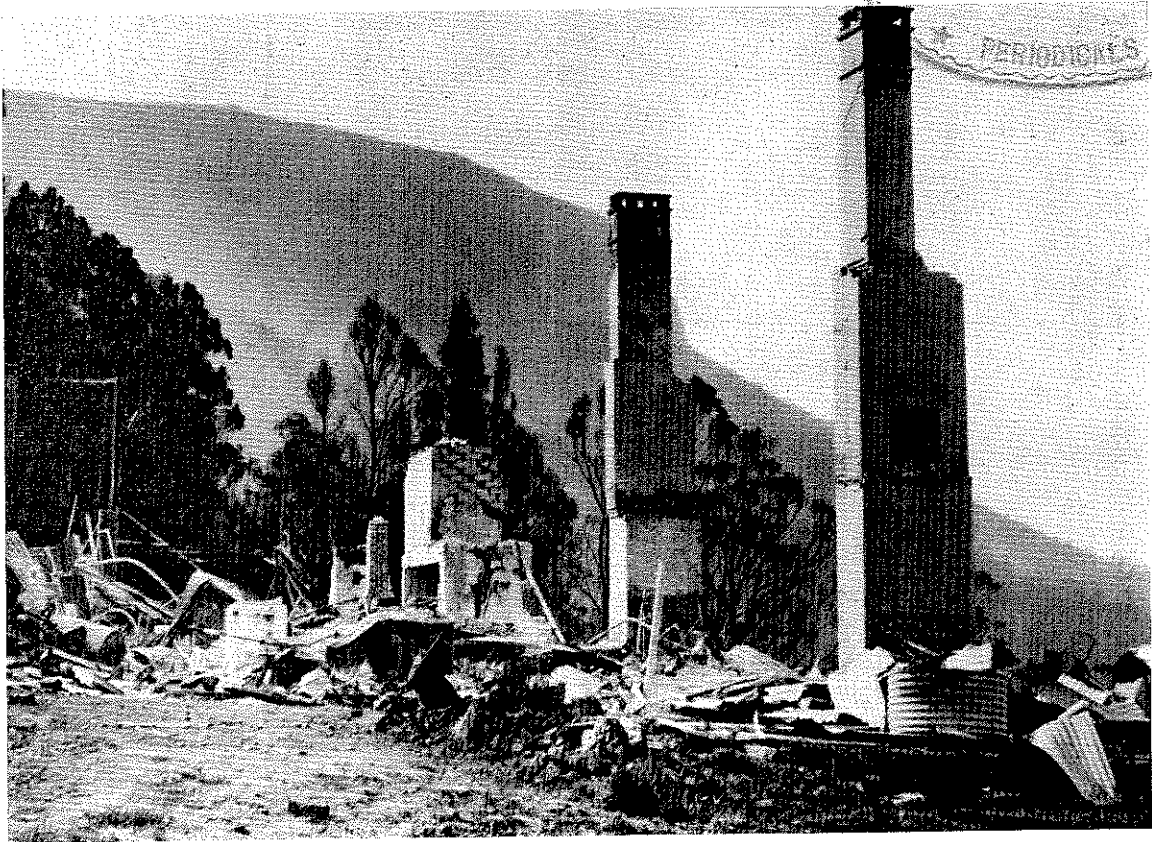
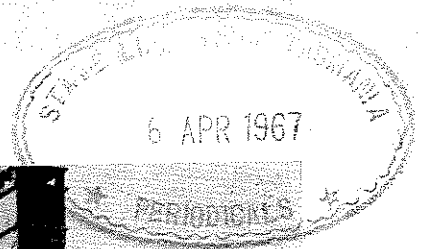


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25c

W.I.C.E.N. IN TASMANIA DURING THE BUSH FIRE DISASTER

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Date: February 7, 1967; **Time:** about 1215 E.A.S.T.

Location: Hobart area.

Situation: Temperature 100+°F., winds gale force from north. Commercial radio sources calling for volunteer firefighters for many areas all around southern Tasmania. Smoke haze thickening rapidly in city area.

HAVING thus set the scene, it is not remarkable that the 6 metre mobile net frequency was well occupied from about 1215 E.A.S.T. and about two hours later was being used in earnest by several mobiles. About that time the first attempts at organisation were made when, after consultation with Tom VK7AL and after ascertaining that phone exchanges were jammed, lines were down and power off in many suburbs, Dave VK7ZMD was sent into the Fire Brigade Hq. with 6 metre mobile gear to relay direct to them fire reports from mobiles moving around trouble spots lacking telephone communications through fire or exchange overload. When the Fire Brigade personnel realised that they could no longer use the information being relayed to them, due to complete occupation of all their personnel and resources, VK7ZMD was relieved of duty.

At about this time the official P.M.G. station, with the R.I. on the mike, came up on the 6 metre net frequency and informed all stations that they were officially urged to continue to handle distress traffic.

This gets us to the point where but one commercial radio source was still

on the air broadcasting a continual stream of queries and requests for firefighters. Someone, I don't know who, suggested we put a base mobile outside the studio of this radio station (7HT) and use the mobiles to try and assist them in the job they were doing. One query satisfied after a short relay, due to power lines across the road, concerned the fate of the children from the Taroon Primary School. They had been evacuated to the beach in a timely move by their teachers and were being looked after. No doubt the parents of these children were very relieved to hear this news come back over 7HT after a 6 metre VK7ZKJ to VK7ZBJ to 7HT relay. All commercial communications were out into Taroon area.

At about 1700 hours the President of the W.I.A. (Tom VK7AL) approached the Police and offered our services as a going concern. About two hours after, Tom received a telephone call from the Police asking for help with communications into Huonville. At this stage we were able to inform them that the situation had been taken in hand by our organisation working in conjunction with Civil Defence and that communication should shortly be available.

NETS ESTABLISHED

Also at 1700 hours Lee VK7KC contacted Jack VK7JB on 3590 Kc. with the upshot being that VK7JB went to Civil Defence Headquarters only to find Ted VK7EB in attendance with equipment half set up on 3590 Kc. Shortly after this, at about 1715 hours, VK7KC and VK7EB set up a 3590 Kc. link, with VK7KC also linking through on 6 metres to most of the mobiles from his own mobile. At approx. 1730 hrs. VK-

7ZKJ arrived at VK7KC's QTH with a.c. operated 6 metre rig and installed it as base station for the mobile net on 53.035 Mc. Thus by 1730 hrs. we had W.I.C.E.N. control station linked to Civil Defence Hq. on 80 metres. Civil Defence in turn had facilities for distributing the information W.I.C.E.N. obtained to the appropriate quarters.

Very soon after this, with situation reports coming in rapidly and finding coverage was not up to the mark on 6 metres because mobiles were getting too far out of the city area, a relay station was set up on Mt. Rumney by Barry VK7ZBJ and Ron VK7ZRO at about 1815 hrs. Mt. Rumney was burnt off prior to this, but was dangerous with trees coming down over the road—it is situated east of Hobart overlooking the airport and so situated as to be a highly favoured location for extended 6 metre ground wave communication.

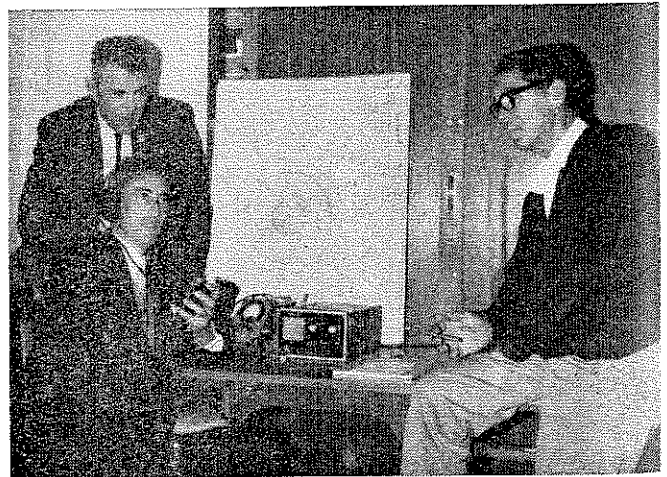
Thus by 1815 hours W.I.C.E.N. had set up 6 metre facilities allowing communication over a radius of about 30 miles from Hobart, had several 6 metre mobiles in trouble spots sending in situation reports, several more mobiles standing by, and a 3.5 Mc. link from W.I.C.E.N. Control to Civil Defence Hq. relaying information coming in on 6 metres for routing to Police or other services.

By 2100 hrs. VK7ZZ, VK7MF and VK7DR were handling traffic on 40 metres in relation to P.M.G. communication replacement requirements.

As the roads were very dangerous in most areas outside the metropolitan area with bridges burnt out and power and phone poles coming down across the roads, all mobiles were recalled at approx. 0100 hrs. Feb. 8 after many



View of burnt out Springs Hotel. Cover photograph shows the remains of the hotel with Mt. Wellington and t.v. mast in background. Hotel was double story, unlicensed, tourist stopping place for morning and afternoon teas half way up Mt. Wellington.



Civil Defence Headquarters, Public Buildings, Hobart.
Rear: Jack Batchelor, VK7JB.
Front left: Crosby Russel-Green, VK7CR.
Front right: Ted Cruise, VK7EJ.

operators had sent in information indicating the situation in most of the disaster areas via W.I.C.E.N. control to the Civil Defence Hq. and thence the Police Commissioner as head of the emergency operations. Communications were not established with Huonville on Feb. 7 as all roads into the area were impassable when our assistance was requested. W.I.C.E.N. Control and Civil Defence link (C.D. link) closed at approx. 0215 hrs.

All links and relays were operational again by 0900 hrs. on the 8th. Several 6 metre mobiles were on standby and several others active, in some cases in areas which had been lacking any communication for 24 hours. Many hours were wasted by three mobiles who were despatched to pinpoint a fire reported in the Carlton area in **three separate bogus reports** to the authorities who requested us to confirm or otherwise.

in direct communication with W.I.C.E.N. Control at 2300 hrs. Up until this time additional traffic was coming through Mt. Rumney from Mike VK7ZMC who set up a base station with his 6 metre mobile at the Woodbridge relief centre—this was the **sole** communication service available in the area south of Snug.

Also on the 8th, from 1100 to 1415 hrs., VK7ZZ was handling traffic to mainland VK for the Departments of Social Services and Labour and National Services, broadly concerned with damage and staff requirements.

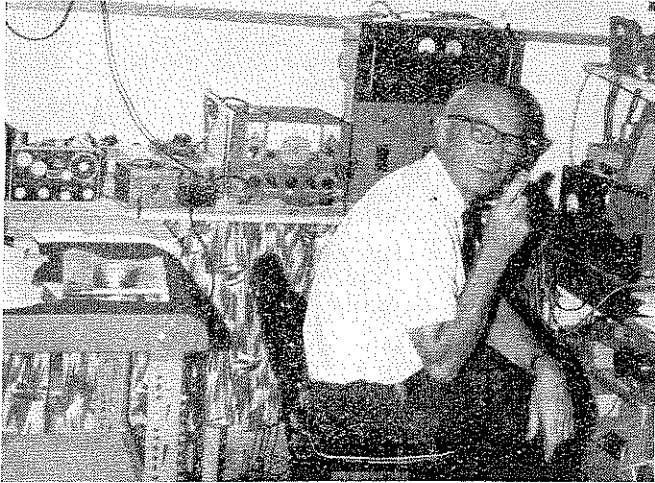
EXTRA RELAY STATION INSTALLED

The situation continued virtually unchanged on the 9th with the exception that to provide against overloading the 6 metre frequency at the Mt. Rumney relay site, at peak traffic periods an alternate 2 metre link from this site

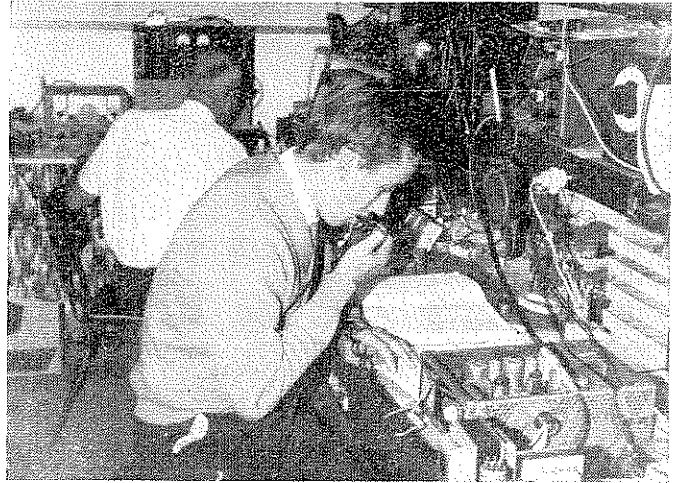
motor driven generating plants. This h.f. link between Richmond and Colebrook was maintained until 1800 hrs. on 14th February.

By Saturday 1100 hrs. (i.e. 11th), this h.f. point to point link was integrated fully into the W.I.C.E.N. system with the installation of a complete station on Mt. Wellington by John VK7ZJG, assisted by VK7ZKJ, at the premises of TVT6 transmitter and we were fortunate to have been able to "borrow" quarters and 240v. a.c. from their emergency generating system. Our thanks are due to TVT6 for allowing us to use their facilities during this period.

Thus was set up a relay station capable of reception on any Amateur frequency up to 2 metres and capable of patching the received signal to W.I.C.E.N. Control and C.D. Hq. simultaneously on 6 and/or 2 metres merely at the flick of a switch.



W.I.C.E.N. Control at the residence of VK7KC. Lee Cordell, VK7KC, at the mike.



Traffic being handled at W.I.C.E.N. Control. Rear: Lee VK7KC; foreground: Iau (Associate).

As fire relief centres were set up in the country centres, mobiles endeavoured to contact their organisers and transmit back any urgent food and clothing requirements they had.

Two mobiles with 6 and 80 metre equipment were set up in Huonville during the late afternoon and while Winston VK7WH was getting set up to relay on 6 after QRM from Amateurs outside VK7 had forced closure of the direct Huon-Hobart 3590 link, Terry VK7CT was passing distress traffic on 3590 per c.w. to VK2AGH who then relayed to W.I.C.E.N. Control VK7KC. Many thanks VK2AGH for your assistance on this occasion.

Very satisfactory 6 metre communication via Mt. Rumney relay to W.I.C.E.N. thence C.D. Hq. was established soon after this and a considerable amount of Police and general distress traffic passed. While this was going on further traffic was coming back through the Mt. Rumney link into W.I.C.E.N. Control from four mobiles in the Carlton to Tasman Peninsula area—the first news back into C.D. Hq. from there since the fires cut the telephone lines into the area.

All mobiles were recalled from their areas at 2225 hrs. and the Mt. Rumney link closed as soon as all units were

to W.I.C.E.N. Control was installed, leaving 6 metres for use on inward traffic from mobiles to the relay station only. A second operator then put it down to W.I.C.E.N. Control via 2 metres. This, of course, doubled the traffic handling capability of the Mt. Rumney relay.

All v.h.f. distress traffic units and h.f. personal third party units closed by approximately 0100 on 10th February to allow the operators and gear to cool down for a few hours as traffic had slowed to a mere trickle at that time. All channels were again opened by approx. 0815 hrs. with an extra link, this time point to point via h.f. (3590 Kc.) between Richmond and Colebrook—again to be the sole communication link available. Units at both towns were also equipped with 6 metre mobile equipment which was used to relay via Mt. Rumney back to W.I.C.E.N. Control and C.D. Hq. when QRM or QRN prevented direct reception of 3590 Kc. traffic at W.I.C.E.N. Control. This meant virtually all the time in daylight hours as the h.f. equipment was QRP d.c. operated a.m. gear which was replaced as demand proved the necessity on 13th February by high power sideband transceivers on the 3590 Kc. channel powered by petrol

In view of the predicted high fire risk in Northern Tasmania, the Mt. Wellington link also established a link through to Mike VK7ZMC/M on Mt. Barrow in the north on 53.035 Mc. net frequency, again with patch facilities available to W.I.C.E.N. or C.D., in case it became necessary to use it.

With the sophisticated monitoring and patch relay systems installed on Mt. Wellington, the relay on Mt. Rumney became largely redundant and was closed down, after being almost continuously manned for four days, at approx. 2000 hrs. on 11th. During this time almost all operation was on batteries as the 240v. a.c. supply was cut very early by fire on 7th. D.C.A. personnel did allow our operators to borrow 240v. a.c. from their emergency set on Mt. Rumney spasmodically.

MOBILE UNITS WITHDRAWN

By 1900 hours on the 12th, all mobile units had been withdrawn as their services were no longer required, but the portable units at Colebrook and Richmond were still very active with point to point traffic on h.f., with Richmond now having telephone facilities into Hobart at times. Mt. Wellington remained open until 1800 hours on 13th for relay from these stations should

telephones fail again, as was occurring frequently prior to this.

Thus things drew slowly to a close at 1800 hours on February 14 when all links were closed as services were largely restored and our assistance was no longer required, although an Army unit borrowed much of the equipment on Mt. Wellington for their use in a station they set up there.

Many questions arise at the conclusion of such an operation. Thanks are due to many. It appears to me to be a risky procedure to attempt to single out more individuals than has already been done, however the work of Lee and the team of very willing workers who assisted at W.I.C.E.N. Control (VK7KC) and of Lee's XYL who fed goodness knows how many people each day and put up with so many relative strangers in and around the home for a full week must be acknowledged with thanks.

The key to the entire operational success was the enthusiasm and selflessness of the operators and assistants of the 22 6 metre mobile stations used at some stage during the operation and who proved, for the first time, the extreme versatility and utility of 6 metre net operation in W.I.C.E.N. work, while the whole competence of the communications was rounded off by the support of the 10 or so h.f. mobile and portable stations which did such good work in providing fixed point to point services. The added 2 metre relay and patch facility boosted the total traffic capacity of the system by 100%. Backing the whole emergency operation were many Associate W.I.A. members and

even friends of Amateurs who assisted throughout as scribes and of course the h.f. home station operators throughout Australia who helped wherever they possibly could in every respect.

One hopes that the authorities will now realise and recognise, at least in some part, the high potential value of our mobile "fleet" when coupled with the normal fixed station network already in existence, during any state of civil emergency such as that just past.

LESSONS LEARNED

In retrospect, what did W.I.C.E.N. achieve and how fast once the situation became one of extreme emergency? Well quite spontaneously a 6 metre mobile net controlled first from the Fire Brigade Headquarters and later from near 7HT studios was operative within the hour of the state of emergency being proclaimed. Within a further 3 hours the 6 metre mobile network was under W.I.C.E.N. Control from VK7KC's establishment, using the call VK7ZKJ, and the whole system was integrated into supplying situation reports to Civil Defence Hq. by an h.f. (3590 Kc.) link from VK7KC to VK7EB. Civil Defence in turn had personnel and serviceable telephone outlets for distribution of traffic sent in by W.I.C.E.N. to their Hq.

The speed with which W.I.C.E.N. got so thoroughly organised was a tribute to those Amateurs concerned, and demonstrated once again the need for radio as a back up for line communications. Here the telephone proved to be extremely vulnerable under the circumstances.

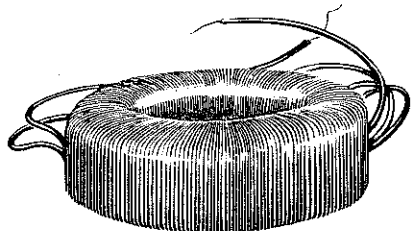
What else did we learn as a result of our activity? First and foremost we found out that the v.h.f. mobiles, assisted by relay stations, could cover the entire disaster area for traffic or situation reporting and apart from the availability at very short notice of so many mobile units (approx. 25) around Hobart, the 53 Mc. net frequency was not subjected to QRM from fellow Amateurs not involved in the emergency. Further, that when backed up by 2 metre portable or mobile, a 6 metre relay station could really handle traffic by using one frequency for inward and one for outward traffic simultaneously.

What did we need? First and foremost direct telephone lines to both C.D. and Police Hq. from W.I.C.E.N. Control, to leave yet another channel clear (i.e. 3590 Kc.) for emergency traffic and as a standby channel should all traffic lines go out. Secondly, and most important, W.I.C.E.N. requires a permanent headquarters on perhaps W.I.A. property with permanent installations of v.h.f. and h.f. equipment; direct telephones as mentioned before; ample space to park up to 25 mobile units on standby; a substantial petrol dump (bulk), and a supply of four-gallon or thereabouts containers for mobiles' use; auxiliary generating set; several battery chargers, and sleeping and cooking accommodation for at least three operators.

Well that seems about the story as I saw it from the very early stages of the emergency and although I hope never to see another such emergency, the experience with W.I.C.E.N. was a most valuable one.

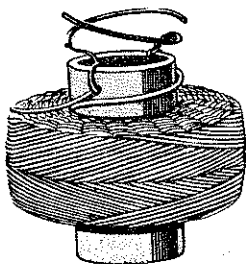
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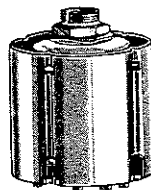
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