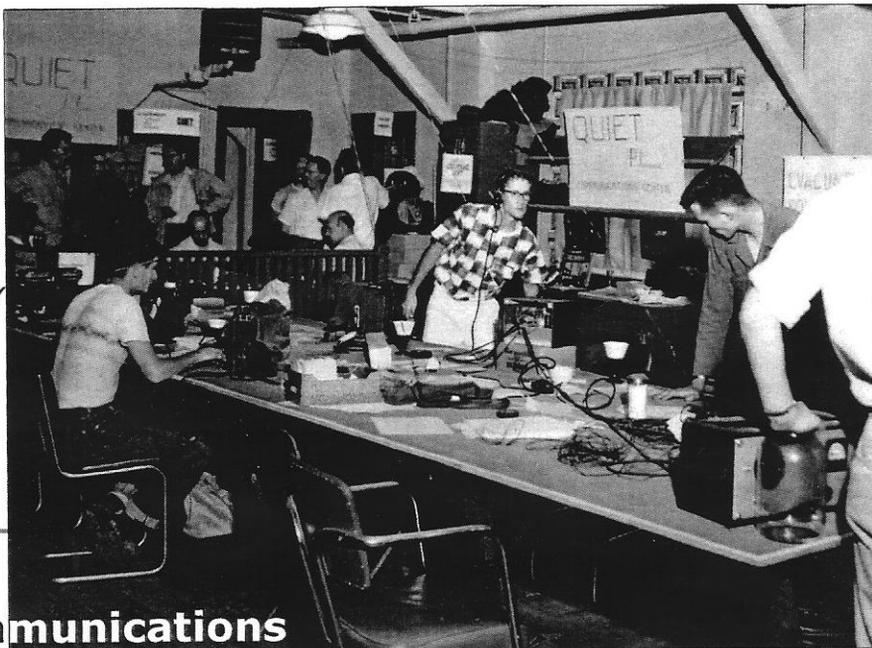


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Riley County  
Historical Society  
Newsletter  
Vol LXV No 1  
June 2017

## Flood of '51 Emergency Communications



Exceptionally heavy rains caused water from the Kansas River to overflow into Manhattan on July 11, 1951. By 4 p.m. rising water forced city officials to leave their downtown offices on North Third Street. Temporary headquarters, including radio communication equipment, was set up on the higher elevation offered by the Kansas State College campus, specifically in the student union building. Amateur radio operators, police radio, and highway patrol resources provided service until commercial communication services were once again available.

The Kansas State College Amateur Radio Club moved its equipment from the ROTC building to the student union. Their transmitter remained on continuously from July 11th to the evening of July 17th. An emergency power plant was positioned just outside a window for use during power failures.

Two other stations on campus were also in operation during the flood. One handled long distance traffic and one handled welfare messages. On July 11th one amateur radio operator actually provided a radio link from his car, parked at the edge of the flood water. Boats were dispatched and evacuations were coordinated by this means until around midnight when police radio was back in service.

KSAC, the college broadcast station, shared time with Topeka's commercial station WIBW. When WIBW went off the air due to flood waters, KSAC maintained communications with Topeka. It was KSAC that alerted the Topeka community of the need for volunteers to sandbag their water plant. Over 4,500 Topeka residents answered the call. The plant was saved. The amateur radio community up and down the Kaw River Valley performed admirably.

Jerome Hartke provided a reminiscence about the flood, shared here with his permission. "I was attending summer school during the summer of 1951. I, and others, operated ... from the old student union, handling continuous traffic between flood victims and their families, together with lots of other traffic. I also waded through parts of flooded Manhattan, carrying an Army handi-talkie, for the purpose of assuring that all residences had been evacuated. I recall worrying that hot power lines might be submerged nearby, but fortunately that was not the case...."

Manhattan's commercial AM station, KMAN, was located north of town in an area covered by the 1951 flood. An Army deuce-and-a-half (2.5 ton) truck was commandeered, driven through water to the transmitter site, backed through a wall, and the transmitter was loaded onto the truck. After emerging from the flood, the truck was parked on the K-State campus just outside KSAC's studio. Wire was strung between two nearby towers that had previously been used by KSAC, and the antenna was connected to the KMAN transmitter, still on the truck. Audio feed came from the KSAC studio that was one story above the truck, and KMAN was operational. The Kansas City FCC office requested organ music while they certified that the frequency was within tolerance, after which the community received news and notices from KMAN/Portable until the emergency ended."

More information on this topic is available at <https://www.k-state.edu/ksuarc/alumniletters.html>.

**Do you have a flood communication story to share with the Riley County Historical Society?  
If so, please contact us at 785-565-6490 or at [lglasgow@rileycountyks.gov](mailto:lglasgow@rileycountyks.gov).**

The historic images in this newsletter are from the collection of the Riley County Historical Society & Museum.

# Amateur Radio Club at Kansas State University WØQQQ

## ALUMNI LETTERS



**This page is meant to be a look at the history of our club. In recent years we've gotten a number of interesting letters and emails from former members. This is just a beginning. Stories and historical info - or even comments on current topics - are most welcome, either by [email](#) or by U. S. Mail. Our mailing address can be found at the bottom of our [main](#) page.**

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### **From [Jerome Hartke, W1ERJ](#) -- November 28, 2003:**

I attended K-State (then Kansas State College) from 1950 to 1956, graduating with a BSEE and an MS in Physics. At that time my call letters were WØAMG, now W1ERJ. I recently visited the club web site, and found photos and letters of interest. [Photo 1](#) was taken in the ham club room located in the basement of the Military Science building. I am standing (brush cut and patterned T-shirt). Seated is Wilbur Goll, WØDEL, and Bill Schrenk, our great faculty advisor. The [second photo](#) was taken at the same time and shows myself and Wilbur seated, Bill standing, and the old BC-610 final, topped by the antenna tuner, in the far corner.

Information on the alumni letters page is interesting. The following comments may provide additional input.

K-State was a key location during the July 1951 flood because its elevation provided dry land while much of the city was underwater. WØDEL traffic included direct ham-band communications with Air Force flights from Chanute Field, Illinois that air-dropped medicines, blankets, and other supplies onto K-State.

I was attending summer school during the summer of 1951. I, and others, operated WØQQQ from the old student union, handling continuous traffic between flood victims and their families, together with lots of other traffic. I also waded through parts of flooded Manhattan, carrying an Army handi-talkie, for the purpose of assuring that all residences had been evacuated. I recall worrying that hot power lines might be submerged nearby, but fortunately that was not the case.

I was also Chief Engineer of the student FM station located across the hall from the college AM station. We first played music, but I later shut it down, and donated tubes from the transmitter to Manhattan police who had exhausted their stock of spares due to constant use of equipment designed for only intermittent use. The shutdown upset a few faculty members and students who envisioned this as their moment of journalistic glory, maybe even a Pulitzer Prize, but emergency police communications were sustained.

Manhattan's commercial AM station, KMAN, was located north of town in an area covered by the 1951 flood. An Army deuce-and-a-half (2.5 ton) truck was commandeered, driven through water to the transmitter site, backed through a wall, and the transmitter was loaded onto the truck. After emerging from the flood, the truck was parked on the K-State campus just outside KSAC's studio. Wire was strung between two nearby towers that had previously been used by KSAC, and the antenna was connected to the KMAN transmitter, still on the truck. Audio feed came from the KSAC studio that was one story above the truck, and KMAN was operational. The Kansas City FCC office requested organ music while they certified that the frequency was within tolerance, after which the community received news and notices from KMAN/Portable until the emergency ended.

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**from Rod Blocksome, KØDAS -- July 14, 1998:**

Are the records prior to 1958 all missing? I wonder if they would still be in the Military Science Building. I started at KSU in 1963 and WØQQQ was located in the Military Science building then and sponsored by ROTC faculty. I remember the station equipment was mostly all WWII surplus and in pretty cramped quarters.

Another piece of history:

In 1973, I was back at KSU going to graduate school. WØQQQ had a very active bunch then - Lee Buller KØWA, Bruce Frahm KØBJ, Dennis Dugan, WAØYPC, Gary Jones, K3OWN (he was a doc at student health), Jack Meadows, now W7QQQ, and Scott Casey, WBØJDK were some of the active members. That summer (a few weeks after we did field day out on "top of the world"), a tornado wiped out half of Clay Center, KS and most of the town of Greenleaf, KS. We (KSU ARC) spent that night and the next 4-5 days in that area providing communications for the red cross, police, and messages of health and welfare for the citizens. A large amount of the traffic was relayed on HF from the towns to WØQQQ who then put it into the various traffic nets.

We even rigged up a "manned repeater" which was a Clegg FM27 set up to Transmit and Receive on 146.94/.34. The operator could then have complete net control of a local 2 meter net in Clay Center. People with 2 meter FM were dispatched to deliver messages or inquire on health and welfare. The info was taken on 2 meters and then passed to/from the HF station operator who sat beside him. They were located at the Clay Center National Guard Armory. A second station on HF was set up in Greenleaf. It had to be moved a couple of times as buildings were condemned and bulldozed down for safety reasons. At one time I remember this station was operating from a pool table in a building with the roof partially blown off.

The club got a lot of good publicity in QST, KSU *Collegian*, *Manhattan Mercury*, and the Topeka paper. Bruce Frahm and Lee Buller are still very active hams today and would remember more of the details. I don't know what happened to the others I mentioned.

There are probably other similar stories of WØQQQ history. Perhaps a note on your web page would encourage others to send them in.

BTW I enjoyed working WØQQQ 2 years ago at your special event operation. Have the card and certificate.

Best of 73s, Rod KØDAS

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**from Frank Gentges, KØBRA -- Oct. 24, 1998**

Hello to everyone at WØQQQ.

I was a member of the club from 1961 to 1965 and found a number of friends in the club and spent a bit of spare time between classes at the club station.

We had a Collins 51J3 general coverage receiver. We were tuning outside the ham bands in the months prior to the John Glenn flight. We would hear loop recordings identifying stations as being part of NASA. These would run 24 hours a day and probably were used by NASA to log which sites could hear each other at different times of the day.

We suspected these sites were preparing for the Mercury space flights so we logged the frequencies which numbered around 6 that we could find. There was a lot of publicity on the Glenn flight so we borrowed a tape recorder and planned to man the station for the duration of the flight to see if we could monitor the flight.

On the day of the flight we were up and running. We heard flight chatter prior to launch and heard the Mercury capsule with John Glenn. We had hit paydirt.

We heard the launch, and the orbit just fine. The NASA network did not have satellites to relay the audio so they were using the HF network to tie together the ground stations. As a result we were hearing all that the Cape was hearing.

I don't remember all the people that were part of that day but I do remember Don Bunny and he borrowed the tape recorder.

I graduated in 1965 with a BSEE and went to work for Rixon electronics in Silver Spring Maryland designing data modems and the like. Rixon was a leader in modems at that time. They are no longer in business.

I went to work for the US Navy in 1969 to work on secure voice systems which were very crude and needed modem type technology to improve it.

I retired from the Navy in December, 1997, and now am president of a small startup company and we are developing a wrist-worn DSP to assist people with a profound hearing loss.

It is fun and I think back to WØQQQ every now and then. I recently went back to my old call sign I had then. I enjoy reading about the club on your web page.

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### **KSU Amateur Radio Club Handles Messages During the Manhattan Flood - July 11 - 20, 1951**

On Wednesday, July 11, 1951, water from the Kansas river began to overflow seriously into Manhattan, Kansas as a result of continuous heavy rains in the area. By 4:00 p.m. city officials had to leave their offices in downtown Manhattan, and they established temporary headquarters in the temporary student union building at Kansas State College. Wire communication services were also being disrupted.

About 5:00 p.m. Wilbur Goll, WØDEL drove over to the home of WØPAH. After a short discussion it was decided to move radio equipment into the temporary headquarters in the student union in order to provide emergency communications for city officials.

WØQQQ, the Kansas State College Amateur Radio Club, whose facilities are provided largely by the R.O.T.C., had suitable equipment. By 7:30 this equipment was installed and in operation under the call letters of WØDEL. This transmitter was never turned off from that time until 10:00 p.m. of July 17 when the city offices were moved back to their location in the downtown area. The transmitter was off during power failures only long enough to crank up the emergency power

plant just outside the window. WØDEL continued to operate from their location on a more limited scale until July 20 in order to help clear welfare traffic.

Two other stations on the campus were in operation during the emergency. WØQQQ, with a BC-610, moved traffic on several bands and handled long distance messages on 20. They also handled traffic on 75. The Naval Reserve Unit on the campus was put on the air and operated under the call WØOKE. All licensed hams in the Naval Reserve had been called to duty or were not in school. Naval Reserve personnel were very helpful, however, and cooperated in every way possible. WØOKE was assigned the job of handling the welfare messages and did a fine job. WØYUQ maintained contact from his home station as much as possible and helped from there with traffic. He was busy helping rescue stranded people daytime and operated at night.

Equipment belonging to WØIYU was brought out by boat to serve as stand-by equipment at main headquarters.

All commercial communications were off in Manhattan for several days. During this time amateur communications furnished most of the help needed, although the police radio and highway patrol gave invaluable assistance.

On Wednesday night, July 11, WØPAH parked his car at the edge of the flood water and provided a radio link to headquarters. This was used to dispatch boats, evacuees, provisions, etc. By midnight the police radio was operating and WØPAH was able to pull out and help at WØDEL.

WØDEL handled almost nothing but official emergency traffic. The local commercial broadcast station, KMAN, lost their line to the transmitter and WØDEL then relayed all official messages they broadcasted until they had to move equipment to escape flood waters.

KSAC, the college-owned broadcast station, shares time with WIBW of Topeka. When WIBW went off the air due to flood waters, the only means of contacting Topeka residents was KSAC and all messages broadcast to them during their time off the air were handled by WØDEL. Typical of this service was a message directing Topeka residents to report for volunteers work to save the water works. Amateur communication is generally credited with being responsible for saving the Topeka water supply. According to newspaper reports over 4,500 persons responded to the call.

Typical of other traffic handled at WØDEL were calls for typhoid serum, boats, helicopter service, red cross calls for food and clothing, weather bureau reports, river information, calls for equipment, several death messages, etc.

Keeping these stations on the air meant using considerable manpower, WØDEL was operated at various times by WØDEL, WØPAH, WØAMG, WØIYU, WØYEE, and others. Other non-amateur personnel helped copy and deliver messages on a 24-hour basis. All local telephones were out during the flood so messages had to be delivered by carrier. This required considerable manpower which, however, was usually available.

It is impossible to name all those outside Manhattan who handled messages. Their help is greatly appreciated by all. Of great aid was the fine work of the Topeka gang and WØHS and WØKSY who maintained contact into Manhattan. WØZLA relayed a large number of messages for us. Ft. Riley, only about 15 miles away, had WØAAE and W7?? on the air. Forbes air force base, Topeka, was represented by WØTRK. These stations handled hundreds of welfare messages when a lull came in the more urgent traffic. Others who helped considerably as far as Manhattan was concerned were WØJXJ, WØFQE, WØGBY, WØAEY, WØGCJ, WØJDX, WØCV, and WØFDJ.

WØNRK, the U.S.N.R.T.C. at St. Joseph, Mo., sent men and equipment for use. Of particular help was their emergency power unit which they left in Manhattan for use until all emergency service appeared ended.

Many others should be mentioned because all amateurs in this area were of assistance. many

unnamed amateurs helped police the bands to cut down QRM, others helped by remaining silent. Some offered to come to Manhattan to help as relief operators. All in all the radio amateur fraternity gave a good account of themselves and their service cannot be estimated.

This report represents only a small part of the disaster communications in this area. Topeka, Lawrence, Kansas City, and other cities all along the Kansas river were also as busy as the Manhattan group. Manhattan had particularly close contact with Topeka and Kansas City because of the large number of urgent messages between these cities. Reports from other groups will undoubtedly be submitted.

Click for [photo 1](#) or [photo 2](#) of flood communications team members in action.

### **from Joe Thornwall, callsign unknown -- April 30, 2005:**

I attended K-State from 1946 to 1950, graduating with a BSEE in the summer of 1950. My call sign at that time was WØABV. I obtained a first class commercial phone license in 1949 and worked at the KSAC transmitter site until I graduated. As I recall, the pay was .60 cents/hour. After graduation I worked at the WIBW transmitter site in Topeka while I was waiting for security clearances required for CIA employment. I worked for the CIA from 1950 to 1961 and again from 1968 to 1981 with assignments in Virginia, Cyprus, TDY to Iran and various parts of the world. I worked at the Goddard Space Flight Center from 1961 to 1968 designing, fabricating and integrating space flight hardware for the Solar Physics Branch there.

I took a job with Quest Research Corporation in 1981. I worked for them in Berlin, Germany from 1981 to 1983, and was assigned TDY to many parts of Bavaria to retune microwave radios for the US Army for most of 1984. The U.S. Army hired Quest to respond to a German Government request to vacate Ku band microwave frequencies they were using so that a State TV network in Germany could occupy this spectrum.

I worked for Quest Research Corporation from 1981 until I retired in 1995. In 1995 my wife and I vacationed for 3 months by automobile in Germany, Austria and Italy. We visited friends we had made during our stay in Berlin in 1980's and early 1990's.

I was working on the Island of Cyprus when the 1951 flood inundated northeastern Kansas. My home town of Topeka suffered greatly from this flood. My father-in-law in Topeka (WØUPU) was very active working emergency communications during that time. His home in North Topeka was badly damaged by the flood.

I am now living in Potomac, MD with my wife of 54 years. I hope to visit Topeka some time in the fall of 2005, and will visit K-State. [Here](#) are recent photos of me and my youngest granddaughter:

[Here](#) is a Goddard archive document "Rocket Camera Timer" that I wrote in May 1966 that I ran across the other day while surfing the web.

It sure is surprising what one can find surfing the web these days.

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<a href="#">ALUMNI 60s &amp; 70s</a>	<a href="#">ALUMNI 80s &amp; 90s</a>	<a href="#">ALUMNI 2000 ON</a>	<a href="#">ALUMNI LETTERS</a>	<a href="#">ARRL</a>
<a href="#">BIG 12</a>	<a href="#">CONST.</a>	<a href="#">EXAMS</a>	<a href="#">FACEBOOK</a>	<a href="#">HOME</a>