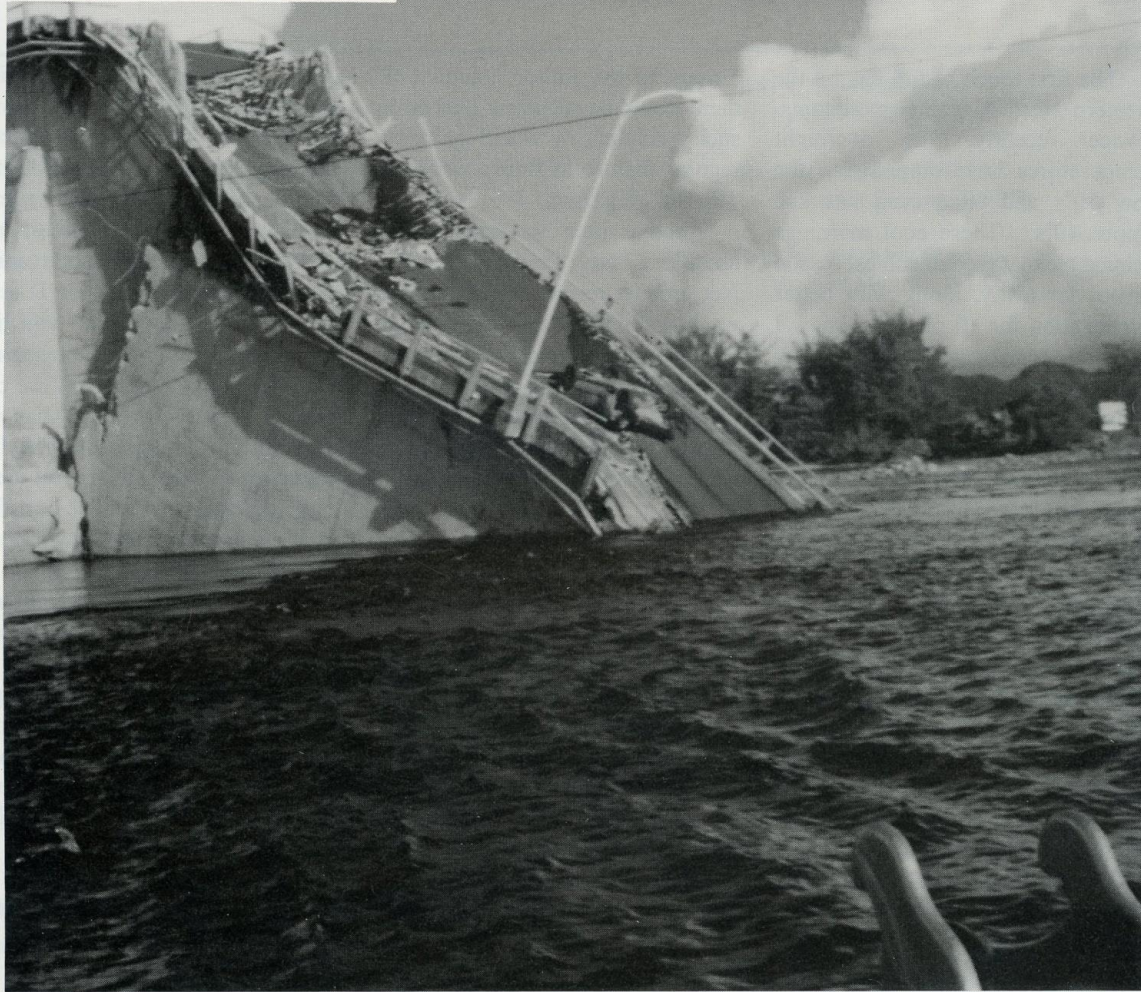


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Disaster on Palau

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DX-PEDITION TO PALAU [T88T]

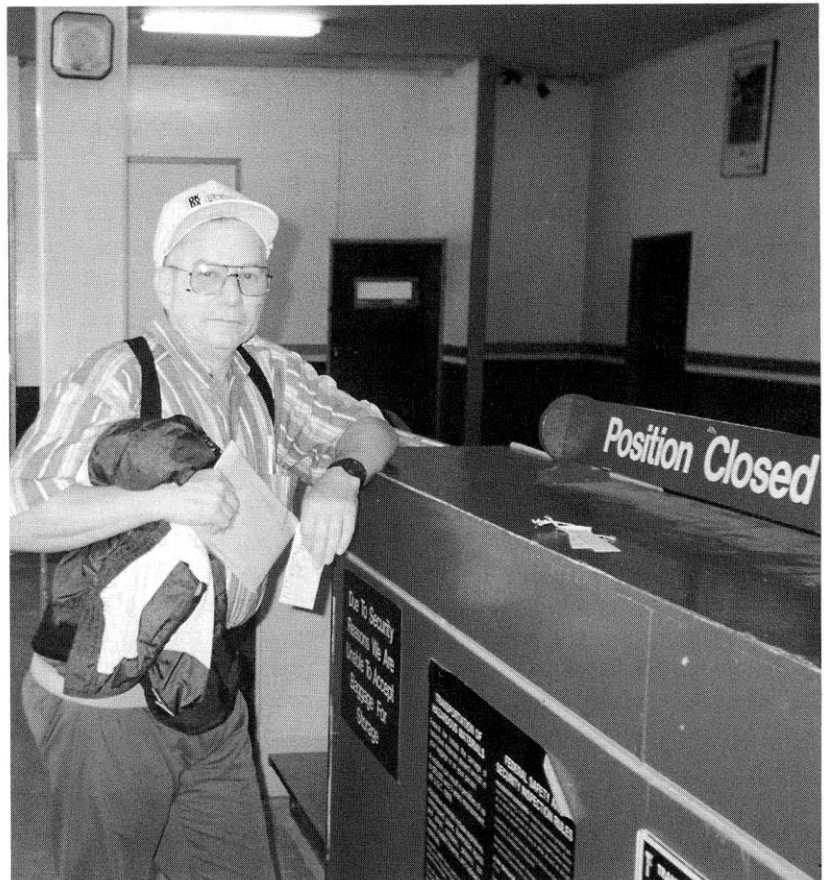
And "Murphy" Was There - *All The Way!*

By Coy Day, N5OK

Palau or Belau? Some of the most beautiful islands in the world lie in the western Pacific Ocean. That's right, western NOT South Pacific. The Republic of Palau [official name] contains some of the *most incredible* of those islands, both above and below the sea. Palau [official short name] is actually 7 degrees north of the equator in the east Philippine Sea.

The islands were originally discovered by Ruy Lopez de Villalobos in 1543. He named the islands Arrecifos. So where did the Palau/Belau contention come from? Later, when Spain's claim to the islands was recognized, they named them Los Palos. That is where the current name of Palau was derived from. I guess that answers that, but how about the Belau listing in the ARRL DXCC Countries List? Good question.

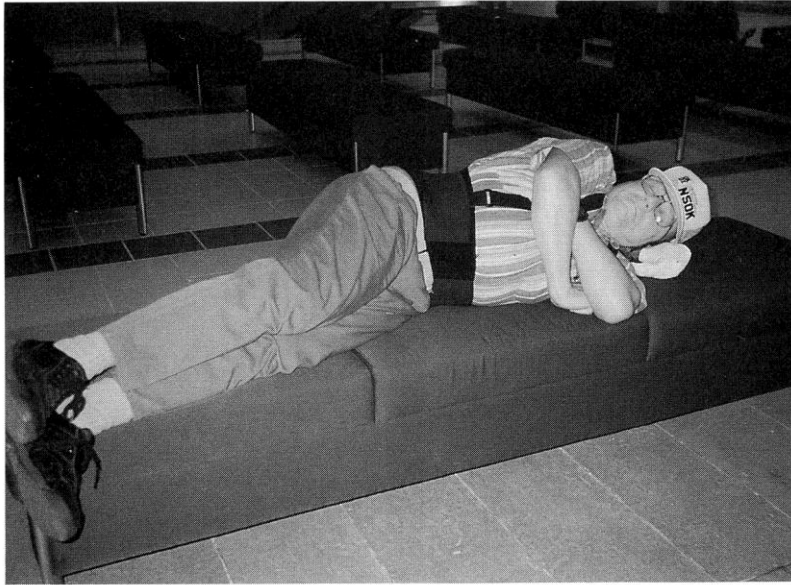
Each of the four times that I've been to Palau, I've had ample time to visit with Father Felix Yauch, S.J. Father Felix is a native born Palauan and is a wealth of knowledge. I'd noticed on some of the signs on Palau in the native language, that they referred to Palau as Belau. When I asked him about that, he said it was really quite simple. Palau had been named for them by the Spanish, however, in their native language the sound of the letter 'P' does not exist, but the



Coy, N5OK, at the airport, but no one is there. This should have been an indication that things were not going to be quite right on this DXpedition.

letter 'B' does. If you've studied language, you know that the only difference between 'P' and 'B' is that 'B' is voiced and 'P' is not. To prove this, all you have to do is hold your throat while making the sound of the two letters and you'll see what I mean.

That explains part of it, but not why the ARRL lists it as Belau! I suppose they may have thought that when Palau gained its independence, they would drop English as the official language and rename the country the native Belau. That hasn't happened.



Coy, N5OK, at the Guam airport, seems to be saying, "Well, I may as well get some sleep since we missed the plane. Besides, my back is killing me."

Besides, many countries around the world call their country by different names than we do. In Greece, they refer to their country as Hellas and in Spain it's Espana, yet we don't list them like that in the DXCC listings. The bottom line then, is that the State Department, the CIA, the United Nations, and the Republic of Palau, all recognize the official name as the Republic of Palau. Maybe we can call Bill Kennamer K5FUV, and ask "Hey, what's the deal?"

We all have times when we know that destiny is getting ready to deal us a wicked blow! You just have that gut feeling. Dave Horn, N5CG [now W5AO], and I had a simple objective. We were going back to Palau [officially Belau] and try to get the new T8 licenses issued, then rack up lots of points in the CQWW SSB Contest. The fact that I hate SSB Contests should have been a clue that we were in for trouble. The next indicator was that we were having a hard time finding airfare that we could afford. No discounts, no frequent flyer miles, no anything but full price. Finally, we found a travel agent that gave us a price

\$200 cheaper than any of the others. We would have to change airlines and fly a circuitous route returning, but we went for it.

We had held off announcing our planned trip until we had tickets in hand. We didn't want to put out the word we were going, then not be able to go. As soon as I put the word out that we were going and would be operating from Palau, I started receiving E-Mail from JA groups that were also planning on being on Palau for the CQ WW SSB Contest. They were going to be in Koror and staying at the same hotel on top of it. There were three different JA groups and none of them knew the others were going! So, there we were. We'd bought our tickets and they weren't refundable. It was a "must go."

We offered to join up with the others and go for multi-multi, but then came the really bad news. The K-B bridge that connects Koror and the big island where the airport is, had collapsed! The bridge just happened to carry the water and electricity for Koror. Wonderful! We called Father Felix in Koror several times to confirm our

suspensions. The only good news was that the other groups going changed their plans. They were smarter than we were, but we decided to go for it anyway.

Then, while weighing my bags to make sure they were under the 70 lb. limit, I strained my back all the way to my knees. I was down and couldn't get to see my doctor before we left. I couldn't stand, sit, walk, or do anything but lay flat on my back and was *definitely* not looking forward to a flight of 27 hrs. I was eating 800 milligram Motrin tablets like they were popcorn, yet after all this when we got to the airport, one of my bags was still overweight! It's a miracle that Dave didn't get taken down with his back too, since he had to carry both of ours.

Except for pain and agony, we made the flight from OKC to Denver and on to San Francisco. That's when "Murphy" arrived big-time. The plane from San Francisco to Honolulu broke down. We were delayed for over an hour. We arrived in Hawaii late, which made our flight to Guam late. When we arrived there, we were to stay overnight, so we had to pick up our luggage. *It wasn't there!* It hadn't made the transfer in Hawaii. By the time we filled out the missing luggage reports, it was after midnight and we were in the middle of a tropical storm. Our motel reservations were only good until 9 PM. Our flight out was at 5:30 AM in the morning, and I was in absolute misery with my back. I took a hand-full of Motrin and sacked out on a bench in the terminal. The only plus here, was that this put us nearby early enough to process through Customs for the flight the next morning. This is when the next "glitch" occurred. They found my hand tools in my carry-on baggage and confiscated them, telling me I couldn't take

them aboard the aircraft and I'd have to put them in my luggage. We didn't have any luggage! I'm not sure how angry I got with those folks, but it was quite a battle. I wasn't feeling too good anyway and was ready to whip somebody. Anybody. Finally, they said they would put the tools in an envelope and give them to the pilot. We could pick them up at the airport when we arrived in Palau. I had to have those tools. We had shipped the antennas over ahead of us and I knew that even though our rigs were lost somewhere, I could at least put the antennas together while we were waiting for them to arrive.

On arrival, we got involved in the procedures to get to Koror. We had to take a bus to the bay, then a boat across the bay and after that, a bus to the hotel. When we arrived at the crossing, the hotel manager met us and asked about our luggage. This is when it hit me that I hadn't picked up the hand tools from the pilot when we deplaned. Now we were stuck and the busses were one way. No one was going to the airport. We finally flagged down a pickup and asked if we could have a ride to the airport. Dave and I had to ride in the back. *Owww!* By the time we'd arrived at the airport, I was in a tremendous amount of pain. The hand tools were waiting for me and we caught the last bus to the crossing. It was close!

On the way across the bay, we could see the storm damage and were amazed at the destruction. Seven people had been killed. Another bad omen was that Dave lost his OKDXA hat crossing the bay. I was sure glad to see that hotel. The first thing I did was get flat on my back. Then more bad news - two different JA groups were still planning on coming. We didn't even know about these. They weren't on the Internet, but they had



Finally on Palau. (l to r) Dave, W5AO (T88M), Coy, N5OK (T88T), Fr. Felix, KC6BS and Yoshi, KC6IY.

reservations at the hotel. - - - t!

The following is what we found when we arrived at the hotel: No water except in buckets. The hotel power was fluctuating when it was on at all. We had a note from Father Felix telling us he was off the island and had not been able to get our licenses. Our favorite betel nut tree that we tied our 160 meter antenna to, had been cut down. The hotel restaurant was closed *as was* the grocery store. The hotel and adjacent facilities were mourning the loss of the hotel owner's oldest son, as well as an employee that were lost on the bridge. It was raining half the time, with thunder and lightning, and then the temps soared into the mid 90's, when the sun finally did come out.

I sat in a chair putting antennas together and Dave would carry them up on the roof and put them up with the help of some of the locals. The second day, the airport called and said our baggage was in, but we'd have to go to the airport to claim them, since they had to go through Customs. We left on Sunday afternoon and *five hours later*, we got back to the hotel with the equipment. Dave's luggage with the TS-930 in it, was still missing. In addition, the bags were beaten up and the equipment looked like

someone had taken 12 lb. hammers to them. The top of my TS-940 was caved in and the feet were broken off the bottom. Two days later, when Dave's finally arrived, his TS-930 had the power supply fan caved in so that the blade wasn't able to turn. I was surprised that the 940 worked when I plugged it in. The 3-500Z for the linear was broken and the spare that Dave brought, turned out to be a 4-400. The linear didn't work, so it really didn't matter. Dave's key line wasn't wired for the Dentrrol Clipperton L that we had left there, so I had to rewire it.

The next day was really hot and the air conditioners were kicking off with high head pressure. This caused the bad voltage to *really* be bad. I was considering unplugging my 940 when we had a real brown out. The 940 blew and wasn't fixable. The Isobar that I had it plugged into exploded and black smoke filled the room. It was a good thing that Father Felix left us a DC power supply and his IC-731. Dave went to the Ben Franklin store down town and bought a fan to blow on his 930 and it worked fine after that. I was monitoring the voltages in the outlets. One leg was reading from 55 volts to 120 volts and the other leg was reading from 120

volts to 170 volts. It didn't take me long to figure out that they had a floating neutral. I begged the hotel manager to call an electrician. Most of the locals though, thought *we* were causing the power to fluctuate in the hotel. They would stand in the courtyard chewing betel nut pointing at our antennas.

I was doing my best to work some of the folks on 80 and 160, but the tropical storms in the area made it very difficult. One night, while I was trying to get the last ounce of power out of the linear, everything blew. Fire and a big cloud of smoke spewed from the antenna tuner that I was using on the G5RV. It was now toast! Also, the G5RV quit working. While cutting open the balun, I broke the blade out of my favorite knife that I've carried for years. [At this point however, the bad omens were coming too fast to count]. Inside, I found two wires had arced through the insulation. I separated them, taped up the balun and was back in business. Then suddenly, the 160 meter antenna fell while Dave was watching it and it fell right across the high lines. We had run it across the high lines because they had cut the other betel nut tree. We were in a panic for a while, but Dave got some help and got it put back up.

Still in pain, I spent a lot of time helping the local licensing authority get on board with their prefix change, but I still couldn't get a license. Finally, he admitted that he didn't *have any of the forms* that they issue the licenses on!! I was remarkably very patient though, and helped them to develop regulations for their amateur radio program. They were very pleased with that effort and appreciated the fact that we weren't there just bugging them for licenses, but were willing to help also. Finally, I asked the director if he would give me verbal permission

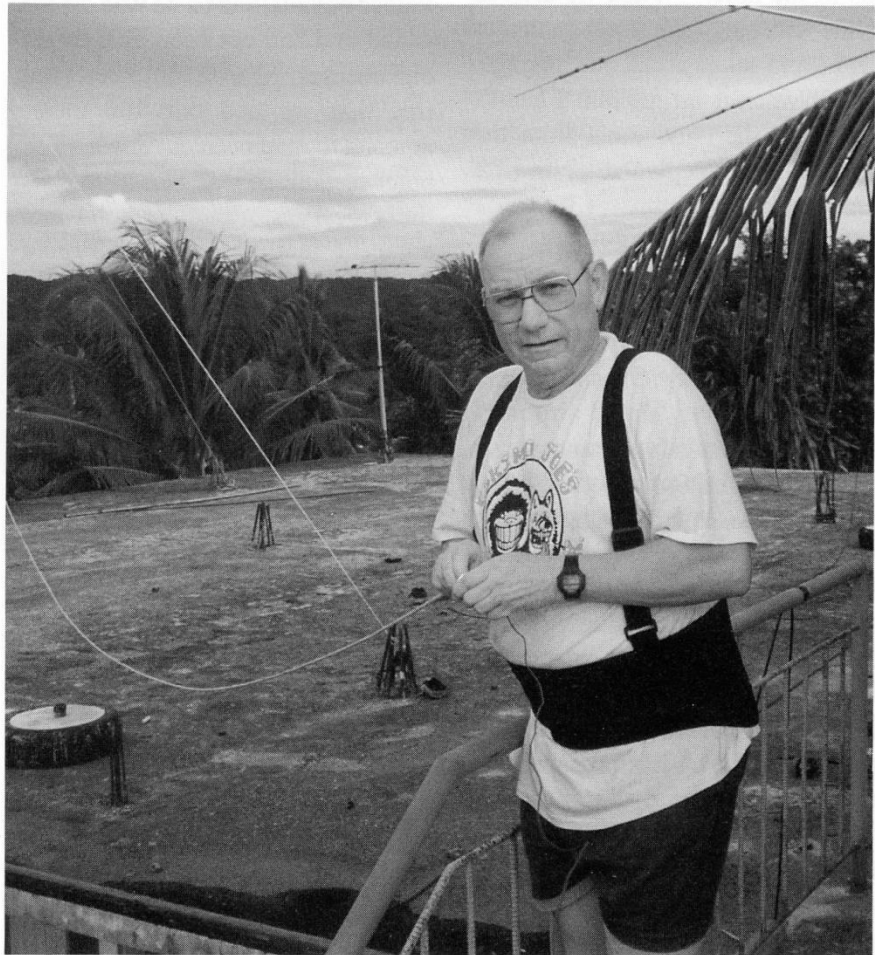
to use the call sign T88T. He said no problem.

Then, *some good news*, which was only too soon cancelled out by an accident. We had been driving Father Felix's car and it wouldn't start. In the process of getting a jump for the battery, Dave came around the car and fell over an air conditioning unit that had been left in the parking lot. He landed on his thumb and we thought he'd broken it. It was swollen to about twice its normal size, which made it really difficult to operate the keyboard.

The contest day arrived and we still had Dave's radio working as well as the Clipperton. Dave's thumb was a bit better, so we were in business. The night before the contest though, we'd discovered that the lower sideband generation

was bad on the 930. I spent the next day tweaking on it without a manual. I don't know exactly what I did, but it started working, so I buttoned it up. We were ready. *Finally!*

Dave had some super runs going and was working JA's at about 5 a minute on Sunday morning when all of a sudden, the power went off. I went to investigate and discovered the electrician had shut off power to our wing of the hotel. I went to the manager to ask what was going on and she replied "don't you want the power fixed?" Right in the middle of the contest, they were now fixing the power! They *didn't* fix it though. After a few hours, they turned the power back on and left. Whatever they did do, the power supply was *worse*. It was so bad we



Still in pain even in a back brace, but the DXer goes on. Coy works at getting some of the antennas put together.

had to shut down the 930 to keep it from blowing. We were off a total of 14 hours due to insufficient power and still made over **3,400 QSO's** and a score **over 3 million points!** In addition, we made a lot of folks happy with the new T8 prefix. It caused others a lot of grief however. During the contest, they would tell us that we couldn't be in zone 27 because T8 was assigned to South Africa. Several even told us that T8 was assigned to Seborga, not Belau!

After the contest, we were ready for a little rest and relaxation. Father Felix had arranged a trip to Pelelieu to see the war memorials. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to take us and turned us over to one of his junior missionaries, Father Russ. As it turned out, we spent about an hour on Pelelieu, then went to some of the reefs where Father Russ and some of his friends went snorkeling. After a few hours sitting in a drifting rowboat in the tropical sun, we were cooked.....I mean well done! When this was added to my back pain, I was done in. However, the "fickle finger of fate" had one final blow!

I was going home the following day, while Dave was to stay through the CQWW CW weekend. It had been a really hot day and the air conditioners were going crazy, as was the power. I finally turned the Icom off because I didn't want to roast Father Felix's radio. Dave complained to me about the power and asked what I thought he should do. I told him to turn it off and go to bed. That is really hard to do when you have a big pile-up of Europeans on 30 meters. I was sound asleep when Dave came into the room rattling around. When I asked what was up, he said his radio was smoking and asked me to look at it. It wasn't just smoking. It was *charred*. Some of the components



*Dave, W5AO, (T88M) finally on the air.
Note the "external" cooling fan on the TS-930.*

weren't even identifiable. That was the last straw! Dave decided on the spot, to come home with me. We got his ticket changed and I was glad he'd made the decision. I don't know how I would have gotten those bags home alone, since I was still in misery with my back.

One last irony occurred while we were hustling around, taking antennas down, and getting them packed up for hauling to the post office. We noticed the power company outside with a line truck. When we asked about it, we found out that the power fluctuations had blown the TV in the hotel lobby. The owner had called the power company and told them to fix the problem or disconnect the hotel. No power was better than bad power. The power company found an open neutral on the pole across the street and power was immediately restored to normal *now that we were leaving!!*

Somehow, I have the feeling that the next evening, when the locals were standing around in the courtyard chewing their betel nut, they were pointing out the power that was *of course* okay once again, now that those ham radio operators

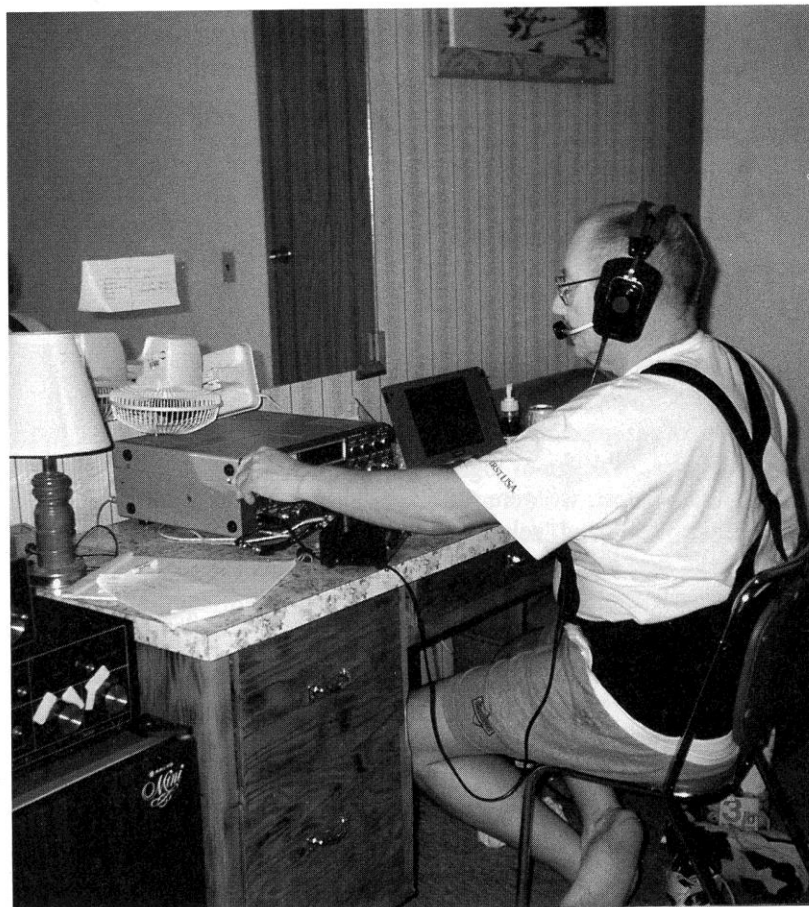
had gone home!

T88T - How did you get THAT callsign? Several people have asked me that question, so I'll attempt to explain just how it all happened.

We had been going to Palau [officially Belau] just about every year since 1992. This year was my fourth trip and over this period of time, we've made a lot of friends. This time was a little different in that we knew that the 95 WARC had assigned T8 as the prefix for Palau. We had called Father Felix, [KC6BS], several times in order to coordinate this trip and check on the status of the issuance of the T8 call signs. We called him just before our departure and he left us feeling positive about our licenses. He was fairly certain that Mr. Lucas Bekebekmad, Director of the Department of Commerce and the licensing authority, would issue us the call signs we had requested. We'd asked for T88T and T88M. We figured T88T would be about the best CW call sign that we could think of and T88M would be the best for SSB.

When we arrived on Palau, we had a note waiting for us at the hotel

from Father Felix. He apologized for not being able to get the licenses for us and let us know he was going to be off island for the next week. We didn't have current licenses, since they'd expired. When I went to visit Mr. Bekebekmad, he was quite cordial, but insisted that he could only re-issue our old call signs, i.e., KC60K and KC6GG. I wouldn't accept our old call signs and advised Mr. Bekebekmad that I didn't think he had authority to issue U.S. call signs since the WARC had authorized the T8 prefix of Palau. We visited for a few minutes and then I asked what I could do to help. I let him know that I was going to be there for 3 weeks and during that time, I would be willing to do whatever I could to help him get his amateur radio program going. He then confided that his right-hand man for communications had died and he was not allowed to fill the position, therefore, all the amateur radio details landed directly on his shoulders and he really didn't know what to do about them. He asked for my help, explaining that many amateur radio operators had been telling him that he must change the call sign prefix, but he had no documents showing that to be a fact. I made him a promise, stating "I will get you those documents." I knew if I came up with them, it would build trust. I had no idea how I was going to get them, but I was going to. I called long distance back to Jim Hood, WV5S [now K5TT], President of the Oklahoma DX Association. I asked Jim to call the ARRL and anyone else he could think of, to get those documents. Each morning we waited for our schedule with Jim to see if he'd been able to get them. He kept coming up blank. People were on vacation or didn't know about the documents. We were about ready to give up



Coy, NSOK, T88T, takes a turn at the "cool" TS-930, during the early hours of the operation.

when we made another new friend.

Yoshi, KC6IY, had been introduced to us by Ria, KC6DO, the hotel manager. I soon discovered that he too would like to see the call sign problem corrected. I asked him if he knew anyone at JARL who could locate the WARC documents. He said Mr. Jey S. Oka of the JARL just might be able to help. The next morning, Yoshi came through the door with a big smile and a handful of documents. They were exactly what we were looking for. I wasted no time getting to Mr. Bekebekmad's office the next morning. That's when you had to catch him in. I explained to him that getting the documents was a team effort, and that Yoshi had them FAXED from Japan. He was impressed. I went over them with

him, pointing out that these were backed by international treaty and that he should comply. His attitude changed completely and we became the best of friends.

What obviously came to mind immediately, was to ask for our licenses. I thought that maybe I shouldn't rush things and just continue to build his trust before jumping into that subject. I asked him instead "What else can I do for you?" After chatting a bit, I said that Father Felix had mentioned that I could possibly help with writing the amateur radio rules and regulations for Palau now that the FCC rules and regulations no longer applied. Mr. Bekebekmad jumped at that suggestion and it was agreed. I had my copy of the ARRL book on the FCC regulations with me. Mr.

Bekebekmad suggested that they didn't need anything as big as all that. We both chuckled. Then he looked at me and said that he would like to issue us our requested licenses, but the fact was that he was out of forms and expected them back from the printer any day. I suppose I had an *extremely* long face at that point. I had started out the door, all the while thinking I really didn't want to face Dave without those licenses. An idea came to mind and I turned back and asked if he might possibly grant us permission verbally to operate, and back-date our licenses to that date when he received the forms. He said "Sure. Go ahead." You could have knocked me over with a feather!

I couldn't wait to get back and tell Dave. As I came through the door, Dave was working a pile-up on 20 meters. I deliberately had a hang-dog look on my face. He took off his earphones and asked if I'd gotten the licenses. I said "Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news was that I didn't get the licenses." Before he could get too upset, I continued with the good news that we had



In spite of all the difficulties, it is a beautiful place!

permission to operate using our requested call signs and we'd have the licenses in hand the following week. We celebrated by immediately getting on the air and working everyone we could, using the new call sign.

I kept my second promise by gaining access via Father Felix, to the Catholic Mission Media Center. I went to part 97 in my license book and started extracting exactly what I thought was essential for Palau, and no more. Mr. Bekebekmad had asked me to keep the regulations simple and easy to read. I hammered away on one of the media center computers. It had Microsoft Word, which made it easy. As I finished pages, I would hand them to Father Felix to proof. I made several changes that he recommended. Most were for simplification or clarification. When finished, it was a work of art; all two pages of it! Again, Mr. Bekebekmad was impressed.

It came as no surprise that we didn't have the licenses the following week. They hadn't gotten the forms back from the printer yet. Each morning I would go back to their office, but always the same answer. I befriended Mr.

Bekebekmad's secretary during this time and one morning, she opened her desk drawer and pulled out two blank license forms. *The day before leaving Palau*, I had my license in hand. T88T, dated the 18th of October.

We had accomplished what no one else had been able to do, simply by being patient, courteous and helpful. Father Felix told Dave and I a story that sums this up. It was about a Pacific island missionary that returned to Rome where he was asked by some of the newer missionaries "What are the key things we need to know as new missionaries to the Pacific islands?" The old missionary thought a bit and then replied "Three things. The first thing is patience, the second is patience, and the third is more patience."

[Editor's note: "Murphy's Law" is an engineering/scientific axiom that says "If anything can go wrong, it will. Unfortunately, not just anything, but nearly everything did on this DX-pedition! We personally feel these Dxers deserve "Can You Top This?" awards for this one.]



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