

The 7O6T 160m Story May 2020 by Jeff Briggs VY2ZM

Hi Gang

I promised to relate the 7O6T story as I have time to do so and tonight I will begin the process. I'll do it with a series of segments as it would take a very long message to do it in one fell swoop.

VISALIA

I attended VISALIA for the first time at the end of April and, while there, I saw Hrane Milosovic YT1AD, Paul Ewing N6PSE and the late Dave Collingham K3LP all speak from the dais at the Saturday night banquet. Little did I know at the time that each of them had just been secretly advised hours earlier that final approvals for a gov't approved license for 7O had just been relayed to them from Dima RA9USU.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

It seems that a large measure of the credit for securing approvals for this operation goes to RA9USU who travelled to Sanaa several times over the past two years. A new government and some fresh thinking among ministers led to a few cracks in what for a very long time was a shut door. Others like JY1 King Hussein, OH2BH and A61AJ had tried in the past to secure a license and permits to come operate from Yemen and all had been turned down in the past. But this time there

was good news!

It was expected that the window of opportunity was likely to be late May or early June - but out of the blue, the word arrived that it was a GO from May 1 to May 15th 2100z to 2100z exactly - and there was damned little time to get ready on such short notice.

A team had been quietly assembled including - 8 Russians, 4 Americans, JT1CO one LZ and one YU - and you should note that I was not on this initial list....

HOW and WHY DID I GO?

Like everyone else, just prior to 01 May I opened my Daily DX and read the announcement - and almost fell out of my chair. I read over the list of operators and it sure looked like the familiar names that I have often seen going out together to YI9PSE/ST0R and other places recently. One name curiously was MISSING - this crew did not include Krassy Petkov K1LZ.

I let it go initially but a day later I decided to contact Krassy. I called him up and said "Hey buddy - I see all the boys are going over to 7O and this one surely looks like it should have your name all over it - how come you are NOT going?"

I should have kept my mouth shut as I was saddened by the answer I received

"Jeff - I was supposed to go on this one to do the lowbands - but my older daughter Zoe just had cancer surgery and I have to stay here in order to be with her. I got the news of this while at JT5DX for WPX SSB and it has occupied all my time ever since then. But how would you like to go in my place if I can arrange it?"

Now - this was quite an offer - and I had already planned to go to K1ZM in Mass in order to work the boys for my own 160M DXCC. In fact I was planning on leaving the next day for the US so I gave it some real consideration. Also, one of the co-leaders was the late K3LP whom I had accompanied a year earlier to Palawan on the way to DX0DX - Spratly - and since I knew Krassy would start with Dave for approval, it seemed as if I might be granted permission to join the team.

I asked my wife and told Krassy to contact K3LP.

That is how it started. David contacted RA3AUU Harry - and three things were in my own personal CRITICAL PATH in order to make this one work:

- 1) I needed approval from K3LP, RA3AUU and RA9USU
- 2) They needed to get me a Yemeni VISA (like ASAP)
- 3) I needed to find a REASONABLE airfare to get there and back - one that was not going to totally break my budget

## THE ANSWERS

It was a YES from Harry and David. Harry asked his support team in Sanaa (Karina) to work with me to get the VISA and I had to send over my US passport pages and my license. It turns out the license was not needed - only the passport was really necessary.

Meantime, I asked David to send me his exact itinerary - because I wanted to DUPLICATE it if I could. Since 7O is not necessarily a routine destination for Americans these days, I preferred to travel WITH K3LP - so each of us could enter Yemen together. My wife actually was quite insistent on this aspect for my being allowed to go from HER SIDE!

A few hours on PRICELINE.com allowed me to find what I needed for a great price - but then I needed to figure out how to get from Sanaa to Socotra. I spoke with David and Karina by email and it seems there is something called FELIX Air which does the routing between Sanaa and Socotra - and by a minor miracle there was seating on David's flights in and out of Sanaa to Socotra and return. It was actually starting to come together.

I left on a Friday at 0200 from PEI and stopped on the way at K1LZ in order to see if I could work 7O6T that next evening. Then I spent a night on Cape Cod to prepare.

Initially I wanted to bring a few accessories that might be needed for

160M including:

My ANC4 Noise Canceller

My Paddle

My Bose noise cancelling headphones

A Beverage Xfmr

A beverage termination

A 160M Preamp

Some interconnecting cables

Some coaxial adapters

ETC ETC

An email from RA3AUU quickly dashed these ideas as it read "Jeff - don't bring anything related to ham radio - and DO NOT bring your FCC license either.

Doing so risks deportation, incarceration or confiscation! Repeat - bring NOTHING except your clothes and when you and K3LP arrive, all you say is that you are on HOLIDAYS and you are staying at the SUMMERLAND HOTEL in Hadibo, Socotra - I cannot emphasize enough the importance of your doing EXACTLY what I say - and nothing else - you got it???"

Meanwhile - Karina had written saying she would have my VISA the

next day - and send it to me via email. I would pay for it on arrival in Sanaa and she booked me on the same FELIX air flights as K3LP. I left the next morning heading South stopping in NYC for lunch with my father in law and a short supper with my daughter in Philadelphia. I called Jon AA1K and asked if I could spend a night there - en route to Dulles/DC airport from which K3LP and I would fly out the next evening.

It was good of Jon Zaines to put me up and I listened to the 7O6T signal at his place that night. Jon hears extremely well from his place - 7O6T was good copy

for almost an hour and Jon let me call from there - and after listening to R7LV answer K1Z? for 10 mins and then get confused as to who he had worked - well I wasn't at all sure if I had a qso or not - but there was no time to worry about that until another day. I actually printed out my VISA at Jon's house that night and now I was finally QRV with all the necessary paperwork in order to make the trip - yippee!

I left the next morning for Maryland and VA - and since I had some time on my hands, I looked up W3UR's place on mapquest and dropped in on Bernie who was finalizing his Weekly DX. He was busy but had a few minutes and I told him where I was going and my plans as to what to expect from me on 160M once I got there. I asked him and Jon to keep a lid on my participation because after the DX0DX fiasco, I just wanted a bit less pressure on me - just in case this did not go well.....

I hooked up with K3LP for a dinner meal at Dulles and both of us immediately came to the same conclusion - that 7O6T had one fairly

serious design flaw in its configuration. Since 80m and 160M shared the same antenna, it was not possible to do BOTH bands at the same time. Also, there was RX noise at the Summerland Hotel - and there was also station interaction when xmitting on the lowbands - which locked up keyboards at at least two other operating positions when 80M was keying.

OUCH! This was not roger at all.....

## A NEW PLAN ARISES

While we were travelling, the boys on site realized they needed to make some changes and even as we were in the air, the team was moving the 80m/160M vertical from atop the Summerland Hotel to a remote site on the beach - 13km from town on a totally isolated beach - with a fantastic shot to EU/NA and JA - and while primitive at best - it could be managed complete with two 600 foot beverages - one on EU/USA and one aimed at JA. Both looked out over the open ocean and there was NO NOISE out there - in fact the nearest ANYTHING was about 5km from this site. We were not aware of this move until we landed in DUBAI and checked out our emails.

## FACT AND FICTION

Contrary to what appeared on ON4KST, there was NO ON LINE INTERNET anywhere at 7O6T's operating positions. Poor service existed only in the lobby of the Summerland Hotel. There was no SKYPE and connections were abysmal at best to say the least.

The CW and SSB operating positions were 600m apart - and could not talk to each other - so when people started asking " Hey what about RTTY or 10M Moonbounce etc etc - these requests could not be accomodated. We could not talk to each other and out at the beach there was NOTHING. No electricity save for one small generator - no food - no real place to sleep - and it was nearly 100 degrees in the day and close to 90F at night. Operation out there was from a small bunker - it did have a roof and open windows - with mattresses on the sand for sleeping. If you did not remember to bring a roll of toilet paper with you out there, well you were SOL (literally) - if you got caught short!

Also while we were enroute, the team put a second 80m vertical atop the Summerland roof - but it too trashed the other positions - so the Dxpediton never could again operate the lowbands from in town in HADIBO - 80m and 160M operations shared the same antenna out at the beach - which meant operation on 80 was at the expense of 160M and vice versa for the remainder of the expedition.

## OUR ROUTE IN

It was Dulles/IAD to Frankfurt - then a short layover in FKFT and on to DUBAI with about a 6 hour layover. Dave and I hung out in a wine cellar, had a meal and checked out EMAILS for news.

We learned that R7LV and UA3AB had had a better night on the lowbands out at the beach and that the new site seemed to work far better than having the antenna at the SUMMERLAND HOTEL.

I am not sure what they were able to do into NA on Topband - what I

was aware of FOR SURE were only a handful of QSO's made with W4ZV/K8PO/K4SV/N4IS/K1UO and perhaps one or two more. VY2ZM was in the log but not yet VE1ZZ....

## ARRIVAL IN SANAA

Dave and I arrived in the early AM in Sanaa - our flight out was delayed two hours but we used the time for a guided tour with Karina of the sights of the 2.5 million inhabitant capital city since we had some time to kill. I really liked our driver and I asked him about Al QUAEDA in Yemen. His reply surprised me when he said "WE HATE THOSE GUYS....If I ever ran across one I will kill

him!"

So I asked "Okay, I know why we Americans don't like them - why do you hate them?"

Again I was surprised by his logic "He said Jeff - we are a poor country but we are trying to improve. Those guys just want to bring us down. They are not real Islam - and they aren't doing us any good at all!"

I came away with a new perspective - here was a young guy who GETS IT - so there is hope in that part of the world going forward,,,,,

## ARRIVAL in SOCOTRA

We flew out of Sanaa on an Embraer regional jet making a short stopover in

MUKALLA in NE Yemen (near OMAN). From there it was a 90 minute hop to Socotra and from the air one could see it is a LARGE ISLAND - over 100 miles long in fact. Larger than Bahrain A92 even.

Our driver Abdullah met us at the airport with a 706T tee shirt on - and it started to rain. On the drive in we saw a lovely rainbow as it was close to sunset. Upon arrival at the SUMMERLAND Hotel, I took off my stinking clothes - had a shave and a shower - and Dave and I looked up RA9USU who was our team leader at supper. Dave and I pleaded with Dima to let me go out to the beach to join RL3FT who was operating out there that night.

Dima was at first reluctant - but in the end said OKAY for ONE NIGHT only as it was not efficient to have two operators out there - since all the bands were open all night long - and they needed one of us in town after that - but for one night only it was okay.

## BEACH ARRIVAL

Abdullah's brother took Dima and me out to the beach site and we arrived just as the sun was setting. I got a tour of the antenna, the operating position - walked the beverages and had a short meeting/ planning session with Yuri RL3FT who is one of the mainstays at RL3A in Moscow and a WRTC competitor at boot - he is a great

operator - and fortunately we knew each other from Moscow 2010.

Yuri was gracious about letting me join him but rejected Dima's request that he go back into the city - he really wanted to stay out there and operate the lowbands (which was understandable) - so my suggestion that we do it together that first night seemed to win the day and that's how it went that first night. So basically we shared operations/split time together and one keyed with the other listening sidecar on a second of phones - I enjoyed pulling familiar calls out of the noise and that seemed to work well - it was a good teamwork approach to getting some NA into the log. There was no second chair - so I sat atop a suitcase with a pillow on it and by morning - my butt and back were pretty sore - but who cares!!

0000Z Arrives - The band was open to EU and near Asia from sunset until NA time - about 2345z it is possible to hear VE1ZZ and sure enough, Jack called in with a rock crushing signal - which sets the stage for the rest of NA to follow - if there is going to be any opening at all.

About 0010z the first American signals appeared and they were BEYOND WEAK. I have all of this on file and even listening again and again to the signals, I can barely detect W3UR/AA1K/W3BGN/AA1V/N1IW and others who made it into the log that first night. Basically, there is VE1ZZ who is consistently 589/599 - and then THERE IS EVERYBODY ELSE!

I think we worked 29 NA stations in all - with the last being K1GUN/

W1JR and KV4FZ who I copied at least 10 times that initial night. Most signals were 349 to 449 to 549. - with maybe one or two peaking to 559 for a second or two.

## WHAT IT SOUNDED LIKE

Signals had doppler shift on them, a pulsating kind of fading and as sunrise neared - well it is almost impossible to put into words - you just have to listen to it to appreciate what it was really like.

Signals do NOT weaken and then fade out. They become TRANSPARENT as if a human form were to do a LAP DISSOLVE INTO INVISIBILITY and they start sounding like they are coming from outer space - with all kinds of echo on them to boot.

In the moments before true SR (which I could see out on the ocean as the sun rose between two freighters which was kinda neat), you could hear plenty of 229 CW but to get a callsign out of that noise just was impossible - at least for me. Signals sounded near normal until about 0145z but after that, only a few miracle contacts took place with NA0Y and K0LW (both in Missouri) who were worked right as the sun popped out of the ocean.

End of Part I

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I awoke this morning and one of the headlines in the NY Times said that a suicide bomber in Sanaa, Yemen had killed something like 300 people yesterday not far from the government house - if I recall reading it correctly.

Since I was there not 4 days ago, there but the "GRACE OF GOD GO I".....fortunately, our team all made it out of there safely as far as I know and I doubt I would return anytime soon.....even though the Yemeni people I met were all friendly, hard-working people who treated us very very well!

#### LET'S TALK ABOUT 160M STRATEGY

As we all know, 160M is still the GENTLEMAN'S BAND - but, whenever something like a 7O6T shows up, we all (myself included) sometimes forget ourselves and fall into the very bad habit of:

- 1) Calling even when we cannot really hear
- 2) Calling on QSB peaks when we think we might hear
- 3) Calling even when it was not our callsign that the station is responding to

ETC ETC ETC

I heard all of this and MORE in the bedlam that was the 160M NA pileup in the days leading up to my departure to 7O.

W3UR even remarked on ON4KST that when R7LV was answering me and had me as K1Z? K1Z? K1Z? - that every letter of the alphabet was in there on TOP OF ME as I was trying to get the last letter across - and I believe he was probably correct as the calling qrg surely was not clear when I checked it now and then.

Now why am I mentioning this? Well not because it is poor operating procedure (which it truly is and we should all try to be better than that) - but for a far more IMPORTANT reason.

What sounds here in NA as a cacaphony of MASSIVE NOISE that is S9+ 40DB is far worse over at 7O6T. Picking out stations who are 339 in that kind of hysterical calling frenzy takes forever and when openings are really short, what it does is actually drive the RATE DOWN and fewer qso's are actually made in the time that is available - and that hurts everyone.

For example: On 11 May when I worked 134 NA in 85 minutes, I was listening DOWN 4 I think it was and, once the band really opened to the East Coast around 0045z, there was a MASSIVE CORE PILEUP centered on 1821 or so - and truth be told, there was some SERIOUS NA RF in there calling.

However, and this is the main point I wish to make here - even though I am a pretty decent op on Topband, even I cannot deal efficiently with that kind of MESS in my headphones. I quickly realized that I had two choices:

1) Grapple with the HUGE MESS - and pick out a call or a partial call every 2-3 minutes or so - a process which could easily have WASTED PRECIOUS TIME in what were VERY SHORT openings

OR

2) Tune off to the side up or down a bit and listen for stations who were calling in relatively clear space - please note that even a far weaker signal than the MAIN ROARING PILE has a distinct advantage over those in the MAIN PILE - and truly seasoned 160m ops like W9ZR/K8MFO/W8UVZ/K8GG/N4JJ/NA0Y/WB9Z and others are well plugged-in to this fact. They made it into my LOG because they knew what to do in order to be heard - they all realized their signals would never be as BIG over in 70 as stations in Maine or New England and they changed their calling behaviour as a result and it worked!.

The reason I worked as many truly DISADVANTAGED stations in the "hole" as I did was because they did it right and LET ME FIND THEM.

When I spoke to Jerry WB9Z, he told me he had almost given up - but just as the signals were going into "STAR WARS" mode, I found him and I only heard his call once - with all kinds of doppler and echo on it - BUT HE WAS IN THE CLEAR.

He was easy copy even though his true RST was something like 339.

So there is some strategy to be applied here the next time folks:

1) If you think the operator is doing some TUNING on the other side of the pile - spread out and get into a clear spot and LET THE OP FIND YOU.

2) Unless you are a W8JI or a VE1ZZ or even a W8LRL - or unless you happen to own an ocean front location, calling into the MAIN PILE is like suicide. I did not do too much listening to the main pile - except when I could pick out a caller who peaked for a few seconds - but it was far more effective to tune off to the side and work the weaker guys who elected to call outside the maddening, hungry crowd.

Guys - there is a real lesson here.....I hope it works for you the next time if you realize the operator on the other side is not focusing on the main pile exclusively....

## 706T FREQUENCY SELECTION

When I visited with AA1K and W3UR, I told them I probably would listen for the

USA below 1810 kHz in an attempt to keep the European guys out of my hair when directing CQ's to NA only. I usually like 1801-1804 if it is clear. This time, I found for the MOST PART, the EU stations

honored my CQ NA attempts and only a few times did I have to ask for them to give me a clear shot at NA.

THANK YOU TO EUROPE for that kindness - we worked a bazillion Eu stations on Topband - and you guys had more than a clean shot. The NA guys had poor prop and little time to make the grade - and this kindness enabled many to make the grade in the end.

## NA PROPAGATION

Generally, I would have to say condx were POOR to NA during my 5 nights there. Sometimes the band would open about 0000z but close prior to 0100z for the most part.

OR

It would open about 0030z and close to NA for the most part by 0115z, EXCEPT FOR THE NIGHT OF MAY 10 into MAY 11th (by zulu time). This was a kind of day we all LIVE FOR on Topband!

VE1ZZ showed up at 2359z and as usual blew me out of the chair.

I told Jack that I was at the key and he checked in about 5 mins again to advise that I was truly 599+ at his QTH. So I asked Jack to please call me and tell me WHEN NA was hearing me and calling me. This

Jack did as requested and please note he did not tell me who was calling - what he did was say NA W1 is calling now.

About 10 minutes later I managed to pick out a very weak Will K6ND calling from Mass and this started a run of stations that was incredible.

It was slow going at first but by 0040z I could hear the ROARING MAIN PILE - and every time I listened it was CHOCK FULL of W1/W2/W3 stations. If I knew the call, I stayed with it a bit but quickly realized that it was not the best approach.

What I did that night was something I learned long ago from Don Miller's operations in the 1960's. Don, who we all know is infamous, did happen to be one of the smartest CW operators who ever lived - and what I did was only a part of what I knew he was capable of doing in managing a pileup.

I split my VFO's and tuned off the pile in one ear and then listened just on the other side of the MAIN pile in the other ear. I could also hear pieces of the MAIN PILE just off to the side in one ear.

Very soon thereafter I found I was able to pick out 3 to 4 calls at a time and I would send the first one a report.

Sometimes, the calling station did not CFM and come back right away - so I sent the NEXT caller on my short list a report - got the

CFM on that one and then called the first station a second time - if still no reply, I went on to the 3RD callsign I had in my head. If he did not CFM I sent it again. Then I sent a report a 3rd time to caller number 1 and so on and so on until those 3-4 stations I knew were good QSO's.

Then it was on to the next batch of calls - It worked I think because I knew some guys probably were not hearing me all that well - but rather than do this stuff single-thread, I was able to maintain a much HIGHER run rate by multiprocessing the run and there were times that 3-4 qso's were taking place all at the same time - with repeats to be sure being sent when necessary to ensure I heard a guy come back and actually send me a report.

(What Don Miller used to do was a little more extreme - Don would answer 10 stations at a time - send 599 - and then pick out the next 10 and do it again.

As a kid in High School, I used to listen in awe to him do this from VU2WNV - man that guy was really good at it too!)

## THE REMAINING NIGHTS ON 160M

May 12th was an RL3FT night and for Yuri, the band condx of May 11th did not repeat themselves and I know he went out there really psyched and came back complaining that he had NOISE - and that the band did not open for him until something like 0128z. Still I think he said he worked about 4 JA stations (more on that front in another

email) and something like 16 more NA stations. We were both hoping for alot more - but you take what the band gives you and don't question why really.....

May 13th was another K1ZM night and I managed to work something like 10 JA's, plus VU2BGS, 9M2AX, ZS4TX (I think it was this night for Bernie). NA condx were poor and I probably worked only 27 NA stations total.

May 14th was another RL3FT night - and again Yuri said he had NOISE and no condx. He worked no more NA stations as I recall and since 160M was poor, he did some 80CW and some 80SSB. He even worked about 80 stations on 160M SSB. I tried that 3 times and never had a nibble - so congrats to Yuri for at least making some SSB qso's on Topband.

May 15th was my last night out at the beach and I will begin that segment in the next message - as that and the JA story require some bandwidth to relate.

End of Part II

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TODAY's HEADLINES (REDUX)

This morning I noted the Sanaa bombing yesterday.

Truth be told - on the way OUT of 7O6T, we all flew (except JT1CO) from Socotra to Yemen at about the same time. Arriving in Sanaa about 6PM, Karina had a bus waiting and we all went together across the parking lot to pack our stuff into the bus.

She said (since some flights were at 0430AM the next morning - mine was 1010AM) - that we all should go to a hotel, have a meal together, then get some rest in a hotel room - for the long flights home. Her driver would make several early AM runs back to the airport, and we all thought this was a good idea.

We drove and drove and drove from the airport on our way to our hotel - finally entering the OLD CITY of Sanaa with super narrow streets, winding turns, and some really shady looking types peering into the bus windows as we went at 3MPH down some of the narrowest streets imaginable.

(One guy - I forget who it was - muttered "OK, here we go BLACK HAWK DOWN!" We all laughed but it was a NERVOUS LAUGH to be sure!)

K3LP asked if we were driving to CAIRO - and I agreed as it was at least an hour from the airport and I had no idea where the HELL where we were or what our final destination was going to be.

We FINALLY stopped in front of what was a hotel that looked like a house- and in fact it was a 600 year old hotel replete with oriental

rugs, wood floors - a tower restaurant and we all took something like an hour to check in.

Karina then said - "OK guys we will get back on the bus and go to dinner....." Inwardly I said, NO FRIGGIN WAY - Miriam told me NOT TO TAKE STUPID RISKS and I really am NOT going to do this one - no way!

I politely said NO, I preferred not to go - and DIMA RA9USU came over and said "So ZM, you are a scared rabbit - yes?"

I said "Dima - just tell me where you want me to send the flowers when I hear on the news that all you guys were blown up in about an hour!" Dima found this all very amusing but I noticed that K3LP and WD5COV also declined to go back out into those narrow streets again after dark (that bus was a perfect target - and I wanted NONE of that - it just was not worth it...I wasn't that hungry!!!!)

So I checked into my room and called Dave and he and WD5COV and I all went up to the tower restaurant overlooking the city and we had a great, relaxed and SAFE meal. Around 11PM the guys did come back unharmed and I was glad to see them back safe again - but I still did not regret for a second the choice I had made. Especially when I read that NY Times headline this morning.

A FEW WORDS AS TO HOW THINGS WORKED AT 706T

Dima was the master scheduler - each day he made up a matrix showing CALL, LOCATION and OPERATING ASSIGNMENT.(Now remember, I arrived TOTALLY EXHAUSTED in Socotra at 5:30PM after two full days on the road - took a shower, got a shave and a bowl of soup and then went out to the ocean to do a 14 hour shift on 160M with RL3FT. After 3 hours in the sack the next morning, I was on the air again before 4PM and shifts were usually 8 hours ON with 4 hours off - but sometimes it was 12 hours ON with 4 hours off. Thus we were TOTALLY BRAIN DEAD most of the time we were there - and the TEAM MEMBERS usually only had 10 minutes together each day - 5 at breakfast, and 5 at dinner time - there was NO LUNCH.

Thus I really had little quality time to get to know anyone else really - except for DIMA who was reminding me all the time that I was late for my next shift!!!!

I did know JT1CO from PIRIN FIELD last summer in LZ - and he is one neat guy - all he wanted to know every time I saw him was whether I had worked K4ZW and JA1BK on Topband yet??? He was delighted the time I told him I had worked both of them on 160M.

Yuri RL3FT and I spent the most time together - and he is a young talented operator - with a good command of English.

One guy I had only read about on ON4KST was David WD5COV

from far western New Mexico. I found his company great fun and he asked me if I had really written DX'ing on the Edge - as he was a die-hard in the wool Topband Dx'er with something like 238 from New Mexico - using a full sized 4 square array.

I hardly got to know the Russians (and never met RA3AUU/UA3AB/R7LV and N6PSE) - as they departed on the plane that we arrived in - so we were their relief - the 3 other UA guys who were there usually hung out together at meals and we chatted only now and then - but what they most wanted to know was why I chose to live in a place like Franz Josef Land????!!!! I explained and they all just laughed - but if they had heard the VE1ZZ signal on Topband, well, perhaps that might have made it all clear for them - RM2M asked me the same thing as we left - and I gave him a different answer - I said "Because EY8MM is 599, UA9MA is 599, EX2M is 599 and you can hear GM3POI all the time in January on 160M."

In the end, I think there was still a lack of real understanding - chalk that one up to cultural differences I suppose.....

I roomed with Andy LZ2HM who flew in with K3LP and me - we found him in our waiting room at the Dubai airport and neither Dave nor I even knew he was coming. Since I had operated with him at LZ PIRIN FIELD last July, and had hung out with him at WRTC 2006 in Brazil, I knew him pretty well and he lives near the giant M/M superstation at LZ9W in Bulgaria. A young guy and a damned good operator - 160m - to 6M at his home station.

By now perhaps it is clear to you folks reading this that:

- 1) This was a GRIND from start to finish
- 2) The co-leaders wanted RATE RATE RATE and MORE RATE
- 3) A constant comparison was made daily against VP6DX/3B7C and other major dxpeditions - and the team co-leaders wanted to finish as close to the top as we could get in 14 days with 10 ops on the ground at a time - I of course wanted to help but 160m is not a RATE BAND.
- 4) There was damned little time to read emails - and when there was time, the damned internet did not work!
- 5) People who wrote me asking for skeds probably thought I was ignoring them or rude or worse - but I had only a few minutes each day for such pleasantries - and on some days I could not even gain access long enough in order to write home to my wife!
- 6) I did try for skeds with K9FD, several JA friends and ZL3IX - some skeds worked - others did not - one or two were very unfortunate NEAR MISSES with no acceptable qso resulting - despite real attempts to make it a go on special listening QRG's
- 7) I blew the one chance I had to work Raoul ZS1REC - and I really felt bad when I listened to a tape of me calling CQ NA only and off to the side I distinctly heard (two days later .S1REC, .S1REC .S1REC and blew it off thinking it was a European caller ignoring my directed CQ to NA. I feel really badly about this one because I did keep up with ON4KST chat when I could and saw that Raoul had said he had heard me and had called for quite some time with no cigar. Again, Raoul - I am so sorry I did not work you - that one was my error to be sure - I thought it was an S51 or something and was not really paying attention when you called in. - You were off to the side too and I was listening hard to weak NA signals at the time - I feel so badly about that one....
- 8) I never heard a peep from VK3ZL (my cousin Robert Briggs) - who said he called most every day at his SR - but I never could even tell

he was there

WHICH LEADS me now to the night of 14 May (15May by zulu)

MY LAST NIGHT out at the BEACH

On the 12th/13th - I saw that my nightly total on Topband was somewhat down from the day before - and since I had not done any 80 at all up to that point, I got pulled aside by Yuri - who suggested (politely) that we had a chance for the #4 or #5 all time DX pedition qso total - and that it might be advisable after looking for JA on 160M - for me to go down to 80M from 1930z until 2400z.

He noted I had worked about 20 stations the last time during this period - and I realized I may have been a bit too 160m oriented (my first love and primary objective) - but that perhaps I had overdone it in my zeal to work the marginal stations - so I mixed it up the last night.

I got out there right at sunset and listened hard for K9FD - Merv heard pieces of me but no cigar.

Same story with ZI3IX - we both heard each other - but not at the same time - and even though it was close - Greg felt it was not enough to call it a good one. He did not hear the report I sent him - and I do not recall hearing him send me a report but I did copy his call.

After that I worked RA0FF and several UA0's and then it was time for

JA.

LET's TALK ABOUT JA (or lack thereof).

It was truly DEPRESSING to try to work JA. I looked at a map and it seemed JA was no further away from 70 than the NA mid-west was - yet JA signals were almost all BELOW my noise level.

I tried PREAMP 1 ON, PREAMP 2 ON, ATTENUATOR ON, AGC OFF - JA BEV IN - EU BEV IN - LISTEN on the XMIT antenna - nothing worked.

The first time I tried for JA - I barely copied JR7VHZ, and JA1BK and about 3-4 more went into the log.

Right at JA Sunrise, I could hear many calling at about RST 119 to 129. A good JA signal was about RST 229 at best.

JA8ISU called me for hours that first day and NO QSO - I never even heard Kaz.

I had JH0BB? in my sights but did not realize it was JH0BBE until he wrote me an email that evening asking me if it was a good one. (It was not)

JH7PFD wrote to thank me for the qso and I had to write back to advise that I had not even heard him at all. I said try again.

So here it was - 1730z on my last night and I was determined to work some JA's. I do not remember them all but I did work JA8ISU, JH4UYB, JH7PFD, JA5FXK, JA3ONB and quite a few other JA calls not known to me - and I think they were not busts - I think I had about 20 JA's in all - with several from the JA6 call area quite late in fact (1940z or so).

After JA SR had occurred, I trekked out to the antenna to switch the antenna over to 3.52 for 80M CW and then headed there.

Mind you, it was a LONG walk to the antenna over large ROCKS, spare tires on the beach, other rubble and it was hard to see even with a flashlight and I was ALONE.

It took about 10 mins time out and back and then it took me 5 mins to change bands and get set up again. This is why I had not moved to 80M before - I was afraid of making a mistake and if I blew something up, well it was TODDLES - there was no one to ask for help to bail you out!

I got to 80 and ran JA for awhile - then EUROPEANS - the two bevs were quite directive - JA's were no copy on the EU bev and EU stations were barely audible on the JA beverage. I wound up staying down there for about 2.5 hours on 80CW and managed to put 250 CW qso's on 80 into the log.

Then I decided to take the walk out to the antenna again to switch it over to 3.750. Again there was about a 12 minute transition to get all set up again.

I had some real trouble getting the I was using K3 so it would produce UNDERSTANDABLE SSB signals that MY EARS could process - I never found a setting that sounded like my FT1000D - but I found settings (eventually) where I could at least understand most signals and on a wild hunch I set up on 3799. I called CQ for 5 mins and finally a SV3 answered me. He was good and loud and I thought "OK - so where is EVERYBODY ELSE???"

I asked him to SPOT me and within 30 seconds the roof fell in on me! That created a JAGOON pileup and I stopped the pile and decided to go split. I started listening 3780-3795 and soon had to go 3770-3795.

The pile was so thick that at first I still had trouble understanding ANYONE - especially since we all had turned the AGC off on all the K3's - something about not having the latest version of the AGC download - I dunno as the K3 was not a radio I was really familiar with- but slowly I started adjusting my ears to what was coming out of that K3 - and the rate started moving up dramatically.

For some reason, guys all piled up on 3770 and 3795. I kept asking them to spread out and when a few SMART ones did, they went quickly into the log. OH6NIO called me and he was 4/4 but he was on a CLEAR frequency and solid copy - so too were stations from the UK who were 30 db down from the Italian callers - who, for some reason, were incredibly LOUD over there on both 160M and 80M.

I stuck with SSB for more than 3 hours and about 2330z VY2RU Ken called in from PEI - soon followed by his wife ELLA who is VY2PEI. I forget who was first from NA thereafter - I know K1FZ and N1RJ were near the start of the opening and I started listening for NA 3799 QSX on 3787 I think.

W1QS John Lawrence called in and said "YOU KNOW WHO THIS IS?" And since I grew up with John and had had lunch with him in Maine on the way down (and he too knew I was going to 7O) - I told him "Wow - you are more than as S unit over the pile which had now stretched down to MD/VA and Eastern PA.)

I worked NA exclusively for 45 mins and then had a gut wrenching decision to make:

1) I noticed I had worked 250 stations on 80 CW and had picked up the rate so that I had now worked 500 SSB stations in less than 3 hours on 3799.

2) It was almost 0030z and I prayed that 160m might again produce another good opening for an hour or so

3) I knew if I left 75 phone that guys further west would miss out - so I flipped a coin and it was qsy to 1824.6 again

I made the trek out to the antenna one more time and set up again on 1824.6 In that I was really spent by this time, my motor functions were quite labored but I got it together and was QRV on topband again. I think VE1ZZ called in again - but OH CRAP - he was much weaker - only 569/579 at this time.

From there onward, it was grunt and groan - but a few good things happened. I did work a few guys who really needed me still including N4RJ/K5UR/VE3CSK and about 15 more NA stations.

When the signals again went STAR WARS around 0152z - I kept calling cq and I could hear guys in there still calling - but by then all I could mentally deal with was a bunch of echo/doppler shift and flutter. The sun again popped up out of the ocean between the two freighters again - and my stint on the lowbands at 7O6T was history.

In the end I think 229 NA stations were worked - I truly wish I could have done more - I had pieces of AT LEAST 50 other calls but they got away from me - Mainly because they were callsigns I had never heard on Topband before. I noticed that many of the calls I logged were stations that are not 160M regulars at all - guys like K1BD/AA1V/many W2's and W3's I do not recall hearing on the band at all - but they all came down to Topband on May 11th and many of them got into the log by calling away from the MAIN PILE.

THAT LAST MORNING was a KILLER!

Normally, Aisa, Abdullah's brother, would come to collect me at 0730 AM. Since sunrise was at 0502 local time, I would spend two hours lying on the sand on a mattress and try to sleep. But once the sun was up, temps went from 88F to 110F within minutes - and I found myself sitting in a POOL of SWEAT until Aisa got there - and sleep was not particularly easy to come by in that kind of setting when you are soaking wet!.

About 8AM Aisa, Yuri, Alexy and one other UA showed up and Yuri

said we had to take all the stuff down which took about an hour.

I wanted to go back to the hotel and crash - but the rest of the guys wanted to swim and then go out for a BOAT RIDE with one of the local fisherman.

I politely smiled, loaded up Aisa's TOYOTA land cruiser with all the gear they had assembled - while they were out on the ocean - and then just sat in the shade until around 0930 when they all came back in. I would normally have loved to take a swim - and go on the boat ride - but it was so FRIGGIN HOT and I felt like CRAP - that I do not think I would have enjoyed it very much personally.

On the way in we stopped at Aisa's home to off load the generator, Yuri gave him my operating table lamp and the FAN from our operating position and we took a tour of Abdullah's and Aisa's home.

Socotran families live for the most part in simple open concrete and cinder block homes with several rooms - rooms are open to the air on one side usually - with windows but no glass - and a walled in compound. Most have goats (and if you really rich you might have a cow as well!)

A typical Socotran family has 20 children and several generations all live together in the compound. Since most Yemeni women are required to wear complete cover when out in town, I did notice that Aisa's sister was uncovered since that is allowed at home and she was the only Yemeni woman I saw without full cover - and she was beautiful! We were told that it is forbidden to take photos of Yemeni women - that is a real NO NO.

Finally, after the stop over at Aisa's - I thought I was almost going to be back in my room with good A/C - but Yuri wanted to drop off our gear at the Taj Socotra (which was not the CW hotel where I slept) - as soon as they went inside I asked Aisa to drop me down the street and then come back in 5 mins for them - as I could no longer stand it any more!

I got into the Summerland lobby - wolfed down some OJ, a few pancakes & some vegetables and then hit the sack. (Dima would awaken me at 4PM for my last stint on HF - but all I could think about at that point was getting HORIZONTAL and fast!)

I did run into DIMA and K3LP in the lobby of the Summerland Hotel and they asked me "So how did it go? Did you actually make some qso's out there last night? I smiled inwardly and said - "Yeah guys - it was a good night - I got 250 on 80CW, 500 on 80SSB and 50 on 160M - total of 800.....howz that grab you?

They were a bit surprised to say the least - and I knew I had partially redeemed myself for my prior night's performance of around 140 total all in on 160M - I hit the sack feeling as if I had DONE GOOD in the eyes of my peers - remember - their objective was RATE and overall 7O6T qso total. Mine was to work the boys on topband - and somehow we managed an acceptable harmonization in the end.....

+++++

## Epilogue

At the end of the day RL3FT and I managed to work 225 NA stations on Topband from 706T - and many recordings of NA signals can be found under the AUDIO CLIPS tab on my personal website which is <http://www.vy2zm.com>

If you would like to hear what it sounded please take a look and hope you enjoy the show!

73 JEFF VY2ZM/K1ZM