

Amateur Radio Nets Crucial Link in Maritime Rescues

05/12/2015

Amateur Radio played a crucial role in two recent at-sea rescues. On April 8, sailors Randy (VA3ORT) and Dawn (VA3PBT) Ortiz of Ontario, Canada, ran into heavy seas that led them to abandon their 42-foot sailing yacht *Nirvana Now* in a remote portion of the South Pacific while en route to the Marquesas. The Ortizes were able to summon help via the **Pacific Seafarer's Net** on 14.300 MHz, and the North Carolina-based *Continuum*, skippered by Bob Jankowski, KJ4ZFP, and his wife Mona, was able to come to their rescue, some 1200 miles from the nearest landfall. The Ortizes were last reported to be safe in Tahiti. Pacific Seafarer's Net member Fred Moore, W3ZU, in Florida was able to coordinate the request for help. Another vessel, *Athos of London*, also had been diverted to help, but that vessel did not have an HF radio on board and could not be called off until after *Continuum* had arrived on the scene and rescued the Ortizes.

"I would like to impress upon all that it was the communications allowed us through the SSB radio giving us access to the land-based ham networks and other boats that saved our lives," Randy Ortiz **told** *Latitude 38*. "I think it is still prudent for all persons voyaging offshore to be skilled in the use of the SSB radio."

On April 16, members of the Maritime Mobile Service Network (**MMSN**) assisted with a mayday call on 14.300 MHz, which NCS William Sturridge, KI4MMZ, handled. Skipper Andrew Fleming, KC4VOA, on board the sailing yacht *Seauquel*, reported his vessel taking on water due to a mechanical failure some 95 miles northwest of Puerto Rico and headed to Florida. Fleming reported that he had been unable to raise the US Coast Guard or other agencies on the radio. Sturridge notified the Coast Guard and also contacted Moore to assist in handling the crisis.

"They had a short window of opportunity in which to communicate," Assistant MMSN Net Manager Jeff Savasta, KB4JKL, reported. "It was only approximately 5 minutes before contact was lost with the vessel, and any other information that they obtained was via an in-house database program which the MMSN utilizes for its contacts. KC4VOA has checked in to the MMSN many times prior so there was a vast amount of information on the vessel."

Savasta said the US Coast Guard was dispatched, the vessel was located, and a Coast Guard Paramedic was lowered via helicopter to treat a head injury that Fleming had sustained. Fleming and his wife Sally, KA3RUJ, later expressed their gratitude to Sturridge.

"We are so grateful that you heard us on Thursday morning and were so persistent to make sure you got everything correct," they said. "I had worried lately that ham radio might be overtaken by technology, but you proved that it still has a significant place. The ham community is a remarkable community and we are so grateful to be a part of it. While cruising, ham nets are our principal source of weather, and it is also how we stay in touch with our cruising friends all over the world!" — *Thanks to John Procter, W1HFG, and Bobby Graves, KB5HAV*

###