Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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Welcome New CCC Member K5PI

We're very happy to welcome George (Robert) Brandon, K5PI, to CCC membership. Don't call him George <grin>.

Robert Brandon, K5PI, November 2022

Robert will bring good balance to CCC's artistic preferences because he's a highly accomplished bluegrass musician. That will help counter some of our avid classical fans such as me and W9NJY.

And oh yes, did I mention that he has a tremendous contesting resume, fantastic on-air skills, and possesses great technical knowledge of all aspects of contesting hardware and software?

Robert was with us on the CQWW CW team at PJ2T in November, and taught us all quite a bit about N1MM and consolidation of Telnet spots. He will be a good friend and a big help to CCC as we move into the future. Robert is a native Texan and lives in Austin. Thanks to CCC member W5MJ for helping to recruit Robert. We should probably send Madison a toaster.

In a space of about an hour after joining the club and my sending him the remoting guide from Gene, Robert was on the air from PJ2T on 12 CW. The learning curve for use of the remote station is that easy.

Another K3 Repaired by N7IR

Here's Gary's story about his latest repair miracle.

I fixed the latest dead K3. SN 157, aka CCC K3(1), wouldn't put out any TX power. I hooked it up when I had a moment on the island and saw PAI ERR. I immediately disconnected it and put it aside for transport home.

I learned all about the KPAIO3 board when I got it on the bench here. Long story short, a $0.70 SMD 5 Volt regulator blew and caused the failure. Those tiny devices are now unobtainium like so many of our electronic parts are these days. Fortunately I had a stash of good old 78L05 leaded regulators and with a little creative wire bending and cutting I was able to install it on the board. When I reinstalled everything the PAI ERR message was gone and we are back in business. I reran the Wattmeter and TX gain calibrations with my new LP-100A; a very nice instrument with NIST-traceable calibration accuracy to 5% at any power (photo).

CCC K3 (1), now working, on N7IR's bench

CCC Determines Charges for Use of the Remote

As most of you saw we held a series of open Zoom meetings in December to figure out the details of financial support for the enhanced remote station, now that it is in service and working well. The goal was to find an equitable and easy way to reimburse the accounts for the cost of using this facility. After exploring multiple options that were presented to the group in a W0CG PowerPoint, we settled on the following.

- Only CCC members can use the remote station.
- Each member who will use the remote in a given calendar year is asked to contribute $200 on January 1 of each year. That flat amount will cover all of that member's non-contest use of the remote for the year, no matter how much or how little he uses it. Those dollars will be segregated into their own "remoting" account.
- Each member will contribute $100 for each remote contest operation in which he's involved. If multiple ops participate in that contest, they will divide that $100 among themselves.
- When there are failures, we will pass the hat at that time among users of the remote to cover repair and replacement costs. That is to say, we will not build a reserve fund for maintenance.
- All the above is subject to adjustment as we gain experience.

We arrived at the above after Geoff made very careful measurements of the electricity consumed by the remote station when it is not on the air but ready to be powered up, and its actual consumption during 1KW CW contesting. The quiescent cost was .07 KW/hr. Operating cost amazingly came out to the round number of 1.00 KW/hr. Electricity presently is $0.51/KWH in Curacao.

We emphasize that these funds are entirely for operation, and are kept as low as possible. This is in keeping with the long-time philosophy of CCC that we will collect only the bare minimum that's needed to fund our activities. The costs of construction of the remote station were almost entirely covered by donations from the users of the remote station.

CCC Treasurer W8WTS will receive these remoting payments via PayPal and will account for those funds separately from all other club finances.

End of Month Balance

At the end of December the balance in the Station Support fund was $5501.43.

K3(8) Bought for PJ2T

In constructing the enhanced remote station we unceremoniously swiped a K3 from the regular inventory of the PJ2T contest station.

N7IR did some careful shopping and found a good K3: single receiver with CW filter, updated synthesizer, updated KXV3B with the 12/10/6 meter preamp and most importantly all hardware updates. Seller W3NA let it go for the fair price of $1559, and that radio is now in Arizona getting the usual TLC and checkout from Gary. He will then ship it to my daughter in Akron, I'll grab it from her in mid-January, and then haul it to the island at the end of the month. This will be our 8th K3.

As always, we are very much in debt to N7IR for his time and expertise in caring for the PJ2T equipment. Without him the treasury would long ago have been empty were we paying commercial rates for all the maintenance he does.

The station support fund was able to absorb the cost of this transceiver, which was a high priority purchase. This is because in November we found ourselves running the CQWW contest with zero functional backup transceivers, a scary thin margin.

What the Heck Is No-IP?

No-IP fees consume some of your CCC dues money, so you may be interested in what this is for.
Your Internet Service Provider changes your IP address fairly frequently unless you're lucky enough to have a static IP address. We don't, so the IP address at Signal Point changes often. This creates problems for the Domain Name System because a URL such as http://pj2tcameras.com needs to know the new IP address every time that IP address changes, else that URL would never be able to find us. What to do?

The solution is to set up a gadget at Signal Point that is able to detect a change in our IP address when it happens, and send a message to inform someone, somewhere that the IP address has changed. That "someone" is one of the multiple companies have sprung up to fulfill this need, and the concept is very simple.

First, we create an account with one of those companies. Our company is No-IP. Next, using the company's web site, we create a domain name such as http://signalpointremotepowercontrol.hopto.org:73, and tell it what the IP address is at Signal Point the moment that domain name is created. Then we set up a device at the house, either the router itself or a client such as the RRC box, or a camera, and instruct that device to inform the company whenever the IP address has changed. That way, our long URL (signalpointremote…) will always be pointed to the correct, current IP address at Signal Point, and all will work.

All of the above is referred to collectively as DDNS ("Dynamic Domain Name System.") The dynamic part is the very fast updates the system makes to our Signal Point URL when the Curacao utility company changes our IP address.

Our DDNS service provider company is No-IP, a Reno, Nevada based corporation that is a leader in the industry. CCC pays a very modest fee of about $25/year to No-IP, and that keeps all of our addresses for the remote station, surveillance cameras, and all other IP addresses at the QTH reachable without delay or hassle. This is yet one more example of how the club uses your Station Support dues.

Thanks KB7Q for RRC Box

A big thanks to Gene for his donation of a remote-side RRC interface box for the remote station. We have one on site now, and his donation will serve as a much-needed backup. It will be in place, ready to go at the remote station, but not powered up until we need it.

Gene's donated unit is the one on the bottom without the CW speed control knob.

This is a particularly valuable donation because the manufacturer is presently not in production, awaiting parts.

Quick Summary of PJ2T Antennas

Backyard:

80 3 element delta loop facing Europe

US/JA Tower:

6 meter 5 el Cush Craft at 84 ft (rotates)
Force 12 C-3E/H tribander at 79 ft, 18 ft boom (rotates)
80 2 el inverted vee at 75 ft facing US/JA
20 5 el modified 205-CAS, 34 ft boom, at 71 ft, fixed US/JA
40 inv vee at 65 ft, favors US
15 home brew 5 el 15, 36 ft boom, at 65 ft, fixed US/JA
10 5 over 5 Cush-Craft at 48 and 32 ft, fixed US/JA

Europe Tower:

40 2 el yagi XM-240 at 107 ft (rotates)
Bencher Skyhawk tribander at 98 ft facing Europe
15 5 el home brew, 35 foot boom, at 82 ft facing Europe
10 5 el home brew, 24 ft boom, at 74 ft, facing Europe
4 el Mosley TA34XL trap yagi at 67 feet facing Europe
3 el Cush Craft A-3S trap yagi at 45 ft, facing South America

WARC Tower:

160 Inverted L
12/17 3 el Cush Craft A3-WS at 65 ft (rotatable)
30 inv vee at 55 ft

Ridge:

80 inverted vee at 32 ft
Bencher Skyhawk tribander at 15 ft facing Europe

Beverages:

US/JA 880 ft on high Ridge (moved to avoid construction)
Europe 1000 ft on high Ridge (partly moved to avoid construction)

PC54 Set Up

Years ago SM4KYN introduced us to very small form factor PCs, donating many of these to the QTH spanning a long period of time. Since then we have standardized on the Dell 7040 Optiplex. These are very capable Windows machines with lots of ports, an i5 processor, and a very attractive small size (below).

We have been buying these refurbished at very low prices, normally in the mid-200s. Only one of them has shown any problem whatsoever over many years. In keeping with that trend, we acquired two more late last year, and Gene has just finished setting up the second one and shipped it to Ohio for me to take to the island this month. That machine has the NetBIOS name of PC54 on our Signal Point LAN. Gene always cleverly sets up AnyDesk on these machines, thus making it easy to keep them maintained remotely.

Revisiting the CCC Collection Problem

On January 7 our overdue operator from CQWW SSB (October) stopped by my home in Idaho and dropped off a check, payment in full, finally.

Here's a *Different* Credential for PJ2T

This landed in my mailbox from special event station SN95PRK. I asked operating guru and master researcher K8ND what he thought this might be, and received this analysis.

Geoff:

Handy Google translate says that the inscription says:

"For communication with commemorative stations on the occasion of a 95 years of Polish Radio Katowice conducted on amateur bands"

No idea how it was earned or applied for! Probably worked some number of special callsign stations during various contests.

Polskie Radio Katowice appears to be a commercial radio station in its 95th year of operation.

Polish Radio Katowice SA - home page (www-radio-katowice-pl.translate.goog)

73, Jeff K8ND

Isn't it a big, diverse, fascinating world?!

Theory, Practice, Law, and Reality for Bringing Amateur Equipment into Curacao

Rich, NN3W, is a WRTC Team Leader, ace contester, and has operated twice from PJ2T. In early November he read of our plans to bring in a KPA-1500, clearly a high value item, and offered up a legal analysis and some advice. Rich is a professional trade attorney in Washington, D.C., and is thus well qualified to guide us. Here are some excerpts from what he sent us, and some editor comments interspersed.

Under the Harmonized tariff system, every physical good in the world has an assigned customs classification - either six digits in length, eight digits in length, ten digits in length, etc. The USA uses a 10-digit system; Curacao uses an 8-digit system. However, all goods that are classifiable under a given subheading (at the six-digit level) in the Harmonized tariff system should be classifiable under the same subheading in Curacao, in Canada, in Croatia, or in the United States. The devil is in the details at the statistical level (i.e., beyond 6-digits).

Ed: There's our starting point – we need to be very aware of the HTS classification number for our ham gear when we arrive at the airport because these numbers are internationally standardized. Now, read on.

In the USA, an amateur transceiver for HF would be classified under 8525.60.1050 which provides for "other" transceivers that are not CB radio, are not low power for use on 49 MHz, are not VHF marine radios, and are not hand-held radios. The Curacao tariff does not differentiate between any class of transceiver, just that the transmitter has a receiver built in. The correct Curacao HTS number for a K3 or a FTDX5000 or an IC7300 is 8525.60.00.

Ed: This, then, says that a K3 should be dutied at 10.5% of declared value because it fits classification 8525.60.0000. If they try to charge us more at the airport, we have a legal basis to argue about that. Now check this out below about antennas.

8529.10.10 pertains to "antennes voor ontvangtoestellen" (antennas for receivers) and rates a 27% duty rate. 8529.10.90 is "andere" which means "other" which pertains to any other antennas and rates a 0.00% (FREE!) duty rate. If you ever try to import antennas in the future, be careful to point out that amateur antennas are designed for transmitting and deserve a 0.00% duty rate.

Ed: In the past we have been hit with 27% duties for antennas, but Rich shows above that this should be 0.0%. Point the airport inspector to 8529.10.90 if he tries to hit you for duty on an antenna. Now, what about amplifiers?

That leaves us with 8529.90. Which is all other parts of goods of HTS heading 8525 other than antennas. In Curacao, HTS number 8529.90.10 pertains to cabinets and racks ("meubelen en kasten") and rates a 27% duty rate. Any other part of a good of 8525 is classifiable under 8529.90.90 and is identified as "andere" (meaning "other") and rates a 0.00% (FREE!) duty rate.

In my opinion, an amateur radio amplifier is a part or accessory that is not classifiable under HTS number 8525 because the linear itself is not a transmitter or receiver. But it is a part that is associated with a transceiver (see, e.g., antennas) that is classifiable under 8525. In my opinion, 8529.90.90 is the correct HTS number in Curacao for a linear. Again, it rates a 0.00% duty.

So, my suggestion is #1 use 8529.90.90 and save yourself $700.00 in duties. The fallback position is #2 8517.62.00 which rates a 10.5% duty.

Ed: Technically, then, the duty on amplifiers such as a KPA-1500 should be 0.0%.

Those, then, are the legal technicalities, and we owe Rich a thank you for his legal research. But as a practical matter, arguing too much with an inspector at the airport will be a losing effort. Most of them are not well-trained and know little about electronics equipment, so if they try to charge duty that should not be levied, we can show them the codes and tables, and maybe they will be intimidated by our knowledge and stand down. If they argue, fight, and dig in, though, it's best to capitulate and pay rather than make a bad impression for our hobby.

Long Term PJ2T Wish List

- Diesel generator
- Manual AC power transfer switch
- 3CX1200A7 tubes.

Another Bit of CCC History

This is some ancient PJ2T history. The photo below shows Noel (W9EFL SK), Geoff, and Dan (K8RF, now NP2J). It's from October, 1999 and we're at the Kadushi Cliffs Hotel in Curacao's Westpunt.

Noel (W9EFL SK), young Geoff (W0CG), Dan (K8RF, now NP2J), Curacao, October, 1999

I organized this PJ2C DXpedition to run the CQWW SSB contest. This was our first ever operation from Curacao. We did it 100% field day style, hauling in a vast amount of equipment and antennas, and setting them all up in a hurry at the hotel after months of careful coordination with Mr. Bilderbeek, then the GM of the hotel. We scored as well as could be expected with low antennas and a bad location on the island, blocked to Europe and partly blocked to the States. At least we won the country!

NETHERLANDS ANTILLES
PJ2C 9,885,330 5700 147 49

We had initially been granted my request of PJ9CW, but the Bureau changed the callsign at the last minute.

After the operation I rented a commercial storage space on the island and stashed some of the antennas and an AL-1200 linear that was on loan from Noel. We later used those antennas to build PJ2T, and bought the amp from Noel. That is AL-1200(1) that is presently installed at PJ2T Station 1. A year later we bought the Signal Point QTH and happily abandoned the rental storage space, moving everything to the house. The South America tribander we enjoy today was part of this original op from Westpunt.

W9EFL was a very active and supportive member of CCC for many years. He was on the Ten-Tec board of directors and had a highly successful manufacturer's rep business in electronics test equipment. Dan (NP2J) is now a well-known Topbander, having lived many years on St. Croix. And I became the chief janitor and garbage taker-outer of PJ2T.

Remoting Assets Bought from KL9A

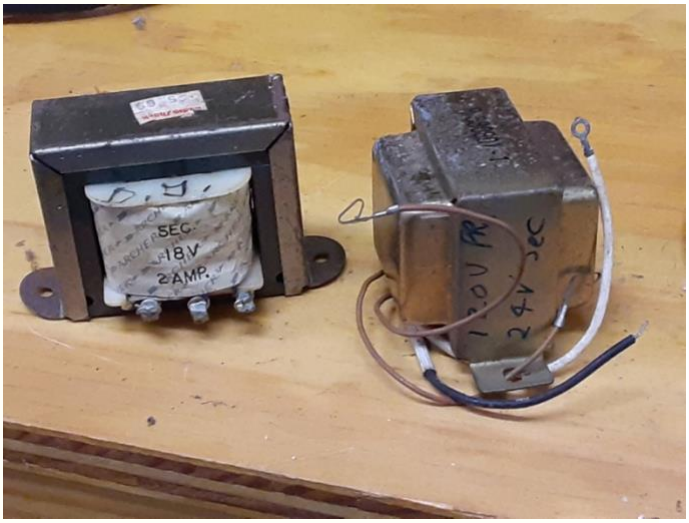
In connection with my search for a K3/0 for myself I discovered some remoting equipment for sale from Chris, KL9A. He cautioned me that the gear may not be in working order, but N7IR offered to have a look at it. The price for one K3/0 and four client side RRC boxes was extremely reasonable, so we took a chance. In a stroke of logistical luck, the seller was local to Gene in Bozeman, so Gene met Chris at his work and picked up the gear, pictured below, on December 31.

Possibly repairable remoting gear, December 31.

As we knew, the K3/0 will not power up, and the suspect is the voltage regulator. Three of the RRC boxes are reachable via their USB ports, and the fourth appears to be DOA with a blown EEPROM. The three working RRC boxes have DC supply problems, but again it is hoped that is a relatively easy fix. We paid only about 25% of the value of this gear in working condition, so anything that is salvageable will put us ahead. Thanks KB7Q and N7IR for taking on this project.

Thanks W5XU for Transformer

I thank CCC member David, W5XU who responded to my plea for a junkbox transformer. He went digging and came up with the perfect item, a 2 amp transformer with an 18 volt secondary, absolutely perfect for our need in the remote system.



The 18 volt transformer from W5XU will become a permanent part of our enhanced remote station.

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