

## Article - H40GC DXpedition 2017 by Stan, LZ1GC

Temotu Province, Santa Cruz Islands group ( H40 ) in Pacific area is a very sought-after destination by many radio amateurs around the World! In 2016 and early 2017, Temoto Province (H40) occupied 30th place in the CLUBLOG list for the most wanted countries. It is currently in 46<sup>th</sup> place and is still needed by many radio amateurs in worldwide, especially on SSB. The H40GC DXpedition 2017 was my second activation of this rare country. My first activation was from Lata, Nendo Island ( IOTA OC – 100) - between October 4 - 17, 2016. Deciding to return to Temotu for a second activation was made easier as there were less unknowns! Additionally, this time I had a serious commitment besides the HF activation of this country. I had to carry out a humanitarian mission under the auspices of INDEXA and with the generous participation of CDXA & CDXF, Kontrax Ltd - Bulgaria and Andy, LZ2HM. I would like to recognize the individual and corporate sponsors, amateur clubs, associations and organizations that sponsored me before the expedition in practice are also participants in this humanitarian mission. I am thankful to all.

In October 2016 during the H40GC DXpedition 2016, I had meetings with teachers and students from the only high school in Temotu Province - JCP College, located on Nendo Island. About 400 students are learning in this school. So on the spot I got to know their problems and their needs. As early as 2016 I was convinced that the best way to help these boys and girls is to provide them with 1 or 2 laptops and other school supplies such as notebooks, pencils and pens. Such are luxuries in a province where the unemployment rate approaches 90 percent of the population. This makes it difficult for the students to buy even simple supplies. The school had not a single computer available! I think that helping young people and investing in them is the best thing that can be done for a country and its people because our future belongs to the younger generation!

Also in October 2016, I had meetings with the head official and officers of the local provincial office for disasters and accidents. They also did not have even a laptop computer to help with their protection of the population living on the various islands belonging to Temotu Province. So, I was aware of what we, radio amateurs could do to help the people of Temotu. My view of helping Temotu inhabitants met with the understanding and support of INDEXA, under whose patronage this humanitarian mission was finally accomplished!

I write about all of this because my understanding is that it is not enough to travel and activate on radio amateur bands at various rare destinations around the world, but that we have to leave something of us there by doing something good that the locals can remember! This will also popularize our wonderful hobby!

The organization and preparation of the H40GC DXpedition 2017 took about 6 months. During these six months, I purchased the required airline tickets, received a renewal of the H40GC and H44GC licenses (from 27 June 2017 - 26 June 2018), booked a room for my stay at Lata Motel on Nendo Island and prepared the antennas and the technical equipment necessary for the expedition. Every day during these six months I was doing something in preparation. Even when I was at work or on weekends I was walking in the nearby mountain - my thoughts were on what I had to do for the expedition so I would not miss something!

On 24 September 2017, my trip to Nendo Island, Temotu Province in the Pacific began with a 3-hour flight from Sofia (Bulgaria) to Heathrow, London (England). I had 20kg of hand baggage and two check-in baggage - each weighing 23kg. After a 5-hour stay at Heathrow Airport, a 13-hour flight from London to Changi Airport, Singapore, followed. In Singapore, the same plane was loaded with fuel, and the trip continued (8 hours flight) to Sydney, Australia. From there immediately - I took a domestic flight operated by QANTAS Airways to Brisbane (Australia). At 09:30 on 26 September 2017 local time, I was already at the International Airport in Brisbane.

Next, I flew from Brisbane, Australia to Honiara, Solomon Islands (H44) on the next day - 27th of September 2017. The hotels in Brisbane are very expensive (over 100 EUR per a night), at least for people with my budget! So I decided to stay at the Airport and repack my luggage to meet the various baggage limits imposed by different airlines.



**Stan, LZ1GC at International Airport Brisbane, at the night before the flight to Solomon Islands (H44)**

The airport in Brisbane is equipped with many luggage scales that helped me to organize my luggage to minimize any overweight charges. I packed my bags and paper boxes all night. All of my pockets were full of cables and different things which I needed for the expedition.

On September 27, 2017, after a 4-hour flight with Solomon Airlines from Brisbane to Honiara, I arrived on the Solomon Islands. The following two days in Honiara were used to get the originals of the H40GC and H44GC licenses. I was honored to visit the local telecom (TCSI) to meet and talk with Mr. Aaron Hopa - Manager of the local TCSI and get my license.



**The meet with Mr. Aaron Hopa at local Telecom (TCSI) in Honiara, Solomon Isl.**

Considering Mr. Aaron Hopa as a good friend, I surprised him with a wonderful gift for his wife - Bulgarian perfume of rose oil! The meeting with Mr. Hopa was very useful because he helped me to buy two laptops (the donation to Temotu Province) by directing me to the best local computer shop.

On September 29, 2017, the day before my flight to Lata, Temoto Province, I visited the management of Solomon Airlines. It occurred to me to talk to someone of the leadership seek free shipping for the donations I had purchased. Having explained to them the purpose of my visit, a nice girl told me that I should discuss my proposal with Mr. Colin Sigimanu - Manager Commercial of Solomon Airlines. So I did - I met Mr. Sigimanu - a respectful and stern man. After a brief discussion - a conversation in which I included a brief introduction to our hobby, he responded positively to my request, assuring me that he would take care of the matter. On leaving, he gave me his business card and said, **"If you have any problems with Solomon Airlines employees - show this business card. It will help you!"** At the time this sounded exaggerated, but his business card really opened doors. Twice if found that showing this card helped resolve issues that surely would have caused me conflict!



Stan, LZ1GC at Domestic Airport Honiara (H44)



Upcoming flight: Honiara to Lata, Nendo Isl. (H40)

On 30 September 2017 at 12:30 local time, the small 36-seat Solomon Airlines airplane landed at Lata Airport, Temotu Province after a 1 hour 40 min flight from Honiara. I was very happy because I was again on Temotu (H40) and in a few hours later H40GC would be on the air!



Stan arrives on Lata, Nendo Isl, Temotu (H40)



With the baggage after arrival at Lata Airport

The Chief of the Provincial Disaster Management Office of Temotu Province - Mr. George Tego, anticipated my airport arrival with a service car. I was quickly taken with my baggage to Lata Motel where I had a reservation. Mr. Tego also had previously arranged for 3-4 local people to help immediately with the erection of the 160/80/40 m bands vertical antenna. The next activity was the installation of the radio shack and initial antenna testing. After several adjustments to the tuning box, I started working 40m CW.



The vertical antenna for 160/80/40m bands



View of 160/80/40m antenna from the beach



Stan (H40GC) just tuning and testing 160/80/40m antenna

On 30 September 2017, at 08:38 GMT - H40GC was already on the air. The first contact was with VK3GA. After 2 - 3 minutes the PILE UP grew ever larger, which is normal - H40GC - Temotu Province, a rare DXCC country was on the air! On the second day as H40GC, I installed a multi-band ground plane antenna for 40 - 6 meter bands, including the WARC bands. In the following days until the end of the H40GC activity, despite the extremely poor propagation, I did my best to maintain a good qso rate. The statistics for the operation show I managed to do it!



**H40GC radio shack**

I tried to spend as much time as possible on the air - as much as 18 - 20 hours per day. During the night hours I worked 160/80/40 or 30m and during the day on high bands - 20/17/15/12/10. I worked all modes - CW, RTTY and SSB. With minimal pauses for a sleep, food, internet and some antenna repairs, H40GC made nearly 18,000 contacts from 08:30 GMT on September, 30 to 12:00 GMT on October 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2017! Unfortunately, a problem with the linear amplifier on 30 meters on the 10th day of the operation deprived me of the opportunity to realize at least another 1,500 QSOs on this band.

A few words about the propagation during H40GC activity - EXTREMELY poor propagation! I think, I nevertheless managed to use the small windows of better propagation when available on different bands so that I can give many radio amateurs the chance to make multi-band contacts with Temotu (H40).

More qso's could have been made, but I was also engaged with the humanitarian mission of this expedition and that also cost me time and effort!

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned that I had a vision of what humanitarian mission could be accomplished during the H40GC DXpedition 2017 so that it would remain a lasting memory of the local population and help them effectively.

On October 6<sup>TH</sup>, 2017 while visiting the local Provincial Disaster Management Office of Temotu Province, I donated one new, fully equipped HP laptop.

Mr. George Tego, who managed the work of this office accepted this donation with great excitement and gratitude. Only a few minutes later he began working with the new computer.





I want to highlight the fact that the 3 employees working for this important and responsible unit are Temotu residents who daily work for the benefit of their brethren and the local environment the province. Their work is often connected with travels to Reef Island and other islands of Temotu Province, so I am sure that this donation will help them carry out their daily and responsible work!

The main humanitarian activity during the H40GC DXpedition 2017 was intended for the local, and only high school, JCP College. At this school 400 students are progressing from grade 1 to 7 per their local education system. In order to qualify for this school, they must first have completed a primary school of grades 1 to 4. JCP College is located on Lata, Temotu Province, and draws students from various located on a distant part of Nendo Island, accessible only by motorboat. The journey from Lata to there is 40 minutes in one direction.

The JCP College visit was planned and coordinated with the College's management for 11:00 on October 12, 2017. In order to be safely transported to the college, I made contact with the Chairman and the Mayor of Nendo Island. I told them that I needed their help and cooperation. It turned out that the Mayor is the custodian of JCP College and he is also the chairman of his council! He directed that I was allowed to use a motor boat owned by the municipality. The Chairman and the Mayor of the island were fascinated with the forthcoming donation to JCP College and said that they were impressed by this humanitarian action. I gave credit to the sponsors, INDEXA, CDXA & CDXF and Kontrax Ltd - Karlovo, Bulgaria. The donation to JCP College consisted of one new HP laptop including accessories: laptop bag, extended mouse, flash RAM, 400 notebooks, 400 pens, 400 pencils, folders, markers, sharpeners and other school supplies.

The motorboat trip to the JCP College was successful although the ocean was not very quiet this day.



Travel via motorboat to JCP College



My helpers - the motorboat driver and Wesley

After my arrival at JCP College a meeting was held with students and teachers at the local church. The meeting began with the performance of the Temotu Province anthem by the students. I will remember this moment forever - the students standing and singing the hymn, myself and the teachers standing also, standing still and listening to this brilliant performance! It was really impressive!

Having introduced the students as to the purpose of my visit, the college director gave me the floor. In my address to the college students and teachers, I briefly explained what the donation is and that it is given under the auspices of INDEXA, with the generous participation of CDXA & CDXF, Kontrax Ltd - Karlovo, Bulgaria, Andy (LZ2HM) and with the help also of all the clubs and organizations which sponsored my expedition to Temotu Province.

I explained to them what our hobby is and that the purpose of radio amateur organizations and clubs is to not only support radio amateurs but also humanitarian activities in different parts of the world.



At this meeting I was asked many questions concerning our hobby and life and work in Bulgaria. I saw that my responses were interesting to those youngsters and students from JCP College. They asked me where Bulgaria is, what I have studied, do I have a family, what is my job and many other things. Keep in mind that most of Temotu residents spend their entire lives without visiting another country, I answered their questions to the fullest. At the same time, I firmly told them that they must believe in the success and struggle to achieve more. I told them that it all depends of them to study and pursue a higher education leading them to a good profession, find a good job, to be able to work and visit other countries. I will remember forever those youngsters and girls with their interest in how other people and cultures live.

The meeting at JCP College lasted about 3 hours. When I left with the motorboat back to Lata, there followed an unforgettable friendly send-off. With the voices ringing - "Stan, come again here", the students did not hide their satisfaction and sympathy to me. After getting off with the boat, I heard their voices for a long time - wishing me good-bye!

Returning to the Lata Motel, I continued to work on the air. I did not need any rest because the meeting at JCP College was an exhilarating experience for me! By prearranged plan the H40GC DXpedition 2017 had to finish on October 20, 2017. My return to Bulgaria had to take place after a series of 5 flights starting with a flight from Lata, Temotu Province to Honiara, Solomon Islands. This first flight had to be at 1 PM local time on October 21, 2017. The night before the flight, I worked on 160 meters. My last QSO was at 14:20 GMT with WL7E.

After going QRT I spent all night dismantling the antennas and packing luggage for my upcoming trip. The next morning, while expecting the taxi to take me to Lata Airport, I was told that because a eruption of the volcano Tinakula, my flight to Honiara was canceled! At this point, the uncertainty was before me - When would there would be a flight? There was also a danger of my missing the other four flights to Europe and Bulgaria. I was worried about my job, my family, and about my limited funds at the end of the expedition. There were no banks and ATMs on the island! I was relieved to be among friends, people I knew from the previous year. I believed they would not leave me in trouble! I was most worried for my job. I have had this work for 38 years, and I understood that a delay of more than 10 days would not be good for me. I managed to get in touch with my relatives and my colleague at work and received permission to continue my leave.

I was more relaxed now! My only concern remained - when will there be a flight to Honiara. The first two days after canceling the flight, I visited Solomon Airlines local office 3 - 4 times a day, hoping to find out that there would be a flight on the next day! Alas, because of the continued eruption of the Tinakula volcano, flights were impossible! Not knowing when there will be a flight, I decided to erect again the 160/80/40m antenna and continue to work on these three bands. So, I continued H40GC activity until 12:00 GMT, October 25, 2017. Just a few hours before my flight to Honiara on October 26, 2017, I dismantled the antenna again and fast packed my luggage.

Finally, October 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2017, a little before 3 PM local time, the Solomon Airlines plane from Lata to Honiara landed at the Honiara Airport. I was even more relaxed now, realizing that the nightmare after the volcano eruption and the canceled flights was over!

I immediately decided to visit again Mr. Colin Sigimanu - Commercial Manager for Solomon Airlines, who I previously met before my trip to Lata, Temoto Province. My idea was ask for his assistance with my missed out flight from Honiara to Brisbane by Solomon Airlines. It turned out that Mr. Colin remembered me! After explaining to him that the humanitarian mission had been successful, I briefly discussed with him the problem of my missed 5 flights back to Bulgaria. I will remember this man with good feelings. Understanding my problem, Mr. Colin ordered his subordinates immediately to include me in the list of passengers traveling the next day from Honiara to Brisbane. He told me that a first class hotel paid for by Solomon Airlines will be provided for me in Brisbane.

Thank you, Mr. Sigimanu, for your goodness and humanity. We parted like good friends. Immediately after this meeting, I took a taxi to S. S. E. C. Guesthouse Honiara, where I had to spend the night and met Bernard (H44MS) and Mrs. Serah in charge of the accommodation there. My meeting with them was very friendly - like a meeting between old friends! It was an honor for me to meet personally with Bernard (H44MS). I want to point out that this is the man, who since 1990, visits yearly for several months the Solomon Islands. During these more than 25 years he has activated for the IOTA program from very rare islands belonging to the H44 and H40 DXCC entities!

Bernard ( H44MS ) and I quickly found a common language. The next morning, with his help, I contacted via mobile phone a British Airways representative who assisted my booking return tickets from Brisbane, Australia to Sydney, Singapore, London and Sofia (Bulgaria)! Finally, after a long and tiring trip on October 30, 2017, I arrived successfully in Bulgaria, and on 31 October 2017 I was in my home - "my fortress"!

With the story of this DXpedition told, I would like to thank all the individual sponsors before and after the expedition that helped for the success of this expedition!

**I thank all members of the GDXF which supported me after the Tinakula Volcano eruption on Nendo Island! Thanks a lot for the support at this moment from Chris (DL5NAM), Rolf (DL7VEE), Uli (DM5EE), Sigi (DL6QW), Gerd (DL7VOG), Roland (DL7BA), Volker (DL7AUV), Helmut (DL5DSM), Wolf (DL8USA), Peter (DK2NG), Ulla (DF6QP) & Walter (DL8JS), Tom (DL1AMQ), Bernd (DL3GCB), Volker (DJ8QP), Tom (DK3DUA), Uwe (DK2ND), Tom (DJ6YX), Ed (EA8AXT), Ed (N4II), Bob (W9BF) and many others!**

**Thanks to all the Foundations, Associations and Clubs which supported me for this expedition: GDXF, SDXF, CDXA & CDXF, EUDXF, INDEXA, WVDXA, Lone Star DX Association, SWODXA, NODXA, KC5WXA - Jake McClain Driver Memorial Amateur Radio Club, WWDXC, Willimette Valley DX Club , LA DX GROUP, GM DX GROUP, Clipperton DX Club, Mediterraneo DX Club and LYNX DX Group!**

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**Here's to new meetings on the air!**

**73! Stan, LZ1GC ( H40GC ).**