

XZ1J - DXpedition to Myanmar

by Paul S. Ewing-N6PSE

You might say that Zorro Miyawawa-JH1AJT is a determined man. A successful businessman, philanthropist and humanitarian, Zorro made approximately ten visits to Myanmar over a four year period to gain permission to bring a multi-national DXpedition team to activate Myanmar as XZ1J.

Myanmar had not been activated in over a decade and was just coming out of a fifty yearlong military dictatorship.

Good things are happening in Myanmar. Reforms and democracy are taking hold. In 2011 the military junta was officially dissolved following the 2010 general election and a civilian government was elected. Their new Government wants good things for their people and Zorro sensed an opening for amateur radio. Zorro is the founder and CEO of SEISA and the Foundation for Global Children (FGC). After their successful efforts in Bangladesh culminating with the very successful S21YZ DXpedition, Zorro then set his sights on Myanmar.

Zorro's first mission was to establish programs that nurture IT technicians and trainers, provide support for medical and education programs, provide water purification equipment, 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. Soon, Zorro received permission to carry out a demonstration operation as XZ1Z. A few months later, Champ-E21EIC would join Zorro and conduct a brief CW operation also as XZ1Z. These brief demonstration operations gave the government the confidence to approve a major DXpedition and to activate Myanmar on all modes and bands as XZ1J.

Being an avid DXer and DXpeditioner with previous DXpedition experiences in Eritrea, Yemen, Ethiopia, Kenya, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Cambodia, Zorro recognized the significance of Mount Pleasant in the hills just north of the Myanmar capitol of Nay Pyi Taw. Mt Pleasant rises to approximately 1600 feet above the valley. The Mount Pleasant Hotel would provide a superb venue for the XZ1J DXpedition. We would be QRV on November 15th, 2013 and we would QRT the morning of November 26th, 2013.

For the XZ1Z operations, Zorro and Champ had used simple vertical antennas, however for the XZ1J DXpedition Yagi antennas and amplifiers would be employed.



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

Soon, the team gathered in Yangon, Myanmar and 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 very honored to meet Zorro-JH1AJT, Franz-DJ9ZB and the rest of the XZ1J Team. Champ-E21EIC and his lovely wife JC-E20KNB would meet us in Nay Pyi Taw as they could fly direct from their home in Bangkok.

We were fortunate to have one full day of sight-seeing in Yangon before our flight to Nay Pyi Taw the following day. Yangon, formerly known as Rangoon, is a very large city with crowded streets and heavy traffic. Surprisingly, motor cycles and scooters are forbidden and everyone is in a car or on a bicycle.





We visited the Shwethalyaung Reclining Buddha and the Shwedagon Pagoda that were visited the previous November by President Obama. Everyone in Yangon still seemed quite excited by President Obama's visit and the US Flag is proudly displayed in Yangon and in Nay Pyi Taw on street lights and even on various items of clothing and garments.



All of our equipment is carefully weighed before loading on the KBZ Air flight to Nay Pyi Taw.

The flight from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw only takes about an hour. Nay Pyi Taw is inland, near the center of Myanmar. A few years ago, the Myanmar Government moved from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw. The airport and much of the infrastructure is very new. They were preparing for the 27th South East Asia Games as we visited Nay Pyi Taw.

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

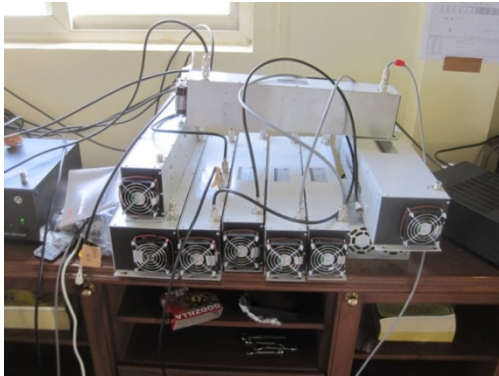
Myanmar is very ethnically diverse. There are over 135 distinct ethnic groups in Myanmar. There are many people whose origins are Tibet, China and India. Approximately 90% of the population is Buddhist while approximately four percent are Muslim and two percent are Catholic and Hindu. Myanmar is in the monsoon region of Asia and its coastal regions receive as much as 200 inches of rain annually. While we were in Myanmar the weather was predominately hot and humid.

Upon our arrival in Nay Pyi Taw, we immediately made the 40 minute drive up Mt. Pleasant to our hotel venue on the top of this 1600' mountain. We decided to make a CW/RTTY camp on the North side of the roadway that divides the mountain top 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.



Obara, Champ, David, Kazu and Franz help to erect the CW camp antennas.

At our CW camp, we employed a very nice set of 403A high power band pass filters and an antenna combiner that allowed us to operate on 10-15-20 meters from a single Yagi antenna with three stations running high power all at the same time.



Our very nice set of 403A high power band pass filters and combiner.

This worked very well and saved us a lot of time in having to set up only one directional antenna instead of three of them. We also set up vertical antennas for 12, 17, 30, 40 and 80 meters. For 160 meters, we employed the services of a rather adept tree climbing fellow to take our long wire high into an aging and very tall tree. This made a very effective support for our 160 meter antenna.



Our CW shack at the top of the hill with low band verticals in the foreground.

Over at the SSB camp, we deployed a five-band Spiderbeam Yagi for 10-12-15-17 and 20 meters. We set up vertical antennas for additional WARC bands as well as 40 and 80 meters. At the SSB camp, we used 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.



Rafael and Peter help assemble our Spiderbeam at our SSB shack on the south-side of the hotel complex

The team was comprised of the following operators: Zorro-JH1AHT (Leader) Franz-DJ9ZB, JC-E2ØNKB, Champ-E21EIC, Katsu-JA1DXA, Jay-JA1TRC, David-K3LP, Paul-N6PSE, Peter-PP5XX, Rafael-PY2NDX and Kazu-VR2KF.



Massive Pileups:

The pileups for XZ1J were quite large. While Zorro and Champ had been briefly active a few months earlier, there had been no large activation of Myanmar for at least a decade. There was a significant pent-up demand for an XZ contact. Propagation on the high bands was quite good. The SFI was between 160 and 170 during our operation. Ten, twelve and fifteen meters were quite productive during our operation. 17 and 20 meters were less productive but still useful.



Champ-E21EIC and Rafael-PY2NDX make thousands of CW contacts.

The team quickly got into our working shifts and everyone enjoyed the pileups. While we could work Asia and Europe quite easily almost any time, it was more of a challenge to work North America and those contacts were made primarily at or near our sunrise and sunset. Zorro stressed to us that one of our major goals was to fulfill the need for North America. I particularly enjoyed working the East-coast of North America via the long path each evening at our sunset. Ten and twelve meters were spectacular and fifteen 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 which was much closer. The opening for the West Coast was only via the short-path and occurred just minutes after our sunrise and would start in W0/W9 and propagation would work its way westward through W7 and W6.



Franz-DJ9ZB and Peter-PP5XX make thousands of SSB and RTTY contacts.

We were able to work North America so effectively only because the Japanese operators were so polite and so well disciplined that they would adhere to our requests to stand-by and allow us to work the furthest regions. We had propagation to much of Asia around the clock on many of the bands.

Operating from Asia:

Operating from Asia is quite a unique experience. The man made noise level can be quite high. Our main nemesis on the bands was the dreaded “Chinese Radar” which would suddenly appear and sweep through the bands literally destroying our ability to hear our pileup. There were several times where we had to literally abandon a large pileup and a band with good propagation because the Chinese radar suddenly made us deaf.

We also encountered Asian taxi cabs and fishing fleets on ten meters from neighboring countries. I’m sure our pileups had no idea how difficult it was at times to discern the call signs from the many sources of noise and QRM.

After the first three days, team members Kazu-VR2KF, Katsu-JA1DXA and JC-E2ØNKB had to return to their home countries. The remaining seven operators kept quite busy manning the stations and giving out the many contacts. Jay-JA1TRC was quite busy capturing the logs and uploading them to Club Log each day.

Champ-E21EIC was our all-around expert troubleshooter and IT expert and was kept quite busy day and night resolving various issues that sprung up. Champ is a very enthusiastic operator and would rather operate than sleep, eat or pretty much anything else!

Push for RTTY:

During our last weekend, the CQ World-Wide CW Contest was underway. We decided to stay clear of the contest and instead focus on RTTY as there was

a significant need for XZ contacts on RTTY. 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-JH1AJT (seated) and his assistants, Obara and Win Than.

A visit to Nay Pyi Taw:

One of the highlights of any Dxpediton is to get to see and experience the unique aspects of the local culture. Myanmar is a very religious country, predominately Buddhist. We enjoyed visiting the large central outdoor market place, the main Pagoda and the sacred White Elephants in Nay Pyi Taw.



Zorro-JH1AJT and David-K3LP are QRV.



This was a very enjoyable Dxpediton in every way. Zorro and his assistants Jay, Obara and our local guide Win, took very good care of the team. Zorro cooked us many nice meals out on the balcony of our CW shack. He is quite the Chef! We also enjoyed group meals together at the Mt. 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 and no one suffered on this Dxpediton!



The team enjoyed a stroll through the open air market place.

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.



Peter-PP5XX, David-K3LP, Rafael-PY2NDX and Paul N6PSE enjoyed a visit to the large Pagoda.

Our operational goals were to exceed 50,000 contacts and to work the furthest regions in an effective manner to reduce the need for an XZ contact. We were thrilled that we were able to make 54,648 contacts with 17,847 unique stations over our ten day operation.



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



The XZ1J Team pauses for a team photo.

Closing thoughts:

The people of Myanmar are very friendly and welcoming. They are a little shy perhaps but always greet you with a smile or a wave. They are very religious, hard-working people trying to take care of their families. Everyone seemed genuinely glad to have us visiting their country.

For me, it was a real pleasure to visit Myanmar. Unlike many places that we visit, we were able to freely take photographs and we saw very few soldiers or armed guards with AK47s as we have seen in other locations.

We are very grateful to the German DX Foundation-GDXF, International DX Association-INDEXA, Clipperton DX Club-CDXC, DX-Italia and all individual sponsors. It is only through the generous contributions of the global DX Community that rare entities such as Myanmar can be activated.

Thank you,

Paul S. Ewing-N6PSE

Team member-XZ1J

Edited for GDXF by Prof. Dr. Uwe Jaeger, DJ9HX