

The road to BY4

In August / September 1999 I was assigned to a project at work which uses a manufacturing plant near Shanghai, China. At that time, I was informed that a trip to the plant might be possible some time after the first of the year. That same day when I arrived at home, I immediately connected to the web page of OH2MCN. Veikko's web page provides a comprehensive listing of instructions to obtain operating permission in most countries. To operate in BY, I needed to provide an application letter, copy of my passport, copy of my U.S. license, passport photo and \$5. I sent my letter to the CRSA (Chinese Radio Sports Association), but did not include a photograph or money. I was unsure about sending cash in the mail, and the instructions didn't appear clear to me regarding the photograph. Several weeks later I received a reply from Mr. Han Zhaofang, BG1HZF – Deputy Secretary-General, CRSA. Everything was okay with my application, but I needed to mail him a passport size photograph and \$5 cash. I included these items several days later and waited. After several email exchanges with Mr. Zhaofang, nearly 6 weeks passed until I learned he finally received my money and photograph, just before Christmas.

On January 4th my license arrived in the mail! Enclosed with the license, was a letter instructing me to contact Mr. Hu Song Qing, BA4HU, to operate the BY4AA club station while in Shanghai. Since I was on my way to Japan later in the, I decided to telephone Mr. Song Qing while I was there week (where I had the opportunity to operate from JA2YKA and meet many new friends in Nagoya). I had to wait another 10 days before I had an opportunity to call BY4AA and learned that I needed someone who spoke Chinese to help me. I then called my co-worker, Brian Yang, in Shanghai and explained what I was trying to do. Brian attempted several telephone calls to BY4AA before success. Unfortunately, the club was unaware that I had permission to operate, and explained to Brian that I needed permission from Beijing to operate.

After returning home from Japan, the trip to Shanghai was forming and it appeared to coincide with ARRL DX SSB. I decided to fax a letter to BY4AA explaining my desires to operate the contest, along with a copy of my letter from Beijing. After I wrote my letter to BY4AA, I recalled my experience in Japan with language barriers. I was fortunate to have my co-worker, Sunshine Chou, translate the letter into Chinese for me. However, yet another snag appeared, the fax machine never answered! So the next step was the USPS. I hoped my letter would arrive before I left for Shanghai. Two weeks before I left for Shanghai, I received an email from Brian Yang that BA4HU had telephoned him. I could operate ARRL DX SSB at BY4AA!

With two weeks left before flying to China, I began the preparatory work for the contest. I asked Brian if he could find out about a computer, with English characters, what equipment was available, bands to be QRV, etc... Brian was able to confirm that there was a PC at BY4AA, but the club suggested I bring my own if I had one. This proved to be very important later. Unfortunately, I could not obtain any other information on the station. I also took the time to notify the DX community via N4AA's QRZ DX Publication, as well as NG3K's announced operations web site. I also alerted my fellow members of the Mad River Radio Club the day I heard from Brian on our Monday evening net. Jim, K8MR, suggested I record some of the contest for the club members as he had done during CQWW SSB from 9M6AAC. Jim promptly mailed me his custom radio to recorder interface. I went to Radio Shack and was delighted to find a small micro cassette recorder was on sale for \$40, so I bought one. I then verified the set up at home in case there were any problems (A must for any type of DX adventure). I then thought about the upcoming contest and how I would set up the laptop and recorder at BY4AA. What type microphone and headphone would I use there? I decided to bring along my Heil Proset and PTT Foot switch since they wouldn't be used while I was gone anyway. I then realized I didn't know anything about the equipment in Shanghai and how would I interface the Proset and foot switch. Fortunately, Dave, K8CC came to the rescue. The night before leaving, I drove to Dave's house and he loaned me an interface cable for Kenwood, Yaesu, and Icom. Returning home, I verified my NA installation on the laptop, joined our weekly conference call with the Shanghai plant and said farewell to the Mad River Gang on our net. I was ready for BY!

Flying to China, and any destination in Asia, from the Midwest can be tiring, and this trip was no exception. I arrived in Shanghai late on Wednesday night March 1st. A quick shower, a couple 807's and a meeting with a team member who had arrived earlier in the week and I was ready for bed. Thursday

proved to be such a hectic day, my hosts at the plant only remembered to telephone BA4HU / BY4AA on the way back to the hotel! We were all disappointed, however this wouldn't happen on Friday. With the contest only 24 hours away, we arrived at work in the next morning and called BA4HU. Mr. Song Qing gave us directions to BY4AA and we agreed to meet him at 8:00 pm that evening. I had many questions for Mr. Song Qing, but he recommended we discuss the technical issues in person at the club station. We arrived back at the hotel, changed and hopped in a cab for the journey across town. Three of my coworkers were kind enough to accompany me on the trip and two of them helped with language translation. Unfortunately, Brian, who had made all the phone calls for me, had to work overtime in preparation of our upcoming build, so another coworker Jenny Yao became my local interface to BY4AA

When we arrived at the address for BY4AA, I couldn't read the street numbers, but immediately recognized a tribander on a roof tower. Mr. Song Qing was there to greet us at the front gate. We learned that BY4AA is located at the Shanghai Military Physical Club. There was a pond where RC boat races take place along with several other activities. Since it was dark, I was unable to view the entire complex. Besides, it was more important to get to the shack. Mr. Song Qing was a very gracious host and showed us several rooms used to display QSL's and provide meeting venues. We finally arrived at the shack. Just like the BY4AA QSL card we found on the Internet, there was a long table filled with a variety of equipment. A banner is on the wall which proudly displays BY4AA's SSTV Contest Championship from 1999.

The main HF operating position consisted of Yaesu FT-870. The rig looked like it had been with the club for some time now. There were 3 HF Amplifiers, Kenwood TL-922, Yaesu FL-1000, and another whose brand I did not identify. As I began to ask questions about the station set up, I was disappointed to learn that 10 and 20 meters experienced VSWR problems, and recently there were problems with the amplifiers. Mr. Song Qing felt very bad, because my friends had told him about my excitement to operate the contest, now less than 12 hours away. I asked more equipment questions, and then Mr. Song Qing asked if I felt antennas or amplifiers were more important. I immediately responded "Antennas" in unison with one of my coworkers (Terry D'Silva, who is also an EE, but not a ham). Mr. Song Qing suggested an alternate club station which had newer radio and operational tribander located on the other side of Shanghai. He asked us to wait while he telephoned the other club to see if I could go over there and operate. Hung up the telephone, the good news came, I could go over to the other club tonight and make operating arrangements there. Mr. Song Qing finished his tour of BY4AA, and explained to us that there were 100 Amateur (Personal and Club) Stations in Shanghai. Remembering Shanghai has a population of 18 Million, that's a small percentage of the population. We then left the station thanking Mr. Song Qing and grabbed a Taxi for the trip across town.

After another 20-minute Taxi ride, we seemed to be in the area of the club and the driver pointed to the road where it should be located. We paid the driver and started walking down the street. As before, my colleagues were looking for street numbers and I was looking for antennas. Just as I recognized the 7 element Tribander on the roof, Mr. Bony Dai, BA4EE approached me and introduced himself. He knew I was a ham because I was the only person on the street looking upward and not forward! Bony then took us inside and brought us up to the BY4BNS club station. I was delighted to find a Kenwood TS-950, FT-100 and new rotator control at the operating position. Bony explained that BY4BNS was QRV on 10, 15, 20, and 40 with the Tribander (Quad Bander if you include the 40 Meter rotatable dipole option) and 10 - 80 with a small Ground Plane also located on the roof. There wasn't an amplifier, but I was thrilled with the station. We discussed call signs, and I was instructed per my Chinese operating license, to sign KT8X/BY4BNS.

Bony explained to us that BY4BNS is located at an activity center / music school. There are many children in attendance on weeknights and weekends who learn dancing and music (Many were surprised to see some foreigners there Friday night). Bony himself was a student at the school and when the prior manager of BY4BNS retired, he decided to accept a teaching position at the school and become the station manager. The school, along with others like it in China, may be visited on the web at <http://www.aseline.net>, but you must have Chinese Character support on your browser. Bony lives only two minutes away where he also maintains a personal station. He has the enviable position to be able to operate practically anytime of the day or night. We made arrangements to meet 1 hour before the contest, Saturday morning at 7 am. When I

returned to the hotel, I notified the Mad River members via our email reflector, and NG3K. This half-hour session cost as much as one month's ISP service at home!

The next morning I was up at 4:30 am still suffering from jet lag, and couldn't get to BY4BNS fast enough. I decided to double check my laptop and ran NA to verify that I didn't need to reinstall, or have other computer problems. I then did a check of the callsign and discovered that the stations at home would need to modify their data files because I was recognized as a US station (This was evident during the contest). After breakfast and a 15-minute taxi ride, I met Bony who was already waiting for me. We went up to the club and I unpacked my laptop, Proset, footswitch, tape recorder and interface cables. I was ready to go by 7:30 am. We scanned the bands and heard zero activity on 10 and I wasn't sure if the band was open to North America or not. We scanned 15 and found some activity. We decided to begin the contest there. After calling CQ and only running a 60 per hour rate, I figured that I wasn't getting spotted on the DX Cluster yet and/or I didn't have such a great signal into the US. I did some search and pounce. K9NS and N6RO both asked me to QSY to 10 meters when I worked them. I wrote down their frequencies, and finally QSY'd a short time thereafter. 10 had tons of activity, but for whatever reason I just couldn't run. As I called stations, they were caught off guard by the long call sign, and many were not sure what country I was in. I had a VE6 who refused to work me and a W4 who insisted I was signing my call incorrect. There were a few stations that immediately knew I was in China, asking which city and wishing me lots of fun and a safe journey home. As 10 began to close, I went to 15 and finally managed a decent run. I maximized the last 10 on the rate display to 225 at 0256 Z. It was also a lot of fun working my friends' back home in Michigan and Ohio. Conditions began to dry up around 0430 Z and my run had dwindled to 60 per hour again. I scanned the band, but I had worked every station that could hear me. I QSY'd to 20, and only heard the biggest East Coast stations CQ'ing. They were running S7 or so, and I assumed listening for Europe as no one heard my call. A little after 0500 Z, W3LPL did manage to hear me, but no one else yet. I took an hour break, and Bony gave me a tour of the antennas from on top of the roof.

I previously described the antennas at BY4BNS, but the most interesting part of the antenna system was the home brew tower. The tower is approximately 10 meters or so tall, and was hand made from stainless steel tubing, appearing to be about 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter. It was made extremely well, with beautiful welds, a true work of art. I wasn't sure of the roof attachment, as it had been covered in tar. A large steel plate at the base was apparent through the tar seal. Even though BY4BNS is in downtown Shanghai, with numerous tall buildings, the path to North America is a clean shot, with the Shanghai TV Tower and Hilton High Rise in the distance. The 10 – 80 ground plane is a compromise antenna for the low bands, and mounted approximately 8 feet above the roof. We chatted about future antenna plans, and amateur radio in Shanghai. One interesting fact which I learned, all the Shanghai amateurs meet once per year. This year the group met in Shanghai at BY4BNS. The group is getting so large now, the meeting required the use of the school's auditorium! I couldn't imagine all the hams in a major metropolitan U.S. or Canadian City meeting like this.

Around 0600 Z it was time to check conditions. The East Coast Signals had improved, and a few others were in there as well. I began to S&P again and ended up doing so for the next 6 hours. I stayed on 20 until about 0930 Z and checked out 40. I had forgotten from my HL9JZ days 11 years ago what a mess 40 is in Asia (Europe for that matter too – I was DA1WD '83 – '85). I was fortunate enough to work a few stations and pick up some multipliers, but the QSO's were difficult for the US stations. The farthest station I heard, and luckily worked, was K0DU in Colorado. I took a few passes on 80 in hopes I could here something. K9NS had requested a sked at 1200 Z. Unfortunately, I couldn't hear any US stations on 80. It was getting late, and I was still suffering from jet lag, so I called it a day.

I was to go sightseeing the next day with my coworkers, but thought we would leave late in morning. I made arrangements to meet Bony at 6 am for the 10-meter opening. When I returned to the hotel I couldn't find any of my friends, so I left phone messages with my plans. When I awoke early in the morning, they had left me notes that we were leaving at 7 am. This didn't fit into my plans at all! I decided I would still go sight seeing. I had a great time operating, but also wanted to see the countryside. How often does one get to visit China from Michigan? I contacted Bony at 6:30 am with the disappointing news. I had hoped to end the contest, but learned Bony would not be available Monday morning, as he had to leave town. So all of a sudden, my ARRL DX SSB contest effort from BY had ended.

Bony Dai has extended an open invitation for any ham to come and visit BY4BNS. If there's enough advanced notice a license can be obtained and the station is available for operation. Bony can be contacted via email at: ba4ee@online.sh.cn. The Mad River Radio Club members are donating a Heil Proset, Heil – Kenwood adapter cable, and PTT foot switch to further enhance the contesting efforts from BY4BNS.

The upcoming week was a busy one, and many late nights prevented a meeting with Bony in person again. I did send my gracious host an email of thanks. We will be exchanging photographs of my visit very soon. On Friday, I was off to BV for a visit with my colleague's family in Tainan. The trip must be taken via a third country, as there are no direct flights between BY and BV. In our case this was Hong Kong. Our layover was long enough to be noticeable, but much too short to contact any amateur radio operators in the city.

We arrived in Kaohsiung, and were greeted by my colleague's brother, who drove us to Tainan. The traffic was much more orderly than Shanghai, but chaotic by American or Canadian standards. After visits with family and friends, there wasn't much time to check on amateur radio. The week's long work hours led to an early bedtime! Saturday morning proved to be quite fun. I learned that another family member, was a ham. Although inactive my colleagues other brother Ying – Shou was licensed as BV6CF. He has been off the air for nearly 10 years, but still has a Yaseu FT-870 HF Rig and Kenwood Multi-Mode UHF / VHF rig. The evening prior, Ying – Shou put a simple wire antenna up for me to listen on the HF bands. Due to the poor antenna, and the late time of the morning, there wasn't much activity to hear. I did copy one station from the U.S. working JA on 15 meters. We went off to lunch and shopping nearby and returned home.

Prior to my BY / BV trip, I again consulted the web page of OH2MCN. I attempted an email to the CTARL (Chinese Taipei Amateur Radio League) but received not replies for a week. I consulted the OH web site again, and read the note from BV5AF, who offered to help foreigners obtain a license in Taiwan. I emailed BV5AF, who quickly responded. He asked me to fax a copy of my license, passport, home address and Taiwan address to him. He instructed me to contact BV2OO in Taipei when I arrived in Taiwan. I faxed the necessary information after receiving my P.R. China visa and made several email attempts afterwards, of which BV5AF never replied. When we called BV2OO from Tainan, he instructed me to come to his club in Taipei Monday night. We explained that wasn't possible and explained the correspondence with BV5AF. BV2OO understood the situation and remembered my call. He then explained an application form is required which normally takes 2 weeks! We explained that this was never mentioned to me, otherwise I would have completed it some time ago. He told us that he never sent it because it was written in Chinese. This was not a problem for me, but the BV hams didn't know this. An important lesson here, find a go between to act as an interpreter up front to avoid confusion. I could have done this, but didn't since receiving the BY license was so easy.

Needless to say, KT8X never lit up the bands from BV. I could have operated under BV6CF's supervision, his station wasn't in very good shape. My visit to the Chou home, may have inspired Ying – Shou to become active in amateur radio again. Even without amateur radio, I had an unforgettable experience in Tainan as a guest of the Chou family. I was t able to experience culture, sights, and sounds like no other Non – Chinese could have. I will always remember the new friends I made in Shanghai and Tainan.