

# W7LR Gatti DXpedition

## Disk notes

The African expedition disk was intended to be used when I would give a presentation and could stop the viewing to explain certain events or background, since there is essentially no audio on the disk. These notes take the place of such narrations.

The ad. When I saw the ad I was working at an FAA tx station – but was bored with the work and so answered the ad. I was qualified to do so, as I had started as an swl in 1933, w6pbv in 1937, and was trained in a Naval Reserve unit for msg handling. Our instructor was Dave Baker W6WX. His call is used for the 14100 etc beacon. After 5 years in the Navy in WW-II I was offered a position as the 4th engineer to be hired to form the Hughes Aircraft Company. I declined and this was a turning point in my life. The rest of this story would not have followed.

In the Navy I did cw operating at NPG, sometimes 180 messages a shift using my bug and typewriter. Also trained in the Japanese code and copied that thru the battle of Midway. Bill Snyder W0LHS and I went to VT for an interview with Gatti, and were selected to be expedition radio operators. In November 1947 I went by train from SF to NY to leave on the ship for Africa, and met Cobi Kapteyn on the train.

Several slides/photos follow. One shows a door in Zanzibar. It had spikes to keep elephants away. We also smelled cloves there, and saw the British office notebooks for the Stanley/Livingston expedition. The journey on the freighter took 48 days from NY to Mombassa. There were stops at Capetown, Durban, and Zanzibar. Bill and I had fun with a note that we put in a bottle and threw overboard near Capetown. We said the bottle came from the Mississippi and later there was a Capetown newspaper story of how the bottle traveled that far.

The map shows some of the expedition routes thru British East Africa – Mombassa, Serengetti plains, Mount Kilimanjaro, Ngorongoro crater, and Uganda.

With the photos of the camp and antenna mast raising, I had a few adventures. The natives dropped the heavy mast which whistled by my ear and missed or I wouldn't be here. I also ran the end of long nose pliers in my eye with a big cut, it healed ok. Also found a way to lose weight, down to 148 #, from dysentery.

The open wire line shots are interesting since the natives thought it was magic to see the glow of a flashlight bulb used to test line lengths.

There is one slide of a Gattigram. Mr Gatti had a separate camp from ours, and would communicate with nastygrams. Most were more nasty than this one.

There are several slides of the hike up Kilimanjaro, nearly 20,000' elevation.

We had ancient heavy VHF radios and so made just one contact with the base camp, but it was the first radio qso from there.

The I1KN qsl slide is interesting to me. Our first qso from Africa was with him. I had contacted him before from W6PBV. It was more interesting later when he was our best man at our wedding in Florence Italy October 5th 1949.

The wheel photo is the prelude to adventures on our trip thru Uganda to the border of the Belgian Congo. One episode was when two rear tires blew out on the truck carrying our gear and gasoline drums. It took help from a native to jack up the truck, remove the axle, and put on one spare. We lucked out by buying another tire at a native village store, the only tire for sale. Another time wheel nuts came loose and came off. We redistributed those, and later had some turned out on a lathe back in Kampala Uganda. We saw the beginning of the Nile there. There was quite a pileup when we got on the air with VQ5GHE.

There is an interesting story about the DE SWL card, from Rolf DL3AO.

I have contacted him on 17m ssb recently and he told of being an swl in 1948 and writing down our call in his notebook. He sent this swl card about 57 years afterwards, and I had a qsl card to answer for him.

The MP4BAL and HZ1AB photos are from my station on Bahrein Island and from a contact from Arabia by my dad to our expedition in Africa.

Next is the PA0ABM qsl of Wino Paas. My wife is from Holland and we have visited there many times, sometimes with Wino and his family in Middelburg or Vlissingen, near the border with Belgium. He has also visited us in MT. Wino took the material that I sent him, and wrote up our expedition story on the internet. See one of the later slides which gives the URL for this, or it is included in the W7LR qrz.com story. Previously Bill and I had tried to write the expedition story but couldn't get the job done with our different writing styles. Wino took on the task and got the job done on the internet, 102 pages of story by Bill, and 42 pages by W7LR. There is also a 5 page short version. The stories have also been in an earlier QST, and in Dutch and Polish ham magazines.

The tanker shot is when I was the helmsman on a tanker bound for the Persian Gulf. When I left the expedition I wanted to go down the Nile thru Sudan and Egypt but it was not a good time for Americans. Instead I got a ride on the Norwegian tanker. I started out in the Dar es Salaam harbor painting the sides of the tanker, then cleaning out bilges. Finally I got to know the radio operator and officers and soon became a helmsman.

There is another story about the pipeorgan. This was in Springfield MO at the home of Weldon King one of the expedition photographers. I had seen the same pipe organ in Billings MT at the home of a ham there. Somehow the same pipe organ wound up with Weldon. It had originally been in a theater in NYC

There are a lot of other stories but they result in a long memo.

We would sit by the campfire at night and see reflections from the eyes of nearby animals.

Early in the expedition Bill was fired, after we had written a letter to Gatti saying that we would operate the station only in amateur fashion and not for his commercial efforts.

Early in the expedition we would use the rx bandspread and bandset dials to eliminate commercial communication for Gatti to Chicago. We would set the bandset dial to throw off the frequency calibration and so could not hear Chicago. Mr Gatti – propagation just didnt work then!

I stayed with RobbyVQ4ERR for a month after the expedition, waiting on a way to get to Saudi Arabia, and helping him with antenna work. He was on the top of the dxcc honor roll for many years.

Some view the expedition as commercial, but was it any different than present day sponsorship by Yaesu, NCDXF, INDEXA, etc? It was the first postwar dxpedition. Modern dxpeditions make many more qsos than we did, when we used a bug, paper log, mainly one operator, short operating periods, more of a rag chew style rather than contest style, and from moving camp quite often.

The DVD was done by Tony Assante, Bozeman, MT with extracts from a disk assembled by PA0ABM from material that I had sent him; plus some original material and from black and white photographs given to me by the expedition photographer, Errol Prince, soon before he became a sk. Cobi and I had visited him then in CA. Program assistance was by Robert Kincaid, KE7CLN, Bozeman, MT.

See the internet site for a lot of other interesting stories.

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