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November-December, 2001



**September 11, 2001**

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# The REACTer

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On the Cover:  
Photo by Richard Olsen

### Editor's Note:

The events of September 11, 2001, deeply affected and involved REACT members across the United States and throughout the world. This issue of *The REACTer* is devoted to the men and women who responded to the crises in New York City and Washington, D.C.

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November-December, 2001

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## *From the Chairman*

*by B. Frank Jennings*

### *Bravo Zulu!*

*REACT* has once again proven that it is a viable organization and can function in even the most horrendous conditions. When the World Trade Center emergency occurred, our New York *REACT* members, Teams, and Councils were up and responding while the attack was in progress. The Board of Directors, Officers, and all of the members cannot thank the responders enough for all of their tireless efforts. Some of these responders traveled as much as 1800 miles at their own expense to relieve the New York units in their efforts.

These attacks upon our nation have opened up a new era in the history of *REACT*. We find ourselves no longer working as a Team, within our own isolated realm. We are now a unit of many teams from more than one area, working together, shoulder to shoulder with our MOU partner organizations: the Salvation Army, ARRL, American Red Cross, and NVOAD.

Your Officers and the Board are in the process of critiquing the *REACT* responses and will compare them with reports from the New York *REACT* units. We will be assessing our strong areas and our weak areas. Once we compile the data, your Officers will make recommendations to the Board as to methods to improve our response efforts for the next national disaster. We know it will happen, we just don't know when or where.

To every one that was involved with this I wish to express in Navy terms, "Bravo Zulu" – WELL DONE!

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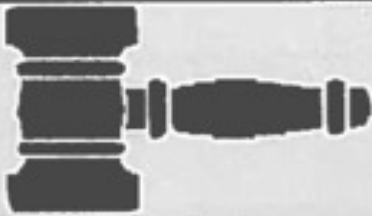


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# From the President

by Charles A. "Chuck" Thompson

## *Debriefing a Disaster*

*REACT* Teams and members responded quickly and effectively in the recent disasters. *REACT*ers in Washington assisted police by manning barricades, while in New York more than 1,500 man-hours were donated to support of The Salvation Army.

We can be justly proud of these contributions.

At the same time, we must also recognize that not everything went smoothly. Without going into details, I'll just report that the *REACT* organization wasn't fully prepared for this type of operation. I'm not sure how anyone could be prepared for this type of disaster, but it's clear that we need to have better procedures in place to be prepared for any future situation.

To that end, I've asked Bob Kaster, President of Oklahoma County (Okla.) *REACT* and one of our Public Relations Liaisons, to form a "blue ribbon" committee to review *REACT*'s role in recent disaster situations, and to recommend procedures and policies to guide *REACT* in the future.

Bob is especially well qualified for this assignment, as he was Team President when OCR provided outstanding support to Oklahoma City in the aftermath of the federal courthouse bombing in the mid-90s. Bob has recruited Jerry Jennison (Texas), Gayland Kitch (Oklahoma), Chris Myers (Florida), and Lawson Smith (Missouri) as

members of the Committee. He is also planning to ask a Salvation Army staffer with experience both in Oklahoma City and NYC to be an advisory member.

Gayland Kitch is a long-time member of University of Oklahoma *REACT* in Norman and is the emergency manager for the city of Moore, Okla.

Lawson Smith is a retired military officer. He and other Missouri *REACT*ers traveled to New York and supported *REACT*'s disaster recovery activities there.

Jerry Jennison is a long-time *REACT*er who has served as Team and State Council president and as president of Texas VOaid. He is currently in charge of a 16-state SATERN region.

Chris Myers has been very active in the Florida DCAT Team. He was recently named Team Leader of the *REACT* NDCAT Team that includes Florida.

This committee will be called the "Disaster Response Procedures Committee" and will report directly to me. I have given the Committee unlimited authority to investigate *REACT*'s role in various disaster situations in recent years. I ask all *REACT*ers,

Councils, and Teams to cooperate fully with the Committee.

Our annual Team Registration is now underway. Again this year, we've made the paperwork easier to allow Teams to be more responsive. At this time of national rededication, we need to retain our trained Teams and individual members, and to recruit new members to support our efforts. There are many people out there looking for a meaningful way to help these days – let's try to get them to volunteer for *REACT*.

---

## 10-9?

In the Sept.-Oct., 2001, *REACT*er, a report from Porterfield (Calif.) *REACT* contained some misinformation.

The Mexican holiday, Cinco de Mayo, celebrates the victory of General Zaragoza over the French army at a time when Mexico was a province of France.

Mexico's independence from Spain is celebrated on September 16th (Diez y Seis de Setiembre). Our apologies for the errors.



## *From the Executive Vice-President*

*by Dick Cooper*

### *Getting Back To Normal*

A lot has happened since my last article. Our world will never be the same, but our leaders have told us that we must get back to a routine and as close to normal as possible.

With that, in mind, I am glad to inform the *REACT* membership that I have published new, updated committee and liaison web pages to the RI web site. Enter the web site as normal and click on "Committees"; you will see the new main page for committees and liaisons. Complete descriptions are included on each page, along with other information available. The committee chairpersons and liaison officers are invited to offer suggestions to these web sites. If any member has any questions, please email me at <dcooper@reactintl.org>.

The new pages offer guidelines for committee and liaison operation. With this information, the chairpersons and liaisons will know the responsibility of their position, rather than leaving it open for interpretation all the time. This can be of assistance to other positions when working on various projects. With this information, other committees and liaisons will know with whom to share information, when working on various projects that may span more than one position. When this sharing is done correctly, every position involved functions more efficiently. Committees and liaisons are encouraged to share information when they feel there

may be an overlap in concern.

I hope that everyone looks at the committee and liaison pages on the RI web site. You will notice that the Communications Committee chairperson and the Government Relations, Volunteer Agencies, and Ways and Means liaison positions need to be filled. I know that there are well qualified *REACT* members that can fill these vacancies so please contact me. If you have any questions you can also call me at 877-881-3995 after 7:30 Eastern Time.

If anyone is in the area of Warsaw, Indiana, on November 10 and 11, 2001, you may want

to visit the Indiana Council meeting. Your Executive VP will be their guest speaker at the Saturday night banquet.

[*Editor's Note: In past years, the Board, Officers, and Committees Directory has been published in The REACTer. The directory took up several pages and was partly outdated by the time it was published. The information on the RI web site will be kept up-to-date regularly, and much more detailed information is available. However, if your Team doesn't have access to the web site, the directory can be obtained from the RI headquarters office in Suitland.*]

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New York City firefighters at the World Trade Center site, a few days after September 11. (Photo: Clark Bortree.)

*The following pages contain several accounts of the actions of REACT Teams and Members in New York City following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. We know that some Teams also were active in the Washington, D.C., area but we have not received detailed information from them; when we do, it will be published. We also have only a brief report from Keith Hosnan of Henry Co. (Ohio) REACT that he has been in NYC working with the Red Cross; we expect a full report from Keith later.*

*Among the first people to reach the World Trade Center site after the first airplane struck the North Tower were members of Emergency Medical REACT of New York City (EMR/NYC). This Team is composed entirely of people with emergency medical certification; the Team is recognized by the City of New York as Certified First Responders. Some members of the Team are employed by emergency medical services and were dispatched to the WTC site by their employers; others heard the terrifying news and immediately went to the site to help. Meanwhile, Team Communications Officer Jeff Schneller was contacted by the Salvation Army and asked to set up and staff a radio system at their headquarters in Manhattan. This is the account of Carlos Varon, Team President:*

Our Team, Emergency Medical REACT of New York City, is recognized by the city and New York State as a Basic Life Support First Response (BLS-FR) Unit. On that fateful day, the following members of my team responded to the call for help from all over the city:

Dennis Case (Vice-President and Paramedic) responded from home and provided medical care and assistance to as many people as he could and stayed as long as he could until there was danger to his patients and his vehicle.

Orlando Abreus (Sergeant-at-Arms/Personnel Officer) responded from home and picked up another member of the Team, Paul Lopez, and went to the scene. Orlando is an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Paul is a Certified First Responder (CFR). They assisted as many people as possible but had to run for their lives to escape being crushed by the falling debris. They and many others were trapped in an area until Emergency Service Unit officer took his gun out and shot the windows out of an adjacent building to allow Orlando, Paul, and himself to escape. While they did manage to escape the initial blast, they did not escape the shock wave that sent them both flying into various cement columns. Injuries were sustained by both men. Aside from smoke inhalation, Orlando injured his hip and chest area. Paul had three ribs broken; his eyes became infected from the debris and he developed a bronchial



Cemetery of St. Paul's Church, across the street from the WTC site. The church itself was not damaged. (Photo: Richard Olsen)





The WTC site as seen by Carlos Varon and Richard Olsen while touring "ground zero." (Photo: Richard Olsen)

disorder from inhaling smoke and dust. Both members are still under medical care and have also been receiving crisis counseling.

Aviv Citron (Advanced First Aid Certified) responded from home and was in radio contact with the other units, but got separated from them with all the confusion and chaos. He assisted another ambulance corps and worked until relieved by other units.

Fabio Silva (EMT) was working with his medical unit when the first reports from the World Trade Center came in. Fabio rushed to the scene with his ambulance unit. He assisted at the Twin Towers. When it became clear that a collapse was imminent, Fabio was evacuated. It was later discovered that other members of his unit were missing and later confirmed dead.

Jared Holz (Paramedic) also was working with his medical unit when the call came in and rushed to the scene; he and Fabio work for the same emergency medical service.

Jeff Schneller (Communications) was one of the first EMR/NYC members contacted. He is also a member of ARES and the Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN). The Salvation Army's district headquarters is in lower Manhattan, a few blocks from the World Trade Center site. When the terrorist attacks first occurred, Jeff was called out to set up a radio system at the Salvation Army headquarters. While the events were unfolding, Jeff activated the EMR/NYC base radio and began calling up other *REACT* Teams and members to assist. Both amateur and GMRS radio networks were operational within a short time.

Danny Ramos (EMT) was downtown visiting a client and also assisted with the rescue efforts until he was relieved by other medical units.

As all this unfolded in New York, I was stranded at the airport in Miami. I finally rented a car and drove back to New York, where I began working at the Salvation Army headquarters alongside Jeff. By then, he had put out a call to *REACT* for more help with communications, and Teams from the NYC area had begun to respond.

Our team has been hit very hard on several fronts. As noted above, several of our members were injured and are still being treated for medical and emotional duress. They also lost much of their EMS gear. The biggest loss was Orlando's truck, which was destroyed by falling debris. I am attempting to see if there are any funds that can be used to replace his vehicle, or at least all the EMS and diving equipment that was in it.

The rest of us have continued assisting the Salvation Army with their efforts; our main duty has been to provide coordination and logistical support for the Salvation Army's canteens in the WTC area. The canteens provide essential support for the thousands of rescue workers, many of them volunteers, still at the scene.

*The following account describes the same events from another point of view, that of Clark Bortree of Westchester (NY) REACT.*

I first heard of the horrific events that unfolded on September 11th when I got a call from my girlfriend at 9:30 that morning. She told me she could see the World Trade Center on fire from her office in midtown Manhattan. I didn't think much of it until a minute later when I turned on the TV. The first indication that something was wrong was when I couldn't get any of the local stations to come in. I finally tuned into CBS channel 2, the only station that didn't have its transmitter at the World Trade Center. I saw the video clips of the second plane hitting the second tower. Disbelief is the only word for what I saw unfold in the next couple of hours.

After watching the two towers fall on live TV, I started to think to myself how *REACT* could respond to such a grave catastrophe. The reporters on TV were saying that Manhattan was being shut to all incoming traffic. Additional attacks in the city still were possible.

I called the president of my team, Charles Bessels, and asked him what we might do as a Team to respond to the situation. He told me to sit tight as he was making calls to figure out how we could respond. Because of the chaos that day, nothing had been determined regarding how our Team could respond. The next day, September 12, I got a call from Charles telling me that the Salvation Army's emergency radio communications team in NYC (SATERN) had requested help from local *REACT* Teams. I immediately got in touch with the SATERN coordinator in NYC, Jeff Schneller (who is also a member of Emergency Medical *REACT* of New York City), and ended up reporting to Salvation Army headquarters in lower Manhattan that afternoon.

There was quite a bit of confusion at the headquarters over how to coordinate the volunteer response. Jeff told me that what they needed most from *REACT* members at that time was to have as many of the Salvation Army's canteens assigned a radio operator as possible. The Nextel phones, which were the main method of communications, were working intermittently. I and a handful of ham operators who showed up that afternoon took our assignments and headed out into the field.

My first assignment was at two canteens located at the Medical Examiner's office on the east side of midtown. As I relayed information back and forth from the canteens to headquarters, tractor trailer loads of bodies continually came in and that is when the severity of the disaster started to sink in. Several hours later as the early evening started to turn into late evening I became a mobile unit, transporting volunteers back to Salvation Army HQ. While I was at headquarters, an urgent request for gasoline came in from the canteens in ground zero and at another midtown location. I was the only mobile unit available and took the call.

There were challenges to carrying out the gas delivery to the canteens. First, I had to locate enough gas canisters to bring down to ground zero. I managed to find 35 gallons'-worth of them at an equipment distribution point set up by the city and loaded them in the back seat of my Chevy Caprice. I then headed into the heart of ground zero looking for the first two canteens. It was quite a task getting through security checkpoints and navigating through the streets which were littered with building debris and civilian and emergency vehicles destroyed in the collapse of the towers. The streets were also pitch black due to the power blackout in the area and one-way streets became two-way streets. As I got closer to the first canteens, the air became quite thick with a white smoke that resembled a foggy type mist. Everyone in the area was wearing gas masks and hardhats. I finally arrived at the first two canteens just one block north of the collapse site at Church St. and Barclay St. I was given a mask by the Salvation Army staff and we began fueling up the trucks.



Salvation Army volunteers sort mounds of donated supplies at one of the receiving areas in "ground zero." *REACT* and other volunteers helped coordinate the delivery of supplies to the SA canteens. Photo: Clark Bortree)

After taking care of the two canteens at that site, I headed back uptown out of ground zero and refilled the gas canisters at a gas station where the Salvation Army had an account. I then proceeded further uptown to fill up additional canteens at other locations. I returned to ground zero once again with more gas for one of the trucks that had not been completely refilled.

It was about 4:00 a.m. when I found myself and a ham operator from upstate New York stationed at the canteens at Church and Barclay being the only two radio volunteers left on duty. I secured the gas canisters at his location and headed home to get some sleep for the following afternoon/night shift.

The following day *REACT* members from all over the New York area started to arrive; they would spend many hours over the next several weeks.. It was tough to keep the radio base and mobile operations going on a 24 hour basis but somehow we managed. *REACT* started becoming a familiar name among the checkpoints leading into ground zero and I as well as other members were often greeted with smiles as we headed in. Toward the end of the second week just when the local teams were finding it more difficult to put in long hours due to work responsibilities, we saw the arrival of the Mark Twain *REACT* Team from Missouri who greatly helped keep the operations going strong for the next two weeks.

There are three memories from my experience during the rescue/recovery effort that will probably remain with me for as long as I live. The first is the image of thousands upon thousands of office documents scattered everywhere in trees, on the sidewalks and in the streets. These faxes, memos and spreadsheets represent to me the thousands of innocent civilians killed in the attack. The second memory is that of the dozens of emergency vehicles burned out and crushed, parked as they were when they arrived on the scene. These vehicles represent to me the hundreds of selfless emergency personnel who perished trying to save others. The last memory is that of the thousands of people from all walks of life who participated in the rescue/recovery effort. As a native New Yorker and American I have never seen such unity and determination as I did in the response to the World Trade Center disaster.

In the months prior to September 11th I had begun to ask myself if *REACT* really made much of a difference anymore on a scale that the public could appreciate. After September 11th, I don't ask myself this question any longer. My only hope now is that we continue to maintain our reputation as an international organization dedicated to providing emergency communications whenever and wherever seconds, days and weeks count.

*RI Secretary Lee Besing posted reports from the disaster sites on the RI Web site as quickly as they arrived. One of the first reports from New York City was sent by RI Executive Vice-President and Region 2 Director Dick Cooper on Sept. 13:*

Currently communications are being provided for the Salvation Army. Their NYC headquarters office is only about twelve blocks from "ground zero" and they need communications for the six canteens located on the perimeter of the disaster area.

*REACT* volunteers will need all forms of *REACT* ID available: card, uniform, etc. If you are not GMRS or Amateur licensed but wish to volunteer, there is probably a place for you.



Clark Bortree (Westchester Co. *REACT*) and RI Vice-Pres. Fred Lanshe in "ground zero."  
(Photo: Harumi Koyama)

Carlos Varon hitches a ride on a "gator," driven by a Salvation Army volunteer, for a first-hand look at "ground zero."  
(Photo: Richard Olsen)

*On September 15, RI Vice-President and Treasurer Fred Lanshe filed this report:*

There was a very good working relationship among all parties involved [at the WTC site]. Good communications have been established. Even a message from the American Red Cross came through looking for blood pressure cuffs. Oftentimes SA [Salvation Army] and ARC field sites were set up next to each other.

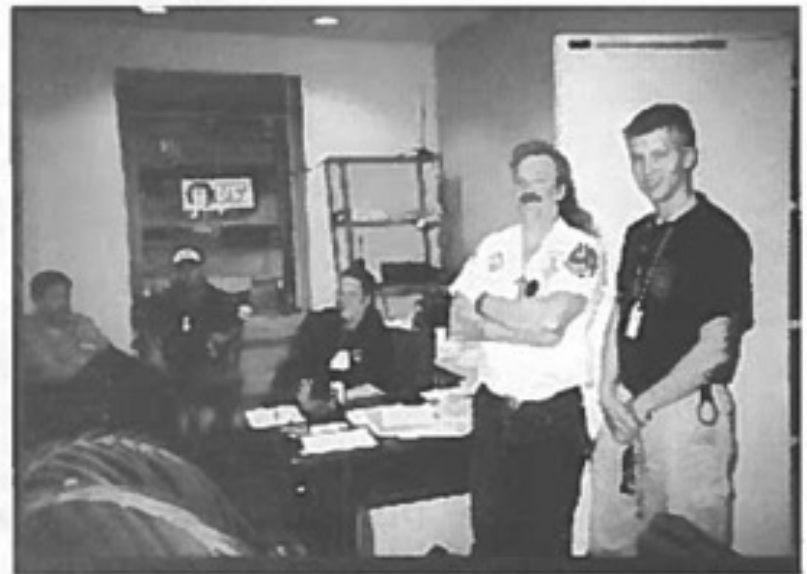
The Salvation Army's SATERN representatives requested *REACT's* GMRS and Amateur operators to support their radio communications covering their mobile canteen vehicles and their base in Manhattan. The local request escalated to the Council level, then the Regional Director's level. The two closest Regional Directors [Lanshe and Dick Cooper] worked together on it with the Southern and Upstate New York Councils.

*Seven days after the terrorist attacks, the recovery activity had settled into nearly a routine. Charles Bessels, Vice-President of the Southern New York REACT Council, reported on Sept. 18:*

As of 2230 hrs today, *REACT* Teams continue to assist the Salvation Army in Manhattan, *REACT* units are making rounds to the different canteens around "ground zero" and at other positions like the Medical Examiner's office, the Jacob Javits Convention Center where they are doing volunteer registration, and the Armory on Lexington Ave. where the families of victims are meeting with officials to give DNA samples and provide additional information. Our units make sure that the canteens have all the supplies, fuel, and personnel that they need, as well as making emergency deliveries of things like ice, additional lighting, etc.

Warren Deitz, the Southern NY *REACT* Council President, and I are now making an additional request for *REACT* units. We need assistance from any units that are able to come to NYC to help us with our operations.

This is expected to be an extended operation that officials are now projecting to last for two months or more. The local Teams and the few who have traveled simply cannot continue to provide the coverage that is needed. We do have sleeping and showering facilities and food is available at all times.

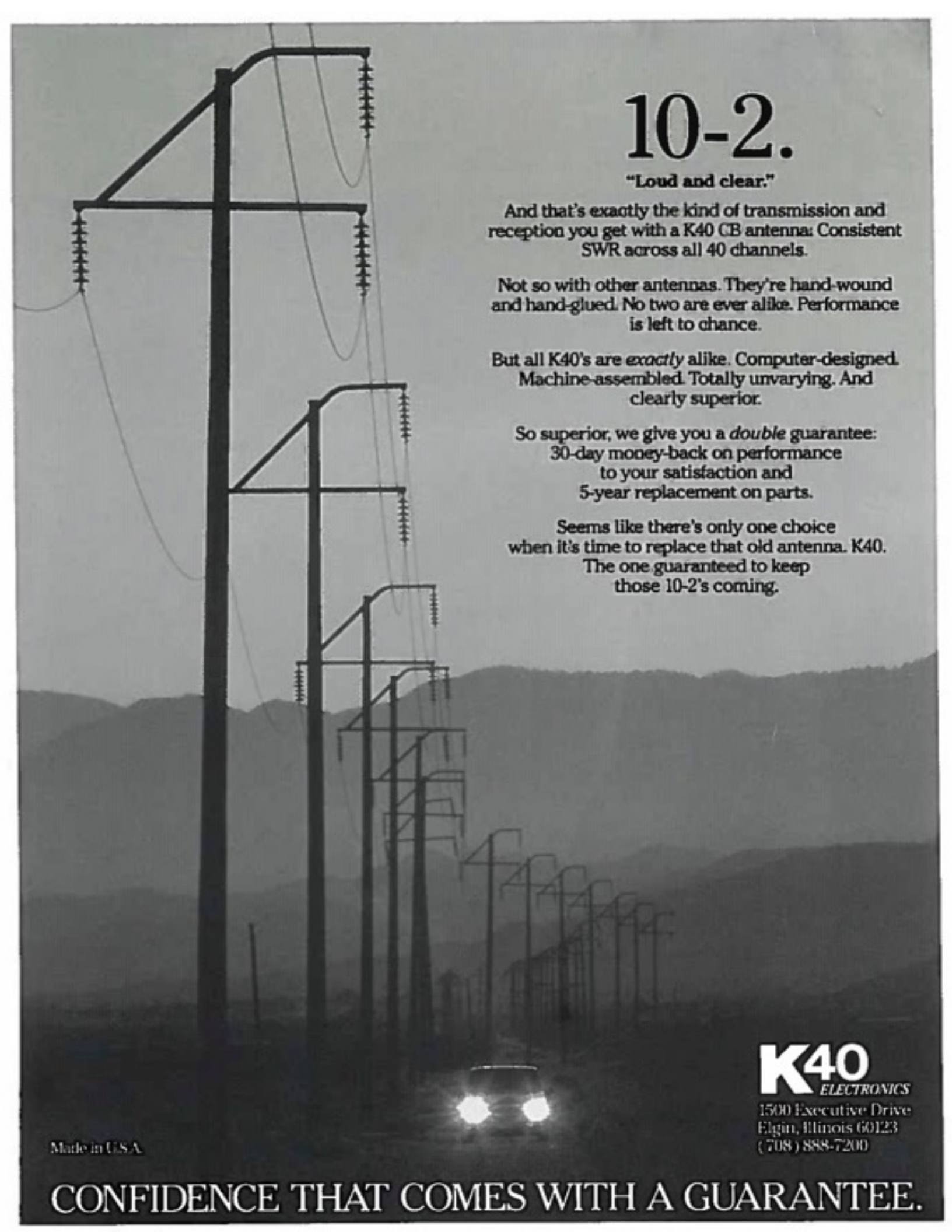


Members of some of the New York area Teams that assisted at the Salvation Army base: Joe Namer, Westchester Co. *REACT*; Amateur Radio operator Anthony Balsamo of Hanover, N.H.; Rich Olsen and John Panos, president and vice-president of Sullivan Co. *REACT*.  
(Photo: Warren Dietz)

*Two days later, Bessels wrote:*

We have received some calls from Teams who want to come and help. At this time a Team from Missouri is on its way to NYC to assist.

We are still busy in Manhattan and continue to provide the services I described two days ago. The mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, told the press yesterday that this operation is expected to go on for at least six more months....This is without a doubt the biggest and longest *REACT* operation ever, and we are going to need help.



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