

There's a house overlooking the Caribbean on the island of Curacao that has been home to multi-multi contest operations for each of the past 50 years, starting with the CQ World Wide CW DX Contest in 1967. Here's the story of the station's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, complete with participation by one of the original team members. (And oh, yes, they won!)



# PJ2T, W1FJ, and the Curacao Half-Century CQWW Celebration

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*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” –Lao Tzu*

**T**hat one step was taken in November 1967, when Al Rousseau, W1FJJ, operated on a team that “won the world” from Curacao in the CQ World Wide CW contest<sup>1</sup>. Last fall, precisely 50 years later, in that same location, he did it again!

The “Curacao Half-Century CQWW Celebration” commemorates 50 years of continuous intense contesting from Curacao’s Coral Cliff neighborhood, honors the memory of five famous Silent Keys who were on that 1967 PJ3CC team, and salutes Al, now W1FJ, who returned to Curacao to win again. But let’s rewind to the beginning, as none of this would have been possible without the remarkable Chet Brandon (SK; *Photo A*).

## Chester Brandon

First licensed as W8BFH in Detroit, Chet was larger than life. By age 40, he held 380 patents (mostly in the field of optics)<sup>2</sup> and had lived in Michigan, New York, Cuba, Texas, California, and Puerto Rico<sup>3</sup>. At Brandon Scientific Development, he designed telescope optics that are still in use today, and is credited with the optics used in the U2 spy plane to detect missile launchers in Cuba<sup>4</sup>. In 1963, Chet moved to Curacao and first explored the Great Santa Marta Bay area on horseback, eventually picking his way through the brush to the ocean. The natural beauty of that site inspired him to build the Coral Cliff Hotel, which he and his XYL Mae began operating in 1964<sup>5</sup>. During this time, he variously signed PJ5CE, PJ2CC, and PJ3 Coral Cliff.

People said Chet could not rest<sup>6</sup>. He might sit for a cold drink for about three minutes, but then he would launch out of his chair and into action. He built most of the hotel on his own, most proud of forming and pouring its many concrete arches. He’d do a week of work in a day, then rush off to



*Photo A. Chet Brandon, PJ3CC (SK), at his Coral Cliff Hotel, Curacao, 1964. (All photos courtesy of the author)*

tackle something else, all in blistering heat and with only one functioning eye. He later became W4LXJ<sup>7</sup> and moved on to other projects in Bonaire, Florida, and Wisconsin, passing away in 1998 at the age of 83, leaving behind a big family and a remarkable legacy of scientific and entrepreneurial accomplishments.<sup>8</sup>

## Curacao’s “Radioactive” Coral Cliff Neighborhood

Chet’s hotel was in a very isolated spot. At Curacao’s small village of Soto is a minor side road that winds a couple of miles through brush and cacti alongside Great Santa Marta

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*Photo B. The author (L) and Al Rousseau, W1FJ, with the 1967 PJ3CC CQWW winning trophy.*



*Photo C. John Thompson, W1BIH (SK), presents one of many historic Curacao contest awards to author and current owner of John's house, Geoff Howard, WØCG, in 2004.*

Bay and then climbs a very steep hill where you're treated to a stunning view of the Caribbean Sea ahead and below. On clear days, you can see Venezuela. In the mile from that hilltop to the road's dead end are the ruins of the former Coral Cliff hotel, about a dozen privately-owned condos, a bed-and-breakfast, and 13 private homes at the dead end. Taken together, these comprise the Coral Cliff neighborhood. Over the past 50 years, this area has been probably the most active spot worldwide in amateur radio contesting.

The hamming began when the January 1964 issue of *CQ* announced that "Chet Brandon, PJ5CE, will accept reservations starting January 15 for a ham vacation at his Coral Cliff Hotel in the Netherlands Antilles<sup>5</sup>." Then, in 1967, Chet persuaded a group of prominent U.S. contesters to come to Curacao and try out what he had come to believe was the best DX location on the planet. They arrived in November, somewhat skeptical, but were immediately impressed. W4KFC, W1BIH, W4GF, W3GRF, W1TX, and W1FJJ signed Chet's

PJ3CC callsign and, using simple antennas, were stunned to win the World #1 multi-multi category trophy in the CQWW CW contest (*Photo B*). Now Chet had their attention.

The magical conditions that led to that contest victory from Coral Cliff stimulated an avalanche of contest operations in ensuing years. PJØCC (1968), PJØCW, and PJØDX (1969), PJØFC (1970), PJ9JT (1971), PJ9JT, and PJ9JR (1974), PJ9JR (1978), and PJ2CC (1979 and '80) are some of the early world wins achieved from Coral Cliff<sup>9</sup>.

In 1971, W1BIH (from the 1967 crew; *Photo C*) contracted with Chet to have a house built in the neighborhood for contesting, and John's house began supporting 27 years of contest operations. In that time, John's PJ9JT callsign became famous worldwide. In 1990, Radioteam Finland operated CQWW SSB as PJ9W from Coral Cliff, shipping in huge quantities of equipment, towers, and more than 20 people. They set a new all-time scoring record in the contest. That operation was documented in a video by WA7LNW and heightened worldwide attention on the Coral Cliff area as a prime contest location.

In 1998, medical problems forced John and Mary to put the QTH up for sale. I bought it in 2000 and named the place "Signal Point," and high-intensity contesting continued from that house signing Papa **John 2 Thompson**. In the intervening 17 years, PJ2T has operated almost every single major contest and is approaching a million contest QSOs in addition to another million or so outside of contest weekends. Contesters have come to count on the Curacao multiplier on six bands.

### The Return of W1FJ

Al Rousseau, formerly W1FJJ and now W1FJ, is the only surviving member of the 1967 PJ3CC crew. He happily accepted our invitation to return to the Coral Cliff neighborhood to reprise the 1967 PJ3CC operation precisely 50 years later. Our 2017 crew was honored and excited to meet the legendary W1FJ and his partner, Ruth (*Photo D*). We enjoyed a delightful week hearing stories from 1967, sharing a full-scale American Thanksgiving dinner, and working together to prepare the PJ2T station for the weekend competition. Al was our VIP guest of honor, yet he was more than willing to get his hands dirty, working in the extreme heat and sun to set up a temporary antenna and string 1,000 feet of feedline through very hostile fields of cactus.

During the contest weekend, we welcomed about 12 visitors from VERONA, Curacao's ham radio club (*Photo E*), who had come to share in the celebration and to meet Al. On the Saturday of the contest, Mr. Glennert Reidel, a senior official in Curacao's Bureau Telecommunicatie, Curacao's telecommunication regulator, visited in order to meet W1FJ (*Photo F*) and to compliment PJ2T on the half-century celebration.

### Al's Winning Influence

In the best of all possible scenarios for our half-century celebration, we were able to win the contest in the multi-multi category, PJ2T's first win in CQWW CW after over 20 years of trying. On top of that, Al turned out to be our crew's top operator, making more QSOs (2,126) than any of the rest of us, and, despite poor band conditions, attaining our fastest rate-hour (196) of the 48-hour competition. He's still absolutely at the top of his game!

Our PJ2T crew of W1FJ, K1YR, NA2U, K2PLF, N5OT, N7IR, KB7Q, W8WTS, WØCG, and WØTT (*Photo G*) could not possibly have had a better outcome or more fun than over Thanksgiving weekend in Curacao, fortunate to "win the world" with the guy who had done it 50 years prior. PJ2T will





*Photo D. Al Rousseau, W1FJ, and his partner, Ruth, at PJ2T's 2017 Thanksgiving dinner.*

QSL the contest 100% via the bureaus with a special commemorative foldout QSL.

## Remembering the Great Ones

The 1967 PJ3CC roster is a Who's-Who of famous contesters, and we are thrilled to call attention to their memory and honor them with our half-century celebration.

**Victor C. Clark, W4KFC (SK)**, Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC), President of ARRL (1982-83), was such a famous and proficient contester that he was regarded by many as nearly godlike. Born in Falmouth, Massachusetts, he grew up in Phoenix and earned his degree from George Washington University. A charter member of ARRL, life member of QCWA, and senior member of IEEE, he was also a regional IARU president. He served many years with the FAA and, in 1963, became Director of the Coast Guard Electronics Laboratory<sup>10</sup>.

**Bill Grenfell, W4GF (SK)**, PVRC, was very well-known within amateur circles, not just as a PVRC member. For years, he served as the Chief of the FCC's Rules Branch. The 1967 contest was the start of a four-year run in CQWW CW in which Bill and Vic were on the winning world multi-multi team with a different callsign each year: PJ3CC, PJØCC, PJØCW, and PJØFC<sup>11</sup>.

**John Thompson, W1BIH, PJ9JT (SK)** had a house built at Curacao's Coral Cliff in 1971 for contesting, and decades of intense operating from his house followed. The PJ2T group has honored John's memory with our callsign PJ2T, and by continuing the tradition of very intense contesting from the PJ9JT house.

**Len Cheretok, W3GRF (SK)**, PVRC, was first licensed at 15 and operated his home-built station from a three-story row house in Philadelphia between 1936 and 1940. From this poor location, he managed a pre-war WAS and WAC. After serving in the Signal Corps during WWII, he helped organize the Potomac Valley Radio Club and served as a leader of the club for many years. His 15-acre hilltop station with three towers became famous in DX and contest circles<sup>12</sup>.

**Roy Fosberg, W1TX (SK)**, was an engineer at Connecticut Light and Power and an avid DXer. He's known for the great vertical antenna on 160 that he built on his small lot in the outskirts of Hartford. He was a member of the Connecticut Wireless Association (CWA) and the First Class Operators' Club (FOC), and a brewer of dandelion wine<sup>13</sup>.



*Photo E. W1FJ running 10 meters and PJ2BR, president of Curacao's radio club, VERONA.*



*Photo F. W1FJ and Mr. Glennert Reidel of Curacao's Bureau Telecommunicatie at PJ2T during the contest.*

All five of these gentlemen were famous, highly-accomplished contesters. We stand on their shoulders at PJ2T and were excited to remember and honor them. I was even lucky enough to have met Vic and Bill as a kid. In the early 1960s, I was WN8KUW, and as a young teen, W8IYD took me to the West Virginia ARRL Convention at Jackson's Mill. I met W4KFC and W4GF there, pretty much unable to speak with excitement at seeing these giants of our hobby. I was fortunate to win the CW contest most years at the convention, and my knees practically buckled when Vic sought me out in the crowd with a handshake of congratulation. I also vividly remember being dizzily impressed seeing Vic and Bill arrive in a private plane, park it on the tiny ramp at Jackson's Mill, and walk up the hill to the convention, luggage in hand. In the final analysis, probably all that any of us hope for in life is somehow to be remembered, and we remember these five great men with fondness and respect.

## Why Contest?

What motivated these legends of our hobby to contest, and why do we continue today? We love wireless! We were all fascinated as kids with invisible, nearly instantaneous, very



Photo G. PJ2T CQWW CW 2017 Team: NA2U, N5OT, N7IR, WØTT, WØCG, W1FJ with 1967 PJ3CC trophy, K2PLF, K1YR, KB7Q, and W8WTS.

long distance communication, and none of that enthusiasm has faded. True, we can now have a real-time video chat with Bulgaria on a smartphone, but there's billions of dollars of infrastructure between us and that distant guy. With HF wireless, it's simply backyard to backyard, over paths thousands of miles long, and that's a miracle.

For those who love wireless, contests are simply the best way to get an intensely concentrated firehose intensity wireless fix. In the 48 hours of the CQ World Wide contest, for example, we have at PJ2T made more than 16,000 contacts and attained Five Band DXCC, all in a weekend! That's a lot of wireless!

And there's no better test for your station than a contest. We're all always tinkering with gear and antennas, trying to build that ever-better race car, and on-the-air competitions are a great chance to take that car out and race it hard and fast. Most of us in contesting have a need for speed — possibly working over 400 per hour on SSB (W2SC) or logging 1,000+ QSOs in just one hour of a large multi-multi (D4C)<sup>14</sup>. That's an adrenaline high!

## The CQ World Wide DX Contest

This is the big one. On the fourth full weekend of October each year, the CQ World Wide DX SSB Contest typically involves some 30,000 stations and 8,500<sup>15</sup> submitted logs, and is certainly the world's largest sporting event in terms of both numbers of participants and geographical span. Beginning at

0000Z Saturday and continuing non-stop for 48 hours on 160, 80, 40, 20, 15, and 10 meters, there are more stations on the air, from more parts of the globe, than at any other time all year. Contestants rapidly exchange callsigns, signal reports, and the number of their CQ zone (Curacao is in Zone 9). Contacts are generally computer-logged, the logs are sent in for evaluation within five days after the contest, and the validated results are published by CQ in the April issue. There's something for everyone in the contest, with categories for high or low power or QRP, single or multiple transmitters, single or multiple bands, use of spotting assistance (or not), 24 or 48 hours of operating, and even a category for rookies. This nets 50 different categories of entry. You need not have a monster station in order to be competitive in many of these categories.

On the fourth full weekend in

November is the CW version of the contest, and in some years, CW participation has exceeded the SSB contest. Since the contest's beginning in 1948, CQWW contest activity has been ever on the rise. In 1967, PJ3CC's year, 1,641 CQWW CW logs were submitted. Last year, that number was 8,451<sup>16</sup>. The results are elsewhere in this issue.

Check out the WA7BNM contest calendar at <[www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/](http://www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/)>, pick out a contest, look up the rules, and get in on the fun.

## PJ2T Today

PJ2T is in its 18<sup>th</sup> year of operating from John Thompson's Coral Cliff house. We're a loosely organized group of about 20 guys who pool resources and effort to keep the big station maintained and active. The composition of our group changes over time as our members' life situations and interests evolve, but we've been fortunate to be able to maintain an ever-changing cadre of committed people for nearly two decades. N8NR, WA9S, W9VA, and I are the only active members from the original group. We struggle financially, but have managed to hang on by our fingernails for a very long time and hope to be able to continue.

We believe that PJ2T has been the most-logged callsign in contesting for many years running now. We've made nearly a million contest QSOs with this callsign, and are happy to be able to honor Chet Brandon, PJ9EE, and John Thompson, PJ9JT, by continuing the tradition of intense contesting that they started in 1967 from Curacao's Coral Cliff. Their work decades ago impacts us daily at PJ2T. Thanks for working us, and a big salute to Ruth and to Al, W1FJ, for making his contesting return to Curacao for the half-century CQWW celebration. It was an honor.

### Notes:

1. John H. Thompson, W1BIH, "How to Make Five Million (points, that is)", *CQ Amateur Radio* (Pt. Washington, NY, October 1968), p. 84.
2. Jim Brandon, Memorial presentation, February 17, 1997 (Bonaire).
3. "Organize Librascope Overseas Unit," *Librazette* (Glendale, CA, September-October 1959), p. 3.
4. Mary Rumelle (daughter), via email (K8ND, June 17, 2013).
5. "Announcing," *CQ Amateur Radio* (New York, January 1964), p. 20.
6. Mary Gay Stone, Personal interview (WØCG, Curacao, February 13, 2001).
7. *Amateur Radio Callbook*, (New York, NY, Watson-Guptill Publishing, 1985).
8. Thanks K8ND for research on Chester Brandon.
9. *CQ World Wide DX Contest*, <[www.cqww.com/winners.htm](http://www.cqww.com/winners.htm)>.
10. "W4KFC – November 25, 1983", <<http://bit.ly/2DxiRu3>>.
11. K3ZJ, via email (WØCG, October, 2017).
12. Victor Clark, W4KFC, "One Man's Family of Antennas," *CQ Amateur Radio* (New York, March, 1961), p.45.
13. W1RM, via email (WØCG, October 12, 2017).
14. *CQ World Wide DX Contest*, <[www.cqww.com/rates](http://www.cqww.com/rates)>.
15. *CQ World Wide DX Contest*, <<http://bit.ly/2FPWO3B>>.
16. *CQ World Wide DX Contest*, <[www.cqww.com/stats.htm](http://www.cqww.com/stats.htm)>.