

Nation's Radio "Hams" Are Of Constant Service

San Jose Mercury-News

Editorial Page

33 Sunday, November 11, 1951

Radio Amateurs Do Job

When the civilian defense drills were held in San Jose a few months ago those in charge were greatly concerned over the problem of communications. Theoretically, after a bomb attack, all telephone lines and cables would be down. Getting orders and information from place to place would be difficult, but most important.

When the scheme for the drills was worked out the responsibility for communications was placed in the hands of the Santa Clara County Amateur Radio Association, Inc. A short wave transmitter and receiver were set up at civilian defense headquarters. These were manned by members of the association. Other members placed radio equipment in their autos. Their task was to rush to the parts of the city where "bombings" and other incidents had been reported. They were to gather information as to the extent of the damage, the number of ambulances and fire apparatus needed, etc. This information they were to transmit to headquarters, where it would be acted upon and assistance sent.

Some of the civilian defense officials admitted later that before the first test they had been dubious as to how the radio amateurs would perform. As soon as the test had been held, however, they were most enthusiastic. "Those 'hams' really did a job," one CD official declared. The truth is that some of the amateurs themselves were a little surprised at how well everything worked out.

Word 'Ham' Is Defined

A new use of the word "ham" came into being in the early twenties. Ever since then a "ham" has been understood the world over as a man (or woman) who operates a radio station as a hobby, asking no money for his very considerable services but carrying on his radio activities purely for his personal enjoyment.

Some of the first local "hams" were a group of devoted students of the late Dr. Charles Herold, whose historic experiments added greatly to mankind's knowledge of "wireless," as it was then called. Dr. Herold's station, one of the first in the world to be licensed, was the forerunner of KQW.

Most of Dr. Herold's experiments took place in the years 1908 to 1912. In those early days a "ham" was delighted if he could send a message by ragged code to another amateur in the next block. A decade or two of feverish experimentation brought radio to a point where thousands of amateurs—including some right here in San Jose—habitually talk with "hams" in Africa, Europe, Australia, the Orient and every part of the world.

American radio amateurs have brought enormous benefits to their country in two fields: (1) Through an elaborate setup which functions in time of emergency or disaster, and (2) through contributions to the development of radio itself.

In late October of last year over eight inches of rain fell within 48 hours in certain areas in Northern California and Southern Oregon. The flood conditions which resulted put western "hams" to a tremendous test, through which they came with flying colors.

In Eureka all connection with the outside world via telephone and telegraph wires was severed. Radio amateurs went into action and hundreds of messages were handled for the Red Cross, Western Union, Associated Press, United Press and many individuals.

Aid In Floods Recalled

Conditions in Crescent City were even worse. All power, lights, gas, telephones, wire services and transportation were cut off for several days. Buildings were partially or totally destroyed, the sea wall was damaged, barges broke loose and ran amok in the harbor and several small ships were sunk. Relief of all kinds was badly needed.

Again the "hams" went into action. Hundreds of messages were sent to San Francisco and elsewhere. A lead editorial in the Humboldt Standard said: "The radio amateurs did valiant service in keeping this region in contact with the outside world."

This sort of thing has been going on since 1919 and is to the great credit of the radio amateurs. In 1936 floods covered 14 eastern states. Extensive operations by the "hams" brought relief to scores of isolated communities. The same was true during the Ohio Valley flood in 1937, the California flood of 1938, the hurricane, tidal wave and flood which hit New England in October, 1938, many hurricanes in Florida, the disaster in Texas City, various tornadoes in Oklahoma and the Middle West, and the recent flood disasters along the Mississippi.

Here in San Jose the "hams" stand ready and willing to handle communications in the event of any unexpected emergency. They maintain a station at Red Cross headquarters which is ready at all times. In addition the numerous sets operated



Federal law states that amateur radio stations are licensed for "public interest, convenience and necessity." One group that takes this idea seriously is the

Mission Trail Net, some of whose members are shown above at one of their annual gatherings. Every night they are on the air to transmit and receive messages

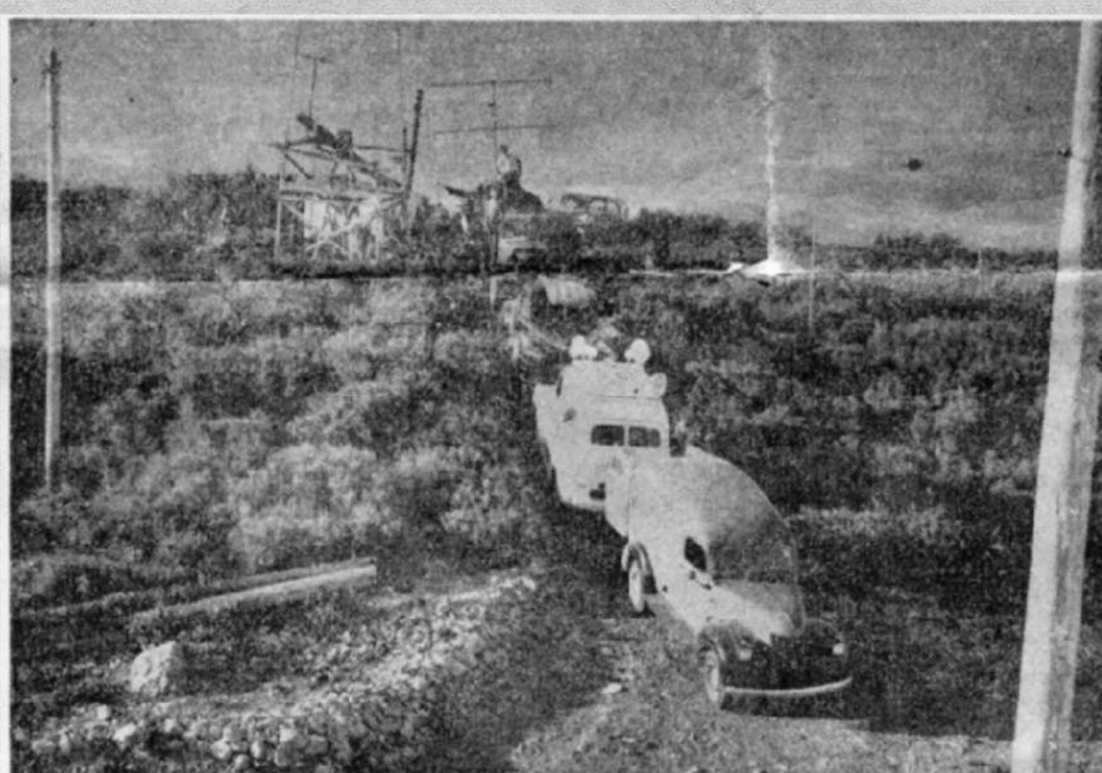
up and down the Pacific Coast as a free service to the public. The "hams" benefit, too, receiving valuable training in communication work.



Leadership in local amateur radio activities is taken by the Santa Clara County Amateur Radio Association, whose officers and directors are shown here. Left to right are Frank

Quement, Harry Engwicht, President Paul Tibbs, Leonard Scarpelli, Walter S. G. Nelson, H. E. Leigh, Bob Davis and Dick Barrett. Quement and Engwicht were among charter mem-

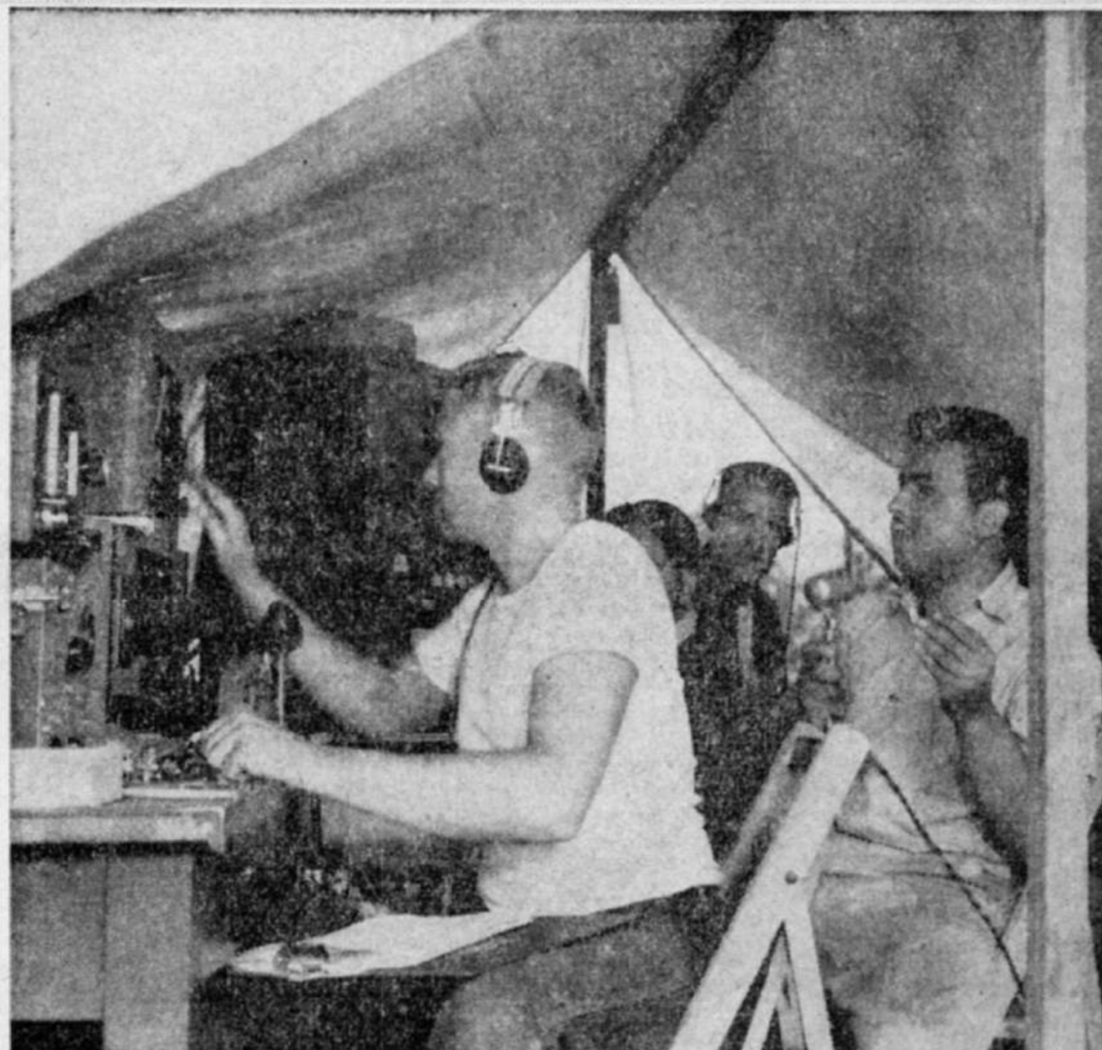
bers of the SCCARA, which was founded in the early 1920s and which, since World War II, has been reorganized as a non-profit corporation with educational and scientific objectives.



Development of short wave communication was pioneered by amateur radio operators when the Government assigned them to that portion of the spectrum below 200 meters in the belief that the short waves didn't have

much practical value. Since then they have proved the usefulness of shorter and shorter wavelengths. Extremely short waves have optical characteristics, traveling only in straight lines. Hence, such elevated lo-

cations as the top of Loma Prieta are much in demand for the annual Field Day event. The photo above shows one such setup overlooking the Santa Clara Valley in the hazy background.



Every year along about the end of June you'll see a group of tents spring up in some rural spot—usually at high elevation—as radio amateurs hold their an-

nual Field Day under auspices of the American Radio Relay League. Use of commercial power sources is prohibited, so gasoline generators are hooked

up to the radio equipment. This simulates the situation which would occur if an earthquake or other disaster knocked down power lines.



"Ham" radio operators are aware of the continuing need to educate the public as to the good use they make of the radio waves assigned them by the Federal Government. One phase of

this work is the booth which the Santa Clara County Amateur Radio Association sets up annually at the County Fair. Two years ago approximately a thousand free messages were accepted

from the public for transmission to all parts of the United States and members of the armed services overseas. This year other phases of amateur activity were stressed.



Ingenuity has been an outstanding characteristic of the amateur radio operator. Constantly experimenting to improve his equipment, he has produced many important advances in the electronic art. This "ham" operator showed a talent for improvisation by building an emergency radio station in a small trailer. This station can be hauled quickly to any spot where communication equipment is needed.

by local "hams" could carry word to any part of the country.

Equally great have been the contributions of amateurs to the development of radio itself. Working constantly to improve the operation of their own sets they have made thousands of discoveries and devised a multitude of improvements which have been promptly given to the world. Many engineers had declared that the wavelengths below 200 were worthless. However,



World War II gave the electronics industry the greatest stimulus in its history. The result was a tremendous outpouring of radio transmitters and receivers for the armed services, many of which hit the surplus market when the conflict ended. Much of this surplus was acquired by amateur radio operators—and put back into use for the public good as was the receiver in this picture. The photo was taken at Herbert Hoover Junior High School last Spring during a civilian defense drill.

adventurous and persistent amateurs pioneered into the short wave field and solved many of radio's knottiest problems, including daylight transmission of signals, transoceanic transmission, etc.

Only a few years ago there came from the headquarters of the American Radio Relay League a new development—termed "single signal reception"—which was such a marvelous refinement of radio technique that today it is used by the gov-



City officials, at first doubtful of the value of amateur radio communications in emergencies, quickly conceded their error last Spring when local "hams" took part in civilian defense drills. "Handy-talky" apparatus such as this provided contact between district headquarters and a "hospital" in a school building a few blocks away. This speedy communication confirmed what other sections of the country learned long ago in time of fire, flood, earthquake and other catastrophe—that the "ham" is a good man to have around.

ernment, airlines, commercial radio companies, broadcast stations and others.

The president of a large radio manufacturing concern has said: "Every great advancement that has been made in wireless and radio was discovered by amateurs. All that our great scientific laboratories have done and are doing, is merely refining what these young fellows have discovered."

Which is quite a statement and quite a tribute to the "hams"—here and elsewhere.