Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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Good News About Dorothy

Thanks to so many of you for your cards, calls, expressions of concern, and medical advice. Dorothy is going to be OK! She was definitively diagnosed last week with takotsubo cardiomyopathy. This is a rare (1%) condition, 90% of which occur in women in her age range. Triggered by physical stress or psychological stress or both, the upper left ventricle goes somewhat limp and fails to pump normal volumes of blood. It looks for all the world like a heart attack, including severe difficulty breathing and a massive jump in the troponin protein, which indicates the heart muscle damage that accompanies a heart attack.

Here's the patient at home on October 28

Because this is so rare, and because so many of the indicators looked like a heart attack, the ER doctors and our family practice doc understandably missed it and instead explained to us why Dorothy's prognosis might not be the best. It looked to them like advanced congestive heart failure, a very bad thing. But finally we were seen by a cardiologist, and she immediately nailed the takotsubo diagnosis. Dorothy is now on meds and forced rest to hasten the recovery of her heart, expected to require a maximum of two months. She is also now on statins for life to hopefully stop any more plaque buildup in her heart arteries. The profound infection that has plagued her sinuses and lungs for months is slowly drifting away, and she has been told to slowly resume normal activity as able. Right now she is still weak and fatigued, as expected, but better every day. We are optimistic that she will be able to come to Curacao as planned in late January. The cardiologist tells us that travel should be no problem at all, and even recommended ocean swimming as good therapy. Dorothy will likely be able to resume an almost normal life over time.

I particularly thank CCCers Dr. Scott Wright, K0MD, and Dr. Andy Catanzaro, W9NJY, for their guidance and support. I was in full panic when I hurriedly got back to Idaho and thus imposed on these two friends for a word of advice, and they saved the day for us.

CQWW SSB Contest Report

We pulled it off. I had been very worried about getting the house and station out of mothballs, assembled, up and running, fixing all of the inevitable problems, and securing the rental house and groceries in the scant four days before the team was slated to begin arriving. (Dorothy chose to stay behind in Idaho during this October trip.) It came together, as you know, and our team posted an excellent M/M score.

Class: **M/M HP**
QTH: SA
Operating Time (hrs): 48
Location: South America

Summary: Compare Scores

Band	QSOs	Zones	Countries
160:	149	13	34
80:	485	19	65
40:	1828	30	106
20:	2640	34	122
15:	3444	35	127
10:	4495	37	134
Total:	**13041**	**168**	**588** Total Score **28,820,232**

Getting things up and on the air would not have been possible without the help of Dr. Melissa Haendel, W7MAH, who arrived a couple of days early to help me get things together. I no longer trust myself to handle the AL-1200s on my own, hauling them out of storage and up onto the trestles. But for two of us working together it was easy. We worked like dogs in the heat for three days, including a complete end-to-end Europe Beverage triage and maintenance trip in the worst heat and humidity I have ever experienced down there. We set up all five stations, cleaned the interior of all amps before powering them up, cleaned up the house and got out patio furniture, worked hard to police up the yard, repaired countless little things in and around the house, and were ready for the team's arrival. She's in top physical condition and there was nothing she was unwilling to tackle, including helping to clear vegetation from the 160 antenna and overhead cable bundles (below).

W7MAH working hard in her heliophobe outfit.

Once the team arrived she led a group of operators (photo) to the Ridge to do the US Beverage so that I would be free to troubleshoot problems in the shack.

W7MAH, KN2P, DL3ON, and W4IPC ready to hit the US Beverage on the Ridge.

This was our youth team, and I was very proud to know that they pumped over 13 thousand contacts into the ether with young and female voices signing "PJ2T." This effort was the brainchild of CCC member Rick, W3ACO, his daughter Melissa, and CCC member W4IPC. Rich and Melissa began three years ago to do what they could to attract young women operators into contesting. This year they coordinated with Connor to build a young team. Rich, Melissa, and Rob (VE4GV) pitched in over $3000 to support travel and on-island costs so that these folks could be part of this team.

This team's youngest four members are all outstanding people and accomplished contesters. KN2P is training to be a professional pilot, DL3ON is an electrical engineering student in Munich, and KI5SXY is a senior in aerospace engineering in Rolla, Missouri. W4IPC is studying engineering in the tidewater Virginia area. All of this group deserve our cheerleading and financial support.

We also had two 30-something ops (W7EY and PC8M), so the average age of the team was a new low at PJ2T. Rather than repeating all of this news here, I encourage you to read the 3830 comments from me and W4IPC at https://www.3830scores.com/showrumor.php?arg=RvYizV777J7nDU .

As you all now know, when Dorothy had her medical emergency I dropped everything into Connor and Melissa's laps and raced home to Idaho. They did a super job of taking over, running the contest, and closing out the house the following week. They did a magnificent job of taking over on very short notice.

Congratulations to the PJ2T WW SSB team – the season is now in full swing, and PJ2T and the youth started it off admirably. A brief photo album follows – I have only a few photos because I had to leave.

CCC member and youth sponsor Rich, W3ACO, at Station 2

CCC member James, W7EY and Pim, PC8M taking a cooldown break from project work

Leon (DL3ON), Morgan (KI5SXY), and Connor (W4IPC) after dinner at the Moran house

Violetta (KN2P) pulling kitchen KP duty following dinner

Melissa (W7MAH) at the Barber tire shop making the best of having to deal with two almost flat tires on her rental car

Marty (AG3I), Leon (DL3ON), and Morgan (KI5SXY)

WPX SSB 2025 Plan

Hearing no interest from among the membership for a big team for this contest, I cancelled our reservation for the Moran pool house for 25 March – 1 April 2025.

I plan to be on site, however, hopefully with Dorothy. Thus we could host a small team of up to four who would stay at the Signal Point house, combined with shifts by remote operators. Or, it could be a 100% remote operation in any category you might wish, such as single op, or single band/single op. Another possibility would be for you to bring a group from your home club and make it a club-themed contest. All things are possible.

Any interest? Let me know?

CQWW CW Anniversary Contest

With Dorothy and me out of the picture, all is still well for the CQWW CW contest. The team will begin arriving on November 19. W8WTS will take the lead, and his work will be particularly challenging with K8ND having had to cancel because of a medical problem that limits his mobility. Jim has been organizing his team into purpose-centered committees, and everyone has stepped up to the challenges. Making things even harder, M0ORD had to cancel at the last minute because of the murder of a family member in South Africa. We wish Roger all the best as his family deals with this tragedy. Within a couple hours of Roger's cancellation, K4JC also cancelled.

With Dorothy not on site, the team will need to take charge of their own shopping, and there are multiple very competent cooks on the team, so the food part will go fine. NA2U has invested considerable effort into getting tee shirts made for the team, and he and W9NJY are picking up the tab for these costly shirts as a gift to the team. N7IR has constructed a tech kit to try to once and for all track down and kill the source of 20 meter interference getting into 10. All indications are that the culprit is an active emitter somewhere on the QTH, but we have not been able to isolate it. W9NJY, W8WTS, and NG7M among others are good engineers, so we have the "A" team on this project. The stations are all set up and functional, as I left everything in place at all five positions after WW SSB. N7IR will have to double check the WinKeyers and their parameters in N1MM, and verify that all the stubs are installed correctly, but this should be straightforward.

The team will be housed at Signal Point, in the Moran pool house, and in the #7 rental house owned by Andrew King. That now much-diminished group consists of NA2U, N7IR, W9NJY, WA7LNW, NG7M, W8WTS, AD8CW, VE9AA, and W1DED. The 25th anniversary event YouTube video I have been hoping to create will still happen. W1DED, well known to all by virtue of his excellent weekly podcast, will not operate, freeing him to shoot material for the video. Further contributing to that video, Jack Reed, WA7LNW will be available to advise. Jack is the creator of the magnificent and historic RadioTeam Finland video with which we are all so familiar.

I immensely regret not being able to be on hand for this momentous 25th anniversary CQWW CW operation, but fate intervened and my first responsibility is and always has been to Dorothy. Best of luck to these guys as they make us proud in the contest. I offer my most profound apology to the team.

A Question for CCC Members

Two of our CCC youth members KG5XR and W4IPC, have proposed the possibility of an almost exclusively youth team for CQWW SSB 2025. They are quite certain that they can assemble a large youth team, possibly more than eight operators, all substantially under the age of 30.

All CCC members, of course, have priority on use of the QTH for all contests. So our question at this point, 48 weeks in advance, is what do you think of this idea? I am absolutely supportive, and this youth operation would not prevent other CCC members from participating if you wish. But we need some sort of reading from you now as to the collective opinion of the membership.

KB7Q and Joyce have tentatively planned to be at the QTH in October ’25 to provide logistical support for a team, making it much easier for the rest of the guys and gals to focus on the radio strategy. With this support from the Sheas, it is unlikely that I will be there,

Reactions?

CCC Financial Report

As of the end of October the treasury balance was $5922.58. This is before the new shack air conditioner cost was posted. Thanks W8WTS for the financial reports.

Remote Station Is Fixed

It took me about 15 minutes after arriving at the QTH to get the remote station back on the air following the August failure. As we suspected, the wall transformer that provides 12 VDC to the RRC box was dead. This was a little 1 amp supply left over from an old Netgear router, and it gave up in the heat in the house and 24/7 duty cycle.

I had brought four 12 volt supplies in my luggage from Ohio, but in the space of less than an hour the first one burned out because it could not handle 60 Hz. So did the second one. Seeing the pattern, I put out a plea for help, and W7EY found a couple of 50/60 Hz supplies at home, brought them in his luggage, and soon we were back in business. This new supply likes 50Hz, and runs much cooler because it’s rated at 5 amps. (The RRC box draws about 600 ma at peak load.)

News on the Signal Point Generator

The WW SSB team worked very hard on this in October. I managed to mount the transfer switch to the wall in the utility room, and we did all of the dog work in installing the buried conduit from the generator to the house. I had intended to finish this after the SSB team departed, but our medical emergency precluded that. My hope now is that W8WTS and others from the CW team may be able to complete this work and get the generator closer to full service.

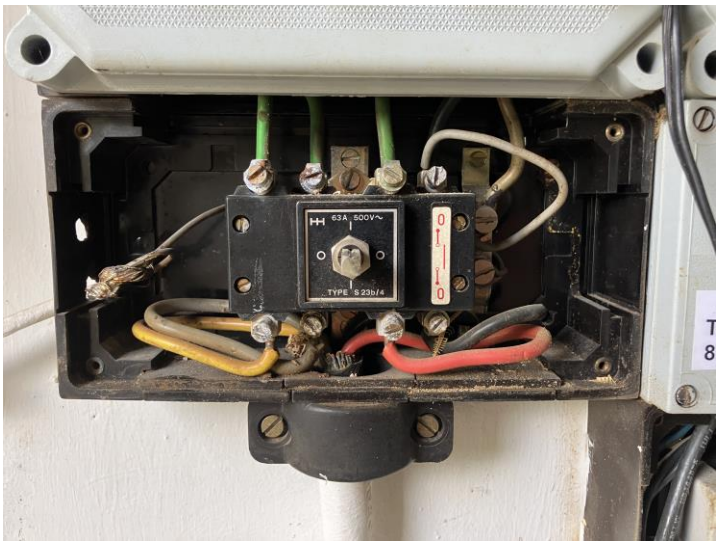
I hauled the heavy and awkward Slovenian transfer switch to Curacao in my checked luggage from Ohio on October 16. Bad luck intervened, customs was X-raying bags, and I ended up having to pay $162 duty at the airport.

In Ohio I had bought some aluminum bracket stock, masonry anchors, and stainless hardware to mount the switch in the utility room. It turned out that this was all the right stuff, as the photo below shows the switch in its installed location.


Generator transfer switch installed in utility room

As you can see in the photo, I fabricated a wall bracket assembly mounted permanently on the wall, but which permits easy removal of the transfer switch if needed. This is in the manner of a relay rack mount. Space on the wall in the room was extremely tight, but I relocated the outlet for the washing machine and that freed up the space you see here. The location is not ideal, and we are probably breaking a thousand NEMA conventions by putting this thing adjacent to a water pipe, but for our homeowner-DIY-special house on the island it will be OK. After the wiring is connected we will, of course, fashion a safety cover from plexiglass or plywood to keep humans safe while in that room.

The next step will be to put in the wiring to connect the switch. Following is a detail of the inside of the master electrical switch, which is above and to the left of the transfer switch.



Electrical master switch in utility room. Input at bottom.

The power from the utility company enters this box at the bottom and exits via the green wires at the top. We will disconnect the three green wires at the top, extend them and run them and the neutral into the "line in" side of the transfer switch, and then run four more wires from the "load" lugs on the transfer switch back into the box pictured. I took three bags of copper crimp lugs, suitable for #6 AWG to the island in my luggage. The mechanics of this connecting will be up to W8WTS, a master engineer and fabricator. He may decide to install an intermediate box for these connections. Once complete, our transfer switch will then be in the line, ready to support transfers. And this install can be done very safely because this box in the photo can turn off all three phases feeding the green output lines.

Now for the connection to the generator. WTS and I consulted together in May and decided to locate the generator under trees in the middle part of the backyard behind my and Dorothy's room. This will provide some protection from sun and salt, and will help to visually obscure the generator from thieves. Noise and fumes into the house will be lessened from this location. To get to the house from this spot, W7EY, PC8M, W4IPC, DL3ON and I dug a ditch to accommodate 75mm conduit. This was a big task, particularly penetrating under the sidewalk, but we made it happen over three days of hot and muddy work (photos follow). We used some 75mm conduit that I had on site left over from the fiber optic conduit, and I bought two more 16 foot pieces at Kooyman, cut them in half in the store parking lot to get them into the Kia, and hauled them home with a bag of needed PVC fittings. It turns out that at the moment I was doing this in the parking lot at Kooyman, Dorothy was nearly collapsing in Idaho and was rushed to the emergency room by a kind neighbor in our condo building.


32 linear feet of 75 mm conduit in the Kia Soul


PC8M (Pim) and W7EY (James) taking a break from vicious digging under the sidewalk in blistering heat

Pim and James are both software professionals, but they did not see this work as an insult to their skills and dove in with energy and aggressive enthusiasm.

They dug the entrances to the "tunnel" under the sidewalk and then retired at around 4 PM for the day. I took over and managed to pound a 1 inch threaded rod through, using a hand sledge and gaining about 1/8 inch per blow. Sore arm. After breaking it through I had to draw it back out using a pair of vice grips and getting about 1/3 turn per clamp. It took about 90 minutes to get it out, and there are no photos because I was a mess of sweat and mud.

Once the rod was out, the hole was just big enough to get the water hose through, and I ran it back and forth many times with high pressure water running, then left the ditch full of water overnight.

The next day Leon and Connor took over under the sidewalk and managed to enlarge the hole big enough for the 75 mm conduit (photos).

DL3ON (Leon) and W4IPC (Connor) half in and half out of the muddy conduit ditch

W7EY, DL3ON, PC8M, W4IPC attacking the task of digging to the generator.

The photo shows the crew teaming up to dig the long ditch to the generator. This has to be done precisely or the conduit's 45 degree bends will not align correctly. 75 mm conduit is a bit of overkill in diameter, but it is very much preferred to go big when pulling multiple heavy conductors through multiple elbows.

DL3ON patching and soldering broken radials

As expected, we broke numerous buried 160 meter radials, but these were easily repaired by Leon and Connor. No harm done. I can't tell you how wonderful it is for me to not have to do everything! This crew was great.

We ran out of time, but managed to install all of the conduit except the last couple feet into the house. It is all dry-fitted and lying in the ditch without wires or a pull rope inside. The CW crew will take it from there, disassemble the pieces, trim up the ditch, put in the pull rope, glue the pieces, and drop the conduit into the ditch.

W8WTS knows how to get the lines into the house and connect to the transfer switch (discussed previously).

That connection will be made with the four 100 ft lengths of #6 AWG stranded copper that W4IPC hauled in his luggage (photo next page), six runs of #14 (thanks K4JC) for signal wiring, and one length of Ethernet cable for the future.


Four 100 ft lengths of #6 AWG to connect the gen to house (Photo W4IPC)

Next, the CW crew will unpack the generator from the protective plastic, charge up the battery, top up the oil if needed, make many trips to the gas station with the 5 gallon can I bought, load the tank with diesel, drain the sump, then start up the generator for the first time. Finally. There will be enough wire length to connect the generator in temporary fashion. Once the concrete pad is built (probably late February), we will rent a forklift, set the gen onto the cured pad, bolt it down, connect it permanently, and paint it with epoxy. There will be a Ring camera watching the generator at all times.

Thanks again to AC7DC for his contribution of $5K that got this project rolling. We're getting close to implementation!

ARRL 10 Meter Contest Plans

Plan "A" was that K8ND and Dorothy and I would be at Signal Point to host anyone who wanted to come for the ARRL 10 contest, as well as to overwatch the remote station. But I had to cancel because of our family medical crisis, and K8ND cancelled for a different, but very aggravating medical problem. So it appears that the station will be unattended after the WW CW crew departs. Thus we will run an all remote operation and, hopefully, N7NR will take the lead as organizer in the same way as last year.

Death of Shack Air Conditioner

Among the many systems I tested during my frantic days of preparation for WW SSB was the shack air conditioner. After the usual fight with corrosion in the remote control, it came up beautifully. For a couple of minutes. But the compressor would not start. I made some quick checks and confirmed that it was truly sick.

This unit has been in service for 15 years, lasting very much longer than expected, particularly given our extreme climate. This was on Friday, one week before the contest. I made the judgement that it would be fruitless to keep chasing it with repairs, particularly given its age and that the R-22 refrigerant was long since illegal and unobtainable except for gouged prices on the black market. Thus I got in touch with my air conditioning friend John Biscayne, who answered my message within a couple of minutes late on a Friday evening. That's incredible and very un-Curacaolike.

He agreed that it made little sense to try for a repair in that we have been limping along for years using homemade replacement parts. We decided to swallow hard and put in a new one. Operating WW SSB the following weekend would have been hellish because the indoor temperatures were running around 96F, and that was with no transmitters turned on.

John gave me his treatise on the present state of airco equipment. NOTHING lasts more than 5 – 7 years, not refrigerators, washing machines, or air conditioners. The good old days are gone because the new units operate at very much higher internal pressures (10x), and the internal tubing is thinner in gauge. He strongly recommended a "brand X" air conditioner as within 5% as good as a top brand such as Panasonic, and very much cheaper. The cost difference was about 75%, so he convinced me to agree to a Hi Sense brand on the theory that it would last just as long as a Panasonic, and for much less money.

True to his word, John showed up the following Thursday afternoon, and he and his helper took out the old one and had the Hi Sense in operation about four hours later. As standard practice, he opens up the compressor and sprays everything inside with salt-protective paint (photo next page). This helps extend life greatly.

John very cleverly adapted the long copper tubing lines from the old air conditioner, making flared ends and using lots of adapters. That saved the huge job of installing new tubing on the long run to the backyard, and he said that the old tubing is very much better than the new anyway. This saved real time and money and resulted in a better installation.

The new 36,000 BTU Hi Sense compressor with the new blue paint, perched on the dead old Westinghouse compressor

The new unit runs much quieter, blows a subtle breeze rather than a gale, cools the shack very effectively during five station M/M operation, does not appear to inject any inverter hash into any of the ham bands, and uses about 40% less electricity than the old one. A success.

We had been expecting this failure for over a year, and thus we had been protecting $3600-4500 for a new shack airco within the Station Support fund. The total installed cost was, in fact, a hair under $2800, a nice surprise.

I had hoped to coat the compressor with epoxy soon after installation, but that must now await my return to the island, delayed by our medical crisis.

Unseen to the members, but stressful for us on the island, John asked to be paid in cash. Suddenly I needed about 4900 guilders. Melissa, her sister, and I made a pile of all our cash, I wrote them IOUs, and then we all started hitting ATMs each day of that week, taking out the max allowed cash each time. Our pile of currency grew, and we just made it by the time John finished on Thursday and needed to be paid. I've reimbursed my partners in currency hoarding, and all is fine now, but it was a crazy week on top of all else.

A big thank you to ND8L who sent in a gift of $500 toward the new air conditioner without anyone even asking.

From here forward we will allocate about $500/year to be ready to replace this one when it fails as expected in 5 – 7 years.

Overall Condition Update on the QTH

The 160 Inv L was kaput when I arrived, but W7EY went climbing and fixed it expeditiously. We also found that the Ridge 80 inv vee was inop upon arrival. Sleuthing by W4IPC and DL3ON quickly verified that the antenna was good but that the switch box was inop. They brought it to the shack, and they and W3ACO quickly found a broken solder joint at the DC end of the inductors, patched that, and returned it to service the next day. Easy. The 20 meter driven element on the Ridge tribander is now broken off on the other side from what I fixed last March. Amazingly, it still works pretty well. Parts and the needed tools to do this repair are on site, but it will be very difficult. The WARC rotor is inop. A replacement is on site. Same for the 40 meter rotor, but that antenna contests very nicely fixed north. W3ACO verified that the replacement rotor works corrrectly, but we did not have the time needed to swap it in. The 80 meter 3 el Europe loops are inop with a broken wire in the driven element. This antenna is not important for our contests, and the repair will require possibly three full days of work and two climbers. The remote station is fixed, as noted elsewhere in this newsletter. There are numerous burned out bulbs in the tree lighting system and a couple in the east landscaping planter. The irrigation system is working well. My custom-built rechargable battery system for the irrigation computer has now worked perfectly for nearly a year. One tree died from OVERwatering, my fault. The Europe tower needs a complete recoating of epoxy finish paint, normal at each three year interval. The US/JA tower needs to be checked, rust controlled, and some zigzag splints fabricated and installed. The Titan III, HF-2500, and Titan 425 amps are all inop and need attention. We quickly get behind on maintenance when I am not able to be on site long term. I'm sure that we can organize a work trip in early 2025 to tackle many of these problems. All indoor station equipment worked well in CQWW SSB.

ARRL DX CW Contest Planning

NF9V, W4SO+XYL, WI9WI+Annette, N7WA+girlfriend, AD4ES, and VA3CW are probable for February. (Rudy has flights.) We have the Moran pool house booked and paid for. Who else can join us? I'm rating the probability that Dorothy and I will be there as about 95% at present.

ARRL DX SSB Contest Planning

K5LD is leading the planning for this fun contest, and we have him, me and Dorothy, AK4R, K4JC, K8PGJ,

N0OJ, ND8L, and N1ZZ likely to be on the team. There's room for more ops, and we have the Moran house. Interested? Let me know, thanks.

W0CG's August to October Disappearance

As you know, the reason I dropped off the face of the Earth in this nine week period was that I was totally consumed with the mega-project of re-doing the exterior of my Ohio house.

W0CG cutting patch pieces for the chimney

I'm fabricating the house number panel

The 13 minute YouTube video I made about the project is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dq3Cbheho6U . Most of you have viewed this. The manufacturer of the siding is in the process of preparing national marketing materials based on my renovation project.

Early Photo of John Thompson

I received a kind message from Will Revaz, the current holder of famous callsign W1TS. He thanked me for choosing to honor John by selecting callsign PJ2T, as he saw in our current "Stray" published this month in QST.

Will knew John in early days and included this photo of him at the CQ Radio Club, Torrington, Connecticut, circa 1948. John is the second from left, back row. This is the earliest photo I have ever seen of the famous W1BIH / PJ9JT.

John Thompson, back row, second from left, CQ Radio Club, Torrington, Connecticut, 1948.

CQWW CW Exchange License Plate

Spotted in the Costco parking lot in Coeur d Alene, November 2024

Special Thanks for Financial Relief

Cancellations for PJ2T contests are unavoidable, particularly as we all become older and face those unpleasant realities. When those cancellations are on fairly short notice, it compromises the team because it's too late to recruit replacement operators. It also adds to the per-person cost of the trip because the cost-share denominator drops while the fixed cost numerator, particularly the cost of the rental houses, remains the same. Thus, costs for the remaining team members can become much greater than they had expected.

I thank K8ND and M0ORD for very quickly making contributions to the CQWW CW pot so as to offset the per-person increases for the remaining team members. Jeff even sent in a bit too much, with instructions to apply it to the Station Support fund. Additionally, Jeff reimbursed me in full for what would have been a large loss out of my pocket for the leased rental car, given that his planned December/January stay had to be cancelled. He did so without having been asked. And M0ORD's reimbursement was about $230 above his cost share for CQWW CW, and then he sent in an additional $200 donation! I thank both of these gentlemen for this tremendous courtesy they have extended to the CCC club and to their fellow team members.

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