

RESCUE ON UNCOMPAGHRE PEAK

Bob Witte, KB0CY

Something happened on the way to Uncompahgre Peak on August 8, 1992.

Around noon, my brother, my two nephews and I made it to the summit and had just signed the log. I called on 146.52 and contacted Chris, NQ5V, who was somewhere to the east of me (Creede, I think). This must be his summer location, since his callbook address is Texas. We talked about the trail up Uncompahgre, since he was interested in hiking it.

After I signed clear with NQ5V and was about to start down the mountain, a teenage boy came up to me and said he had been sent to "find the guy with the radio" because a girl had been hit by a rock down below and was hurt. I am not sure how they knew I had a radio, other than I used it once on the way up the trail. The story seemed rather sketchy and I was skeptical but asked NQ5V to standby on frequency because we may have a medical emergency. At that time, Arnold, W7JRC, from Cedaredge, CO, came on frequency and said he had a phone nearby. (NQ5V did not have a phone available.) A second, older teenager came up the trail with more information. He said he was a pre-med student and had search and rescue experience. He had more detailed info which made the story more clear. At this time, I concluded that we had a real emergency and asked W7JRC to call the authorities. I handed my HT to the older teenager and had him describe the victim's condition to W7JRC. W7JRC had some trouble contacting the police, but eventually got through to the Ouray County Sheriff's office. (It turned out we were in Hinsdale County, but we did not know that at the time.)

Jim, NR5Y (also close to Creede, I think) came on frequency and said that he was close to a telephone. I was not always able to communicate with NR5Y, so NQ5V relayed to NR5Y. Since W7JRC was having trouble with getting the telephone call through, I asked NR5Y to also try to place a call. He called the Mineral County Sheriff, who relayed to Hinsdale county. All this time, I was moving down the mountain to try to get closer to the victim without losing my radio contact. About this time, my HT battery went dead, so I switched to my spare. (Good thing I had one!) As I moved onto the saddle below Uncompahgre, I lost contact with W7JRC and contact with NQ5V got much worse, but usable. About this time, Doug, N0LAY, came on the air and his signal was very strong at my location which allowed me to stay on low power and conserve my HT batteries. N0LAY apparently came on the air in

response to a call from the Hinsdale County Sheriff. N0LAY also had a radio which was on the sheriff's frequency and relayed information from me to the sheriff's dispatch.

I had not proceeded down any further because I was certain that I would lose radio contact with N0LAY. The victim had several people with her that had First Aid training and was about 1000 feet below me at the bottom of a cirque. I sent the older teenager back down to the victim with instructions to signal me as to her condition. We both had signal whistles—two whistles meant her condition was the same (stable), three whistles meant her condition had deteriorated. After I got the two whistles back, I felt like things were going to be OK.

About that time, N0LAY relayed that an ambulance had been dispatched to the trailhead and a search and rescue person was on the way up the trail with a trail bike. Also, a helicopter had been dispatched from Montrose. It took us a little while to communicate to the sheriff where the victim was, but we had a pretty good topo map, so we eventually gave them an accurate fix on the location. As I was listening to N0LAY relay, I realized that my Kenwood TH-77A could receive most police frequencies. N0LAY provided me with the frequency and I programmed it into the HT, scanning between 146.52 and the sheriff's frequency. This allowed us to listen in on what was going on. In fact, many times I was clearly hearing the various parties while they were having trouble communicating.

The S&R guy on the trail bike made it to the accident scene without us noticing him. He had parked his bike about half a mile away from us and had scrambled down to the victim. The first time I was aware of his position was when he transmitted from the accident site. He confirmed that the girl was pretty banged up, but stable, and needed a helicopter ride out. About this time, the sheriff's dispatch reported that the helicopter was about 5 minutes out (I think it turned out to be more like 15 minutes away). Soon the helicopter came up on the sheriff's frequency and I could hear the S&R guy coordinating with the helicopter pilot. The two-seater helicopter landed and they put the girl in the second seat. Apparently she was stable enough to walk to the helicopter with some assistance. The alternative was to put her outside the chopper in a litter. The helicopter lifted off and set back down a few minutes later near the ambulance which was near the trailhead. The two-seater

chopper was not a medical evacuation helicopter and the plan was that Flight-for-Life from Grand Junction would pick up the victim at the ambulance location. It turned out that Flight-for-Life was unavailable so they took the victim to a hospital by ambulance (to a local clinic, then Gunnison, I think).

We stayed on the ridge until the chopper headed for home, then we did the same. On the way down, the S&R guy on the trail bike caught up with us and we talked about the accident. He said the girl lost some teeth, had facial cuts, internal bleeding and swelling in the face, but was in stable condition. He said that without the radio report that they would be just getting the initial call at the time he was heading home. That is, we saved about 5 hours on the response time with amateur radio.

I have carried my HT on every 14er hike I have ever done and had considered the possibility of using it for emergency communications. I guess I never gave it too much thought because people venturing into the back country need to have a self-sufficient attitude. That means being prepared and preventing or handling any emergency situation on your own. But the unexpected happens, and here I was in the middle of a medical emergency. It certainly has caused me to take this emergency communications thing more seriously.

Things I learned that day:

- * Always carry an extra HT battery (or two)
- * Always carry a decent portable antenna (more than a rubber duck)
- * Always carry a good topo map, even if you don't need it to follow the trail.
- * Make note of what county you are hiking in when in unfamiliar parts of the state. This aids in getting to the right Sheriff's office. (This is important because the person you contact via radio is likely to be two or three counties away.)
- * My signal whistle (which has caused considerable abuse from a few hiking companions) is actually useful.
- * Extended coverage receive is very useful in emergencies. (I am still thinking about extended transmit—I clearly could have used it in this case.)

I was very pleased that everyone reacted quickly but in a professional manner. The radio amateurs all helped out when they could but stayed out of the way when appropriate. I am sure we can find some things that could have been done better, but I felt like things went well overall.

FCC RULES PROPOSAL COMMENTS

ARRL

Attn: Dave Sumner, Secretary

I forgot to talk to you about this problem at the LA Convention, and I have been getting some concerned calls on it from ATV repeater owners. The audio and video Space Shuttle retransmissions may be endangered by the revised part 97.113.

As I read Docket 92-136 on Page 64 of the Sept. 92 QST, paragraph 4e, the Shuttle cannot be retransmitted on a "regular basis", and only "as an incident to normal amateur radio communications." Most all Shuttle retransmissions are regular on known dedicated repeaters. Many individual amateurs and schools enjoy the Shuttle video and audio because they know which repeaters will have it any time there is a mission. This is especially important for those involved with SAREX. Is there some wording that can separate the Shuttle communications from the weather broadcasts as far as regular basis?

We also have been taking 97.113 exception to retransmit the Shuttle communications to supersede the prohibition to transmit music. Music is sometimes part of the Shuttle communications and it is not practical to insure that the music audio will be shut off quick enough. It is not unlike the problem that digipeaters have had.

I talked to Jay Holliday about it because I worked with him on getting the original Space Shuttle audio and video retransmission waiver as a member of the JPL Radio Club. He may be talking to you about it when he gets back from a trip. Meanwhile, he suggested you might know who to mention this to and is handling the comments for the League.

Thanks,

Tom O'Hara, W6ORG, TA