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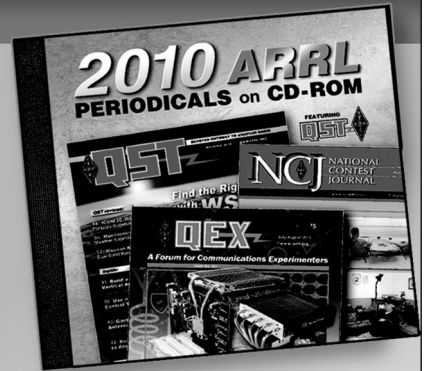
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**QST Issue:** Feb 1998

**Title:** Spratly...1S1DX Then, 9M6OO Now

**Author:** Bob Schenck, N2OO/9M6OO

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# How's DX?

— Edited by **Bill Kenamer, K5FUV • DXCC Manager**

## Spratly...1S1DX Then, 9M600 Now

By **Bob Schenck, N200/9M600**  
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 Tuckerton, NJ 08087  
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It's April 1, 1979. The 38-foot ketch *Banyandah* is slowly approaching Amboyna Cay after a 2½ day journey from Brunei. There was virtually no wind for the entire trip, so we had to rely on a small diesel motor that moved us along at a steady 2 knots! The calm swells of the South China Sea moved faster than the boat!

On board the *Banyandah* were Harry Meade, VK2BJL; Stew Woodward, K4SMX; Bill Poellnitz, K1MM; John Ackley, KP2A; Austin Regal, N4WW; Captain Jack Binder and his wife Judith, and myself. Jack, Judith and the *Banyandah* were contracted for \$10,000, which was provided by the Northern California DX Foundation. What was a dream only six months earlier, was about to quickly turn into...a nightmare.

We all cheered when we first spotted Amboyna Cay in the distance. It first appeared as a small white speck on the horizon. It was sheer torture in slow motion as we slowly crept closer. As we watched, our mood went from joy, to confusion, to despair, to hope, to sheer horror!

We saw what seemed to be some sort of structures on the 900-foot wide island. This was a great surprise to us since the aerial photos we acquired showed it to be unin-

habited as recently as one year earlier. As we drew nearer, we could see people scurrying about. We kept a safe distance while Captain Jack considered our options. We saw no flag, or other indication as to what country was represented on the island. Could they be Filipino fishermen?

Finally, Judith noticed through her binoculars that someone was sending semaphore from the island. Who knows semaphore? Judith only remembered how to send the alphabet from her experience as a Girl Guide in England when she was a child. So, she started sending A B C... with her arms. Meanwhile, Captain Jack and Stew were readying the dinghy in preparation for a quick visit to the island to speak with whomever was ashore. These two activities (Judith's semaphore and the movement of the dinghy at the bow) apparently upset the inhabitants. Suddenly the person sending semaphore threw down his flags. Within seconds we heard four loud cannon blasts from the island!

The shells missed us by a wide margin, but their message was clear. We were not welcome! We quickly put the 2 knot diesel into gear, put up the sails, and steered away from Amboyna Cay. As if by divine intervention, a stiff breeze came from nowhere and carried us quickly away. After considerable discussion, Captain Jack decided to return to Brunei.

Upon our return, Stew went to work to see if he could find any other islands that might be accessible to us. After numerous phone calls back to the US, and some seri-

ous investigation at the local library, Stew and the captain plotted out several possible islands/reefs.

All team members were asked if they wanted to go out for another try. Austin had to return home because he was running out of time. John and I opted to stay in Brunei and maintain a backup operation as VS5KV and VS500. We would also maintain close contact with the *Banyandah* via radio, something we sorely missed having on the first trip. Stew, Harry and Bill would go with Captain Jack. (His wife Judith and their two boys who had been left behind in Brunei for the first trip, went along as well.)

They passed by a couple of reefs that had no land above water. They approached another island and could see from a distance that it was inhabited, so they steered clear. Another island had several ships anchored near it. One of the ships suddenly got underway and headed straight for the *Banyandah*—not a good sign! Captain Jack quickly changed course to demonstrate his peaceful intentions. Apparently the "message" was received because the vessel turned back to the island.

Captain Jack decided to try Barque Canada Reef as a last hope on the way back to Brunei. This reef was listed as "a submerged reef with a small sand cay that dries at low tide." Upon arriving, they discovered that the 30-foot wide sand cay was about a foot or two above water at high tide! The group set up here, putting on a 70-hour operation as 1S1DX and making nearly 14,000 QSOs.



The 9M6HIL, special-event team at the grand opening of the Hillview Gardens Resort (9M6AAC permanent call) in Keningau, Sabah, East Malaysia. From left to right, Doris, 9M6DU; Alfons, 9M6MU; Jani, YB0US; Bob, N0RN; Bob, N200/9M600; and Rashid, 9M2RS.



The 9M600 team on Layang-Layang Island in the Spratlys, August 1997. Left to right, Jani, YB0US; Bob, N0RN; and Bob, N200/9M600.

## Back in 1997

For 18 years I had been comfortable with my decision to stay in Brunei while the others operated from Barque Canada Reef. But I couldn't help but wonder what it would have been like to have gone along. On one hand, VS5 was a decent place to operate from in 1979. And, looking at the outcome of the entire venture, it was a huge success for its time. We made about 15,000 QSOs from VS5 all together (10,000 by VS500 alone), another 2000 from Hong Kong as VS6AK on the way down, and another 14,000 from Spratly. On the other hand, I had missed my chance to operate from the Spratlys.

When my old friend Alfons, 9M6MU, started talking about his resort in Sabah, my mind started wandering. He wanted me to come for the grand opening celebration of his resort called Hillview Gardens, built around his home in Keningau, Sabah. As it turns out, Sabah is only 300 miles south of a diving resort on Layang-Layang island, part of the Spratly Island group. Would it be possible to attend Alfons's grand opening and make a side trip to Layang-Layang for my long-awaited chance at the Spratlys?

Thanks to Alfons and his wife Doris, I was able to do both! I put out the word on the Internet DX reflector and I soon had two volunteers to join me. Bob, NØRN, was a veteran of the Navassa DXpedition (me too). He came on board without any hesitation! Jani, YBØUS, was a last-minute surprise. He joined us at Hillview Gardens and expressed his desire to come with us to Layang-Layang.

Hillview Gardens is a quaint little resort located in Keningau, Sabah, in the interior of Borneo. It incorporates ham radio as a focal point. (The massive 85-foot radio tower in the center of the resort is lit up with flood lights at night!) Twenty modern motel-style rooms provide air-conditioned comfort for the guests. There is a 50-foot pool, nightly entertainment in the outdoor beer garden and plenty of delicious food. Rates are quite reasonable. All ham visitors are invited to make a Hollywood Boulevard-style hand print in a concrete tile. These are being collected for a "Ham Radio Wall of Fame." The resort is quite informal; it's simply a place to go for rest, relaxation...and Amateur Radio.

As soon as we arrived we erected the 402CD and A3WS antennas donated by Cushcraft. There were transceivers already available, so all we had to do was incorporate the donated Astron SS30M power supplies, Heil Prosets, and Log-EQF logging software into the existing equipment.

We participated in the official opening ceremony on August 10, which drew over 300 people, including many local 9Ms! The guests of honor besides myself were the Sabah Minister of Tourism and Environment, as well as the Keningau District Officer. There were speeches, cultural dances, music, food, drink and a wonderful performance by Elvis of Sabah. In between all this,



Bob Schenck, N200, making the first contact from the Spratly Islands as 9M600/Spratly. It only took 18 years!

we operated special-event call 9M6HIL from August 3 to 23 and made about 5500 QSOs overall. I was also able to work Beth back home in New Jersey almost every day! Propagation on 20 meters was fantastic!

On August 14 we flew to Layang-Layang Island for a four-day side trip. We set up and operated three stations using the Cushcraft A3WS, Alfons's old TH3 beam and a borrowed AP8 vertical. We made about 10,000 QSOs in 3½ days of around-the-clock operating using Yaesu FT-900, Kenwood TS-50 and ICOM IC-735 transceivers. We had no difficulty working the world with 100 W.

Layang-Layang Island is a diving resort. And diving is about all there is to do on this very small 3000-foot long island that shares space with the Malaysian Navy. The island is part of the Spratly Island group although it is administered by Malaysia.

Layang-Layang Resort has 86 rooms available. Accommodations include a fresh water swimming pool, a bar, five buffet meals a day, cable TV, in-room refrigerators, air conditioning and more. It cost us about \$1000 (US) per person to stay four nights, which included air transport and all meals. Since the island is considered to be part of Sabah, a 9M6 license is necessary for anyone to operate from there.

The staff at the resort was extraordinarily helpful and receptive to our presence. On our last night there we were visited by four members of the Malaysian Navy who thoroughly enjoyed listening to me handle a wild pileup while logging the contacts on my laptop. Finally, after 18 years, I was able to get to the Spratly Islands! And not one shot was fired!

After seeing NØRN off, Jani, Alan and I headed back to Hillview Gardens to finish our antenna projects and enjoy our last several days in Borneo. A second, shorter tower was erected and the old TH3 was mounted on it. The A3WS was placed on top of the 85-foot tower above the 402CD. Finally, on August 24, it was time to go home. We all shared emotional good-byes as we promised to come back again...someday.

Thus ended an extraordinary 3-week DXpedition. For a group of individuals, many of whom had never met before, we

simply got along marvelously. It was a real pleasure!

Anyone interested in either the Hillview Gardens Resort or Layang-Layang Island Resort can write or e-mail me for more information. You can also find the Hillview Gardens on the Web at <http://www.idis.com/alfons/hill.html>. Where are we going next? Probably nowhere for awhile, but you never know! See ya' in the pileups ...

*A special thanks to my wife Beth, KF2BQ. She was absolutely wonderful throughout this adventure.*

## SPRATLY 1998

Barring unexpected problems, 9MØC will begin from Layang-Layang Dive Resort on February 12, 1998, running through 23 February.

The Spratlys are number 57 on the DXCC Most Wanted List, with even greater need on the USA East Coast. Layang-Layang has been the location for a number of Spratly expeditions, including 9MØS and 9MØA. Recently, there have been other operations that have dented, but far from removed, the "most wanted" status of this DXCC country.

The team is expected to include G3NUG, G3OZF, G3SED, G3WGV, G3XTT, G4JVG, GØOPB, K5VT, VK2BEX, 9M2OM (G3NOM) and 9M6SU. They plan to keep four stations on the air around the clock, to maximize band openings.

All HF bands will be activated on SSB, CW and RTTY, and the group will also have equipment for 6 meters. The intention is to put out big signals on all bands by using the best possible equipment and a wide selection of monoband and multiband antennas including phased verticals for both 40 and 80 meters. Yaesu is supplying six transceivers for four main operating positions.

All operators will be using split frequency and listening up the band. The one exception will be on 80-meter SSB where they'll be listening both up and down to accommodate both European and US requirements. Please do not call on the DXpedition transmit frequency unless the operator clearly indicates that he has reverted to transceive.

## AMATEUR RADIO IN IRAN

Amateur Radio call signs have again been heard from Iran. Recently, I had a rare opportunity to meet one of the new Iranian amateurs, Hamidreza (Hamid) Rahimi, EP3HR, at the offices of the Associazione Radioamatori Italiani in Milan, Italy.

Hamid said that Amateur Radio had been suspended during the Iran-Iraq war. Prior to that time, only amateurs from other countries had been active. In the last few years, the government has seen the benefit of starting Amateur Radio again, with the result that Amateur Radio exams were given about a year and a half ago. Five new amateurs, Hamid among them, passed the tests.

Currently, Hamid is using an Alinco DX-70 transceiver with an inverted V antenna on 20 meters. He also has a home-brew QRP transceiver that he has used to work about 30 countries on 20 meters.

Hamid works as an R & D assistant manager for Iran Telecom Industries. His QSL information is: PO Box 158, 7155 Shiraz, Iran.

There is no national radio society in Iran, and the current laws prohibit such associations. However, the Ministry of Communications is providing QSL bureau service for Iranian amateurs. The new bureau's address is:

Iranian QSL Bureau, Directorate General of Telecommunications, Ministry of PTT, Dr. Shariati Ave, PO Box 11365-931, 16314 Tehran, Iran. 