

The Desert Voices Project

In the midst of an escalating Gulf War, families and loved ones of the United States military began to worry more and more for the safety of those that had been sent overseas. However, the difficulty and expense involved in long range communication at best significantly delayed messages to and from soldiers and at worst prevented them from being delivered at all. As the volume of messages increased and the delays became even worse, one communications professional, Edward Addy, began the search for a solution to communicating effectively over such a long distance.

Without many feasible options, Mr. Addy turned to the Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) which was operated through the Department of Defense. The organization had already been hard at work relaying messages, however they were simply not able to keep up with the overwhelming volume of traffic. Mr. Addy set to work on a solution that would enable even the families with limited financial resources to speak with their loved ones. As the owner of a communications design consulting firm, the technical know-how was at his disposal, however he concluded that to bridge the distance it would require a fair amount of resources.

After speaking with several companies and the media, Edward Addy was able to secure funding, equipment, and over a hundred volunteers to construct the required antenna and building infrastructure. Once land and facilities were acquired on the Nike Missile Base that was large enough to support the large antenna arrays, supporting

equipment, and staff, construction began on November 19th, 1990. The buildings that the radio equipment and staff would be housed in were quite old and dilapidated to the point that they required a great deal of restoration before being fit for duty. In the meantime, the antenna crews managed to construct one of the most powerful long range HF antenna arrays in North America in only 18 days. The antenna consisted of two rhombics that were about 450 feet by 275 feet mounted on 105 foot cedar power poles. By December 7th, testing of the station began and by December 13th it became operational making the first contact with Saudi Arabia at 2 P.M.

The system patched telephone calls into the HF radio station, allowing families to communicate with their loved ones. Relaying messages and phone calls from the troops, the station continued operation until the following May 1st. With the contributions of over 300 volunteers and 45 companies many families were able to relieve the enormous amount of stress that was induced by loved ones being deployed so far away without means of communication. The amateur radio community and others had stepped up under the leadership of Edward Addy to provide an invaluable service that will always be remembered by families across the country.

Sources:

<http://www.mapability.com/ei8ic/index.html?http&&www.mapability.com/ei8ic/rhombic/ncaec1.html>

http://www.northernvisual.com/about_ed.html