

“THIS IS NOT A DRILL”

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Orange County (CA) Hospital Disaster Support
Communications System (HDSCS)

- ▶ 23 April 2002
 - ▶ Early morning, prep for Annual OC (CA) County-wide EMS drill
 - ▶ Involves: Multiple North County Hospitals, OC Fire Authority, Ambulance, City Police, OC Sheriff's Dept, Red Cross, HDSCS and OC RACES
- ▶ Drill scenario
 - ▶ Host: City of Brea Fire Department
 - ▶ Terrorists commandeer fuel tanker. Crash into busy shopping area
 - ▶ Drill set to begin at 9:15 AM
 - ▶ 100+ 'volunteer 'victims' moulaged by Red Cross
 - ▶ First responders are staged for start of drill
- ▶ HDSCS
 - ▶ Members are pre-staged, ready to deploy
 - ▶ Waiting for assigned hospital to activate us
 - ▶ W6DQ waiting for breakfast at Jack-in-the-Box drive-thru

LET'S SET THE SCENE ...



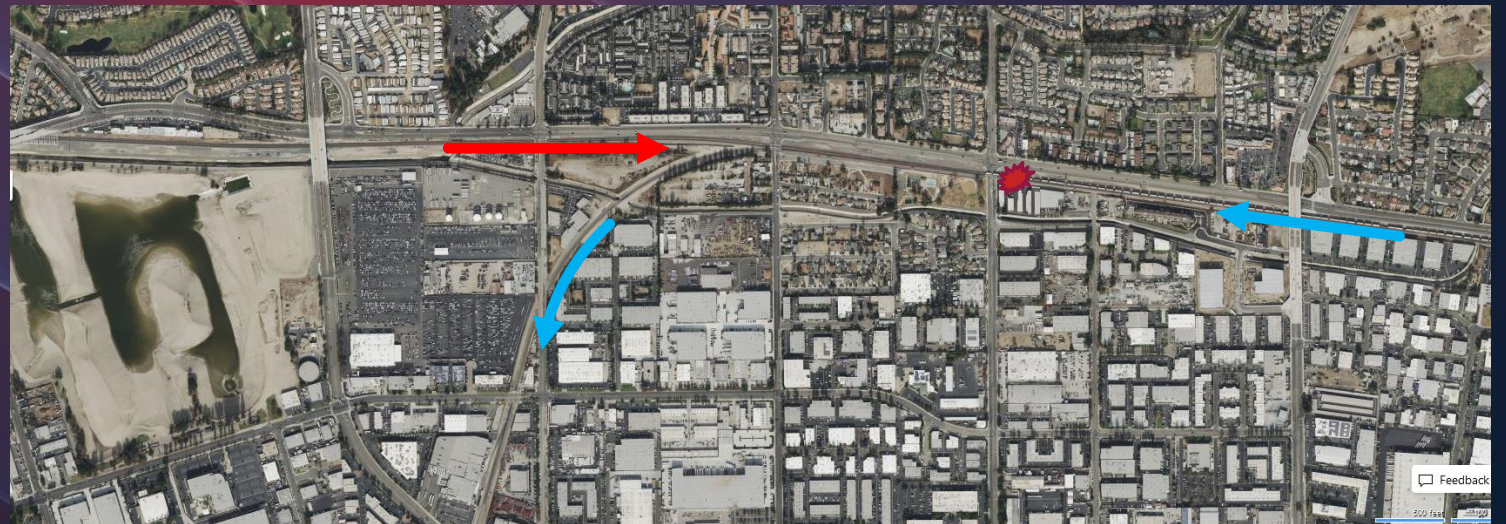
- ▶ A former ARES group, dedicated to providing internal and external communications for critical medical facilities in Orange County, CA, whenever normal communications are interrupted
- ▶ Founded in 1980 with one hospital: St. Jude
- ▶ Grew to support ALL receiving hospitals and additional medical facilities – 35 in all
- ▶ 100+ members
- ▶ Members assigned “core” response (facility close to home or work)
- ▶ In the course of 38 years
 - ▶ 124 activations for hospitals experiencing comms failure
 - ▶ 219 drills
 - ▶ 125 ‘stand by’ ops e.g., phone system cutovers, etc

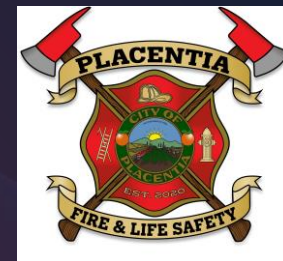
FIRST ... ABOUT HDSCS

- ▶ 8:15 AM: HDSCS member at drill site announces on our main frequency:
“Stand by, there is a potential REAL MCI in progress”
- ▶ W6DQ, picking up breakfast, listening to local news broadcast
 - ▶ “Getting word that there has been a commuter train accident in Orange County”
- ▶ Net control monitoring OC HEAR net
 - ▶ Hospital Emergency Radio Net
 - ▶ 911 calls coming in from the accident site
 - ▶ The MCI call goes out
 - ▶ On the repeater: “This is not a drill, this is not a drill”
- ▶ HDSCS activates, members instructed to immediately report to assignments
- ▶ W6DQ sets breakfast aside and heads off to St Jude Hospital

A FATEFUL RADIO CALL

- ▶ Westbound Metrolink with one locomotive and three cars with 300 passengers
- ▶ Eastbound freight – 67 cars, three locomotives: nearly 6000 tons of train
- ▶ 8:10 AM, met head-on in the city of Placentia
- ▶ Roughly six miles from the drill site





- ▶ Placentia Fire Department holding a drill several blocks away
 - ▶ First on scene
 - ▶ First situational awareness reported to County EOC
- ▶ Orange County EOC
 - ▶ Sheriff's Dept Emergency Communications Bureau
 - ▶ 911 call center
 - ▶ "Control One"
 - ▶ Law enforcement, Fire and paramedic dispatch
 - ▶ "Central Point"
 - ▶ Hospital Status via HEAR/ReddiNet (ED and bed count stats)
 - ▶ RACES and HDSCS radios



FOLLOWING ACCIDENT



Command Post Entrance

- ▶ Met on arrival by security (!), showed me where to park
 - ▶ Easy access to Incident Command Post (mere footsteps)
 - ▶ Great! My "Go Kit" was quite heavy at that time
- ▶ The Command Post
 - ▶ CP is very VERY busy
 - ▶ Best described as "organized chaos" to outsiders
 - ▶ This is normal and textbook application of HICS
- ▶ Immediately rendezvous with second HCSCS communicator
N6NVR, John



W6DQ

AT ST. JUDE HOSPITAL



- ▶ Met with St Jude Disaster Management Coordinator
 - ▶ Briefed us on the situation
 - ▶ Big problem: internal communications
 - ▶ Staff handie-talkies not working – using runners – slow process
 - ▶ Issued “Communicator” vests – important, shows we belong there
 - ▶ N6NVR assigned to Emergency Department
 - ▶ W6DQ assigned to shadow Incident Commander
 - ▶ We establish an internal simplex frequency and deploy

AT COMMAND POST



- ▶ Potential for serious comms problems at St. Jude
 - ▶ Handie-talkies not working
 - ▶ PBX is beginning to be flooded with calls
 - ▶ Internal and external calls were jamming the PBX
 - ▶ Outsiders requesting info on loved ones
- ▶ To make matters worse
 - ▶ ED has set up portable trauma trailers for incoming triage
 - ▶ The hospital expecting many victims to begin arriving
 - ▶ Comms between ED and triage could become critical
 - ▶ Transfers of information and patients/victims



AT COMMAND POST

- ▶ Solution via HDSCS: request a third operator
 - ▶ Net control dispatches a third member to St. Jude
 - ▶ Assigned to support triage staff
 - ▶ KE6NVJ, Dave arrives, given internal frequency and takes his assignment
- ▶ Main repeater is beginning to heat up
- ▶ HDSCS has access to multiple repeaters

AT COMMAND POST

- ▶ IC was interested in what was going on at other hospitals
 - ▶ Normal channels don't provide this type of data
 - ▶ Sitting next to the IC I was asked to NOT use headphones
 - ▶ Hams provide a different perspective on activities
- ▶ In HICS, the IC must integrate and interpret incoming intelligence
 - ▶ Amateur radio adds an additional channel

AS SHADOW TO INCIDENT COMMANDER

- ▶ Central Point was staged for the exercise
 - ▶ Hospitals reported simulated conditions on ReddiNet
 - ▶ One hospital had set PCCI with Immediate = 50 (!)
- ▶ As accident unfolds PCCI is not updated
 - ▶ CP is dispatching majority of Immediate to that hospital
 - ▶ At St. Jude: "Where are the victims?"
- ▶ Eventually straightened out, victims began arriving



WHEN AN EXERCISE TURNS REAL

- ▶ Typical traffic was internal (440 simplex)
 - ▶ Material requests from triage unit
 - ▶ ED requests additional nursing staff
 - ▶ ED request to certificate a volunteer ER MD
 - ▶ Patient counts
- ▶ And external (144 on several repeaters)
 - ▶ Request for additional communicator
 - ▶ PCCI for EMS (Patient Care Capacity Inventory)
 - ▶ Search for a specific victim (Placentia PD trying to locate engineer)
 - ▶ Requests for Metrolink/Red Cross contact numbers

MESSAGE TRAFFIC



- ▶ HDSCS invited to participate in St. Jude debriefing
 - ▶ Each department presented their report
 - ▶ HDSCS was praised for our contribution
 - ▶ And we were fed a nice lunch
- ▶ Takeaways
 - ▶ Most indicated that “It went as if it were a drill”
 - ▶ For HDSCS, we felt that we were a part of their team, echoed by staff
- ▶ “Drill like you work ... work like you drill”

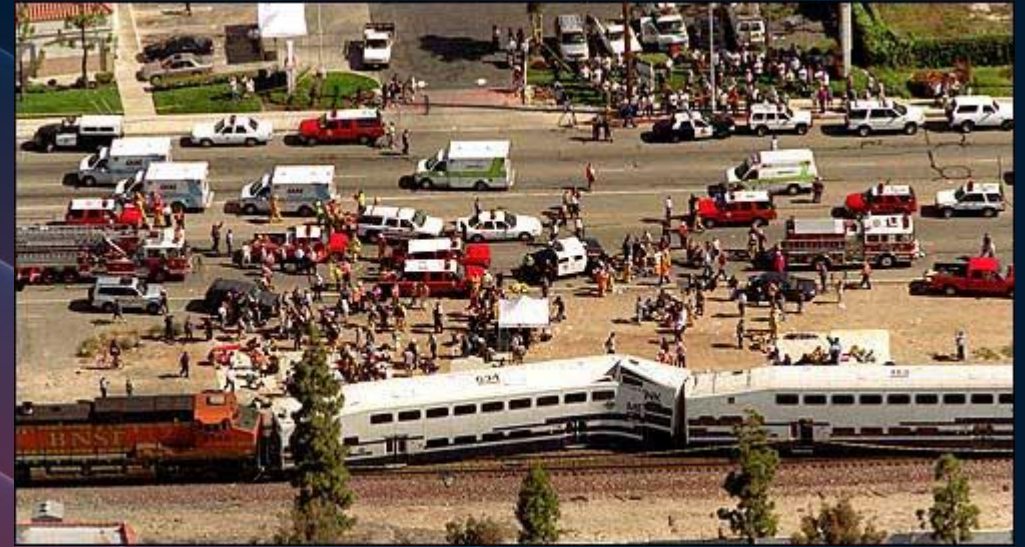
AFTERMATH

- ▶ 75th communications emergency in 21 years
- ▶ 28 members responded to 14 hospitals and EOC in Orange County
- ▶ Communications: critical internal and external comms
 - ▶ Successfully located engineer (broken leg jumping from cab)
 - ▶ ReddiNet “error” was quickly identified and resolved
 - ▶ Emergency phone numbers for Red Cross & Metrolink
 - ▶ MOUs with Red Cross and City/County RACES
 - ▶ Direct access to critical information
 - ▶ HDSCS response was “by the book”
 - ▶ Exemplary work by HDSCS volunteers
 - ▶ Integral component of OC Health Care Agency EMS

HDSCS RESPONSE

- ▶ Lasted 4 ½ hours
- ▶ Of 300 passengers on Metrolink
 - ▶ 264 were injured + one fire fighter
 - ▶ 164 were transported by ambulance
 - ▶ 2 fatalities: one at scene, one en-route
 - ▶ All critical victims were off the site in less than one hour
- ▶ Fifty five ambulances were dispatched
- ▶ Three busses transported minor injuries
- ▶ Uninjured transported back to initiating stations
- ▶ Third victim succumbed 45 days later from injuries
- ▶ Remains the single, largest Mass Casualty Incident in OC

INCIDENT STATISTICS



- ▶ NTSB publishes report Oct 7, 2003
 - ▶ BNSF PLACCLO3-22 collided head on with SCRRRA passenger train 809
 - ▶ Occurred on track 2 at Control Point Atwood in Placentia, CA
 - ▶ 162 victims transported to local hospitals with 2 fatalities
 - ▶ Damage estimated at \$4.6 million
- ▶ Probable cause
 - ▶ Freight train crew inattentiveness to signal at milepost 42.31
 - ▶ Failure to heed yellow light, slow to 30 mph
 - ▶ Train was accelerating to 50 mph
 - ▶ Could not stop when approaching red light 90 seconds later
 - ▶ Contributing: lack of positive train control system
- ▶ Some good news
 - ▶ The Safety Board concluded that "... the emergency response to this incident was timely, effective, and appropriate ..."

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Collision of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Freight Train With Metrolink Passenger Train Placentia, California April 23, 2002



Railroad Accident Report
NTSB/RAR-03/04

PB2003-916304
Notation 7590



**National
Transportation
Safety Board**
Washington, D.C.

County of Orange Health Care Agency - Emergency Medical Services

CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

to the

Hospital Disaster Support Communications System

Presented for Outstanding Service During the



*April 23, 2002 Response to the
Commuter Train Collision
Placentia, California*



Bruce E. Haynes, M.D.
Bruce E. Haynes, M.D.
Medical Director

May 30, 2002

Date

- ▶ October 2018: HDSCS becomes unsustainable
 - ▶ Continuous leadership of April Moell, WA6OPS
 - ▶ Unrealistic to continue due to multiple medical issues
 - ▶ While dedicated and capable, no member had time and experience
- ▶ A new organization has emerged
 - ▶ Orange County Health Emergency Amateur Radio Team (OCHEART)
 - ▶ Rapid response strike teams
 - ▶ Many former HDSCS members
 - ▶ Continues to forge relationships and support OC hospitals
- ▶ Please visit the Web sites
 - ▶ HDSCS: hdscs.org
 - ▶ OCHEART: ocheart.net

POSTSCRIPT