



XZ1J DXpedition to Myanmar

A prized DXCC entity takes to the air!

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Myanmar is one of those strange and mystical places with people who are serenely quiet and gentle. In most large Asian cities you hear the continual honking of car, bus, and scooter horns. In Yangon, in contrast, you hear mostly the chants of monks and the muted clangs of small ceremonial bells. There are no scooters in Yangon; they are not allowed.

In 1989, the military government changed the names of many places in an effort to shed Burma's colonial past. Burma became Myanmar. Rangoon became Yangon.

Myanmar is diverse with more than 135 distinct ethnic groups. There are many people whose origins are Tibet, China, and India. Approximately 90% of the population is Buddhist while 4 percent are Muslim and 2 percent are Catholic or Hindu.

Myanmar is in the monsoon region of Asia and its coastal regions receive as much as 200 inches of rain annually. While we were there the weather was predominantly hot and humid.

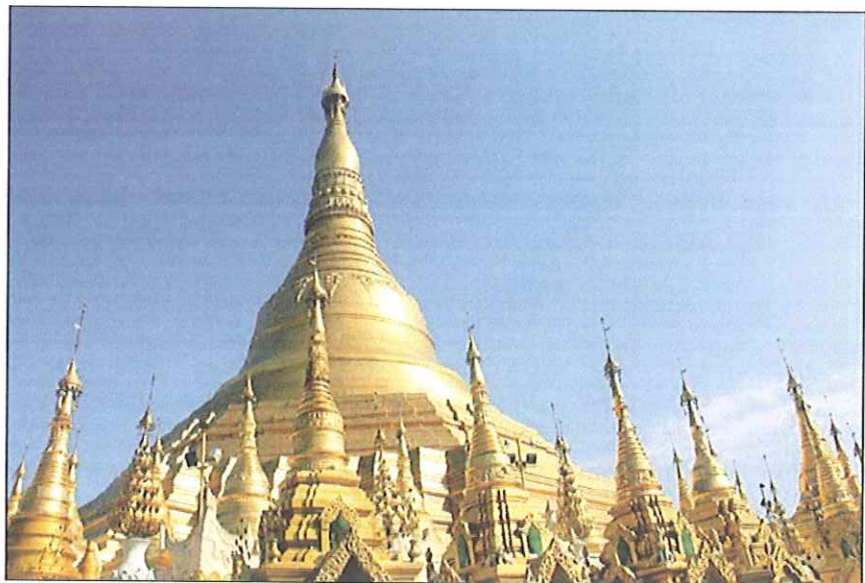
Good things are happening in Myanmar these days. Reforms and democracy are taking hold. In 2011 the military junta was officially dissolved following the 2010 general election and civilian government was restored. The new government is more responsive to the needs of the people and our team leader Zorro Miyawawa, JH1AJT, sensed a potential opening for Amateur Radio.

Getting the License

You might say that Zorro is a determined man. A successful businessman, philanthropist and humanitarian, he made ten visits to Myanmar over a 4 year period to gain permission to bring a mul-



Team members PY2NDX, N6PSE, VR2KF, K3LP, JH1AJT, JA1TRC, DJ9ZB and PP5XX meet for the first time in Yangon, Myanmar.



The Shwedagon Pagoda.

Rafael and Peter help assemble our Spiderbeam at the SSB shack.



Obara and Champ help erect the CW camp antennas.

tional DXpedition team to activate country as XZ1J. It would be the first large-scale Amateur Radio operation from Myanmar in more than a decade.

Zorro's first mission in the country was to establish programs to nurture IT technicians and trainers, provide support

for medical and education programs, provide water purification equipment, and improve personal hygienic programs by providing education and training for physicians, nurses and public health workers. They formed a joint project with the Union of Myanmar Federation of

Chambers of Commerce and Industry. These contacts led to Zorro's involvement with the Ministries of Health, Communications and Information Technology.

In a relatively short time Zorro received permission to carry out a demonstration operation as XZ1Z. A few months later, Champ, E21E1C, would join Zorro and conduct a brief operation once again as XZ1Z. These demonstrations gave the government the confidence to approve a major DXpedition to activate Myanmar on all modes and bands as XZ1J.

Being an avid DXer and DXpeditioner with previous experiences in Eritrea, Yemen, Ethiopia, Kenya, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Cambodia, Zorro recognized the significance of the Mount Pleasant in the hills just north of the Myanmar capitol of Nay Pyi Taw. Mount Pleasant rises to approximately 1600 feet above the valley. At the summit is the Mount Pleasant Hotel, a superb venue for the DXpedition. If all went as planned, we would arrive at the hotel and be on the air on November 15, 2013. Our plan was to operate through the morning of November 26.

For their XZ1Z demonstrations Zorro and Champ had used simple vertical an-



Our CW shack atop the hill with low band verticals in the foreground.



Champ, E21EIC, wades into the CW pileups.

tennas. However, for the XZIJ DXpedition they realized that Yagi antennas and amplifiers would be required.

Meeting in Yangon

The team members flew to Yangon, Myanmar where they met for the first time. It was a great pleasure for me to visit and operate again with David, K3LP, and Peter, PP5XX. I was also honored to meet Zorro, JH1AJT, Franz, DJ9ZB, and the rest of the XZIJ team. Champ, E21EIC, and his lovely wife JC, E20KNB, would join us in Nay Pyi Taw since they could fly directly from their home in Bangkok.

In all, the team was comprised of the following operators: Zorro, JH1AHT; Franz, DJ9ZB; JC, E20KNB; Champ, E21EIC; Katsu, JA1DXA; Jay, JA1TRC; David, K3LP; Paul, N6PSE; Peter, PP5XX; Rafael, PY2NDX, and Kazu, VR2KF.

We were fortunate to have one full day of sightseeing in Yangon before our flight to Nay Pyi Taw the following day. We visited the Shwethalyaung Reclining Buddha and the Shwedagon Pagoda. President Obama had visited both sites recently and US flags were still proudly displayed in Yangon and in Nay Pyi Taw.

The flight from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw takes about an hour. Nay Pyi Taw is inland, near the center of the country.

A few years ago, the Myanmar government moved from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw, so the airport and much of the infrastructure there is very new. At the time we arrived they were preparing for the 27th South East Asia Games.

As we flew over Southern Myanmar on our way to the central highlands, I marveled at the vast untouched forests and waterways. Myanmar is rich in natural resources and has plentiful water. On the other hand, Myanmar lacks modern intercity highways and railways that most developed countries enjoy.

Upon our arrival in Nay Pyi Taw, we immediately made the 40-minute drive up Mount Pleasant to our hotel venue. We decided to make a CW/RTTY camp on the north side of the roadway that divides the mountaintop and the various wings of the hotel. The SSB camp was placed directly on the other side of the road to provide some separation between the stations and the antennas.

At our CW camp, we installed a set of 403A high power bandpass filters and an antenna combiner that allowed us to operate simultaneously on 10, 15, and 20 meters from a single Yagi antenna at high power levels. This worked very well and saved us a lot of time since we only had to set up one directional antenna instead of three.

We also set up vertical antennas for 12, 17, 30, 40, and 80 meters. For 160 meters, we employed the services of a



Peter, PP5XX, worked many of the SSB pileups.

rather adept tree climber to take our long wire high into the branches. This made a very effective support for our 160 meter antenna.

Over at the SSB camp, we set up a five-band Spiderbeam Yagi for 10, 12, 15, 17, and 20 meters. We installed vertical antennas for additional WARC bands as well as 40 and 80 meters. For SSB operating we relied on a pair of Kenwood TS-590S radios while at the CW camp we used one TS-590S and an Elecraft K3 dedicated to the low bands.

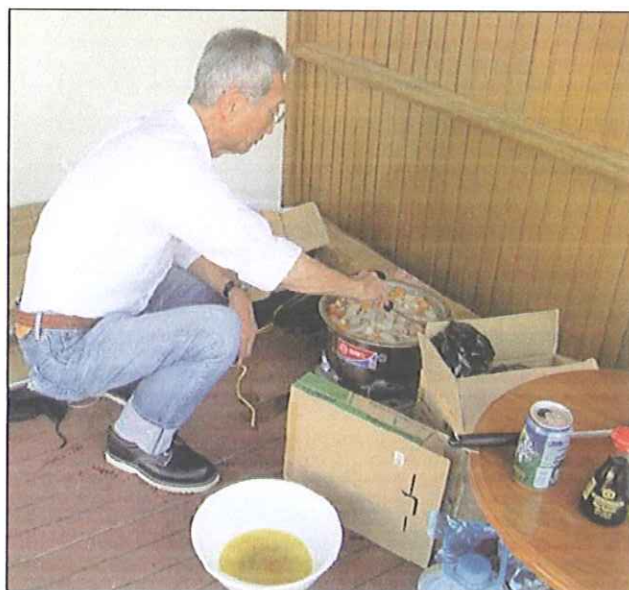
Massive Pileups

The pileups for XZIJ were enormous. This was aided by the fact that propagation on the high bands was quite good.

The SFI varied between 160 and 170 during the entire time we were there. Ten, 12, and 15 meters were quite productive during our operation. Seventeen and 20 meters were less productive, but still useful.

The team quickly got into our working shifts and everyone enjoyed the pileups. While we could work Asia and Europe easily at almost any time, it was more of a challenge to work North America. Those contacts were made primarily at or near our sunrise and sunset.

Zorro stressed that one of our major goals was to fulfill the need for Myanmar contacts among North American



Our leader, Zorro, JH1AJT, makes another tasty meal!



The XZ1J team pauses for a photo.



The team celebrates the culmination of their successful DXpedition with a colorful cake.

amateurs. I particularly enjoyed working the East Coast of North America via the long path each evening at our sunset. Ten and 12 meters were spectacular to the States and 15 meters was quite good. Much of the time, it was easier for us to work the US East Coast than it was to work the West Coast, despite being much closer. The openings for the West Coast were only via short path and occurred just minutes after our sunrise. Propagation to the West Coast would start in W0/W9 and work its way westward through W7 and W6.

It is worth noting that we were able to work North America so effectively only because the operators in Japan were so polite and well disciplined. They would adhere to our requests to stand-by and allow us to work the farthest regions. We had propagation to much of Asia around the clock on many of the bands

Operating from Asia

Operating from Asia is a unique experience. The man made noise levels can be high. Other than noise, our main nemesis was the dreaded "Chinese Radar" that would suddenly appear and sweep through the bands, destroying our ability to hear our pileups. We were occasionally forced to abandon a large pileup on a band with good propagation because the Chinese Radar had suddenly made us deaf.

We also encountered interference from Asian taxi cabs and fishing fleets on 10 meters. I'm sure most amateurs had no idea how difficult it was to pull their call signs out of the noise and QRM.

After the first three days, team members Kazu, VR2KF, Katsu, JA1DXA, and JC, E20NKB, had to return to their home countries. The remaining seven operators kept busy manning the stations and giving out as many contacts as possible. Jay, JA1TRC, was also preoccupied with capturing the logs and uploading them to Club Log each day.

Champ, E21EIC, was our all-around troubleshooter and IT expert. Hardly a day passed when he wasn't resolving one problem or another. Champ is also an enthusiastic operator who would rather be on the air than sleeping, eating, or pretty much anything else!

The Push for RTTY

The CQ World-Wide CW Contest was underway during our last weekend. We decided to stay clear of the contest and instead focus on RTTY as there was a significant need for XZ contacts on that mode. The need was so great that at one point we had three separate stations running on RTTY! A few of the team members had not tried RTTY before and they found that they really enjoyed it.

Zorro and his assistants Jay, Obara, and our local guide Win, took very good

care of the team. Zorro cooked us many nice meals on the balcony of our CW shack. He is quite the chef! We also enjoyed group meals together at the Mount Pleasant Hotel. In order to maximize our operating time, the team elected to have two meal breaks each day. Zorro and Jay kept many kinds of fresh fruit and snacks on hand as well. No one was deprived on this DXpedition!

During the XZ1J activation, Zorro was very busy with his NGO and humanitarian activities. He attended meetings at the various Ministries and even held a meeting with the President of Myanmar.

We came to Myanmar hoping to exceed 50,000 contacts. As the operation ended, we were thrilled to discover that we had made 54,648 contacts with 17,847 unique stations. It was an unqualified success!

Closing Thoughts

Not only was the DXpedition itself a thrill, the pleasure of experiencing the people and culture of Myanmar made it well worth the trip. Everyone seemed genuinely glad to have us visiting their country.

We are very grateful to all of our club, foundation, equipment and individual sponsors. It is only through the generous contributions of the global DX community that rare entities such as Myanmar can be activated.