

W3ZI M/M in the 2006 Pennsylvania QSO Party

By John Unger, W4AU

State QSO parties are popular operating events, and hams have many possible ways to take part. In addition to traditional classes such as single-op, multi-single, and multi-multi, state QSO parties offer the opportunity for mobile operators to accumulate big scores and activate rare counties. Competition among clubs is usually lively and these events even encourage many non-contesters to take part. This story is about a different kind of operation: a stealth invasion of Pennsylvania by a group of Virginia hams, who set up a "portable" multi-multi station in Berks County in 2006.

Hams in our small Virginia club, the Loudoun Amateur Radio Group (LARG), have been kept participants in the Virginia QSO Party for the last 10+ years, and we have enjoyed a spirited competition with the Central Virginia Contest

Photo by K3HE



The W3ZI crew enjoying dinner Friday night before the start of the QSO Party. (L-R) Mark, W3ZI; Norm, AI2C; Gary, NC4S; John, W4AU; Bill, K8SYH; Tom, NA4MA, and Chester, WA9LAZ. Not pictured: Denny, KF4TJI, Carol, KF4TJJ, and BA Buchholz, our cook.

Photo by AI2C



Three of the portable antennas we used: At the left is the ladder-mounted 15-meter beam. In the center is the club's trailer-mounted tower with the 4-element 20 meter beam. On the right is the 40-foot mast supporting the 40-meter delta loop. AI2C's farmhouse and outbuildings are in the background.



Norm, AI2C, at the controls of the 40-meter SSB station.



Mark, W3ZI, working hard on 80-meter CW.

Club for the top-scoring club in the state. Over the years, we more “hardened” contesters in the club have used the VA QSO Party to introduce other hams in the club to the pleasures of contesting.

A number of club members are ex-Pennsylvanians or have been long-time participants in the PA QSO Party. I grew up in northeastern Pennsylvania, was first licensed in 1956 as WN3GOI in the “Back Mountain” region of Luzerne County and have participated as an out-of-state station in the PA QSO Party for many years. Another one of our members, Bill, K8SYH, has frequently operated as a portable station in the PA QSO Party, most recently from a campground in rare Somerset County. Norm, AI2C, is yet another Pennsylvania native living in Virginia; he’s operated the event / 3 from his family farm in Berks County.

Our plans for the 2006 invasion of Berks County evolved over about six months. Originally, we thought it would be fun to mount a mini-M/M or M/2 operation from K8SYH’s campground QTH in Somerset county, but as interest was generated and it looked like we may have as many as a dozen operators, Norm, AI2C, generously offered to let us use his Berks County family farm as the base for a 2006 PA QSO Party operation. However, we were not going to have the luxury of just showing up and operating at a “real” M/M station. The only permanent antennas at Norm’s farm were 40 and 80 meter dipoles. The station would have to be a Field Day type of set up.

As the planning evolved over a couple of months and we finally zeroed in on a M/M station with five HF rigs, Mark, W3ZI, decided to accompany us and volunteered use of his FB call sign; that would make our operation sound more like a real in-state station. We decided



John, W4AU, looks pleased with the way the 40-meter CW station is performing.

to keep our plans to ourselves. Although we carefully monitored the PA QSO Party e-mail reflector, we didn’t advertise our operation ahead of time.

We had a lot of preparation to do. Early on the Friday morning before the weekend of the QSO party, an undercover LARG caravan with a total of 11 Virginians sneaked into Pennsylvania and began setting up the M/M station. AI2C arrived a few days ahead of us and erected a second dipole for 75 meters plus big, low, 160-meter dipole. He also put up his 3-element 15-meter beam using a 40-foot ladder to support it.

We showed up with our secret weapon: the club’s trailer-mounted 60-foot crank-up tower, on which we installed a 4-element 20-meter beam along with a 2-meter vertical. We also put up a 40-meter vertical delta loop on a 40-foot mast for the CW station on that band. We ended up with 10 operators

plus a first-class cook. See the sidebar, “W3ZI Station Set-Up,” for our ultimate station configuration.

Setup went fairly smoothly, and the farm gave us the opportunity to separate the antennas as much as possible. Each station had a bandpass filter, and the only inter-station problem we experienced was occasional interference between the two 40-meter stations, even though the two antennas were separated by about 300 feet. We did not have many of the amenities that a “real” M/M station would have, however. For example, none of our computers were networked, we had no alternate antennas and our sole spotting capability was via a dial-up Internet connection on a spare computer. We stationed someone with a strong set of lungs at the spotting computer to broadcast spots of rare counties. However, when the bell sounded at noon on Saturday, we were ready to go!

Our crew was about half experienced contesters and half more casual operators, but everyone got lots of chair time during the 22 hours of operating. The 20-meter station was popular because it was the only one with an amp. Because we had the four-element beam on our 60 foot portable tower we racked up the highest QSO totals on that band. The point total from the two 40-meter stations was not far behind, however.

As our QSO totals and serial numbers increased, it was fun to have other in-state folks asking who we were and where we were operating — especially when they took the time to look up W3ZI and found that Mark’s QTH was in Ashburn, Virginia!

Without exception all of us had a fantastic time, and our results far exceeded our expectations. We finished first in the M/M category with a total of 2164 QSOs

and 380,261 points. We had a clean sweep of Pennsylvania counties, worked all the ARRL US sections except AK, PR, and VI, and worked 8 of the 13 Canadian provinces. The camaraderie was wonderful, and we were extremely well fed throughout the weekend by BA, K8SYH's XYL and chef extraordinaire.

AI2C has put together an excellent Web page about our event. It includes more photos and plots of rate and QSO for all the stations: www.k4lrg.org/Members/W3ZI_PQP_2006/index.html.

Thanks to everyone for all the Qs, and our hats off to those intrepid mobile ops who seemed to be running another new

W3ZI Station Set-Up

Station 1: 40 CW — TenTec Omni VI+, 40-meter vertical loop

Station 2: 40 SSB — Kenwood TS-440, 40-meter dipole

Station 3: 20 CW/SSB - TenTec Omni VI+, Alpha 78, 4-el beam

Station 4: 80 CW, 160 CW/SSB and 15 CW/SSB — Kenwood TS-850, dipoles, and 3-el beam for 15 meters

Station 5: 75 SSB, 2 FM — Kenwood TS-2000, dipole, Diamond vertical.

county every time we turned around. For me personally it was great to return to the Keystone State. It was the first time I had operated from Pennsylvania since about 1961!

I can't say what our plans are for the 2007 edition of the PA QSO Party, but keep an eye out this October for a caravan of antenna-clad vehicles heading north into Pennsylvania from Virginia. **NCJ**