DXpedition to Kuria Muria

● Admiralty charts place the Kuria Muria Islands at 17° 32′ N, 56° 05′ E, give or take 2¾ miles. They are hot, barren chunks of limestone and granite rising from the Red Sea off Aden. Chief exports, 1963: fish and QSL cards. Population, 1963: 60 assorted British subjects plus operators of the Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society.

It will surprise few DXers that the RAFARS journeyed to Kuria Muria for their second almost-annual DXpedition last year, though it surprised many that reasonable, sober flyboy types would even want to *visit* there. Here's their story.

In October 1961 the Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society mounted a highly successful DXpedition to a "new country": the Red Sea isle of Kamaran. That trip was so successful that members decided to make similar trips yearly.

Well, *almost* yearly — 1962's trip to Kuria Muria failed at a very late date, so the journey was postponed until 1963. That meant we had nearly two years to figure a way to get onto the island with all supplies, stay there the allotted time, and get off again.

Kuria Muria is a group of four islands in the Red Sea. Only the largest, Hallaniyah, is inhabited. It falls under British political advice from Bahrein and Aden; and is locally ruled by Shaikh Said Bin Muhammad. It is practically devoid of vegetation, water is unpredictable in supply, and ships seldom stop there.

At first we planned to charter a dhow at Masirah (VS9O), but discovered that a motorless dhow would run up weeks of costly charter time in getting back to port. Flying was considered but discarded. It was finally decided to approach a local shipping company which had a boat going to Masirah monthly. For the sum of £100 we were granted permission to take this boat — if we did our own cooking. They would offload us at our destination and pick us up on the return trip eight days later.

We recruited a party of twelve, which was divided into two groups, one to make a geographic-geological survey of the island, and one to serve as a base support group. Squadron Leader A. Silvester was in charge of the group. He was also the geography expert. The party was to include a doctor and an interpreter.

The equipment required was slowly gathered together at Aden. Gus Browning flew in from Afghanistan during October, in time to join our party on the twenty-fifth. Ken Smethurst, VQ4IN had arrived by October 25 and whiled away the time fishing at Aden. Ross Kelley, VS9ARK, and myself were already at Aden.

Meanwhile, much was going on behind the scenes. Permission had to be obtained from the political advisor in Bahrein to land on the island. Permission had already been obtained from the Postmaster General to operate from Hallaniyah. As VS9K had already been issued for Kamaran, VS9H was suggested for Hallaniyah and duly issued. Radio links on service channels had to be arranged. Royal Air Force flights already scheduled to pass near the islands on their way to Masirah were rerouted slightly to pass over the main island. Finally, the estimated time of arrival and commencing of operations had to be passed over the air from Aden to as many DX operators as possible.

Special permission had already been obtained from the Postmaster General at Aden for Gus, W4BPD, to operate from the Kuria Murias and Aden if he used my call when I was there. He stayed longer than expected at Aden and managed to keep VS9AAA very active.

We loaded our ship, the *M. V. Seiyun*, on November 9, and departed the next afternoon. The trip took six and one-half days, during which we played bridge or conducted sextant practice. Most of the party slept out on deck among orange crates, drums of aviation fuel, and sundry items. We had two complete stations aboard; we had originally planned for three, but the third genera-

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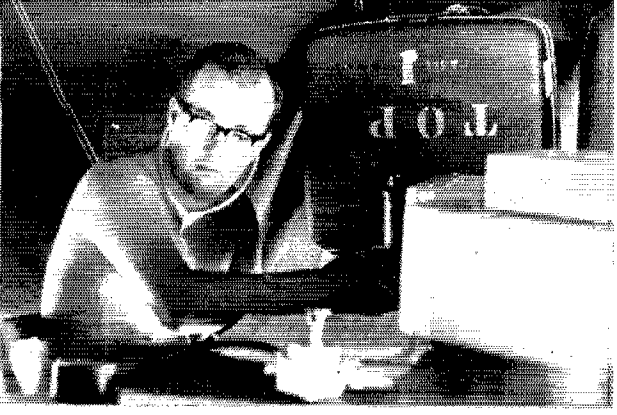

(Left) The VS9H expedition set up shop on a beach in a small cove on Hallaniyah. Author Hern is shown at the operating position of VS9HAA. Nobody could wear a shirt when it got hot in those tents!

tor had failed to materialize at the last minute (it was held up in India!)

Unloading our equipment into a pitching ship's boat took about four years of the lives of the owners of the equipment. All went well however, and after five trips we were all on the island safe even if a little soaked in sea water.

Our first job was to let the local population know they were not invaded, so we dispatched our interpreter to talk with the shaikh. The tents then went up on the sites selected and the radio equipment was set up.

Before leaving Aden a considerable amount of thought had gone into antennas required. We found that 70 per cent of the active radio world could be contacted either long or short path via the northwest. We would also have an antenna for Masirah, and a system for minimum QRM between our two stations.

For one station, we set up a TA-33 Jr. beam thirty feet high and pointed northwest. A two-band trap dipole served to cover directions the beam did not.

To the southwest of our operating tent was a small valley in which we placed two four-band verticals fed in phase by carefully measured coaxial links. It acted as a vertical beam on all bands used, 40-20-15-10.

Operators kept two-hour watches for the first two days, until we finally devised a system which gave everyone six whole hours' sleep in every forty-eight. It proved impossible to sleep during the day because of flies and heat.

Lessons learned during the 1961 expedition were remembered, and both stations operated twenty-four hours a day for eight days. To persons listening to a VS9H calling CQ and not receiving a reply this may have seemed pointless, but we went there to give a new country to as many as possible. If in fact we made ten QSOs in four hours on a nearly dead band — well, that's what we went there for.

Conditions on the bands were relatively poor. Few massive pile-ups were encountered. The

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(Above) Loading the *Seiyun* at Aden. Unloading in heavy surf at Hallaniyah was another matter.

(Below) Putting up the TA-33 Jr. The mast would bend or break if we were not very careful!