

## This Day in History... March 28, 1964

# American Radio Relay League Saves Lives

On March 28, 1964, amateur radio operators provided essential emergency communications in the wake of a devastating earthquake in Alaska.

The idea for the American Radio Relay League came from Hiram Percy Maxim of Hartford, Connecticut. One night in April 1914, he wanted to send a message to a friend 30 miles away in Springfield, but was unable to reach him. From this, the idea struck Maxim to create an organized relay system for radio amateurs.

A few days later, Maxim attended a meeting of his local radio club and suggested the creation of an American Radio Relay League. The club agreed and the American Radio Relay League was formed on April 6, 1914. In the coming months, they sent out applications to every amateur radio station they knew of, and by that September, they established a network of more than 230 stations.



*This stamp was issued on the date of the president's proclamation of Alaska as a state.*

Over the next 50 years, the league's membership grew across the country, reaching all the way to Alaska. Then, just days before the group's 50th anniversary, a major natural disaster brought the Amateur Radio Relay League into the spotlight.

On March 27, 1964, the largest earthquake in the history of the United States struck Alaska, greatly damaging Anchorage, Valdez, and the surrounding areas. The earthquake, which measured a magnitude of 9.2, caused widespread destruction. In conjunction with the ensuing tsunami (tidal wave) it caused, the quake took nearly 140 lives.

On March 27 and March 28, in the aftermath of this natural disaster, amateur radio operators provided essential emergency communications, which greatly aided relief and rescue operations. Most other communication systems had been knocked out during the earthquake, so these radio operators provided important aid in the early hours, before other communication systems were back up and running. The Alaska-Pacific Emergency Preparedness Net was established after the earthquake and is still maintained by amateur radio operators today. The 1964 Amateur Radio stamp was produced to celebrate the league's 50th anniversary. It was issued in Anchorage, Alaska, in recognition of the league's efforts during this natural disaster.

Amateur radio operators, often referred to as "hams," continue to serve during emergency situations, especially in places with such sparsely populated areas as Alaska. Today, the Amateur Radio League has 161,000 members in the US, as well as 7,000 in other countries.



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