

ARRL DX Test CW 2004 at VY2ZM - What an Adventure! by K1ZM/K1LZ

For ARRL DX CW, Krassy Petkov (K1LZ) and I travelled to my station in VY2 to participate - an operation that had been in the works for some time. Krassy wanted to try a mono 80m as VY2LZ to see what he could do and the plan was for me to sign VY2ZM down on 160M in a companion single-band effort. This was intended to be a simple, no hassle, low pressure operation but it turned out to be ANYTHING BUT!

Ah yes! As often happens, the hand of GOD (in this case Mother Nature) intervened and a 100 year blizzard of epic proportions hit the Maritimes on Wednesday night/Thursday morning making a rather simple effort a true ****classic**** that I will not soon forget! I think it is safe to say I will NEVER forget this operation.....!!

Our plan was easy - I would drive up to Boston from NY on Thursday morning (leaving 1AM) - hook up with Krassy at Logan airport - and we would take an 0855AM flight to Halifax. There we would change planes to fly into

Charlottetown, drive out to the house - walk in and have all day Thurs afternoon and Friday to get ready for the test.

Disaster struck early - Halifax airport was closed late Wed - so we rerouted to Montreal from Logan - arriving there around 11AM Thursday morning.

We then learned Charlottetown airport was now closed. And Moncton was closed and St. John was also closed.

In fact, the only thing that was *open* was Fredericton, NB and even that was "iffy". The plane took off and we were advised by the pilot that if he could not see the runway in Fredericton when we got there, we would return to Montreal as nothing further East was open in the Maritimes.

About 4PM we arrived in Fredericton where it actually was only lightly snowing and rented the BIGGEST SUV we could find (I would have rented a HUMMER if they had had one!).

We set out for Moncton (two hours away to the East) and encountered deep snow covering the road within 30 mins. As it got dark, it was clear we would not get very far that night as in places the road was all but closed with abandoned cars everywhere.

There is a spot along the Trans Canada I know well at MAGNETIC HILL and I kept on hoping we could make it there - (we were then about 40KM away at that point).

About 7PM we reached the Magnetic Hill exit and the ramps were all but snow clogged. We were lucky to get off the highway.....We put up in a nice spot - had a great dinner of salmon and several pitchers of beer - and even got to see Donald Trump's new reality TV show before crashing for the night!

Friday morning was sunny and clear in Moncton - and we made an early start

for the hour (or so) drive up to the PEI bridge. **DISASTER!** The bridge was closed as PEI had declared a state of emergency. No one was being allowed on the island. The airport was closed, **MOST** of the roads were closed - and it was expected that secondary roads would be closed until Saturday.

At that point - 0930AM Friday - it was NOT looking good for us...

There was an update at 1200 hours - still no bridge opening - and another update was promised at 1500 hours. So we stopped for lunch at a place called the **BRIGGS Homestead** (probably run by one of my distant relatives as that is my last name).

Around 2PM a group of other travellers sitting near us in the diner yelled "**The BRIDGE is OPEN again...!!** and about 50 people cleared out of that diner in about 90 seconds.....

We did too and upon reaching the island, it was clear that things were in a near state of disaster. Only one lane was open on most of the TransCanada, so it was single file travelling to the capital and my next thought was "**What about my road from St Peters to my home on the North Shore?**" I kept thinking "**We might make it to the Bay - but that is still more than 15km away from my home - then what? Perhaps rent a snowmobile?**"

Doubtful at best because the drifts were blowing across the road all the way there - and some of them were 4-6 feet high...Lucky for us, we had a **BIG** truck!

I kept calling my local neighbors "**Have you seen a snow plow? Do you know**

anyone who HAS ONE?"

About 5PM on the way out, I got a return call - a plow had made an attempt to clear the Northside Road - but had broken down.... I asked "WHERE DID IT BREAK DOWN?"

I was told the plow made it to about 300 yards PAST my driveway and if I HURRIED, we might make it to my driveway - but the winds (100kph) and blowing snow were already closing the road again.

So we crossed our fingers and kept going...

We made it out to the north shore around 5:30PM - with the contest starting at 8PM. After parking in my neighbor's driveway (two of the finest folks you will ever want to meet by the way) - we found they had made a special effort to clear a spot where we could park OFF THE ROAD. What a break!

Emma and Levrett (who have lived on the North shore for more than 50 years) suggested we really ought not to try walking in - as they knew from their time on the island that the blowing snow would have made some drifts of epic proportions. They were RIGHT! But we had to try - we had come so far and we really did want to OPERATE the contest!!

We promised to call on our cellphone if we got into trouble and also that we would call when we reached the house - just so they would know we were okay. Then we set out for the shore.

BIG MISTAKE!

I should note that Krassy had made two requests for the contest:

- 1) He wanted to bring his IC 781 radio**
- 2) He wanted to bring his ACOM**

I remember he had not really believed me when I told him that carrying anything down to the house was probably out of the question - but having been through this before, I know you can only carry a change of clothes in a small bag when you attempt a "walk-in" such as this in mid-Winter and maybe a small milk and a bag of English muffins and some cold cuts. Anything more in terms of weight is totally unmanageable - and he soon realized that his request for the 781 and the Acom were beyond the pale!

So off we went, him with his clothes in one bag in one hand and a small bag of groceries on the other hand - me with a dozen eggs & some butter and a few other things in a single bag.

Now normally, it takes about 45 minutes to an hour to make this trek - in snows of from 1-3 feet deep. I figured perhaps a little more than an hour and we might get there - but THEN I SAW THE SNOW. My GOD! We rounded the first turn in the laneway and here was a 15 foot high drift over 100 yards long.

We were already pretty well spent and not even 1/4 of the way there yet.

We stopped for a moment and Krassy uttered the first of his "MUST DO DOG!"

comments. I had to think for awhile as to what he meant but I soon figured it out - as he started climbing up the drift on his hands and knees and then rolling along it over and over in order to make forward progress and not sink in up to his neck.

Actually this worked out pretty well. Crawling was hard - but FAR EASIER than sinking in with every step up to your chest!

We used all I have learned during the past two winters as to the BEST possible routing to take to the shore - following a line of trees which often prevent drifts from getting too large. In this case, the snow was only two feet deep meaning just about up to knee height. But that was a HELL of alot better than 4-6 feet snow depths - which is truly God-awful to walk in...

Every once in a while - perhaps for a hundred yards, the wind had blown a clear path of 6" snow - and I can tell you, we LIVED FOR THOSE PLACES!

I knew it was taking an enormous amount of time to make forward progress and Krassy kept asking - "When will we see the towers? When will we see the house?"

I almost did not want to tell him that we were still 2200 feet away at that point - but I knew EXACTLY how far it was since I could see my 160M RX array off to the right - and I know how long the feedline is..... I just told him "The house is closer to us now than the road is, so we have to keep going; we can't turn back now - trust me, we'll get there."

One thing in our favor I held back was the knowledge that **MOST OF THE TIME**, the wind at the shore blows the snow off my neighbor's laneway - and I **HOPED** the last 1500 feet would be an easier walk - which meant we **MIGHT** only have 700 feet more of 10 foot drifts to crawl over.

About 20 mins later we reached the crossover point and I asked Krassy to just rest and wait a moment.

I crawled over a huge drift to get onto my neighbor's land and **SUCCESS** - I was now standing in 6" snow! I called out to Krassy to join me and he did. He asked "Why did we come over here?" I said look at your feet - this is a **BETTER** way!

What a difference - we almost jogged the last 1500 feet - & compared to what we had done so far, this was a **CAKEWALK!**

Still we had to cross a 20 foot drift next to the 20/40M tower to get to the house. Usually a drift forms right at the mouth of the driveway & this one was a **MOTHER!** The damned thing was almost up to the first set of guy wires on the Rohn 45 tower (I have a picture to prove this!) and finally we made it to the garage. The doorbell light was **ON** and I said - "**Good NEWS! We have A/C POWER!**" I knew it was on at the road and was really glad it was also on down at the shore!

We took off all our bibs, boots, long underwear and all the other stuff we had on and went inside. **OUCH!** It was 7:31PM - the walk in had taken over 2 hours. Krassy wanted a shower - but there was no time. He took off his wet

clothing, put on something that was at least DRY and I went down soaking wet to set up the station.

Most things were ready, but there are a few changes to be made from SO2R to a single band effort - an interlock must be disabled to allow me to work 160M while he was on 80M and of course, a CT BIN file needed to be created. Plus everything needed to be reconnected - about 20 mins of work completed in a real panic!

At 2357z, I said - "Here sit down.....you are ready my friend. Find a spot and get going.."

I went upstairs to get out of my soaking wet clothing, took a shower and actually got 160M going about 0118z.

Krassy was off in a flash - 80M condx were GREAT and he was doing well. He had a HUGE pileup and was obviously having a blast. UA9BA said we were booming and that made us feel REALLY GOOD - considering what we had been through - just to GET THERE.

I found 160M condx a bit SLOW - and I avoided CQ'ing the first night - as I had not had time to do a few things to improve the band to band intermod that I knew was okay - but not 100% down over on Krassy's radio.

Mind you, I did not hear much of anything from Krassy as I was listening to EU on the remote RX array way up the road, but he was hearing a bit of white noise from ME.

Saturday afternoon opened a bit late to EU for me on 160m - about an hour earlier for Krassy on 80m - but still a bit later than what I expected.

I did alot of CQ'ing on Sat night and had some good runs into EU - Krassy was smoking and I could see condx must have been GREAT over on 80M.

At sunrise Sunday, Krassy worked quite a few JA's, a JT1, some VK's, ZL's - and said he was being heard by everything he called - which I know must have been fun for him.

Sunday afternoon produced a REALLY EARLY opening for us into EU - I am pretty sure he was into EU by 2000z and I was only a few minutes behind on 160M.

He had a good rate right up until 2400z - things got pretty worked out for me down on 160m and I think the 23z hour yielded perhaps only 15 Q's for me - if that.

FINAL TOTALS:

KRASSY VY2LZ - 80M 1224/98

JEFF VY2ZM - 160M 472/76

Krassy's score was a new W/VE record. My score, while over 100K, was a bit off my 2001 score - but still vy respectable - especially considering how I was forced to operate on Friday night.

We both were pretty happy campers as we chatted with LZ1JY on 75M SSB at 2400z. Nick said we were LOUD during the test and the numbers bear this out.

A quick dinner and it was NITE NITE time. This because we knew we would have to get up at 3AM to WALK OUT - with an 0835AM flight Monday morning. The walk out was almost as tough as the walk in - but we used our PREVIOUS FOOT PRINTS all the way - at least the ones we could find as it had snowed another 6" on Sunday night. (Give me a break!)

It took 1.5 hours to walk out this time and we were back in C'town at 0630AM - just enough time to gas up the rental truck and head for a STEAK and EGG breakfast. We called Robby - VY2ROB (whom I had never met - but Krassy knows him well) - and Robby was nice enough to come out to join us for a 45 minute bullsession.

The airport was OPEN - Halifax was OPEN - and we got off almost on time.

Our connection was on time in Halifax and when we stepped out of the plane at Logan Airport it felt almost like SUMMER - even though I think it was round 40F.

I headed off to collect my car and get ready for the 4 hour drive back to my home in NY. Poor Krassy got screwed...

K1LZ EPILOGUE

Krassy was supposed to head DIRECTLY to Los Angeles for a dinner - but as

soon he got on his cell phone, he was asked to come directly into the OFFICE as there was a major problem at his plant.

It probably is not well known, but Krassy's company makes some of the MOST SOPHISTICATED robots in the world - and his stuff was actually used to inspect the rubble and PATH tunnels in NYC for bodies in the aftermath of 9/11 at the World Trade Center in NY. Robots can go in places where it is unsafe for humans (due to poisonous gasses, smoke and the like) - and he has some pretty incredible stories to tell about the role his company played following 9/11!

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY....

The US COMMAND in Iraq had recently placed a rush order with Krassy for 20 robots to be used for unmanned PATROLS in BAGHDAD - in order to help SAVE LIVES of our guys serving over there. The logic is simple - it is often SAFER to send in a robot down a terrorist laden street - by remote control with complete visual images being sent back to command - so the controllers SEE what the ROBOT sees. These things are outfitted with RPG grenades and MISSLES - and high caliber cannons (depending on the specific KIND of robot specifications).

Anyway, it seems there was a problem with a new part - and Krassy was needed to help resolve a design issue - and since the shipment was just about due to go out AIR FREIGHT to Baghdad, it was a "FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION" situation for Krassy.

Poor Krassy - he had to rush over to the plant to try to come up with a FIX - and I really felt sorry for him. When I left him, he was still planning to

take a LATE NIGHT flight out to LAX for a breakfast meeting.

I guess there is "NO REST FOR THE WEARY!"

Anyway, it was an incredible weekend for BOTH of us. I am really pleased that we actually were able to have pulled this one off. For a long time, it looked like we were going to be sitting in New Brunswick or in Charlottetown drinking beer all weekend.

But lady luck smiled on us in the end.

Thanks to all the stations who called us & please QSL ****direct only**** to K1ZM and to K1LZ if you want a card. Incoming mail is usually answered on a same day basis.

73 JEFF VY2ZM//KRASSY VY2LZ