

PJ4X in the 2012 ARRL International DX CW

The Crew of Seven descended on the Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire for the 2012 ARRL DX CW Contest. In the crew were Charlie, K1XX; Marty, W1MD; Craig, K1QX; Bill, NK1Z; Bob, WA1Z; John, W4IX, and George, K5KG. Our destination was the "Radio Haus" that sits atop the highest point of the island, some 784 feet ASL. With the exception of Bill, Bob and John, we had all been there for contests in previous years.

Bonaire is a small island (24 x 3-7 miles), located in the southern Caribbean Sea 50 miles north of Venezuela. Tourists who go there for diving are vital to the economy of Bonaire. Since October 2010, the "BES" islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba have been considered as "special municipalities" of the Netherlands, and they became separate DXCC entities. From a DX contest perspective, Bonaire and the neighboring Dutch islands of Curacao and Aruba are in South America, which makes them 3 point contacts for stations outside of South America.

The Radio Haus is owned by Noah, K2NG, and its only purpose is ham radio

"OJ" and "Mults Are"

Some readers may wonder why many Florida Contest Group (FCG) members sign as "OJ." It is in recognition of our founder, Jim White, K4OJ, who became a Silent Key in February 2004, shortly before the ARRL International DX CW. Several of us had planned to operate the contest from Dominica that year. When we arrived, we quickly petitioned the PTT officer for the special call sign J7OJ to commemorate Jim's life. The license was granted moments before the contest began, and we proudly made 8000 QSOs that weekend in Jim's honor.

Jim grew up in a ham radio family. His mother is Ellen, W1YL, and his father was Bob, W1CW (SK). Both Ellen and Bob worked for years at ARRL Headquarters, and Jim even worked there as a kid. Jimmie, or "OJ" as we fondly called him, had founded the FCG in the mid-1990s. He was an enthusiastic contester and fanatical supporter of the annual Florida QSO Party (FQP), with his daily postings on the reflector to encourage everyone to participate.

Jim has left us with many memories that have become woven into the fabric of the Florida Contest Group. In addition to "OJ," it was Jim who coined the expression "Mults are," which has become our club's motto. And, of course, there are those prominent orange FCG shirts that we wear in memory of Jim, whose favorite color was, naturally, orange.



Figure 1 — The PJ4X Team (L–R) Bob, WA1Z; Charlie, K1XX; John, W4IX; Craig, K1QX; Marty, W1MD; Bill, NK1Z, and George, K5KG, in front of Radio Haus

K5KG

operations. Noah's property has a three-bedroom house that is fully equipped with radio gear and antennas. For our operation, we took our own K3s and laptops and used three AL-1200 amps and a FT-1000MP from the property. In addition, Hans, PJ4LS, loaned us a TL-922 amp.

Far in advance of the trip, Charlie and Marty did the heavy lifting on the planning. They laid out the detailed operating schedule and equipment configurations. They prepared a meticulous station diagram and made lists of everything, right down to identifying and numbering every cable. This proved to be invaluable, and once we arrived, the stations went together quickly and easily.

Bill, NK1Z, was sheep-dipped and dragged to PJ4 for his first-ever major contest. We told Bill that he had to "earn" his right to operate the contest by first making 1000 contacts as PJ4/NK1Z during setup — which he did, with a little help from John, W4IX.

John was our BISM (Butt-in-Seat Master). Not only did he ensure that every radio had a butt in the seat throughout the weekend, he spent extra time Elmering Bill during the contest.

Craig, K1QX (aka "Mother"), donated a number of equipment items and served as the chef throughout the week. In addition to pulling operator duties on 10 and 160, Craig kept the hot meals coming. He coined the term "Orange Crush" for our team (after the REM song), because of our "OJ" shirts that were compliments of Charlie.

Bob, WA1Z ("Bonaire Bob" of Super Check Partial fame), managed to survive the harrowing trip from New Hampshire to PJ4 and even threw in a vacation on PJ2 with his wife, Amy, prior to the team's arrival. He was brave enough to send her back home alone the *same* day we arrived to head for PJ4.

Our story would not be complete without mentioning Hans, PJ4LS. Hans is a retired Dutch Naval Officer who lives on Bonaire with his wife. Their children and grandchildren are all back in the Netherlands. Although Hans and his family lived all over the world during his military service, Hans told us that he and his wife choose to live on Bonaire because of its quiet solitude. They lived on Curacao for several years but moved to Bonaire to get away from the hustle and bustle. He told us there is only one traffic light on Bonaire. Since our visit to Bonaire in February, Hans has become an honorary member of the Florida Contest Group, in recognition of his friendly and helpful support to the many FCG ops who have had the pleasure of operating from PJ4.

The Contest

Since we were on Bonaire for the ARRL DX CW, the first thing to realize is that all antennas pointed north. Our operation was a multi-multi, so we set up four stations, all networked, using *WinTest* as our logging software. We also set up a laptop on the network, so the off-duty ops could

keep an eye out for needed mults. After all, mults *are!*

One station each was devoted to 40 and 20. The other two stations were paired up on 10 and 80 and 15 and 160. Our seven ops were scheduled in 2 and 4 hour shifts, and each station had dedicated ops, so that each would be thoroughly familiar with

K5KG



Figure 2 — "Bonaire Bob," WA1Z

K5KG



Figure 3 — The PJ4X antenna farm

his assigned station.

Antennas were allocated to each station according to its dedicated bands. Our antennas were a C3 and 2 element 40 meter Yagi atop the big tower, a C19XR 40 feet up on the big tower and fixed on the US, a C31 atop the 60 foot tower, a 4 element array and an inverted V for 80, and an inverted L plus a Beverage (which apparently did not work) aimed at the US.

A high-power triplexer designed and built by Noah allowed three stations to use the C31 simultaneously. It worked very well. Our intent was not to do any antenna changing once the contest was under way. However, during the contest, we did have to move 10 to the C19, primarily to get around some intermittent line noise.

Contest Highlights

It's worth pointing out that the entire operation came off without any major difficulties, injuries or power failures. We quickly settled into our assigned slots and proceeded to click off the contacts. Our first hour was the best, at 503 QSOs. During that first hour, K5KG reeled in 200 contacts on 20. Band conditions were excellent, and we were not plagued by any significant electrical noise or static. When the dust settled 48 hours later, we had amassed 10,701 Q's and 352 multipliers for a score of nearly 11.3 million.

Well into the contest on Saturday afternoon, Bob was operating 20 and noticed that signals were dropping off. After a bit of head scratching and eliminating several possible causes, we determined that the problem was likely a defective TR relay in the AL-1200. Fortunately, Hans had told us that there was a new spare relay on the shelf (how's *that* for luck?). Charlie and I opened up the amp and quickly realized that changing out the TR relay was not going to be outpatient surgery. The relay was mounted on a small PC board with a half-dozen wires attached to each side. Charlie, in his ever-so-calm fashion, said that he would conduct the procedure, if I would be the scrub nurse. So we proceeded with needle nose, snips, flashlight, soldering iron, and steady hands and nerves. After 2 sweat-dripping hours, the patient was back on his feet. We powered up the amp, and Bob made a contact or two.

"But wait," Bob said unhappily. "The receive signal is still dropping off." Charlie and I were dumbfounded. "That can't be," we exclaimed! Bob made another and then another, before saying, "Okay, signals are good. I guess the relay is okay after all." With that Charlie and I had an 807 and left Bonaire Bob to his pileup. He never complained again.

Around 1900 UTC on Sunday, I was looking for mults on the spare laptop and



Figure 4 — Hans, PJ4LS, at his operating position

noticed that VO2NS — a mult we needed — had been spotted on 20 SSB. Bob was our 20 meter op at the time, so I asked him to take a listen for the VO2. Sure enough, was able to engage VO2NS in a chat. After a casual friendly exchange of names, Bob asked Nazaire to QSY to CW. He obliged and gave us a quick, high-speed exchange on CW for mult number 60 on 20. (By the end of the contest, we had missed only

NT, YT, and NU.)

In summary, it was a successful operation. Most of all, no one got hurt, we had a great score, and we all now have a closer bond of friendship. (Thanks, OJ.)

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