

The article posted to the WARTS web page, A Baptism by Water, is a synopsis of the beginning of the Columbia Basin Net, originally known as the Columbia River Net. However, the trauma suffered by many families is not told.

The series of floods began at the junction of the Yakima and Columbia River where the Richland sewage disposal plant went under water. As the crest reached Richland I had the opportunity to fly over the area. At the junction of the rivers and the entrance to Richland stood a little red barn. All that was visible was a rooster weather vane protruding from the water with the barn beneath the surface.

We had dinner at a restaurant situated at the junction of the Yakima and Columbia a few days before the flood. It was now under water.

Thirty years later we ate in that same restaurant which brought back the realization that this can happen again. We noted the watermarks still on the ceiling.

At that time I was employed by the Atomic Energy Commission and stationed at the Richland airport, there was tremendous concern about the yard waste that was being flooded and the possibility that the Columbia might become contaminated.

For the next three days following the peak flooding I operated Ham Radio from a military tent stationed on a high bank of the Columbia. 1500 messages were originated and all signed by military or civilian officials. In the year of 1948 WARTS handled an average of 30 messages a day. My BPL certificate received for those three days hangs in a frame in our hamshack.

Tom Nelson, usually acted as CBN NCS and along with myself realized that the biggest potential for flooding was in Oregon as the crest reached the coast. Vanport was flooded and back up the River the main street of Kennewick was underwater. Even the South entrance to Richland was under water. In order to drive from Richland to Kennewick one had to take a 65 mile detour up through the Horseheavens.

The Oregon Emergency Net cooperated, as did the WARTS, in handling traffic and both were in 24 hour operation. The Columbia Basin Net then was considered to be part of the OEN whereas we met half an hour before OEN and used 3980 as our primary frequency.

When the waters had subsided Tom Nelson and myself received commendations from the Atomic Energy Commission and Harry Cramer who updated his predictions hourly, received a General Electric award and the new Richland High School was named in his honor.

A few weeks after the water had subsided I was engaged in replacing the intercom system in the Administration Building. Crawling under the building I was looking for the one inch diameter hole in the floor that had passed the old intercom cable. As I found it I could hear voices above. Naturally I listened.

The overheard discussion involved the potential for another similar flood disaster and the effort made by volunteers such as the Ham operators. Soon it was agreed to order 250 Motorola 'lunch box' transceivers, state of the art at that time. The purchase would be classified as Top Secret.

I scooted out from under the building ran into the office of the Secretary and asked to use the telephone. I called my boss, F.J.

McHale who was in the next room and said, "Mac, when you order those Motorola transceivers could you add three or four for us out here at the airport?"

73,
Harry/W7JWJ