

EVALUATION

“OPERATION VICTOR ECHO” – 2017

Poor propagation and logistical/technical issues were the main disruptive factors affecting the smooth operation of this training exercise.

One of the main operators in the scenario did not have a battery to power his equipment, neither had a mains power supply, so that prevented that station from functioning on the HF bands, that station however had VHF communications and was able to remain in the loop. That station, operated by J88NEB from Rose Hall has a functioning renewable energy system that only needs a battery operate.

Propagation plays an important part with regard to HF communications and despite being on air and making calls before 5:00 AM, the first station from Tobago -9Z4W was heard at 05:25, 9Z4DT at 5:30, J69CU at 5:49, J88NAC at 5:42 and J88FP at 5:59. Despite the fact that J88NAC was at SOV (which served as a communications command center) for the scheduled starting time, there was no one present to deliver the equipment which was in safe keeping, so that also accounted for a late start. After the exercise began, it flowed according to the plan.

The exercise started in earnest at 6:00AM, with J88NGU located in Georgetown making the initial call that “the volcano was acting up”. Thereafter, the scenario unfolded as planned until 07:30 when propagation began to deteriorate. However, despite being a mainly HF activity, communications continued on the VHF band, but only in certain parts of the island. Stations in Fancy could communicate directly with hams in St. Lucia via their South repeater, while stations in the South of St. Vincent were able to communicate with each other using the VHF repeater in Bequia. By the time propagation failed, most of the scenario had been completed.

Lessons learned, NEVER rely on only one means/mode of communications, always have a redundant system for both HF and VHF/UHF. If possible, always

have at least three portable stations which can be set up for the Prime Minister, Governor General and Commissioner of Police so that these officials can communicate with each other following a national emergency which cripples the telecommunications providers.

Summary: All who participated did so professionally, the announcements were regular and the ladies who read the announcements were confident during their delivery.

Going forward: For the duration of the hurricane season it is strongly suggested that a mini field exercise be conducted once per month. We will use these activities to experiment with antenna types including NVIS so that we can identify the best type of antenna for our terrain and propagation vagaries.

With regard to batteries, the RRL does NOT have the financial resources to purchase 12 volt deep cycle batteries, much less the more efficient LiFePo batteries. We will have to approach corporate society for assistance. Batteries provide an uninterrupted service during domestic power outages, which is absolutely necessary during an emergency.

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