

there was no room for amateurs!

This short sighted jealousy by the Post Office was to be recalled only two years later when the disastrous storms hid hundreds of miles of the coast, causing havoc with all public services and, in only a few hours, communications were at a standstill and were unserviceable for several days.

So it was just one year later, the Radio Society of Great Britain launched the Radio Amateurs Emergency Network (RAEN), designed, in theory at least, to be a communications back up service for emergency use only. It was very soon realised that without some pretty drastic changes being made to the amateur radio licence, RAEN was going to be a little more than a weekly net with a controller.

Another immediate problem was the design and construction of mobile and portable equipment — it was obvious that to be of any use in an emergency the Hams had to be right there at the site of the incident, not back home in their shacks.

At its inception, RAEN, as it was then known, was to be of little assistance in an emergency, as the passing of third party traffic was very restricted and it was still too easy to exceed licence regulations in its limited capacity. The RSGB and the Home Office commenced a slow but continuing round of negotiations to make the emergency service viable. As the service has grown, it has repeatedly proved its ability to organise an emergency communication service, so the Home Office have added special licence dispensation to the Raynet Members licence for use under live or exercise conditions. The first move by the RSGB was to change the name to Raynet; the letters R.A.E.N. being a ship's call sign.

Flexible Communications

The flexibility of the Raynet system often makes it more versatile than many of the user services' own communication systems. As an example, an ambulance has its radio link firmly mounted in the vehicle, so if the crew have to leave the ambulance to go a few hundred yards into a wood they are out of contact with their base. Whereas, a Raynet member would most likely have a walkie-talkie, which could simply be

unhitched from the car for use on foot. This is just one example where the Ham can be more versatile than the professional user!

Since its formation, Raynet has been involved in many real (live) emergencies, from forming a communications link with the Hampshire police when an overwhelming number of volunteers arrived to hunt for a lost baby in a forest or, for over 70 hours, relays of Raynet members passed 999 calls when a telephone exchange was badly damaged by fire.

Emergencies have no respect for time, weather or location. A couple of Raynet members were enjoying a quiet summer's afternoon nap in their cars by a South Coast beach, when a light aircraft plunged into the sea. Raising the alarm they had the rescue service there in minutes; then continued to handle messages for sometime until the rescue services were able to establish their own communications links. The full local Raynet force was put on Yellow Alert ready to handle any back up required.

The incidents that Raynet has been involved in is endless. Of course not all call outs are as exciting; sometimes there have been hours of waiting with just routine signal reports — waiting for high tide, to see if a river will break its banks; or one I was involved in sometime ago, when the telephone and fire alarm lines to the exchange were cut by contractors working in the grounds of a large remote boarding school, built mainly of timber. The Science Master G8PGY called for assistance. The local Raynet Group kept an all night vigil over the 500 boys, in case of an emergency.

So what does it take to be a Raynet member? If you are, or have been a scout or in any of the cadets or forces; if you can accept orders and carry them out to the best of your ability; if you don't get fed up waiting for something to happen and don't panic when it does; if you're prepared to spend some time each week training and go on the occasional exercise — then you are the type they are looking for!

Most groups are organised so that every member gets the opportunity to experience the conditions of being controller — relay station — base or mobile outstation. There are so many jobs to be done at a live

incident or exercise. If you're not licenced yet, you can still play an important part, writing out messages, keeping log, delivering food and drink to outstations — there's a hundred and one jobs to be done. A great deal of help comes from the YLs and XYLs too!

Your Equipment

If you're licenced, the choice of equipment will probably have been made so you will have to make the best of what you have.

A good Group Controller will have organised his team such that the less agile members and those without motor transport will act as relay stations, or general monitoring stations or base control station. Mobile stations should have equipment permanently, or easily installed in their cars. All stations will be expected to have O.S. maps covering their area and any neighbouring areas you may be called into to help.

Handheld transceivers have been a boon and a curse to Raynet members; their portability makes them ideal for use away from the car and in difficult country, but their short battery life can be an embarrassment. Imagine walking half a mile across rough terrain in blizzard conditions to get to a stranded group; you press the PTT... your signals are not heard... **FLAT BATTERIES!** Therefore, a must is at least one spare set of batteries and take them with you! If you use nicads, there are circuits designed to enable you to charge your batteries from the car. All batteries rapidly lose their efficiency in cold weather; keep the spare set in an inside coat pocket!

