

PJ4Q — CQ World Wide CW 2013

Voila, Done — Easy and Fun.

I have to agree with my team mate Brad, WF7T's characterization of our team's adventures as PJ4Q last November: "I was in an operating paradise, with wonderful people, living out a ham radio dream." Our grizzled Caribbean veteran leader, Scott, W4PA, admonished us with the prime directive: "If it feels like work, we're doing it wrong." That was one sentiment we did our best to live up to. Winging my way back home, a little sunburned and happy with the whole affair, I wondered, "How did that happen?" Then, I took another sip of my extra-healthy, double-lime gin and tonic and tried to remember.

Cue the Way-Back Machine

At the 2013 Dayton Hamvention — probably in a hospitality suite after midnight — Scott convinced Brad and me to make up the crew to take it easy in the Caribbean sun for the CQ World Wide CW. Peter, PJ4NX, one of the resident hams on the island, was to be our fourth operator and local contact.

As it turned out, Peter was instrumental in assisting us with all things Bonaire. New Bonaire resident and non-CW operator, Steve, PJ4DX (aka 9M6DXX/G4JVG), participated in putting up the antennas and in long conversations about all things life and all things Amateur Radio. At CQ

WW CW time in the Caribbean, there isn't much difference.

While I'd operated from outside the US a few times (only once — from Zone 8 in KP4), Brad was new to the game and anxious, yet pleased to be checking a few items off of his ham radio bucket list: Experiencing a contest from the DX side, operation from the Caribbean, and multi-style contest operation. For those of you who have done such things, you'll appreciate Brad's various anxieties. "I was not a good enough operator, or I would have no clue, or I couldn't afford to take the time...I had to ignore these voices." All swept away in good time.

As Scott put it, "The mission was overall very simple — we were going to run Multi-Two, keep two rigs on for 48 straight hours, have a lot of laughs, and not get too hung up on trying to win the contest. You can lose the contest without too much effort, and if the premise you start with is that you're not going to win, all that pressure disappears pretty quick." Yes, sir, right away, sir.

Seriously, Scott and Peter made all of this easy for me and Brad. Scott has been going to the Caribbean since 2002, including numerous times to Bonaire since 2006. "Through a series of events I've ended up with a good-sized stash of radio gear on the island that resulted from hand-carrying items there as well as a couple of ocean

shipments via Miami," he explained. "Everything I need to run up to a Multi-Two station is there; multiple rigs, amps, antennas, antenna masts, many coax cables, band-pass filters, a large stash of spare parts, basic test and repair equipment, wire, keyers, paddles — the only things left to bring are headsets, computers and creature comforts."

The gear is stashed in between trips and retrieved in a couple of pickup truckloads. Add a trip to the grocery store for a healthy supply of Amstel Light 807s — very important to stay fully hydrated in the hot tropical sun, folks — and it was almost time to start putting things together.

What came before the putting together was the getting together. The PJ4A team was arriving at about the same time and a pre-contest dinner was definitely on the agenda. (So was a post-contest dinner.) We all hopped back in the truck and whizzed down to Kralendijk, the capital of Bonaire. We met up with all of the PJ4A ops who were beginning to build their own M2 station at the hilltop location of Noah, K2NG. Nothing like a seaside restaurant, good food, pre-contest trash talk, and a few more Amstel Lights. Nothing too rowdy — after all, we had a contest coming up and some antenna-raising work...er...fun on the agenda.



The best part: Sharing the sunset with friends. The PJ4Q team (L-R): Steve, PJ4DX; Scott, W4PA; Peter, PJ4NX, and Brad WF7T. [Ward Silver, NØAX, Photo]



Our host and skilled fourth operator was Peter, PJ4NX, who says he never gets tired of the pileups on Bonaire. [Ward Silver, NØAX, Photo]

Table 1 — The PJ4Q score breakdown.

Band	QSOs	Zones	Countries
160	154	13	29
80	947	21	86
40	2,448	33	118
20	1,790	36	115
15	2,863	34	125
10	1,998	26	99
Total	10,200	163	572

Total Score: 21,594,300

The PJ4Q Flamethrower

The station was basically set up Field Day-style from a duplex condo on a city lot that is a little east of Kralendijk, about 2 miles from the water. We put up a pair of Spiderbeam Yagis at 33 and 20 feet, a 40 meter wire vertical taped to a fiberglass push-up mast, an 80 meter inverted V atop a 48-foot multi-section aluminum mast, a 160 meter inverted L using a pair of the fiberglass masts, and a 580 foot unterminated Beverage antenna through the thorny acacias and cacti. (The first night of the contest, it was also an un-connected Beverage antenna, but I digress.) All antennas survived their several encounters with wild goats and donkeys and humans who can't see well at night.

Many hands make light work, it is said, and so it was for our valiant crew. Putting up the Spiderbeams on the push-up masts required the full attention of the team, as did walking up a 48-foot mast with inverted V attached, but otherwise the process relied mostly on slow-and-steady preparation, leading to the oft-repeated cheer, "Voila — done!" Tip: If you're going to operate from the Caribbean, make sure you have plenty of sunscreen, and stay out of the stickers.

Inside, the rigs were Yaesu and Ten-Tec with 500 W amplifiers. Band switching was traditional style, with manual coax switches. Nothing fancy. Keeping it uncomplicated was a priority. A long table was pressed into service with side-by-side operating positions. This facilitated use of the highly sophisticated PYAS Operator Communication Protocol (pointing, yelling, and swearing), whenever coordination was required.

Uncomplicated is good, because troubleshooting is simplified. As we all know, putting a station together for the first time never goes exactly as planned. There is always something to fix or reconfigure or for which one part has gone missing. Further, the simpler the station, the sooner you'll get it working and be able to free up those brain cells for relaxing and thinking about the contest, instead of, "Why doesn't this device work with that computer?" Even more important, maintaining strict compliance with our prime directive left more time



Brad, WF7Y, and Scott, W4PA, hard at work dealing with the huge pileups. [Ward Silver, NØAX, Photo]



Even the wall hanging says "Multi-Two". The station layout was kept simple and allowed two operators to coordinate very easily. [Peter De Graaf, PJ4NX, photo]

for swimming and snorkeling and evening sit-around conversation with Steve and Peter under the crepuscular rays of the sunset behind the saguaro.

The nice thing about this "two boys and two radios" approach for M2 meant that very little coordination was actually required except to say, "Nice rate!" or to inquire if the other operator needed a snack or a drink. You get on the air, pick

the band, change the band-pass filter, call CQ, and get ready to run.

Born to Run

From the Caribbean or Hawaii or any of the other "sweet spots," you don't have to go around begging and pleading for QSOs. And with the all-seeing, all-hearing collective hive-mind of the Reverse Beacon Network (www.reversebeacon.net) keep-



Careful balance required; not a soft landing below: NØAX holding mast, W4PA and WF7T on the ground. [Steve Telenius-Lowe, PJ4DX, photo]

ing watch, you don't have to wait very long for the fireworks to get started — maybe 30 seconds, tops. Got your game on?

Before the contest, we all got in some warm-up time on the air. The PJ4 prefix seems to have a world-wide following, and Brad found himself immediately in the crosshairs. "After the third CQ the pileup

was so thick I couldn't think," he recounted. "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and I did both. I felt absolutely inept while I tried to pick call signs out of the din. I had read articles and chatted with hams over the years about what it is like to operate from the Caribbean, but there is nothing like experiencing it first-hand. I had no idea and

I was completely overwhelmed." Mind you, this was *before* the contest. Not to worry: Brad got a lot better very quickly.

Knowing what to expect, Scott made up the band and operating plan. With only four operators, we made some compromises on sleep in favor of chair time. But there were no extended periods of low rate of the sort that kills motivation back home. Only in the 0900 UTC hours both nights did things get slow, and some of that was due to tuning around on 160 looking for multipliers.

As Brad remembers, "I was awakened from my nap around midnight the first night, resolved to do the best I could, have fun, and make tons of QSOs. Forty meters was absolutely beautiful, it was almost like you could hear forever; signals arriving from every compass point were loud. Our little vertical was making me very happy. When daybreak blinked, and 40 closed like someone hit a switch, 15 meter long path and short path were almost the same strength for a few minutes, making copy difficult but amusing me to no end. It was absolutely stunning." Sounds like fun, huh?

After the Final Bell

Tired but happy as 2359 UTC came and went on Sunday night, we totted up the tally (see Table 1). When all was said and done, we were one place out of the World Top 10 in M2 with 10,200 QSOs and a multiplier total that trailed the pack somewhat, a result of not making any effort to set up a separate multiplier station. The PJ4A team met us for a relaxing reverie and shared some of their stories. (Congratulations to them on their third-place showing in the final M2 results!) In a final few hours of work on Monday, the antennas were down, the rigs were stowed, and one last trip around the island was in the log. Tuesday found me back on the plane — oh, yes, that's how it happened.

Scott's vision of the future of operating from Bonaire is a good one: "Contesting is supposed to be fun. Fun means snorkeling, sightseeing, beer, socializing, and radio contesting all mixed together. I'll visit the equipment pile for CQ WW CW each year with the understanding I'll have to play it by ear and will not be delivering any absolutes to myself about it either. CQ WW CW 2014 planning is already underway for PJ4Q, consisting so far of having approximate dates for the duplex reservation in place and keeping an eye on airline tickets. It's in the background of life right now; some perspective and keeping it light and fun is going to mean more years of future enjoyment from contesting down there. We had a fantastic time on the 2013 trip. See you on the air." What more needs be said? *Voila — done!*