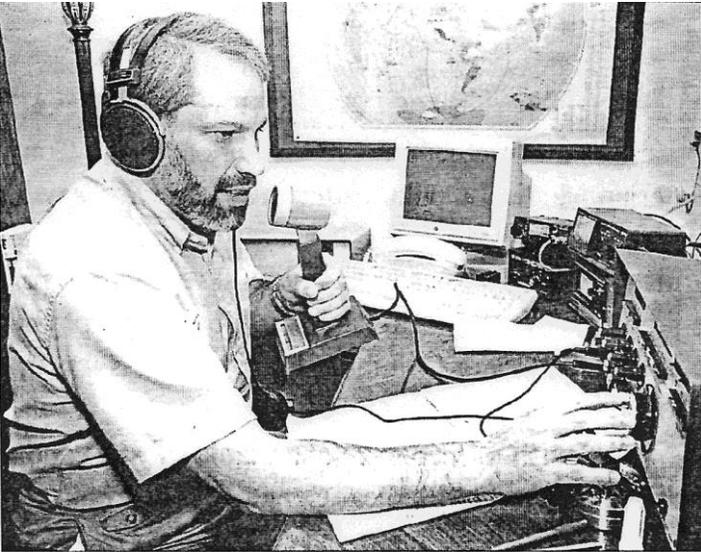


## Doctors Use Ham Radios to Save a Life in Russia



Dr. Charles L. Starke with shortwave radio at his Briarcliff home. He uses the radio to consult with Soviet doctors about the condition of patient injured in a car accident.

By PATRICIA KEEGAN

An internist from Briarcliff Manor is among several doctors from the United States responding to an unusual call for help from the Soviet Union. Their efforts may not only save a man's life but also increase medical cooperation between the two countries.

What most of the American doctors involved in the case and the injured man have in common is that they are amateur radio operators. The doctors were contacted by other ham radio operators and asked to get involved in the case, and they continue to send some messages to the Russian doctors by radio.

Since late May, Dr. Charles L. Starke of Briarcliff Manor, another doctor from Brooklyn, a psychiatrist from Michigan and a dentist and neurologist living in California have consulted with Soviet doctors on an almost daily basis about the condition of Oleg Murugov, a 25-year-old Soviet man seriously injured in an May 26 automobile accident.

### Advice and Antibiotics

Dr. Starke and the others have contributed their professional advice at no charge and have also paid

for the shipment of antibiotics, liquid nutrients and medical equipment to the Soviet Union.

"It's a real joy to help a brother ham," said Dr. Starke, a 43-year-old who has been a ham radio operator for about 30 years but became actively involved only about three years ago.

Referring to what he said was the Soviet doctors' increasing acceptance of American help, he added, "the success of glasnost has spread to the airwaves."

Ryazan, the small city 120 miles south of Moscow, where Mr. Murugov is hospitalized, is still closed to Westerners, Dr. Starke said, adding that he hoped cooperation between doctors of the two countries would help open it up. In fact, the American doctors involved in the case were invited last week by their Russian counterparts to visit Ryazan.

On May 26, Mr. Murugov and other ham operators were traveling to a radio-sport contest when their car was broadsided by a truck in a remote area. One ham radio operator was killed and Mr. Murugov sustained serious head and chest injuries and was taken by helicopter to a hospital in Ryazan. He lay comatose, with a collapsed lung and double pneumonia and was breathing only with the help of a respirator.

Dr. Starke explained that in the Soviet Union ham radio operators who compete receive support from the government and enjoy a status comparable to that of American sports figures or celebrities. So word of Mr. Murugov's injuries spread quickly within Russia and several hams

began broadcasting requests in Russian for medical help.

Among the first to hear the appeal was Edward Kritsky of Brooklyn, a computer operator who immigrated to the United States from Iris native Leningrad about 11 years ago.

Mr. Kritsky, who was at Dr. Starke's house on a recent evening, recalled how the Russian radio operator kept repeating, "We need help in the worst way." Mr. Kritsky said he believes Soviet medical equipment is about 40 years behind that of the United States.

### How the Process Worked

Mr. Kritsky got in touch through the ham network with Dr. Lawrence Probes of Lowell, Michigan, and

Dr. Lionel Traubman of San Francisco. Once he received a medical analysis of Mr. Murugov's condition from doctors in Ryazan, he facsimiled the Russian text to Dr. Traubman, who had a Russian doctor who had emigrated to San Francisco translate into English.

Dr. Traubman then contacted Dr. Joseph Izzo, a neurologist in San Mateo, California. Dr. Izzo is not a ham radio operator, but agreed to help.

Dr. Starke said that he had heard about the case from Mr. Kritsky and offered his help. Several days later he arranged for about \$350 in antibiotics to be sent to the hospital in Ryazan. The nature of the mission eased the Soviet customs restrictions.

The American doctors now are sending some medical instructions by Telex to the Soviet Union, but at 10 P.M. Eastern time on most evenings they turn on their ham radios to talk to Igor Korolkov, a ham operator in the Soviet city of Penza. If there are coming into Moscow from the United States, Mr. Korolkov contacts hams in Moscow who pick them up at the airport and get them on a train to Ryazan.

One recent evening's conversation with Mr. Korolkov took on even more of an international flavor because of initial difficulties in getting on the same frequency, an occasional occurrence that the New York ham radio operator blamed on sun spots.

### **Connecting the Voices**

Dr. Starke turned his 75-foot-high antenna southward to the Caribbean and picked up the voice of an English ham radio operator who was vacationing on the island of Anguilla. The Englishman had heard Mr. Korolkov and offered to relay the communications. But then, with another adjustment of Dr. Starke's antenna, Briarcliff and Penza were in direct contact.

Mr. Korolkov reported that the patient had been able to be off the respirator for five hours that day, that he seemed to be trying to open his eyes, that his temperature had returned to normal and that the pneumonia seemed to be lessening. He said that the Russian doctors were administering the antibiotics that Dr. Starke had sent but were concerned about their impact on the patient's immune system.

With Mr. Kritsky at the microphone to translate English into Russian, Dr. Starke advised, "Just give him the calories from the liquid food and don't worry about the immunity."

Also at Dr. Starke's home that night was Allen Singer, a businessman and ham operator from

Queens who had just sent a shipment of liquid food to Moscow by air freight.

Through Mr. Kritsky, he gave the flight number and receipt number of the shipment so that the ham operators in Moscow could pick it up and get it on a train for the hospital in Ryazan.

Mr. Singer said ham operators were frequently involved in helping others, particularly when other means of communications fail – during hurricanes, earthquakes or blackouts, for example.

"It's not just a hobby, but a service," he said

For Dr. Starke – who recently joined the international professional association known as the Medical Amateur Radio Council, based in Acme, Pa. – it was the first time he had combined his knowledge of medicine and the airwaves. His wife, Mary, and children, Katherine, 13, and Robert, 12, all have ham radio licenses. But the family had used them only to communicate on such occasions as when the children went to camp or the family went on vacation. Dr. Starke said.

Dr. Starke has had previous experience in dealing with emergencies on an international level. He served for two months with the Royal Flying Doctor Service in western Australia, flying into remote areas of the outback. He also supplied medical equipment to a National Geographic expedition to the Kalahari in Africa.

Dr. Starke graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University and studied theoretical physics for four years at the State University of New York at Stony Brook with a Nobel Prize winner, Chen Ning Yang. He then graduated from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx and did his internship and residency in internal medicine at the Georgetown University Hospital in Washington.

### **Patient is Improving**

Dr. Starke taught at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx from 1978 through 1981 and then opened his private practice in Briarcliff. He is on the staff of Phelps Memorial Hospital Center in North Tarrytown and the County Medical Center in Valhalla.

While Mr. Murugov's condition continues to improve – he has recently recognized his mother and twin brother when they visited the hospital – Dr. Starke and the other American doctors said last week that it was still too early to say that the patient was out of danger. He spoke unequivocally about his willingness to assist Mr. Murugov and others over the airwaves:

"It's really gratifying. So often, head trauma doesn't respond, especially if there is a lot of damage."