



It Seems to Us

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A Painless History Lesson

“This year the ARRL is celebrating the Diamond (75th) Anniversary of the DX Century Club, Amateur Radio’s premier operating award. Earning a Diamond DXCC Challenge award is not just an enjoyable way to spend one’s operating time. It’s also an opportunity to recall how much the world has changed, mostly for the better.”

A brainchild of Membership and Volunteer Programs Manager Dave Patton, NN1N, the Diamond DXCC Challenge celebrates the achievements of the pioneers whose quest to contact other radio amateurs in as many places as possible led to the DXCC awards program that we know today. The first list of DXCC members, published in November 1937 *QST*, contained just five entries. No one at the time could have imagined that 75 years later somewhere between 50 and 60 thousand stations would have earned at least one DXCC award. After all, in 1937 there were only about 70,000 amateurs in the entire world and most of them — then as now — were not DXers.

The unique challenge of Diamond DXCC is that, instead of using the current DXCC list with 340 entities, we are using the list as first published in January 1937 *QST*. There’s where the history lesson comes in. Just assembling the list was a lesson in itself, and we’re still learning — the list of 1937 countries and their current equivalents is online at www.arri.org/diamond-challenge and is updated as new information comes to light.

DXers are pretty good at geography but the 1937 list contains many place names that are unfamiliar today. If you want credit for Bechuanaland, what country do you look for today? Where were the Straits Settlements? What was the difference between the Federated Malay States and the Non-Federated Malay States? How many Somalilands were there, and how many equivalent entities are on today’s list?

While the 1937 list was much shorter, some of today’s entities are represented on that list by several different countries (they didn’t call them “entities” in those days). If you work Kaliningrad, a relatively rare spot today, don’t get too excited; in 1937 it was part of Germany. On the other hand, Newfoundland and Labrador were not yet part of Canada and count separately for the Diamond DXCC Challenge. Tasmania counts separately from the rest of Australia. If you work five Indonesians you might pick up as many as five credits. In general, working stations within the 1937 boundaries of the Soviet Union won’t add much to your total but there are exceptions. Work UAØYAY or one of his neighbors and you will get credit for Tannu Tuva. Work Wrangel Island and you will accomplish what no one did before World War Two — it was on the list but no one ever confirmed a contact. (Where is Wrangel Island? Hint: It causes a jog in the International Date Line.)

While we tried to define the territory of each of the 1937 countries in current terms, one of our ground rules in developing the Diamond DXCC Challenge was to not redraw existing borders. If you work an SP2 in Gdansk you earn credit for Danzig, but if a border was relocated after World War Two between two countries that retained their separate existence

the current borders apply. The goal is to have some fun, not to stir up old enmity.

Make no mistake: no one should wax nostalgic for the world of 1937. In ways too numerous and depressing to recount, that world was in dreadful shape. Europe was plunged into war just two years after the announcement of the DX Century Club. DXCC listings were suspended with the December 1940 issue of *QST* — by which time, incidentally, there were 220 call signs on the list. Even with all the problems facing the world today, on the whole it’s a much happier place.

Nor should we pine for Amateur Radio’s “good old days.” As proud as they must have been of their accomplishments, none of the prewar holders of DXCC would hesitate to trade their operating privileges and their equipment for what we enjoy today. In those days DX meant 20 meters. At times they might work some DX on 10 meters but it wasn’t easy to get a transmitter to operate reliably at such a “high” frequency and there was no 15 meter band, much less 30, 17, or 12. The longer wavelengths of 40, 80, and 160 meters were popular for domestic work, not for DXing. Neither mechanical nor electrical design of antennas was well understood by most amateurs, and rotary antennas were a rare exception.

DX also meant CW. By December 1940 only four amateurs had earned DXCC on “radiotelephone.” The DXers in that era would have been amazed to be told that, thanks to the introduction of SSB, by 1975 the pendulum would swing so far toward phone that the ARRL would create CW DXCC in an effort to restore some balance. Of course, digital modes and satellites did not exist and probably could not even have been imagined.

Without a doubt, except for the fact that there is more competition DXing is much easier today. DX Cluster tells us who’s on the air. We can find them easily because we can dial up the exact frequency, or let the computer do it for us. We have many bands and modes to choose from and can change between them at the press of a button.

If you accept the Diamond DXCC Challenge, and we hope you will, take some time to think about what the world was like in 1937. Think about those early DXers, especially those who went off to war a few years later and did not return. Try to see today’s world and today’s Amateur Radio through their eyes. Through their eyes, the world we enjoy would truly sparkle.