

YI9PSE Iraq 2010 – An Extreme Adventure

A DXpedition team braves the challenges of activating a war zone.

David Collingham, K3LP, and Paul Ewing, N6PSE

My son, Nathan Collingham, KC7NKN, had just finished serving two 12-14 month tours in Iraq when I (K3LP) saw the announcement by N6PSE that he was looking for YI9PSE team members. Thinking, “Ah — another Tom Clancy adventure, which best describes my lifestyle.” It didn’t take me a minute to fire off an e-mail and request to be part of this unique challenge.

So what type of person jumps at the opportunity to go to Iraq during a time of unrest? I imagine very few would take the risk. After explaining my reasoning to my wife and family on why I would even consider this venture, the only reply was a blank stare. The only interpretation of this stare was an obvious, “Why?” So I did the right thing, I took out a million dollar life insurance policy and immediately purchased my airline ticket.

About Erbil, Iraq

We would be operating from Erbil (also known as Arbil or Irbil) a city of over 500,000 located in an area known as Kurdistan (see Figure 1). Erbil is a commercial, agricultural and administrative center with a predominantly Kurdish population; it is one of the world’s oldest continually settled towns.

The fourth largest city in Iraq after Baghdad, Basra and Mosul, Erbil lies 50 miles east of Mosul and is the capital of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region.

In April the average maximum daytime temperature is a warm 76°F, with little chance of discomfort from heat and humidity. This made our trip quite comfortable. Erbil lies between 1300 and 1725 feet above sea level. The area we operated from was about 1700 feet above sea level.

Getting the License and Permission

The team came together as a result of persistence and the willingness of our Team Leader, Paul Ewing, N6PSE, to overcome many different obstacles (see Figure 2). His efforts led to the issuance of the YI9PSE license and the success of our DXpedition. The licensing effort took about 7 months.

Support from NCDXF, INDEXA, NCDXC, ICOM, ACOM (K1LZ) and SteppIR were key in enabling the trip’s success.

Getting Started

At the beginning, the team started as a

four to five person effort with three radios, then transitioned to a team of 12 uniquely qualified and skilled operators representing the USA, France, Japan, Martinique and Serbia and another ham from Iraq named Heathem Sabah, YI1UNH.



Figure 1 — Map of Kurdistan, Iraq showing Erbil (Arbil), our operating location, near the center.

Contacts by Continent

Continent	Total
Europe	35,773
Asia	6,801
North America	6,706
South America	515
Africa	396
Oceania	210
Totals	50,401



Figure 2 — The YI9PSE team. Front row (from left) Paul, N6PSE — Team Leader; Krassimir, K1LZ; Al, K3VN; Bob, N6OX; Jack, W0UCE; David, AH6HY, and Wayne, W5KDJ. Rear row (from left) Heathem Sabah, YI1UNH; Bill Beyer, N2WB; Jun Tanaka, JH4RHF; David Collingham, K3LP; Michel Brunelle, FM5CD, and Hranislav Milosevic, YT1AD.

The core team arrived between March 31 and April 2, 2010. With Bill Beyer, N2WB, and Bob Grimmick, N6OX, arriving on March 31 and Krassimir Petkov, K1LZ, and Hranislav Milosevic, YT1AD, joining the team on the evening of April 9 to participate in the last 2 days of the trip.

Our primary contact in Iraq was Heathem, YI1UNH, who proved to be very valuable in coordinating resources. He also provided tourism support for our team members during off-operating hours.

Bill, N2WB, proved to be valuable in soliciting for donations while Bob, N6OX, and George Williams, N6NKT, provided much needed support during beam antenna and computer checkout in California prior to shipping the equipment to Iraq in early March.

Planning the Trip

The Station and Antenna Installation Plan was revised numerous times prior to our departure. We had to make a lot of tough decisions that took into account the availability of team contributions and donations. Sometimes what you want to bring and what you end up with are clearly not the same.

We were blessed to have ICOM providing us with five IC-7600 HF rigs and ACOM (K1LZ) who loaned us four amplifiers (two ACOM 1000s and two ACOM 1010s) that performed exceptionally well. In addition, SteppIR loaned us two Big IR verticals and two 2 element SteppIR beams that also performed well.

Paul, N6PSE, purchased six new laptops and configured them with the donated *WriteLog* software in advance for our team's use. Jun, JH4RHF, prepared the 240 V ac power cables for the amplifiers and radios plus set up the RTTY effort. I provided two USB WinKeyers (k1el.tripod.com) for use at the CW stations.

Assembling the Core Team

Our team was divided into three camps (SSB, RTTY and CW) with Bill, N2WB, leading SSB; Jun, JH4RHF, leading RTTY and myself, K3LP, leading the CW efforts along with 160 meter CW/SSB. Al, K3VN, Bob, N6OX, and the remaining team members participated in the development of the Station and Antenna Installation Plan including site installation and operating.

Traveling to Iraq

Our trip to Iraq ended up being pretty routine. Each of us flew from our own respec-



Figure 3 — Jun Tanaka, JH4RHF, racking up RTTY contacts.

Band and Mode Breakdown

Band	SSB	CW	RTTY	Total
160	270	1713	0	1,983
80	1605	2193	1	3,799
40	4004	3690	260	7,954
30	—	3256	891	4,147
20	8244	8004	1079	17,327
17	5478	2896	1015	9,389
15	3007	2387	210	5,604
12	143	15	1	159
10	12	27	0	39
Totals	22,763	24,181	3,457	50,401

tive locations and arrived in Vienna, Austria. From there, we would fly to Erbil, Iraq.

Because of the war in Iraq, the secured hotel location was expensive, running about \$275 USD per night per room. Team members paid for the hotel and airline ticket expenses. The donation money was used for equipment transportation, and purchasing needed supplies and materials. On average, each team member contributed \$5000 to \$6000 toward the trip.

Locating the Equipment

Our plan was to have the equipment clear customs prior to our arrival on Friday, April 2 and have it sitting at the hotel ready for installation. Our advanced team, Bill and Bob, were unable to get the equipment released on the previous Wednesday or Thursday prior to the local scheduled weekend. Since we arrived on Friday, it was a non-working day and also the Easter Holiday weekend.

The next day, Saturday at 7:30 AM, Paul, N6PSE; Bob, N6OX; Heathem, YI1UNH, and I, K3LP, went to the warehouse. We found that Iraq customs had opened all of the crates and inventoried our equipment. There was just one big problem. Only one of the five ICOM IC-7600 radios was there.

More panic set in. How can we have a successful DXpedition with only one radio? We asked the shipper about our other equipment. More confusion and more pandemonium set in. The shipper did some checking and after about a half an hour, the shipper told us that part of our shipment was still in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

As we stood around, trying to figure out what to do, we were told that a cargo plane from Dubai had just landed. We waited anxiously as the cargo plane was unloaded. The giant skid was brought to the warehouse and we helped tear the packaging off. We were so glad to see the four large black ICOM Pelican cases.

The shipper sensed our frustration and relief. He agreed to have his truck immediately loaded and deliver our equipment to the hotel on April 3. All of our equipment arrived safely at our hotel around 11:30 AM.

Getting on the Air

Anytime you want to operate SSB, RTTY and CW in close proximity with multiple transmitters for each mode, you are going to have a little stress, okay, sometimes a lot. Beyond the station design (filters, antennas, radios, amplifiers), a little understanding goes a long way. Let's face it, every mode wants to be on the same band at the same time and it's just not possible.

A couple of issues that need to be managed on a DXpedition are the following:

- SSB — keep the HF rig RF power output around 75 W (approximately 11 o'clock) to reduce overdriving the amplifier and interfering with the CW camp (especially when there is no ALC jack on the amp or when you have no ALC cable)

- RTTY — avoid being on the same band as the CW camp and keep the output power as low as possible but keep operating by finding unique placements and opportunities no matter how much negative feedback you get from the other camps

- 160 meters — operate both CW and SSB from the CW camp and move to SSB on the hour for 10 minutes and return to CW

- Gray line map — have open the gray line map and properly manage workable regions. This may mean putting others in timeout, as Jack, WØUCE, calls it, in order to manage the pileup and hear the weak ones.

SSB Camp Activities

Paul, N6PSE, made the first YI9PSE team and SSB contact to kick off our DXpedition

effort. The SSB camp focused on 10 through 80 meters SSB. Bill, N2WB; Al, K3VN; Bob, N6OX; Paul, N6PSE; David, AH6HY; Michel, FM5CD, and Heathem, Y11UNH, did a nice job handing out needed contacts for the next 7 days.

The antennas used at the SSB camp included a C3S Force 12 Beam, one SteppIR BigIR vertical, a 2 element SteppIR beam and a ¼ wave aluminum vertical for 80 meters.

RTTY Camp Activities

At the RTTY camp, Jun Tanaka, JH4RHF, handed out all the RTTY contacts (see Figure 3). He did a great job minimizing interference issues and exceeded our expected RTTY effort. He is simply a fantastic operator, technically smart and overall a great person. The antenna used at the RTTY camp was a SteppIR vertical with the 80 meter coil.

CW Camp Activities

Initially, Jack, WØUCE, made the first CW contact on 20 meters and quickly exhibited his command of CW by working the pileup with ease over the next 6 hours. Both Jack, WØUCE, and Wayne, W5KDJ, were relentless in keeping CW alive from 0600 until 1800 each day for 10 days.

This allowed me (David, K3LP) time to work on antenna enhancements during the day and operate from 1800 to 0600 on 40 and 80 meter CW and 160 meter SSB and CW each evening to early morning. It was wonderful installing the 160 meter ¼ wave vertical antenna and operating 160 meter CW and SSB as well as 30-80 meters.

The antennas at the CW camp included one 2-element SteppIR Beam, one SteppIR BigIR vertical, a 2 element 40 meter homebrew K3LP wire beam and ¼ wave wire verticals for both 160 and 80 meters supported by the Spider Beam telescoping poles.

Michel, FM5CD, provided CW support during the evening when available from working SSB. It was nice to see Krassy, K1LZ, and Hrane, YT1AD, arrive on the last 2 days of the trip providing additional CW manpower (see Figure 4).

Trip Results

After about 8½ days on the air, we were able to make 50,401 contacts after removing all busted call signs and duplicate contacts from the log. Actual contact total was about 55,000. The operating time started on April 3, 2010 at 15:09 UTC with the last contact occurring on April 12, 2010 at 03:21 UTC. A total of 50,401 contacts (with duplicate and busted call signs removed) and 19,396 unique call



Figure 4 — Krassy, K1LZ, adding some extra man-power to the CW effort.

DXCC by Band and Mode

Band	SSB	CW	RTTY	Total
160	37	63	0	63
80	72	79	1	92
40	101	94	38	116
30	—	86	55	93
20	110	100	61	122
17	110	86	58	118
15	88	83	24	102
12	30	12	1	33
10	6	15	0	19
Totals	145	133	74	165

signs were made on this DXpedition. Refer to the tables for a breakdown of the numbers.

A Change in Propagation

Toward the middle of the week on April 5, we noticed that propagation really dropped off. A check of www.spaceweather.com reported a very strong geomagnetic storm. While we could still work into Europe, the JA stations were much weaker and working North America became quite difficult. This lasted for several days before things improved again. During our last weekend, propagation was again very good. We enjoyed working many West Coast/Zone 3 stations, including many members of the Northern California DX Foundation.

The high point was when Paul, N6PSE, was able to work Reg, K6SSJ, on SSB in his mobile station at his “hot spot” and also worked a big rig trucker who was driving down Highway 70 in Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was very surprised when he found out we were in Iraq.

There was limited activity and no real band openings on 12 and 10 meters. We did not include 6 meters, 2 meters and VHF/UHF/Satellite activities on this trip.

Thanks for the Support

We want to thank the Iraqi Amateur Radio Society (IARS), President Diya N. Al-Asadi, Y11DZ, and staff members for a job well done by issuing our YI9PSE license in a timely manner.

We also want to thank Zerro Sherwani, our hotel general manager, the Ministry of Security in Kurdistan and the Kurd people for being very kind, supportive and great hosts to our DXpedition team.

Where Do We Go Next?

In January 2011, our team members will join the Spratly Island (DXØ) DXpedition, and then in May 2011 we’ll head to Afghanistan (YA) We hope to see you on the bands from these exotic locations.

Photos courtesy of David Collingham, K3LP, and Paul Ewing, N6PSE.

David Collingham, K3LP, an ARRL member, was first licensed as a WN6KTF in 1975 at the age of 15 and currently holds an Amateur Extra class license. He is very active in DXpeditions and contesting.

David is the Founder and Executive VP of AQCES International Corporation and International Quality Registrars. He has visited 60 different DXCC entities and operated from 36. He enjoys contesting and is a member of the Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC). He is also a life member of the National Capital DX Association (NCDXA). David has published numerous articles in QST, the DXCC Year Book and enjoys youth development. He can be reached at 12410 Glissans Mill Rd, Mt Airy, MD 21771, k3lp@yahoo.com

Paul Ewing, N6PSE, operates from San Jose, California. He is a member of AMSAT, The Northern California DX Foundation, the Northern California DX Club and a Life member of both the ARRL and INDEXA. He is very active on SSB on 10, 15, 17 and 20 meters and really enjoys chasing new DXCC entities.

In addition to operating as N6PSE, he has operated from the following entities: The UK, Italy, France, Alaska, Hawaii, BVI, US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, St Lucia, Barbados, Grand Cayman, Mexico, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Dodecanese (Rhodes) Greece, Japan and Vietnam.

Paul works in the Information Technology industry in Silicon Valley. In his spare time he likes to tinker with and drive his 1924 Brockway LaFrance Torpedo-Chemical Fire Truck and SCUBA dive. He also volunteers his services to the Doctors Without Borders organization. Paul can be reached at 3052 Wetmore Dr, San Jose, CA 95148, paul@n6pse.com.

