

NEWSLETTER

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Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA - North America - North East



Friends with many things in common!

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OTHER STUFF

E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net

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VIEW FROM THE TOWER



CRISIS IN SAMOA

December 7 - 19, 1991

by Reg Hardman VK4XH

This article was originally printed in the 14 April 1992 issue of Amateur Radio Action, an Australian amateur radio publication, no longer in operation. Different versions were also printed in QST (January 1993) and TCA - The Canadian Amateur (September 1992).

Over the last few days conditions had gone from bad to worse, with very high winds and heavy rain. Read on for the final installment...

PART 3

DECEMBER 11

0500z: Good contact is re-established with Ed and Utai through the net, as they have finally scrounged enough distillate to get the emergency generator operating again, and we receive the following status report:

“The weather has started to improve a little but winds are still very strong,” we were told. “All buildings in Apia are now damaged and most homes are damaged beyond use. Apia Hospital has been closed and the patients have been sent home because there is no power. The airport is still closed but they hope to get it open Friday, December 13. The road to the airport is now open. We’ve just learned that the hospital on the island of Savaii has been totally destroyed and four are dead.

“It has become clearly apparent that it will take years to rebuild, however the Samoan people are very resilient and still smiling. The Samoan Cabinet will meet today with all village mayors to discuss the immediate problem of food supplies. The Prime Minister estimates that there is about two weeks of food available on the islands; the rest has been destroyed or spoiled beyond use. Ed states that there

is an immediate need for short-grained rice, flour, brown sugar, tinned fish, and tinned corn beef.

Other than the devastating news about its hospital, there is still no information from Savaii which has been hardest hit. The weather is too turbulent still for planes or boats.”

We receive word and also pass to Ed that our church in Sydney will be shipping 39 tons of food for immediate distribution via Emory Air Freight that weekend as long as the airport remains open. A further 200 tons of food will be shipped via sea leaving Christmas Day 1991.

DECEMBER 12

2000z: We establish contact with Utai and Ed with good signals both ways. The highlights are as follows: Ed tells us that the Samoan airport is about to open for the first time since the storm struck. The flooding has subsided and there has been no rain or wind so far today. There are still no phones, though. Ed has seen this ‘strange golden object’ in the sky. Turns out he’s talking about the sun, which hasn’t been seen for a week.

It is now a case of rebuilding under difficult conditions and coordinating the shipping of materials. The net receives a transmission from F05DO, Fernand, that another cyclone (Wala) had threatened Tahiti, with some damage to homes in Bora Bora, but generally not too bad.

Information is now filtering through from Savaii that the island was virtually totally devastated, with most buildings severely damaged or destroyed altogether. Other deaths are now being reported as communications improve with the weather.



Almost all stocks of rice on the island have been damaged by rain.

The NZ High Commissioner states that the NZ Deputy Prime Minister will be flying into Samoa today on a mili-

tary aircraft.

The club station, 5W1JL, received a visit from the Samoan authorities this morning. They wanted to know what extraordinary kind of equipment was it that was able to perform throughout the emergency when other far more sophisticated equipment didn't make it. All they had to see

THE SAMOAN AUTHORITIES WANTED TO KNOW WHAT EXTRAORDINARY KIND OF EQUIPMENT WAS USED TO COMMUNICATE WHEN ALL ELSE HAD FAILED.

was one soggy Kenwood TS-430S and its power supply sitting on a small table in as a small room. Nothing much is said.

DECEMBER 13

We contact Utai and Ed with good signals both ways. Savaii is a total disaster. Ed tells us that he has talked with a Wing Commander in the RAAF (Royal Australian Air



Force) who said that Savaii looks like an 'A' Bomb has been dropped on it. With their homes destroyed, some people climb inside their water tanks to escape the fury of the storm. The police station, hospital, several schools, and many other buildings have been completely destroyed. It looks like there is absolutely nothing left. A much worse condition than Upolo (where the capital Apia is located).

The 39 tons of food and tarpaulins from Sydney arrives in Apia okay and is stored. The plane arrives four hours late and has to be unloaded by hand. A time consuming exercise... Ed reports that there is pressure already from

some areas of the population to make the food available immediately.

There is still no communications available other than amateur radio. A great deal of health and welfare traffic is passed for various individuals.

Requests for tarpaulins, emergency generators, lanterns, water purification tablets and more foodstuffs are passed through to church's headquarters in Sydney.

THE AFTERMATH

DECEMBER 14 TO 19

Contact is made regularly every day with Ed and Utai in providing information on delivery of foodstuffs, tarpaulins, water tanks, shelters, and medical supplies from Australia, New Zealand and the USA over this six day period. Also a great deal of health and welfare traffic is passed for residents, visitors who have found themselves stranded, and friends and relatives who are living abroad.

The phones finally come back into operation on December 19, but only a few channels are available. Despite this, the emergency communications program is phased out almost immediately.

The NZ warship Canterbury arrives in Apia with much needed tarpaulins. The Australian Government begins delivering emergency foodstuffs and supplies via Hercules aircraft based in Sydney. The Canadian Government also makes a donation of \$50,000 for immediate relief.

A sad note occurs when the hull of an Australian fishing boat, washed ashore at the height of the storm's fury, is discovered. No upper structure remains on the decks, and it is assumed that the three men on board have been lost. All that can be seen of the human inhabitants is one forlorn, wet driver's licence – the only evidence that people had once been on the boat.

AFTER THE FACT

What was different about this exercise was the length of time over which Cyclone Val did such great damage; where there was no communications, telephone-wise, for two weeks and no outside communication via conventional radio means for up to six or seven days, with an entire nation thereby relying solely on amateur radio and, particularly, the operators of 5W1JL.

Passing such intense traffic for up to two weeks was a tall order for a part-time amateur radio group like MARA. Many operators helped out, however special thanks must go to the following:

K7FY Bill, Utah, USA
VK2CMT Max, Sydney, AU

VK2BWS Bryant, Sydney, AU
VK3AKY Ken, Melbourne, AU
VK3ASY Orm, Melbourne, AU
W7YSO Don, Utah, USA
ZL1BSU Neville, Hamilton, NZ
ZL1BLR Len, Rotorua, NZ

...and of course, operators of the club station 5W1JL – Utai and Ed – in Apia, Samoa. It was certainly a very satisfying experience participating in this emergency operation.

CHURCH NEWS ARTICLE

<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21340/Church-responds-swiftly-to-Samoa-disaster.html>

NY TIMES ARTICLE

<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/22/world/samoan-islands-are-staggering-from-big-cyclone.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

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CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

Mother of all Antennas

*Big antenna
Lots of metal
Makes my signal
Strong and loud
Want to make sure
That I get out*

*All that metal
Can't go wrong*

*Big antenna
Signals so strong
All my neighbors
Stand and shake ♦sts
Blame me for their
Power troubles
Makes me proud
To be a ham*

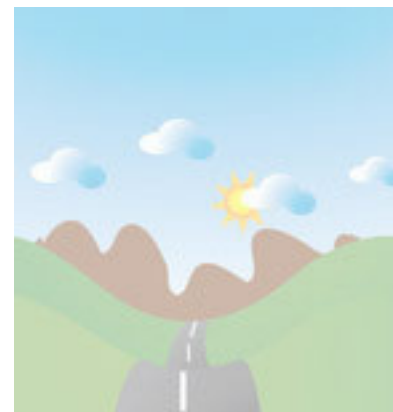
*Big antenna
Glorious sight
With the setting
Sun behind it
Gives me shivers
Down my spine
Makes me wish for
Higher power*

*Big antenna
One rainy day
Serious thunder
Lightning struck it
Used to have
A big signal
Now my neighbors
Have block party*

GRANDMA MARA'S CORNER

GRANDMA'S ON THE ROAD

The weather being so nice and all, I've washed and waxed and serviced the bike, and taken a few day trips here and there. The plans are to do some cross country travel this summer and, if they don't reject my passport application because of the picture, cross the border into Canada. I've never taken the time to visit our neighbors (or as they spell it - neighbours) to the north, but from what VE1VQ tells me, they are regular



folks, just like us (even if they do speak with funny accents!). He tells me I have to leave my old government issue Colt 45 ACP and my spray can of MACE on this side of the line. Seems that if they catch me with them (and how many hiding places are there on a motorcycle?) they'll give me the choice of turning around or spending a few days enjoying the hospitality of one of their ♦ne Canadian detention centers (and losing my stuff in either case). I've been reading that the crime rate is lower up there so I'm not afraid of running into any problems. Besides, there's always my VHF/UHF rig on the bike, in case I need help; and of course, the KA-BAR combat knife I keep strapped under my pant leg!

See you in September!

Grandma Mara

TECH STUFF by VE1VQ

Recently I ordered and received a new laptop from a well known and normally very good computer company, to use for business when on the road. I became a bit suspicious when I discovered all of the literature was in French. When I opened the lid I found the keyboard was also French. The manufacturer agreed to replace the unit. Four weeks later, the replacement arrived via courier (with everything in English). I spent a happy 10-12 hours loading the necessary software. It was only after this that I noticed the battery wasn't the right size. When I looked further at the installed options, I found there were other things missing or substituted. Another phone call, another replacement on its way! Over the next week I thought about this, and in the end, cancelled the order, returning the computer bag previously shipped. Those folks in India were very apologetic about it, and I might at some point in the future, order from them again.

Since I was leaving for western Canada, I delayed my grat♦cation a bit, doing some on-line research and price comparisons. On the day I ♦ew in, I ended up at a Future Shop store in Edmonton (Alberta) talking with a technically knowledgeable young sales guy who determined what my computer level was and didn't talk down to me. Since I already knew what brand and model I wanted, the sale didn't take long to complete. My son-in-law needed a new wireless card for an older HP desktop. By asking questions about the colors of the PC and the router, the sales guy determined what would work in this instance. He further impressed me by giving me his business card and telling

me to call if we had any trouble! Now that's the kind of service you hope for, but very seldom get.

We are quick to complain about poor service; we should also let someone know if we receive great service. I've written their head ♦ce to let them know that this individual went the extra mile.

WE ARE QUICK TO COMPLAIN ABOUT POOR SERVICE; WE SHOULD ALSO LET SOMEONE KNOW IF WE RECEIVE GREAT SERVICE.

Since I was staying with my daughter and her family, that gave me the time to install the software (once again!) from a DVD I brought with me. Now that the serious business stuff is loaded, I can get on with the serious play stuff. Stuff like EchoLink.

If you haven't tried EchoLink, go to <http://www.echolink.org>. Click on DOWNLOAD, and then RUN or SAVE, depending on your preference. If you click on RUN then the program will download and another message will pop up asking you if you want to RUN the installation. A few seconds later the Install Wizard will begin - follow the prompts to perform the installation. The last window allows you to launch EchoLink; click to check the box and then click on Finish to start the Setup Wizard. Just as the name says, it sets up EchoLink with your personal preferences.

Choose the COMPUTER USER option, decide on your internet connection speed, ♦ll in your personal information, pick your geographical location, run the ♦rewall test to determine whether your computer will connect to the EchoLink server, and continue on. In my case, I had registered some years ago but could not remember my password, so I had to go through the validation process where it sent out a password to my registered e-mail address. Once I retrieved that from the e-mail, I logged in and the program came up with the stations logged into the server.

Once you've managed to log onto EchoLink, scroll down near the bottom of the list of stations and double click on the EchoTest server. This link allows you to record your 'transmitted' audio and have it played back to you. If your audio is not to your liking, go up to the menu at the top of the window, click on TOOLS, and come down to ADJUST SOUND DEVICE. Next click on RECORDING. A window will open up and your microphone or microphones should be listed. Highlight the one you wish to test and continue on to set the 'transmit' level. To talk with someone, simply double click on their callsign, and give them a call. Use the same method of communicating as you would over the air on HF or VHF. Your spacebar is

your push-to-talk button. Default is push once to talk, and push again to stop transmitting. If you want to change it to act as a regular push-to-talk switch then go to Tools on the menu bar, then to Preferences, then to the Connections Tab, then to the Push To Talk button. To disconnect, click on the broken chain icon at the top, just under Edit and Station on the menu bar.

With a laptop, you can use the built-in microphone and speakers. If you are using a desktop or you want better quality from the laptop invest in a set of computer headphones/microphone.

A few links to check out are LDS-HAMS, WW-MARA, and ERC-ECS. The first two are maintained by Jay W7KBH. LDS-HAMS is intended for general rag-chewing by LDS amateur radio ops, but can also be reserved for nets by contacting Jay at the e-mail address shown once you connect to the link. WW-MARA (not the MARA we all know and love!) is intended for emergency assistance on a 24-hour basis. The ERC-ECS link is maintained by W7AOR and is intended for ERC-ECS nets.

Whether you connect from your firmly anchored home PC or a laptop on the go as I did, give EchoLink a try. You don't need the latest powerhouse computer to work the world. Anything that runs Windows XP or later will be more than sufficient. Who knows who you might meet -on the air'!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Paraphrasing a quote from a former MARA NE member -

"This country has the finest politicians that money can buy."

The answer to last month's quote tease -

"There are 10 types of people. Those who understand binary and those that don't."

Binary is either a 1 or a 0 (zero) and is written in a row, the same as the more common decimal system that we're all used to. The right most digit stands for the ones, the next digit to the left is for the twos, the third digit from the right stands for fours. The next one is for eights, and so on (... $16+8+4+2+1$). For example, 0001 converted to the decimal system would stand for 'one' ($0+0+0+1=1$). 1000 is not 'one thousand' as it would be in the decimal system but 8 ($8+0+0+0=8$). Converting 1001 to decimal

is $8+0+0+1=9$. Converting the figure in the quote above, "There are only 10 (read in binary as 'one-zero', not ten, so $10 \text{ binary} = 2+0=2$) types of people" would read, "There are only 2 types of people. Those who understand binary and those who don't." You've just learned something new today!

SWAP SHOP

List your items you wish to buy, sell, trade, or give away at "no charge"!

DI-DAH-DI-DAH-DIT

HAMS ALREADY HAVE COMMON BORDERS!

Years ago, when I was young, my parents and I were visiting my maternal Grandmother in New England, as we usually did every summer. We were in upper state New York and had stopped at one of the old historic forts that line both sides of our common border. I was reading a plaque or sign about how the Americans had won a battle on that site, beating the British. My Grandmother told me that at sites of battles on the Canadian side the signs read how the British had won this or that battle, defeating the Americans! I haven't been back to those old forts since then, so I don't know if those claims are still there or not.



Our respective peoples have gotten along fine for years now (except for the odd stupidity on the part of politicians - e.g. the claim made and repeated by US politicians that the terrorists responsible for the 911 tragedy travelled through Canada to reach the US - **not true**). Until recent years no identification was needed for crossing the border either way. When ID finally was required, typically a driver's license, and birth certificate were all that was necessary. Effective June 1, 2009, Canadian citizens require a pass-

