

The Commemoration of The Forgotten 98

A Different Kind of DXpedition

2 November- 15 November 2013

<http://wake2013.org/>

by Lou Dietrich, N2TU- Team Leader



Genesis: In the beginning....

Following a taste of DXpeditioning with the Swains Island NH8S group in 2012, I was hooked on DXpeditioning. This had been a lifelong dream since my teenage years. Back then with my EICO 720 and Lafayette HE 10 receiver and simple wire antenna, I imagined how it must be on the other end of the pile-up, that sense of adventure and having others yearning to contact me!

Most of us sit in our shack and chase DX, trying to figure out splits, propagation and then we welcome the warm sense of achievement when we hear our call come back from far off. We are exhilarated and feel accomplished. I had often wondered how the other end must feel.

When the Swains' DXpedition wrapped up and we returned to the other end of the pile-ups, there was something missing. The longing to get back out there, to enjoy the camaraderie of the group and the quest for adventure was calling. Unless you have experienced this, it is hard to describe. DXpeditioners are a breed apart. They are, in every sense of the word, a working unit with a singular sense of purpose. Nothing stops them, nothing.

Where to go to next? That was the burning question.

Being rather naïve at this DXpeditioning game, I asked around and was basically told that most of the top 15 Most Wanted could not be arranged for political, economic and environmental reasons. Looking down the list, I spotted Wake Island. Wake's World War II history had always intrigued me so I began the "quest".

Researching these days is quite easy with the internet, although a lot of the information is outdated and inaccurate. Information on Wake Island's history is well documented but how to get permission to visit is clouded with misinformation and dead ends. The first few months were an exercise in futility. My desk was littered with "no longer my job, talk to this person", "try this Governmental department", "can't help you and I don't know who can" letters. Going through channels would be the appropriate route but there weren't any appropriate channels defined! The sum result of this effort was that Wake Island is now a USAF military base and access would have to be granted by them. It was a start!

Contacting the USAF, I learned that civilians were not allowed access to the military base, period, no way, no how.

Back to the drawing board! More research was needed. Another month passed by and I was fully entrenched in the policies and procedures of attempting to get access but all roads led to the same end. The USAF has jurisdiction and doesn't allow access.

One night, an article about The Forgotten 98 was referenced in my volumes of Wake historical notes. Having never heard of them, I gathered information about the people behind the name "The Forgotten 98". As I dug into the literature surrounding their unfortunate deaths on the shores of Wake Island in 1943, my pursuit took on a different meaning which had nothing to do with ham radio. These Depression era men seeking high paying jobs took assignments in far off locations and as fate would have it, never returned home.

While reading article after article, an idea germinated! 1943 is the year of their death and 2013 would be the 70th Anniversary of their sacrifice. Wouldn't it be great for amateur radio to commemorate the lives and contributions of these men? Amateur Radio is known for our exceptional support of emergency communications but this would be different. We could, through the global reach of amateur radio, highlight the sacrifices of these unknown men and their families on the 70th anniversary of their deaths, 7 October 2013.

At this point, the road leads to a legal "blank page". Let me explain. During my research, I contacted a person associated with The Forgotten 98, who acted as an agent with the USAF hierarchy and obtained an endorsement from the General of the USAF-Pacific.

Due to a Non-Disclosure Agreement, this person has and will remain nameless but suffice to say this person fully supported the commemoration and is a friend of the amateur community.

The DXpedition, no, Commemoration planning began! During January, 2013, I contacted Joe Pater, W8GEX, Joe Blackwell, AA4NN and Craig Thompson K9CT (they became know as the Wake Management team) and informed them we might get access to Wake Island. Being a true neophyte at planning a major DXpedition, I relied heavily on them and in fact, it is doubtful there would have been a 2013 Wake DXpedition without their knowledge and guidance. There is nothing that stood in their way!

On 13 February 2013, we received the endorsement from the USAF to visit Wake Island and hold our Commemoration.

The research phase was completed, the endorsement received and the monumental task of assembling a Wake 2013 team, equipment procurement, Foundation applications, web design, publicity, material logistics, and USAF coordination begun. During an initial video conference call, I was 'elected' to be the Team Leader. How that happened, I will never know!

Bumps in the road!

As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, The Forgotten 98 Commemoration DXpedition received an endorsement from the highest level of the USAF- Pacific forces. We subsequently learned this endorsement did not mean we had permission to actually go there! It simply meant the trip was endorsed. Permission documentation had to be developed and reviewed and final approval obtained from the USAF Second in Command, the Vice Chief of Staff.

To accomplish this, the various staffs of the USAF had to review the volumes of documents which were submitted, first at the unit level, then the Command level and finally at the Pentagon. The purpose and scope of our Commemoration had to be clearly defined and explained to personnel who knew little of Amateur Radio.

In this day of budget constraints, we had to show proof of self funding. In other words, the Government would have to be reimbursed for all expenditures. With an initial budget based on Foundation funding, individual contributions and Team personal payments, the Commemoration was able to provide assurances we would be self funded.

Also, Medical Evacuation Insurance had to be provided by the Team. USAF Medical review and clearance had to be obtained for each member of the Team and documents provided with personal information were assumedly used for background checks.

This took many weeks of reviews, clarifications and escalations and we were getting close to the 7 October target activation. In order to hit the window of 7 October, the paperwork and travel orders had to be completed by 1 October. The end of September 2013 coincided with the closing of the Government's fiscal year and start of the new budget cycle and it unfortunately, also coincided with the shutdown of the Government. Needing to pay attention to more pressing issues, our Commemoration paperwork went unsigned by the USAF and we missed our travel window. (Flights to and from Wake are every two weeks).

The continuing shutdown again caused a delay two weeks in mid October. Finally, travel authorization was received on 28 October and the group flew to Hawaii to begin our Commemoration.

The Team

The USAF restricted us to a smaller team than on Swains so we enlisted 12 operators. A core team of Swains operators were solicited and quickly joined the team.

Due to the delays encountered by the Commemoration, Carl, K9CS, Tom ND2T and Stu K6TU had to drop out due to personal and work related obligations and were replaced by Jim, N9TK and Ralph, K9ZO. Carl, Tom and Stu continued to support the operation and the Team owes them a debt of gratitude for their pre-assembly, testing and packing activities.

The final on island Team consisted of;

1. Joe, AA4NN- QSL Manager
2. Joe, W8GEX
3. John, K6MM- Web Master
4. Jerry, WB9Z
5. Jim, N9TK
6. Ralph, K9ZO
7. Craig, K9CT
8. Hal, W8HC
9. Mark NA6M
10. Mike, K9NW
11. Dick, W3OA-
12. Lou, N2TU- Team Leader

Station Planning-

During discussion with the USAF, we were offered two locations, an abandoned chapel across from the Arrivals building and the Marina location. Using Google Earth, we were able to establish approximate antenna fields and coax requirements.

The marina site was a good distance from the lodging barracks and this necessitated the movement of the marina operating site to a beach "house" (An open air hut on the lagoon). Fortunately, the Beach House was within walking distance from the barracks.



Chapel on the Ocean.

Colin Bradley, WA2YUN/ KH9 working on Wake as a contractor, arranged for the relocation and his assistance during and after our operation was nothing short of phenomenal. Colin was an integral part of the Commemoration Team. He facilitated the wiring of the chapel for 220V and equipped the Beach House with adequate electricity to support the operation.



Beach House. (SSB/ RTTY/ 6M) Site

Antennas

The Wake Team decided to use two BigIr SteppIR verticals along with a Battle Creek Special for 160M at the CW (oceanfront site). At the SSB (beach house site), there would also be two Big SteppIRs. The SteppIRs performed flawlessly and their ease of installation allowed us to be QRV within hours of landing on the island. There is nothing like pushing a button and have the antenna tune to your desired band! Additionally, a CrankIR was installed and used as a back-up.

We also brought along a TW antenna, used extensively with our fifth (spare) station. This antenna is quite a nice performer! At the Beach House, Colin had previously installed a 6M7JHV (M2), which proved extremely effective with openings to JA, BV, BY and KH6.

Equipment-

The K9W team chose five Elecraft K3 and KPA500s which performed without a hitch. They are a great combination of excellent receiver performance, lightweight, stable, reliable. In other words, super for DXpeditioning!

For a bit more power on 160M, K9W used the Expert 2K-FA amplifier. Loafing along at 1.5KW into the Battle Creek Special, this amp helped put over 2200 160M QSOs in the log.

Ten-Tec provided their top of the line headsets, Giga Parts, the Samlex power supplies, foot switches, antenna analyzers, DX Engineering the radial plates and coax connectors, InnovAntennas 6M yagi, Msquare 6M loop, Vibroplex, the Iambic keys and TW antennas. In short, the equipment manufacturers stepped up big time to support our Commemoration. Check the wake2013.org sponsors' page for a complete listing of very generous sponsors.

Logistics

Getting all the equipment and site specific material to Wake Island was a monumental task. Every piece of gear had to be procured, inspected, pre-tested, loaded with software (N1MM), packaged for overseas shipment, weighed, externally marked, and delivered to a 'marshaling' center.

Tom ND2T, John K6MM, and Kevin K6TD took on the task of pre-assembling and testing the SteppIR equipment.

Craig K9CT tested the Elecraft rigs, laptops, CW and RTTY interfaces.

Jerry WB9Z, Val NV9L, and Carl K9CS, assembled and packed the coax and connectors.

W3OA, Dick purchased the site specific material and stuffed three foot lockers

W8GEX- Packaged and shipped the radial plates.

N1DG- Overall logistical guidance and support.

Once this was done, all the material was shipped to Kimo, KH7U in Hawaii. Kimo inventoried the equipment, pre-staged it and subsequently delivered all 1400 pounds of material to the USAF at Hickam Air Field. He was a one man warehouse and freight forwarder.

From Hickam, the material was in the hands of the USAF, who delivered it to Wake and stored it in an environmentally safe area awaiting our arrival.

Arrival and Operation

Our transportation to and from Hawaii to Wake Island was on a military chartered flight. The Team took this opportunity to relax and prepare for the next two weeks. Once on Wake, we were ushered into an orien-

tation meeting and briefed on the restrictions of the military installation.

After the briefing, the Team settled into the barracks and then dove right into the previously delivered equipment pile. This is where our pre-planning paid off, Big Time!

As part of the logistics plan, all material was marked with a site identifier, CW or SSB. It was then a simple matter of breaking down the pallets and loading the equipment onto a flatbed truck provided by Colin, WA2YUN.



Colin WA2YUN/ KH9 and Mark NA6M

The Team split into previously assigned sub-teams, antenna installation and station set-up. This worked out perfectly. As the antennas were being installed, Craig, K9CT and Mark, NA6M set up the station's rigs, amps and laptops.

The Team schedule, developed by Dick W3OA, called for a rotating shift schedule. This schedule, 4 on, 8 off, 4 on, 8 off and then 3 on and 6 off, provided for adequate rest periods and rotating shifts allowing the Team to operate different propagation openings. During the entire operating period, no one missed a shift and some stayed for multiple shifts demonstrating the determination of this Team to get you in the log! It was a dedicated Team effort.



The Shift Schedule Board- Lou -N2TU doing the honors



By the time they had completed their work, the antennas were ready.

At around 6PM (local), K9W was ready to rock and roll. After a couple hours of rest, The Forgotten 98 Commemoration began at 0757 UTC, 2 November with JA1ADN the first QSO in the K9W log.

The K9W Team worked 100,062 QSOs , provided 2700 new DXCC, 32% Asia, 27% Europe and 35% NA, a truly remarkable feat with 4 active stations. Extraordinary effort was put into EU QSOs as the propagation to Western Europe in particular, was very difficult. Each site was provided with propagation forecasts develop by Stu, K6TU.

K9W's last QSO was with OH1LA, 0725UTC, 15 November.

Keeping the Commemoration aspect of this DXpedition in the forefront, the SSB stations frequently announced information regarding The Forgotten 98. On Veteran's Day, the Team had a prearranged schedule with Don, KA7T in Boise, Idaho which was the home

base for the employer of the Forgotten 98, Morrison-Knutsen. During the contact, a eulogy, written by Bonnie Gilbert was delivered by Lou, N2TU, as well as, an emotional reading of each of the 98 names. This event was taped by a Boise TV station and aired locally.

The K9W Team also presented a 48 star World War II era flag to the USAF with the K9W logo enclosed. This Flag, in a display, was hung in a place of honor in the Drifters Reef above a relic of a 50 Caliber machine gun used by the defenders of Wake Island in 1941.



Ralph K9ZO and Lou N2TU with the Flag.



Lou N2TU trying to get a few more QSOs out of Jerry WB9Z. Yes, we did have fun!



Lou N2TU and John K6MM at the POW Rock

Toward the end of the operation, the Team took time to visit the POW rock. This rock was carved by one of the Forgotten 98 and is a place of remembrance and reflection on those unfortunate men caught up in the turmoil of war.

A Few After Thoughts.

As documented recently, the costs of activating these 'rare' ones are escalating to astronomical levels. Remember those days when a single QSO with a rare entity more than sufficed? Well fellow DXers, those days are over! Challenge Awards, Leader boards and multi-mode activities have dramatically increased the demand for group operations with multiple set-ups. So when you hear about the costs associated with these DXCC entities and wonder why they are so expensive, look in your log and see how many band/ modes you've filled. It is a fact that each QSO you made equates to a dollar amount required to put these rare ones on the air.

Credits and further 'Thank You's'!

It is impossible for the Team to thank each and every supporter of this Commemoration. The worldwide Clubs, Foundations and the individual donors made this happen; your support and encouragement was nothing short of remarkable. We, the K9W Team, collectively thank you!

Our Pilot Stations, headed up by Val, NV9L, consisted of Hiroo, JA1WSX, Col, MM0NDX, and Stan, KH6CG provided on-time reporting of the world's needs and operating hints. Stu, K6TU did a fantastic job of developing propagation forecasts used by the Team and Don, N1DG was instrumental in guiding the Team through the 'ins and outs' of Logistics.

Margarett Blackwell and Janet Pater guided the Financial and Fund raising support, which proved invaluable, as we found out when dealing with the self-funding issue.

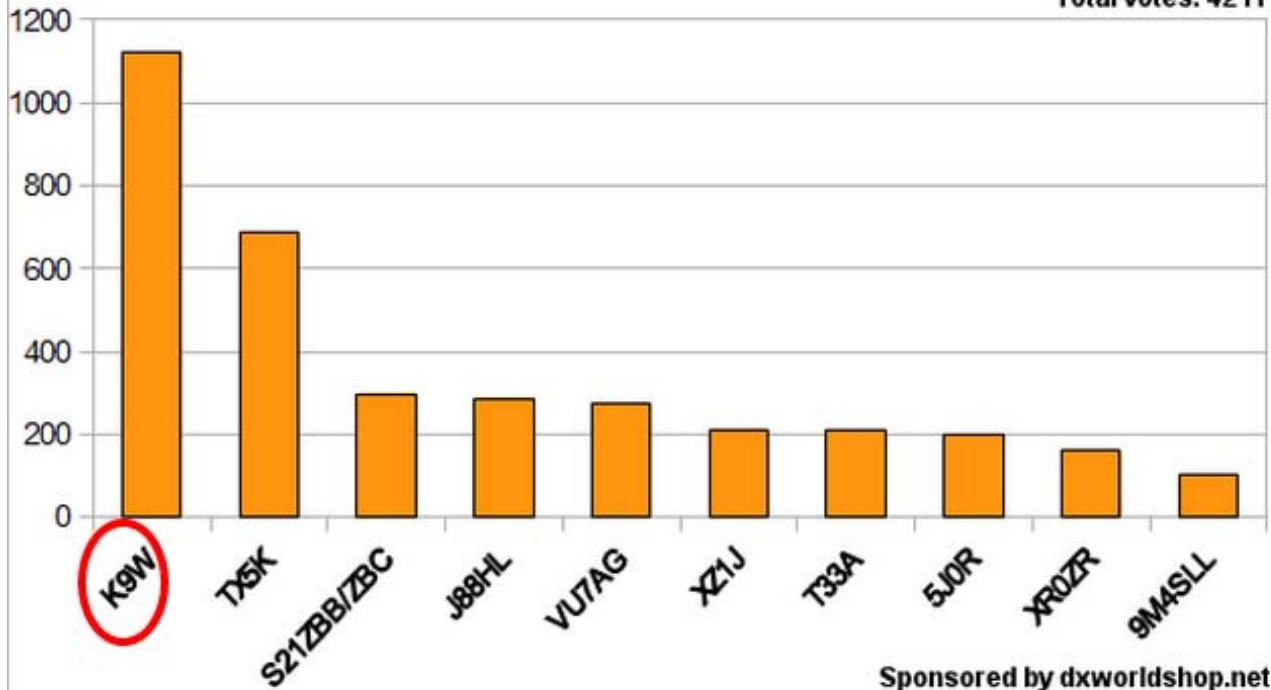
Elecraft, SteppIR, DX Engineering, Array Solutions, Ten-Tec, Expert Amps, M Squared Antennas, InnovAntennas, TW Antennas, Vibroplex, GigaParts and Primus cable and connectors supported this DXpedition. Their unwavering, generous support and sometimes unsolicited contributions greatly added to the success of our mission.

Thank you for a great DXpedition and please remember The Forgotten 98 and their Families. These men are wartime heroes and our Commemoration honors their lives and achievements.

DXpedition of the Year 2013



Total votes: 4211



Sponsored by dxworldshop.net

