

## Notable Events on the Timeline of Amateur Radio Disaster Communications

Far from an exhaustive list, here are a few events involving Amateur Radio communications support over the past hundred years that may help define our role over time and its evolution.

*1906* - Radio amateur Barney Osborne, later W6US, provides emergency traffic handling during the San Francisco Earthquake and fire, according to family lore.

*1913* - Hams provided emergency communications during Midwest storms and floods with spark gap transmitters and crystal receiver sets, as vacuum tubes wouldn't emerge until after World War I and 1919.

*1916* - A national traffic relay system was organized to provide relay of messages cross-country, and 9XE in Illinois originated a message that was received in California in 55 minutes and on the East Coast an hour after that.

*1926* -- The cover of the May issue of *QST* featured a drawing of a railroad engineer holding an ARRL radiogram with the caption reading "Amateurs Give Emergency Service for Railroads When Wires Are Down"

*1920s* - A motor provided emergency power to the plates of newly-invented vacuum tubes in a station of an "RM" - a "Radio Man" - during a Mississippi flood.

*1925* - Amateur Radio provided the only communications (5 watts CW) during the failed rescue attempt of caver Floyd Collins.

*1933* - Radio amateurs at W6BYF provided disaster communications for the Long Beach, California earthquake. Although his house was demolished, famous ham Don Wallace, W6AM, operated a portable station through his surviving extensive antenna farm with the help of the Navy in supporting the relief effort.

*1935* - Predecessors to ARES established. ARRL had a vision of them in 1917.

*1936* - The catastrophic floods of the northeast (from Maine through to the Ohio River valley) wrecked the ARRL HQ station in Hartford (along the Connecticut River), with Amateur Radio again providing support. Famous VHF pioneer and ARRL HQ staffer Ed Tilton, W1HDQ and his wife provided communications.

*1937* - Dr. Joseph Vancheri, W8BWH, was a key relief communications asset, arranging for aid to refugees from the Johnstown floods.

*Late 1930s* - Commercial emergency Amateur Radio gear appeared and was advertised: an example was the battery-powered 50-S transmitter from Harvey Radio Laboratories of Brookline, Massachusetts.

*1948* - Flooding of Vanport, Washington, after the rupture of a Columbia River dike prompted an Amateur Radio Emergency Corps response under EC W7DIS, with amateurs using hand-held radios (walkie-talkies).

*1957* - RACES was involved in providing communications support during the Malibu-Topanga Canyon (California) fires. Deputy Chief Radio Officer W6QJW operated under RACES tactical call sign CPT19 and controlled a net on 3995 kHz. The Gonset Communicator was an iconic Cold War/Civil Defense portable transceiver.

*1964* - The Great Alaskan Earthquake hit Anchorage, drawing a massive amateur response in handling emergency and health-and-welfare traffic. It was the most powerful earthquake in North American history, and the second most powerful in recorded history of the world. There was sweeping destruction

in the city and the region. George Hart, W1NJM, wrote about the amateur response in the July 1964 issue of *QST*: 314 Alaskan amateurs supported the disaster relief effort, with 1200 more from around the rest of the country actively supporting them. "KL7DVY reports he operated 20 hours on two meters, relaying messages from the Alaska Native Hospital to c.d. headquarters in Anchorage." See the August 2014 issue of *QST*, Public Service column, "Alaska Shield 2014."

1979 - Hurricanes Frederic and David wrought destruction on the Gulf Coast and East Coast, respectively. Amateur Radio support of relief efforts was in evidence in both cases.

That brings us up to the modern era and the emergence of the contemporary emergency management model. A few of the major events beginning in the eighties that come to mind are Hurricanes Gilbert (1988) and Hugo (1989), and the spate of four hurricanes in 2004 that affected us here in Florida extensively. Hurricane Andrew (1992) also wreaked incredible devastation in Florida. Hurricanes Katrina (2005) and Sandy (2012) were game-changers for emergency management thinking and policy for this country. Amateur Radio was extensively involved in all cases. And, of course, Amateur Radio was involved in the colossal relief effort in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

*[Much of the above was culled from an excellent presentation given at the ARRL Pacificon convention in San Ramon, California, 2010, by Bart Lee, K6VK, ARRL State Government Liaison, ARRL Volunteer Counsel, Historian and Archivist, California Historical Radio Society, and lecturer, Antique Wireless Society. A tip of the ARRL fedora to him. - K1CE]*