

# **MINUTES OF THE LONG ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION**

## **MEETING - JUNE 15, 2021**

As the COVID virus precautions have remained largely in effect, the June meeting of the Long Island DX Association was once again held via Zoom.

Attending were: John, W2GW, President; Louise, K2MAU; Art, N2KA; Karen, W2ABK; Walter, W2TE; Richie, K2KNB; Bob, W2OSR; Rick, K2RB; Gerry, K1NY; Richie, KB2ZPB; Tom, KA2D, Vice President; Steve, N2AJ; Dave, KA2HTV; Allen, N2KW; Lee, VK3GK; and our special guest, John, K6MM.

The meeting started at about 8:00 PM. The usual free ranging rag-chewing session took place while we awaited the members to assemble.

It was mentioned that Adrian, KO8SCA, was currently participating in the activation of Market Reef with Martti Laine et al. Steve, N2AJ, reported that Adrian would not be able to join our meeting via Zoom due to his having no connection to the internet.

Richie, K2KNB, described a problem he has been experiencing with getting his N3FJP logging program to communicate via virtual com ports. Tom, KA2D, offered suggestions for some things to try. But, in the end, no definitive solution was found.

At about 8:20 John, our president, turned the meeting over to John Miller, K6MM, our special guest, as co-host.

John's presentation was entitled:

### **NAVASSA: THE CARRIBEAN'S SECRET ISLAND**

As John had addressed our LIDXA meeting last fall on the topic of Palmyra Atoll, the members present knew they were in for an awesome treat. John has a special knack for enriching the descriptions of his operations by acquainting us with little known facts about the history and geography of

these seldom visited places. He illustrates his talks with lots of photos and film clips.

We learned that Navassa Island is an uninhabited, unincorporated U.S. possession that lies midway between Jamaica and Haiti. It is roughly two square miles in size; about the same as New York City's Central Park.

The Island was named by Christopher Columbus. It is composed of coral, and has no beaches. It is ringed by steep cliffs, 30 to 100 feet high. The only place that the cliffs can be scaled (by experienced climbers) is adjacent to a small cove named Lulu Bay. Boats can anchor in the Bay.

Navassa is mostly covered by tropical grasses and trees, and is home to red-footed boobies and other kinds of birds and fauna. Man-made features include an inactive 162 foot tall lighthouse, the lighthouse keeper's house (now roofless due to hurricanes), and a small utility building. The lighthouse was built as an aid to marine traffic to and from the Panama Canal, which was completed in 1914. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1996 as obsolete because ships navigate by GPS in modern times.

The island was once rich in guano, valuable as phosphate fertilizer. John explained that it was "the Guano Island Act of 1856 that allowed U.S. citizens to take possession of islands with guano deposits." Strip mining of guano on Navassa went on for about 40 years, ending in 1899.

Today, Navassa is also claimed by Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. However, the U.S. has full legal control. Since 1999, the island has been administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of Interior (USFWS). They maintain it as a wildlife refuge, closed to the public.

John told us that well-known DXpeditioners, Bob, K4UEE, Glenn, W0GJ, and Mike, NA5U worked for twelve years to overcome the political obstacles they faced in getting a permit to operate from Navassa. They were motivated by the knowledge that the entity was number two on the "Most Needed DXCC List." The last previous operation had taken place in the early 1990s.

Finally, a "Special Use" permit was granted. But USFWS issued a 20-page set of rules, regulations, and requirements. Among them were: fourteen days

maximum visit; fifteen person team maximum; a standby helicopter and a ship offshore required; no souvenirs to be taken; weapons, alcohol, fires, gambling prohibited; must take along four USFWS personnel (furnish transportation and meals, etc.) at no cost to taxpayers. The latter requirement added \$104,000 to the cost of the operation.

With the permit in hand, an experienced team of operators was assembled. The requirements were: mutual trust; good work ethic; good pileup management skills; triple mode competency (CW, SSB, DIGI); having special skills, such as, IT or antenna installation. The call sign of the operation was to be K1N.

Engaging a full-time ship was deemed too expensive. So, it was decided to use helicopters for transport. A reliable service (Helidosa) was contracted in Jamaica at a cost of \$200,000. They had Bell 212A aircraft that could do 100 mph. Maximum load per trip was 1200 pounds, so everything had to be sorted and weighed. The distance from the airport in Jamaica to Navassa was about 100 miles and a round trip (including refueling) would take 2 1/2 hours. Each operator was limited to 40 pounds of personal gear. Since absolutely nothing was available on the island, everything else needed, including water and fuel, had to be shipped by the helicopters. Obviously, it took many trips.

As fires were prohibited on the island the team could not do traditional cooking, and instead had to get by on military-style MREs (meals ready to eat). The food was heated by a microwave which they had brought along, or outside on a rock that had become hot in the sun.

The requirement to have a ship standing by offshore was fulfilled by George Wallener, AA7JV, who owned a sizable yacht, usually berthed in Miami FL. George was instrumental to success of the operation. He re-supplied the team's water and fuel. George also successfully implemented his idea to rig a catenary cable from the top of the cliff at Lulu Bay sloping down to the sea floor. With a pulley riding on the cable, 200 to 300 pounds of gear could be conveniently hauled up or down.

On January 31, 2015, four USFWS men flew separately to Navassa from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, presumably to check things out. They were equipped with automatic rifles. Part of their assignment was to provide

protection for the radio team from drug smugglers who were known to land on the island occasionally.

The team soon became comfortable with having the USFWS people around. They turned out to be obliging and helpful. For example, they gave permission for both the lighthouse and light keeper's house to be used to house some of the stations. But first the hams had to clean out the debris. Notably, John, W2GD, was able to install several wire antennas for the low bands using the lighthouse as a support.

The stations consisted of Elecraft K3 transceivers and KPA500 amplifiers. Antennas included four two-element StepIRs, a yagi for 6-meters plus the aforementioned wires. A bank of Honda 2000 generators provided power. Two large tents called MEG shelters were set up for sleeping.

The USFWS rules required, of course, that nothing be left behind on the island. Luckily, A group of Haitian fishermen had stopped to fish in Lulu Bay. Prior to leaving, the hams donated everything other than the electronic equipment to the fishermen. Being excellent climbers, they helped with striking the encampment, and loading the donated equipment and fuel into their boats.

The operation came to an end on February 15th. Just before they left the island the USFWS affixed the rarest of stamps to the passport of each operator: that of Navassa I.

The team had set a goal of making 100,000 contacts. They ended up with 140,000. And, because of K1N, Navassa is now number 44 on the most needed list, down from 2. K1N was honored at the 2015 Dayton Hamvention as the DXpedition of the year.

Not surprisingly, due to our proximity to Navassa, LIDXA did very well in working K1N. John showed us a table of all the call signs on our roster which he had looked up in Club Log. The table showed that Tom, KA2D, and Steve, N2AJ, were tied for having worked the most band/mode slots at 22 each.

John closed his presentation with a fly over video tour of Navassa taken by Mike Snow, KN4EEI using a radio controlled four propeller drone. It was incredibly detailed and outstanding in every way.

John answered a couple of questions from the audience and then turned the meeting back to our president at about 9:35 PM. The meeting ended shortly thereafter.

Thank you John. 73 de LIDXA