



Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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Farewell to Bill Smith, W9VA, 1937-2023



Bill Smith, W9VA, February 18, 2012, 20 meters CW

As reported via E-mail, we lost Bill Smith, W9VA, on December 20. Here below is an E-mail from Jane a couple of days following. (Thanks W9NJY).

Andy:

I wanted to let you know that Bill died quite unexpectedly on Wednesday this week. I called the paramedics Tuesday afternoon because he was having trouble breathing and they took him to Highland Park Hospital. He had pneumonia and when I left at midnight they had decided he needed to be in the ICU. Next morning when I called they didn't indicate how bad it was. During the day the lung doctor said that his tests showed he was continuing to fail and he wouldn't recover. Bill did not want extreme measures to be taken, so around 5:00 they administered a morphine drip, took off the heavy oxygen mask and he was soon gone. The family was all there for him during the day.

I will miss him terribly.

Jane

Bill had been seriously ill for over a year, but he stoically never complained and courageously did not call attention to himself nor his situation. He had been in touch with Andy, W9NJY over the past year, including a couple of visits that Andy made to Riverwoods.

I first heard from Bill in mid-1997 when he sent me an E-mail on the PacketCluster network, a common practice in those days. He had heard of our CCC VP5 contest operations in 1994 and 1997 and asked if he could be a part of the next effort. That resulted in his joining the VP5CW team that I organized for ARRL DX CW in February, 1998. Bill is at the far right (not politically) in that team photo on the following page. Since that contest he remained constantly active as a CCC member until his death last week, a period of 25 ½ years! That loyalty continued to the end when he sent in dues this past summer, knowing that he would not again make it to PJ2T. That's commitment and courtesy and generosity at the utmost.



VP5CW, February 1998. L-R: KP2L, W9EFL (SK), N8LGP, N8LGP's XYL, K8RF (on tower) WA9S' XYL, WA9S (SK), KP2L's XYL, W0CG (on tower), and Bill Smith, W9VA (SK) at the right.

Since that first contest with us in 1998 Bill has been to PJ2T countless times, proudly never for SSB, and most times for his favorite contest, the ARRL CW contest each February. Many times through those years he told me that PJ2T was one of the top experiences of his life, and always thanked me profusely for my work in keeping this activity going. In October of 2010 he was at Signal Point at the moment Curacao gained independence and thus became a new DXCC entity. He spoke fondly since then of the worldwide massive pileups, a fun and memorable experience.



Bill enjoying being cargo in my pickup truck in PJ2

Bill started in the hobby in 1952 as WN9VBV, His professional career was in the insurance industry. In connection with that he lived in Brazil from 1980-84, holding callsign PY1ZFO and developing superb Portugese language skills. That began a series of 12

trips to Ferdnando de Norohna, so he has lots of experience with "being the DX."

In the Chicago area Bill is noted and remembered as one of the fathers of the W9DXCC Convention, serving as General Chairman for many years, a loyal member of the Northern Illinois DX Association. I can still very clearly picture him in my mind at the podium, welcoming us to the convention, looking 100% the part of the well turned out senior corporate executive that he was. The photo below is from W9DXCC 2005, with W9EFL (SK) in the foreground.



W9VA (right) with W9EFL (SK), W9DXCC, September 17, 2005

Bill has been my dear friend through this quarter century, a generous and active supporter of PJ2T, and a tremendous leader in the hobby by way of his work with W9DXCC, QSL Bureaus, the ARRL Legacy Circle, and many ways unknown. It was an honor to have been counted as one of his friends.

Stew Perry Contest, by K8ND

Here are the results.

Stew Perry Topband Challenge - Dec 30

*Call: PJ2T
Operator(s): K8ND
Station: PJ2T*

*Class: Single Op HP
QTH: Curacao
Operating Time (hrs): 12.6*

*Summary:
Total: QSOs = 419 Total Score = 3,924*

Club: Mad River Radio Club

Comments:

The local dark period started well, with many USA stations audible slightly before twilight on Curacao, while the Sun was still fully up in the USA! First QSO was KILT, who I stumbled upon while looking for a CQ frequency.

Conditions were quiet and full callsigns were copied (i.e. no 'letter mining') during most of the operating time. QRN increased for the last 1/3 of the contest, but was not very bad. QSB became fast and deep.

Quite a few Europeans were worked, notably MANY LY stations! This suggests that the CQWW 160 Meter Contest in a month may be more interesting than feared at this point in the sunspot cycle! No JA, no VK, no ZL.

Some weirdness: at some point in the middle of the dark period, European stations became louder on our 880-foot USA Beverage than they were on the 1000-foot Europe Beverage. This should not happen. It's possible that the terminating resistor on the US Beverage is no longer in place or lightning-zapped, and the wire is behaving in a bidirectional mode. Investigation will be done before CQWW 160 CW.

*Elecraft K3S
AL-1200 @ ~1000W
Transmit Antenna: Inv-L
RX Antennas:
1000-foot EU Beverage
880-foot USA/JA Beverage*

Third Sercomm Router Installed 13 December 2023

As reported earlier this year our tried and true Asus router of many years finally failed hard. Rather than replace it, we decided to transfer all of the WiFi support duties to the new Sercomm router that was provided by the Curacao telecomm company when we got the fiber. That resulted in a cleaner overall PJ2T IP architecture and seemed like the way to go. But since then we have had two Sercomm routers fail, one totally and the second losing its WiFi adapter for 2.4 GHz.

The Flow serviceman who brought us our third Sercomm router in December told us that these Sercomms have proven to be very unreliable on WiFi, and that the WiFi adapters were intended as sort of an afterthought. He said they have been failing all around the island, that we are no different, and recommended that we go back to the outboard WiFi router,

particularly because we have a very heavy traffic load on the 2.4 GHz channels.

Thus, I bought a top-quality Asus RT-AX3000 router in the States and will install it at Signal Point in late January. This is by far our preferred brand because those things last easily a decade in our experience. Also, Asus allows you to set a different LAN address for the router instead of the factory default of 192.168.1.1, which would conflict with the Sercomm router. It also affords great flexibility in setting up the port forwarding upon which we depend heavily.



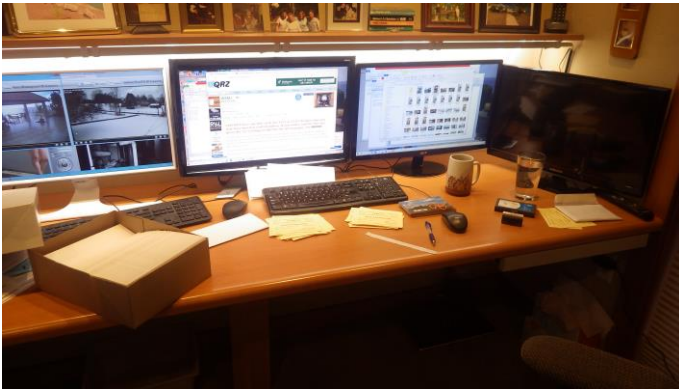
With any luck, then we will be back to our old architecture and, hopefully, back to solid WiFi service on site by the end of January.

Backup Power Monthly Update

Committee members are discussing parameters for the generator. We are hoping to go generator shopping on the island with W8WTS in late January.

VERONA Membership Cards Mailed

PJ2CFM handed me the filled-out and signed VERONA membership cards for all CCCers at the Christmas party on December 13. I hauled them back to Idaho and put them in the mail on December 21. The photo (next page) shows my envelope stuffing and addressing factory at my home office desk in Idaho on the 20th. The cards going to Germany, Canada, and Sweden will be a bit slower, but they are all on the way. Thanks to K4JC and SM4KYN for letting me know that their cards arrived.



Prepping VERONA membership cards in Idaho
December 20

Notes and News for PJ2T Remote Operators

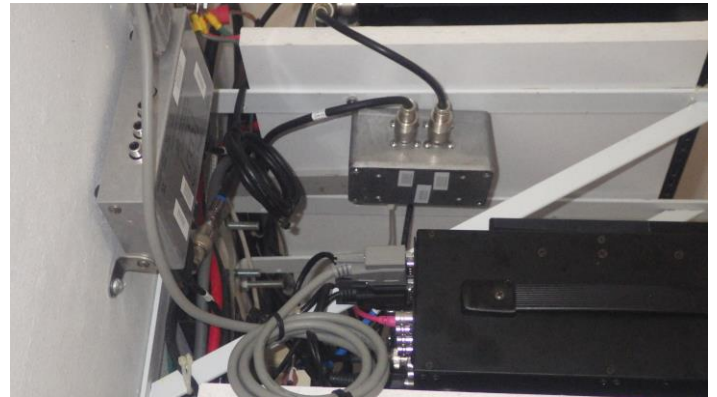
January is when we collect the contributions from remote operators for each calendar year. The deal is that anyone who uses or anticipates using the remote capability in CY 2024 is asked to contribute \$200 to the remote operation fund. This covers your use of the remote station for the entire year aside from special contest operations. We then apply that money to the Signal Point electricity account, and in this way the remote station operation covers its own utility consumption plus a partial subsidy to the real estate account for overall utility costs. You can send your contribution to Treasurer W8WTS who will accumulate that money and then send it to me, after accounting, for deposit in the house operating account.

The bandpass filter system for the remote station is in full operation now. You will not even know it is there except for some slightly high but acceptable SWR readings on 20 and 40 looking up from the K3 into the KPA-1500 amplifier.

As it turned out, I had a terrifically difficult time installing the capability to bypass these filters in case of a failure. The coax jumper lengths from the remote K3 to the coax relays and to the filters themselves were long enough, in some cases, to cause disabling impedance bumps in the line from the radio to the amp. After a huge amount of troubleshooting and no small quantity of profanity, I finally solved almost all of those problems. What remains is the slightly high SWR readings on 40 and 20, but the auto tune is able to handle these with no problem. I'll work on reducing those in 2024, but they are small troubles. The system works fine as is.

The solution was for me to homebrew a bypass control relay and install it at a location very close to the remote K3 and amplifier (photo) so as to minimize the lengths of the bypass cables. The relay disconnects the long

cable run to the filter panel when in bypass. Below you can see that box attached on the bottom side of the shelf where the amp sits, and slightly above the K3. I repurposed a surplus Magic-T RX system splitter box for this application in the remote station. We had some spare parts for the remote antenna control system on site, including a DXE high power relay, so all of the parts were available. I left the Magic-T circuitry in the box, disconnected of course, so we could revert if needed.



Filter bypass relay control for remote station

When the remote operator presses the (secret) button the relay in the box in the photo keys and removes the entire bandpass filter system from the line. Click again and the system is back to normal with the bandpass filters invoked.

Operators Still Needed for ARRL DX SSB

We are hoping to keep our string of World #1 victories intact. Two spots remain vacant on this team, which presently consists of N1ZZ, W0CG, K8PGJ, N0OJ, K4QD, ND8L, W9NJY, and K4JC. We have the Moran pool house for this one, and Dorothy will be on site with her smiles. We will have fun and hope two more of you can join us. ghoward@kent.edu if you're interested.

CQ WPX SSB 2024 Update

At present we have zero operators signed up for this late March contest. Can anyone help? Does anybody want to do this via the remote as a single op? We presently have an E-mail thread happening on this topic, as you have surely seen.

CCC Polo Shirt Re-Order

Thanks to all who responded to my inquiry about additional polo shirts. They are now at the embroiderer in Idaho, and I'm hoping they will be available before

Dorothy and I are both gone on January 20. I extracted a promise from them to complete the work no later than January 18, so fingers are crossed. I am in Ohio, but Dorothy (still in Idaho) awaits the call from the embroiderer. She will stuff and mail the shirts using the shipping envelopes that I left behind, addressed and waiting.

Still Need 3CPX800A7s

Can you help us find a couple of 3CPX800A7 tubes? These are increasingly difficult to get. K8ND found a couple that are available on January 15, and we are pursuing that purchase now. I'll let you know how that worked out.

OZ1ING Visits Signal Point

Here's host K8ND's narrative of Henrik's 26 December visit.

Today Henrik OZ1ING visited the Signal Point PJ2T station during a 12-hour stopover by the cruise ship 'Silver Dawn'! [NOTE: His XYL is a jazz singer employed to perform on the ship. Henrik takes a couple of cruises a year with his XYL!]



Henrik, OZ1ING, December 26, 2023

After a tour of the facilities, he sat at Station #1 and operated for a time on 20m SSB, 17m SSB & CW, and 15m SSB. He has 48 QSOs in his PJ2 log.

Henrik is President of the DDXG, the Danish DX Group and an accomplished 160-meter operator. He worked PJ2ND on 160-meters on December 1 from his home in Denmark, and we exchanged QSL cards for that QSO during his visit.

He had to depart the station mid-afternoon to make the long taxi ride back to his ship, which departed the island in early evening headed toward Aruba.

He scheduled a taxi to pick him up at the end of his stay, and it worked out OK (they arrived 15 minutes early though!).

End of Month Treasury Balance

The end of 2023 balance in the Station Support fund is \$10,918.35. THANK YOU to Treasurer W8WTS for his work on this and for his patience with some of my potentially confusing transactions. Everything is sorted now.

AL-1200 (6) Repairs

In December K8ND noted that the AL-1200 at Station 1 was hanging in receive. This is a classic AL-1200 problem we have seen many times before, requiring replacement of the T/R board in the amp. Those boards are no longer available, but we had three new ones in storage, pointing up the critical importance of stocking parts when we can find them, and keeping precise records of where they are stored at the QTH.

The problem is that replacing that board requires unsoldering some 15 wires, two of which are shielded coax. It's time consuming, requires careful documentation before beginning, and requires some considerable careful technique.

K8ND started that process and did most of the dog work in January. We'll finish it up in a couple of weeks. Here's that amp under repair.



AL-1200 (6) under repair, 3 January 2024

Seldom Seen in Curacao

Here's the a rare siting of three American 737s on the ramp in Curacao. One was the early afternoon arrival from Miami. The second was an arrival soon afterward from Charlotte. The farthest 737 had just blocked in from Miami, the later afternoon flight, and about 45 minutes after the photo Dorothy and I boarded that third arrival.



Three AA 727s in Curacao at once, 15 December 2023

Our flight to Miami arrived early and we breezed through Global Entry. Then the problems began. We waited an hour for a hotel shuttle, took a Lyft to the hotel, but were left behind at the hotel by the shuttle the next morning. Another Lyft ride. Our PHX flight was delayed almost three hours, so I rebooked to go to DFW, then Spokane. We boarded that Dallas 787 but all passengers were then asked to deplane to a different gate and airplane. We boarded that different Dreamliner, and all passengers were then removed twice and then reboarded twice. Finally arrived in DFW after a five hour delay, ran, and we made our Spokane flight by one minute. AA gave us First Class upgrades on that flight in apology. Who cares, but it makes an amusing story. Travel from Curacao to the Pacific Northwest is often problematic.

The following week the hotel rebated \$100 of our room rate in apology for the limo problem and no hot water. The limo driver had literally driven away from me in the parking lot, refusing to wait one more minute for Dorothy, who was in the slow elevator.

A/B Boxes Arrived from Santa

Under our tree in Idaho: here (next column) are the four Top-Ten Devices A/B boxes that arrived from Santa N7IR. One is unwrapped and three others still in green bubble wrap. They will fly south for the winter.



A/B Boxes for Signal Point, December 21, 2023

Youth!?

Two members reacted to the proposal that we consider sponsoring some young ops directly. This discussion cotinues.

KPA-500 Returned to Service

Since we got the enhanced remote startion on the air, K8ND's 500 watt Elecraft amp has been in storage at Signal Point. With the AL-1200 at that position currently under repair, Jeff got out the old amp on January 5, and it is working well. An advantage in having this amp at Station 1 is that this will save wear and tear on the normal contest station amp during Jeff's long stays at Signal Point. He operates very heavily, and that is imposing a workload on that AL-1200 equivalent to many normal weekend contests. This new arrangement benefits the club.



K8ND's KPA-500 at Station 1

Unfortunately it was later discovered that the KPA-500 output had been connected to the Station 1 bandpass filters, blowing out the 80 meter W3NQN filter and possibly other as yet undetermined parts of that filter system. That system is designed for 100 watts, not 500.

K8ND has kindly offered to pick up the costs of these replacements, all of which are now on order.

Wire Tracer Ordered

Thanks W8WTS for alerting us to the existence of this instrument. We'll take this to the island in January, and it will be a huge help in figuring out what 160 meter TX antenna radials have been damaged or dug up so that we can do repairs and replacements. This device is manufactured by Kosol, just under \$60, and is well worth it for the labor it will save.



Leadership at VERONA Party

Three important contesting leaders together at the VERONA Christmas party, December 13, 2023 (next column). At the left Jess Maass, K8ND/PJ2ND, current President of CCC. I'm in the center, and that's VERONA's long time President Brett Ruiz, PJ2BR. Brett and I have worked very hard over a period of almost 25 years to keep these two club groups intact and always improving.



PJ2ND, PJ2DX, PJ2BR, December 13, 2023

New Construction in the Neighborhood

Eight apartments spanning four buildings are presently under construction across the street from our station and east two lots. These are directly across the street from House #3 (Marlies' old place) and immediately adjacent to Dirk's home. This is NOT associated with the new hotel, but instead involves different owners. This all came up rather rapidly. Apparently there was an announcement in the newspaper with an invitation to raise objections, but nobody in our neighborhood saw it in time, and the zoning permit was issued. This is an unwelcome development that will result in people and cars in our quiet neighborhood.

Here is another of K8ND's magnificent drone photos showing the present state of construction.



Apartment construction; Signal Point is out of the photo beyond the bottom left. (Photo K8ND)

History: Photos from Tile Hell, March, 2015

In March of 2014 I ordered 180 square meters of ceramic tile from China. It took the expected year to arrive, but the price made it worth waiting for. After it was delivered we started prepping the concrete patio for the new tile. The concrete was covered with very

persistent mildew, algae, and dirt and dust. Dorothy and I marked off one square meter at a time, and had to scrub each one individually on our hands and knees with a stiff brush and full strength bleach. Nothing else would get the tile clean. Here's one square meter completed.



1 sq meter scrubbed, 179 to go

I know this sounds insane, but we knew that if the preparation was not done correctly that the new patio tile project would not hold up over time. We tried all kinds of hopefully faster methods, but nothing worked except patience and elbow grease.

Dorothy then went home as scheduled, and I stayed behind for two more contests and to do the tile install. Zoom's uncle, Ribert Johanna, a superbly skilled builder, was available beginning in March, and we started the tile install on February 28.



Ribert sets the first of 657 tiles, February 28, 2015

Thus began 17 days of tile hell. I picked up Ribert each morning in Soto at 7 AM, and the two of us worked this tile project until nearly dark every day. We worked every day including the weekend. No let up.

He and I made a good tag team. I measured and cut the tile pieces, and he mixed the thinset mortar and installed the tiles. Here's my cutting factory

with my big rented wet saw, set up just outside the man gate.



Geoff's lonely tile cutting shop

Over 350 of the tiles needed to be custom cut, no two alike, so this was a time consuming job. I had a lot of tile experience from building a couple of my homes, so there was no learning curve. Here's an example of one of the many irregular shapes.



One of ~350 custom cut tiles, March 1, 2015

Obviously the project was eventually completed with the result that the patio looked dramatically better. Here we are (next page) putting in some of the brushed aluminum stair nosing pieces.

