

Messed Up CQ Phone 1997 from WP2Z Just Bring Your Toothbrush

by Doug Priest W3CF

We had discussed a trip to St. Croix over Caribbean cocktails after the 1996 CQWW Phone contest from V26B. Dick, K3MQH, and his YL Mary were lounging around the Royal Antigua's in pool bar basking in the afterglow of a great contest weekend when my wife Mary and I joined them. V26B is our thing. We have all worked extremely hard in building it into a world class contest station. Setting up a Multi Multi in the Caribbean can be a taxing chore even under ideal conditions. Everything must be planned and thought out as the local radio shack may not have that hard line connector you suddenly find needs replacing. The only coax you'll find is RG 59 if you are lucky. Add in the physically demanding job of taking down, fixing, and re erecting antennas and rotors and the job can really grow on you. We decided we needed a break! I had seen a brochure at Dayton about this villa on St. Croix that had an existing station. It seemed to be just the thing for two aging contesters and their wives. Walk in, sit down, and operate. A one year sabbatical! We could do a 2 man M/M and just go for the points for our beloved Frankford Radio Club. I figured two FRCers could do perhaps 10 million points in the CQWW Contest and that would mean 5 million or so points each for our in club standings. The ladies agreed as they were pretty much by themselves for most of their stay on Antigua while Dick and I were off contesting.



I contacted Larry, KE2VB station trustee at WP2Z, as soon as I got back to the states to inquire of the availability of the station for CQWW Phone 97. Larry returned my E Mail that same day with loads of information about the station and St. Croix. We booked on the spot! The rental rates for CQWW weekend were still off season so they were very affordable for two couples sharing the expenses. I quickly subscribed to two on line fare watching services to track airfares to St. Croix. Every time the fares change US \$25.00 they E Mail you with the update and you can either buy your tickets on line or through your travel agent. Darrell, AB2E/V26E, is Team Antigua's Travel Agent so naturally we chose to book through Darrell. The tickets were finally purchased for \$423.00 each! Total cost of the DXpedition including airfare, lodging, food and beverage was less than \$2K per couple for a week!

The planning began with a short meeting when Dick and Mary K., we added the K to her name to eliminate confusion, drove up from their York County Pennsylvania home to visit. Dick is an W3LPL alum and quite the VHF guru. He has a 9 tower VHF superstation in central Pennsylvania. He would be in charge of all things technical in nature. I would handle all the arrangements and planning. Good thing, too! I am not a very technical person. If I can't fix it with a sledge hammer and crow bar I get help. My contest career is only 8 years old but I have found my niche as a hired gun traveling to wherever I'm needed to fill out a multi op station. I trained at several FRC stations before getting the DXpedition bug. My contest elmers were WB3FIZ, K3WW, and W3EA and I have been part of Multi Op teams at W1AW and W1AW/3 at W3LPL's for IARU Radiosport and at W2GD for CQ160 phone from the Sandy Hook N.J. Coast Guard Station. For the past 4 years Dick and I have been part of V26B. Now we would be WP2Z after arranging with Larry to use the club call sign.

After consulting with Larry it was learned that the station on St. Croix sits atop the highest inhabited hill on the island overlooking the north shore just west of the main city of Christianstad. It has an existing 30' tower with a Force 12 C 4 with the 40m kit and inverted V's for 80/160. Further down the hill is a 20' tower with a 2 element Cushcraft shorty 40m yagi with a length of rope that serves double duty as a way of turning the antenna and holding it against the winds. A Yeasu FT 1000 MP and Ameritron AL 80 with a IBM PS 2 computer completes station 1. An Icom 751 A that serves as the FT 1000's back up would serve as station 2. Larry advised there was a TA 33 in a ski bag complete with a 10' military mast in the closet along side the carport. We would need to bring an amplifier and a laptop computer to complete the second station. Larry said everything else was provided. I had my doubts and continued my planning as if we were enroute to V2 instead of KP2. I began the usual list of things I thought we would need. I should have trusted Larry. He has done ARRL Phone from WP2Z several times and knows the station. I didn't want to take any chances.

I discussed the amplifier situation with Alex, W2OX / V47KP, and he offered one of his back up Dentron MLA 2500 amplifiers as a loaner. My Command Technologies amp was just too heavy to cart through two airports and Alex's offering was a blessing. I foraged through my mothers closet and found a hardsided suitcase in which to pack the Dentron. I pulled the tubes and made sure the transformer was securely fastened to the chassis. I even added a couple of drops of Loc Tite thread adhesive to each stud just to make sure the thing stayed put then I wrapped it in large bubble wrap and stuck it in the suitcase. I applied several inches of foam rubber around it and closed it up. I finished the job with two nylon web straps around the outside of the suitcase to insure the case stayed closed. I was lucky airport security didn't want to peek inside the case. One of the advantages of going to St. Croix is that there is no U.S. Customs to endure.

Larry E mailed me a message shortly after WPX contest that the PS 2 computer developed a power supply problem and that I would need to bring another laptop to insure no problems. After checking with Dick we offered to replace the power supply on the PS 2 while we were on the island and Larry quickly shipped us a replacement supply. George, N3ISH, answered a plea for a loaner laptop with a nice 486 machine so with Dick's new laptop and a loaner null modem cable from Sam, WT3Q, we were ready , equipment wise, for the contest. We were NOT ready for Murphy.

The months passed quickly as summer turned to autumn and soon it was time to get this show on the road. Dick and Mary K. drove up the night before we were to depart and checked into a local motel instead of sleeping on my family room sofa. We had a quick pizza dinner and turned in early. We had a 7:05am flight and according to American Airlines international flight rules we needed to be at Philadelphia International Airport at 5:00am for check in. My neighbor Jeff, N3MBJ, had offered to join with my father and supply the transportation to and from the airport and both of them were waiting outside the front door at 4:00am. One of the advantages of taking your spouse (or significant other) is that you suddenly have 2 additional check in places available. My goal as a back injury patient is to check in all baggage except for a VERY light carry on which holds personal toiletries and a change of clothes just in case your baggage gets sent to the Pakistan instead of St. Croix. This way traveling through San Juan is as painless as possible. We had a comfortable ride on the Airbus 300 to San Juan then caught an American Eagle ATR commuter flight for the 45 minute trip into St. Croix. I do not like commuter flights!

Larry had advised that the owner of Windwood, as the station/villa is known to non amateurs, Mr. Lorrin Woodman, would meet us at the airport in St. Croix and sure enough this haired octogenarian gentleman was holding a small placard with my name on it at the arrival gate. I can not convey just how special Mr. Woodman was to our St. Croix experience. This Harvard educated gent lives on St. Croix with his wife in a hilltop villa just across the way from the WP2Z station. He used some shrewd negotiating to acquire the hill that Windwood sits on and sold lots all around the bottom of the hill to finance the hilltop villa we called home for a week. Dick got the rental car and we followed Mr. Woodman across the island toward Windwood. We could see the house from nearly any place on the island but as we got closer we began to appreciate just where the house was situated. On the final leg of the journey we turned left on scenic drive and started an ascent that took a good 10 minutes to complete. We all remarked on how steep the climb was as we neared the top. I estimated a 45 degree leg and wondered how in the heck they got a paving machine up there! We finally turned into a private drive and made our way up another steep grade to the villa. We stepped out of the car and the view was simply breathtaking! We were on the peak of a 900' hill with steep drop off in every direction. None of the previous accounts had prepared us for this moment. We climbed the stairs behind Mr. Woodman as he unlocked the huge sliding glass doors to the house. Stepping inside we were greeted by a large room with vaulted cathedral ceilings and impeccable furnishings. The room had a

living room area, including a sleeper sofa, on one side and a large glass dining table on the other. On the far side of the dining table in a small corner was the table that served as the radio shack. The bedrooms were off to our left and had two single beds in each room along with a full bath. The villa had 75% glass walls throughout and only the well appointed kitchen was fully enclosed except for two windows overlooking the driveway and pool. Mary is a real stickler for cleanliness and she was very satisfied as she and Mr. Woodman struck up a friendship as he showed her where all the particulars were stored and how to fire up the washer and dryer and BBQ grill.

After Mr. Woodman left we sat on the balcony overlooking Columbus Cove where Sir Christopher landed in 1493 and were overcome with the sheer beauty of our location. We had virtually a 360 degree view of the island. We quickly found out why they called it Windwood. There were near gale force winds most of the day. Windwood has no air conditioning or fans. It does not need them. The house is cooled by opening the sliding glass doors around the house until you get the desired temperature in the different rooms. We all thought about how devastating it must have been in 1989 when Hurricane Marilyn destroyed the original house. The winds died in the evening for an hour or so and local bugs known to Cruzans, as the locals are called, as no see'ems take aim on Caucasian tourists. They are called no see'ems because you literally can not see the little buggers. Their bite is very similar to our green headed fly back here in the states. In short they HURT! I had downloaded the Center for Disease Control advisory and they suggested the insect repellent Repel which has the active ingredient DEET. It worked! We highly recommend it to any DXpeditioner with a cautionary apply lightly. It is strong stuff!



It was Wednesday afternoon and we had a full 48 hours to prepare for the contest but our stomachs came first. We all piled into the rental car and headed off on our first excursion for food and libation. We had seen a store called Pueblo on the way to the shack so that was our destination. I drive because that is what I do professionally. I am a certified CDL driving instructor for the U.S. Postal Service. Dick navigates. The YL's yak in the back seat. We were pleasantly surprised upon our arrival at the store. The prices and selection were very near what we experience back home unlike Antigua which is VERY expensive. We stocked up on groceries and decided we would Bar B Que chicken that night. We were both on a very tight budget as we were on our second DXpedition of the year so we were trying to eat in until after the contest. On the way to the check out counter we found the distilled spirits aisle. The local Cruzan Rum was \$2.99 a bottle for stuff aged 2 years! Needless to say we bought several bottles along with some coconut and pineapple to make our own brand of Caribbean cocktails. It was pretty good mixed with Diet Coke, too! The locals were very friendly and we detected no animosity whatsoever. We headed back to the house to begin unpacking.

Upon closer inspection we were amazed at just how well the villa was stocked. The kitchen had every modern convenience including ice maker and blender. All dishes, pots, pans, and utensils were neatly stored for our use. The bathrooms had been stocked with all linens and plush towels along with thoughtful things like anti diarrhea medications and the like. Brand new and unopened! Maid service is scheduled twice a week and the pool guy comes every Friday! The next time we come we'll travel lightly and just bring our toothbrush and change of clothes!

Mary started the grill while Dick and I began to assemble the station. Dick quickly changed out the PS 2 power supply while I began setting up the second station on a table to the left of the main station. It was all there just as Larry had advised. In a closet in the master bedroom were the 751A and extra coax for the TA 33. A tool box contained all the hand tools we would need and some extra connectors left over from previous renters. Since we had 2 laptops I went ahead and used those to power the station and just borrowed the PS 2 keyboard and monitor for my laptop. I HATE laptop keyboards! The chicken smelled great! Dick had his station on the air in no time. The SWR was decent but the receiver seemed deadened. Hmmm...perhaps it was in the menu for the 1000MP. Little did we know that this would prove to be a very costly technical error. We set it aside for Thursdays work schedule as we had been up for over 17 hours and were beginning to tire. Mary and Mary K had prepared delicious BBQ chicken and we had a side dish of chicken flavored rice while we watched the market crash on Wall Street on CNN. We chased the meal down with my version of a Pina Coloda and started a list of things to do Thursday.

The Contest Advisory Committee, in its infinite wisdom, had given the approval of internet cluster spots and I had found a route from Bill, W4WX, through Puerto Rico so I brought along my KAM TNC with a cable I got from HRO for the 2m Kenwood transceiver I packed into luggage. Dick had procured a 4 element 2m beam and a 100' length of coax. The idea was to get spots from Puerto Rico which got them from an internet connection in Florida. Thursdays first job was to climb the tower and affix the yagi on Puerto Rico and hopefully I could connect to the node in KP4. I had brought along my climbing belt thinking it would fit Dick. Wrong! He's skinny and I'm fat. I can not climb for more than about 10 minutes until after I get disk surgery so Dick went up the tower without a belt and I had to go up after him to lend a hand till he got the U Bolts threaded. A classic example of what NOT to do but sometimes you make sacrifices in the name of your score. It proved to be a waste of time as once I plugged the Kenwood into the power supply that Dick had brought the radio blew up. At least I thought it did. I thought it was important enough to our score that I went into town and bought a 2m radio from the local Radio Shack with the understanding that I could bring it back if I couldn't get the packet connection to KP4. To make a sad story short it was not the radio but the TNC that died. I took the radio back that afternoon. It used up more than half of Thursday running into a dead end. DRAT!

I had both stations computers talking to each other and now we needed to work on putting together the TA 33 together and erecting it on the supplied 10' mast. We drafted the girls to lend a hand and after finding a spot next to the driveway managed to plant and guy the antenna. I didn't think much of a TA 33 on a 10' mast but I underestimated the effect of being on the edge of a 900' cliff. It would turn out to be our most effective high band antenna. The station was almost assembled and operational. We still had to erect the low band beverage antennas. This was Dicks baby as I had no knowledge of beverages. We were just about ready for the contest when we broke for supper and a relaxing evening in the pool. We were still baffled by the deadened receiver on the FT 1000 and this would be the main chore on Friday morning along with the low band antennas.

We awoke to an absolutely beautiful day on Friday and after breakfast started in on final preparations. We had shopping to do for the weekend so that the ladies would not have to venture out by themselves and so we would have munchies available during the contest. We were still trying to track down the problem on the C4 when suddenly Dick took ill. We are still not exactly sure what happened to him but about 10 AM Friday Dick disappeared into the bedroom and that was the last we saw of him until late Saturday afternoon when he emerged looking ashen faced and ugly. Great! Now what?! We have one station with the FT 1000 that has an SWR of 2 to 1 but is, for all intents and purposes, deaf. We have no low band beverages. We are down to one terribly upset appliance operator and two YL's who have no desire to play radio. At least the Icom 751 A and the TA 33 are playing well. We ran coax from the shanty 40 up into the shack and I quickly determined that it was going to be good enough to be my 40m antenna. It also worked quite well on 17 meters I would just have to go out and hand turn the 40 whenever I wanted to change directions. After scratching my head for most of the afternoon I suspected the other problem to be in the Force 12 feedline but was really unable to change it out by myself. I resigned myself to working with what I had going and make the best of it. If Dick got better we could change out the coax and try and get two separate stations on the air for as long as possible. I had made over 5 meg SO/low power from Martinique in 93' as TO5MM and I figured this would be the worst case scenario. I figured about right. The girls got up enough guts to head off to the store by themselves while I finished putting together what I could to make the station ready for the opening of the contest some 4 hours distant. After finishing up what I was qualified to do I headed off to bed for a short nap at 5pm.

I set up the video camera on a tripod overlooking both stations, plugged it into A/C to save batteries, and hit the record button about 2345Z. It was not a pretty sight. Try as I would I simply could not get a European run going. As you can see from our attached continental breakdown a full 76% of our QSO's were with North America.

		160	80	40	20	15	10	ALL	percent
North America	SSB	75	383	260	1258	1477	700	4153	76.0
South America	SSB	4	15	4	24	10	15	72	1.3
Europe	SSB	0	16	15	308	582	158	1079	19.7
Asia	SSB	0	0	0	58	17	9	84	1.5
Africa	SSB	0	2	1	11	14	13	41	0.8
Oceania	SSB	0	1	0	11	20	4	36	0.7

Dick finally emerged late Saturday evening feeling and looking a bit better and operated most of the night while I caught some sleep. We finally tracked down the problem with the C4 station Sunday morning when Dick climbed the tower and unhooked the coax. Water poured out of the balun! It seems the 14 inches (not a mis-print) of rain St. Croix got the previous week put a stress test on the coax seal. Actually there was no coax seal. It was just taped. We swapped out the coax with some RG-8X we brought down and got two stations on the air for the first time. We made a note for the operator due in the next week to replace and seal the coax and sprinted to the end of the contest. Any chance for a good score was long gone but we wanted to finish on a high note and bank as many points as possible. Here are the gory details:

CQ WORLD WIDE DX CONTEST -- 1997

Call: WP2Z

Country: US Virgin Is.

Mode: SSB

Category: Multi Multi

Zone: 8

BAND	QSO	QSO PTS	PTS/QSO	ZONES	COUNTRIES
160	79	162	2.05	6	14
80	412	851	2.07	15	39
40	278	570	2.05	11	25
20	1632	3661	2.24	29	90
15	2067	4764	2.30	28	86
10	894	1977	2.21	26	65
Totals	5362	11985	2.24	115	319

Final Score: 11985 x (115+319) = 5,201,490 pts

After the contest we spoke with our comrades over at V26B and found out they topped 30 meg. Great! There was really nothing we could do about it but realize we did the best we could under the circumstances. We still added 5.2 meg to FRC coffers! Better than either of us could have done at home!

It is a V2 tradition to end the contest with a feast of titanic proportions and under the advise of Larry we made reservations at The Waves at Cane Bay. What a delight! We were led to an ocean front table where the surf splashed over the rocks in front of us and fed a small grotto full of small reef fish with fresh sea water. The ladies were glad to finally free themselves of CQ CONTEST and get out and enjoy the St. Croix hospitality. The food was absolutely delicious! It was a fitting end to a CQ Contest DXpedition weekend.

Dick had recovered from whatever bug he had come down with and the four of us spent the next four days touring the island and handing out WARC band Q's while the YL's were not looking. They were looking quite a bit as I think I handed out a total Q count of 271 over 4 days and Dick had even less. We enjoyed the rest of our stay and reluctantly headed back to reality on Thursday when Mr. & Mrs. Woodman returned to help us back to the airport and send us off . What a fantastic host and hostess! We will miss them.

