Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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Etzel Provence PJ2EP (SK)

It is with great sadness that we report that our VERONA friend Etzel Provence, PJ2EP, has become a silent key. The dated photo from Signal Point shows Etzel in the foreground with a very young PJ2BR at the right.

PJ2EP at Signal Point, July 10, 2004

Etzel was at the QTH that day along with many other VERONA guests to run the IARU Radiosport Contest together with CCC operators. Etzel was an absolutely delightful gentleman, quiet, mild-mannered, pleasant at all times, and a very gifted musician. He played keyboards in the VERONA Christmas party bands, improvising parts with ease. I'm very saddened that I won't be seeing him again, such a sweet man.

The last newsletter talked about these July get-togethers. Each year for several years running we hosted members and families from VERONA at the QTH, and they operated with us in the IARU Radiosport Contest. It was always great fun to introduce them to HF contesting. The practice stopped, regrettably, when I moved twice as far away from Curacao in 2008 and the trips became too difficult and too expensive. It's much more difficult to get there from Idaho than from Cleveland.

Curacao Awaits Our Return

Monday Morning, Nov 30, after 2020 CQWW CW

If things had gone as planned, we would be in this scene, a screen capture from one of the cameras at Signal Point, celebrating the successful 20th anniversary CQWW CW operation. The pandemic snookered us, but it's increasingly apparent that we'll be back in business in the spring of 2021. Given the rotten weather outside my Idaho window, the return to Signal Point can't come too soon.

Likely Scenarios and Projections for Contests

Here's what our future will probably look like, working backwards in time from mid-2021.

Second Half 2021: IARU Radiosport, WAE Contests, IOTA Contests, CQWW Contests, ARRL 10 and 160 Contests. Probability of Operation: 99%. It is clear that by the middle of the year anyone in the U.S. who wants to be vaccinated will have done so. Travel will be much safer than at present. The virus will still be around, but most people will either be protected from

having had COVID or will be vaccinated. Airline schedules will be back in decent shape. Curacao will be admitting travelers, but may still require negative test results, and tests will be faster and easier to obtain. Thus I anticipate normal team contesting from PJ2T, although a few people may still choose not to travel.

WPX CW Contest. Probability of Operation: 90%. By the end of May there may still be a few segments of the populace who have not been able to get vaccinated yet. But most of us, because of our age, will have qualified for the vaccination and will thus be in good shape to travel. Traditionally WI9WI and KA9DOC have taken over Signal Point for this contest, but they have also been open to others joining in if they wish. We'll wait and see what Jim and Annette may have in mind for this contest.

WPX SSB Contest. Probability of Operation: 75%. In late March there will still be many who have not yet had both shots, assuming that is the protocol in your state or country. As a 70-something person, I expect that by then I will have had the second shot and will definitely be on the island. Dorothy, being younger at 63, may not yet have qualified to get the two vaccinations and may still be in Idaho. Thus I think it highly likely that we will be able to assemble a team for WPX SSB and have a full-up PJ2T operation.

ARRL SSB Contest. Probability of Operation: 30%. This contest is scheduled for March 6-7, and N1ZZ's group from Florida has plans to go as a team. They were the last to contest from PJ2T, departing just before the shutdown in mid-March of 2020. But this contest is "iffy" because there is a high chance that the team will not have been able to receive both shots in time to travel to the island. Also, it will be imperative that either K8ND, KB7Q, or I be there to set things up and host the team. Jeff will probably not have vacation time left to do this, and Gene's other travel plans will likely prevent his going. I am not willing to travel until I have either been vaccinated or caught COVID and recovered. So ARRL SSB in early March is possible, but not assured. If both the team and I have gotten the shots by then, we will definitely go, but that is not certain. The Moran pool house is reserved, conditionally.

ARRL CW Contest. Probability of Operation: 25%. This one is February 20-21, and as much as I would love to be there, I am giving only about 1 of 4 odds that Idaho will have gotten both shots to me by then. Same problem, but even more so for Dorothy, because her younger age will push her into a later phase of the vaccination program. I have the Moran house reserved for this contest and have paid the 50% deposit. But the showstopper is that if I am not available, the only way we would be able to run this contest is if KB7Q wanted to be the host, and at present don't know his plans or wishes.

CQ WW 160 CW Contest. Probability of Operation: 75%. This January 29-31 contest has traditionally been run by K8ND and W8WTS. K8ND is willing to travel unvaccinated, and flights are operating, so it is quite possible that Jeff may opt to go south and run this contest after obtaining a negative PCR test. He knows the QTH and station well enough that he could un-mothball it and get on the air. W8WTS has job and personal constraints that will likely prevent his participating this coming January.

All of the above is educated conjecture because I have not talked with anyone about their wishes. I'm just trying to start a discussion of possibilities. Everyone has different thoughts about the disease, the vaccines, and the risks, and we respect that completely. My personal position is that the odds of getting seriously sick, unvaccinated, are unacceptably high. Once vaccinated, the risks do not drop to zero, but my judgement is that they are low enough that I will be willing to take those odds and go to the island. The geniuses in the pharma industry have pulled off a fantastic miracle in coming up with these vaccines so quickly. Now my hope is that the distribution and administration logisticians are half as smart as the vaccine developers, and that this will unfold quickly and efficiently in Idaho and in your own state and nation. We have 20 miles of this marathon behind us, the finish line at Mile 26 is in sight, and PJ2T will be back on soon, louder and bigger than ever. Thanks to all of you for your patience and your generosity in continuing to support the club and our contest facility on the island.

PJ2BR and PJ2ZZ Receive Yasme Excellence Award

Brett and Helena ("Nena") Ruiz have been the leaders of the Curacao VERONA amateur radio club for all the years I have been around the island. I'm honored to that are close personal friends, have visited at my home in Ohio, and we have watched our kids grow up in parallel. Managing a volunteer organization like this is pretty much all give and minimal take, and Brett and Nena have been patient leaders seemingly forever. Thus, I was thrilled to see that they had been recognized by the Yasme group. Following is the narrative about these awards.

Dorothy with Brett (PJ2BR) and Nena Ruiz (PJ2ZZ), December 3, 2019

The Yasme Excellence Awards are presented to individuals who through their own service, creativity, effort and dedication have made a significant contribution to amateur radio. The contribution may be in recognition of technical, operating or organizational achievement as all three are necessary for amateur radio to grow and prosper. These awards shall be given from time to time as the board feels appropriate.

The awards are categorized roughly in accord with FCC (USA) "Basis and Purpose" for amateur radio as consistent with the foundation's purposes and expertise. Those areas of amateur service include noncommercial communications service, advancement of the technical and operating arts, technical training and international goodwill.

You can read about the award and its recipients, including Brett and Nena, at

http://www.yasme.org/yasme-excellence-awards/

Congratulations!!

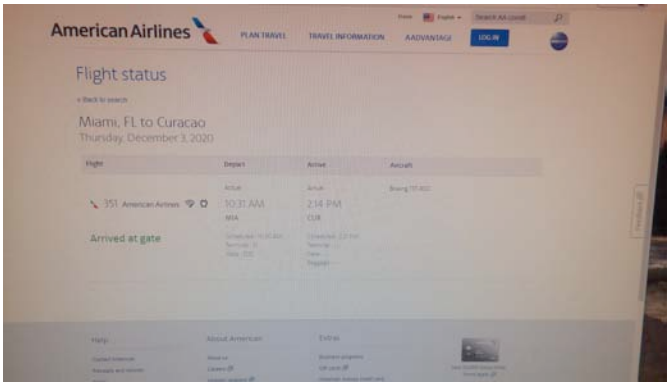
Curacao Travel Update

Restrictions on island life were tightened on December 1. See https://gobiernu.cw . There is a curfew beginning at 9 PM, all dining is now outdoors at 50% capacity, most stores close at 6 PM with 50% limitation, masks are required in grocery stores and other critical establishments, group size is limited to four, even on beaches, and public transportation is still available until 9 PM.

Residents of New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Florida are still allowed into the country without quarantine, but the rest of us are pretty much out of luck. Written exemptions are possible in certain situations.

MIA – CUR Flights Resumed on December 3

Flights resumed on December 3. As you see from the screenshot, that flight, now designated AA 351, arrived early.



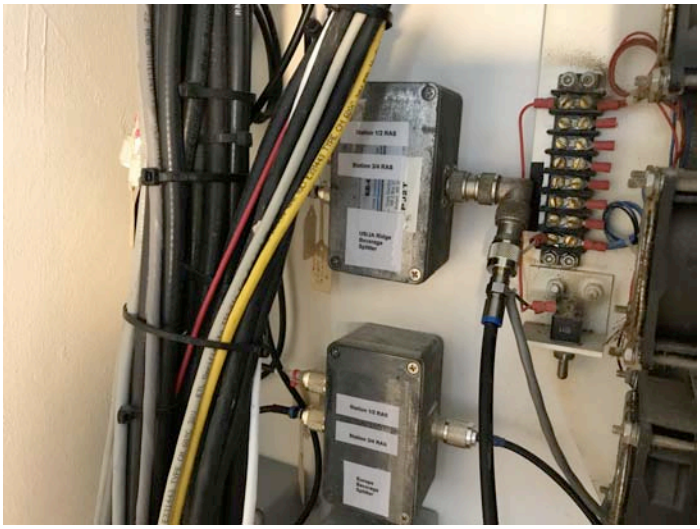
Reactivating PJ2T: RX Antenna System

The ever-ongoing flurry of CCC/PJ2T activity got frozen in mid-frame last mid-March in the same manner as pushing the "Pause" button on Netflix. Everything stopped, operational, logistical, and technical. One of the technical initiatives that got stopped was some improvements to the RX antenna signal distribution system in the shack. You will remember the huge project of Fall 2019 in which N7IR brilliantly led a complete renovation of our RX antenna system cabling. The result was all new cabling, two new Beverages installed, a signal distribution box installed across the street, addition of state-of-art chokes and filters, and improved cabling in the shack. The photo shows the cabling distribution box across the street as the concrete was drying.

RX antenna cable distribution box, November 6, 2019

The final phase of this project is to replace the circuitry in some of the signal splitter boxes with improved magic-tees. The legacy splitters (pictured below)

showed poor port isolation. W8WTS took the hardware back to Ohio last year, and once those boxes are upgraded and re-installed, this huge RX improvement project will be complete. Thanks to Gary and Jim for having the vision and foresight to make this happen.



RX splitter boxes at Signal Point

Endless Curacao Challenges

You've read in various newsletters about the frustrations of everyday administrative life as a Curacao legal resident. The latest ridiculousness was the Battle of the Insurance. Our Signal Point homeowner insurance renews each September. This is a somewhat limited policy that excludes hurricanes and terrorism, but still provides a measure of protection for fire, theft, and normal homeowner perils. In years past when I was doing September work trips to the island I simply walked in and paid the bill in person. I had become friends with a policy service representative, Ivette Cjintje, so I could show up, she would pull the invoices from the file, I presented a pile of guilders, and off I went.

Then disaster struck. Ivette retired. At about the same time I quit going to the island in September, thus began a struggle of trying to get them to paper-mail or E-mail invoices to me sometime each August. It never happened. So each year I have had to E-mail for help in getting the invoices generated. Then, regrettably, my latest E-mail contact at Guardian Group Fatum insurance (Terry) disappeared, and nobody answered my pleas for a bill.

Finally in desperation in late October I suffered through a long series of phone calls, holds, transfers, and elevations, and eventually reached a quite professional lady in the Collections Department. She E-mailed me the invoices (There are three policies, thus three invoices). I paid them by MCB bank local transfer (about $450 for the year), and phoned her to confirm that the payment had been made. Then, in classic Curacao fashion, she asked me to E-mail her the screenshots from the bank web site because they had no way at the company of correlating my payments with the policies being invoiced. It all finally worked out, and she promised to E-mail me invoices next year. I have heard that every year, but it never happens. The saving grace is that all of the people I deal with in this and other companies and agencies on the island are wonderfully pleasant, courteous, and kind. If only they would do their jobs!

K8ND MCB Bank Headaches

In other frustrations, K8ND has an on-island account with MCB now that he is a Curacao legal resident. It took a long year+ and magnificently patient effort to open that account and obtain on-line access, but he finally succeeded. Now, suddenly, his on-line access has been suspended without warning because of account inactivity. They are telling him, "No problem mon, just stop by the Barber bank branch with ID and we can restore your access." Oh yes, you are forbidden at present to set foot on the island. Not our problem…. Here's how we told it.

I'm awaiting some - any - response to my inquiries from the bank before trying to 'poke' the account. I can transfer funds from my local Credit Union, but no point if the restoration of the account status requires them to do some manual step. Once I establish contact, I can gain some idea of what might work.

I discovered the issue as I was going to pay my BTP fees for PJ2ND. They were very slow to respond - two+ months, after four emails asking for my invoice. Had they responded in the first month, I would have likely avoided this issue with MCB with the transaction.

Frustrating, but normal. Jeff and I agree, though, that Curacao is such a wonderful place that all of these hassles are well worth it.

The W0CG/7 Megastation

Look out WB9Z, K3LR, and W3LPL. I'm coming for you.

On CQWW CW weekend I was frustrated out of my mind that not only were we not contesting from PJ2T, I couldn't even listen on the bands. So on Saturday I dug out my IC-756. I bought this in an estate sale in Washington using insurance proceeds after my TS-940 was stolen in a major robbery of Dorothy's house in 2014. The Icom had been on the shelf for years. I also set up an Astron power supply I brought out here years ago from Ohio.

Since I'm president of our condo homeowners' association, I have access to all of the private and mechanical spaces in the building. The photo shows the radio set up on CQWW CW Saturday in the equipment attic on the 6th floor of the building next to the Metasys system computer that controls the building's HVAC systems that I manage. That PC also does a nice job supporting VE7CC spots, so once I installed that I felt just a tiny bit more connected to the contest.

The W0CG/7 shack in the condo equipment attic.

Now, what about a receiving antenna? I stumbled on a roll of red #18 stranded wire in the basement electrical room and appropriated it to the attic. After careful consultation in various ARRL technical guides about receiving antennas I hung about 30 feet of the hookup wire in the attic, resting it on sprinkler system pipes, heating loop water plumbing, various electrical conduits, and above a gas fired boiler. All of this stuff, particularly Variable Frequency Drives for big electric motors, create horrible electrical hash, so I didn't really expect to hear anything, but had to at least *try*. The photo shows this carefully designed and installed red hookup wire RX antenna, the end of which I friction-shoved into the coax center conductor port on the radio. You can just barely see the back of the shack chair at the radio in the distance at the bottom left.

Shockingly, I brought this sophisticated system up on 20 meters and instantly there was a SIGNAL! No tuning. Right there, well above the local electrical noise, CCC's own VE3CX running contest QSOs!! After 9+ months of radio drought, this was a big thrill. I listened to Tom run some Qs, then tuned around and found only two more signals, K3LR (of course) and N7DD, Larry Pace, in Tucson. Larry has operated with us in Curacao, and I have been a guest at his home a couple of times, introduced by CCCer W8TK. What struck me most is that K3LR was only getting a call on about every 4th CQ, making me ever more grateful for PJ2T and our fabulous conditions there. The rest of the band was obscured by noise. I went back upstairs at about 5 PM local Pacific time, and by then the band was "loaded" with about 20 signals. KH6 was coming through loudly, as was ZF and many stateside stations. This is really encouraging, motivation enough to try for a small outside antenna. I have found an empty PVC conduit that I'm pretty sure leads out to the roof, and there's plenty of room for a 20 meter wire dipole. I have obtained the board's blessing to try something on the roof. For now, all the gear is back on the shelf and the red RX antenna coiled back up on its reel. WB9Z has nothing to worry about after all.

W8WTS' September Treasury Balance

Here's the end of month balance: $4645.29. Thanks to one anonymous donor in December, the balance went up!

Steve, the PJ2T cat of many years, assisting K2PLF in running QSOs on 15 meters.

ARRL Pays Authors!

I was very surprised when *CQ* magazine informed me that their authors are paid. That was in connection with the May 2018 article about our 50th anniversary CQWW CW operation. I thought they were kidding, and indeed no payment was ever received. But yesterday, to my infinite surprise, a check arrived from ARRL in payment for the article that will appear in the next issue of *QST*. It seems just so incongruous that a hobby organization would pay authors, and I'm excited and greatly humbled that my name would appear in this magazine that I have worshipped since I was 12. My first thought was to donate that $195 right back to the league, but on second thought I donated it into the maintenance fund for Signal Point as a token offset to the huge losses we have suffered in this year of the pandemic.

Now I'm motivated! My favorite science fiction author, Robert Heinlein, once remarked that if he'd known that you can get paid to write, he would have started much sooner. So now I'm thinking of doing a 20 volume series for QST, each part of which would be very long. If one gets paid by the word then lookout: I'll generate a ton of words!

Member Spotlight: Daniel Gravereaux, N1ZZ, ex K1DMG

I met a ham op, a senior in high school, saw him operate, got turned-on, and became a ham, KN1DMG, at 17 years old. I got on the air with an ARC-5 receiver, and a Heathkit AT-1 (20 watts). Got #2 Novice Half-Century award. Then with a Hammarlund HQ-100, I got DXCC in my first year as K1DMG. I then made a transmitter using a Geloso VFO (drifted like mad) and a 6146 tube, then I made a KW using two 4-400A tubes. My antennas were a 15meter 3L beam made from EMT mounted on the roof of the farmhouse, and a 3 element 20 meter yagi made from aluminum tubing from the junk yard mounted on the top of a live 60 foot pine tree.

After my stint in the US Army during the Vietnam era, I got hired by CBS Laboratories and had an exciting engineering career. One day I quit to do a start-up business making Audio PA amplifiers for the New York City Subway cars (2800 sold). We had four hams in our company. We discovered PSK 31. One of us made a small interface. I connected it to my sound card, the SoundBLASTER, and to my radio, the RIG. Wow, it became a "RIGBLASTER". We made a few hundred….sold them at Dayton, and named our new company "West Mountain Radio" because my chief engineer, K1UHF, lived in town on West Mountain. During the next 15 years we sold thousands of products, made some money, but MFJ copied everything and undersold us…so, I then sold West Mountain Radio, Inc., and retired at 76 years old.

During those 50 years I worked many DX stations, got 376 confirmed countries, all current entities except North Korea. I was world winner for the VP9 contest…they paid my way to receive the award in Bermuda.

Kathy and I purchased property on St. John, USVI. There, in 1998, I met Jim, W0NB. He invited me down to PJ2T for the CQWW CW contest. When at Signal point I was put on 10 meters for the start. It was dead…but only for a few minutes. It opened. Then the JA's found me. What pile-ups! Boy what a way to learn fast contesting. I got over being nervous very fast. I have been down to PJ2T over 18 times….not sure.

While at PJ2T, K8ND introduced me to 160. Worked my way up to an inverted L in a 100 foot high pine tree, about 40 radials, and beverages in four directions. Worked 226 countries, entered all 160 contests, but only made #12. Too many BIG stations!

Better chance of winning is to be a member of CCC. And I have done so, paying dues for 19 years. Helped with many projects there…antennas, fixing amps and power supplies, climbing the mountain, mowing the lawn, installing and fixing 160 radials, swimming, eating and even dancing the Electric Slide at the old hotel Thanksgiving beach party.

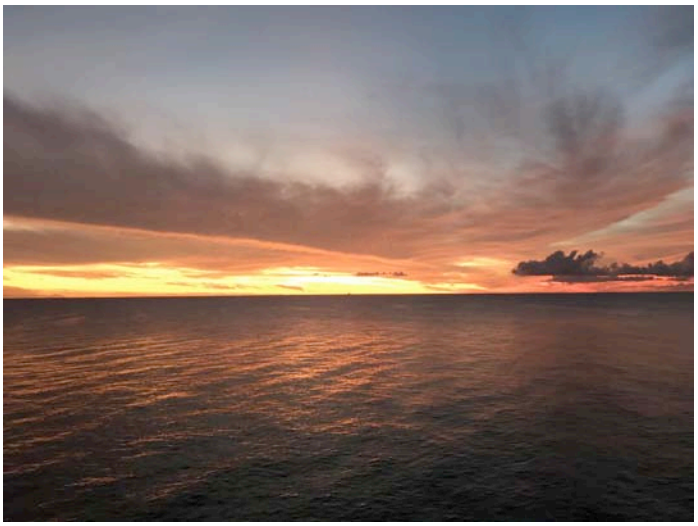
I'm still enjoying all my friends at CCC, remembering many that have left us, and continue to return to the contest station that works!

A little about me: I was born in France from an American mother and a French father, came to the US during WW2, my father was killed in the war, resided at my grandmother's farm, went to a one-room schoolhouse, then high school in New Canaan, CT, became a ham, KN1DMG in 1957, graduated from the university of Connecticut as an EE, joined the US Army, came home and then started a fun career.

N1ZZ knocking down points on 160 CW. –Ed.

March 3, 2019, at the ARRL SSB Contest at PJ2T, Dan is engulfed in flame, one candle per decade, on the day he turned 80. He is an active, avid tennis player and that and good DNA have kept him young. –Ed.

Celebrating after an ARRL DX CW contest victory Sunday evening, February 21, 2010. –Ed.



The end, PJ2T sunset, November 30, 2019.

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