



# Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium

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## Dr Tom Kravec , W8TK

I was first licensed as K8PBZ in 1959 at the age of 13, and have been licensed continuously ever since. My first contest was Field Day, with the 20/9 ARC in Youngstown, in the summer of 1960. I operated CW for 24 hours straight and decided that life could never get any better than that. Seems true today as it was then. I operated traffic nets between contests while in high school, but was mostly inactive for a decade after that because of the commitment required by college, medical school, internship, and residency. One other contester (W9ICE, now AD6C) attended Northwestern at the same time I did, and we operated a few contests together at the club station, W9BGX. Field Day remained my first love, and I talked Fred into trying it from the roof of the engineering building overlooking Lake Michigan. We were five stories above the parking lot where the generator kept dying, and I had to run the stairs numerous times to keep it running. Fred, one of the finest operators I have known, thought I was nuts.

After a stint in the Navy, defending the shore of Lake Michigan for two years at Great Lakes, I moved to Columbus with wife Lora in 1974. She got licensed shortly thereafter, and is now K8LJK. She has no interest in CW whatsoever, or contests either. I bought a farm north of town because it is the highest point in Delaware County. That farm hosted its first Field Day in 1979, when two separate teams from the Mad River Radio Club operated there. Field Day has remained my favorite contest, and I have missed only a couple in the past 20 years. K4LT and I have operated almost every year from the farm, and we have won class IB every year we operated, except for one. We have used computer logging since 1983 (did you know that the RESET key on an Apple II wipes out everything? K4LT knows!).

The home station is modest: tower height is limited to 60 ft by local ordinance, so that is where the tribander sits. A center-fed wire handles duties on 80 and 40. Medical practice and two kids left me little time for hamming, but after coronary bypass surgery in 1997, I had to retire from practice, so now I have more time to play with the radios. I participated in the CCC effort at VP5FXB in 1998 and had a great time. I look forward to pounding some brass from PJ2 in the future.

## From The Editor

By Jeff Clarke KU8E

Hello to everyone.... Sorry about the this current issue of the newsletter being late. I didn't really have much to work with until W0CG came though with a couple articles . Also, thanks to W8TK for his contribution. As always I am looking for stuff to put in the newsletter so get on those keyboards and write something up just telling us about yourself and what's been going on.

As I write this a lot has happened since the last issue of *Signals From the Point*. All the tower and antennas have been shipped to Curacao and have arrived safely. The big task is now to get everything together and up in the air. Geoff will be leaving in June and will be spending about 5 weeks in Curacao. Others should be joining him off and on during that time and hopefully everything will be together before the IARU contest which will be the smoke test.

73's and hope to see many of you in Dayton.

Jeff KU8E



W8TK operating at VP5FXB in 1998 ARRL DX CW.

# Renovations to Signal Point – Un Pia Un Pia

By Geoff Howard, W0CG

“Un pia un pia” means “little by little” in Papiamentu, Curacao’s local language. It’s the watchword on the island for “patience.” All of us fast-movers from the frozen North would do well to slow down a bit and learn to live at the island’s pace. I’ve not learned yet, though, so I was impatient to do a lot, fast, to fix up the house.

As you know, the QTH was built for W1BIH in 1971, and used by John and Mary and a succession of radio visitors for contesting. For long periods of time there was nobody in the house, and thus it never made sense to worry much about the livability and aesthetics of the place. Then, in 1998, the Thompsons had to leave the QTH in a hurry because of medical problems, and did not return. Because of the urgency of their departure, food was left in the kitchen cabinets and in the refrigerator, and the house was left closed up and almost completely unattended for about two and a half years. In addition, no arrangements were made for maintenance of the grounds.

Thus, you can imagine the scene when W0CG arrived on 9 November 2000 to start working on the place. The weeds and cacti had grown higher than a person, and it was impossible to even see that there was a tilted over tower in the yard. Worse, the weeds were full of “catch-and-keep” sticky cactus, so it was impossible to move around on the grounds. It took me two hours (no kidding) with pruning shears and very thick gloves just to get to the mailbox, which is set back only four feet from the road. Inside, the iguanas, rats and bats had moved in and taken over. There were piles of shredded rags and newspaper in most drawers and all closets and vanities, and most of the piles, over three feet high, were and other critter effluent. The countertops were coated with multiple layers of you-know-what. The smell made it impossible to breathe degrees all year around, and there had been no ventilation in the furniture was largely chewed to bits, the floor littered with broken walls covered with bat droppings, floor to ceiling. To add to the fun, ceiling panels had holes nibbled in them by the critters, and many of were rotted out or totally missing, dripping wet pink fiberglass plumbing worked, none of the power would come on, the phone had disconnected, and the appliances had been reduced to nothing more clods of rust. What fun.



soaked with urine hardened brown (remember, it is 85 house), the glass, and the many of the interior the exterior panels insulation. No long-since been than non-functional

Beauty is in the eye of... Well, you know the saying. The interior treatment of the house was different. Most everything was painted in a dark olive green, with drapes of bright orange, a purple shag rug in the main room, and combinations of various smeared drab colors in the bedrooms. The bathrooms were done in bright blue tile with yellow paint. Furniture was interesting, to say the least, and the place was not a candidate for a visit from an *Architectural Digest* staff photographer. Such was the state of the place when the project began.

None of this was a surprise. W8TK (a CCC member) had visited there in mid-1999 and declared the house non-salvageable. Cindy and I had also visited with a realtor, and Noel (W9EFL) and I were again there a year later. Noel will confirm that the place seemed beyond redemption. This is both good news and bad news – the good part is that this is much of the reason we got such a good price. Another factor was that W1BIH wanted as much as we did to see the QTH remain within the amateur radio community. Still, the purchase contract specified that we were buying it in “as-is” condition.

I bravely cleaned the rat crap off one of the “beds” in the west bedroom, swept up a little bit of the broken glass, and crashed for the first night with a towel around my face to make it possible to breathe. Managed to sleep fine, thanks to having been up most of 24 hours by the time I arrived. The bathroom facilities consisted of a bucket and some trash bags, augmented with a shovel. Luckily, it was raining pretty hard the first morning, so I took mother nature’s shower on a stone path under the torrent of rain coming off the roof.

The first chore was to hit the supermarket and drop a bunch of dollars on brooms, mops, dust pans, and a LOT of Lysol, Mr. Clean, Comet, and scraping/cleaning supplies. I also went to the Notary office and paid some final fees associated with the transfer of the ownership deed. In July I had noticed that a hose bib had been stolen from the outside, so I brought two from the States, one of each size, and installed the one that fit using some Teflon tape I had also brought along. After doing that and closing all valves in the house, then opening the supply valves at the street and in the utility room, I was amazed to be able to get running water. It had taken over an hour, working with loppers that Noel and I bought in July, just to find and activate the supply valve near the fence! I ended up bloody and sweat-soaked, but very happy to have water flowing. That evening I managed to get on the air with a 12 foot high makeshift 17 meter vee and our IC-765, which I had retrieved from its storage spot at PJ2MI’s shack. Amazingly, this lousy setup generated pileups on 17 CW, and the big thrill came when W0/KP2L called in. Jim had just returned from several weeks in

France, and was slated to come to Curacao two days later. I asked him to bring me a bottle of Sudafed in hopes of getting rid of the permanent headache I had, probably from the odor of the house.

Next trick: drains. Initially, *nothing* drained. I started with the bathtubs, and disassembled the drains and cleaned out all the clogged up critter droppings and corpses, and then snaked them with the 30 foot snake I'd brought in my airline baggage. This cleared the tub drains pretty easily. A similar approach worked on the bathroom sinks and the left side of the kitchen sink, but the right side had a garbage disposal, and it was beyond salvation, never to drain again. The toilets were both DOA, as neither would fill, and neither seemed to want to drain when filled with water from a bucket. I removed both toilets, snaked the drains, and got them draining nicely. There were quite a few archeological remains in the drain pipes, but the PVC itself was intact and in good condition. The toilet tanks were both beyond salvation, so a trip to the hardware store the following day for new toilet guts paid off, and both were made to fill and flush successfully, this on about the fifth day. It was sure nice to not have to use "the bag" any more. Before that time, I had had to spend some time doing unpleasant and not-to-be-described bailing with kitchen scoopers to get one particular disaster cleaned out of one of the bowls. The things we do to be the DX!

The power distribution box looked like something from a Frankenstein movie – all fuses, no breakers, and it was covered with faded handwritten notes, duct tape, and seemed totally incomprehensible. We later found out that fuses are the Curacao standard, island-wide, and actually the fuse box works quite well now that it has all been fixed up. I picked up some fuses from the floor, stuck them in all the holes I could find, and turned on everything that looked like a switch, and amazingly much of the power in the house came up fine. Or so I thought.

Much of these first few days were spent throwing out almost everything. Everything came down off the walls, all drapes and curtains, which smelled like you can't believe, were removed and hauled to the porch, and almost all furniture items were hauled out to the porch. By the end of this process there was a MOUNTAIN of icky, filthy, putrid material on that west porch. It took multiple passes inside with hot water and Mister Clean, but gradually the first layers of crud were coming off the walls and countertops. Almost everything in the cabinets had to be trashed – anything plastic, like Tupperware, had a permanent odor. At the end of this long process, the house was almost totally devoid of contents, except for the sofas and one or two old chairs, one dining table, and the beds and mattresses. Needless to say, all pillows and bedclothes went to the trash pile.



Monday morning I heard something that sounded like a garbage truck out in the road, and sure enough I was able to run them down and have them haul off a few bags. Selikor, the government's trash brigade, comes once a week and hauls off reasonable quantities of trash, for about \$11/month. Pretty good deal. The rest of the stuff was hauled away by Zoom, the neighborhood caretaker, in the bed of his old S-10 pickup, in several successive loads at \$50 each, including landfill charges. Well worth it. Next went the refrigerator and range and range hood, which were completely unsalvageable. Zoom and his truck again, and I was happy to pay the tab to get that stuff out of there. Probably the toughest thing I did in those first few days was cleaning behind the refrigerator, which had been the rats' entry/exit point for the whole house. It literally took a big screwdriver and hammer and hours of chipping layers on layers of dried you-know-what off the floor, with a towel around my face. I only barfed once – good thing the bucket was handy. I even found a very flat, very dead rat back there (right).

On November 14 the reinforcements arrived, and I had never been so glad to see friendly faces. Jim, KP2L, Noel, W9EFL and Doug, K4LT all arrived together at the airport and we made for the house, which by this time was at least minimally habitable. I had lucked out on the water heater. I had expected that it would be toast, based on its external appearance and the slow leak out the bottom, but it worked OK, even though the thermostat was stuck "on" and we had to remember to turn its fuse off and on. So the guys were able to have hot showers, use the one toilet that pretty much filled and flushed (the second one had failed again), and cook in an old and small, but very reliable microwave oven.

The next day the full team dug into projects, fueled with new enthusiasm and hundreds of bucks worth of paint and tools we picked up at the local hardware store. We also bought a string trimmer and Doug charged into the task of yard-clearing. (W1BIH had a lot of tools, but everything had been stolen by the time I arrived.) I headed to town to buy a refrigerator and washing machine (and also picked up a toaster) while Doug mowed and Jim and Noel tackled the walls in the main room, and scraped, filled, sanded, cleaned and, finally, started painting. Even the cabinet and drawer handles, all 20 of them, were trashed, as they were 1970 vintage aluminum, all corroded and UGLY!

We alternated work on the house with radio work, of course, starting by trying to find, and then unearth the tower and cables. One evening, before the tower had been raised, Doug got on to work some CW with W9VA's TS-930. We were getting good reports until a DL1 was honest and gave us a 597 report! We listened with another rig and YIKES, were putting out a horrible hum. After some messing around under the table we found that plugging the radio directly into the wall, instead of into the stepdown transformer, eliminated the hum. So I reconnected the radio to the transformer and then brought out the green ground wire from the box to ground the chassis to get rid of the hum. Bang. The lights went out, and so did the radio. Bad idea, as that was the end of the TS-930, and that radio is still in the States awaiting repair by K8RF. *Much* later, we determined that the green wire in Curacao is NOT ground, as in all the rest of the world, but instead is one of the hot 220 phases!! Thus, we had put 220 across the 110 input of the radio, and it is very badly fried throughout.

Somewhere in the midst of all this electrical system confusion, we finally got a working telephone line! Prior to this renovation trip, I had worked very diligently through our permits agent to set up and prepay all utility accounts and billing so that all would work fine upon my arrival on 9 November. I had been assured that all would be OK, but the phone was dead when I got there. Many phone calls (made from the hotel) through Korra finally resulted in the arrival of a Setel phone technician, who walked in the house, picked up the phone, confirmed that it was dead, and disappeared without comment. Three days later, he was still disappeared. After more phone calls another tech showed, assessed, and departed, permanently. By now I was nearly desperate to make Internet contact with my employer, so I found a long piece of line and tapped into the phone box on the house next door. (The Stones were in the States, and I knew their phone worked.) This did the trick, and I was able to get onto my file server and catch up on backed up work at my job. Two days later, a third Setel technician arrived to announce that the phone was now working. Voila – off came the temp line and we were "on the air" from the house. What a hassle. Setel is a classic example of a government owned and controlled PTT (Post, Telephone, and Telegraph) company. These are unfortunately, standard in most of the underdeveloped world. Service is very poor, but there is talk now of privatizing that company, and we can't wait!

Speaking of power, we finally managed to hack a path to the base of the tower, thanks to Doug's bloody persistence, to find the structural steel at the base to be in very badly corroded condition. It needed scraping and an application of Rustoleum right now. Jim set up a wire brush in the drill, addressed the tower with it, and BOOM, drew a big arc! Figuring it had been a static discharge, he started again with the brush drew a second arc! What the h%&!?!?? Out comes the multimeter to discover that the tower and the drill are 220 volts apart! For the next couple of days we kept getting fried, as the rotor controller was 220 volts away from the radio chassis, etc., and even the LPT1 line from the computer was 100 volts above the TS-940. The house wiring and grounding turned out to be a disaster of errors. To limp through the CQWW we chose to run EVERYTHING off one outlet, the wiring which we understood, and defer solution of the electrical problems for later, as we were running out of time.

A couple of days later the new refrigerator and a Maytag washing machine were delivered, and we were finally treated to cold drinks. It was like heaven! Meanwhile, Doug and Jim had patiently swapped multiple rotors and control boxes until they found one that worked, and Doug had installed fresh new coax on the tower from our storage stash, and it was time to try to raise the tower. This was scary, to say the least, given the enormous stresses on the rusty old base at about the 30 degree point, but with help from W9EFL Doug toughed it out (he is a marathon runner) and the tower went up without a hitch. It had been worth it! The signal reports that night were out of this world, and Doug discovered the following morning that we could hear a clear double round-the-world echo on 10 meters, long path, from the beam. Wow, maybe this place was going to WORK!

More painting. Noel and Jim worked endless hours to cover the puky dark olive green with white. Meanwhile, I set about installing plumbing for the washing machine. There had never been a washer in the QTH, so all had to be done from scratch in the utility room. I had brought a batch of copper fittings and valves from the US, but not tubing, and quickly found out that the island tubing (metric) I got at the local hardware store is not quite compatible with our (English) dimensions. It took a LOT of care to solder this stuff all together leak-free. With some patient help from KP2L, we finally had hot and cold supplies running to the washer. Next, I bought a bunch of metric PVC fittings and pipe at the hardware store, and cut into the existing drain plumbing and managed to fashion a trap and standpipe. The next day we were washing clothes!! By then I REALLY needed clean clothes, and it was a delight to be able to hang them on the line in the hot wind to dry.

Doug continued to do the outdoor dog-work, clearing the land laboriously, square meter by square meter. Also, he spent MANY hours on the roof with putty knives and a vat of black roof cement, filling what he believed to be the offending voids that were causing the roof to leak. Imagine that: a reflecting silver galvanized roof, in the afternoon, at 12 degrees North! Doug is TOUGH, and sure enough, his expertise paid off, as there is no evidence of any other leaks as of this writing in mid-May. In the midst of the land clearing project, one of the neighborhood locals stopped by, offering to work on clearing the land. I made the classic error of not getting a firm price agreement up front, and while he did a superb job for a full day and a half in the heat, I ended up several hundred bucks lighter, and wiser. This guy was very big, and very local, so I wasn't about to argue with him.

When Noel, Jim, and Doug had arrived, we made a quick trip to the store so that they would have something resembling bed clothes for that first night. Since then, we bought a lot more bed clothes, pillowcases, mattress pads, and tons of house wares and it was starting to almost become livable in there! We continued to work in what seemed like a blur of paint, Lysol, trips to the hardware store, and trips to the landfill (thanks Zoom) and finally it was almost time for the contest. W9EFL and K4LT departed on the Tuesday before the contest. They both desperately wanted to stay and operate, but had elected to put family first and be home in time for the Thanksgiving holiday. Will the CQWW committee *never* be convinced of the folly of holding CQWW on Thanksgiving weekend?



KU8E arrived on Thursday and we put up the low band antennas, with KP2L doing almost all of this work solo while I continued working on house renovations. Jim showed incredible patience with antenna tuning and radial installation. KU8E set up the 160 meter unun matching box he had brought, and all seemed to play well.

The contest went well, save for a few whacky computer problems when one of the CT machines kept resetting all of the other clocks. We got the Internet connection working well, and feeding spots to the CT network, thanks to some coaching from K4LT, who by now was back in the States. For a tribander and wires station we did well, making the box as 5<sup>th</sup> Multi Single worldwide, and top in this hemisphere. The pileups were nearly perpetual all weekend, from all parts of the world. Our only big constraint was pretty severe interstation interference, thus we were very seldom able to properly use the mult station, and our mult total suffered badly as a result. Our W3NQN filters on the run station helped immensely, but were not enough alone to wipe out the interference. This was mainly because of the funky electrical wiring and grounding problem, which now has been solved.

Monday after the contest we had to roll up radials, and close up the QTH, frustrated that there was still so much work to be done, but excited that the QTH was obviously near the propagation center of the world. We elected to leave the tower in the air rather than risk irreparable damage by dropping it, and tied a set of lightweight yellow rope guys on it for safety. Everyone headed home the Tuesday after the contest (November 28), after three weeks of very hard, dirty, basically revolting work on the QTH.

I returned by myself on December 31, picking up projects where we had left off. Thankfully, the tower was still in the air and everything inside was intact as we had left it.

One of the key objectives in the first week of this 31 December trip was to install what was hoped would be a permanent fix to the electrical and grounding problem. It was clear from the November experience that we had to scrap what was there and start over. To do so, I did some shopping in the commercial electrical supply house catalogs, and finally decided to use Hubbel "Basetrak" wiring duct technology. This system consists of a plastic raceway, about six inches high and 2 inches deep, together with various kinds of elbows, tees, unions, and plastic receptacle boxes. My friend Jim Murphy, who works as a purchasing agent for a large Akron area industrial company, ordered all the Hubbel components for me because it is very difficult to buy this stuff at retail. The material arrived from three different Grainger warehouses in three states over the ensuing 10 days, UPSed to my house.

After much cramming and artful use of space, all of these Hubbel components, as well as the 6 220 V receptacles, 7 110 V receptacles, and one Hubbel phone jack, were packed into a cardboard box 6 ft long by 14 inches wide by 5 inches high. It weighed 69 pounds, just fitting into airline limits for checked baggage weight and size. As one last precaution, I called American Airlines two days before departure to be sure there was no temporary box embargo that would prevent taking anything in a cardboard box as checked baggage. Darn, the box embargo *had* been reinstated, and would apply on the Curacao route until 7 January. My reaction, after some considerable cursing, was to try to repack all of the Hubbel into the N8LGP PVC tube that had been used to transport the 5 el 10 monobander (and many other antennas) on prior trips back and forth to Curacao. Frustratingly, the pieces would not fit. In a second attempt, I unwrapped all of the Hubbel ducts, discarded all of their packing material, and managed to barely get them all in the tube by interlocking the pieces. This would scratch some of the now unprotected plastic surfaces, but by now I was beyond caring -- the Hubbel had to get to the island. The bad news on the tube is that the whole thing, now crammed with Hubbel basetrak components, weighed 89 pounds. It was painful to lift, and far over the airline weight limit.

Check-in at Cleveland at 5:00 AM on the 31st was not fun. The computer at the counter insisted that only *one* excess piece per passenger was permitted. I argued nicely but firmly that the AA national information number person had told me just the day before that two excess pieces could be taken. The airline folks were not very happy with me, but after \$100 of excess baggage charges and much persuasion I was away from the counter with only my two oversize carryons left, and began to breathe again.

Arrival on Curacao was routine, and the Customs agent charged me only a nominal duty of about \$50 on the Hubbel and several suitcases crammed full of tools, housewares, wires, copper strap, and antennas. There were no clothes or toiletries anywhere in my many bags!

The next morning I unpacked everything and dug into the task of installing the basetrak pieces on the wall above the tile baseboard. Amazingly, just putting the duct on the wall required a full day and a half of cutting and drilling, but I finally managed to get all 35 linear feet of the baseboard duct installed permanently. This required drilling about 120 holes into the masonry and installing plastic anchors, all of which I had brought in my baggage. Next came installation of the receptacle bases into the Hubbel, and each of these operations required more custom cutting and adaptation of the basetrak than I would ever have imagined. Finally, I installed wiring for one 110 VAC circuit and one 220 VAC circuit into the entire duct, and then put in all of the receptacles. This required nearly three and a half full days of work. For my next challenge, I had to figure out the best way to energize these circuits.

Still not fully understanding the wiring in the house, I once again took the service panel, meter base, and fuse boxes completely apart, and rung out all circuits, making careful notes and diagrams for the whole house. None of the 220 VAC circuits running into the distribution boxes along the wall near the radio duct were particularly hefty. However, we had decided to abandon the old W1BIH electric range approach in favor of a propane range, thus freeing up a VERY high-capacity 220 VAC pair from the fuse box to the electric range. So I ran a pair of #12 solid copper from the back of the range, 35 feet up and over a sliding glass door and back down the wall to the east end of the new wiring duct. This cannibalized 220 circuit became the source of the power for all of the linears. For 110, I used one of the two phases wired into the in-wall box near the old PJ9JT operating position. This phase was different from the two hot phases used for the 220, and was supplied on an adequate #12 circuit to the wall box. To get the 127 VAC 50 Hz down to a level suitable for the equipment, I used the 2KVA transformer we had bought on the November trip. This transformer was mounted directly to the wall using masonry anchors, and then permanently wired into the wall circuit, with its secondary fed into the Basetrak to supply all 110 VAC radio outlets in the 35 foot long duct. The last step was to safely terminate all of the bogus mixed phase outlets along the ocean wall where the stations would go, and cover them (forever) with blank cover plates.

Finally, a good ground was needed. The radios did not have a available, and the electric utility neutral was measured to be above the potential of the actual earth ground. To remedy this, long solid copper strap (brought in a checked bag), was shack through the 8 inch solid masonry wall, through a shallow back yard, and down the cliff into the sea. I anchored the 8 foot the water with a concrete block and several huge spikes. in fins and my mask and snorkel gear, with a hammer and SCUBA mesh bag, has to be one of the more unique (and fun) done in ham radio.



good ground floating about 9 VAC a 1.5 inch 90 foot installed from the ditch I dug in the tail of this copper in Wiring up this ground ratchet wrench in my things I had ever

The night before Cindy's trip to the island I e-mailed her a Word file containing a set of color-coded labels I had made up for the fuse box and all of the duct outlets, now that I understood all of the unusual Netherlands Antilles wiring conventions. She printed them at home (I do not have a printer on Curacao) and she brought them in her baggage.

On 4 January Cindy arrived, and together we worked on finishing up the grounding system. I had taken a 45 foot length of huge gauge stranded copper in one of my bags. It consisted of 8 strands, and Cindy and I separated it into two pieces of 4 strands each out in the yard one night. It was comical trying to do this in the dark, but her patience prevailed and we got it apart. I used the twist drill technique to straighten the pieces, and the next day installed one of these 40 foot pieces into the duct, tying it to each of five black binding posts (that we bought at the Radio Shack on the island) and installed in the top of the Hubbel duct. This ground was tied to the ocean ground and the electrical system neutral. As a final step, I ran the second 40 feet of heavy stranded copper from the master ground toward the electrical system box, making the remaining distance to the box with a length of #6 solid copper that we had picked up out of a junk pile in the national park the day before. The pieces were tied together using massive copper split bolts that I brought from the States. Finally, this was tied to the electrical system neutral in the fuse box at the service entrance, and the objective of a good ground was achieved. The 9 volt float was eliminated, and all radio equipment was provided with a good quality ocean ground, acceptable (109 VAC) 50 Hz voltage from the duct, and a solid source of 220 for the amplifiers. As a final touch, I installed the Hubbel phone receptacle into the duct and connected the phone line from the east bedroom into the duct. About two hours later, all of the duct cover pieces had been cut and installed in place, including the necessary cosmetic tees, elbows, and end caps, and the duct was DONE!!! Except, of course, that I had failed to realize that special cover plates were needed -- Hubbel, of course. The cover plates would have to wait until the next trip. The crowning glory on this wiring project was to spray paint all of the fuse box and service entrance covers electrical grey and, with Cindy's assistance, I cut all of the pre-printed labels, covered them with clear packing tape, and put them on the fuse box lids. The finished product looked great in the next morning's light.

January 6 our friend Jim Murphy arrived. His three checked bags, together with the three Cindy brought, and the three I had brought, finally rounded out our nine-bag, six carry-on January bag-drag. We happily washed all of the dishes and other house wares from the baggage and Cindy put them into the proper places in the kitchen cabinets. It was starting to look like a functioning kitchen!! Jim settled in and the next morning he tore into the sliding glass doors and screens. None of the doors worked properly, from corrosion and neglect, and three of the screens had been kicked in and iguana-nibbled over the years. After much patient work over a two day period, and several trips to the hardware store in Barber, Jim worked a miracle and got everything working quite well. In the process, I learned how to re-screen sliding glass doors, which is a LOT trickier than it looks. Cindy was painting diligently all this time, putting a third coat on all of the kitchen cabinets and shelves. She also put a third coat on the west bathroom.

Next, Jim tackled the mess in the ceiling panels. The entire ceiling, inside and out, consists of 2 foot by 4 foot gypsum or composition board panels laying in wooden tracks somewhat in the fashion of a more modern suspended ceiling. Many of these panels inside had holes eaten in them, probably by rats, were stained orange by roof leaks, and almost half of the outside panels had collapsed and fallen through or had serious peeling paint. Again using great patience and clever carpentry techniques, Jim managed to replace these panels and reinforce the exterior slats. (The new panel pieces were cut from 4 x 8 sheets by our friend Mr. Van de Valk at Terra Home hardware -- this was the only way we could fit them into the rental Toyota.)

With only about four days until Cindy had to leave, we ordered five gallons of Benjamin Moore custom color paint, picking it up two days later at the hardware store in Barber. All three of us then attacked the main room, painting from morning until past midnight, and then trimming bad spots the following morning. Cindy had to leave for Ohio (11 January) before this was all quite finished, so the last she saw of the place was mountains of drop cloths and the whole house in complete mess and chaos. Jim and I finished that room the day after Cindy left, and I put it back together, replacing the Yaesu map over the run station, and the main room started, after being cleaned about three times, to look almost presentable.

The PJ9JT station had several buried coax and rotor cable runs, as well as a nice rubber conduit from the tower base to the rear of the house. Age had claimed most of these cables, though, and since we planned to put up two more towers and install a LOT of runs of Heliac, it was necessary to abandon the buried cable routes. Instead, I decided to put in an overhead messenger cable system to keep the expensive Heliac and other cables safe from damage, especially from possible brush fires. I had a huge cable shackle left in my garage from the original construction of our Ohio house, and Jim and I installed that galvanized beauty at the top of the northwest corner of the house, securing its 12 inch long bolt through the wall of the house. It's stout! I then used some surplus 3/16 inch guy wire and deadends to put in the messenger. The finished project looked great, and it was hard to believe that just a few days before I had been yanking that used guy cable out of frozen weeds and deep snow back home.

Jim left on January 13, and I was again alone to try to accomplish what I could with my eight remaining days. I stopped at the nursery on the way home from dropping him at the airport and bought two beautiful purple bougainvilleas and a huge palm bundle. It was a major one-man trick to get the VERY heavy palm out of the back floor of the Toyota, but I planted it in a big terra cotta pot that I had picked up at Cost-U-Less, and the east porch was starting to look almost tropical.

My next big project was painting in the west bedroom. After a VERY aggressive scrubbing with hot water, Mister Clean, and then Clorox, I filled all holes and cracks with drywall compound, repeating the entire process the following day. All curtain rods and drapes were also removed and pitched out because of the sickening permanent odor in the fabric and the brittleness of the old plastic traverse rods. After wet-sanding the drywall, spending many hours chipping grout and concrete spills off the top of the tile baseboard, and then masking all edges, I set about putting on two coats of paint. Incredibly, this required two full days of effort, working late into the evening both nights. I was rewarded, however, with a VERY good looking result and a room that actually looked hospitable. I assembled the second of two small bed stands we had bought in town (Jim did the first one before he left), and set up the room with the stands and the two matching lamps we had bought the week before. Even better! Next day, I bought a small maple bookshelf and assembled it that evening, and moved all of the paperbacks and videos to that shelf. Adding a couple of my Dominica place mats and one or two small plants and cacti planted in custard cups, and the west bedroom actually began to look finished. Jim had installed the new towel racks we had brought in bags from the states before he left (requiring redrilling of ALL the holes in the masonry), and so that room was finally taking on a semi-finished, good-smelling appearance.

Now for the tower base. Most of the steel pieces extending out of the top of the existing tower base were severely corroded, some nearly all the way through. It was obvious that the 54 foot tower would not last much longer in this condition, so the obvious solution was to add about two more feet of concrete on top of the existing base. This was imperative if we were to have a station we could count on until the larger towers could be installed. Losing this tower would be a disaster. Thus, I made an early morning commando run up to the hotel junk pile, and loaded many hunks of lumber and scrap plywood into the Toyota and drove it back. Three trips later, I had a nice pile of very hacked-up used, irregular lumber. But the price was right. I even found a few pieces of usable rebar. This, added to six old kitchen cabinet doors we had picked up two weeks prior from a junk pile in the national park, constituted my form material for the concrete pour.

I started the forms by drilling 1/2 inch lead anchor holes into the existing tower base and using them to secure ledger boards to the base. Then, several hours of very sloppy and imprecise carpentry with hammer, nails, and the circular saw donated by W8TK and brought in my baggage, I had a set of concrete forms ready to go. These were so awful-looking I did not even shoot any photos! Getting cement was easy -- I bought six bags in Barber at the hardware store, in two separate trips. Sand and gravel were a lot harder, but after several phone calls and five days of delay, the truck finally showed up one afternoon and dropped 2 cubic meters of gravel and one cubic meter of sand in the yard. (The poor delivery guy was so lost that he had to call me on his cell phone and I went to Soto to lead him in (in Spanish!)). The next morning (Thursday, 18 Jan) brought another trip to the hardware store, this time

for more nails, a garden hose, a mortar trowel, and a Brazilian wheelbarrow. After getting them home I spent time putting more anti-burst braces on the forms. (My crew and I had a set of column forms burst once on an Air Force project in Italy, and I was not about to let this happen again.) Finally, all was ready for the concrete, perfectly timed, at about 1:15 in the afternoon, the peak heating time!

I put on a ton of sunscreen and a big floppy hat and started mixing wheelbarrows of concrete. Dr. Stone took pity and came over from next door and helped and provided moral support for hours. It took countless loads, but by about 5:15 the forms were full. I cleaned the wheelbarrow and concrete tools, carved the date and my callsign in the concrete, and died, pretty much unable to move the rest of that evening, except to report on the CCC club net that night that the concrete was in.

Next morning I got out the 155 foot length of Heliac I had brought (yes, in baggage) and climbed up the tower with our W9JUV Type N female to PL-259 adapter, took off the old coax, and connected the Mosley to the Heliac, weatherproofing the connection with duct seal and tape and Scotchkote. I dressed the Heliac down the tower, across the messenger wire, and around the porch on the new cable hooks and into the house. (It had taken almost half a day just to install those cable hooks into the masonry walls of the house, just below the soffit, but they made for a nice-looking cable path.) After installing the new Heliac through the wall and the cable bulkhead, I installed the other Heliac connector, made up a Type N female jumper, and excitedly put the Mosley back on the air. Result? Perfect SWR.

We had a new gas range at the house that had been delivered a couple days after Cindy arrived. With the painting and other messes in the main room, however, we had not had time to work on installing it. It was to run on propane, fed from the same type of small bottle that we use in the States for gas grills. Finally, I had some time to tackle this, and carefully disassembled the thing and followed the directions diligently for converting the appliance for LP from the factory settings for natural gas. Next, I started looking into what it would take to connect an LP bottle to the range. Surprisingly, even though this is a standard Curacao technique, none of the hardware stores or the appliance store had installation kits. Zoom bought me two filled LP gas bottles, but the rest was in my lap. A visit to Terra Home Hardware netted the info that the required bottle regulator did not exist on the island. I special-ordered one that was to be shipped in from Caracas. A week later the regulator arrived. It was actually a very clever design, snapping into a special fitting on top of the gas bottle – far better than we use in the States. After many trips back and forth to two hardware stores, I finally pulled together the needed hose, nipples, ells, and other fittings and got the darned thing connected. It ran fine with a match start, but the auto-igniters were dead. A call to the appliance store brought a technician three days later who pronounced the circuit board DOA, and he showed up again a week after that with the new board. Finally, we had a fully functional gas range. Nothing's easy!

Meanwhile, I had been dousing the tower base concrete with water every couple of hours for two days to control the curing speed. Finally it was time to take off the forms. I must have built them well -- it took over an hour, working with a crowbar and the claw hammer. Instead of the mess I had expected, the result looked reasonably decent, and I chalked this job up as complete. Great feeling.

Another loose end was the toilet in the east bathroom. It would NOT fill or flush correctly. I installed all new guts in the tank, but still could not capture enough water to get a satisfactory flush. After much analysis, I finally decided that the unusual bowl design was pure stupid, and that it was never going to work right. Cindy's suggestion was the best one: scrap it. This thing was sucking hours away from other more important projects. One trip to the hardware store and 30 minutes of installation time did the trick. Our "Porcelamix" Mexican bowl and tank worked perfectly. Finally!

Theft is a significant threat at this QTH, and our Curacao insurance agent had told us that security systems and lights are significant deterrents to the amateur burglars on the island. I was out of time to do anything fancy, but I bought some boxes and wire duct at the hardware store, and used the motion-detector I had brought from Ohio to install one large spotlight in the main room. It works fine, and will sure get an intruder's attention if he walks into the main room after dark.

As nearly the last step for this trip, I spent almost a full day painting the new ceiling panels that Jim had installed with a very good quality exterior gloss latex, indoors and out. This was hot and very messy work, and gave me a fuller appreciation of what a tremendous job Jim had done on the panels. The finished result looked great, though, so it was worth the effort.

Regrettably, this trip was at an end, and I spent the rest of the morning of January 22nd (2001) cleaning up, safing the equipment and the house, and making one last trip to the utility company to continue to try to get the billing and automatic payment system working the way we wanted it. With great regret, it was wheels up that afternoon, but behind was a MUCH more attractive home, a functioning kitchen and gas range, a safe and functional electrical system, a tower that was going to stay up and be fed reliably with Heliac, and high promise for the future!

Arrival home was a horrid affair -- cold and snow, and I counted the days, almost the hours until it was time to return on 12 February. In that interim, I had obtained the cover plates (Hubbel specialized) I had forgotten on the first trip, and Cindy had done MUCH shopping to get curtain rods, drapery material, and many other kitchen and houseware items. In addition, we had found some BEAUTIFUL tropical bedspreads on the Internet and bought 10 yards of matching fabric. Cindy and her Mom worked in Ohio down to the last minute making drapes and valances with this matching material and, once again, we checked in at the airport with six huge suitcases, all at the weight limits, and two heavy carryons each. (One of these was my TS-940 from my home station.)

Thanks to the professionalism of American Airlines, that trip was also uneventful, and we arrived that afternoon, excitedly putting out the bedspreads, housewares, and hanging many beautiful photos and paintings that Cindy had framed prior to the trip. Only one broken glass item -- not bad. The next morning I unpacked the many pieces of small wall mold and hardware I had brought to



conceal the 220 line from the range to the duct, and went to work installing it, completing the project by that afternoon. No missing pieces this time -- my lists and measurements had been correct. A day later, all of the new curtains and rods were installed and hung (after picking up one set of rods on the island), and we were ready to think about the ARRL DX contest. Jim and Mary Livengood were already in residence at the Sunset Waters resort, and Mary and Cindy sat with the group, which now included W9VA, WA9S, N8BJQ, and W9EFL and took requests for food and beverages, heading for the grocery store.



Meanwhile, the ham crew worked on building an 80 loop and fixing up the existing 40 loop. We also assembled the N8LGP 10 meter yagi and put it in place of the A-3WS on the pushup mast. This was an experiment to see how a low antenna would play on 10 into the States. I spent most of this time installing some new plumbing fixtures (new faucet for the west bathroom) and then preparing to put the two coax bulkheads on the wall. These had been designed and built in the States, with holes punched by Jim Murphy at his employer's machine shop. Prior to putting them on the wall, I had to carefully chip two metal work boxes out of the masonry wall, and then drill multiple holes through the wall for the coax runs. Thanks to WA9S for help on the drill. The bulkheads were finally installed with about three hours to go until the contest....

The contest went well, but it was obvious that the good conditions were resulting in all stateside beams being aimed at Europe. Only after the bands closed to Europe did our rates become really good. Now and then we heard HC8N, with big towers and monobanders, running rates that we could not sustain. Still, we finished third in the Multi-Single category – not bad for a low tribander and wires, and a good enough result to convince us to press on with building a bigger station.

I took time near the end of the February trip to make the three Phillystran guys for the tower. All of the Phillystran and specialized deadends and thimbles had come down with me in my checked bags, and I finally got them in the air. These will be the permanent guys for this tower, and the bottom 15 feet of each is EHS steel, to protect the Phillystran from vandals and brush fires. I also, on the morning of my departure, installed the T-2X in the mult tower, replacing the flimsy TV rotor that had been up there.

All of the renovations that had been conducted between early November and February had brought the place up to a clean, habitable, but far from luxurious status. It was good enough, though, to support contest operations by K6LA in ARRL SSB, WI9WI for WPX SSB, and K6LA for the CW WPX. This renovation story will continue as work continues in the Summer of 2001.

Special thanks to W9EFL, K4LT, KP2L, and Jim Murphy, all of whom sacrificed time and funds to come to Curacao and assist in making Signal Point into a serious, permanent endeavor.

- Geoff, W0CG

**Check out the Caribbean Contesting Consortium web page at**

**<http://asgard.kent.edu/ccc/>**

# CCC's Ocean Shipment



By Geoff Howard, W0CG

When we hear the BIG signals on contest weekends from P40V, HC8N, V26B, VP5V, 8P9JA and other Caribbean guns, we can sometimes be envious without stopping to think about what they did to GET those big signals. Behind the fantastic S-meter readings is a mountain of logistical detail, not the least of which involves the complexities of transporting antennas and towers to the islands. Our shipment is now complete and so we are about to also become major players in that S-meter elite!

The impetus and timing of our shipment was dictated by the terms of our building permit on Curacao. Obtaining the permit was extremely difficult – a slow and complex process requiring submission of forms, multiple fees, elaborate drawings and engineering specs, and no small amount of bureaucrat-pushing by Korra, our permits agent. Once the permit was issued, we knew we must use it, as it would be nearly impossible to get a renewal, and because it expires in October, 2001.

Knowing that we would have people available to assist in construction in June-July, we calculated backward, and it was apparent that the shipment would have to leave northeast Ohio no later than the third weekend in April.

Gathering all the materiel for the shipment was about a 10 month process, beginning with the W9EFL fund drive last summer to obtain the Heliac and Phillystran. At that same time, I put together a comprehensive, detailed list of items we would need, down almost to the detail level of individual nuts and bolts, posted it on the web, and we set about the task of figuring out how to get all the stuff. With liberal donations of equipment, antennas, dollars, and time, the stuff came together. That's a story for a future article in itself. Goose offered his barn in Wooster as the marshalling point for the shipment, and we began moving stuff there in March. N8NR and N8BJQ made multiple trips from Dayton with truckloads of Rohn components and feedline, and N8LGP and I did the same from the Akron area. As the shipment date approached, the list of items still needed dwindled, thanks again to a lot of hard work by a few of the guys in the CCC gang who live close enough to be able to assist.

N8NR researched Caribbean shippers and recommended AMCAR, based in Miami. See <http://www.amcarfreight.com>. I followed up with several e-mails and phone calls to them and was very impressed by the speed and professionalism of Louise Rodriguez, AMCAR's Traffic Manager. We determined that we need a half-container of space, about 950 cubic feet. (The weight is not an issue for ocean freight.)

The last couple of weeks before the shipment I began making item labels with my laser printer. EVERY item in the shipment had to have a unique identifying tag and a unique number and, even trickier, every item had to appear as a line on an invoice. Steve and Goose and I spent hours labeling boxes and masts and loose yagi bundles, and I put in three long evenings at home preparing the invoice packet and cross-checking to be sure everything was correct. I booked a Ryder truck for Thursday, 19 April, a return flight from Fort Lauderdale to Cleveland on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and we were good to go.

I picked up the truck in Kent on the 19<sup>th</sup>, loaded the last of my 25 G tower sections and some boxes and the 15 yagi into the truck, and drove it down to Goose's. That evening, K4LT, W8AV and I worked like dogs hauling loads of stuff from Goose's barn on his garden tractor cart and arranging them in the truck. Doug gave me a ride home that night, and I drove down again Friday evening to repeat the process. Goose and I finished the loading late Friday. (See <http://asgard.kent.edu/cc/photos.1.miami.shipment.htm> for all of the pictures.)

Saturday morning I made the last few updates and corrections to the packing list and the invoices, and Cindy drove me down to Goose's, departing for Florida in the truck at about 10:45. The trip was pretty much glitch-free, except that I stopped right after departing to put a LOT of air in one of the rear outboard tires. It held fine after that. The load rode well, and checks during fuel stops showed that it was stable and was packed well. I did not need to stop for food, thanks to the care package Cindy put together for me Saturday morning. It's frustrating dragging up grades in the West Virginia mountains at 45 MPH, but truckin's truckin. I stopped in Ridgeway, South Carolina, for the night, and continued on, reaching Palm Beach Gardens, Florida the following evening, stopping only for gas (frequently) and a bite to eat now and then (infrequently).

Monday morning I phoned AMCAR to be sure I had the directions correct, and headed into the Miami traffic jungle, stopping first to buy a potted violet for Louise. No navigational problems came up, and I showed at the AMCAR dock at 10:30 or so that morning. They were expecting me, and assigned one Spanish-speaking fellow with a Towmotor to help me unload. It was a hectic, exhausting hour. He brought small pallets to the back of the truck, and I loaded the items onto them, trying to stay ahead of him. He helped me with the very heavy and awkward Windcharger tower sections, and with some of the Rohn 55 sections. An hour later, I was soaked in sweat, and had lost a few ounces of fat, but all the stuff was in the warehouse on the floor. I tipped the Towmotor guy very heavily – he helped in ways



he was not supposed to, because in the trucking industry it is customarily the driver's sole responsibility to unload the vehicle. Afterward, I chatted briefly with the guys who would load the container, and was totally convinced they were professional and had common sense, and that they would do the load better than if we were doing it ourselves. I stopped in the office to sign the paperwork and drop off the invoices and packing lists, and to give the violet to Louise. She was very happy, and answered some of my additional questions, and I was very impressed with the order and cleanliness of the AMCAR office. They run a very tight operation – there was a guy with a push-broom in the warehouse who swept the floor after EACH LOAD was brought in by the Towmotor! The owner of the company is from Curacao, which explains a lot. She indicated that they would be willing to handle loose pieces and individual boxes going to Curacao for us in the future, now that they “knew” us!!

I swept out the truck, and had a slow, cool, relaxing lunch to reward myself. After a day of sightseeing in Miami (mostly on the beaches, of course), I turned in the truck at the pre-arranged Ryder franchise in Fort Lauderdale, hopped their van over to the airport, and rode the airlines home. Cindy was busy, so Jim Murphy, the same fellow who did so much hard work on the QTH, picked me up at the Cleveland airport. We owe him!

As I write this, the shipment has cleared Customs on Curacao and will be released for local delivery as soon as payment is made. To do so, Noel sent me the PJ2T Building Fund proceeds, I deposited them in our CG/Curacao Group business account in Ohio, waited two days, then wired the amount to my account at Maduro and Curiel's bank on Curacao. As soon as I receive the final amount (I'm in touch by E-mail with the Caribbean Cargo N.V. agent), I'll send a FAX instructing our bank to pay the shipper. This amount will cover everything: paperwork, ocean freight, duty, and local delivery.

Next week, when Korra is back from Puerto Rico, she will meet the truck at the house and pay Zoom and Raytienne to unload the container into the east bedroom. It will be waiting for our construction crew (that's us) on 11 June.

In total, the shipment was 5379 pounds, about 770 cubic feet, consisted of 32 boxes, 11 bundles, and over 40 loose items, including 34 10 foot tower sections. Since we did not have quite a half-container equivalent, Louise cut us a deal and knocked about \$400 off the total charge!

We DID it guys!

73, - Geoff

