Orange County Radio Amateurs
Newsletter for February, 2010

an ARRL-affiliated club in Orange County, North Carolina

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Orange County ARES Activated January 30th

Snow and ice falling across Orange County late Friday, January 29th and into Saturday, January 30th resulted in Orange County ARES being ratcheted up to standby mode and actively staffing the radio room at the Hillsborough EOC building.

Our own Laurie Meier (N1YXU), Orange County ARES EC, kept good control of the situation while Ken (KR4FM) and Woody (K3VSA) deployed to the EOC to handle the radio room operations. Patrick (KJ4EWX) was to relieve the first shift operators, but the weather situation improved sufficiently during the course of the day, so further manning of the EOC was called off in the afternoon.

Thanks to all of the operators who either deployed or stood by, ready to be deployed in the event the winter storm became worse, and special thanks that it didn't get worse!

The President's QRM

Reflections of a First-Timer:

I had my first activation in an ARES emergency on Saturday, January 30th. Laurie Meier (N1YXU) had asked that I write-up my observations and lessons learned before they faded away. I thought that I would share them with all of you. Here they are, in a stream of consciousness fashion. The lessons are all obvious in hindsight.

Winter Stinks:

We already knew that, and that is why many of us moved to this area from the great white North. As far as I am concerned, snow is a four-letter word. There is a huge difference between setting up a station during a drill, and setting up when the weather is horrid. Of course, we will only need to do this when the weather is horrid, and should be prepared. Doh!

Specific observations from this weekend:

It was stinking cold.

Cold enough to freeze my butt off. Actually, it wasn't my butt that was in danger of falling off, as there was plenty of natural insulation there. No, the appendages that were falling off were the head, hands, and feet.

1) It is a real pain to be setting up an antenna when freezing rain is falling down your neck. I had my trusty OCRA cap, and that kept the ice off my noggin, but that rain down the neck is really cold.

2) I had gloves, but I needed *magic* gloves. You know, the ones that keep your fingers warm, while letting you twist on tiny screws and radials to the antenna, and give you good grip while aligning mast sections. The gloves that I had let me do one or the other, but never both at the same time.

3) L.L. Bean's "Maine Hunting Shoes" are made too well. I bought my "Maine Hunting Shoes" in 1976. This was when my lovely wife and I had decided that we would spend quality time together camping. (Hi, Hi, Hi). We never did go camping again, but I still have my "Maine Hunting Shoes". I bought the "Maine Hunting Shoes" because they were very highly rated for durability and water-proofing. After 34 years, my "Maine Hunting Shoes" are as water proof as ever, and are still in very good shape. (They should be, now I only wear them on Field Day). Why is this a problem? Because they are in too good of shape to replace. While my "Maine Hunting Shoes" have survived the decades with little change, my feet have not. My feet have grown. My "Maine Hunting Shoes"

are not very well insulated, and this fact was known when I purchased them. The answer was to purchase the "Maine Hunting Shoes" a size larger than needed, in order to leave room for the cushy, warm, wool socks that would keep my feet toasty warm. Alas, the cushy, warm wool socks have gone walkabout over the years, and my feet have grown too large to accommodate them anyway. This means that my feet were very dry, but they were stinking cold.

Did I mention that it was cold?

Let me make some other observations about setting up a station in the cold:

1) When you load up the equipment the night before, and it is cold, all of your equipment gets very cold.

2) When you get to the site, and start setting up, your equipment is still very cold.

3) When you put together the antenna mast in the cold, and the freezing rain is coming out of the sky, the freezing rain freezes on the antenna mast sections, which are very cold. This makes it very difficult to align the mast sections, and to twist them together. Unless you have *magic* gloves (see above), you need to take your gloves off to align and twist the mast sections. This makes your hands very cold. Cold is a four letter word.

4) When you put together the antenna mast sections in the snow, you are likely to get little plugs of snow in the ends of the mast sections. When the plugs of snow go into the mast sections, they are wet. When the mast sections are very cold, the little plugs of snow become little plugs of ice. Ice is very hard. Ice does not move. Ice is a four-letter word.

5) When you put together antenna mast sections in the freezing rain, the freezing rain gets into the joints between the mast sections. The freezing rain then freezes, and is stronger than super glue. This makes it very difficult to disassemble when you want to go home.

6) When you store your coax cable in the car overnight in the cold, it becomes very stiff, and the coil of coax behaves like a little spring. When you take the coiled spring of coax out of the car, and try to lay it out between the antenna, and the EOC door, it tries to get away from you. This is a bad thing if you are trying to keep the coax connector from getting wet from the cold snow or the freezing cold rain. It is nearly impossible to keep both ends of the coax cable dry in this situation. I did not keep both ends of my coax dry in this situation. I did not keep either end of my coax dry in this situation. This means that I had to go get an old Kleenex from the car, and try to get the water out of the coax connection. But it was cold, and the snow/water had frozen. (Because it was cold). Since I did not have the *magic* gloves that would let me warm up the coax, while using the used Kleenex to dry the connection, I had to take my gloves off. This made my hands very cold.

Thank goodness Woody was there. Without Woody, I would not have gotten the antenna

up. Without Woody, I would have perished in the snow. Once Woody arrived, we stood the antenna up, and strung the coax cable to back door of the EOC.

7) Moral: We need to deploy in teams. (But, we already knew that).

Here are my observations about getting the coax into the EOC:

1) It was very cold.

2) The door was blocked by a snow/ice drift.

3) We bashed against the door from the inside, and got it opened.

4) We strung the coax through the door.

5) We could not close the door all the way because of the coax.

6) It was cold.

7) The Captain at the EOC was not very pleased that we had the back door of the EOC open, because it was cold.

8) The Captain at the EOC could not understand why we were stringing the coax through the door when the county had installed a "Silver Box" above the door, which was expressly intended for the Ham Radio guys to string their antennas through, so that the back door could stay closed, in the cold.

9) We told the Captain at the EOC that no one told us about the "Silver Box".

10) Chris Pope joined us. We spent about 10 minutes deciding whether we should locate a ladder, set it up in the snow and freezing rain, find a screwdriver to open the Silver Box, and determine if we could string our coax through.

11) It was cold.

12) We decided to string the coax through the door, and to seal the door with Duck tape.

13) We used Duck tape to tape the coax to the floor.

14) We strung the coax under the door to the radio room. This meant that every time we opened the door, we took the chance of pinching the expensive LMR cable with the door.

15) Moral: We need to get the EOC radio room set up, with a permanent antenna. (But,

we already knew that).

We got the radio to work. The radio worked fine. The radio was the only thing that worked fine:

1) For the third time in a row, my Winlink Station did not work fine. This time, it was the USB to Serial connector. The USB to Serial connector worked fine at home. The USB to Serial connector did not work at the EOC. The USB to Serial connector needed a Windows XP driver that mysteriously disappeared during the night. A search of the Windows PC found thirteen copies of the driver for the USB to Serial connector that the Plug and Play installation said that it needed. None of them worked. The Plug and Play installation wanted to search the Internet for the driver……..

2) The Internet would not work. Everyone in the EOC was able to connect to the Internet, except for me. Kevin at the EOC, the only person who shared the radio room with Woody and me, was very helpful, and made sure that I was using the correct pass-phrase on my wireless connection. My PC would associate with the Access Point, but would not get an IP address. Kevin worked with me for a very long time, and tried multiple things (Kevin is kind of the tech expert for the EOC). Kevin was very helpful. Kevin could not get me connected to the EOC.

3) I was able to connect to a neighbor. The neighbor had an unprotected wireless connection called Default. It showed up with half of one bar for a signal strength. Which means that I could connect for about 2 minutes before the connection would drop. I used it to search the internet. I found many serial drivers for my USB to serial connector. They were all for Windows 98, ME, 2000. (I apparently have a very old USB to Serial cable). There were no drivers for Windows XP. Stink

4) There is another wireless connection that shows up at the EOC. It is much stronger than all of the other connections. It says "Free Public Access" and it is an Ad-Hoc rather than infrastructure connection. I asked Kevin about it. He says nobody uses it. They are afraid to. They think that it comes from the Adam and Eve building, and if they are caught using it, they will be fired. (I made that last part up, it is not true, and Kevin did not say it). I did not use the really strong, "Free Public Access connection. I was afraid to.

5) After about four hours, the Internet connection in the EOC started working. I hadn't changed a thing.

6) Never did get the USB to Serial cable to work at the EOC.

7) I used a different USB to Serial cable when I got home. I could connect to my station fine. I could not connect to Steve Ahlbom's W3AHL-10 station.

8) Moral: Radio technology is robust. The “new” technology is fragile.

Woody carries a bag of plastic spoons:

1) I was prepared for a long stay at the EOC. I had a change of clothes. I had all of my toiletries. I had lots of delicious Nutrisystem diet food.

2) I did not have cutlery.

3) I was at the EOC. I figured that they would have plastic cutlery.

4) The EOC has a big box of plastic knives.

5) The EOC has a microwave.

6) The EOC did not have any plastic spoons.

7) So, I microwaved my delicious Nutrisystem Fettuccini Alfredo for lunch and brought it back into the radio room with my plastic knife.

8) I began to eat with my plastic knife.

9) Woody, seeing my predicament, took pity on me, and reached into his backpack.

10) Woody’s backpack is about 1/3 the size of my duffel bag.

11) Woody pulls out a zip lock bag which is full of plastic spoons, and offers one to me.

12) I take it, and finish my delicious and nutritious Nutrisystem meal.

13) I think that if I had needed a set of 4 all-season radial tires, Woody would have been able to reach into his backpack, and pull them out. Steve Ahlbom is the same way.

14) The folks at the EOC say that they don’t provide any snacks, and that we need to bring our own food. That is only partially true. They have a file cabinet full of snacks. But, they are out of Fritos.

15) Moral: Bring the right stuff, not lots of stuff.

16) Moral: Diets stink.

Was it worth it?

I think that it definitely was. I got to go through a live exercise, setting up the station, and establishing the net, in real-life, stinking conditions. I don't have to worry about that part anymore, and I have stories to tell.

Moral: The real moral of the story is that I needed to get involved, and actually participate in an activation. No amount of studying or listening prepared me for actually arriving on-site in emergency conditions, and operating in real-time. I am very glad for the opportunity to learn this in a "low intensity" emergency, rather than a critical situation.

Finally, I want to thank all the people who supported us during the exercise. Special thanks to Woody (K3VSA), Patrick (KJ4EWX), and Laurie (N1YXU).

OCRA Member Is The New ARRL PIC For NC

One of the last acts of retiring North Carolina ARRL Section Manager Tim Slay (N4IB) was to appoint Raymond "Woody" Woodward (K3VSA) to be the new Public Information Coordinator for the section to replace Bill Morine (N2COP), who was elected to take Tim's place as NC Section Manager.

Woody will be in charge of public relations across the entire state, directing the efforts of about a dozen Public Information Officers there. He immediately established a website to assist with these efforts (http://www.ncarrl-pio.org), which will give the PIOs tools and information to help them and will also provide relevant background material for media professionals.

Woody's appointment means that there are now two OCRA members holding statewide ARRL offices, the other being our new Section Manager, Bill Morine, who has a family membership in OCRA.

-Woody K3VSA

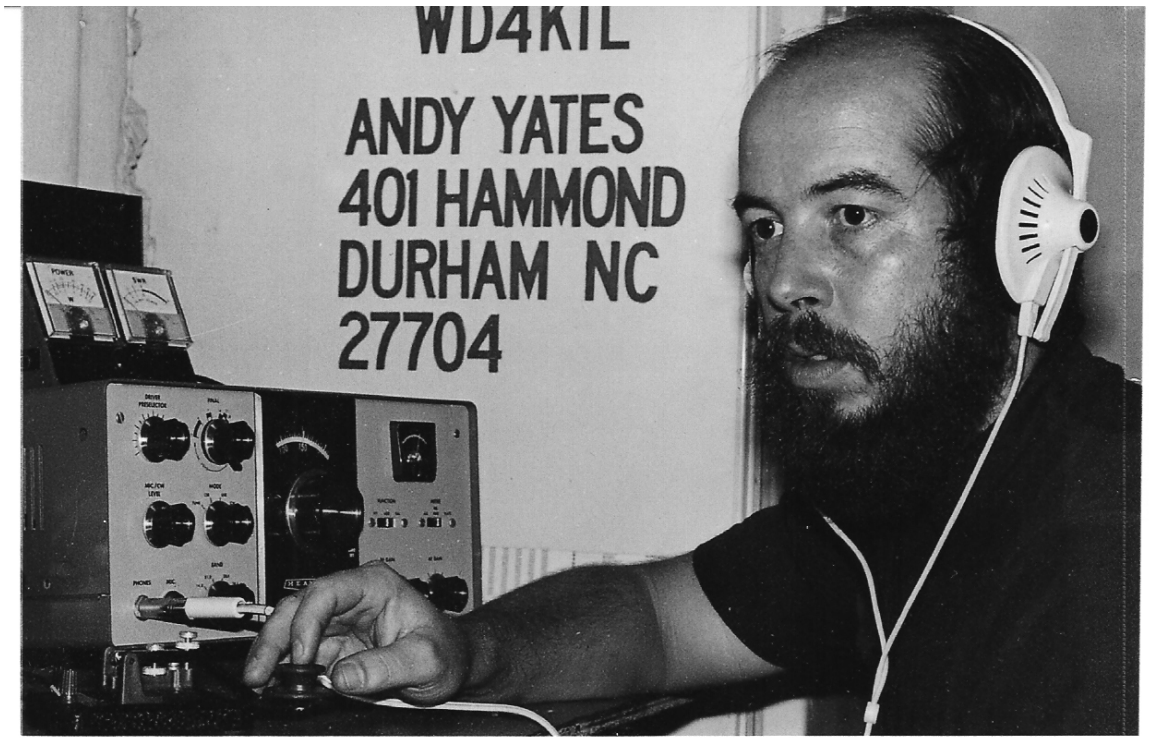
The Next OCRA Meeting

The next OCRA Meeting will take place on Monday, March 8th at 1930L (7:30PM), as usual at the Orange County EOC Building in Hillsborough. In the meantime, join many of us for Saturday morning breakfasts at the Hillsborough Bojangles on South Churton Street beginning about 0930L (9:30AM). See these and other upcoming events on the calendar portion of the OCRA website:

http://www.ncocra.org

-Woody K3VSA

QSL Card Of The Month: W4KIL



This month's QSL card of distinction shows a -then- younger Andy Yates (W4KIL), diligently working the controls of a -now- older radio. The transceiver was a Heathkit all tube rig, and I believe Andy told us he built it himself. These “hot water” radios have proven to be solid performers that have stood the test of time. So has Andy.

Andy said that fuzzy look he sported was a result of an agreement that he and a coworker made to both grow the full beards. Why did he shave it off? "I got rid of it when my friend and I were together at work one day, and somebody sneered, "There go the Smith Brothers!" [Editor's note to young whippersnappers: Back in "the day" the leading cough drops were the Smith Brothers brand, and featured prominently on the package was a drawing of the two fully bearded brothers. Smith Brothers cough drops had probably been made since the turn of the century, and that would be the turn of the Twentieth Century, by the way, so they were iconic. They tasted pretty good, too.]

vy 73 de Woody (K3VSA)
OCRA Secretary