

Specs history by Walter Read, W6ASH

The American Radio Relay League, Inc.

Leadership Official

W6ASH DEC at large

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To the SVECS "REPEATER",

Your editor and my old time friend, Don Gaubatz, has asked me to give a history of SPECS. I presume that I have been one of the most active for the most years so I'll try to cover it. The forerunner of SPECS was the Palo Alto Civil Defense Net. W6DU (ex W6JWD) who is known worldwide for his DX achievements, recently gave me a brief sketch of the group which became active about 1952. In those days most of the two meter gear was homebrew or military surplus, modified. In 1953 this group simulated a large disaster drill. I note that one member of that group, W6UCE, Hank Martin, is still an active participant in SPECS although he has passed up any appointments. (35 years). W6DU was active in SPECS at least until 1975. (21 years). In 1957 when I, W6ASH, came to the area I met the EC, K6BBF, on the air in August on 146 MHz. He invited me to join the CD group which I did. Between that time and 1960 we participated in various drills and Simulated Emergency Tests. (SET). Usually there were four or five of us. We conducted a net on 146 MHz every Monday night at 8PM rain or shine, holidays included. This frequency and time continued right up until Oct. 27, 1979 when the SPECS repeater came on the air on 145.27 MHz. The time did not change. For three months W6ASH/R was located at the home of W6ASH using his HT for a receiver and an FT227 as a transmitter. After this a permanent repeater was installed on the roof of the El Camino Hospital where it has been ever since. In the sixties, using AM and crystal controlled transmitters we

would call CQ and then tune the band for a response. Growth of the net was slow since there were few hams on two meters. During one of our board meetings in 1960 I suggested that we call the net SPECS. It was approved and it has stuck.

In 1966 our EC, K6BBF, succumbed and I, as the AEC, was appointed EC for Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills. Every time I contacted a new ham on the band I invited him to join SPECS. Even then growth was slow. Jim Lomasney, WA6NIL was one of these. He joined in February 1965. As you know, he is now one of the top ECs in the SCV Section. From my SPECS log, as NCS, I note that I welcomed WV6ADN, Joe, to the net. Joe has participated over the years in most SPECS activities and still regularly checks in to the Los Altos section as WA6ADN. (He joined Nov. 2 1959 -- 30 years ago.). The SPECS net was listed in the 1961 ARRL Net Directory. In the period between 1965 and 1970 SPECS was able to install antennas at the following locations: El Camino Hospital, Mountain View EOC, Palo Alto EOC, Palo Alto Medical Clinic, Stanford Hospital and the Electronic Museum in Los Altos. In the meantime Santa Clara County Communications joined us and installed antennas. We had installed an antenna at the Palo Alto Red Cross prior to 1960.

A SPECS telephone tree was prepared and every member of SPECS was given a specific assignment to one of the agencies in our area. ie: Hospital, Police, Fire, Red Cross etc. Each agency and the ECs and AECs were given the SPECS Emergency Plan. The plan contained the following details for each agency: Person in charge, Location of antenna terminal and radio equipment, Amateurs assigned and their phone numbers. A single cover page described the coverage area, the organization, (SPECS), the purpose, the duties of the EC and AEC, the frequencies, the procedure and the supplies to be brought by the amateur. From 1966 onward SPECS always participated in the SET. My

files show years and number of participants as follows: '66-8, '68-15, '69-22, '70-27, '73-35, '74-40, '77-55, '79-60, '80-76 (15 cities and five counties). You can see how SPECS grew. Growth was phenomenal after W6ASH/R came on.

In the period between 1966 and 1980, W6ASH seemed to be the Palo Alto Red Cross contact when requests for Health and Welfare information were needed. An example of this was during the Alaskan Earthquake, 26 March 1964. The gave my telephone number to the Palo Alto Times newspaper and when it hit the street at 4PM my phone rang continuously from then until midnight and all the next day, Easter. People from all over Northern California called. I put out a call for help on 146 MHz and K6ZVC, W6KIN, K6YOL and K6MOB, SPECS members, responded immediately. Each of them took a shift to help with the telephone and the paperwork. 1000 messages passed through us that weekend on CW and Teletype.

Other requests for H and W, (DWI), from the Palo Alto Red Cross follow showing the time involved and number of inquiries:

- Italian Quake 8 3 days
- Alviso Flood '81 -- 3 weeks
- Pescadero Flood '83 -- 22 days
- Stanford Olympics '84 10 days
- Mexican Quake Oct, '85 3 weeks
- Eureka Quake Nov, '80 2 days
- Alaska Boat Fire 2 days
- Nicaragua Quake 20 3 days
- Santa Cruz Flood '83 6 days
- Coalinga Quake '83 10 days
- Palo Alto Flood '83 1 day
- Pesticide Spray '81 1 week
- Wichita Falls Tornado 3 days
- and many others

NOTE: In these National and International disasters we participants almost always learn new methods, procedures, systems and tricks used by those at the other end. I feel that too much

emphasis is placed on VHF in our emergency work. HF was used in almost all of the above. We should develop a team of HF operators and train them to interface with our VHF/UHF system.

Other SPECS activities:

For the very first CDF-VIP Red Flag Patrol, SPECS furnished 20 amateurs on July 4, 1981. They have continued to participate right up to this time. From 1973 to 1978 SPECS handled the March of Dimes communication between Sunnyvale and Stanford University. SPECS was invited to participate in one of the first MEDEX drills conducted by Dr. Alexander in 1972. My files show SPECS participation in two MEDEX drills per year starting in 1975 and ending in 1982 when I ceased keeping a record. These were conducted by Dr. Rush and the County OES.

In November 1981 I requested relief from running SPECS alone. I was appointed DEC and later DEC at large at which time I appointed four new ECs to replace me. They were: WA6LIJ, Los Altos, WA6ROM Mountain View, KJ6N Palo Alto and N6IIU (ex W8RPA) Stanford. KJ6N moved and was replaced by WA6NIL in Palo Alto.

The SET, MEDEX and other events are reported by the new ECs and I do not have a file on them but SPECS is still in there hammering away.

There was a need in 1980 for another net South of SPECS territory. I coached WB6LVN, MAC, in methods for setting up a new system with a weekly net later to become SVECS. However, he lacked time for it so Bill, WB6OML, took some coaching from me and with the help of many others has developed a real up and coming system. Both of these systems currently have more than 300 members.

My appointment as DEC at large is unique. It gives me no responsibility and calls me a consultant and advisor. I am happy,

since now I am free to travel anywhere at any time and not worry about SPECS or SVECS because I know they are in there pitching.

73 de Walt, W6ASH

Transcribed by Jim Thornton KE6SZJ from a copy received from the author, Walter Read, W6ASH. Original was on ARRL letterhead and signed by Walt. Walt's address was omitted from this version.