

CHAD TT8KO DXPEDITION (op LA7GIA)

Part 1/2

Republic of Chad is a landlocked country in Central Africa and Africa's 5th largest country. The most popular religion of Chad is Islam (at 55%), followed by Christianity (at 40%). In 1960, Chad obtained independence from France as many other African countries during that period. While many political parties are active, Chad is a centralized, authoritarian state, with little democratic tradition and a fragmented political opposition. Power lies firmly in the hands of President Déby who has been the President since 1990. According to the new constitution, President Déby can stay in power until 2033. Chad remains plagued by political violence and recurrent attempted coups d'état, and is ranked among the world's poorest countries on UN human development index.

PLANNING

I started planning to go to Chad just after I returned from Somalia as 6O6O in January. I was looking into a couple of options but knowing that Chad is ranked high up on lower bands made the difference. Getting the license wasn't that difficult except they had a somewhat strict licensing process. They required that I obtained a VISA as a proof of my stay in Chad. However, their European Embassy would not issue the Visa until 2 months prior to my arrival, and when my professional agent finally presented the application in person at the embassy in Germany, they refused to issue the

VISA. My agent had to bring my passport back to Norway, before we made a successful attempt some weeks later. After a long discussion with ARCEP (the regulator) I could file my license application without having the VISA, but I had to send a copy of the VISA when I received it, as that was necessary to have the license application approved. ARCEP also required the address of where I was staying



The image shows a certificate from ARCEP (Autorité de Régulation des Communications Electroniques et des Postes) for Monsieur Kenneth OPSKAR. The certificate is titled 'CERTIFICAT D'EXPLOITATION DE LICENCE RADIOAMATEUR'. It lists the following details: Mode de transmission: Phonie et graphie; Indicateur: TT8 KO; Station utilisée: Radioamateur; Puissance: 100w; Certificat d'opérateur: Radioamateur. The certificate is valid from 09/10/2018 to 08/11/2018. It is signed by Dr HAGGAR BACHAR SALIM, Directeur Général. The certificate is dated 13.08.2018 and delivered in N'Djamena.

ARCEP also let me wire transfer the 30 USD license fee to their bank account. Wire transfer money to

TT8KO authorization

such countries like Somalia and Chad is not always easy, and only a few banks allow transactions to these countries. Many of these countries do not use the IBAN/SWIFT details, and the transaction can very easily be stuck in the system or returned.

N'Djamena is the capital city with a population of about 750.000. I knew that the previous DX-peditions to Chad had problems with noise on lower bands. I chatted with several of them prior to going there. I tried to put some effort into choosing a good QTH – which isn't easy in such a city. The first hotel I dealt with refused to host my antennas and radios. They said this is a country where telecom is a sensitive issue and would not let me do the installation. Leaving the best option, I talked to the next one. They had a large plot which would accommodate my RX antennas (beverage), as

well my low band verticals. After discussing the installation with them, they refused to do anything due to security until I sent a copy of the authorization. Obtaining the license took about one month. It was also forwarded to the security police. The reason was that there were a lot of Embassy's nearby the hotel, including the US Embassy, and the hotel wanted to check with the security police that transmission was ok. After security police had seen it, they confirmed the authorization was good. Hence, I had all permission that was necessary. I had the authorization issued by the Ministry, I had the security police confirmation, I had the Hotel Managers approval of my installation, and I also meanwhile had obtained equipment admission certificates to bring my equipment into Chad. All HF equipment to be imported temporary to Chad is by law subject to an admission fee (yes, I have a copy of the paragraphs).



2 el Mosley beam up 25 meter

Now, I was really looking forward to this trip. I planned to install a 26-28m tall top loaded 160m vertical with 2-3 elevated radials, a 13m top loaded 80m vertical on Spider pole in the garden with ground radials. At the roof, 25m above ground level I planned to install my favorite Mosley mini 32AW 20-10m beam which has served me so well in the past 5 DX-pedition's. It's a great beam! As well at the roof I would have my favorite homebrew fan dipole for 40+30m up about 25-30 meter. The dipole is made of spare parts, some left over antenna wire, baseboard as spacers, and I put it in a plastic bag. All my equipment weighted about 105 kg / 230 pound, I had about 1700m/5500 feet of wire and coax with me to Chad. I had an upgraded Elecraft K3 radio, a 1 kW JUMA lightweight amplifier, and an Elecraft KX3 as backup. I had a Remote QTH RX antenna system; a directional beverage kit and K9AY RX loop (4 directions) (www.remoteqth.com), including a custom-made RX controller. I also had some 250 m/ 800 feet of receiving 75-ohm coax, some sponsored by DX Engineering.



40+30m homebrew fan dipole



Beverage antenna 1.0m/3 feet height

GOING TO CHAD

The day of departure all gear was packed. I had a full working day at the office before I headed to Oslo airport in the afternoon. I checked-in on an Ethiopian Airlines flight going to N'Djamena with a change of flight in Addis Ababa, before the final leg to Chad.

Arriving in the very small airport in N'Djamena the following day, I was quite relieved to see all my luggage at the bag belt. I headed for baggage screening, but when they checked all my gear, they immediately took all my bags and locked them in a room out of my sight. I showed them all papers, but still had to wait for the big boss. It was 3-4 other people in same situation. I was worried, but after 30 min waiting time, I met the big boss in his office smoking a cigar. He checked all my papers, we had a brief chat, and he said I could go if I took the gear with me when I left Chad. I was very relieved when I headed for the hotel. Despite all the discussion with the hotel about my room location facing the North side of the building, they had failed to make a reservation in the part I wanted. It took a while to sort out this, but finally I was happy and could continue with the installation. The hotel manager wanted me to rest, but there was no time for resting in the schedule so after 2,5 hours my beam, dipoles and 200m beverage to EU/NA was up, and radio and all gear installed just prior to sunset. The installation was carefully planned upfront and all bags packed accordingly. The hotel had provided me with many detailed photos, so I knew exactly how it looked. I knew all about their satellite dishes, the weather station, the lightning arrestors, the security cameras, the router, dimensions of roof hotel, directions, heights of structures and so on.



80m top loaded vertical

check my station. I did not mind. I continued with the transmission. Still great signal all over! Late in the afternoon the Mosley beam failed! I had high SWR and the PA tripped, still I run the pileup with 3W for some minutes! After some checking's, I decided to continue with the backup dipole (yes always bring spare parts and backups...).

I planned to install the 80m antenna the following day, and 160m the third day if the beverage worked well. The first night I started on 15m before I changed to 40m about 22 UTC. The signals were fantastic on 15 and 40m. The beam was excellent in that position up 25m. The beverage was located about 150m from the hotel and in a 500m/1500 feet radius there were almost no houses. The beverage was very quiet, and many NA stations had booming signals throughout the night on 40m (S9)

After 43 hours (!) with almost no rest, I slept for 3 hours that night before I continued. I had a great time! The next day at lunch time I installed the 80m vertical antenna, as I planned to be on 80m in the evening. At the same time, I had a phone call from the reception. There were some people looking for me, and in the reception the national security police waited. We had a talk about my equipment and authorization for about 20 minutes.

They said they would return later that evening to

At 18 UTC, after exactly 24h operation I managed 2135 CW QSOs while sleeping, eating, doing the 80m vertical antenna installation, talking to national security police, meeting the hotel management, and dealing with a failed beam. I decided to have a few hours break before continuing 80m.

I had rested for about 5 min before the receptionist called me again and let me know I had some guests waiting.

I went down to the reception.

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CHAD TT8KO DXPEDITION

Part 2/2

In the reception I met several men asking for my name – they were the national security police. We went to the room, but it was soon clear I could not discuss with them in French. So they called for an interpreter assisted by hotel security people, and soon the room was packed with people. The security police started the interrogation. Their questions were all related to

- Why I was in Chad. What the purpose of my trip was
- If I was working for the Norwegian government. And if I was a telecom engineer
- Why I had all this equipment. Who I had been in touch with prior to coming to Chad
- If I had an invitation to come. If I had a VISA, and who had issued that.
- If the equipment had been shipped or brought into Chad by others
- Who brought the equipment from the airport to the hotel
- What persons I had contacted in Chad after arrival
- Who had issued the authorization. If I had a copy of all my documents, including my LA license

All these questions were answered with: no, I am not a telecom engineer working for the Norwegian government. I work as an electrical power engineer, and I am in Chad on vacation as a tourist.



After that the questions turned into: what I was transmitting, who I contacted, what we were really talking about, how long our conversation lasted, if this was a commercial business or broadcasting. We went through the N1MM log and I patiently explained how we did the transmission, the logging and so on. The 1h interrogation concluded when the police claimed that my radio could be controlled by others even from abroad.

I was told to stop transmitting, and that they would return next day. All this in a

friendly matter. I caught up with some sleep, and next morning I decided to fix the beam by replacing the failed inductor with a spare part. At 11:00am the national security police arrived in the hotel. It was a brief meeting, and they explained that all equipment should be disconnected, and the antennas would be locked down at the roof with no access. I was clearly told that everything should remain as it was, in the same position, nothing was to be touched or altered. I was not allowed to maintain the antennas at the roof, not even for visual inspection. I was told that the equipment was going to be checked for compliance with documents. The chief of the national security police had decided that he and his technicians together with ARCEP who issued the authorization would perform the inspection. I showed them the documents and the radio to convince them about the compliance. But it was not their decision, but an order from the Chief himself. At that time I was convinced it meant TT8KO would be temporary QRT until they actually had checked the documents and the equipment the following days. Unfortunately, Chief of security police was a very busy man.

At that time he was travelling together with the President Idriss Déby and they were supposed to return from abroad the next day (Friday).

While waiting for the big boss I went to see ARCEP on Friday to have their explanation. It was nice to see the city and the daily life while driving there for a short sightseeing. The traffic was chaotic, cars and people everywhere – still no accidents – quite different than Los Angeles which I visited the previous month. In the small office 7x7 feet there were 3 people sharing one desk, where the manager had 90% of the space and the two others 10%. After talking to ARCEP it was clear that even with the authorization they could do nothing if the transmission was stopped by the security police for any reason. I realized after waiting for 3h that I had to spend the weekend in the hotel doing nothing.

Police order

The hotel was reasonably well protected behind concrete walls. There were about 15-20 armed guards on duty 24/7. It had a perfect river location very suitable for amateur radio transmission. They also had a strict procedure to check all cars and people entering the compound. They used metal detectors, and all weapons and machetes were taken from the visitors and returned when they left the hotel. During the weekend I looked after my antennas. At Saturday night there was a Chadian party at the hotel, with music and happy people. Hundreds of persons in the hotel and garden. No wonder some of them got entangled in the 80m vertical antenna guy wires. Next morning, I found the 80m vertical collapsed on the grass. But because I was not allowed to touch anything, even after it fell down, I could only look at it - doing absolutely nothing. During the weekend I realized nothing was going to happen. I tried to gather more information about what was really going on. It seemed that the first security police men filed a report about my massive equipment, coax and antennas to their boss. When they interrogated me, they had confirmed the impression that I had a lot of communication equipment with me without (for them) a reasonable explanation about what we were really talking about. This report went all the way to the top Chief of the security police next to the President. It was also clear that the national security police after a few days' investigation said my documents were ok. However, they had not been informed about the authorization by ARCEP. The national security police do not issue authorizations, but they supervise security issues.

Monday morning, I decided to again go to ARCEP and talk to the Director. Another sightseeing trip, I really enjoyed seeing the city. Luckily, we managed to get an appointment with the Director. There was a brief meeting and discussion about my authorization and the purpose of applying for a permit. I was quite surprised about the questions as they apparently had no idea what amateur radio was all about. They said usually the tourists did not bring their own communication equipment but used the commercial mobile network to contact their friends. After a while I kindly asked ARCEP to come to the hotel to verify the equipment. They agreed to come to the hotel at 16:00 local time that day to do the inspection together with the police, and it was clear that a decision would be made that evening. I was not worried about the inspection because I had the authorization and equipment certificates in order.

By late Monday evening, at 20:00 no person had arrived. I was truly disappointed when I realized the deal. The faces of the hotel staff that used to be happy when I arrived one week earlier had turned into sad and worried faces. Many of them expressed their concern and supported me. Wednesday morning, after waiting one week - I decided to change my return ticket back home to Norway, so I would leave the following day. I was hoping that they finally would arrive and do the inspection of the gear and let me continue. And this was definitely not a question about bribe or paying a fee to be allowed to continue transmitting. We had a meeting with the national security police and I informed

them about the flight change and asked for permission to disassemble the gear as everything was still locked down. I was still not allowed to touch anything but after the inspection had been done. By late Wednesday evening I contacted the Hotel management to prepare for departure the following day as the police never came during the day. We had a very rough meeting with the national security police. After a heated discussion I was informed that a police order had been issued preventing me from leaving Chad even without the equipment. I had to stay until the inspection was performed, and they had concluded about my equipment was legal or not.

I was truly shocked about this dramatic change in situation which I never saw coming. I was told that the security police would arrive at 10-11:00 next morning to check the station just prior to my departure at 11:30. That would give me 30 minutes to pack all my gear before I had to go to the airport! It was an impossible task, it meant I would have to leave a lot of gear behind. That night I headed straight to the bar to calm down.

Thursday morning I woke up early, I did not sleep much at all that night. By 12:00, two hours before my flight, I had to call Ethiopian airlines to cancel my flight ticket and the status of my return flight changed to “open” as the police never showed up. I was warned not to challenge the police order and go to the airport, even without equipment.

I had a busy Thursday as I started to contact the Foreign Ministry in Norway and the Norwegian Embassy in Chad. I definitely needed their assistance in this case. After sending all my documents to them, I received a letter with the top 10 Schengen lawyers in Chad. As they said, “in case you need it”.

Liste Avocats

Les listes sont communiquées à titre d'information par ordre alphabétique et n'engagent pas la responsabilité de l'administration, tant sur la qualité des prestations fournies que sur le montant des honoraires réclamés ; le choix est libre.

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Friday morning was no change in situation. I did not care about my equipment anymore – if the antenna fell down 25 meters because I was not allowed to maintain it – nobody would care. I had several expensive phone calls to the Embassy.

Saturday was another big event scheduled at the hotel. A fashion show or beauty pageant. The hotel was packed with young women (and men..) – most of them smiling when taking selfies. So many happy people! In the evening it seemed like the whole city joined the party, even the national security police were busy. After so many days I had learned a lot about the national security police.

There were 4-5 security police on patrol in the hotel every day, they were dressed like civilians, and if you did not know them you would think they were regular guys. By the weekend arrived several hams had started donating “beer money” to my PayPal account which was very much appreciated. In fact, a few people also made a refill on the beer account! Lots of people expressed their support and prayers for me. Fantastic ham spirit! I had received hundreds of emails from all over the world, especially from NA. All this really kept my spirit up, and the support was very much appreciated in a difficult time! The days went along, I spent much time chatting with people all over the world from 5 min to hours. I really had no clue when the saga would end, if it would take days or weeks. I started worrying about my daily life back in Norway, my family, my business and so on (also VP6D .. which was an ATNO). By Saturday the Hotel management also clearly stated that they had to withdraw from the situation.

Sunday I was informed that the Chief had decided to visit hotel on Monday. However, it turned out to be fake news. Yet, another disappointment. Monday I had further discussion with the Embassy

and the management to try to get in touch with the Chief of security police. No success, but the Embassy understood it was mentally difficult to stay there alone, so they put even more effort into the process. By Tuesday at lunch time I was informed that there would be a presidential event at the hotel starting Tuesday evening and the hotel would be occupied from then on. Because of this event the Embassy really pushed for a solution. If we could not obtain a quick solution, I would have to stay at least another week.

By lunch time Wednesday – 2 weeks after they stopped my transmission - I was informed by the national security police that I had to leave Chad by next morning prior to the event. The Norwegian



Embassy had managed to get in touch, and situation was finally resolved! They said all gear had to be taken down before sunset as the hotel would be filled up with police, VIPs and in fact Presidents from other countries in Africa. They were all going to attend the meeting at the hotel. All rooms were checked, there were police all over the hotel. I was allowed to leave the country with my gear, but I was not allowed to transmit. It was an emotional moment. After that I quickly

called the airline to change my flight ticket – I complained about the change fee, but really had no choice. After that, It took me only 2.5 hours to disassemble all gear and pack everything.

Leaving Chad

I was also informed that because of the Presidential event all roads out of the hotel would be closed, and it would be very difficult for me to leave. However, I had the hotel management promises that they would assist me. By Thursday morning, hotel was packed with even more VIPs. In the morning I was escorted out of the hotel – it was fascinating to have a glimpse of the event, the ceremoniously preparations, the military road blocks, the machine guns and so on. I was relieved when we were allowed to leave the hotel gate after they checked all papers. At the airport it was the same procedure, because a lot of VIPs and Presidents would arrive that morning from all over Africa, there was a very strict security measure.

Guess who I met at the airport? I will tell you some other time. I was truly relieved when we finally headed for the runway. Not to say when I landed in Oslo the following day!

Despite all my papers were good, still I faced all these problems. I will never know for sure why the security police did not want me to transmit. But I don't think this would have happened to a larger group.

I want to thank each and every one who supported me – it really meant a lot to me! You really kept my spirit up. I also especially want to thank those 40 persons who donated 1500 USD out of 2500 USD extra expenses I had due to changing flights twice, paying additional accommodation and expensive phone calls. Thank you!

So, where next?

73 Ken LA7GIA