

“A Dedication to Emergency Service”

9-11-01

As we reflect on the 6 months that have passed since the terrorist attacks, we'd like to share some personal recollections received from the amateur community since our report in the November 2001 issue.

WORLD TRADE CENTER NEW YORK CITY

SATERN's Volunteer Effort

The Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN) Amateur Radio volunteer support effort in New York City ended October 18, according to SATERN Amateur Radio Liaison Officer Jeff Schneller, N2HPO. The Salvation Army relief operation itself has continued, relying on NEXTEL and cellular telephone service.

Over some five weeks, several dozen Amateur Radio operators from the Greater New York City area and elsewhere assisted the Salvation Army. Ham radio primarily was used to provide logistical support for the organization's canteens and feeding centers. Schneller said hams volunteered from throughout the US, including New Hampshire, Ohio, North Carolina, Florida and Missouri. Offers of help came from England and Canada.

Among the later group of volunteers were Steve and Kim Merrill, KB1DIG and KB1GTR, from Dover, New Hampshire, who did an arduous but rewarding tour of duty October 7-18.

We arrived at Salvation Army Headquarters in Lower Manhattan on Sunday, October 7, at 4 PM—on Steve's Birthday. We walked into the building and went right to work. Jeff Schneller, N2HPO, from SATERN greeted us. We were introduced

to everyone and received our IDs and special passes. There was a large amount of information to review. The emphasis was placed on the new role of providing logistical support, via Amateur Radio. The debriefings lasted till 10 PM. With Jeff's help we adjusted our radio equipment and were ready for work the next day.

Our shifts ranged from 14 hours a day

during the first week we were there to around 10 hours a day the second week. We all set our own pace. Time went quickly.

Kim spent the majority of the time at one of the canteens located at Ground Zero. She made sure that the personnel were well stocked with supplies. The orders were radioed to Headquarters via Gary Smith, the Salvation Army site coordinator. Kim utilized her Yaesu VX-5R hand-held with a 19-inch Comet whip antenna and a hand microphone attachment. This was ideal, because it enabled her to monitor radio operations and, between transmissions, to assist in various other duties. She served food to the many workers who came through the line, emptied trash cans and helped out in various other clean-up/maintenance duties. She very much enjoyed meeting the people and getting to know them.

At first, the RF interference around the WTC was terrible. Communication by 2 meters was difficult but manageable. NEXTEL and cell phones were subject to intermittent lockups or failures.

It was very spooky being there. There was so much devastation. Nothing we had read in the newspapers or seen on TV could have prepared us for the actual sight of all of this.

Steve spent most of his time driving all over Lower Manhattan. Our little Mitsubishi pickup truck was well-suited for the job. The mobile radio was the Yaesu FT-2500M along with a Larsen glass-mount antenna. Our truck was washed with fire hoses twice

RICHARD MCABEE, W4MTK



George Kay, KU4DE (left), and Richard McAbee, W4MTK, two South Carolina hams inside their communications van at the Brooklyn Navy Yard on September 13.



Kim, KB1GTR, and Steve, KB1DIG, Merrill, of Dover, New Hampshire, were among the hams who arrived from all across the US to assist when the call for ham volunteers went out.

each time it drove out of the WTC disaster area. This was to remove some of the contamination from the tires and such.

Steve also used a Yaesu VX-5R for times when he was out of the vehicle. Steve transported people and supplies and was in constant contact with the control operator at Salvation Army Headquarters. We logged roughly 300 miles of travel in the time we spent there. Some of the time spent was just talking to people and cheering them up.

We lived a lifetime in a few short days in New York City and made friendships that will last a lifetime. SATERN is to be commended. They were more than nice to us. We felt like a part of a family!

SATERN's Schneller urged all Amateur Radio operators to prepare for the future by first getting acquainted with and joining their local ARES or SATERN teams, then by taking the ARRL Amateur Radio emergency communications courses, www.arrrl.org/cce. More information about SATERN is available on the SATERN Web site, www.satern.org.

Eastern New York Hams Respond

Eastern New York Section Manager Pete Cecere, N2YJZ, said some 160 amateurs from the ARRL Eastern New York Section were among those responding to the New York City World Trade Center disaster. Volunteers worked via the Westchester Emergency Communications Association (WECA), which served as a staging point for all volunteers arriving from north of the city.

Under the direction of Eastern New York Section Emergency Coordinator Ken Akasofu, KL7JQC, three District Emergency Coordinators—Joe Bruno, WB2VVS; Frank Stone, KB2YUR; and

George Odom, KB2SIY—guided the process of grouping and funneling volunteers to the Westchester County staging area to await assignment.

"We're very fortunate to have so many hams in our section who have a tremendous amount of expertise and have demonstrated such a high level of dedication and professionalism," Akasofu said. "Their investment of time participating in public service events, local and section-level nets, SETs, and other training activities have really paid off."

Akasofu said the magnitude of the disaster even affected telephone service outside of the Greater New York City area for a time. "To get around this, we arranged for some of the Eastern New York Official Emergency Stations to be on standby," he said. "They were far enough away from the area so that their phone lines weren't affected, and they had the capability to reach the repeater used by the staging area in Westchester."

Cecere said Akasofu ended up putting in so much time volunteering that he got into a bit of hot water with his employer. "He told me that he was taking calls at work pertaining to the disaster, even during meetings," Cecere said. "Fortunately his company also realized that Ken had a big obligation to the community with his service in Amateur Radio."



At the SATERN communications center, Jim Wingate, WA2EIU (standing), and Michael Gomez, N2WGC, review field reports from canteen and feeding locations before forwarding them to the Salvation Army logistical officer.

Ulster County ARES operated from September 11-16 from the Ulster Amateur Radio Club to pass traffic to the Westchester American Red Cross chapter and to monitor the ARC net on the Northeast Link repeater, reported Frank Stone, KB2YUR. Said Dutchess County EC Adam Nowik, KC2DAA, "It was amazing that we had 49 members respond, who took time off from work and refused to take breaks when we got busy."

Cecere said WECA deserves special mention for handling the staging of "all these great volunteers."

From Standby to Action

ARRL Life Member Douglas Bard, W2ING, lives in Newburgh, New York—some 60 miles up the Hudson River from Ground Zero. He was on stand-by duty with Orange County ARES/RACES Tuesday and Wednesday, September 11-12, when he learned of the critical need for amateurs to help the Salvation Army at its headquarters on 14th Street in Manhattan.

I received the call to assist on Friday. Fortunately my oldest daughter, Nancy, also came along to do the driving, while I handled communications and navigation via GPS. We arrived at the headquarters by 8 AM. We were soon dispatched as the only amateur mobile unit in Manhattan to cover the 13 mobile canteens.

Traffic was awful, and confusion was generally the rule, but everyone was quite courteous throughout the whole episode. In New York City? you ask. Yup!

We had a map of where the canteens were supposed to be located, but many had relocated slightly, and informing net control of these changes turned out to be one of our jobs.

We double and triple-parked. As soon as police saw our Salvation Army signs, barricades were removed, and we were able to get to some of the canteens more easily.

Friday, September 14, President Bush visited the WTC site. By this time we were on Canal Street and couldn't get to the canteens farther south until later. The whole area was in "lockdown." Police were everywhere. Many were volunteers who had just come to help, as did many EMTs and firefighters.

Residents of Greenwich Village—close to the disaster—had been evacuated from their buildings, as the structures were deemed unsafe. Several were trying to get escorted to pick up a few belongings but weren't allowed, due to the lockdown. Nevertheless we saw many residents taking food to the police, who had to stay in place.

We'd heard that a nearby telephone central office had been destroyed. Cables were being laid at street level. Most

cellular phones were useless.

We finally were able to move farther south on West Street, to get to the canteens closer to Ground Zero. Headquarters had lost contact and needed reports of canteen vehicle numbers, fuel supplies, locations, supplies needed. Pictures don't do justice to the scene. One look at the faces of the rescue workers told the story. Several wanted to talk. I listened.

We reached a point where it was easier to walk to three of the nearby canteens. One had too much soda; one not enough—so some trading was in order. There was a NYC prisoner van parked near the bridge in the background. The cop said he had a load of underwear and sweatshirts and asked if I could get them picked up, as he was not allowed to move. One of the Salvation Army cadets had just put in a call to net control for sweatshirts, so that van was cleaned out on the spot.

Net control called and told us to go home, as four amateurs were inbound. As I was reattaching one of the antennas a voice behind said, "If you weren't a ham I'd bust you!" It turned out to be a NYC cop, who said he had had a 440-MHz repeater on the WTC. A couple of blocks north, Nancy suggested we pick up three tired-looking guys walking out. As it turned out, they were off-duty Suffolk County police officers who had showed up to help. They talked about what they had experienced. As we went past the barricades, crowds of people were on the street corners holding candles and signs and cheering.

I can't say too much about the Salvation Army. These people are truly dedicated. Nancy and I will never forget that day in New York.

ARRL Special Service Club Responds

"WECA Operators Shine in the Gloom of WTC Disaster," proclaimed the October 2001 issue of *The WECAGRAM*, the newsletter of the Westchester Emergency Communications Association—an ARRL Special Service Club. "The hours of training, public-service events and drills WECA operators culminated in an overwhelming, well-organized response to the World Trade Center disaster on September 11 in New York City," the article read.

According to *The WECAGRAM*, WECA members who served as Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) or Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) leaders also helped mobilize the Westchester chapter of the American Red Cross and the County Emergency Operations Center to provide key assistance to New York City counterparts. Nearly 50 WECA members contributed to the rescue and relief effort.

The WECAGRAM Editor Mike Arrow,

K2NR, summarized his organization's experiences in "What WECA Did: A 911-Style Response to the 9/11 Emergency," excerpted here.

The news came to Tom Raffaelli, WB2NHC, at about 9 AM on September 11, 2001: a jet airliner had crashed into a tower of the World Trade Center. At that moment, Tom, the WECA emergency services director, assumed his alter ego as communications director of the Westchester County chapter of the American Red Cross and rushed to chapter headquarters in White Plains. On the way, he notified WECA member and ARRL Westchester County Emergency Coordinator Alan Crosswell, N2YGK. Joe Bruno, WB2VVS, a WECA member and the RACES coordinator for Westchester, also was mobilized early on.

Westchester County official Liam Murphy, deputy director of the county Office of Emergency Management activated RACES. A call for amateur volunteers was made via the WECA repeater on 147.060 MHz, which was activated as the Amateur Radio emergency network hub in Westchester.

The role of Amateur Radio became clear as landline and cellular telephone services rapidly overloaded with frantic calls from victims and escapees of the disaster and from worried family members. Even police and fire radio networks became swamped with calls. Amateur Radio became a vital means of communication.

For many of the critical early hours, Assistant EC Adam Epstein, N2DHH, served as the amateur network control operator at the EOC. But the New York City EOC already was in danger. The collapse of the twin 110-story towers rained down debris on the 40-story 7 World Trade Center, which subsequently collapsed—destroying the New York City EOC within. City officials fled to a remote temporary EOC.

Greater New York City Red Cross chapters mounted relief efforts to aid injured and displaced disaster victims. The Westchester County chapter was a vital part of this effort, and WECA members established a communications center at the chapter. Relief stations called "care centers" were quickly established to provide mental and physical first aid. Amateurs staffed centers in White Plains as well as Mount Vernon, New Rochelle and Yonkers.

WECA operators also joined New York City-based relief efforts that continued for weeks afterward. Hundreds of radio amateurs from many areas responded quickly, willingly and unselfishly to the call to aid the rescue and subsequent relief effort.

The Westchester ARES/RACES network operations closed down on September 22, followed on September 24

by the closing of their larger NYC counterpart operations. The club credited the success of its response to a "dedication to emergency service through programs of formal off-line training, on-the-job training at public service events and participation in emergency drills."

RACES Member Recalls "Distant Explosion"

As it did for most Americans, September 11, 2001, began routinely for RACES member Ryan Jairam, AB2MH, of Manhattan—except on that day, he did not have a radio or TV turned on. At around 9 AM and with his wife already out the door to work, he heard "a distant explosion" that shook his house—a "sonic boom" he thought at first. "Twenty minutes later my wife walked back into the house and told me that she had watched the second plane crash into the south tower," Jairam said.

He immediately checked into the "TAC-2" citywide RACES net and soon had his first assignment—to report to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal in St George and act as a communications shadow for one of the doctors. Hundreds of emergency workers—from medical to fire and police personnel—gathered there to act as triage units for anticipated casualties. Once it became apparent that no major casualties would be arriving, however, personnel were dispatched back to their respective home bases. Jairam spent more than a week volunteering.

Tuesday evening I was sent to the Red Cross shelter at Curtis High School, where 120 students from lower Manhattan schools had been evacuated. I was relieved at 9 o'clock the next morning and reported back at 10 that night. A mag

RYAN JAIRAM, AB2MH



Left to right: Ryan Jairam, AB2MH, Joe Lipton, N2IOZ, and Steven Greenbaum, WB2KDG take a break from their responsibilities in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attack.

mount antenna sitting on a window sill provided good communication with TAC 2.

Friday I reported to the Staten Island Red Cross Chapter headquarters on Richmond Avenue for a five-day tour. The chapter mission was to collect and distribute donated supplies. Many monetary contributions were also collected. With a mobile antenna and pie tin ground plane mounted on a metal fence outside of the building I was able to hit the TAC 2, TAC 10 and TAC 12 repeaters with no difficulty.

On Tuesday, New York City District Emergency Coordinator Charles Hargrove, N2NOV, called the Staten Island Red Cross Chapter and asked if I would volunteer for a "special assignment." Once we'd determined that a radio operator was no longer required there, we shut down the radio operation.

A disaster coordinator at the Red Cross had initiated an "outreach program." Instead of immediately setting up one or more service centers, the Red Cross would send six multi-disciplinary teams to various parts of the affected area to assess resident needs and provide whatever help they could. According to Assistant Director of Communications for the Red Cross Jay Ferron, N4GAA, the coordinator of the so-called Multi-Disciplinary Operational Teams (MDOT) did not want any ham operators to participate—a cell phone in each team member's hand would be adequate. Jay absolutely forbade the operation to continue without an Amateur Radio operator on each team, however. This proved to be an extremely wise decision.

Our mission was to canvass residential buildings in the affected area, going door to door if necessary, and start getting needed aid to residents.

Communication gear consisted of a cell phone for the radio operator, a wireless e-mail device called a Blackberry for the team

leader, myself and one for each set of two volunteers—plus I had my dual-band H-T. Net control at Red Cross also had a Blackberry. The Blackberrys were provided by IBM, but we were on our own for training. As expected, cell service was extremely unreliable and became my last resort. I was on MDOT 1—the only team to enter Ground Zero. Our assigned location was the Gateway Plaza section of Battery Park City, one block from the south tower and filled with dust and debris. All of the buildings already had been evacuated and searched. Residents were given 15 minutes to return in small groups, gather any belongings they could and cart them away.

We had an hour, but it wasn't long enough. Even though only a handful of residents were coming through, most needed some assistance from the Red Cross—a place to stay, trauma counseling, etc. We were hard-pressed to make it back in time for the buses to return us to Brooklyn.

On Thursday, September 20, it rained! We were instructed to don Tyvek hazmat suits. Outfitted in these white suits combined with white hard hats we looked like a team of ghostbusters!

That day we were able to process many more clients. Needs varied from a place to sleep to prescriptions and lost wheelchairs.

As many of us learned, an amateur hand-held radio is not always so handy. Perhaps it would be good to require members of ARES/RACES to have a mobile radio and a magnetic antenna mount. In some locations, we needed an outdoor antenna. At Ground Zero, we found that an H-T with a gain antenna would work in most spots. The Blackberrys turned out to be a good way to network non-hams.

New Jersey Ham Assists at Ground Zero

Barry Pearse, N2RPL, of Perth



Barry Pearse, N2RPL, rushed from his home in nearby New Jersey to assist at Red Cross Headquarters in lower Manhattan.

Amboy, New Jersey, volunteered to help in the days following the WTC attack. Pearse reported for duty September 15 at Red Cross Headquarters after contacting ARRL Northern New Jersey SEC Steve Ostrove, K2SO.

As I traveled through Staten Island, I could see where they were dumping the rubble from the World Trade Center and searching through it. As I got closer to New York City, it hit me as I looked at where the World Trade Center used to stand and only saw smoke rising above the skyline. Military aircraft were flying over Manhattan to protect against further attacks.

After arriving at Red Cross Headquarters and receiving my Ground Zero security pass and paperwork, I received my assignment. Then we were taken to our assigned positions, and the scene was more than words can describe. As we got closer, we were stopped at roadblocks for our security passes.

My job was to provide communication for the Red Cross personnel on location and to request supplies. Neither the cell phone nor the landline systems worked well. Our radio links were the first line of communication.

My first shift ended some 19 hours later. Most shifts were between 13 and 16 hours long. After my shift we were brought back to Red Cross Headquarters for a debriefing on what we saw.

During the remainder of my six days in New York City, I was posted to the temporary Office of Emergency Management site.

In all, I spent seven days handling communication. I was honored to have been able to serve in this way and to represent the American Radio Relay League, Amateur Radio Emergency Service, Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service and Amateur Radio in this terrible event.

DOUGLAS BARD, W2ING



At the collection point for donated clothing, food and water for the rescue workers. The photographer reports: "Hundreds of people were donating so many items for the WTC workers that the fire captain shown in the photo quickly ran out of storage. We called in for three large trucks to clear the area."

AND AT THE PENTAGON. . .

The team managed by Virginia Amateur Radio Emergency Service to support the Salvation Army's disaster relief operation at the Pentagon stood down September 18. Virginia Section Emergency Coordinator Tom Gregory, N4NW, said the support provided at the Pentagon site as well as in New York City and Pennsylvania "clearly demonstrates the resolve and commitment by so many hams to meet the needs of our fellow Americans at this time of great tragedy."

Observations from the Pentagon Salvation Army Support Effort

ARRL member Paul Konigsburg, K3MZ, of Great Falls, Virginia was among those who turned out September 14-15 to support the Salvation Army communications effort.

As I rode in the Salvation Army van, I first saw the gouge in the Pentagon. It looked similar to what I had seen on TV. As we drove around the parking lot, I saw three dogs resting on the grass. To get badges many people were waiting in line staring at the hole in the side of the Pentagon 200 feet away. It smelled like a fire that had been recently put out. Several generators were running nearby, so the burned smell mixed with exhaust odor. Heavy machinery was moving in and out.

Police were there in many forms: FBI, NTSB, ATF, OSI and MP. The Secret Service was also there. Then there were rescue people and firefighters from the surrounding area. There must have been 600 rescue people on-site.

While I was in line, the three dogs headed into the breach with their handlers. Construction workers who could run the heavy machinery to remove the debris, truck drivers to haul the debris away, and others who could install temporary wood bracing to stabilize the building also milled about. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld came walking past, clasping his hands together and looking pleased at the level of support.

I finally get my badge and can help.

At least 2000 people worked this crash site, and they all needed to be fed. The Salvation Army set up four feeding centers—two outside and two inside the restricted area. The amateurs relayed information to and from the various canteens. Many messages were similar to "need 50 meals at site 1" or "need gasoline at site 2." My job was to shadow Capt Burton of the Salvation Army, who was making the rounds of all the sites. This was a controlled net, so all communications went through net control at a local Salvation Army site.

From a radio perspective, the area was

very noisy. I saw the military had set up wireless communications, and from the size of their antenna, it looked like they were using a frequency somewhere between our 2 meters and our 70 cm. On the amateur frequencies, there were lots of beeps, squawks, chirps and other forms of radio interference, plus the audible noise from the generators. You needed an in-the-ear type speaker. Many messages had to be repeated.

There was a temporary chain link fence with black plastic on the chain. Capt Burton said that was where they placed the victims' bodies. I was glad it was covered up.

Some firefighters came by later in the evening and asked for some hot food. We put some trays together and then went into the restricted area. When you were in a cart or in a vehicle, dogs would sniff you for bombs. I asked a firefighter if there was any chance of finding people alive. He shook his head, no.

Most of the workers wore grim expressions mixed with a little exhaustion. I didn't see much hope on their faces. They were doing their jobs and were going to let the emotions have their time later.

As the warm day turned into a cool evening, calls on the radio changed to requests for sweatshirts, socks and underwear. A call came on the radio that Station 1 needed dog treats.

This was a day where I got to witness firsthand some of the worst of humanity. While destruction was horrendous, I thought to myself that, as bad as this was, New York City must be 20 times worse. I also got to see some of the best of humanity—people volunteering their time and special skills, people doing all they could to rescue their fellow man, people

and corporations giving food and clothing.

I realized that these specialized rescue people need ordinary folks to feed them, clothe them and give them fresh batteries. I was glad to be a part. I was honored that I could help. And yes, the dogs got their treats.

Observations from the Pentagon Red Cross Support Effort

Another amateur team consisting of members of the Vienna (Virginia) Wireless Society, the Arlington County Amateur Radio Club and other amateurs provided communication and technical support to the American Red Cross relief effort at the Pentagon site. Arlington County ARES Emergency Coordinator Alan Bosch, KO4ALA, said his team ran shifts from 8 AM through 1 AM each day. His report appeared in a September 16 special edition of the Montgomery County (Maryland) Amateur Radio Club *MARC Mini-News*.

At first we ran stations out of the Red Cross chapter house and in the Pentagon south parking lot, then added one at their operations base set up in a former Montgomery Ward store on US Route 50. Later, we went back to two sites—one at the Pentagon and one at the Montgomery Ward's location.

Things were pretty straightforward using our 145.47 repeater and the chapter station to anchor things, but we had to iron out antenna and equipment glitches at the Ward's station before we got running smoothly. I got the Red Cross to acquire half a dozen FRS (Family Radio Service) hand-helds early on, which kept their on-site staff glued together until they got the higher-powered Vertex UHF business-band hand-helds

DAVID G. BOYD, K9MX



The net control station at the Pentagon, photographed just before photos were banned from the area. The partially hidden ham in the red shirt is Chris Hanslets, KA8UNO. The photographer, K9MX, whose day job is with the Justice Department, procured specialized cameras, robots and other high-tech equipment following the attack.

(donated by Vertex Standard), which relieved us of having to hunt down Red Cross personnel in an incredibly congested and chaotic area. One persistent occupational hazard was nearly getting run down by golf carts full of VIPs or supplies.

A real problem was the news helicopters—they were everywhere all the time the first few days, and they made hearing even nearby conversations challenging if not altogether impossible. My heartfelt advice to any ham working any emergency is to bring an earphone. Just don't leave home without it!

Another issue was security. On one shift the Red Cross transport vans could drive inside the perimeter to the activity center; on the next shift, they could not. One day drivers' licenses were sufficient ID; the next we had to have Red Cross event photo ID badges. Finally we were supposed to have little yellow dots on the badges to be permitted anywhere outside the ARC tent. That proved rather comical, because you could not see the dots from more than about 3 feet away.

From where we were on the ground, we could not see the impact zone directly. The odd thing was that, except for the smoke and fire early on and the cranes that appeared later, the building itself looked perfectly normal.

A memorable aspect of this effort was the North Carolina Baptist Convention Disaster Response's mass cooking operation. These wonderful people were at it 24 hours a day. In the afternoons the smell of chicken barbecuing on a grill several square yards in size suffused the area.

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CRASH SITE

Amateurs provided communication support for investigators and outside relief agencies at the so-called "fourth crash site" in a rural part of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, where United Flight 93 went down after a heroic effort by passengers to keep the hijackers from using the aircraft to wreak further destruction.

Kevin Custer, W3KKC, arranged preliminary repeater communication into and out of the crash site to help the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Pennsylvania State Police, the FBI and other state and federal agencies. SATERN's Eric Hegerle, N3VOC, said his organization was able to take advantage of linked repeaters set up in the vicinity of the crash to keep in contact with the Salvation Army's Pittsburgh headquarters. Custer said communication was "basically non-existent" because telephone and cellular systems were shut down or overloaded.

Somerset County RACES Radio Officer Jim Crowley, NJ3T, says he was at work



This billboard and others like it reflect the mood of the American people in the wake of the events of September 11.

when the plane crashed September 11. Crowley, who is also president of the Somerset County Amateur Radio Club, contacted Scott Zimmerman, N3XCC, who had already started an emergency net on the Somerset County Amateur Radio Club's 147.195 MHz repeater. Soon, Emergency Management Agency/911 Director Richard Lohr, N3VFG, had requested amateurs at the county EOC.

Crowley shared a summary of his report to Western Pennsylvania ARRL Section Manager John Rodgers, N3MSE, on the events of September 11-12, 2001:

Our RACES/ARES volunteers established preliminary communication between the EOC and the crash site EOC quickly and professionally. Volunteers were poised to help continue communication as needed.

Artis Kitchens, N3XGL, and Barry Shaffer, N3XDZ, took over the net from the EOC Amateur Radio station, while Scott, his wife, Elisha, KB9WCX, Kevin Custer, W3KKC, and his friend Dawn Mello traveled to the crash site to set up communications there. I joined Barry and Artis as soon as I got off work. A new ham in our area, Bill Smith, KB3GUN, also stopped by the EOC to offer his help.

Jack Humberson, N3SQH, chairman of disaster services for the Keystone Chapter of the American Red Cross was at the site and in touch with the EOC. Kevin assisted SATERN by linking the 145.39 repeater—which is close to the crash site—to the 146.835 repeater on Laurel Mountain in western Somerset county. Kevin informed me the 146.61 repeater in Pittsburgh also was linked to the 146.835 repeater.

The Red Cross and the Salvation

Army—with help from numerous volunteers from Shanksville and surrounding communities—were working hard to feed the investigators and officials at the crash site.

Meanwhile, Richard Warren, WB3HGL, stayed in contact with the Western Area RACES Net on 75 meters and relayed information for the EOC. Many Amateur Radio organizations, clubs, RACES/ARES groups and individuals from the surrounding counties offered equipment and volunteers.

We learned that evening that the FBI was treating the crash site as a crime scene, and the agency had established its own communications for security purposes. Additionally, portable cell phone sites were erected. Roadblocks were set up around the area.

Due to the level of security, it was decided on September 12 to put RACES volunteers on high-alert stand-by status until further notice. We were asked to monitor the linked 147.195 and 146.625 repeaters for possible reactivation orders. Fred Maize, KM3M, who was handling RACES operations at the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency's Western Region headquarters in Indiana, Pennsylvania, told me he would continue to monitor our local repeater.

This particular emergency was much different from anything we were used to.

Everyone who responded should be proud to be a ham and proud to be an American! Our condolences and deepest sympathies go out to the families of those who died in the crash. We will never forget their bravery and ultimate sacrifice. We would also like to extend our thanks to all those hams from surrounding counties who offered their help.

QST