



HAM HUM

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S P E C I A L

T O R N A D O

I S S E



TORNADO 75

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PREPARATIONS

Whereas it is well known that in the event of an emergency, Hams from that community affected as well as surrounding communities will flock to the rescue and give a good account of themselves by assisting in communications, it is also a well known fact that in so doing it takes considerable time to become organized to the point of efficiently using these volunteers.

About two years ago the Ak-Sar-Ben Radio Club, Inc. did cause one of its members, Robert Lockwood, WAØDHU, to apply for and receive the appointment as Emergency Co-ordinator for Douglas County (Saryp County was later included). He gathered a group of interested and dedicated Hams and they developed an AREC Net for the purpose of training and preparedness. In an effort to be even more helpful during any emergency, this group took courses in

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disaster survey from the Red Cross and developed a tornado watch team for assisting the U. S. Air Force Weather Wing and contacted the Douglas County Civil Defense who helped with this training. Then on 10 January 1975, Omaha had a blizzard. Immediately thereafter contact was made with the Omaha Garrison, Nebraska National Guard, and our support was volunteered. We have always been ready and willing to be of assistance and as of the first of May, we were also prepared and trained.

TORNADO WATCH

Shortly after noon on the 6th of May we received a call from Lt. Colonel Vernon Von, Commander, Detachment 1, HQ 3rd Weather Wing (MAC) from Offutt Air Force Base and in accordance with previous plans we established a net control station at Offutt Air Force Base and dispatched

several mobiles to designated points. Once they were at location they provided Offutt with continual visual observance of developing weather conditions. At approximately 4:30 P.M. an amateur radio mobile reported funnel touchdown in the Ralston area.

In a letter to Bob Lockwood, WAØDHU, Douglas/Sarpy County EC, Lt. Col. Von states:

"The cooperative network of AREC observers provided absolutely superior support during the disastrous tornado outbreak of 6 May 1975. Both TSgt Melvin D. Amick, SSgt James R. Nelson, and all AREC members are to be commended for their persistence and time spent in manning the radio network and in keeping weather station personnel informed of events as they occurred.

"The timely reporting of tornado sightings at Murray and near Plattsmouth coupled with the numerous reports of large hail were instrumental in helping us decide when to sound the tornado warning sirens. Consequently adequate warning was given, damage to military and civilian property was minimal, and no lives were lost at Offutt Air Force Base.

"The service is indispensable, invaluable, and typical of the outstanding support the AREC provides to the community."

Moments after the Offutt sirens sounded, the Omaha sirens began their continuous wail. Thanks to these sirens as well as the warnings given by radio and TV, and to the police force in using PA systems on their cars up and down the streets suggesting "take cover," the number of deaths and injuries were held to a very low point.

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AREC NET ACTIVATED

Upon the sounding of the sirens the weather watch was no longer needed. Net control was immediately turned over to the regular AREC Net. NCS at this time was John Gebuhr, WBØCMC, who is one of the corps group of AREC. As the weather watch was in operation for some time prior and with the sirens and news warnings, it was not necessary at the time to use any calling list. From 4:30 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. mobile units reported and plotted the path of destruction and the Red Cross was notified.

Here's what Bob Lockwood, WAØDHU, our Emergency Coordinator for Douglas/Sarpy County says about it:

"The success of the efforts of Douglas/Sarpy County AREC during the disaster period of May 6 and the week following was directly attributed to the combined efforts of more than 120 amateurs. In the area of leadership, however, the responsibility fell on the shoulders of a small group. Speaking as your EC, I can truthfully say that the task before us looked very large and, in fact, it was. However, I found out just how strong our local AREC really is when real genuine leadership was displayed by several members. At this time, however, I would like to single out one man who we can truly say did an outstanding job. Without him it would have been much harder. I am talking about John Gebuhr, WBØCMC. He remained cool and collected all during the period, that is, all but the time when the tornado came within four blocks of his home. Hi Hi. He knew all the people in

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leadership at the Red Cross and was familiar with how they work. This turned out to be a valuable asset to our overall effort. He displayed firm leadership as NCS when going was really rough. During the first hour after the storm, at the request of the Red Cross, he organized the initial survey and coordinated Red Cross communication. He worked directly with Red Cross leaders where major decisions were made. He was on top of every activity during the period. His counsel was solid and reassuring."

OPERATION INITIAL SURVEY

The first problem at hand in such a disaster is to survey the area. Having been trained to do so, we were asked to make this initial survey for the Red Cross. Several teams were sent out to find the disaster areas and to determine the severity and extent of property damage and people problems. This includes a concern for human safety and welfare as well as notification of such things as gas leaks and downed power lines. Block by block reports were sent to the Net Control Station where the information was recorded on city maps. The total time for this initial survey was approximately five hours.

During this time there was a continuous sending in of information and as a result the Red Cross could coordinate services with city officials to somehow take care of the people. Also during this time the city was surprised by several low-flying jets that had special photographic equipment whose purpose was to provide for Civil Defense the area outline of the damage. This was followed by higher

flying planes who took infrared pictures. Our initial survey corresponded with this survey. We had found it all. About 14 miles of it!

We were later informed the results of this survey were immediately dispatched to Washington and even hit the desk of the President and the area was declared a federal disaster area.

OPERATION DISASTER RELIEF CENTER

By 7:00 P.M. it was concluded by Red Cross officials that a Disaster Relief Center would be established at Boys Town and a station was established at Boys Town for coordination of efforts with the Red Cross. Inasmuch as the Net Control Station had moved by this time to the Red Cross Chapter House, this gave the Red Cross immediate communication.

OPERATION 911

The National Guard was activated almost immediately as it is necessary to start a protection service in a disaster of this type. Their function was to assist regular police in performing their expanding duties and it became necessary to coordinate the activities of the National Guard and the Omaha Police. For that purpose liaison officers from Brigade Headquarters were dispatched to 911 position at Police Headquarters. As they had need for communications back to the National Guard Headquarters, we established a rig and operator at Police Headquarters for their purpose and a rig and operator at the National Guard Headquarters. This

operation was also linked to the Red Cross Chapter House on the AREC Net. Up until this time we had confined our efforts to the 34/94 repeater. To put this additional communication path in play, we used the 22/82 repeater.

OPERATION COMPLETE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEY

In studying the situation we were in, local, state and federal officials felt the need of further damage verification. We were again called upon for a survey. A report on this survey was sent in by WBØCMC, John, as follows: "About the middle of the morning of Thursday, May 8th, the Chapter Manager of the Red Cross approached me and requested a complete damage assessment survey of the entire area. He told me there were conflicting reports of federal and preliminary Red Cross survey reports. Particularly he needed this done meticulously and thoroughly and in the daylight hours as the initial survey had been undertaken in the worst possible conditions.

"I divided the area into seven sections from Benson to Ralston and with one operator and with five volunteers assigned to each area, had the results in about three hours after the initial request was made. Out of the hundreds of destroyed homes, only ten were missed (according to Red Cross), comparing favorably with the original survey done Tuesday night.

"This survey was done with the help of operators from Lincoln without whom this could not have been done so quickly as our own
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Omaha operators were already tired or at work."

This report states the facts. However, even in daylight and good weather conditions, many of the streets had not as yet been opened to vehicular traffic and much of the survey, therefore, was done on foot. This proved the value of a good repeater and the use of handheld equipment.

OPERATION RED CROSS FOOD VAN

Following the tornado, it became necessary for the Red Cross to dispatch food vans into the areas and in order to make their operation more efficient, we supplied a communication setup for each of these vans, thus permitting the Red Cross to be in communication with them for the purpose of directing them to the areas of most need and also to be able to plan their supplies so the van could be stocked upon its return and immediately go back out. They operated with five vans initially and increased that finally to eight vans, cutting down to two vans after midnight until about 6:00 A.M. In this operation we not only provided the essential communications but our operators on the vans were there seeing the help being rendered. For example this story was submitted:

"We came upon the scene of one family whose house was nothing but a pile of kindling on its foundation. They were aimlessly walking about putting the debris into little piles here and there. We asked them if they would like some food. The man said 'no thank you.' We watched for a

while. I went to this man and suggested to him that the family must eat to have strength. Also, that we wanted to help them. With tearfilled eyes the man told his family, 'come, let's take time to eat.' We spent the time talking with the family about everything else but the storm. We let them channel the conversation.

"At a time like that the best medicine is still good old human fellowship. What a wonderful way to communicate."

In a letter addressed to Mike, WBØBMV, Club President, the Red Cross says:

"It wasn't until a week or so after the tornado that we at Red Cross could sit down and draw a second breath and analyze what had happened. It was then that we realized just *what* communications had done and how important it was. Put it this way, Mike, if the systems your Club instigated had worked imperfectly or not at all, our attention then would have been riveted on *communications* instead of the *problems* that we were facing. As it was I must admit that many of us took communications so much for granted that we really didn't appreciate what we were getting. We worked your operators to death and put a tremendous amount of mileage on your "repeater." How many times that repeater was called into action none of us will ever know - and speaking of repeaters, why fellows who can put together such an amazingly complicated piece of equipment as that continue calling themselves "amateurs" is beyond me - in my books they will always be communication pros.

"Like myself, I hope our community is never called upon again to

go through what we have just experienced, but from my standpoint as Chapter Manager I can't tell you how reassuring it is to know I have so solidly behind us such a grand group as yours. Accept this as a thank you and a *well done* from the Red Cross and please extend it to all of those untold and unthanked individuals who spent so many hours providing us with a service that we absolutely could not have gotten along without."

OPERATION CLEANUP CREWS

The city had requested cleanup crews to sign up for work on Saturday and Sunday in cleaning up debris, loading trucks, etc. They were swamped with calls from volunteers, many of whom wanted to work on Friday. It was concluded, therefore, to open the areas for these groups on Friday as well as Saturday and Sunday. So, Thursday night the National Guard requested ten mobile stations for Friday to keep track of these groups of workers. Each group was supervised by a Public Works Department official. We served the purpose here not only of keeping the National Guard informed as to the whereabouts of the groups but at the same time could forward an occasional message or request to the Red Cross for any food stuffs or drink that were necessary during the operation.

OPERATION NATIONAL GUARD

The cleanup operation itself worked so smoothly that it was deemed not necessary to have

communications with each group on Saturday and Sunday and even though the size of the operation was greatly expanded, the city would be able to expand its supervisory crew to the point of being able to handle each group. On the Saturday and Sunday, therefore, we turned our attention to work more directly with the National Guard, specifically with the individual Guardsman at his post, providing him with backup communication to the communications already at hand. The big fear of the Guard at this time was an expected attempt on the part of the public to become sightseers. Fortunately this did not materialize. Evidently the fact the area had been bottled up since Tuesday night plus the publicity given by radio and TV, and a statement by the mayor that he would put sightseers in jail if necessary, did cause people to stay away. During the Saturday and Sunday operation, therefore, we performed the function of being there if needed and the necessary communications did dwindle until until by Sunday noon they were a mere trickle. This is hard duty as a mobile unit established with very little to do finds it harder than if he had many messages to handle. The service rendered, however, is no less important. It is a case of being there if needed rather than when needed.

For this operation we established a volunteered 75-watt FM rig on 146.52 simplex at the National Guard Headquarters and connected it to the antenna we had installed right after the blizzard. With this rig and antenna we could reach all of our mobiles as the National Guard Headquarters happened to be in the center of

activities, just two blocks from the storm damage area.

Major Ross Winters, Omaha Garrison, Nebraska National Guard, says, "The assistance rendered was of great help to the National Guard as we are limited in the amount of communications equipment allocated to the Omaha Garrison."

OPERATION FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE

As the operation on 52 was lessening, another problem needed to be solved. The FDAA established two offices within the disaster area approximately 6 or 7 miles apart. They established these offices in schoolhouses adjacent to the damaged area. They found, however, that the few telephones already established were very inadequate as other agencies were also operating in these buildings. Therefore, at the request of the FDAA we did establish a fixed station point to point between those two offices for their use in keeping their operations going. As our useage of the 52 frequency was at a low point, we shared it with this operation. This point to point operation kept up until through Tuesday at which time these offices moved elsewhere where they could get better communications by normal services.

OPERATION HEALTH AND WELFARE

As any amateur with experience knows, Health and Welfare is the big one and a natural result of such a disaster as this. The group handling

this traffic is so large it would be impossible to list them. The Red Cross Station WØCQX was the hub of the activity, and was beginning to receive many inquiries by 10:00 P.M. To simplify matters as much as possible and handle expeditiously the thousands of messages, we duplicated the map resulting from the initial survey for the Red Cross and attempted to get answers back immediately where the address of the party was completely out of the disaster area. For any address within the disaster area, we checked with the Red Cross listings to find out what we could. Those we could not handle either by not being able to find them or positively identifying the address as being out of the area, we turned over to the Civil Air Patrol who worked with the React group (React is a well-organized group of Citizens Band licensees whose purpose is emergency communications). Messages requiring further checking were first tried by telephone. Failing to get any answer they were sent by CAP teletype to the CAP Headquarters at Eppley Air Field. From there a mobile unit of React proceeded to the address to determine the extent of physical property damage and find out what they could about the people. These answers then were returned by teletype to the CAP Red Cross Headquarters which is adjacent to WØCQX, and the answer dispatched to the originator of the request.

Again we have a story easy in the telling but it took a lot of effort and a lot of cooperation before we could get our heads above water. By Saturday, May 10th, we had pretty much worked out the backlog of messages.

Even though CAP, React and Hams

had previously had conversations with Red Cross and with each other, the cooperation in this operation was splendid and much appreciated. It's one thing to get the messages in; the problem is in getting the answers back.

OPERATION THANK YOU

This is the most difficult of all as there truly is no adequate way to state our appreciation to all those who did help. As citizens of the community we recognize the immense amount of help and cooperation given by federal, state and local governments, charitable organizations, such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, Churches, and the many thousands of volunteers. Particularly we want to thank those Hams who assisted in the overall communication project.

You will note in the foregoing we have singled out only one Ham. If there were such an award as "most valuable participant," he might be selected. To select number two would be most difficult as above average effort was given by most Hams who did participate. We are unable to locate names and addresses for some calls, perhaps because they are listed incorrectly or for other reasons. If you served in any capacity in amateur radio during the disaster period and do not find your call listed, we would appreciate it very much if you would let us know as we wish to have a complete roster of all those who served. Our thanks go to all of you.

Our special thanks go to those many Hams who remained silent during our operations and to those who monitored on HF and did not interfere with frequencies being used for emergency traffic but who did,

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when necessary, report in for accepting or delivering traffic. And a special thank you to those who remained inactive when not involved in net operations on VHF on the 34/94 repeater, 22/82 repeater and 146.52 simplex.

We also express sincere appreciation to those not in the Omaha area who came to assist, such as Hams from Lincoln, Fremont, Des Moines or wherever they came from.

OPERATION FUTURE

After experiencing this 14-mile long strip of destruction which made kindling and rubble out of homes, churches and businesses, we have none left who believe "it can't happen here."

Since the tornado we have held several meetings to determine how a better job could have been done. We are pleased with the service we have rendered, but now know where it could be improved and will work toward this improvement.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS OF AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY CORPS, DOUGLAS/SARPY COUNTY, AS RESULT OF THE TORNADO OF MAY 6, 1975

May 6

12:30 P.M.

Amateur radio operators requested by Col. Von, 3rd Weather Wing-Offutt Air Base, to provide mobile radio units for severe weather spotting.

- a. Dispatched by Offutt to critical geographical areas where severe weather was expected.
- b. Once they were at location, they provided Offutt with continual visual observations of developing weather conditions.

04:30 P.M. (Approx.)

Amateur radio mobile unit reports funnel touchdown in Ralston area to Offutt Weather and National weather Service.

04:30 to 5:00 P.M.

Path of destruction tracked, reported and plotted by amateur radio operators.

- a. Red Cross notified
- b. Amateur radio station set up at Red Cross Chapter House. Remained in operation 24 hours a day until 8:00 P.M. Sunday, May 11.

05:00 P.M.

Immediate block by block damage assessment began at Red Cross request.

- a. Initial concern for human safety and welfare.
Notified MUD for gas leaks
Notified OPPD for down power lines.
- b. Survey done to give Red Cross idea of severity and extent of damage.
- c. Results of this initial damage assessment on President Ford's desk yet that night.

07:00 P.M.

Direct radio communications via amateur operators established between Red Cross Chapter House and Boys Town disaster relief center.

Also 7:00 P.M.

Amateur Radio stations established at National Guard Armory and Omaha Police 911 Center.

- a. Provided direct radio communications for National Guard personnel at 911 and the Guard Armory.
- b. Also linked these two points with the Red Cross Chapter House.
- c. Augmented National Guard communications for traffic control and area security on 24 hour basis thru Saturday, May 10.

8:00 P.M.

Amateur radio operators, with their own equipment, provided communications for Red Cross mobile food vans on a 24 hour basis until 8:00 P.M. Sunday, May 11.

10:00 P.M.

Long distance short wave amateur station at Red Cross begins receiving the 1000's of health and welfare inquiries. Also provided direct radio communication between Omaha Red Cross and other Red Cross chapters nationwide.

- a. As information was made available, replies to the inquiries were made via the same short wave station.
- b. This operation continued thru Saturday, May 10.

Thursday, May 8

9:00 A.M.

House to house survey for damage assessment undertaken at request of the Red Cross. Amateur radio mobile units provided communications and coordination for the damage assessment teams.

- a. Highly accurate survey report completed within 5 hours.
- b. Missed only 10 houses out of the 900 destroyed.

Friday, May 9 - Saturday, May 10 - Sunday, May 11

Conducted support communication for the National Guard during cleanup efforts on both days.

- a. Kept track of the volunteer groups.
- b. Handled messages.

Saturday, May 10 - Tuesday, May 13

Amateur radio operators provided a point to point communications link for the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration centers in Ralston and at the Hillside Elementary School.

May 22

AREC critique meeting held on radio amateur operations during the tornado. Discussed problems and improvements, and started planning for future training.

PARTICIPATING AMATEURS

- WAØABT Robert W. Golden
3926 Ida Street, Omaha, NE 68112
- WAØASM Stephen O. May
2830 South 42nd Street, Lincoln, NE 68056
- WØAUH Lyman B. Longstreth, Jr.
6127 Pinkney Street, Omaha, NE 68104
- WBØBCB Edward C. Eichler
308 West Highway, Valley, NE 68064
- WBØBKZ Paul S. Sherrerd
3008 Mason Street, Omaha, NE 68105
- WBØBMV Marion (Mike) Wilczynski
6212 Kansas Avenue, Omaha, NE 68104
- WBØBOR Kent A. Sinram
9705 Hartman Avenue, Omaha, NE 68134
- WA9BVT Donald Sachnoff
9429 Ohio Street, Omaha, NE 68134
- WØBXJ Roderick A. Pugsley
2602 North 63rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68507
- WA2BXY David A. Blean
114 Galvin Road North, Apt. 13A, Bellevue, NE 68005
- WØCES Ernest A. Bowerman
9181 Boyd Street, Omaha, NE 68134
- WBØCMC John Gebuhr
2340 North 64th Street, Omaha, NE 68104
- WAØCMK Jack T. Barnett
3538-8th Avenue, Council Bluffs, IA 51501

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WØCQX	Emergency Communication Team, Inc. 432 South 39th Street, Omaha, NE 68131
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WBØDGF	Roger A. Cox R. F. D. #1, Corning, IA 50841
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WBØEGR	Patrick Scolla 826 South 91st Street, Omaha, NE 68114

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WBØIKL	William R. Forbis, Jr. 650 South 69th Street, Omaha, NE 68106
WBØINQ	Gary L. Dolan 4041 Southgate Blvd., Lincoln, NE 68506
WAØIWF	Frank M. Wolczak 3120 "U" Street, Omaha, NE 68107

WBØJAX	Rev. Frank E. Dunn, Jr. 6613 Spaulding Street, Omaha, NE 68104
WØJCP	Claire R. Dyas 2933 Dudley Street, Lincoln, NE 68503
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WAØQJK	Edwin E. Woerner Box 81158, Lincoln, NE 68501
WAØQVZ	Harold W. Boltinghouse, Jr. Sunset Blvd., Trailer City #34, Council Bluffs, IA 51501
KØRAI	Ralph A. Miller 11921 Elm Street, Omaha, NE 68144
WAØRJR	George W. Blessing, Jr. Box 133, Park Ave., & Campbell, Murray, NE 68409
WØRMB	Cecil D. DeWitt 5124 Jackson Street, Omaha, NE 68106
WAØROP	Rick K. Stansbury 9348 Camden Avenue, Omaha, NE 68134
WAØRQA	Dennis E. Mathias 4718½ Calvert, Lincoln, NE 68506
WØSBZ	Verne Kaye Ramsey 6115 Kansas Avenue, Omaha, NE 68104
WAØSCM	Ronald L. O'Brien 12273 Bel Drive, Omaha, NE 68144
WAØSMN	George F. Moore R. F. D. #1, Plattsmouth, NE 68048
WØSMY	Ralph E. Erts 5019 Burt Street, Omaha, NE 68132

WAØSPV	Dennis P. Taylor 246 Flora, Ferguson, MO 63135
WAØTMG	W. Earl Sorensen 8738 "O" Street, Omaha, NE 68127
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WAØVEE	Russell A. Minks 1010 Center Street, Omaha, NE 68108
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WAØVOQ	John W. Hotovec 1312 E. 82nd Terr. #12, Kansas City, MO 64131
WAØWGF	Arthur Monsey 446 North Warson Road, Olivette, MO 63124
WAØWOT	Raymond F. Kydney 6746 Florence Blvd., Omaha, NE 68112
WAØWRI	Joseph I. Eisenberg 2919 South 101st Street, Omaha, NE 68124
WØYCP	James C. Droege 19 Indian Hills Road, Council Bluffs, IA 51501
WØYDV	John W. Ferrel 6401 North 39th Street, Omaha, NE 68111
WØMYU	Rolland A. Fried 6717 North 37th Street, Omaha, NE 68112
WØYZV	Dick L. Eilers 7838 Poppleton Avenue, Omaha, NE 68124

WAØZQX	Rick A. Brown, Jr. 3201 Marcy Street, Omaha, NE 68105
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KØJKO	
WBØMTM	
KØPGG	
WAØPJK	
WØRHX	
WØTXT	
WA7VVA	

If you are not now registered with AREC and wish to become registered, contact:

Gary D. Maples, WØOXT
Secretary, Douglas/Sarpy County AREC
7325 Ames Avenue
Omaha, Nebraska 68134

Phone: 572-6254

Registration with AREC does not obligate you for more than you wish to do, but will give information about you and your station so you can be called in the event of an emergency.



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THOUGH MANY WERE INVOLVED IN THE DISASTER, AS WELL AS THE HAMS, YOU FELLOWS DESERVE A BIG AND SPECIAL "THANK-YOU" *!al*

73 AL McMILLAN WØJJK

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