After Action Report:
Florida Baptist Disaster Relief Thanksgiving 2020
Simulated Survivor Messaging

Gordon Gibby
Monday, Dec 7 2020 (Pearl Harbor Day)

EXERCISE:

Volunteer members of the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief core communications team have all received instruction in the usage of the WINLINK radio email system.   Some have additional experience in traditional amateur radio "traffic net" systems.   This Exercise was a Drill designed to familiarize the volunteers with a proposed Survivor message form, intended for moving traffic outbound from a communications-impaired disaster area, from survivors to loved ones whom they wished to inform of their circumstances.

The form is presented in Appendix One.

The expected disaster ministry usage would be as follows:

- Blank message forms are provided to survivors through a combination of public tables near the FBDR PCC trailer, distribution within shelters, distribution through feeding centers.

- Completed message forms are returned to the FBDR PCC trailer.

- Survivor messages are typed into WINLINK computers for transmission over the air, one email for each message.   There is no specific "WINLINK FORM" for this type of message as of yet, so a simple email suffices.

- Messages may be directly typed into the computer that is attached to an HF Winlink transmitter, or may alternatively be typed into other computers, and then "exported" as a group on a flash drive, and then "imported" to the one computer that connected to the HF transmitter.   The latter technique allows skilled typists to simultaneously move a large number of messages into typed format, while the radio operator concentrates on making the required radio communications.

Volunteers were encouraged to utilize the proposed paper form with friends and family over the Thanksgiving weekend (or throughout the next week/weekend) to gather simple messages to friends and family at distant locations.   Experience explaining the paper form would be gained by this action. Then the resulting message(s) would be transmitted, by HF radio if possible, using either the WINLINK system or via the amateur radio NTS traffic system.   As a fallback, participants could use a VHF WINLINK system if they lacked HF capabilities.   (Some members even suggested just sending using WINLINK Telnet if no radio at all were available.)

RESULTS:

I am aware of three volunteers who participated in the Drill: Gordon Gibby, Nick Murabito, and Michael Crisler.   All were successful in moving 1 or more messages.   Nick Murabito further tested the export/import function, as had Gordon Gibby (to provide the original drill instructions).   No information was gathered on the methods of message transmission, but it appeared all were accomplished using WINLINK.

The following feedback comments were received either orally or in writing:

1. Explaining the "form" to a spouse encountered difficulty because the spouse thought they were being asked to create and send an email themselves.   It seemed that an improvement would be to use the metaphor that is was a "telegram" which would be sent after the message creator simply wrote down the "telegram" to be sent.

2. Nick Murabito reported that four messages were exported, but it seemed the fourth message did not join the group and only three messages were imported.

3. Michael Crisler reported that there was a concern that REPLY messages would result in inbound traffic, clogging up the operation-- and that it was unclear how to even find the original creator of the message. He suggested the form be altered to include as part of the message that replies could not at this time be accepted (due to the disaster situation).

Improvement Plan:

Documentation providing improved suggestions how to explain this system to the public need to be created to avoid the confusion that was apparent in trying to explain this form to family members. Such explanations may need to be placed as placards at the message form distribution/collection sites, so some means of displaying them should be arranged.   Additionally, explanatory information can be placed on the reverse side of the form itself.

Export/Import: I tested the export/import with four messages and it worked properly, moving all four messages, using WINLINK EXPRESS version 1.5.32.0   It is possible that either a bug in an earlier version, or a user error, might have caused the difficulty that Nick experienced.   Appendix 2 displays the dialog box that shows when the messages are imported, showing the count of messages imported and also a line indicating no "duplicates" were found.   So it is possible that Nick had the identical message previously created or extant, and this is why the system refused to re-import it. Further testing by Nick could determine whether this is the case.

REPLIES: The form will be upgraded to include as part of the message to the intended recipient that replies cannot be accepted at this time.

APPENDIX ONE: Survivor Message Form

	OUTGOING MESSAGE TO LOVED ONES VIA _____ DISASTER RELIEF	
	MESSAGES MUST HAVE AT LEAST EMAIL ADDRESS -or- PHONE NUMBER FOR DELIVERY	
FROM:	PRINT YOUR FIRST NAME | LAST NAME	
DATE:	MONTH DAY, YEAR	
INCIDENT:	GENERAL NAME OF INCIDENT	
TO:	PRINT PERSON ADDRESSED TO	
	PRINT EMAIL ADDRESS	
	REPEAT PRINT EMAIL ADDRESS	
	PRINT **PHONE NUMBER** INCLUDING AREA CODE ( )	
MESSAGE	PRINT MESSAGE TO SEND (MAX 100 WORDS) IN LINES BELOW:	
	MESSAGE CREATOR ACKNOWLEDGES THAT ACCURACY OR EVEN DELIVERY IS NOT GUARANTEED THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THIS SERVICE DONE BY VOLUNTEERS. **DO NOT PUT EMBARRASSING OR PRIVATE DETAILS AS THIS MESSAGE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.**	

APPENDIX TWO: Importing Exported Emails

Dialog box demonstrates the results: