

T48K Crew Celebrates 15 Years Operating Together

Nordic and Cuban operators of Las Tunas Contest Crew, T48K, demonstrate that it's possible for a modest Field Day-style station to be competitive in worldwide contests.

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Two years ago, Kenneth, OZ1IKY; Pekka, OH2TA, and I decided to share efforts in a multinational operation from T48K, the Las Tunas Contest Crew station. Over the years, Kenneth and I had scheduled contacts on several bands to get to know each other. In February 2015, I heard of Pekka's journey to Las Tunas, and invited him to visit. His help fixing my radiant system and building antennas led to the idea to participate in a contest as a multioperator station.

Las Tunas Contest Crew Birthday

Coincidentally, Las Tunas Contest Crew's, T48K, birth was the indirect result of another Nordic presence in Cuba. In 1997, Carlos, SMØKCO/CX7CO, organized the first and only CQWW multi-multi operation from Las Tunas with a group of Swedish, Danish, and Cuban radio operators, three of which were T48K's founders (CO7RR, CO8DM, and CO8ZZ). That



Figure 1 — Las Tunas Contest Crew station, T48K.



Figure 2 — Las Tunas Contest Crew, from left to right, Alex, CO8KA; Douglas, CO8DM; Pekka, OH2TA; Raúl, CO8ZZ, and Kenneth, OZ1IKY.

operation was the inspiration for further multioperator contesting.

The first opportunity to join forces was during the ARRL International DX Contest (CW) in 2001, when T48K went on the air for the very first time. Our 15th anniversary in 2016 was a magnificent opportunity to celebrate with Kenneth and Pekka.

Historically, Field Day-style stations have been the essence of all Las Tunas Contest Crew operations. We found a small house in La Herradura, a little fisherman's town located at the north coast of Las Tunas, and we converted it into our station (see Figure 1). Thanks to a generous donation from

the Union de Radioaficionados Españoles (URE) to the Federación de Radioaficionados de Cuba (FRC), we used a Yaesu FT-857D, my old Collins 30L-1, and fiberglass poles for the whole system of antennas. Kenneth also sent a 12.5-meter and a 15-meter antenna, while Douglas, CO8DM, sent another heavy-duty 12.5-meter antenna. For logging, we used *NIMM Logger+*.

Guests Arriving

On Tuesday, February 16, 2016, Kenneth and Pekka arrived in Cuba, each carrying their remaining gear. After picking up Douglas, we headed toward La Herradura, where we arrived just after noon and began to assemble antennas. Alex, CO8KA, arrived at the same time to support with logistics (see Figure 2).

That night, Pekka and Kenneth

designed an antenna arrangement that would minimize the interference as much as possible. We decided that in addition to the VDAs for 10, 15, and 20 meters, we would build a ground plane on 40 meters and an inverted L for 80 and 160 meters, all of which were set just a few meters from the coast line. Before dark, three VDAs and an inverted L were assembled. Due to inclement weather, we could only raise the inverted L and the 20-meter VDA that night.

It was our first experience as a Multiband, Multioperator entry, and despite only having four operators, we knew we could work efficiently. We decided to work in 4-hour shifts with Pekka and Douglas operating together, and Kenneth and I working together



Figure 3 — Kenneth and Raúl operating at T48K.

during the next shift; that way, during resting periods, they would have an available translator if need be (see Figure 3).

On Wednesday and Thursday, we continued raising the VDAs and inverted L, making adjustments using Douglas's MFJ antenna analyzer. We also finished installing the Icom IC756 Pro-III with the MAFET linear and Kenneth's Elecraft K3 with my Collins 30L-1. The initial proofs showed no interference issues, thanks to our pre-planning and the filters Pika brought. The two stations networked through a router and used *WinTest*, installed on two lap-

tops. Unfortunately, one of two power sources for the MAFET was out of service, so we had to use it at half capacity, with 250 W.

When everything was ready, Pekka and Kenneth began to call, but at sunset, we realized we had to repair the house's ac net because of corrosion that affected the junctions. Once finished, the problems were transferred to the ac pole outside, where there were further connection difficulties. After that was repaired, the 160-meter antenna showed unexpected promise.

Friday

On Friday, Douglas and I resolved issues with equipment that had been damaged by strong winds and humidity, while Kenneth and Pekka continued operating.

Just a few minutes before 19:00 local time (00:00 UTC), Pekka and Douglas took the first operating shift on 40 and 20 meters. Based on 2015 International DX Contest results, we concluded that to reach the top three worldwide in our category, we would need 8,000 contacts with 59 and 61 multipliers per band to get over 8 million points. This would certainly be a difficult task for a small station in a category

that generally favors fixed super-stations. Our strategy was to give priority to multipliers that were historically difficult to work, passing them to other bands when it was possible.

By the time Kenneth and I started our shift at 0400 UTC, we'd already made 1,156 contacts on 80, 40, and 20 meters, with an average of 289 contacts per hour, and by the end of my shift, we had 1,911 contacts, and the first 225 contacts on 160 meters.

The only setback during the rest of the contest was the poor propagation on 10 meters, which made it impossible to

reach our initial 8 million-point goal. Still, it was a personal triumph, as we had never worked that well before. After 48 uninterrupted hours of operation, T48K finished with 7,239 valid contacts and 356 multipliers, for a final score of 7,731,252 points, which earned us 12th place. It was a good debut for our modest station in a difficult category and will help prepare us for WRTC 2018.

Conclusions

The celebration of our contest station's birthday demonstrated the value of ham radio and the friendship, growth, and talents that can come from it. Ham radio brings together people of different personalities, geographic regions, and sociocultural backgrounds in pursuit of a common objective.

The experience was unforgettable and strengthened our friendship. I would like to thank Pekka and Kenneth for their help, as well as Anna for joining Kenneth on this adventure. I thank FRC National President Pedro Rodríguez, CO2RP; FRC President of the Subsidiary in Las Tunas Idelfonso Rodríguez, CO8IR; our families for tolerating our absence, and ARRL for a great contest.

See you on the air!

Photos by the author.

Licensed since 1993, Raúl, CO8ZZ, has always been active in DX and contesting, mainly on CW, getting into Cuban confirmed entities top ten in CW, SSB, and mixed modes. In 2001, he was one of three who founded Las Tunas Contest Crew, T48K, the oldest and most successful multioperator Cuban contest station. Raúl is also the Grupo DX de Cuba national coordinator and the Federación de Radioaficionados de Cuba (FRC) vice president in Las Tunas. He also works as a cameraman and photographer for the Cuban TV Network. Raúl can be reached at co8zz@frcuba.cu.

