

DXpedition to Myanmar

Part 1: Romeo 3W3RR ends a 28 Year Radio Drought in Burma as XYØRR

by Romeo Stepanenko 3W3RR and Ed Kritsky NT2X

The XYØRR expedition was not an isolated event. What made it possible was a chain of incredible events and coincidences. This expedition was different from most others. It only came about thanks to the joint efforts of individuals and groups all over the world, who solved problems so this trip could become a reality. One might liken the XYØRR expedition to a huge jigsaw puzzle: drop one piece and the rest would have become meaningless. And

more than anything we wanted to prove to ourselves that it could be done, against all odds.

As always, at the outset a license was needed. It was easier to get than we had originally thought. Romeo knew the president of a company that had a contract with the Government of Myanmar to provide and install radio-location (RADAR) equipment. A deal was made and preparations began immediately. Permission was granted for a

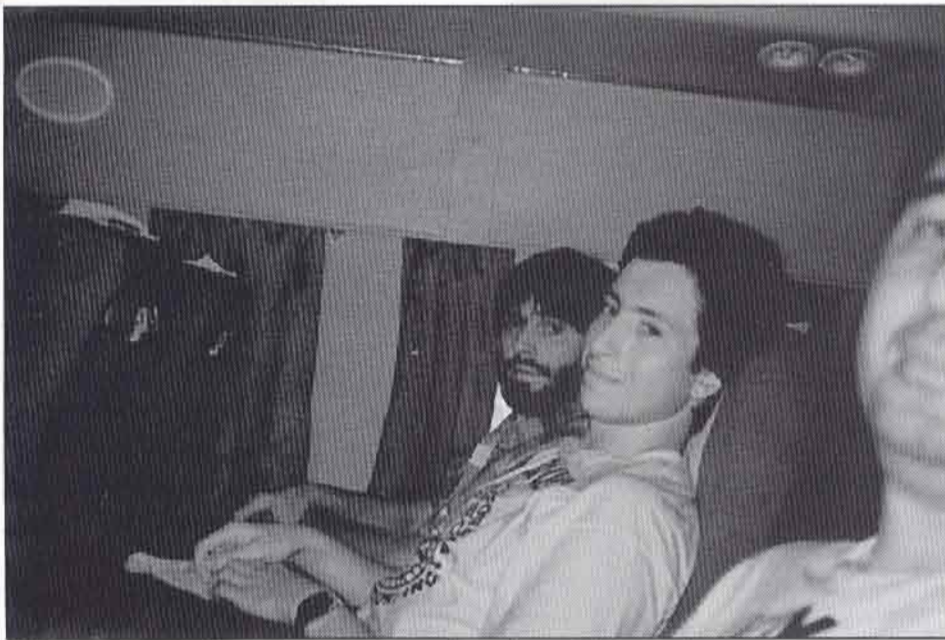
group of four people, under Romeo's supervision, to enter the country as part of the project.

A radio license was received in early June 1991. At that time the DXpedition plans were completed, including guarantees of assistance from the Burmese. The license was good for 6 months and authorized the group to use the callsign of XYØRR on all amateur frequencies from 1.8 through 50 MHz. There existed some real concern (which, as it turned

out, was well founded), over the adequacy of the authorization to set up stations and put up antennas in the given location (i.e. whether additional permission would be required). Experience gained during the first Afghanistan expedition (YAØRR) showed this could become the major obstacle to success. A copy of the license and supporting documentation was presented to the ARRL by Ed Kritsky, NT2X. When Romeo visited the USA in July, we went back to Newington and were told by Chuck Hutchinson K8CH, Manager of Membership Services (of which the DXCC desk is a part), that our documentation was enough to give our DXpedition the



In Moscow, Ed Kritsky NT2X and Roman 4K2OT get prepared by testing their equipment.



While enroute to Burma our team wonders what will await them.

'green light' for DXCC (provided that additional supporting documentation, to verify our presence in Myanmar, was received by the League when the trip was over.) This produced a major celebration right there at the League—with champagne for all present!

With the license in hand Romeo proceeded to compute the DXpedition budget and prepare a list of necessities. He counted for support on his friends in Japan and the USA, and he wasn't disappointed. The total budget came to \$48,000. Yuri Brazhenko, Romeo's boss at the time, advanced the expedition \$10,000 from Moscow Boston International, Ltd. This set the wheels into motion and the departure date was set for August 26, 1991.

The Moscow 'Support Group' consisted of UA3AB, UJ8JLT, UL7IDX, UV3DCX, UV6HRR, and RA3AA. Most of these hams had aided with prior trips, so now they began locating and buying medical supplies we would need in the tropical Asian climate, ropes, tents, canned food; and building and testing wire antennas. The apartment belonging to Harry RA3AUU, was designated as our headquarters, and for almost two months thereafter it bore the

distinctive atmosphere of a mental institution.

The success of any expedition is determined by a good crew. A group of four was formed: Harry RA3AUU, Gena UA9MA, Roman 4K2OT/UB1KA, and Romeo himself. Everyone understood the risks involved and was ready to try them. Good operating skills weren't the only criteria—the most important

consideration was, once again, how people got along with each other. This saved us a lot of aggravation later, regardless of the conditions.

Two separate locations had been proposed for the upcoming operation by the Burmese. Until the last moment we had no way of knowing which we were going to: an island off the coast (our preference), or an undisclosed location in the infamous 'Golden Triangle.' At the same time an MBI representative in Singapore chartered a yacht, so generators, fuel, and food could be brought in. Myanmar officials were to receive these and deliver them to our final destination before our arrival.

In the meantime, our Japanese coordinator, Taka Ajiro JA2JPA, had begun a major fund-raising effort even before the license was presented to the League. This money was enough to pay for the boat charter and supplies from Singapore. It was a monumental task which he did very well. Major support was also given by JA1BK, JA6LDD, JA7SGV, and JA7JPZ, among others.

Romeo's trip to the United States in June and July 1991 contributed significantly to the success of the DXpedition.



Enjoying a soft drink in the Calcutta Airport, where they were bumped off the flight to Burma.

Aside from meeting K8CH at the League, he spoke with Chip Margelli K7JA, of Yaesu USA, and Yoh Sakurada JP1NWZ of Yaesu Musen. Both were very helpful and an agreement was reached for a generous donation of three sets of FT-990 transceivers and FL-7000 amplifiers. All this equipment behaved extremely well under the most demanding conditions and never failed during the entire operation. Meeting Bill Hein AA6TT and Bill Sattler NØXX, resulted in a donation of



Roman 4K2OT is directing the antenna placement.

log-periodic antennas from DX Engineering, Inc., of which both men are principals. None of this travel would have been possible without active participation from everyone who opened their hearts and homes to accommodate a fellow DXer from Russia. For that we were very grateful! Many of U.S. clubs and associations gave to the Burma operation, which resolved the financial matters. Brook K4TKM/6 made the largest individual donation of \$1000 - possibly the final contribution needed to begin the expedition.

Our U.S. coordinator, as on earlier trips, was Edward NT2X. Ed came to Moscow on business, but found time to participate in our preparations. In the meantime, Romeo needed to travel to Japan, where the equipment donated by Yaesu Musen was awaiting pick-up. For some reason, Romeo's Japanese visa wasn't ready, with only two weeks remaining before the scheduled departure to Burma. When Ed mentioned that Americans don't need Japanese entry visas, his destiny was sealed, un-

beknownst to him at the time. Fortunately, Ed's business schedule was somewhat flexible. It was inevitable that he would save the day and fly to Japan to return with the donated equipment. Ed refused to believe that he was going from Moscow to Japan for one day.

The next afternoon, August 16, on calling the MBI office, Ed learned, to his disbelief, that his plane was leaving in three hours and that he had better pack his belongings. Without exaggeration, he had exactly 5 minutes to grab some items and be on his way to the airport. He was also very worried about how he was going to re-enter the USSR—he had a single-entry/single-departure visa. He was leaving the country without any apparent way to get back in! A mad rush to the airport followed (where check-in for any international flight closes one hour before scheduled departure). A lot of haggling on the part of Romeo who was changing tickets already purchased in his own name to Ed's (Ed suddenly became an 'employee' of MBI going on a business

trip). An unsuccessful bid to swap pre-paid cargo tickets into Ed's name (for equipment on the way back). Too little time remained. Another trick was to get NT2X on the plane without showing his US passport and his ticket at the same time (the ticket had been paid for in rubles, not dollars, as it would have been for a citizen of a foreign country). As a foreigner Ed would normally have had to pay between five and six thousand dollars for a round trip to Japan on Aeroflot; instead it cost us 10,000 rubles (approx. \$300 at the time). Romeo and Andy UA3AB, promised to take care of the Soviet visa. The idea of being in Tokyo on Saturday was making Ed very nervous—Soviet bureaucrats never worked on weekends! He left Moscow overwhelmed with the importance of this mission and the uncertainty that lay ahead.

Nine hours later he arrived at Narita (the main international airport for Tokyo), and was immediately greeted by Koji-san JS6BLS/1, who works at the airport. They traveled into the city by

train and met with Ajiro Taka JA2JPA, who had received the details about Ed's arrival in a phone call from Moscow at 3am Tokyo time. Together they went to the offices of CQ Ham Radio magazine, (a major sponsor of the operation). There they met with Kan-san JA1BK, and the staff of the magazine. A shopping trip followed to the Akihabara, the electronics retail bazaar of Tokyo, and also to the 'T-Zone,' a well-known amateur radio dealer nearby.

Throughout the day Ed tried, to no avail, to call the Soviet Embassy about his return visa. Only at 5pm did they locate someone who told him that the Embassy indeed had received a telex from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, instructing consular officials to issue an entry visa immediately to a certain Mr. Kritsky, a US citizen, who had to return to Moscow to conduct important busi-

ness negotiations. A visa requires four passport-size photos (\$20/set at a nearby instant photo place in pricey Japan!) An hour and a half later and \$100 lighter, the tired team of Koji-san, Ajiro-san, and Mr. Ed arrived at the house of Toshi Kusano JA1ELY, the Editor of '59 Magazine,' a popular Japanese DX publication. Toshi-san had kindly agreed to store the Yaesu equipment and aid with Ed's return trip. Everyone was exhausted from running around Tokyo all day (and Ed also from flying all night), and both Koji and Ajiro soon left. Ed set about to re-pack the three sets of FT-990/FL-7000s from Yaesu Musen, and an Icom IC-726, donated by Ham System Shonai. The equipment was heavy, way over the limit allowed on Ed's passenger ticket. Since the pre-paid cargo ticket Ed held was in the name of Romeo Stepanenko, he wasn't at all sure

if Aeroflot would let him use it. The Narita Airport Aeroflot operation charges \$50 for each kilogram of excess baggage, so being 60 kg over the limit was hardly any reason for cheer. Not even the JAs had \$3000 to spare. Yaesu had specified that all three sets were to be taken—or none. It was a tough spot for Ed to be in: Romeo was a continent away by telephone, and he didn't want to be left holding the bag(s). A ham is a ham, so Ed got on the air as 7J7AAS/1 and spoke with W2MIG and other friends back home. All were very excited about the trip and wished Ed a safe return to Moscow.

In the morning, after about three hours of sleep, Toshi-san drove Ed to the airport and helped him to unload—it took two baggage carts to move all the equipment around. His first-class ticket allowed for some additional luggage, but



Romeo 3W3RR, working CW and drinking 7up; perhaps the knife in the key base helps cut through the pile-ups.

not enough to get on board without paying for excess. Ed slipped Romeo's cargo ticket to a young lady at the counter, but she soon became puzzled and called her superior. Mr. Ohtaka, the Aeroflot manager, looked friendly and also determined. He immediately found himself surrounded by JA1ELY, JK1KRS (Takuro-san, a Lufthansa employee at Narita), and JS6BLS. Watching from the side it looked like a battle of words. The Japanese DXers were trying to persuade Aeroflot to let Ed go without paying an exorbitant fee. Mr. Ohtaka made a sad face and went to make a phone call. Five minutes later he returned with the same sad face, approached Ed (whose heart sank) and in Georgian-accented Russian told him: "RAZ-RI-SHAYU!" ("I permit.")

NT2X was going to miss the flight because of the huge passport control line, so five minutes before departure he was taken through a service entrance (first-class tickets are nice) to a separate passport control for pilots and flight attendants, getting to the gate three minutes before departure, where an Aeroflot employee duly noticed that the two duffel bags he was carrying probably weighed more than the 18 pounds allowed. Ed feigned ignorance and got on board 'playfully' carrying more than 120 pounds. (NT2X: 2, Aeroflot: 0)

Landing in Moscow on the afternoon of the 18th, Ed was met by Romeo and Rif UA3ADK. Since Romeo had

done his 'homework,' they went through customs unhindered and uninspected. Otherwise, considering the events that followed over the next several days—they could easily have been arrested by the authorities and had the equipment confiscated. Another lucky coincidence!

The rest of the day was spent testing the equipment. Everyone was tired and happy. The very rude awaken-

which, the dazed group continued preparations for the trip. Leaving Moscow might prove difficult. Telephones worked for calls inside Moscow, but not to other Soviet cities and certainly not internationally. People, however, could call from other cities in the USSR to Moscow. Gena UA9MA, phoned from Omsk and was told to come quickly, or he might get held up if internal flights were cancelled. The next few days were filled with frenetic activity. RA3AA, 3W3RR, RA3AUU, and UA3AB set up ICOM equipment at the Russian parliament building. Gene, UZ3AU modified the Yaesu amplifiers to transmit on 10 meters for the expedition. Gena UA9MA and Roman 4K2OT arrived in Moscow. More supplies were bought.

Ed got on the air from Moscow as UA3A/NT2X, drawing tremendous attention to everything he had to say about the situation in Moscow, the coup and the people of Russia. Later, the members of the team and several guests got on the air with Ed's call (to protect their identities). The most frequently asked question on the air was:

'When will the Burma expedition begin?' The DX world was much more interested in the DXpedition than the coup. Fortunately, the putsch failed three days later and life slowly returned to normal, so everyone thought the adventures were over. Little did they know the real adventure had not quite begun.

There were no tickets to Burma for



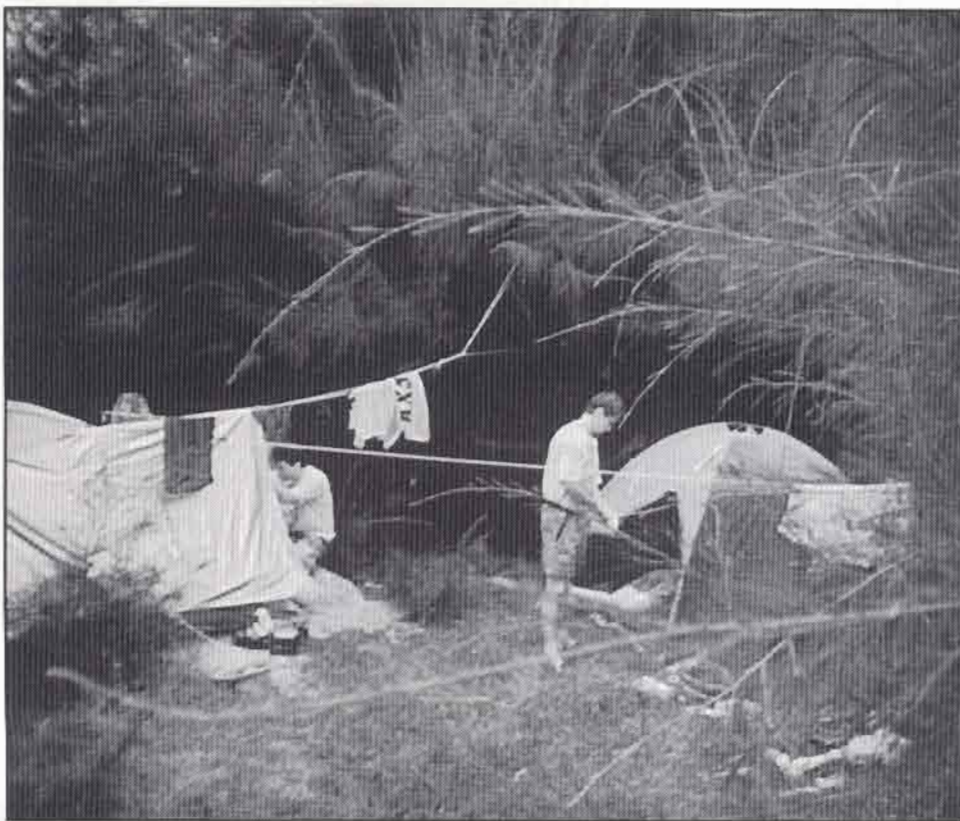
Gene UA9MA, contemplates the intricacies of the camp stove.

ing early the next morning came with a telephone call announcing a state coup in the Soviet Union. These events happen every 75 years or so. Moscow was placed under a curfew, airports were semi-closed, banks were fully closed, Mr. Gorbachev was supposedly ill, and the people who had taken power reeked of Stalinism and stupidity. Notwithstanding

sale in Moscow. Somehow, four tickets to Yangon Airport were acquired a few days before the departure date, August 26th. Ed left Moscow for Leningrad on the 25th, to fly on to New York later. The group of four was seen off at Sheremetyevo Airport by Andy UA3AB and Dima UA3AGW. At the same time K5VT, NZ7E, and KC7V showed up in Moscow en-route to Mongolia. [See *The DX Magazine*,

April, 1992.] Andy and Dima also greeted them at the airport. The Burma DXpedition departure from Moscow wasn't without its unexpected moments. Loading so much equipment and supplies brought additional attention from the customs officials. Four serious-looking men, dressed in NCDXF T-shirts with the XYØRR logo, definitely stood out from the crowd of other passengers for the Myanmar flight. When asked who they were, Romeo nonchalantly told the customs people that they were a rescue team going to the South China Sea to save lives after an accident had taken place on an oil rig there. They were hurried onto the plane, without any further questions or checks.

While on board, the 'quartet' found themselves to be the only passengers destined for Burma. Rangoon is only a stopover for Aeroflot. The airline decided to unload the foursome in Calcutta and get them flown to their destination by Air India. Moscow was hot, but Calcutta was hotter and very humid, a



The XYØRR operation was set up in the middle of the jungle.

precursor of events to come. Also, 300 kilos of luggage were quickly starting to weigh like three tons, in direct relation to the temperature, the air quality, and the distance to the destination. An hour and a half later they were on their way by small plane to Myanmar. The group was expected at the airport in Yangon. A jeep, which waited on the tarmac, drove them to the terminal building, where their passports were stamped and the video camera they brought was taken away, to be returned only upon departure. The humidity wasn't quite as vile as in Calcutta. The customs officials checked all the cargo against pre-approved lists, and somehow everything matched, except two HT's (gifts from JA7JPZ). After some haggling these were allowed in as well.

The airport looked fairly civilized, a good sign. The team loaded their wares onto a military helicopter. Suddenly, it turned out that the operating position was no longer to be in the Miei Islands, as was originally discussed. It

was in the Golden Triangle, about 160 kilometers from its geographic center. Romeo checked his topo map and found elevations of 1000-2000 meters above sea level. Oh, well, it could be to their advantage. After all—better radio reception, maybe fewer mosquitoes and snakes? Mosquitoes were there in force, it turned out. The helicopter takeoff was smooth, overflying the perimeter of a large city at low

altitude, heading in the direction of Laos. What a pity they didn't have a camera; the beauty of the land was breathtaking, the bright colors of vegetation almost painful to the eyes. Soon the helicopter landed, as if into the jungle. Hidden beneath the trees were some buildings, and a well-groomed landing area. Refueling took several minutes. A Burmese officer, part of the assigned guard, spoke a few Russian words. He had graduated from some Russian military institution, but had completely forgotten the language they taught him for several years there. Just like the XYØRR team, he was going into the Golden Triangle for the first time in his life. Among the military the place held a bad reputation—some have gone there and never come back. Neither the helicopter pilot, nor the other guards had seen Russians before, but Romeo and the team felt a bit better, having made contact with their minds.

The helicopter finally landed. Gena UA9MA got off first and began walking

with a proudly raised head. With helicopter blades slowing and drooping down, it was not a smart move. Suddenly, Gena was on the ground, with blood all over his face, having been hit by a rotating blade. Romeo jumped out to aid Gena and broke a toe (which was discovered much later). The glancing blow left Gena's head intact, with two deep lacerations that were cleaned and bandaged. We were afraid of tropical infection. Gena regained his senses and began to joke about how nothing could damage a head made of solid bone.

At some time prior to our arrival, a patch of land had been cleared for the operation. The 'Honda-2800' generators and fuel had been forwarded by the Burmese hosts from the islands, the originally scheduled operating location. We were briefed by the chief of the guards: an area 20x30 meters was assigned for the operation, and leaving this area wasn't desirable—per instructions from above. This middle-aged officer spoke very good English. Erecting any metal antennas was absolutely prohibited, under threat of expulsion from the country. We were dumb-founded—why? What could be secret in this patch of land in the middle of nowhere with two army barracks in the woods? The operators were speechless. How could we operate without real antennas? Well, we wanted to put on the expedition, now we had to live with the consequences. Fortunately, surrounding the parcel of 'our' land were 6 or 7 tall trees of unknown variety, with smooth trunks. We decided to try a good old 'Afghani Special.' A 21-meter long wire was measured and then Romeo used his mountain climbing experience to deliver it twenty-something meters up one of the trees. The generators were brand new, but would they work? From the scratches and dents in evidence it looked as if our hosts had transported them with all the care normally attached to firewood or stones. One generator worked right away, two

others didn't. Damn!

The historic moment approached—who would make the first QSO, thirty years after the notorious Don Miller W9WNV, operated from Burma as XZ2TH? We drew lots and fortune smiled upon Harry RA3AUU. The guards left us alone until sunrise, but continued to watch from a distance. First CQ—no response—well, after all, we were barefoot with a long wire. Second CQ—DU1EIB, with DU1KT next (DU1KT was Romeo's first QSO from 1S0XV in 1990, wow!) The first operating position was ready, and work continued. The second barefoot FT-990 was hooked up to the same generator, and another 'Afghani' went up. Global

madness descended upon XY0RR. We made a rule—two operating positions must be active at any given moment, despite any other problems. We then erected the tent and stored the remaining equipment and our belongings. The broken generators had to be fixed no matter what; we couldn't really be heard without them. They were disassembled and put back together several times—even the guards helped, as best they could. Only on the third day did the second and third generators kick in. That's when we began to be heard in both Europe and North America. Those three days gave us the opportunity to almost satisfy demand from the Japanese DXers without much pressure from

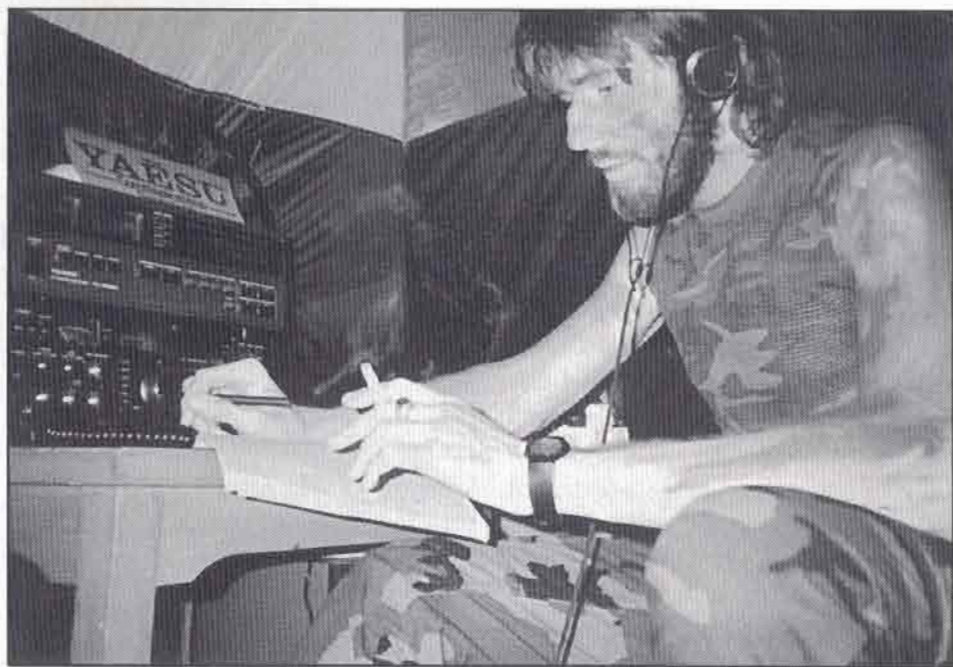


Local children are fascinated with radio operations.

other parts of the world. That was why Japanese hams patiently waited when we worked the rest of the world for many hours on end. In three days we covered our trees with a 'spider web' of antennas, managing even to put up a 160-meter quasi-sloper, which worked quite well, no doubt because one end of it was attached to an empty bottle of 'Irish Cream' (a potent medical potion, purchased in Moscow). Don't believe people who say that Russians love only vodka!

Part 2 will appear in the October 1992 issue of the *The DX Magazine*.

to be continued...



Romeo 3W3RR, reviews the contacts made - over 50,000!

DXpedition to Myanmar

Part 2: Romeo 3W3RR ends a 28 Year Radio Drought in Burma as XYØRR

by Romeo Stepanenko 3W3RR and Ed Krisky NT2X

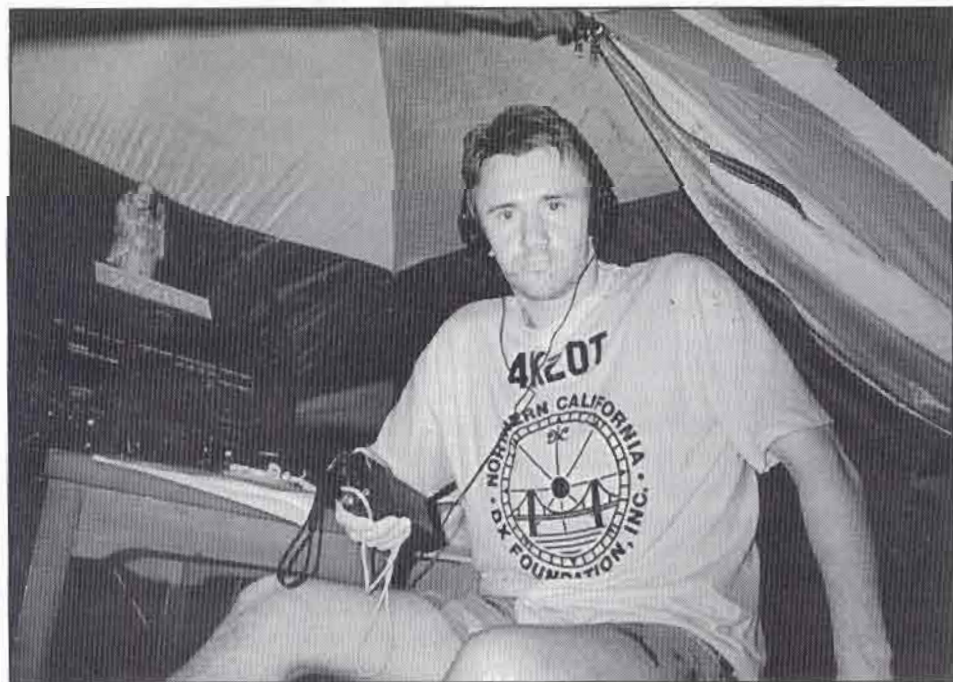
The days were hot, but the nights cool. The nights also brought mosquitoes and ugly flying creatures of unclear sizes and unknown intentions. For some reason only Harry fell victim. He was bitten by an insect with the funny local name of 'Chook-chook.' His recovery was complete only upon access to antibiotics when the group returned to Moscow. Harry also got stomach sickness and spend a lot of time hiding in the bushes. Roman 4K2OT, managed to catch a cold and was coughing. How

could anyone catch a cold in the jungle at 30° centigrade after eight years on Franz Joseph Land, in the bitter Arctic?

With wire antennas, propagation openings to North America weren't very long: 2-4 hours per day, at most. Those windows were used for that purpose exclusively, without acknowledging anyone else. Most signals other than the West Coast were weak, so we had to spread our pile-ups over 100 Khz. We knew it wasn't the right move to do, but we felt we had no choice. Having heard

complaints about our 'spread' practices, we would challenge anyone to use wire antennas from such a rare spot, with every signal about 3x3. Try to make sense out of the wall of noise we were faced with! Many stations called at the same time, without even knowing our callsign. One hundred Khz was hardly enough. We worked people calling on the edges of the pile-up, their power and antennas made no difference whatsoever. Everyone was the same strength. We often answered QRP stations on a clear frequency and wouldn't come back to a 'big gun' in the middle of the pile, whose call couldn't be made out. Japanese DXers were in a more advantageous situation: at any time of day there was propagation into Japan on some of the bands. Many DXers there worked us on 6-8 bands, and JL1WPQ managed QSOs on all 10 bands, **all** modes! Europe was at some disadvantage, compared to Japan, but everyone who wanted worked us on three or more bands. The East Coast of the U.S. wasn't lucky at all—most W1s, 2s, 3s, and 8s made one or two contacts. Propagation would change dramatically in direction and signal strength from minute to minute. (Some East Coast stations have told us that our signals arrived there with wild swings—from North to South to West within the same hour). Once Ed NT2X,

Roman 4K2OT operating XYØRR from Burma.





Romeo 3W3RR and the rest of the XYØRR team made more than 50,000 QSOs from Burma.

broke in from New York and spoke with Gena, later relaying information about our problems to the rest of the world. Ed also suggested some ways to improve

on our spectrum usage and operating techniques. We listened, because he was our eyes and ears and we had to rely on his opinions.

We tried to give everyone an equal chance to work XYØRR. And how painfully insulting it was to hear, over weak W1s and 2s for whom propagation was marginal, fat 20-Khz wide signals covering one and all. An Italian station appearing to run no less than 20 KW would chastise us for several minutes for working Americans. 'Russians must be ill-mannered, if they work the USA for an hour, without considering Europe!' Unfortunately, this self-indulging, egotistic CB-band attitude persisted with some. People like that didn't care if it was late night in Myanmar and we were doing the 'graveyard shift,' falling asleep next to our radios from approaching 'battle fatigue.' No, these 'gentlemen' would get on the radio after some fine meal, in the comfort of their homes and ready to work DX when they wanted, right then and there. We heard so many insults (unfortunately, a lot of them from Italian stations), that we began to wonder if we somehow deserved it for bringing a new country on the air, for all

Packing the gear for the departure from Burma.



the sickness and deprivation we suffered, for trying to be fair. Romeo was somewhat used to this behavior, but Gena, Harry, and super-patient Roman screamed back and threw down the mike. Something must be wrong with our hobby, when XYØRR continued for hours to work the same multi-kilowatt stations out of Italy, ones that populated every kilohertz of 15 meters, the ones that kept coming back to us with the same familiar voices but with different calls. Gena UA9MA experienced a brain-washing 'technique' when in the middle of a weak American pile-up several very loud voices began sweetly persuading him to work Italians instead: 'Hey, Gena, don't work those stupid Americans... We are easier to work, Gena... We are friends... We know you do it for the money Americans gave for the expedition... Gena, work us, we got money too...' When that

failed, RTTY carriers were thrown in, effectively jamming every North American signal. Gena had no choice but to switch bands.

We made our first low-band contacts on 80 and 160; Japan enjoyed a 2-hour opening on 80 and exactly 30 minutes on 160 meters. We kept trying 160 meters into Japan on 1.910, working anyone we could. The same went for 40-meter openings towards the USA. We thoroughly enjoyed our first 80-meter contact with—who else?—John ON4UN,

then—of course!—OH1XX. Also, every day, for an hour or so, we worked the United States on 3.5 Mhz. Gena made most of our low-band contacts. Others got to play as well, when he got tired.

On about the 5th or 6th day our operators quit expressing surprise that we were being heard with our modest antennae. We were sleeping about three hours a day; three operating positions had to be manned. The 'WARC' bands gave us much pleasure, they had fewer 'breakers' and malicious jammers. Clearly these bands are the domain of true

our ears. The 'Irish Cream' and alcohol provided pleasant diversions, but they ran out, too. We were left with several cases of '7-Up,' bought in Moscow and Calcutta. Hot '7-Up' for two weeks with no alternative—what could be worse? We decided to commemorate our suffering and began listening '7 up' instead of 'up 5.' We were approaching forty thousand QSOs; sleep deprivation continued and every member of the team was dreaming about dropping everything and waking up someplace with an air conditioner or at least a fan, cold beer,

or, even better, very very cold beer—or even water, and **No mosquitoes!** Our guards were changed. The new officer in charge spoke Russian with a distinctly Ukrainian accent. Strangely, he refused to tell us where he studied in the USSR. He was very interested in what we were doing and why he was sent in to guard us. He fully believed our explanation

Band	First	USA	Europe	USSR	Japan	QSOs
1.8	JA6HUG	W2NQ/7	ON4UN	LY2WR	JA6HUG	151
3.5	JH7BDS	WN4KKN	SM6CVX	UA1ADY	JH7BDS	466
3.8	JF6DPM	W6RJ	OH3SR	UA4LCH	JF6DPM	508
7	JR1AIB	W6RT	OH4RF	UW0CW	JR1AIB	3662
10	JA3REK	KK6H	ON7PQ	UA9CBO	JA3REK	536
14	DU1EIB	WA6HAT	DK5PR	UB5LPL	JH1SJN	15393
18	JQ1BNA	N4MM	OH1XX	RT5UN	JQ1BNA	1171
21	JS6CDB	N6QR	IK4DCT	UA3DMZ	JS6CDB	17736
24	JE3NWQ	N6BFM	OZ3PZ	RW9FW	JE3NWQ	1169
28	JH9GAT	WB4LFM	PA0LEG	UW0WX	JH9GAT	7569
50	JH1ECU	KG6DX	-	-	JH1ECU	494
RTTY	JA3MNP	W4JXM	OH2LU	UZ9CWA	JA3MNP	1152
TOTAL						50007

DXers. As always, we'd like to commend the Japanese operators for their courtesy on the air: none made it onto the dreaded 'Black List.' We are sad to mention the extremely poor operating habits of some Italian stations. Of 38 stations blacklisted for this DXpedition, 26 were Italians. We didn't make note of ordinary violators of ham ethics; to get on the 'Black List' one had to try very hard to make our operators angry.

The weather was hot, all the time. We ate canned food until it came out of

that we were there to study the quantity of signals passing over Myanmar territory from foreign radio stations. After finding out all the facts, Myanmar could then tax foreigners for the use of the ether above the country. He gave permission (and turned his back, for "plausible deniability") when we put up a 6-meter yagi. Hurray—almost 500 QSOs with Japan, plus KG6DX—neither he, nor we could believe it! In the final few days one operating position was converted for RTTY. 1152 contacts followed,

including such notables as TY1PS and C9RKL, wow! The equipment really performed well, without a hitch. Everyone positively fell in love with FT-990 radios and FL-7700 amps: an ideal set-up for such demanding trips.

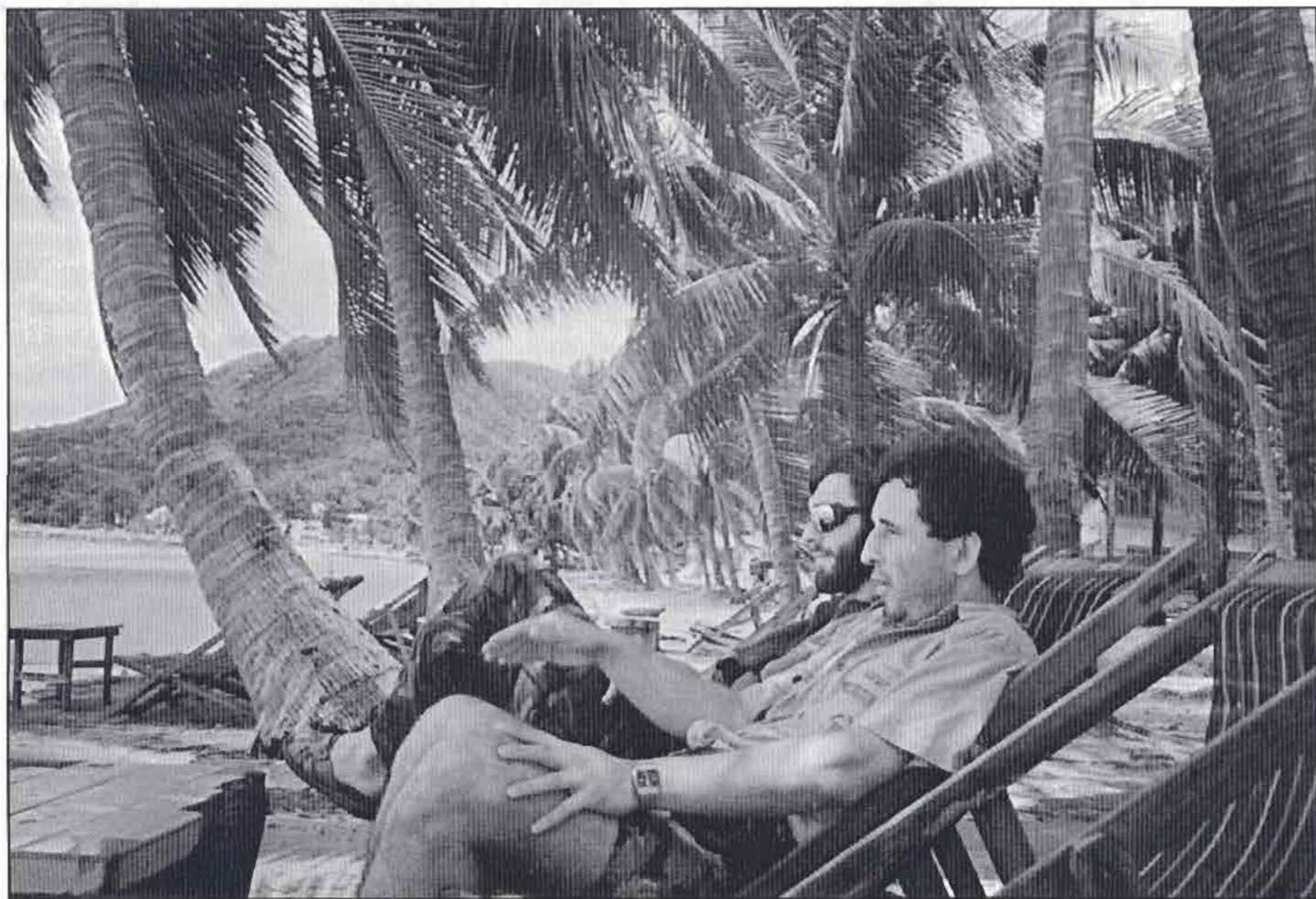
But the boys were falling apart. Roman was thrashing around with high fever, Harry wasn't feeling well at all and was in dire need of medical attention. And so was Gena, when his head wounds became inflamed. Romeo's broken toe got swollen, too. It became apparent that most active DXers had worked us. On the last days of the operation (September 10-11), we started getting calls from stations in the USA, who were asking questions about the kind of expedition we were, our operating location, QSLing, giving us their names and states. The Japanese would ask us to QSY to 18 Mhz CW, because

they already had us everywhere else. Someone wanted us on 24.9 Mhz RTTY, yet others for 29 Mhz FM or AM. XYØRR saturation had set in. We were informed of about four pirates. On the 6th or 7th day of operating we tuned 21 to Mhz and for two hours observed a pirate XYØRR, working the USA on hi-speed CW. He was working them an hour or two before we started hearing North America. He seemed to have been someplace in UAØF, perhaps the same pirate who made trouble for other expeditions organized by Romeo. Unfortunately, he worked a lot of people.

By the last day of operation we were absolutely exhausted and couldn't take it anymore. The helicopter arrived, forcing us to shut down altogether. We made our last contact with KH3AE and pulled the plug on the XYØRR operation on September 11, with a total of

50,007 contacts in the log (the '7' in honor of '7 Up'). The generators were 'donated' to the Myanmar military for 'accommodations' provided for the operation, after they refused to load them on board the chopper. This was a major snag, since Romeo had planned to sell them in Thailand and use the money to return to Russia. We left behind much of what we brought with us, including two barrels of fuel, and a lot of coax cable. We had to be out of the country in 10 hours, and the helicopter wouldn't make another flight just for the generators. We all fell asleep on board and awoke only when we landed in Rangoon. We spent a good six hours at the Yangon Airport, where a security officer took away all the film we had shot in Myanmar. They developed and printed the film, and returned us the photographs that were okay by them, which

Romeo and Roman relax on the Vietnamese seashore, while trying to figure out a way back to Russia.





Romeo pays the captain for the trip to Spratly.

amounted to about 120 pictures. We never got back more than 20 rolls of slide film, which they probably had no way to develop. There wasn't much we could do. Earlier, Romeo had tried to

work out a deal so the government of Myanmar, which had invited us in the first place, would pay for our return trip to Russia. They offered only Bangkok as a final destination. We had no choice

but to leave immediately—Harry's and Gena's health problems were becoming our most serious concerns, as were Romeo's and Roman's. The group also ran out of food, and wanted nothing more than to complete the 'mission' and get the hell out. Flown to Bangkok, we were left with equipment, antennas, our backpacks, and confusion. What could we do? We didn't have the generators to sell, which would have given us money to get back. There was enough money for one person to return to Moscow, but not all four. We all had to live someplace, eat, and wait for money from somewhere, but Romeo knew no one in HS-land. There was one other option—getting to Saigon (a.k.a. Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam, where Romeo had lived during 1989 and 1990, and had friends and acquaintances. There were enough funds to pay for four one-way tickets to Saigon, but not enough to pay for 200 kilos of luggage. We booked ourselves on a plane leaving in an hour. Romeo convinced the airline we would be met at the Saigon Airport and would pay for the luggage there—there was no other way out!

So there we were, landing in Saigon. Romeo was hoping to get help from his Vietnamese friends. Unfortunately, major political changes swept that country during the past year. Most of his friends had simply disappeared and were nowhere to be found. The pro-communist coup attempt in Russia didn't help matters, either: the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party sent a congratulatory telegram to the coup leaders. When the coup in Moscow failed and democratic forces won out, the Soviet Union ceased to be a 'Big Brother' for their Vietnamese 'comrades.' We found ourselves on the other side of the fence. The officials in Vietnam were treating us as 'suspicious foreigners.' Damn politics! Romeo convinced the Vietnamese customs to hold our luggage until we could come up with the funds to pay for it all. Each

Contributors

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additional day would cost us even more money. It made him worried sick, because along with the equipment the bags contained all the logs for the XYØRR expedition and losing them would have been a DX-catastrophe!

We checked into a local hotel (with no money, on credit), where they remembered Romeo. Then sold everything we could. We raised \$80, a tremendous sum, spent \$10 on medicine for Harry and Roman and used the remaining \$70 to send two fax pages to Ed in New York, asking for help. We needed \$3500 to pay for the luggage and tickets to return to Moscow. It was our only hope. By the way, there was and still is a complete economic embargo imposed by the United States on Vietnam, which meant no direct communications and no way to wire money. Here we were in complete isolation, with no one to help. We had \$6

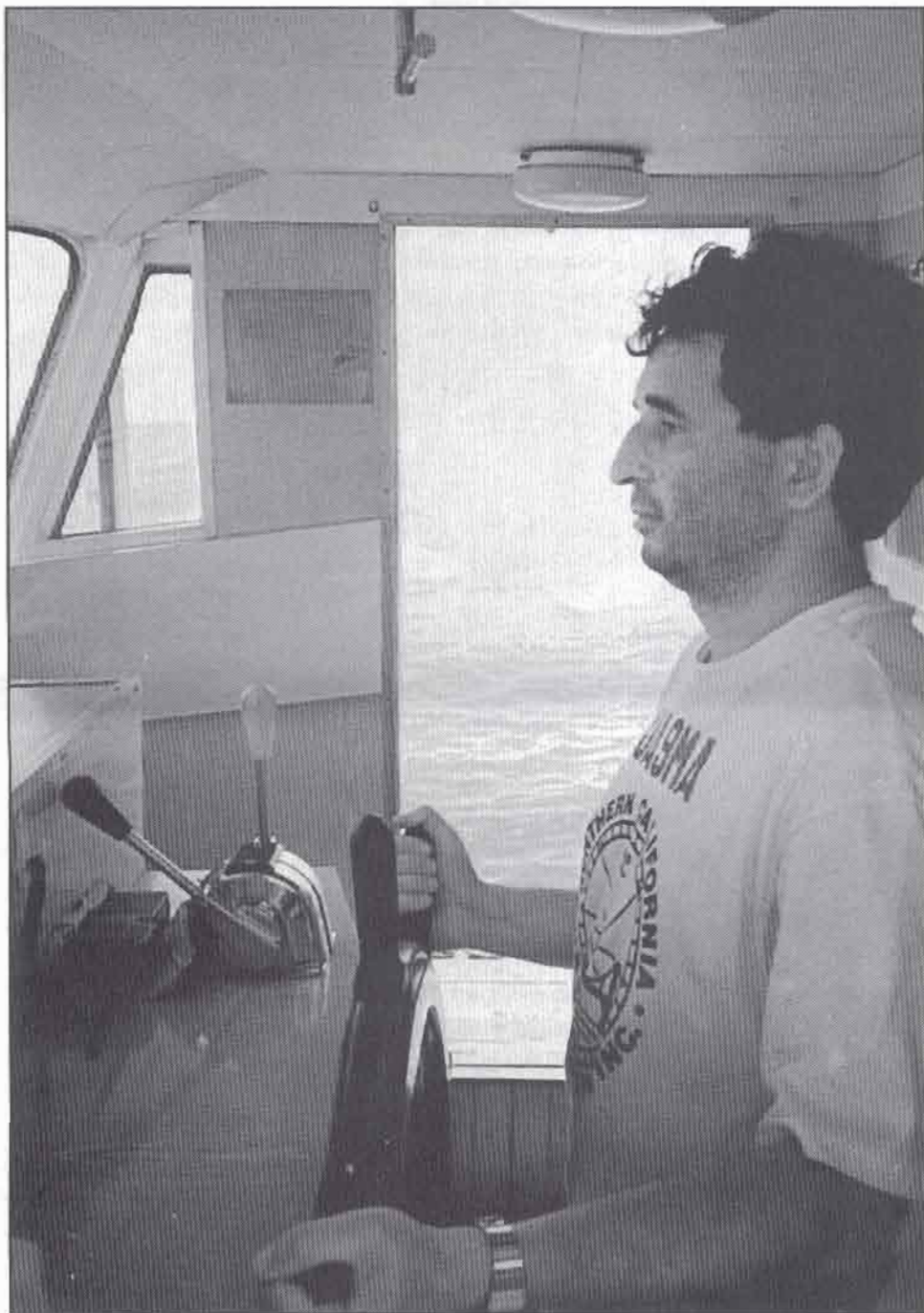
in our pockets, enough for six days of living (food could be eaten on credit at the hotel and, with a \$1 tip to the waiter, we were rich clients to the hotel management). This trick worked, and we

didn't have to pay until the money arrived! We went and borrowed the Kenwood transceiver Romeo had left at XV2A a year earlier after the Spratly DXpedition (1SØXV/1S1RR). [See *The*

callsigns for Roman, Gena, and Harry and we made more than 10,000 contacts from Vietnam before leaving.

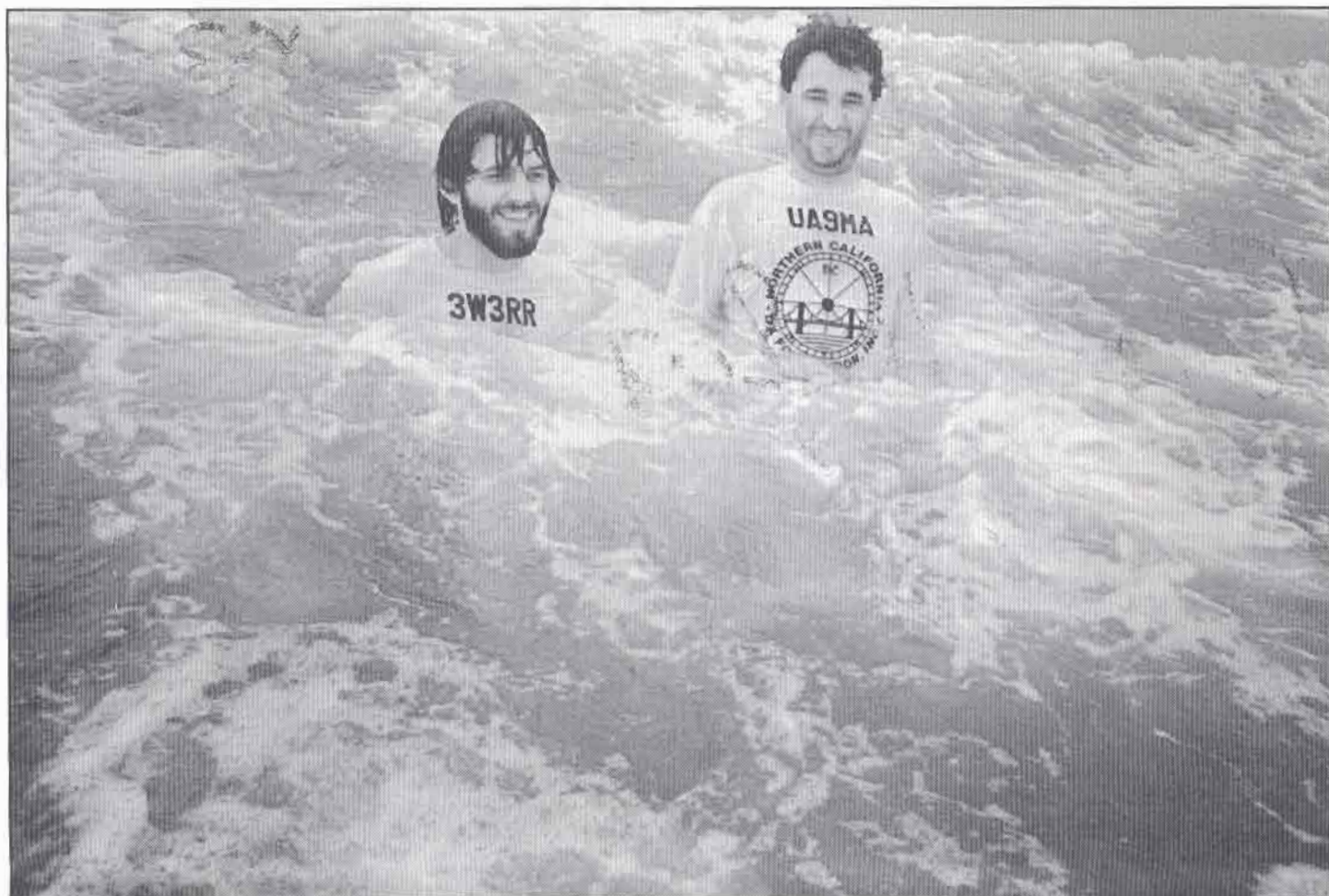
Concurrently, Ed was organizing the 'rescue campaign.' He was working against time trying to get us out of a difficult position. Many phone calls went to Japan, because he couldn't call us directly from the States. JH3DPB, then JA2EZD, and JA6LDD got involved, because Ajiro-san JA2JPA, was away on a business trip. They found a way to get us money—some of it came through the mail, some via Hata-san of Kichietsu Trading Company of Saigon. We spent a lousy time, waiting. Ed NT2X talked to us on 20 and 15 meters most every day and kept our hopes high. We finally got the money to pay for the luggage, hotel, visits to the doctor, and treated ourselves to a decent meal. Romeo's Soviet contacts sent us tickets for getting

back home. They were from Hanoi, for the 4th of October. So now we had 12 days to kill. In the meantime we donated a 6-element log-periodic, as well as an FL-2100 (from JR1RCQ, of VK9ZM &



Gena UA9MA takes a hand at piloting the ship on the way to Spratly.

DX Magazine, January, 1991.] We got on the air with wire antennas strung across the street. The antennas came down in the morning. Romeo helped to arrange



Romeo and Gena try to keep their cool in the waters off Spratly.

VK9ZW fame) to the XV2A club station, because of weight limitations.

Life is full of surprises. The next morning, walking down the street, Romeo met an old acquaintance who worked for the government. It turned out his brother was the captain of a boat conducting sea research in the South China Sea, and leaving the next day for Chuong Sa, in the Spratly Archipelago, for 3-4 days. Romeo quickly decided it was a chance not to be missed, since his permission for the Spratly operation was valid until the end of 1991. The captain was happy to have a few hundred unanticipated bucks in his pocket. The 'gang,' on the other hand, wasn't happy at all to hear the 'good news,' but ultimately went along... Soon after, we boarded the ship and 30 hours later landed on a small island not far from the island of Dalat, in the Spratlys. Unfortunately, we

couldn't take the log periodic with us (the club station was closed for the weekend). So there we were, with all wire antennas again, bamboo poles, and some food we bought with our last \$50. The captain was kind enough to loan us a small generator and some fuel, which lasted for 56 hours. There was very little shade on the island, so we got burned by the ferocious sun almost immediately. Two of us would operate while the other two would sit in the water, cooling off with all their clothes on. We really didn't need this torture, but were doing it for our fellow hams. By this time each of us hated the sight of anything ham-related. Quite unexpectedly we heard ZA1A, and recognized the voices of Chip K7JA, and Martti OH2BH—hurray for another 'new one!' 56 hours and another 10,000 contacts later we got off the island.

By the time we returned to Saigon, we were fully exhausted, and couldn't care much about anything but going home, home, home. We expected additional funds to arrive, to cover our return trip to Moscow from Hanoi. Unfortunately, when the money arrived, a large part was missing. We couldn't afford to miss the plane on October 4th, because if we had, we could have been stuck there until November or even December—all flights were sold out! Thanks to the help of Hata-san of Kichietsu Trading Company, JA6LDD, and JA2JPA, additional money was raised an hour before departure for the airport. Another day was spent in Hanoi because the airline wouldn't let us board, saying no seats were available, though we had the tickets in hand. We finally paid another bribe to get out of Vietnam and 18 hours later disembarked

in Moscow. Our last \$20 was spent on a taxicab to get home from Sheremetyevo Airport. Two full bottles of vodka were consumed to celebrate the end of this very exhausting marathon. Our DXpedition was finally over on October 5th!

When we arrived at Harry's apartment, we realized we had succeeded in all three goals we had set for ourselves: returning home alive, giving as many contacts as possible to the deserving, and bringing back the equipment. In the end, everything worked out. We are thankful to everyone who believed in us. In Romeo's words: 'I'm grateful to the

world of Amateur Radio that let me get hundreds of true friends. I hope they can be my friends for life.'

It was tough to make 50,000 contacts in 17 days using wire antennas, with armed soldiers breathing down your neck in the discomfort of a tropical climate, all of us sick or wounded—but we did it. We succeeded only because we felt the world wanted us to succeed and hams everywhere were behind us. A world-wide effort, supported by individuals and groups from Japan, the United States, and European countries, with funds, advice and selfless work. A remarkable international undertaking!

We want to thank our DX-coordinator in Japan, Mr. Takashi Ajiro JA2JPA, who, together with CQ Ham Radio magazine and friends, provided support before and during the expedition, on and off the air. Big thanks also to JA6LDD, JA7JPZ, and JA7SGV, who helped us out of many tough situations.

The organizers of this Dxpediton wish to thank all amateurs and groups -
☛ Please refer to the list of Contributors on page 8. © 1992 NT2X and W3RR

[Correction: Don Miller W9WNV operated as XZ2TZ, not XZ2TH; thanks to W6AM historian Jan Perkins N6AW.]