

WRTC - A World-Class Event

BY RICH ASSARABOWSKI, K1CC

I first heard about it in the early spring of this year. Martti Laine OH2BH was on 20 meters talking with several guys from the West Coast about rules for a contest to be held "on-site" at the Goodwill Games in Seattle. There was a lot of discussion about what the contest should be and how to select the participants. I listened in for a while, sensing that this was not just idle chatter but a serious planning session for the event. Nevertheless, the incident passed by and I didn't hear anything more about it until a short mention of it in the National Contest Journal. Buried among the articles was a request for contesters to submit their resumes as team members for the amateur radio event at the Goodwill Games. I didn't hesitate. The rest, as the popular saying goes, is history.

It's a long flight to Connecticut to Seattle. The flight arrived just about at midnight on a Wednesday night. I was told that someone would be at the airport to meet me, but I had no idea who it was going to be and where I would be staying. As I entered the lobby, I immediately recognized him. He had a QSL card in his hand and we introduced ourselves. Charlie KX7L and his wife Karen were going to be my hosts for the Goodwill Games, actually the "World Radiosport Team Championship", or just "WRTC". Charlie left his XYL at K7SS's house where a party was going on all day for the arriving participants. We loaded my suitcase into his trunk and set off to Danny's house. "Did the Russians arrive?", was my first question. They did, but not without incident. Their plane arrived 24 hours late, as their flight was delayed for 2 hours, then 4, then 2 and so on, for no apparent reason. Their baggage was left out in the cold Moscow rain -- leaving the Soviet Union wasn't going to be made too easy for them. But they finally came, to a big sigh of relief from their Seattle hosts. We pulled into some side streets and started climbing a hill. I knew we were close.

The party had started at noon and was winding down at 1 AM when we arrived, but it was far from over. I met Danny K7SS, host and the visionary of this whole event, and introduced myself to the guests. There was Rusty Epps, W6OAT and Steve Morris, K7LXC, still discussing contest preparations, along with Danny. I shook hands with Julius HA6NY, who visited New England several years ago, and his teammate Gyozy HA0MM. I met the comedians and master chefs of late-night Italian pasta

dinners, Paolo I2UIY and Ivan IK2DVG. Until now they were just calls that appeared in many contest logs. A whole day and evening of partying was not without its effect on the guests, though. After their own full day of meeting new faces behind the familiar calls, I could have told them I was Ernst Krenkel and they would have believed me! Someone walked up to me with a black shirt with big silver letters spelling out "KGB". It was Willy, UW9AR from Chelyabinsk. Who would have thought several years ago I'd be at a party in Seattle with the voice of UK9AAN (now UZ9AYA)? By now the party had progressed from beer and mixed drinks to the serious stuff -- Stolichnaya vodka, hand-carried from the Ural mountains. In my sober state I was able to assess the damage. It was starting to look like Chernobyl after the nuclear disaster. It seems Karen, KX7L's XYL had taken the full effect of the "Stoli" fallout. We finally got her in the car and found Larry UA6HZ, who was the other guest staying with Charlie and Karen.

Larry is well-known in the States as "UA6 Hot Ziggy" and his English is excellent. He's been to the U.S. several times before. In an interview on the local National Public Radio station, when asked how he felt to be in the States he said "It's nice to be home again". He's not a typical Russian ham. He owns one of the few Western transceivers in the Soviet Union (a TS-930) as well as several VHF radios. In fact, he donated his hand-held to Musa Manarov, U2MIR, the Russian (actually Armenian) cosmonaut on the Soviet space station MIR. Larry is also an Armenian, who's family emigrated to Russia around the time of World War I. I was always reminded of this whenever I referred to Larry as a "Russian". Also unusual about Larry is that he is an entrepreneur in a Soviet system which only recently has accepted a free market economy as a reality. In 1989 he was part of the Malyj Vysotskij Island expedition along with OH2BH, K7JA and others. He was also very actively involved in providing communications during the Armenian earthquake. He brought with him several albums of photographs from Armenia showing the terrible destruction. I learned from him that the most effective mode for traffic in and out of Armenia was CW. I also learned of the scam involving the shipment of packet radio equipment to the Soviet Union by the ARRL. The large shipment of equipment was appropriated by a certain individual in Moscow, and it was only months later that it was located. The two

volunteers from the U.S. experienced in packet radio were sent home after only several days in the Soviet Union. The individual has since lost his amateur license, but not before the opportunity to help the Armenian people was lost.

We got to sleep sometime around 3 AM. At 6 AM I was awakened by the sun and that was about as much sleep as I would get for most of the rest of the week there. While I waited for the others to wake up, I studied the information which the WRTC Committee had provided each of the participants. There were about 60-70 participants in this event, including judges, support team members and team alternates (which included myself, N2AA and AH3C from the U.S.). Participants were hosted by various individuals and families in the Seattle area, where they slept and by whom they were chauffeured to the various planned activities. Many of the hosts took vacations from work in order to spend time with their guests and to participate in the WRTC events. As I flipped through the information packet, I found a spreadsheet listing all of the participants, their hosts and telephone numbers, a schedule of events, a hotline to call for daily updates of activities, repeater frequencies to monitor, a daily tape-recorded activity bulletin on a special telephone number, a tourist guide to Seattle and a list of activities in the Seattle area for hosts and their guests to participate in when there was any spare time (!?). It was going to be a busy week. The WRTC Committee and all of the local radio clubs were determined to make the World Radiosport Team Championship an unforgettable experience for everyone.

After breakfast we took a walk outside. Charlie and Karen live in Bothel, about 30 miles from Seattle, on a 2+ acre wooded lot. It was a perfect day, under a cloudless sky and with low humidity. I was immediately impressed by the height of the evergreen trees, and in my mind I was already stringing wires among the trees. Charlie does not have a tower and I'm sure we would have put one up for him that morning in our enthusiasm. That enthusiasm was somewhat dampened when we turned on his rig and found the bands completely dead, except for a couple of W6 and W7 ragchewers. The solar flux was low and the K-index was rising... At 1 PM we were scheduled to be at Anthony's Home Port, a yacht club on bay. VE exams were being offered to any of the DX visitors at the yacht club, and Larry was anxious to get a U.S. license. It turns out most of the DX visitors wanted to take VE exams. VE exams were being given at every possible opportunity during our stay -- on the bus to Portland, at parties, at the picnic in Portland, in restaurants, in the hotel, etc.. We'd never seen so many Russians become "U.S. generals"! By the end of the week it became a ritual, as the DX visitors progressed from Novice up to Advanced and Extra. For the Russians, it was a unique

opportunity to get a U.S. call with a U.S. address. For me, it was an opportunity to add several more callsigns to my QTH (you never know when you might need a spare call...). I also learned a lot of new words in Russian. Although I learned to speak Russian at home and speak it reasonably well, my technical vocabulary was limited. Nevertheless, I was immediately put in the unique position of translating the exam questions for the Russians when they needed help. They did quite well on the technical questions (how do you explain a "Colpitts oscillator" when it's been 25 years since you took the General) but many of the regulatory questions puzzled them (what is the Novice power limit these days anyway?). Everyone who took the tests came back home with some kind of U.S. callsign, which will no doubt raise some eyebrows back in the Soviet Union.

By 4 PM the room was getting full in preparation for the operators' meeting. Team members were still arriving, and new faces were still becoming connected to familiar callsigns. The WRTC Committee members were very busy, running around with beepers and cordless telephones, still making final arrangements for the stations. Even though stations for each of the teams were selected to be as equal as possible in terms of location and antennas, there were differences. Ward, NOAX was managing the station preparation and assignment. Stations were chosen at random for each of the teams. He carried with him a handful of 3 dB and 6 dB attenuators, which were to be used by the better stations in their antenna feedlines in an attempt to make everyone as equal as possible. Some of the teams had more time for station preparation than others, though. Word got out that one of the Russian teams even climbed a neighbor's tree to string a new wire antenna! As 4 PM approached, the room was getting packed. T-shirts were being given out for the team members, ICOM was giving out their own T-shirts and caps and had their banner displayed prominently. A professional camera crew was filming the event for the upcoming WRTC movie coming to a local theatre near you this fall (well, maybe only to a club meeting). By now, all of the teams were there and took positions in the audience. The contest organizers gave their introductory remarks -- OH2BH, K7SS, K7LXC and W6OAT. The organizing committee was introduced. We finally saw the faces of the people that worked so hard for 2 years to pull this off. Then came the details of the contest and time for questions and answers. Questions from the teams seemed to arise endlessly:

"Can the spotting ICOM 735 use the main antenna?"

"No, only the wire listening antenna"

"Can voice keyers be used?"

"No, only microphones and paper and pencil logging"

"Can foreign languages be used on SSB?"

came the question from K7JA. Delighted with the answer, it was obvious to everyone what Chip's strategy was going to be in the contest. Little did he know how propagation would change his plans to run JA's during the contest! It was announced that call signs for the contest would be issued to each station only 45 minutes before the start of the contest, on 14.250 and on 2 meters. Anyone who made skeds with his friends back home was out of luck...

After the welcoming ceremonies and the operator's meeting were adjourned, the room was opened up to a buffet dinner and a bar. The banquet room overlooked the sound and the view out the window was spectacular. The crowd spilled over onto the deck as the sun set over the water and the distant mountains of the Olympic peninsula. I met some of the later arrivals and those whom I missed at Danny's party: the OK1ALW (OK5R) boys (Jiri OK1RI and Karel OK2FD), the two LZ's from LZ1KDP (Rumen LZ1MS and Ogy LZ2PO), the YU's from YU1EXY (Tine YT3AA and Rasa YU1RL), the JARL team (Yoh JJ3UHS and Naoko JM3JOW) and the Crazy Contesters from Japan (Tak JE1CKA and Saty JE1JKL), the two G's (Dave G4BUO and Steve G3YDV), the French team (Jacky F2CW and Claudia FD1NYQ from 4U1ITU), the Germans (Stefan DL5XX and world-traveler Walter DJ6QT), the OH's (Hannu OH1XX and Jukka OH8PF), the EA's from EA9EA (Juan EA5BRA and Guillermo EA9EO), the neighboring VE7's (Dale VE7SV and Lee VE7CC) and the many W7's who took this opportunity to finally meet their guests that they had been expecting for so long. And of course Oms PY5EG and Talma PY4OD, who showed an impressive video tape of their huge station in Curitiba. However, this was one night that was not going to be a late one for anyone. Tomorrow was the contest, and everyone was anxious to get at least some sleep before the big one!

Since Larry UA6HZ was also an alternate for his team, we decided to pair together for the contest, even though we wouldn't be signing /WG. However, we didn't have a place to operate. After some deliberation, we were assigned to the station at ICOM headquarters. Although initially impressed, I was told not to expect too much as it was judged unacceptable by the organizers when selecting stations for the teams. Nevertheless, we were happy to have a station to operate, and we were told we'd be assigned one of the unused calls from the FCC block of approved call signs for the Russians. We checked with ICOM and were told we could be there as early as 8 AM to start setting up the station.

The next morning 8 AM came much too early, after late night ragchewing with Larry, Charlie and Karen the night before. I grabbed my trusty keyer paddle and keyer under my arm and we were off to ICOM in the morning rush hour. Upon arriving at ICOM we understood what they told us. The antenna was a TH7 but it was in an industrial park with lots of metal roofs and overhead wires around, and a fairly big hill to the east. We were impressed by a 4el KLM 40 on a separate tower at 50', but that had problems as we later found out. The receptionist in the modern office building was expecting us and showed us to the shack. There were lots of VHF radios and one IC-781. No second radio, no keyers, no headphones, no amplifier. And in true ham fashion, lots of poorly marked coax cables. We were expecting Ron, NV6Z, the ICOM service manager to show up, and he did, which made things a lot easier. We finally figured out which antenna was which and he pulled a new IC-735 from the warehouse. He then connected one of their automatic antenna tuners which made for instant band switching on the second radio, using one of the wires outside. By the time everything was set-up and working, we were very hungry, not having eaten anything yet that day. I asked Ron for a 2-minute tutorial on the '781 which taught us where the volume control was and how to change bands. After lunch, we tuned on 20 for our call assignment (N0AX) and prepared log sheets.

The contest didn't exactly start with a bang. Bands were quiet and muted, and the few Europeans we heard were weak and very hard to work. Hardly anyone came back to our CQ's. Low-power from Seattle without a /WG suffix was not fun. Interstation interference, as expected, was horrendous. I also had to get used to a BIG paper multiplier sheet, after a couple of years of being spoiled by CT and NA. It was obvious the /WG stations were having a good time, though. We tuned around and listened to them, and it was really exciting to hear the bands full of mini-pileups. From the operating style, there was no question that these were world-class operators behind those call signs. Our operating strategy became to work as many of the /WG's as we could find. The loud ones were easy, the weak ones on the other end of Seattle were weak and very difficult to work as we competed against the rest of the world calling them. We started to keep track of QSO totals by the /WG's, who was leading whom, being lucky enough to know the call assignments before the contest.

I took a couple of breaks to talk to Ron, NV6Z, the head of the service department at ICOM USA. Ron was one of the P40V group who set the world record for CQWW (nothing like having the ICOM service department with you on an expedition!). He had to be with us until midnight when the contest ended, so he used this

time to catch up on repairs in the shop. ICOM has an excellent reputation for service and it was obvious why. All of the radios used for the teams were ICOM's (IC-765's and 735's) and other than some minor details, received high scores from the team members after the contest. It seems ICOM has taken a very wise approach to advertising by sponsoring operating activities. They donated \$25,000 to the WRTC, so their help really made the event possible.

The bands started to pick up after sunset. Larry took about 20 minutes to talk to Ed, NT2X in Russian. It was nice not to operate the contest too competitively! Ron went out for several pizzas and we raided the soda machine. All this time we were wondering what happened to the JA's. We only worked 2 JA's during the entire 10 hours, which was on par with what the /WG's worked. Even the locals said that was extremely unusual! I had a chance to look through W7WA's log from the IARU contest just the weekend before, and his log was packed with JA's during the same time period. At midnight the contest was over. We packed up and were picked up by Charlie. Our bus to the Portland DX Convention was departing at 8 AM, which meant we had to be up by 6 AM. We were getting used to minimal sleep by now, after all, you don't sleep when the DX is starting to come through, do you?

As we boarded the bus the next morning, it was like 3830 in person. Most of the teams had stayed up until 3-4 AM verifying their computer log entries, so everybody looked pretty tired. Willy and George from the Chelyabinsk team were particularly distraught -- they started having S9 line noise 5 minutes into the contest. Their hosts and the locals went on a search to find the offending pole, even spraying water from a hose on the utility poles to find the right one. A utility truck rushed to the scene, but it was 6 hours into the contest before the problem was licked. It looked like the AR/DG team had a good lead in the raw QSO total, but the KQ2M/KR0Y team had a big multiplier. And NOBODY worked more than a handful of JA's! As soon as the contestants handed in their disks and their recording of the contest on cassette tapes, the judging started. It wasn't until 5 PM on Monday night, two hours before the final contest announcement, that the final results were fax'ed from San Francisco. Until then, the OK's, LZ's, VE's and DL's all had claim to the #3 position at one point or another during the weekend!

The bus ride to the Portland DX Convention was very relaxing. There was a second bus which was leaving from the south part of Seattle and K1AR had announced earlier that we would be having a contest between the two buses using 2m HT's. Somehow that idea never caught on. We played musical chairs on the bus instead, swapping seats to trade stories about the

contest, about operating strategy, equipment, and just about everything else that had anything to do with contesting and radio. I had a nice chat with Vassily Bondurenko, UV3BW, the head of the Central Radio Club, who had spent the night before together with the other Russian support team members driving all over Seattle to videotape the Russian team members in action at their host's stations. As he talked, his eyes were constantly looking out at the scenery. He seemed to be awed by the American lifestyle which he had experienced unlike any other Soviet dignitary. Among the many conversations was one with Dave G4BUO and Steve G3YDV, who showed pictures of their various contest expeditions to GJ and GU. The Channel Islands in October and November are a far cry from the Caribbean, with lots of wind and cold temperatures. Steve particularly stood out in our group, with shoulder length blond hair and a beard -- it turns out he mixes audio for big-name heavy metal rock groups and spends a lot of time in the States, as evidenced by his FRC name tag. Juan EA5BRA and Guillermo EA9EO described their CQWW efforts as EA9EA in detail. Juan is an engineer with the Spanish equivalent of Bell Telephone Labs and had lots of interesting ideas regarding contest station setup. They brought a remote digital keyboard with them for the '765 so the spotting operator could punch in the frequency of a multiplier instead of punching out the main operator. Look for them at the Pantelleria Island (IH9) CQWW operation this fall (Zone 33). As we approached Portland, it was becoming hotter and hotter outside and to our dismay, the air conditioning in the bus wasn't working. It was becoming very steamy inside the bus, most of us probably had no time to take a shower after the contest and it was becoming very obvious and uncomfortable. Although goodwill pervaded, we coined a new phrase to use as an insult: "*You smell like a contester*". We found out later that we were only 2 degrees from the all-time record temperature in Portland!

As I stepped into the hotel lobby, there was Jack W1WEF, who had come all the way to Portland on a frequent flier ticket for the convention. I shared the hotel room with Gene N2AA and Will AA4NC. After a quick shower (what else?), we migrated down to the convention. The hotel bar became popular and a couple of cold beers really hit the spot. Scores were still coming in and the bar became the unofficial repository of contest results. I bumped into the LZ's who were running around anxiously looking for a place to eat. Their log file became corrupted and they had 1200+ QSO's which they had to enter into the computer again. W1WEF and I have spent many hours entering log data from Caribbean expeditions and I offered my service as a hired-gun touch typist. We went to an upstairs hotel room, they sat me down in front of a portable PC and we proceeded to enter calls.

Others were not as lucky. George UA1DZ and Vlad RB5IM had someone entering their calls during the contest who wasn't accustomed to Russian handwriting. They sat in another corner of our room reading the calls out loud to N7ZZ who edited their log -- at least 1 out of 4 QSO's was entered incorrectly! Meanwhile, Dick Norton N6AA would occasionally run up and down the hallway, dashing in and out of hotel rooms as he tried to keep everything running smoothly. We managed to finish in time for the banquet which was just about to start as we walked into the banquet hall.

Martti Laine, OH2BH, was the featured speaker. He recalled how his father had fought the Russians in World War II, about "Finlandization" and the new relations between the West and the Soviet Union. Would his father ever have imagined his son going on a joint expedition to Malyj Vysotskij Island, where the remains of Finnish settlements can still be seen before the Russians "invaded"? Other speakers followed: Vassily Bondurenko UV3BW from the Central Radio Club, ably translated by Boris UW3AX from Radio magazine, and Chip Margelli K7JA, who also showed slides of the M-V Island expedition. The organizers of the Pacific Northwest DX Convention, the Willamette Valley DX Club, were introduced. They acknowledged this convention to be the best ever, thanks to the presence of the World Radiosport teams. During dinner, I found out that both Rumen LZ1MS and Ogy LZ2PO are Ph.D.'s; Ogy is a specialist in the chemistry of wine-making (Bulgaria makes excellent wines!) and Rumen is the Vice-Director of the School of Management at the Karl Marx Higher Institute of Economics in Sofia. I was going to ask him why he still had "Karl Marx" on the business card he gave me, but then I remembered I was still using QSL's with my old address from 5 years ago...

After the banquet everybody piled into the hospitality suite which was not unlike Dayton, except there were a lot more W7's there! I finally met Dan W7WA, who gives us East Coaster's a big run for the money in DX Contests. It was nice to meet the W7's and the VE7's, including the #4 WRTC team: Dale VE7SV and Lee VE7CC, in a very close race. As the crowd started to thin into the night, we migrated into one of the rooms with UW3AX, UZ3AU and UA6HZ. Boris, UW3AX is deputy editor in chief of Radio magazine and speaks English very well. Gene UZ3AU is technical editor of Radio and is the one who fixed the Yaesu FT-1000 on M-V Island when it broke down. He also went to Chernobyl after the disaster to help with communications and participated in the Armenian relief effort. We talked about the future of the Soviet Union. All three expressed a lot of fear about civil war breaking out. They were worried about ethnic strife in the Soviet Union, which makes even the

best intentions at "perestroika" impossible to carry out. Life in the Soviet Union is not easy and the future is not bright. They envied our comfortable positions in the U.S., where we can pursue our own individual goals and ambitions without worrying too much about the future of our country.

The next morning at breakfast there were several hundred people in attendance. Word must have gotten out that the Northwest DX Convention was not to be missed. Jacky F2CW presented some very interesting slides of the Bouvet expedition in his French-accented English. The preliminary top-three WRTC positions were officially announced -- the Americans took them all! After lunch, we were scheduled to go to a picnic at Camp Bonneville (a military base), sponsored by ICOM. The Russians took a side trip to the only Soviet monument in the U.S., which commemorates the first trans-Polar flight which happened to end in Portland when their fuel ran out. We arrived at the picnic site, which was on the shore of a small lake. A big tent was set up, with lots of food and drink. The weather was beautiful, as we ate and drank to the accompaniment of a band, although the conversations drew the attention away from the musicians. The mandatory VE exam tables were set up between the two buses to provide shade from the hot mid-afternoon sun. The picnic was a big success. It was really a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

The team members were scheduled to return to Seattle the next day, but because there was not enough room on the bus, some of us were asked to leave on the bus departing for Seattle that evening. After a full day in the sun, the bus ride back to Seattle (this time in an air-conditioned bus!) was very comfortable. I sat in the group of some of the CQ Committee members: Bob Cox, K3EST, Ville OH2MM and Gene N2AA, so the conversation naturally turned to log checking and log scoring. I spent a long time talking to Adam N7MJZ (the real person behind that call!) and we came up with some interesting ideas for creating contest categories and for stimulating contest activity, based on our collective experiences in sailing, bicycling and autocrossing. Based upon the incredible success of this event, in days following the contest there was talk in various circles about the formation of a "World Radiosport Federation". To everybody at WRTC, waiting until 1994 for the next Goodwill Games in order to hold another on-site contest was too long to wait...

It seemed that in no time at all we were back in Seattle. Because our hosts in Seattle were not expecting us until Monday, other arrangements were made for us. I stayed with Bruce WA7YFJ, a retired engineer/lawyer from Boeing. He was the host of Vassily Bondurenko,

