provide a superb venue for the XZ1J DXpedition. We would be QRV on 15 November 2013 and we would QRT the morning of 26 Nov.

For the XZ1Z operations, Zorro and Champ had used simple vertical antennas. For the XZ1J DXpedition Yagi antennas and amplifiers would be employed.

Soon, the team gathered in Yangon, Myanmar, and met for the first time. It was a great pleasure for me to visit and operate again with David Collingham, K3LP and Peter Sprengel, PP5XX.

I was very honored to meet Zorro, JH1AJT; Franz Lagner, DJ9ZB and the rest of the XZ1J Team. Champ, E21EIC and his lovely wife, JC, E2ØKNB, would meet us in Nay Pyi Taw, as they could fly direct from their home in Bangkok.

We were fortunate to have a full day of sightseeing in Yangon before our flight to Nay Pyi Taw. Yangon is a very large city with crowded streets and heavy traffic. Surprisingly, motorcycles and scooters were forbidden; everyone was in a car or on a bicycle.

Our flight the next day only took about an hour. Nay Pyi Taw is inland, near the center of Myanmar and because the government moved from

Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw a few years ago, the airport and much of the infrastructure is very new. When we were there, preparations were being made for the 27th Southeast Asia Games.

As we flew over southern Myanmar on our way to the central highlands, I marveled at the vast untouched forests and waterways. Myanmar is very rich in natural sources and has plentiful water sources, but lacks modern inter-city highways and railways that most developed countries have.

On the air

Upon our arrival in Nay Pyi Taw, we made the 40-minute drive up Mt. Pleasant to our hotel on the top of this 1,600-



The team enjoyed a stroll through the open air market place.



Rafael and Peter help assemble our Spiderbeam at our SSB shack on the southside of the hotel complex (above), while Obara (bottom right) and Champ (top right) help to erect the CW camp antennas.

foot mountain. We decided to make a CW/RTTY camp on the north side of the roadway that divides the mountain-top and the various wings of the hotel. The SSB camp was placed directly on the other side of the road to provide some separation between the stations and the antennas.

At our CW camp, we employed a very nice set of 4O3A high power band pass filters and an antenna triplexer that allowed us to operate on 10-15-20 Meters from a single Yagi antenna with

three stations running high power all at the same time.

This worked very well and saved us a lot of time in having to set up only one directional antenna instead of three; we also set up vertical antennas for 12, 17, 30, 40 and 80 Meters. For 160 Meters, we employed the services of a rather adept tree-climbing fellow to take our long wire high into a very tall, aging tree. This made a very effective support for our 160 Meter antenna.

Over at the SSB camp, we deployed

a five-band Spiderbeam Yagi for 10-12-15-17 and 20 Meters. We set up vertical antennas for additional WARC bands as well as 40 and 80 Meters. At the SSB camp, we used a pair of Kenwood TS-590S radios while at the CW camp we used one TS-590S and an Elecraft K3 dedicated to the low bands.

Massive pileups

The pileups for XZ1J were quite large. While Zorro and Champ had been briefly active a few months earlier, there had been no large activation of Myanmar for at least a decade. There was a significant pent-up demand for an XZ contact. Propagation on the high bands was quite good. The SFI was between 160 and 170 during our operation. Ten, 12 and 15 Meters were quite productive during our operation; 17 and 20 Meters were less productive, but still useful.

The team quickly got into our working shifts and everyone enjoyed the pileups. While we could work Asia and Europe quite easily almost any time, it was more of a challenge to work North America; those contacts were made primarily at or near our sunrise and sunset. Zorro stressed to us that



Our CW shack at the top of the hill with low band verticals in the foreground.



Clockwise, from top left: Peter, PP5XX; Franz, DJ9ZB; David, K3LP; Zorro, JH1AJT; Rafael, PY2NDX, and Champ, E21EIC.

one of our major goals was to fulfill the need for North America. I particularly enjoyed working the East Coast of North America via the long path each evening during sunset; 10M and 12M were spectacular and 15M was quite good. Much of the time, it was easier for us to work the US East Coast than it was to work the West Coast which was much closer. The opening for the West Coast was only via the short-path and occurred just minutes after sunrise and would start in W0/W9 and propagation would work its way westward through W7 and W6.

We were able to work North America so effectively only because the Japanese operators were so polite and well disciplined, adhering to our standby requests, allowing us to work the farthest regions. We had propagation to much of Asia around the clock on many of the bands.

After the first three days, team members Kazu Fujita, VR2KF; Katsu, JA1DXA and JC, E2ØNKB, had to return home; the remaining seven operators kept quite busy manning the stations and giving out many contacts. Jay Oka, JA1TRC, was quite busy capturing the logs and uploading them to Club Log each day.

Champ, E21EIC, was our all-around

expert troubleshooter and IT expert and was kept quite busy day and night resolving various issues that sprung up. Champ is a very enthusiastic operator and would rather operate than sleep, eat or pretty much anything else!

Push for RTTY

During our last weekend, the CQ World Wide CW Contest was underway so we decided to stay clear of the contest, instead focusing on RTTY as there was a significant need for XZ contacts there. At one point, we had three separate stations running on RTTY. A few of the team members had not tried RTTY before and they found that they really enjoyed operating in this mode.

This was a very enjoyable DXpedition in every way. Zorro and his assistants Jay, Obara and our local guide, Win, took very good care of the team. Zorro cooked many nice meals out on the balcony of our CW shack; he is quite the chef! We also enjoyed group meals together at the hotel. In order to maximize our operating time, we elected to have two meal breaks daily, and Zorro and Jay kept many kinds of fresh fruit and snacks on hand so no one suffered on this DXpedition.

The team was comprised of the

following operators: Zorro, JH1AHT (leader); Franz, DJ9ZB; JC, E2ØNKB; Champ, E21EIC; Katsu, JA1DXA; Jay, JA1TRC; David, K3LP; Paul, N6PSE; Peter, PP5XX; Rafael, PY2NDX, and Kazu, VR2KF.

Our operational goals were to exceed 50,000 contacts and to work the farthest regions in an effective manner to reduce the need for an XZ contact. We were thrilled that we were able to make 54,648 contacts with 17,847 unique stations over our 10-day operation.

Closing thoughts

The people of Myanmar are very welcoming and friendly. They were a little shy, perhaps, but always greeted us with a smile or a wave. They are also a very religious and hard working people. This was a terrific adventure in an amazing place. The team got along very well and fast friendships were formed. We all thoroughly enjoyed each other and in bringing this DXpedition to the DX Community.

We are very grateful to NCDXF for its support as well as for all of our club, foundation, equipment and individual sponsors. It is only through the generous contributions of the global DX community that rare entities such as Myanmar can be activated.



AT THEIR JULY 2014 PICNIC, THE NORTHERN California DX Club presented a check for \$4,000 to NCDXF. For the check presentation, pictured are (from left): Phil, W6PK; Bob, W6OPO; Don, AI6RE (NCDXC Treasurer); Rob, AG6RK; Jim, K8JRK; John, K6MM; Rusty, W6OAT; Ross, K6GFJ; Tom, ND2T (NCDXF President)



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