

# Radio operators took to air

## Aided rescue at Ground Zero

By Michaelangelo Conte  
Journal staff writer

**W**hen the collapse of the World Trade Center towers disrupted area communications, one Jersey City resident radioed his troops — literally — and they all sprung into action.

Members of the Jersey City Amateur Radio Club banded together the day of the Sept. 11 disaster to assist in the relief efforts by helping emergency units communicate between Jersey City and Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan.

The destruction of Twin Towers wiped out the antennas mounted on them, crippling area communications and hampering signals from rescue units.

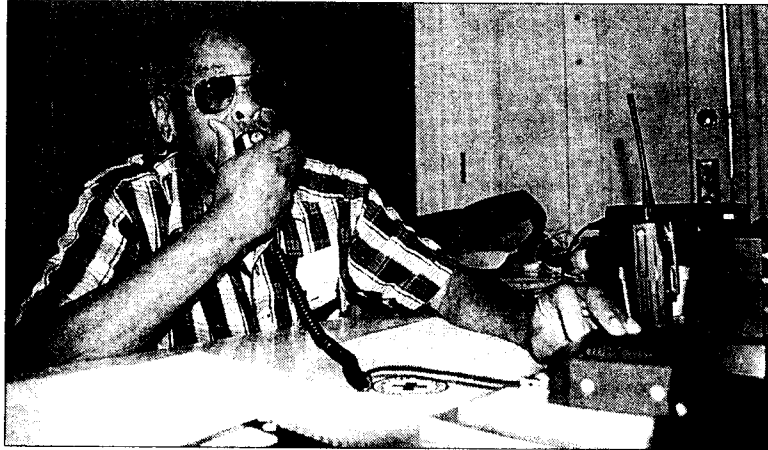
Since many radios in emergency vehicles and hand-held units transmit weak signals, they often sent their signal to the WTC antenna where it was then amplified and repeated with enough strength to cover a large area.

Unlike this very centralized system, amateur radio has a widespread network of repeaters, allowing continued communication in times when centralized systems are knocked out.

That's where the 35-member club was able to help.

John Hunter, a member of the radio club who retired from a career in avionics electronics, heard of the disaster from car radio and jumped into action.

"I knew there would be a tremendous impact on communications so I called Stan Daniel (a club member and



Journal photo by Alan Leon

**JOHN HUNTER**, of the Jersey City Amateur Radio Club in the Greenville area, has been volunteering his time and radio knowledge to help with communications due to the World Trade Center disaster.

local sports coach) and we gathered radio equipment, pipes, solder, tools, anything we needed," said Hunter. "I went to Hoboken and bought a VHF radio for \$259 and we went to the Hudson County Red Cross and started setting up."

Hunter said Club President Richard Krajewski and Red Cross worker Mike Janeczko, who "risked his life putting the antenna on the roof," helped the club get on the air before 11 a.m. that first day.

From a cramped room at the rear of the Red Cross building on Greenville Avenue near Old Bergen Road, club members took long shifts on the air — organizing the influx of food and emergency workers by communicating with workers at Ground Zero.

They steered trucks of milk, medical equipment, shovels and goggles to relief areas and put out relayed calls for equipment from Ground Zero. They

also coordinated the numerous emergency workers who drove toward New York — often from long distances — while also identifying HAM radio operators who radioed saying, "I know how to operate a HAM radio, tell me where I should go."

HAM is the term given to an operator of an amateur radio.

HAM operators must pass a test and are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission. The radio operating at the Red Cross can transmit about 40 miles. HAM operators are barred from using their radios for profit and from broadcasting to the public, according to the club.

"The whole reason HAM operators exist and are licensed is to help in times of need," said Krajewski. "The main message taught is that 'you are a telephone for emergency services.' We don't run the show, we are there to help."

"It was frightening at first because there was so much that needed to be done," he added. "To help in any way is gratifying, but there was so much more that could have been done if we had more people. There is a crying need for more operators and we would have felt better if we could have done more."

Club members Hunter, Daniels, Krajewski, Claudio Perez, Max Samad and Brian Fernandez have all played key roles during the disaster, often spending long hours at the radio and taking naps in the tiny radio room. Hunter worked 48 hours straight from the time of setting up the station, said Krajewski.

Mike Santopietro, Health and Safety Director for the Hudson County Red Cross said members of the agency contacted him about a month before the attack searching for a place to set up a radio and hold meetings. The group had actually planned to have its first meeting just two days prior to the attacks.

"That was OK with us and we thought they would be useful to have around," said Santopietro. "As soon as the attack happened, we lost our radios because we were on the Trade Center antenna. That morning they showed up and set up their radio. They have been a tremendous help."

But while club members kept busy operating the radios, they were grieving in silence. Club member Bob Cirri, a lieutenant with the Port Authority Police Department, is still missing.

"I was OK as long as I was on the radio working, but when I got home and saw some TV, I just fell apart and cried," said Hunter.

Anyone seeking to learn about operating amateur radios or becoming a club member should call the Hudson County Red Cross at 433-3100 or E-mail [jcarc@qsl.net](mailto:jcarc@qsl.net).