

TRAFFIC HANDLING AND AMATEUR RADIO

BEGINNINGS

The origins of traffic (message) handling are almost as old as amateur radio itself. Indeed, when ham radio as we know it was in its infancy, most households in the United States were without any of the communications devices that we take for granted today. Even as late as the 1950's some homes were without telephones and communications relied upon friendly neighbors who would relay information to another community member who was without a telephone. Almost every town had at least one radio nut who had built his crude transmitter from common parts and a few copies of *Popular Electronics*. Amateurs in those days felt compelled to be public servants due to their unique talents and almost always were willing to deliver messages to and from other members of the community.

At that time, radios were only good for a few hundred miles of reliable communications due to frequency and equipment so messages were normally relayed between many stations before reaching their final destination. Thus the origin of the American Radio Relay League, in case you were wondering how they came about that name. At first there were many unconnected radio operator networks and messages might take quite a few turns to get from points A to B so it became obvious that a universal system of message relaying and format would be beneficial to the public. The evolution of the National Traffic System as we know it today is actually developed in the past 50 years. There were competing groups that met and finally decided upon a plan that would move message traffic efficiently across the country.

PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION

Network operations are broken down into five basic types of operation as follows:

LOCAL NETS operate in small areas such as communities or parts of a county or metropolitan area. Today, they are typically VHF 2 meter FM operations meeting at regular times, daily or weekly and they exist primarily for local delivery or pick up of message traffic. They often operate on a more informal basis and provide time for training as well as chat. Local nets have a liaison assigned to the next step up in the message chain who will bring in or take out messages to the section level.

SECTION NETS operate either in partial state areas or have full state coverage and have many stations reporting in on a regular basis to pick up and deliver messages for their own communities and local nets. These nets normally operate in the HF range (often both SSB and CW) and are a bit more disciplined than the local nets. They too have stations assigned to bring traffic in and out of the net up to the next level of operation.

REGION NETS cover larger areas often a call area. For instance, the Third Region Net consists of Eastern PA, Western PA, Delaware, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

A net will consist of a net manager, net control station, representatives from each section and one or more liaison station to handle in and out going messages. The net activities are normally highly structured (although there is some deviation to this rule) and can restrict check ins for the sake of brevity.

AREA NETS are at the top level of the NTS covering a lot of territory. For example, the Eastern Area Net consists of representatives of region 1, 2, 3, 8 & 11 (Canadian Seaboard Provinces). Again there is a net manager, assigned net control stations and instead of liaison stations there are assigned TCC (Transcontinental Corps) stations that handle the movement of inter-area traffic on pre-arrange schedules.

TCC stations do not exist as a net but as stated above, these stations meet on pre-assigned schedules for the purpose of transferring traffic from one area to another. The normal mode of their operation is CW HF only and TCC members are seasoned veterans of the NTS.

FORMAT - Another important part of message handling is proper message format. Attached are some standard forms. These forms need not be used but the crucial information blocks must be filled in whether on a scratch pad or on a fancy form. I would like to take some time to discuss these forms in detail.

IN SUMMARY, traffic handling is just one of many facets of Amateur Radio and you may or may not want to be involved with it. On the other hand, it is something you may be called upon to do someday and you should at least learn how to do it properly. Side benefits earned from participation in traffic nets include camaraderie, fraternity and improved operating skills be they in any mode. You owe it to yourselves to at least check in to a net from time to time and see what is going on and how it works. Be careful, you may find you like it!

73,
Jim Cottrell KB3DEN
SEPPTN Net Manager

NET LISTINGS FOR OUR AREA

SEPPTN	2 meter FM	Sun & Wed nights at 8:00 PM	145.31 MHZ
MARCTN	2 meter FM	Mon, Wed, Fri nights at 8:30 PM	147.06 MHZ
EPAEPTN	75 meter phone	Daily at 6:00 PM	3.917 MHZ
PTTN	80 meter CW slow training net	daily at 6:30 PM	3.610 MHZ
EPA	80 meter CW fast net	daily at 7:00 & 10:00 PM	3.610 MHZ
3rd Region	40 meter phone net	at 4:00 PM daily	7.243 MHZ
PA Phone Net	80 meter phone	at 5:30 daily (non affiliated)	3.958 MHZ

(Please provide net listings for your area)