Reviewing Emergency Nets
Chapter Three
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Nets in general are designed to allow for the smooth flow of information. The more hectic things become the more important that effective net operations become. There are few situations that call for smooth and effective communications more than in a disaster. Concise and accurate information to support all efforts in recovery is vital. Thus understanding net operations is a top priority to all that engage in communications support.

There are two types of nets when it comes to the control system. These are "Directed" (formal) and "Open" (informal) nets. In the directed net, all permission to transmit is given through the Net Control. The net control station (NTS) call the net into session and sets the mood for the net. If the net control station appears relaxed and gives the appearance that everything is going fine, it allows the rest of the net to relax and be less tense. In the formal net the NCS will usually call the net into session and will ask for emergency traffic. This is the highest precedence for messages or traffic. When a person enters a net with the announcement that he or she has Emergency traffic all other activities comes to a halt until the emergency situation is resolved. What constitutes an emergency is that life or property is at risk. Under most circumstances people will enter a net by announcing their call phonetically using the ITU alphabet. When holding a piece of emergency traffic the person may just announce "Emergency" and at this point the net control might announce, Everyone standby, "Emergency" go ahead. The station would then announce their call and the nature of their emergency. Everyone not involved in participating in the emergency communications would observe radio silence until the net resumes with normal net business.

The second type of precedence is that of "Priority". This precedence should be the most common heard in an emergency or tactical net. This is a message that has "time value". This means that the message must be delivered within a reasonable time or the content would become worthless. If you are requesting meals or bedding that is needed for the current day or next meal, it has no value if it is delivered two days later. Many messages that fall in this category are sent with a "Routine" listing when in fact they should be "priority". I have been in disasters (the Johnstown Flood in the late 1970s when the net would not accept "Routine traffic". Remember that the designation is not designed to note how important traffic might be. It just is a designation for "time value" traffic.

Another type of traffic is Health and Welfare (H&W) and is usually considered less important than Emergency and Priority. It is hard to imagine the kind of anxiety that family members are experiencing when they realize that someone they love was

right in the middle of the impact area and they have not been heard from since the disaster struck the area. It is vital to supply information concerning loved ones in the midst of disaster. This is one role that the SATERN network attempts to provide. Many SouthBears members also belong to the SATERN system.

Routine is just what the name applies and is the least important and the last to be handled by a net. It usually is the kind of message that finds its way through the National Traffic System (NTS) today. It is sometimes referred to as "ham spam". It gives hams practice in traffic handling but has little value to the addressee. You generally find traffic of this type on directed nets. Twenty or thirty years ago these message were very common and delivered to hams and non-hams alike. With the advent of telemarketing this type of message has become less welcome by the general public.

The second type net is an "open or informal" type net and has no net control. This is little more than a "round table" found everyday on many crowded ham frequencies. Each ham in an open net just listens to make sure that no one is using the frequency prior to making a call. These type nets may be used during a resource net for hams that are on their way to an assignment or staging area. This net would be used to coordinate the traveling hams on their way to where they will be setting up and operating. If an "Open Net" begins to get very busy, it will need to move into becoming a directed net in order to cut down on confusion and making the net more efficient.

We will now look at how a net is handled. The (NCS) Net Control Station is totally in change and everything flows though the NCS. He or she may read a preamble but may choose not to do so. This preamble will usually set forth the purpose of the net and rules that the net will operate under. The net might open in this way. "This is the Virginia SouthBears net. This net is now in session. This is a directed net. All stations checking into this net please do so by using standard ITU Phonetics. Please give your call slowly, followed by your name and location. Net control is Whiskey Four Golf, Hotel, Sierra, and my name is Glen. I am located at the SouthBears Command center located at Disasterville Virginia. We are looking for check-ins with emergency traffic only. Those with emergency traffic please call net control at this time." Nothing heard, anyone with priority traffic please call W4GHS. Nothing heard, we will now take regular check-ins. Stations from Franklin County please check in now. Those from Roanoke County call now. Those from Henry County call net control. Do we have any relays for stations not heard? The reason for taking check-ins by counties is to spread them out and avoid "doubles" during check-in. Another way of avoiding "doubling" is to have hams check in by using the last letter of their call sign. An example is "All stations with the last letter of your call ending with the letter of Alpha through Echo, A through E, please call net control at this time and give your name and location. It is vital that all

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communicators be able to give their call with ITU phonetics. This should become second nature to you.

The following is the ITU alphabet.

ALPHA	MIKE	YANKEE
BRAVO	NOVEMBER	ZULU
CHARLIE	OSCAR	
DELTA	PAPA	
ECHO	QUEBEC	
FOXTROT	ROMEO	
GOLF	SIERRA	
HOTEL	TANGO	
INDIA	UNIFORM	
JULIET	VICTOR	
KILO	WHISKEY	
LIMA	X-RAY	

When you have made a decision to leave the net and someone is not going to operate using your tactical call (such as First Baptist Shelter) then let Net Control know that you are leaving the net. When you return you need to check back in with Net Control and let him know that you have returned. If NCS has sent you to another frequency to pass some traffic, when you return to the net, announce, "recheck". Net Control will say, "go ahead recheck". He knows that he has you on his list so he will check your information from your earlier check-in.

The use of "Pro-Words" can help to keep the net uniform and reduce the use of detailed descriptions.

PRO-WORDS

To further enhance effective communications, we need to become acquainted with several pro-words. The term "pro-word" is a contraction for "procedural word," and the pro-words we'll be using were developed and still in use by US military forces. While the use of these pro-words may, at first, seem awkward (and, in some cases, outdated), once you get used to using them, you'll find that they will dramatically enhance your station's ability to communicate - both as a transmitter and a receiver of information - more efficiently.

THIS IS: This pro-word is self-explanatory. THIS IS@ should precede your call sign in every transmission during a DIRECTED NET operation. For example,

W9FX replies to the net control station (NCS), K7JAD: ATHIS IS WHISKEY NINER FOXTROT X-RAY.
ROGER, etc.

OVER: This pro-word is used at the end of a transmission when additional communications is expected with another party. For example, Harry, W9IB, is communicating with Pat, WW9E. Here's Harry's transmission: WHISKEY WHISKEY NINER ECHO, THIS IS WHISKEY NINER INDIA BRAVO. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING FURTHER, PAT? OVER. Harry's use of the pro-word OVER indicates that he expects a transmission from
Pat. An NCS asking for check ins to a net would also use this pro-word to end his/her transmission: ADDITIONAL STATIONS FOR THIS NET, OVER.

OUT: This pro-word is used to indicate that no further communication is expected from the other party. Using the above example, Pat, WW9E replies: THIS IS WHISKEY WHISKEY NINER ECHO. NOTHING FURTHER. OUT. The pro-word OUT is similar to hanging up the telephone - the conversation between the parties has ended. This pro-word would also be used by an NCS to terminate net operations: ALL STATIONS, THIS IS WHISKEY NINER INDIA BRAVO. THIS NET IS SECURED. OUT.

ROGER: This pro-word means that you understood the transmission of another station. This is not to be confused with answering a question in the affirmative. If you are asked a question and the answer is in the affirmative, use YES, or AFFIRMATIVE - not ROGER!

WAIT: There are two forms of use of this pro-word. WAIT, or WAIT, OVER is used when an operator experiences a brief delay. For example, if you drop your pencil or have to reach into a drawer to retrieve a piece of paper or pen, transmit the pro-word WAIT or WAIT, OVER. The transmitter can be either be unkeyed or remain on the air during the delay. If, however, the delay is anticipated to be longer than a few seconds, transmit the pro-words WAIT, OUT. Circumstance that might dictate the latter use of this pro-word include a visitor in the radio room, a telephone call, or other disturbance. In any event, the pro-word WAIT is similar to putting someone you're talking to on the telephone on hold. Just as you must take the person on the phone off hold to conclude your conversation, don't forget to finish your communication with the station to whom you transmitted WAIT. If you are not acting as NCS and you've used the pro-words WAIT, OUT, be sure to once again obtain the permission of the NCS to resume your communications with the other station. By using the pro-word OUT, you terminated whatever communications were earlier taking place. "WAIT, OUT," releases the frequency for use by the NCS and other net members.

SAY AGAIN: In a perfect world, all communications would be understood by all

parties on the first attempt. Alas, the world is not perfect (nor is 20 meter propagation), and repeats or "fills" of transmitted information will be required. The pro-words ASAY AGAIN tell the other operator that you need a fill or repeat of information that was previously transmitted. If you are copying formal traffic, other pro-words may follow. For example, ASAY AGAIN ALL AFTER xxxx tells the other operator that you need him or her to repeat everything in the message after a certain word or group of figures (xxxx). For example, you might transmit SAY AGAIN ALL AFTER SCHOOL, OVER. If you only missed a word or two or a short phrase, you can transmit the pro-words SAY AGAIN FROM xxxx TO xxxx. This tells the other operator that you need all the information contained in the message FROM the word (xxxx) TO the word (xxxx). For example, SAY AGAIN FROM ELEPHANT TO MONKEY, OVER.

FIGURES: Routinely, in handling messages, we encounter groups of numbers B telephone numbers, latitude and longitude indications, street addresses, and so forth. In order to let the operator on the other end of the communication pipeline know that what we're about to transmit is a group of numbers, or, a mixed group containing both numbers and letters but beginning with a number, we use the pro-word FIGURES. Here's how it works: We need to transmit this telephone number: 800-3743-7279. We transmit that information as FIGURES EIGHT ZERO ZERO DASH THREE SEVEN FOUR THREE DASH SEVEN TWO SEVEN NINE.

I SPELL: Here again, we rely on the International Phonetic Alphabet. Many words in the English language sound alike but have entirely different meanings. To, too, and two, for example, sound exactly the same. In order to make certain that the recipient of information understands what word we're using, when we encounter words we cannot pronounce, words that sound like other words, or uncommon words, we phonetically spell them out. In order to use this pro-word, we SAY THE WORD, SPELL THE WORD PHONETICALLY, and then, SAY THE WORD AGAIN. Here's how it sounds in practice: I AM GOING TO I SPELL TANGO OSCAR TO SEND YOU TWO I SPELL TANGO WHISKEY OSCAR TWO FORMS COMMA TOO I SPELL TANGO OSCAR OSCAR TOO PERIOD MIXED GROUPS: You will, from time to time, encounter groups of letters and numbers that, taken together, represent a single group. Ham call signs are a very good example. The rule for transmitting mixed groups by voice is very simple: If the group starts with a letter, use the pro-word I SPELL. For example: I SPELL WHISKEY FIVE ALPHA BRAVO. If the group starts with a number, use the pro-word FIGURES. Example: AFIGURES SIX ONE FOUR SIX ALPHA.
CORRECTION: We all, occasionally, make errors in our transmissions. When an error is made, the pro-word CORRECTION should be communicated, followed by the correct information. Example: THIS IS WHISKEY FIVE CORRECTION WHISKEY EIGHT ALPHA INDIA. OVER.

The use of these pro-words is very similar to what you would hear with a military or

MARS net and also is the recommended protocol for SATERN and SouthBEARS nets.

If you are ask to be an alternate Net Control and you agree, you have an important role from that moment forward. You need to record check-ins and if people are sent off frequency to handle traffic you need to track this information. If net control needs to shift the net to your control, you have a list of all those on the net and it will not require the Net Control to read you all his records on the air and take up valuable time. If the net control has equipment problems, and suddenly leaves the air, then all the information and roster that he is holding will not be available if you didn't record this information along with Net Control.   If you are alternate on an HF net the primary may ask you if you have relays from time to times, especially if you are separated a long way from the Net Control. You may hear stations that he is unable to copy. When you are ask to take Net Control from the NCS you would do so by announcing "This is Whiskey Four Golf Hotel Sierra, I an Net Control". At this point you would then continue with the net.

The forms for messages and logging are an important part of nets and will be covered in a separate chapter.