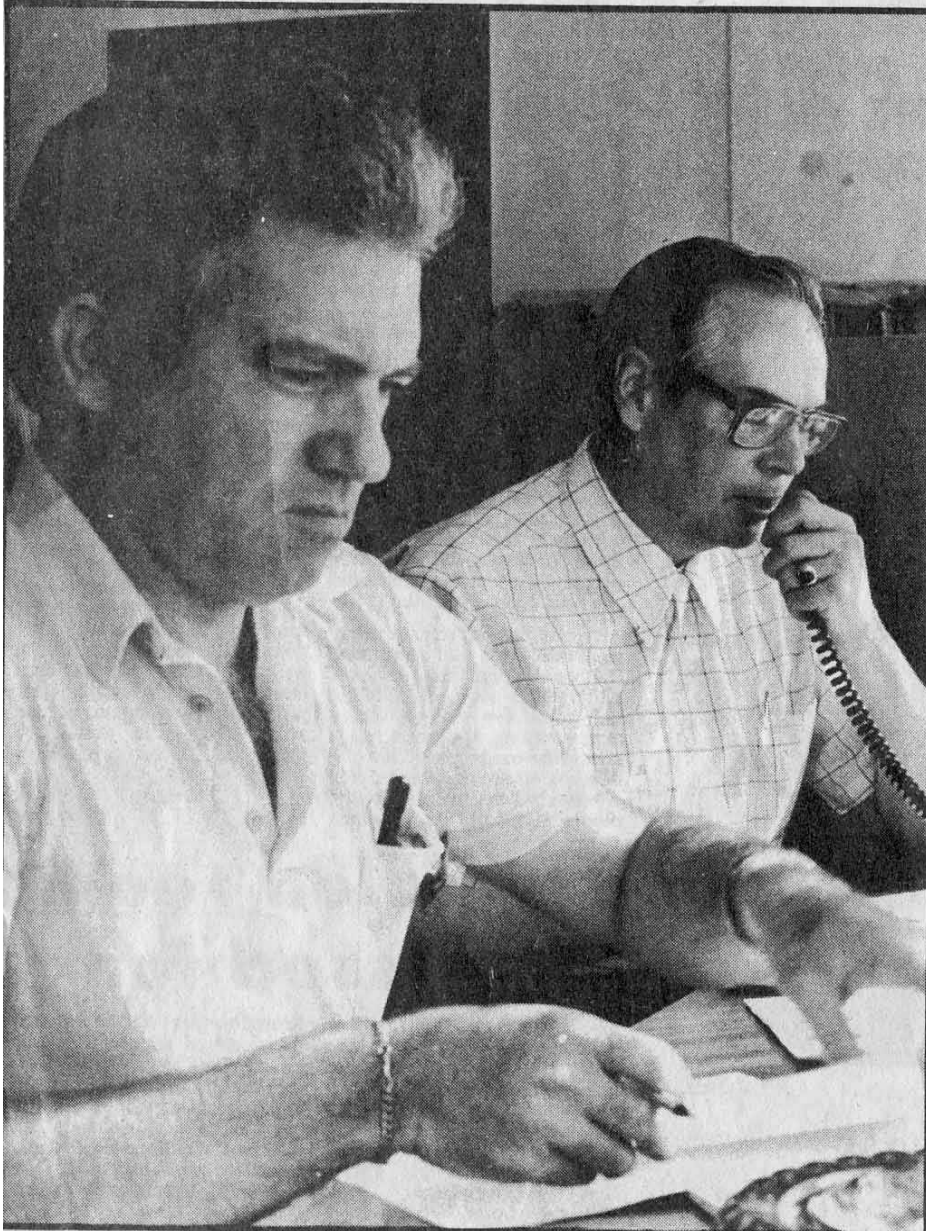


HURRICANE MAYBE

... but it was just practice for Red Cross



Paul Wittaker (left), Morley Kipp and Al Vanderburgh man the radios.

(Daily Times photo)

By PETER HUGHES
Daily Times Staff Writer

'Hurricane Maybe' hit Brampton at 10 a.m. Saturday morning, ripping the roof off the Northern Telecom Building.

But wait now. Don't be alarmed, because it was just a test of how fast local ham operators and the North Peel Red Cross can react to a disaster. The roof didn't really fly off the building, but if it did, what would happen?

Since the Mississauga train derailment almost two years ago, the question of reaction time by the Red Cross has been a growing concern.

NOT PREPARED

"The derailment showed the Toronto region Red Crosses how unprepared they were for a disaster," said Phil Macklem, chairman of the communication committee for Peel Red Cross. "Because of that we had to adopt a plan to organize Toronto area Red Crosses to be prepared."

He said most Red Cross branches across Ontario have formed disaster committees consisting of six essential parts.

Included are separate committees for shelter and clothing, registration and inquiries, food, communications, transportation and first aid.

At 10 a.m. when the first message reached headquarters on George Street, Macklem notified Red Cross volunteers and the local branch of the Canadian Ham Radio Relay League. Within 15 minutes a communication command post was set up, and a volunteer and an accompanying radio operator were on the scene at Northern Telecom.

25 'DEAD'

The team sent in a message that the roof had blown off the building, that 25 were dead and 75 injured. At 11 a.m., an emergency was declared.

Immediately Sheridan College and Victoria Park Arena were set up for emergency relocation because hurricane winds were causing tremendous damage in the city.

Peel Memorial Hospital was alerted to receive casualties and direct lines to the mayor and chief of police were established.

By the time firefighters arrived there was an

uncontrollable fire. An explosion was determined as the cause.

The hurricane continued to become deadly but no more were killed. But at the peak, the injury toll climbed to 500.

To make the disaster as real as possible, each volunteer was given envelopes to be opened at certain times. In the envelopes were reports on the status of the disaster and what was supposed to happen at that particular time.

GOOD PRACTICE

Macklem said this simulated disaster was excellent practice for this communication team.

"We learned quite a bit," he said. "It better prepared us for an actual disaster."

The Red Cross will not get involved in a disaster unless asked to do so by Peel police or the mayor's office.

Macklem said there's no reason why they wouldn't be asked, but noted co-operation is the key to a successful operation.

He said the day was successful and those involved were very enthusiastic. During the day, messages were received from areas including Mississauga, Toronto and north Halton.

FIRST TIME

This is the first time the Red Cross has been involved in this type of exercise. In the past the ham operators have been doing it alone.

Rod Pears organized the radio relay team consisting of 18 operators, and said the day went well — with a couple of exceptions.

"I think we made a lot of mistakes with communications, but it was worthwhile," he said. "I feel if you don't practise once in a while, you won't know what to do in an emergency."

John McDermid, MP for Brampton-Georgetown, and Mayor Jim Archdekin visited the Peel North Red Cross and Pears and Macklem showed them their setup.

"We demonstrated to the mayor that if a disaster did happen we could keep him in contact with various emergency units including the Red Cross, police and fire departments," Pears said.