

DX Contesting

PJ2T, the Ultimate “Man Cave” for Contesters

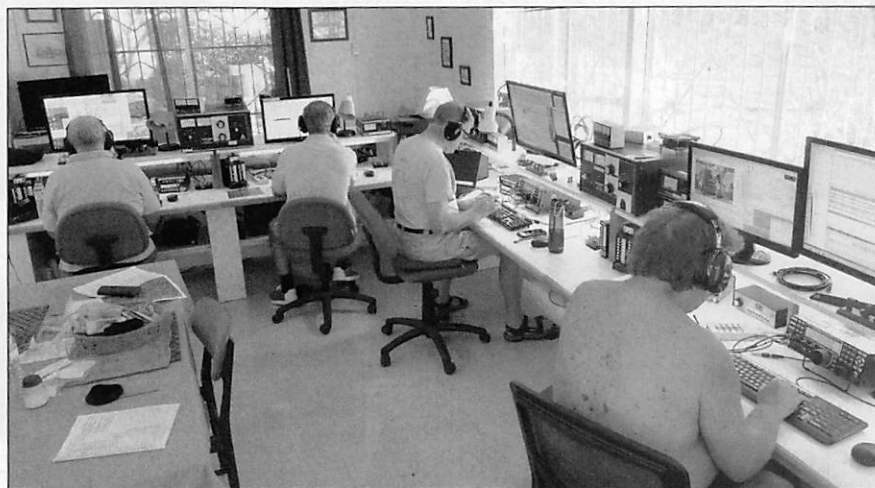
The day before operating in the 2019 CQ World Wide SSB from PJ2T, I rented a car in Willemstad, Curaçao, to take a tour with my wife Carolina. Our second stop was at Signal Point, the location of PJ2T. Carolina asked me why we were stopping there, since I was going to be at the station all weekend. I thought she was joking. Had she forgotten that visitors to our contest station in Chile often come ahead of the contest to see the station and learn scope out its functionality? The real issue, I suspected, was that she'd be alone at the resort where we were staying. This was my first experience contesting in the Caribbean, though, and I wanted to be prepared.

Upon our arrival, Geoff, WØGC/PJ2DX, welcomed us, joking to Carolina, “I am very sorry but this a man cave.” We both laughed, but secretly I hoped he would soon show us this fantastic station with its view of the Caribbean north of the property. No wonder PJ2T has such loud signals into Europe, Asia, and North America with its proximity to the ocean. This station is equipped with Elecraft K3s, like the ones we use at my Multi-2 contest station. It also has a tremendous antenna system — more stacks on a small property than one can imagine. I knew then that the upcoming contest would be a special event. After the tour, Carolina conceded that she understood why I wanted to contest at this station and why it was the ultimate man cave for ham radio contesters.

My time at the PJ2T contest station left me with several impressions. It is a very beautiful place with a magnificent view of the Caribbean. One could spend a week there relaxing, outside of ham radio contesting. The team of operators who travel to PJ2T are an amazing group of highly skilled and committed individuals. I knew they were competitive, as one op requested to spend 10 hours each night of the two nights just working his favorite band, 160 meters. But, I also saw that great fun happens along with the intense operation. It was a privilege to share the weekend with a talented team of great people who are world-class operators at a world-class station enjoying one of the most important contest of the year.



CE3CT operating

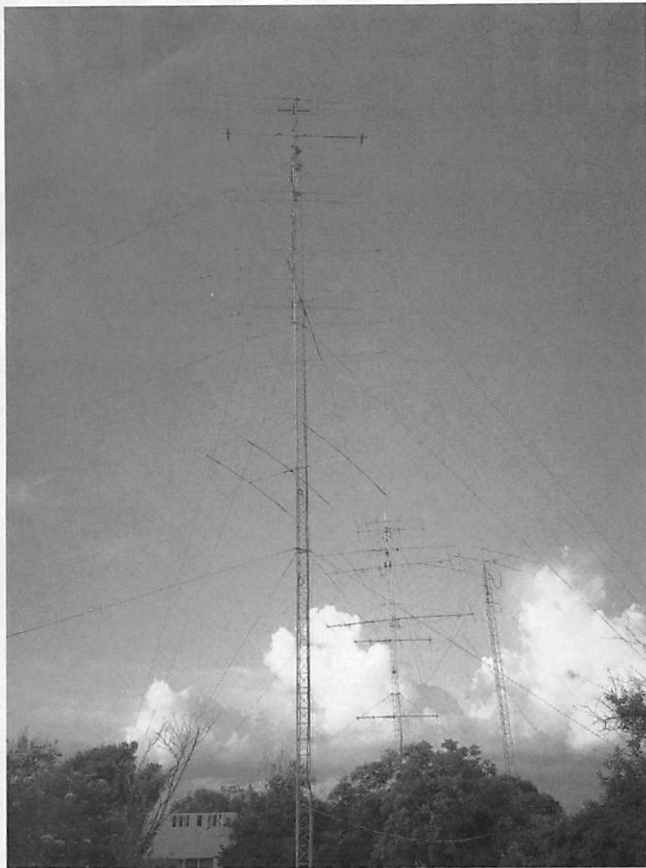


The ultimate contesters’ “man cave.”

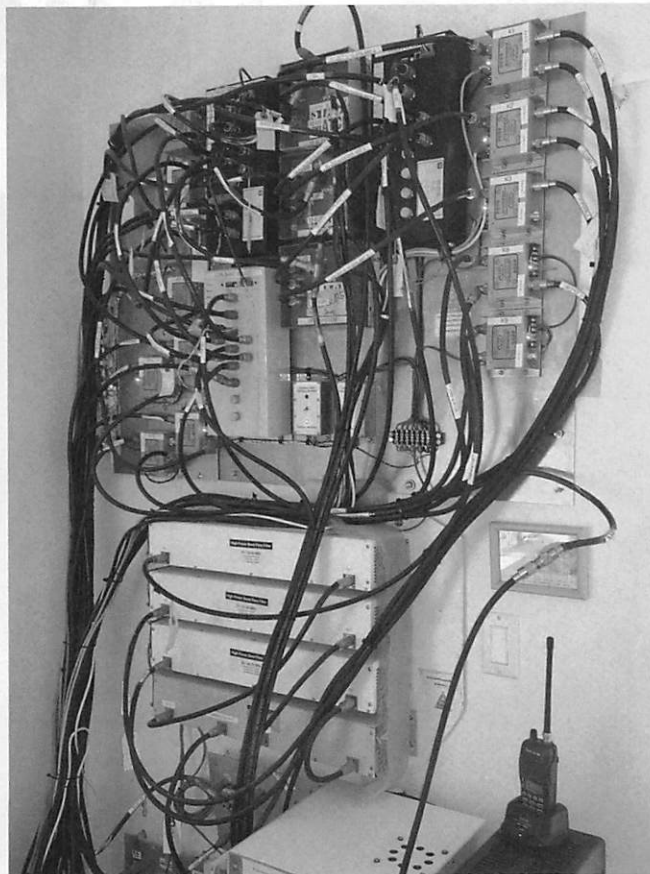
What it Takes to Compete at PJ2T

There is clearly a well-thought-out method to the operation at PJ2T, and I had hoped to learn from Geoff just how he so often fields a winning team. My own Multi-Two station could often reach a score of 20 million points. But we never make 10,000 QSOs as frequently happens at PJ2T. I learned it takes more than a great location with great antennas

and world-class transceivers to complete 10,000 QSOs in the CQ WW SSB. PJ2T has all of that and more. WØGC is a strong and skilled contest leader, who maintains the station and lets others operate as much as they want. That said, he guided us effectively by creating a contest plan several weeks ahead of time with an operator schedule that ensured we each had plenty of time to operate on the bands



The PJ2T antenna farm.



The switching box.

we enjoy. Geoff also recruits serious and competitive hams to contest from PJ2T. Last is the great coordination at the station: It operates around the clock, multipliers are easily passed among different band operators, and Geoff ensured we were well fed and hydrated. During our off-times, we had comfortable beds to sleep or rest in. *Wow!*

It takes a great leader, great operators, well planned logistics and esprit de corps to make more than 10,000 contacts.

The "Secret Sauce of PJ2T"

The fantastic PJ2T ham radio man care is a year-round project requiring organization. Geoff maintains the antennas, feed lines, switches and radios. He ships radios and/or amplifiers to the US months ahead of any contest season for needed repairs. He raises funds to replace old gear and antennas. Last summer, he spent considerable time getting a new tower installed, along with several new antennas. The magic of PJ2T is hours of sweat, work, and tears by Geoff and his partner Dorothy. They spend a considerable amount of time on the island, away from their Idaho home, keeping the station ready.

Geoff's Comments

Geoff, WØCG, emailed the CCC after the contest and had this to say.

"These guys made over 20 million points and nearly 10,400 contacts in CQ WW SSB this weekend. A great effort, and one of the top scores worldwide."

"Jim, Ed, Roberto, Ray, Pete, Egon, Rob, Scott (in absentia), thank you again for making the trip to Curacao, and to Scott, KØMD, for initially intending to do so. We missed having Scott in the team photo. You guys were a superb team and a great pleasure to spend time with. I much appreciated your great work ethic in that we were a small team to man a MM in these good conditions. The schedule was demanding of your time and energy.

Thank you also (and an apology) for tolerating the station problems that popped up at T minus 30 minutes. As you read elsewhere, I have found and fixed those problems, but what rotten luck that they surfaced late on Friday instead of in the many hours of operating the week before"

Geoff also maintains a detailed station notebook, with diagrams and instructions on how everything works. It describes the antenna switching system and the connections of rigs to amplifiers to various antennas pointed to EU, NA, or JA. Geoff also analyzes the past year's performance and creates a "game plan of attack" for the upcoming contest season. He also has an effective but collegial way of sharing the plan with the operators ahead of any contest, giving each of us ample opportunity to make revisions. No detail is too small for his attention prior to any contest event.

One lesson from Geoff's preparations is that snafus from Murphy can be managed more quickly when they do arise. Our team saw Murphy's appearance approximately 30 minutes before the contest with our switching network. Did this rattle Geoff? Not at all, as he had a detailed plan of the station's switching network, quickly did the troubleshooting and had each of us test our run/multiplier stations right before the contest following the repairs. It was amazing to see this happen so close to the start of the contest. It is important to add that Geoff has several

members of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium (CCC) who can assist with troubleshooting. We were lucky to have Jim, W8AWS, for this contest. He worked the switching problem with Geoff, and they solved the problem with minutes to spare.

I feel that any serious contest station would be wise to follow this example. It is important to have a teammate who can help the station owner troubleshoot issues and work to resolve problems.

Propagation at the Nadir of Cycle 24

Our conditions were better than I encounter in Chile and likely better than what most North American operators encounter. Our team at PJ2T made 40% more QSOs and 87 more multipliers in this contest at the nadir of Cycle 24 than did the team in 2018.

Our QSO numbers increased on all bands except on 10 meters, which I think is amazing given the SFI during the contest. I was amazed personally to experience rates in excess of 300/hour from this Caribbean location. We do not experience such rates in my part of South America.

I was especially impressed with our team's performance on Top Band, where the QSO numbers were double those of

the previous year. This was largely due to the persistence of Jim, W8AWS, who pulled two consecutive all nighters on 160. Jim is a Top Band guru. The rest of us took turns operating 4-hour shifts for the 10 – 80 meter operations. Thankfully, Murphy did not appear again.

Cuisine

Our master chef Ray, ND8L, was in charge of the kitchen, and he fed us splendidly each day. We had a great celebration at the end of the contest with grilled hamburgers and sides, plus some nice red wine I'd brought from Chile.

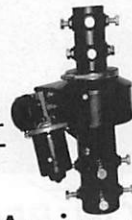
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