

# SWISS RADIO AMATEURS HELP THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS TO HELP HUMANITY



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**B**ELIEVE it or not, radio amateurs in many countries all over the world are often a little envious of those amateurs, who are fortunate enough to have incentive licensing in their countries, who may handle third party traffic, operate phone-patches and immediately come into action during emergencies.

Yes, in many parts of the world radio amateur activities are only just tolerated in various degrees by the authorities and examinations are often deliberately stiffened to keep the numbers of those enthusiasts

down. Of course the old and still valid argument that radio amateurs form a never-ending reservoir of good technicians and operators is always brought forward, but if one is not normally allowed to show what one could do when necessary, it is obvious that any opportunity to demonstrate the radio amateurs' useful abilities is accepted enthusiastically.

## Our Chance

Such an opportunity was offered to the Radio Amateurs of Switzerland when back in 1963 the International Committee of the Red Cross—ICRC—was called upon to organize and operate a field hospital somewhere in Yemen, where Republican and Royalist partisans were fighting each other cruelly, and where practically no medical assistance was available. As usual in such cases, the civilian population was also suffering very much and the stationing of a hospital, complete with operating theatre, X-ray installations power generators etc., staffed with fully qualified physicians and other medical personnel was a Godsend.

## Where There Is A Will...

However, normal communications installations to keep this medical team in constant touch with the headquarters of the ICRC at Geneva, Switzerland, were many hundreds of miles away from the hospital. And that is "how it all started". Alert leaders of the Red Cross consulted two of the most experienced Swiss amateurs—Messrs. Kurt Ruesch, HB9ET and Edouard Maeder, HB9GM, first in regard to the transmitters and receivers to be used. The job had to be done with absolute

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HBC 88, the Headquarters radio station of the International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva, Switzerland, Planned, installed, operated and maintained by radio amateurs. It looks familiar, doesn't it?

reliability, as the well-functioning of the entire plan and the well being of the personnel depended upon it. The task had to be carried out with equipment which could be obtained at a cost much less than that of official commercial transmitters and receivers. Red Cross organizations unfortunately never have been very rich, and if they were, the money would rather be spent for humanitarian purposes than on anything else.

Secondly, personnel had to be found to install and operate the necessary stations, both at the field missions and at headquarters at Geneva. And the third—and most difficult problem—was to find and monitor frequencies outside the radio amateur bands, and the local authorities in the countries concerned had to agree to their use for this new communications service.

### Official Cooperation

The Swiss PTT authorities gave their full cooperation from the very beginning and at the request of the ICRC assigned official frequencies just outside the lower band edges of the amateur bands for two main reasons. Firstly, the use of such frequencies was possible with normal amateur equipment. Secondly, it was hoped that this should make the creation of a future world-wide Red Cross emergency service easier, as radio amateurs everywhere—with the agreement of their own Red Cross and their licensing authorities—could simply use their existing equipment for emergency contacts with the headquarters station of the International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva.

### It Works!

What the amateurs always knew but what nobody else apparently would have thought possible: in the shortest practicable time the new service was working. An excellent headquarters station was planned and installed at Geneva by HB9ET and HB9GM requested Swiss amateurs to volunteer for short operating periods at field missions, where they could demonstrate their excellent knowledge of c.w. and s.s.b. phone procedures.

### Danger And Privations

The work at such troublespots is of course never without danger, as the accident with HB9AET showed. He was wounded in the left arm during his stay in the Yemen and his recovery was slow. Last year Red Cross per-



The main radio station in a tent in South Yemen.

sonnel were killed during a bombing raid in Biafra and others were wounded while on active duty in Israeli-controlled territories. Living conditions are often more than primitive. For many months a Red Cross radio station and living quarters were placed deep in a hollow in the Yemen, to escape almost daily bombing and strafings by aircraft of the "other side". But despite all this, there has never been a moment when there were no volunteers to continue the good work.

### Yemen, Nigeria, Biafra, Congo Etc.

Today, the system still operates to every-



After a bombing raid: motor-generator smashed, antenna down and the transceiver out of order.



The Red Cross radio station at Santa Isabel, Equatorial Africa. Note the "luxurious" bed of the operator in the background.

bodys complete satisfaction and many Swiss amateurs have already helped to make this worthy idea a resounding success. Not only are a main field station and several substations still operating in the Yemen, but some time ago another main station was successfully installed at Santa Isabel in Equatorial Africa, with substations in Biafra/Nigeria. Also, much good work was done some time ago in connection with the evacuation of the white mercenaries and their families from Africa to Europe by a radio amateur at Kigali, who was especially licensed to work almost daily with the Red Cross radio station



HB9AET, who was wounded in the left arm, is carefully placed in the ambulance after being flown back to Switzerland.

at Geneva. And earlier temporary communications between the Congo and Geneva were as successful as all the others.

### Mission Continued World Wide

With a large rotary beam and other short wave transmitting and receiving antennas on the roof of its Geneva headquarters, the International Committee of the Red Cross proudly wears a familiar badge. Having joined the world brotherhood of radio amateurs, the ICRC looks forward to cooperate ever more closely with the amateurs of the world and to benefit by their wealth of experience and their devotion to humanitarian ideals. It is now known beyond any doubt that reliable radio contacts are a prerequisite in any far-flung relief action. The regular two-way communications service carried out by Swiss amateurs between ICRC headquarters and its field missions has proved an invaluable contribution to the success of numerous Red Cross operations. On the basis of the experience gained during the last five years under the most strenuous conditions, it is hoped that the next step will lead to the development of a Red Cross emergency world network which will make it possible to establish and maintain radio communications in case of conflict or natural disaster with Red Cross, Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun societies all over the world.

In the important tasks HBC-88, the ICRC's short wave headquarters station may be called upon to perform. radio amateurs will have a continued prominent part to play in the service of humanity. The radio amateurs of Switzerland are proud of the fact that they were given the opportunity to show what can be done by "mere amateurs" when called upon to do a mans job.

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"Just been on 2 but it's as dead as a doornail..."