

Ozzie's Ham Radio Adventures Following Hurricane Andrew
<http://Spaceyideas.Com/ozzie/andrew.html>

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 Published by Via Oz Press, PO Box 6841, Titusville FL, USA 32782
 "Via Oz" is a fanzine pubbed irregularly for inclusion in APA-Nu

Robert Osband, N4SCY

**How I Spent My Summer Vacation
 (in Hell)**

I've never lived in Hell, but I went camping there one week at the end of August of 1992. In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, I went to operate Ham Radio Communications in hurricane ravaged South Florida.

On August 24th, Hurricane Andrew slammed into the Bahama Islands and then headed for Florida, just south of Miami. Weather forecasters and news reporters at the National Hurricane Center (NHC) were about to find out the hard way what the fury of a hurricane was about first hand. Not the full fury, mind you. The full fury of Andrew would pass to the south of the Coral Gables office. Yet America saw the shreds of the radar dome in the parking lot of the building, and cars that had been picked up by the howling forces of Nature, and dropped on other cars. Newscasters trying to do "Stand ups" in the parking lot were nearly blown over trying to show "the folks at home" what being in the hurricane was about.

Those guys should have had their press credentials pulled by the NHC for stupidity. Sure, these guys were under pressure from their bosses to bring back spectacular news coverage, but at that point the report should have been, "I can't possibly convey the force this hurricane is displaying, except to say that I fear for my life out here. I'm going back inside, and back to the studio".

Ham radio operators were not sitting idly

by in all this. Networks of amateurs were operating on frequencies that are established for such things. People knew where to check in, and await assignment. Many operators were assigned to Red Cross Shelters before the storm. Residents living in low lying areas, and in trailer parks were told to go to Red Cross Shelters. But those guys had homes that they needed to go home and repair themselves. They were not only relief workers, they were victims themselves.

The immediate dangers in a hurricane are "Storm Surge", and (naturally enough) high winds. Storm Surge is the phenomena whereby the hurricane pushes water ahead of it, causing a wall of water up to 30 feet high to come ashore, and simply wash away buildings. Substantial buildings.

I have attended the Governor's Hurricane Conference in Tampa the last two years, and Bob Sheets, Director of the NHC always shows the photo from Hurricane Gilbert that hit the coast of Louisiana (There were 87 eight by ten color glossy photographs with the circles and arrows, and a paragraph on the back of each one explainin' what each one was - However, they were shown as slides, and narrated). It shows an aerial view of a three story brick apartment house near the shore where residents were told to evacuate. One group in the building told the police that visited them that they were staying and having a Hurricane Party. The next slide shows an aerial

photo of the site after the hurricane washed away the building, leaving only the outline in the sand showing the foundation of the original building in the first photo. The only survivor of the 23 people at the party happened to be in the bathroom when the storm surge came through, and was floated out the second story window. <P>

Have you picked up a gallon jug of water lately? Now think of the weight of a 30 foot high wall of water. Next, think of that wall of water moving forward at 10 miles an hour. I never got near the shore to find out what damage the storm surge did, because the true aftermath of Hurricane Andrew was inland. One report I remember, though, said the lobby of the Fountain Blu Hotel (Home of SunCon in 1977) was flooded.

Retirement Heaven becomes Hell

Florida is a retirement haven. When I moved to Florida five years ago, I learned that the letters FL are not just the two letter postal code for Florida, but the acronym for Fantasy Land, because it's where people go to live their fantasies. Many retirees live in trailer parks, because it's cheap housing, and the weather is such that the trailer provides the necessary roof over ones head. It is also low maintenance, low cost, and someone else mows the lawn.

Those with more retirement money saved up (usually through the retirement plan of the large Northern manufacturing company they worked for, such as Eastman Kodak of Rochester NY in my own parents case for instance) buy a condo for many of the same reasons. Especially because someone else mows the lawn, and they don't EVER have to drive through snow again (Boynton Beach, which is North of Ft Lauderdale came through with just some high winds, and my Mom was busy collecting their own hurricane supplies of canned food and bottled water to drop off to the Andrew relief collection site on her way to the golf course the day after the storm passed through). The condos are built pretty well, and construction codes in South Florida are such that buildings are built to

withstand winds in excess of 100 MPH. The 160 MPH winds of this Category 4 hurricane (on a scale of 1 to 5) however, ripped apart the sheet aluminum sides of trailer homes, and scattered them and their contents to the winds.

The night after Andrew hit, I got a phone call from Charlie Shipman N4OBT (If you have to make a choice between using a ham radio operator's name or his FCC assigned call sign, use the call sign). I had pulled an 8 hour shift of working ham radio from a Red Cross shelter in Oakland CA after the 89 earthquake.

Based on that experience, I was asked by N4OBT to be the leader of a team from Pinellas County that would drive down and provide ham radio operators for the relief efforts that would start coming into the affected areas. No one else had as much disaster experience as I had, which is why I got the Team Leader spot. When you're out of work, and collecting unemployment, you have some liberties from the usual time constraints. The catch was, I didn't have the bucks to go. You see, the Dade County EOC (Emergency Operations Center) in Miami was telling hams coming in, "Be self sufficient when you come in. Bring your own food, water, and fuel for 4 to 5 days".

I didn't have the money to buy all that, but naturally enough, local hams who had health problems, or job and other commitments, or just otherwise couldn't go, put up the money for the supplies and gas. We set up a net (radio network) of ham operators to discuss the plans of any volunteers who wanted to go down. On Tuesday the 25th, the phone calls that Charlie N4OBT was getting as the Pinellas County Amateur Radio Emergency Coordinator said that a group of hams from Jacksonville, Orlando and Melbourne (FL) were meeting at the Rest Area on I-95 just south of Melbourne at Noon on Wednesday. We felt that we could not meet that deadline with the preparations we had to make, but could leave the following day.

By the time those discussions were over,

it had been decided that we would wait four days, until Saturday, and field a team that would meet in the parking lot of the Clearwater Chapter of the American Red Cross. This way, we would provide relief operators for those that were meeting on Wednesday at noon. We had nets at Noon and 7PM EDT every day to discuss plans, activities, and work out arrangements, as well as keep up on the latest news coming out of South Florida. The news of looting, marshal law and such made us over prepare for our convoy of 8 vehicles, and a dozen or so personnel.

Operators in the mission included, Ozzie N4SCY, Bill KK4XI, Lee WB2TEJ, Jim W4APV, Keith KC4DIP, Scott KC4TGQ, Ed KD4OOS, Chris KN4VU, Bob N4ZML, and Carolyn KC4SXP. Bob and Carolyn had their daughter and son-in-law in another vehicle as well. They are from the Homestead area originally, and Bob's sister had called him with the needs of a hospital clinic she works at. Carolyn, being a Health Professional, had gotten contributions from the local hospital she works at, and she and Bob used the convoy as a means of getting through the expected road-blocks, and on with their own "personal mission".

A vanload of three ham operators from Hillsborough County across Tampa Bay from us were also leaving Saturday, and met up with us outside Sarasota and joined the convoy. Bob knew where to find the EOC, since he helped build the place. We took some masking tape, and put an "X" on the back of each rear view mirror. The theory was that at a Toll Booth, or Check Point, we could tell the official that members of our crew had the X on the mirror. No tolls were charged to relief vehicles.

Arriving in the area

We drove down I-75, which becomes "Alligator Alley" which crosses the very top of the Everglades (Any discussion about "Gators" in Florida brings up the topic of the state's dominant religion, with it's two major sects, the Gators of the University of Florida,

and the Seminoles of Florida State University. Other local sects are the Hurricanes of Miami and the Rattlers of Florida A&M. The professional teams, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and the Miami Dolphins are for those transplanted Yankees who just don't understand about real life in Florida. But I'm really not here to talk about football.

We turned south on State Route 27, under Bob N4ZML's instructions, and stopped to top off our fuel at a Shell station on State Route 27 (SR-27) and the Tamiami Trail (US-41). Ed KD4OOS spoke to someone at this stop who said that no relief had shown up at the nearby Indian reservation. This was 5 days after the hurricane. Ed promised that the word would get to the emergency management officials. Bob talked us all into the Dade County EOC (Emergency Operations Center). While waiting for our assignments from the EOC, Bob and Carolyn took their mini-convoy off towards Homestead.

The Amateur Radio room at the EOC is right near the main entrance, so I didn't get to see much of the place, but I've been through the EOC in Clearwater. There are situations boards, and maps. TV's are tuned to CNN and The Weather Channel. There is also a desk and two chairs for each agency that is represented in the EOC (one to man the phone, and the other as a runner). Besides the Red Cross, there is the Department of Transportation to dispatch crews to clear roads. The electric company and telephone company are there to coordinate downed power and telephone lines. Police, fire and other civil authorities are also represented in "the pit". Ham radio's role is to provide communications where needed. Telephone service is not expected to survive a direct hit by a hurricane. It didn't. Primarily, the requirement for ham operators is to provide shelter communications between the Red Cross Shelters, and it's chain of supply.

When Ed came in to sign in and get his credentials, he mentioned the situation at the Indian reservation, and he was taken

into The Pit. It was determined by the ham radio staff that Ed himself was the message and he should be taken in to deliver the word from the field. It appeared that written messages delivered to The Pit had a low level of credibility.

In this disaster, there was not only a need for shelters, but for food distribution centers, and first aid stations in the field. While all people in trailer homes were required to seek hurricane shelters, many thousands of others were told to stay in their homes. It was expected that regular homes would withstand the force of the Hurricane. They weren't counting on the force of Andrew. It meant that with the widespread devastation, with businesses shut down, and transportation at a standstill, people who were not in shelters needed food and water as well.

TV cannot adequately convey the amount of destruction caused by the hurricane. There were no leaves on what trees were left standing. Roofs, and walls of houses were ripped apart, and fallen down. Many people were huddled in corners of their house, hoping they would survive. Once they survived the hurricane, they had to survive the aftermath.

Krome Ave and SW 200th St Our Home

I was stationed at a food distribution site, with a first aid station set up by HRS, the Florida Department of Health & Rehabilitative Services, which ordinarily oversees Welfare, and Food Stamp programs. The problem at this site was that there was no one in charge of the food distribution side of the house. This site was not part of the original disaster plan, but had been an impromptu site that was started by Channel 7. A group of Jay Cee's (formerly The Junior Chamber of Commerce) came out, and started helping. Most of them left at the end of the day, promising to be back, and leaving one of their guys behind. Jimmy was a Godsend, because he got the food distribution going in a much more orderly manner.

The site was set up at what used to be a

local bank, started out under the shelter of a four car dive-up window car-port. We got there Saturday night, and pulled up on one side of the bank in Bill's RV. It was our base of operations, and we handled message traffic. Food and water were also put under the car-port in the other drive up lanes. Clothes were piled up in the bank's parking lot behind the building. People would come by, and look through the piles for clothes they thought would fit.

Then it rained on Sunday. A tropical, torrential downpour. Canned goods weren't bothered, but dry foods, and breads were totaled. The clothes were soaked, and a soggy mess. A day later with mildew, they were declared a health hazard and we were calling for their removal.

The first large tent for sheltering supplies arrived Sunday, and the First Aid operation took one end, and the food operation took the rest. The clothes were still out back, but food was our first concern.

The National Guard was patrolling, but without ammunition they couldn't do much. The National Guard was "hanging out" at our location, but they didn't make a real "base" there, and they were ordered out on Tuesday. There were so many areas for them to guard that they were spread very thin. The Lieutenant was real good about leaving a few men as long as he could (and maybe a little longer than his orders allowed, but I'm not going into that in a permanent record like this - this man should NOT get in trouble for doing the right thing). Anyway, Tuesday night the food tent got looted. It was in the middle of the night after the guard had gone, and Bill and I had secured our station for the night, and were busy "cutting Z's". The next morning, though, a side of the canvas tent next to the road was folded up to allow access, and boxes near the hole were ransacked. We had only enough food to last one hour of distribution.

The 27th Combat Engineers (Airborne) showed up to deal with our acres of unhealthy clothing. They "took it out" in the

best military meaning of the term. If it hadn't been such a waste of material donated with the best of intentions, it would have been a true marvel to behold, as their troops and heavy equipment filled 50 5-Ton truckloads of the sorry mess out to a landfill. Once the 27th was through, troops of the 82nd Airborne picked up the material that had, quite literally, fallen through the cracks.

Until Jimmy from the JC's got things in hand, and stayed on the site, we'd get people coming by at 6 or 7 AM in vans and pick-up trucks wanting to drop things off. We must have been official, since we were walking around with radios, right? Well, I'd explain that "I'm only the ham radio operator around here," and that I had no authority. "But what that also means," I'd tell them, "is that I don't have the authority to say 'No'". I'd then show them some empty places to drop their stuff, but I had to get back to my radios in the RV.

The bottles of water donated by Millers, Coors, and Budweiser were of great help to the people who needed it. You've seen quart bottles of beer? Well, the labels were changed, and they contained only water. Most also said "Not To Be Sold". Actually, there were stories of "black marketeering" of relief supplies. I didn't see any of it myself, but then again, I'll admit that it's not the kind of thing I look for.

Security at the Site

While the troops were running around without ammo, Bill, KK4XI and I were civilians. And Bill is the Assistant Range Master of the St Petersburg Police Department Firing Range. He usually wore his "Blue Knights MotorCycle Club" cap, and t-shirt. The Blue Knights is made up of off-duty police officers, and any cop we ran across would recognize it. He carried his nine millimeter Glock, and I got his 38 Special with the HydroShock cartridges. No, I don't know much about what the HydroShocks are, but Bill told me it would be loud, and anyone hit with them would know it the first time.

I don't handle weapons often these

days, and I don't consider it a game when I do. I really got the 38, because I was wearing a belt with my pants, and Bill wore no belt with his shorts. The holster on the 38 needed to be put on a belt, while the Glock's holster had a clip. We only wore them at night, and I made it a point to be standing near our RV in such a way that a car's headlights would reflect off it, giving anyone second thoughts about dealing with our site. Basically, I tried to use the pistol as a scarecrow, because I didn't want to have to use it any other way.

In the mean time, our primary activity was to keep the EOC apprised of the needs of our food distribution site. We kept yelling to get the Port-O-Let brand portable toilets cleaned (and it was important to know what brand you had at your site - Net Control never did), but it seemed the servicing crews were believing the Press reports, and were refusing to enter the area without a police or military escort. During the day, I don't think they had much to worry about though.

We had plenty of bottled water, though food became critically short once or twice, with semi-tractor trailer trucks pulling up like the 7th Calvary. In fact, a couple of times I almost sent out messages "signed" by "Major O'Reilly, First name Radar" to let the EOC know that we were without anyone in authority at the time to sign messages, as well as the fact that the situation was getting desperate enough to justify the tactic. Heck, SOME-ONE at the EOC must have watched MASH. In fact, I wanted to know the Zip Code out here, so we could be M*A*S*H 33030.

No such luck, though. We weren't a Surgical hospital (MASH = Mobile Army Surgical Hospital), our first aid station was a DMAT (Disaster Medical Action Team) pronounced "Dee-Mat".

Finally, a bus pulled up. It was a mobile hospital from the Veterans Administration. The nomenclature plate read "Date of Manufacture: August 1992". This was the

bus' first mission. The HRS nurses had been brought in each morning, and taken out each evening by an HRS driver and van, but one male nurse who had driven in from Bradenton stayed overnight in a tent that appeared from somewhere. People came all through the night seeking food and medical attention. While the distribution site was closed at night, we'd try to give people what they needed to get through the night, and have them come back in the morning. The VA bus would leave each night, and come back each morning also. The thing cost taxpayers one million bucks, and they weren't going to leave that kind of resource out in a field behind a burned out bank overnight.

The VA Medical Staff were told what we had been telling people - we were NOT asking for ID. Many victims in this area were illegal immigrants, and we were relief workers, NOT the immigration department. The VA staff agreed quickly, but the young pharmacist had a real problem with that. "We need to keep records of drug disbursements, what do we use for Social Security Numbers if they won't give them to us?", she asked. "Just put all nines in that field", she was told by her boss. It went against the grain (and probably a few regulations), but she did it.

On Wednesday, September 2 the EOC net made it clear that the net would shut down that night. The US Forest Service was handing out hand-held radios that would allow our "communications clients" to have direct contact with the EOC and disaster officials. Bill and I had been keeping in touch with other members of the Pinellas County team via our radios, and many of us felt that our clients were not yet ready to give up our services. The 800 MHz band HT (Handie Talkie) had shown up with a Miami Metro Parks official, but he had a couple of sites as his responsibility, and was never around when someone needed to pass a message on Tuesday or Wednesday.

At Midnight Wednesday night, the EOC Net shut down. At Midnight Oh One on Thursday morning, the Dade County Red Cross established a net on the same fre-

quency. We were not the only radio operators to stay and help our clients, but it was starting to look like someone didn't want "those mere ham operators" in the loop any more.

The VA Administrator in charge of the VA Bus wound up with one of the HT's, and it was beginning to look like we were out of a job. But besides keeping in touch with the official team we'd fielded, Bob and Carolyn had popped up on frequency every now and then. They had gotten involved with the NDMS (National Disaster Medical Service) team that had set up a Field Hospital in what had been until recently a Senior Citizens Recreation Center.

On Tuesday night, I contacted Bob, and spoke with him about the team joining up with him in Homestead after the nets had shut down, and we were no longer needed at our current posts. The channel was a bit noisy with static, and since the pay phones in front of the convenience store across the street were working, I decided to phone him on the 800 number that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) had set up at Homestead Field Hospital.

I walked across the street with a flashlight, and ran into a scene from my past. I'd forgotten what it was like in those long lines waiting for the pay phone after a hard day in Basic Training. There were 25 or 30 men with M-16's in line in front of me. And being a civilian, I outranked them all - and further, I had official communications to transact! They may have wondered what that shaggy haired, bearded weirdo was chuckling about as he smiled, turned and walked away. I decided that I would put up with the static on the radio channel, and leave the phone lines to guys who needed them much worse than I did.

Getting Bob back on the radio, we agreed to meet at Noon Wednesday to plan strategy, see his situation, and otherwise muddle things out. By this time, Bill and I were "in" so good with the 82nd Airborne, the National Guard, and the VA, that it was time to abuse some that good

will. After all, Bill's RV was a little ungainly to just take out for a brief jaunt. I found the Lieutenant, who routed me to the Captain, who said "Sure, we'll find you a hummvee and a driver". And so, we were driven to Homestead Field Hospital for lunch.

Bob and Carolyn were set up in a paradise. FEMA had its communications van set up with antennas for radio repeaters, a satellite dish for connection to a telephone exchange in rural Maryland via an AT&T Telstar satellite, a Coast Guard mess tent which served us (and our driver) a pork chop dinner fit for royalty, and a small office outside the Hospital Administrator's office for a Ham Shack. A heliport had been established out the back, and Bob had commo with a US Navy ship that "just happened" to have some ham operators on it. The fact that our new found ham buddies were the Communications Chief and Radio Operator of the ship in their "day job" helped to speed through requests made through this channel outside the loop of the Dade County EOC.

Bob had gotten his site well supplied, and operational. He hadn't had so much fun since his days as a military manager in Viet Nam. Since our sites were getting supplied with radios, and we were getting the impression that we were overstaying our welcome in the "official" net, we decided to pool our resources into this site, and went back to the "Krome 200 Palace" (as Bill called it) to get the RV. Our driver had enjoyed his lunch, and I enjoyed my Hummvee ride.

Tetanus shots were in high demand, as people working on their homes were scratched by, or stepped on, exposed nails. With Bill and myself, Ed and Chris, and Keith and Scott pulled in, we were a fairly large group. We had enough people to put on some "morale details", as well as provide staff for crews that would go out in the field. Since the military radios could not get out as far as our ham rigs, our people would ride with Army units carrying the NDMS medical people looking for patients to treat. The ham operators would radio in if supplies were needed, or emergency evacuation had to be

called. I spent some time making up some "certificates" on the copying machine to give to the people we were working with from Kentucky who were the medical team.

It seems the NDMS is a new service similar to the Army Reserve, in that volunteers are trained, and equipped for emergency operations, and when called up, at least one third of the 100 members of the team must be available for deployment. They are then taken by military transport to provide medical assistance in case of emergency. There was an NDMS team from Albuquerque NM working near Cutler Ridge, and the team from Kentucky replaced a team from North Carolina that they had replaced. Teams do a one week tour of duty, and are then "rotated out" (to use the military term for replacing battle weary troops with fresh ones).

Two members of our team, Lee and Jim were assigned to a local high school which hadn't been opened as an official shelter site, but had been opened by firemen using their axes to break the chains on the doors for neighborhood residents who had come to be sheltered. Lee tells the story of the First Sargent of the 82nd Airborne who had no need of civilians whatsoever. However, in listening to their communications people discuss their problems of limited radio coverage, Lee suggested that he and Jim build them a 6 Meter Dipole antenna.

They took some electrical cord, measured it to the length that would transmit a good signal on the proper wavelength for the frequency band the Army was using, and hooked it up. It improved the range of the radios so drastically, that the "Top" (as First Sergeants are called) became their best buddy the entire time they were there.

Another anecdote I heard after I got back from Homestead was that in many cases, whole housing developments had been blown down by the hurricane - except for the "Model Home" which still stood. You can imagine the number of irate home owners who expected their homes to have

been built to the same standards as the Model (lawsuits are still pending).

On Saturday September 6, The NDMS unit was "rotating home", and there would be no replacement, as Homestead General Hospital had learned to cope with things. Ed and Chris had decided to go south to the Florida Keys where they had heard there was a need for some operators, and had friends to check on. Keith and Scott and I thought it was about time to go home, and Bill, Jim and Lee wanted to stay on at the High School. We decided that as long as no one was stranded, we could all go home when each of us wanted, but the job essentially was done. We had provided essential communications when no other means was available, and when we could find no further need for our talents, it was time to go home (There was also MagiCon, which I was missing). I rode with Keith in Scott's van.

We stopped at a Country Kitchen restaurant for a "good home cooked" meal (or best equivalent) on the way home. Again, we showed our "Emergency Services" signs on the dashboard of our vehicle, and were never charged a toll. As we got into radio range of Pinellas County repeaters, it was great to hear the thanks of the other operators for going down and doing the kind of job that only ham radio could do.

You have to realize, that we are not heroes. We did no herculean task. We just went in, put up our radios and antennas, and passed messages. Dull, boring, but necessary work. We just happened to do that work when it was necessary, and in a professional-like manner. It belied the name "Amateur" in the Amateur Radio Service. OK, so maybe we put in some weird hours, and some of had bigger problems to contend with than others (like generals and other brass hats parading through (and eventually being tossed out of) the communications room). But we did it, we were happy to do it, and most of us are ready to do it again.

Other Sidelights

Most net operations were on one of two

repeaters (radios on high towers that receive your transmissions, and retransmit them to a wider area than your own radio can reach). One of those frequencies was clobbered by intermod (the inter-modulation of diverse radio signals from nearby antennas). Many of the ham operators we spoke with at the EOC seemed to be young, inexperienced kids. Every third transmission seemed to be "Roger, QRX" (in a telegraph based hobby, "Q" codes have been developed to shorten routine messages. QRX means "Please stand by"). One Hispanic operator had difficulty understanding the radio operators in the field, though the other operators on the net could hear the caller perfectly well. Though the difficulty seemed to be that he did not understand the English language terms being used, his reply was always "Please increase your power, or move your antenna".

These kids at net control would constantly come up on frequency with "The Four Questions", as I came to call them. It was a request for the status of certain staples, some of which were pretty stupid based on our previous transmissions. Undoubtedly, the EOC was getting some pressure on it if they kept asking us this stuff, but the view from the field was that they could have kept track of some of this stuff themselves.

"Do you need a Water Buffalo?", was the standard request we'd get. Scott at the Cutler Ridge Shopping Center, with a number of these water tanks on trailer wheels sitting in front of him would reply, "I've got TEN water buffaloes! Where do you need them sent?" The net control operator replied, "Answer the question, yes or no. Do you need a water buffalo?"

Using Local Resources

Bob at the hospital informed us that through his "mere ham buddies" on the Navy ship, he'd found out there was an Hispanic repeater that had gotten back up near Homestead, and that the folks on it

had offered the use of the repeater if we needed it. We tuned to the frequency, and heard a lot of Spanish being spoken. Bill got with the National Guard, and found a fellow that was bilingual, and had him speak to the Spanish speaking hams (It was legal, because it was a legitimate emergency, and because a Ham operator was controlling the on/off switch, and could shut down the transmitter if the unlicensed user said anything against the radio regulations).

"Yes", the fellow said, "They will move off the repeater anytime you need it". We set up a Sked (a scheduled time for operation) with our other Pinellas County team members, and at the appointed hour broke into the rapid fire Spanish chatter. Sure enough, someone came back in English with a little prepared message relinquishing the use of the repeater to Relief Operations (us), and then gave the speech again in Spanish.

We got a few things squared away about our team operations, and admitted that some of the stations couldn't reach this repeater very well, but it was certainly better than the frequency with the intermod on it. We signed off with a cheery, "Thank you gentlemen. This is N4SCY returning the repeater to normal use." The fellow who gave us the frequency came back with an "Any time," and the machine went right back to rapid fire Spanish. It appeared to me that there was a real problem with the lack of inter-operability of the Anglo and Hispanic communities in the South Florida area. Those folks really need to put on a Field Day activity together sometime.

Packet Radio - Here's where I had fun.

One of the things I like to do (and the reason I got my ham radio license) is "Packet Radio", which is the transmission of data over ham radio. The EOC Net claimed to have Packet going, but most message traffic was supposed to be going via Voice on the repeaters I'd spoken of earlier. Well, one evening after the food distribution site had shut down for the night, and the net was quiet, I opened up my back pack, and pulled

out my computer and packet radio controller. I tuned to the frequency that the EOC Net Control had given me for packet, but we were too far from anyone. After a half an hour of hearing nothing, I went to other frequencies.

Basically, I'd set my radio to a frequency, and go read a magazine. If a packet came over the air, I'd hear it, and it would be printed on my computer screen. On 145.09 MHZ, I saw a packet go by from "MIA7", a NetRom Node of the Packet Network. I couldn't figure out why MIA7 wasn't on 145.07, but in an emergency you put up what you can, where you can. If I could connect to this Node, I could have it connect me to a PBBS (Packet Bulletin Board System) in Hollywood, where I'd been told before I left Clearwater that I could get messages out.

While I could see signals coming from MIA7, my radio was too weak to get a signal to it. Then I saw another packet go by from someone else. I set my packet controller to let me try to connect to MIA7 via this other guy, and sure enough, whoever he was, he was close enough to hear me, and digi-peated (digitally repeated) my packets to where MIA7 could hear them, and respond back to me through this guy.

Once I hit MIA7, I typed "C HWD" (Connect me to Hollywood's Node), and BINGO! "#### Connected to HWD" came across my screen. I was in. "C W7LUS" was my next command to the network, and I found myself connected to the PBBS that had a direct link back to the W4DPH PBBS in Clearwater over the HF (High Frequency) bands. I sent a report to Charlie N4OBT, the Pinellas County EC (Emergency Coordinator) of amateur radio operations about our deployment. Then I sent the only piece of "Health and Welfare" traffic I sent all week.

"Health and Welfare" messages are sent by the public via ham radio operators, and are delivered by hams in the city of destination. They say things like "Everyone safe here. I will call when I can", and like that. In this case, I sent a message to an

address in Boca Raton Florida (I needed the Zip code for routing the message through the Packet Radio network of BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) systems, and the telephone number so the radio operator at the other end would be able to deliver the message).

The message said, "Hi Mom, I'm at Krome and SW 200th St. I'm fine, and everything is OK here. Don't even THINK of coming to visit me. Please call Vicky and let her know I'm OK. Love, Rob".

OK, not very original, but hey, it got the message across. I wasn't far from Boynton in the grand scheme of things, and I didn't need tourists coming by to visit. My Mom later said that the thought never entered her head to come visit, and that she understood why I said that. Now about the phone call to Vicky.

You have to understand that my girl friend Vicky has given me strict instructions to NEVER send a message to her via amateur radio EVER AGAIN. The hams in New York City are just not as nice as hams elsewhere, and are (for want of a better term) slimy. So here's the scene. It's 7AM, and the phone rings. "Vicky? This is Mrs. Osband calling". Vicky sits down on her bed waiting for news of my death. After all, why else would my mother be calling her? Well, I'm not supposed to do THAT again either. But she finally said that if I have to get a message to her, it is better through my mother.

So Wha'd I Really Do?

Well, we did what we were supposed to do. We operated radios, and passed messages from our site managers to the EOC. Of course, you first had to either have a site manager, or find someone who had just taken over things, and convince him or her that they were the closest thing to a manager we were going to get for a while, and could we use their name and title to "sign" messages, please?

We got all the messages that were going out, down on paper, and usually got someone to actually sign the things. These are the traditions of message handling after all, and they are a dying art. Hmm, I think I'll suggest

that the Radio Club put on an evening's program of "Running a message center" (and guess who'll probably wind up running it).

Messages would be sent to operators in the EOC, and never heard from again. It was OK, it happened to me in Oakland too. You never got back an answer to a request, but people and material would show up. The problem here was that there were never enough volunteers to help with things like unloading trucks, stacking cartons, sorting clothes, packing bags, and myriad other chores.

As radio operators, we had a focussed task. While we would sometimes help out with a few things here and there, our primary job was communications.

When the EOC needed information from our site managers, one of us would go out and find the fellow, while the other stayed in the RV. We would both listen to the request for information. While net control is saying the request a second time (due to inexperience), the guy in the field sends the answer back to the RV on the same frequency, but on simplex, since the hand held radio is too weak to reach the distant repeater, but can override the repeater's signal to the RV. The guy in the RV then relays via the repeater frequency what the manager's answer was. The EOC may have thought the manager was in the RV with the operator just to answer their questions, but in fact he would be in the middle of activity, constantly making decisions on where does this go, what should be done with the other, and what about keeping some spare for the evening, etc.

Two person teams are necessary for any site to be properly maintained on the air. One guy to stay near the radio, the other to float around, go to the bathroom, get fed, or just deal with things. That second guy should always keep a hand held going to keep informed as to what's happening, but it's so much easier to have someone dealing with a problem while the other is getting the word back that it IS being dealt

with.

With only one operator, you'd have to waste the time telling Net Control you will comply, ("What? Say again? Please increase your power, or move your antenna") and THEN go off and do whatever it was. We were very happy to have deployed our group in teams of two.

So what would I recommend for the future?

First off, I think there needs to be a video on "How to contribute food, clothing, and materials" on the shelf of every TV station in the country. It should give instructions to church groups and companies on how to pack donated material for immediate distribution in the affected areas. Rather than case lots being sent, the cases should be broken up, and bagged so that the material can be immediately handed out upon arriving at the scene. Clothing should be grouped in sizes, and like sizes grouped together and marked. The video would be shown by the local station the day after a big disaster.

The video also needs to inform the public as to the delineation of responsibilities of the various aid agencies (Red Cross, Salvation Army, Baptist Convention, etc). Some have sharply defined roles, while others try to fill in the gaps. Of course, this means planning ahead of time for each agency to HAVE a role in time of disaster. There is a Florida group of aid agencies that has a combined display at the Governor's Hurricane Conference each year. They might be well suited to developing the video.

While we had gone down to Homestead with all sorts of radio capabilities on board for various frequency bands and modes of operation, simple 2 Meter voice was the method that the EOC could handle with the amount of pressure from all different directions that they had coming down on them (I may have been harsh in my criticism above, but I respect the amount of responsibility those guys had at the time). They did their best, and we were out there trying to make them look good to EOC officials. There

was information I found out after the operation that would have been useful during the time I was down there. For example, while I couldn't reach the EOC directly by packet, there were arrangements for messages on the W7LUS PBBS addressed to the EOC to be delivered to the Packet Mailbox at the EOC. I didn't know about it, but it meant that through my round about routing, I could have sent the daily list of goods we needed by packet.

Each radio operator needs to have what I had in that elementary school in Oakland after the Earthquake - a spiral bound steno pad. Using it as a log book means that you have access to information that has already gone by on the net. You jot down things that may not be meant for your station, but when a question comes up at your site, you've got the answers at hand, without having to take up time on the radio channel. That's not to say I didn't have paper, but since it was the typical "legal pad" style, it meant that I had individual sheets everywhere.

I would like to suggest that any future net have an hour or so each evening during "quiet time" to simply send information to the operators in the field. It made it easier to explain situations to our site administrators if we had information as to what was happening farther up the distribution chain. We wouldn't be happier about delays, just more understanding. This "information hour" would let us fill up those steno pads with useful info, and let information about useful techniques be shared among sites. Information flow "sideways" among the net operators was some of the most useful. Many times operators at other sites responded to radio calls with solutions not requiring the EOC, once the nature of the problem was established.

The radio van at our site was well away from the food distribution tent by the time things got settled. Jimmy came to us asking for National Guard troops to help establish an orderly line one morning, since things at that time looked like they could get out of

hand. The site hadn't opened yet, and people were showing up for food. The situation wasn't that bad, but everyone was nervous. We called the EOC with our request, and Chris at her site turned to one of the Brass Hats she constantly had at her Government Center site, and had a squad of Guardsmen sent to us. I've got to say that our Pinellas County team watched out for each other. It was great!

The EOC, relief agencies, and others need to realize that amateur radio comes out of a bright tradition of "message handling". This concept comes out of an age of telegraphy which has now passed. Newer technology means messages are passing via different means, but they have to understand that when a message comes with the word "Signed" followed by a name and a title, that there really was a person at the other end that signed off the message, and approved it for transmission. There are a few stories of officials who waited until a voice communication with the sending official could be made, or a message came up "through the proper channels" that cost time, and possibly lives.

While the Amateur Radio area of the EOC contained the survivable site for the radios, I feel that *The*EOC*should*not*be Net*Control*! The guys in the EOC are too harried by what's going on to properly run the net. Messages certainly have to be passed to the EOC for response by the affected agency, but the Net Control can be anyone with a radio, some paper, a runner, and a coffee pot. In a pinch, you can do without the runner, because temporary net controls can be assigned. Net Control should also be shifted between operators to alleviate boredom.

I'm also trying to find out where Federal Express gets their uniforms, because their people have walking shorts that have a little side pocket that would be perfect for a steno pad. It sure would have been useful in Homestead.

The Hurrahs and the Shouting

Well, we came back to Pinellas, and were the subject of debriefing pizza parties (at N4OBT's house), radio club meetings (to report what we did to the folks who contributed the money allowing us to do it), and newsletter articles (like this one - but shorter). I'm sure I can't get all of it across, and I haven't tried. I've just tried to convey what one small part of the operation was like. Sure, there was some fun (you have to make it where you find it or you go crazy - OK, in my case, crazier), and there were what would have to be called "adventures", but we went because it was work that needed to be done, with skills we had to offer. I'm proud to have done it, and would be happy to go again. I'm just glad there are others with "time in grade" now, so I don't have to be the leader.

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Sorry this report took so long to get out. The first 8 pages were put in very shortly after I got back. Since then, it's been this and that, moving to Titusville, and the report was always pushed to the back burner. Another APA-Nu came in today, and it was time to get this thing word processed, and out the door. APA-Nu is the Amateur Press Association of the NYU Science Fiction Society (no longer affiliated with New York University). Copies are being sent to the American Red Cross, the Florida Department of Community Affairs, the American Radio Relay League, and anyone else who wants one. It has turned out that I've had to cut some things out to keep it to 16 (regular) pages. If you want the entire thing, call me for an ASCII modem transfer. Opinions are those of the author, who will take the rap for them, I'm sure. I'm also sorry for the format, but it cut printing costs LOTS!

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Formatted for Hypertext: 1996-04-06
Formatted for Publisher: 2003-04-01

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