

Voice for Christ

By Staff Member Bob Widman

Loading a variety of tubular steel parts, rolls of wire and cable, as well as hardware and boxes into a MARC aircraft created a variety of images in my own mind as to what they would be used for. For the present, all I knew was they were heavy, bulky, and a challenge to load safely into the airplane.

As we began our week long, 1900 mile trip, to seven Alaskan villages (Quinahagak, Hooper Bay, Bethel, Sand Point, Perryville, Iliamna, and Port Alsworth) the value of the cargo, and the ministry of Voice for Christ Radio, became very apparent. I witnessed two very dedicated servants of Christ, Karl Thieme and Rich Redmond, survey a potential radio station site, relocate, install, or repair Christian radio stations in all of these villages.

I was transfixed watching Karl Thieme (a man outstanding in his field, or in this case, out standing in the tundra) in the village of Quinahagak as he was able to locate a geosynchronous satellite with a hand-held receiver and determine exactly where the satellite dish had to be pointed to receive the Christian radio signal.

The current radio station and antenna needed to be moved from the pastor's house to the local church. This was necessary because the noise generated from the electronics in a small house was disturbing to the pastor and his family. I soon got an education in relocating a satellite radio station. The steel hauled in the airplane soon became the new satellite antenna mount and supporting beams for the structure. These were braced with the cables that were secured with the hardware we had brought with us.

While this may all sound easy, in reality it was hard, messy, and sometimes dangerous work. I remember Rich lying in the mud under a house in Hooper Bay securing radio wire to the floor joists with clamps. Earlier we had to shovel fresh dog excrement out of the way to avoid stepping in it. Since the water table in the tundra was one inch below the surface, and walking on it caused the surface to undulate with a wave like motion, the antenna had to be installed on the side of a house. Additionally, during the previous year, snow drifts as high as the house tops prevented the satellite dish from receiving the radio signal. An attempt was made to dig a hole through the offending snow drift, but this effort was thwarted by more drifting snow. The new antenna is now mounted higher on the side of the house, and pointed at the low side of the drift that forms in the winter time. It is the hope of the house occupant, Lena Funk, that she will be able to hear Christmas music on the radio this year. Hopefully the work done will make this a reality.

After the antennas were installed Karl and Rich hooked up the digital radio station boxes in the buildings that were available; then a series of adjustments were made until the satellite dish was getting maximum reception and the transmitting antenna was transmitting on the appropriate frequency to the surrounding village; finally, almost miraculously with just the flip of a radio switch, Christian radio programming could be heard on the radio throughout the surrounding area.

In Perryville, an isolated Alaskan Peninsula village, Karl had to get lifted up on a fork lift about 30 feet in the air. Standing on a wood pallet on the forks of the fork lift, he adjusted the antenna until it was processing the signal properly. I watched as the forklift was slightly swaying back and forth. If he slipped or fell, the only way out of the village was in our plane. Even then it would be hours before he would be able to get to a doctor, if he survived the fall

In the end the five villages that were capable of being licensed to have a radio station in them, had Christian radio stations operating! In these villages people can hear Christian radio 24- hours a day including programs like: Back to the Bible, Stories of Great Christians, Unshackled, Adventures in Odyssey, Keys for Kids, and speakers like Charles Swindoll, John MacArthur, James MacDonald, and David Jeremiah, among many others.

It was a privilege to travel with these two Godly servants who worked in difficult conditions, many times until late into the evening until each of these radio stations was on the air.

Several people including some of the pastors, mentioned what a blessing it would be to have this programming in their village. Currently Voice for Christ Ministries has radio stations in 21 villages. Their purpose is to reach rural Alaskans with the Gospel of Christ, and they seek to air programming that helps Christians grow in their relationship with their Savior Jesus Christ.