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TOPICS



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To the Men and Women of Our Company

FOUR times within the past twenty years storms and floods have tried your mettle. Now we are recovering from the most serious disaster that has ever faced any company of the Bell System. Your strength and loyalty have been tried by an ordeal greater than any telephone people have ever had to face.

Poles have fallen, cables have been broken, wind and water have demolished much of our physical plant, but they have only strengthened your courage and determination.

With our facilities operating at from zero to 50 per cent. of their normal capacity, the volume of calls increased to more than 70 per cent. above normal. You faced this situation with cool efficiency.

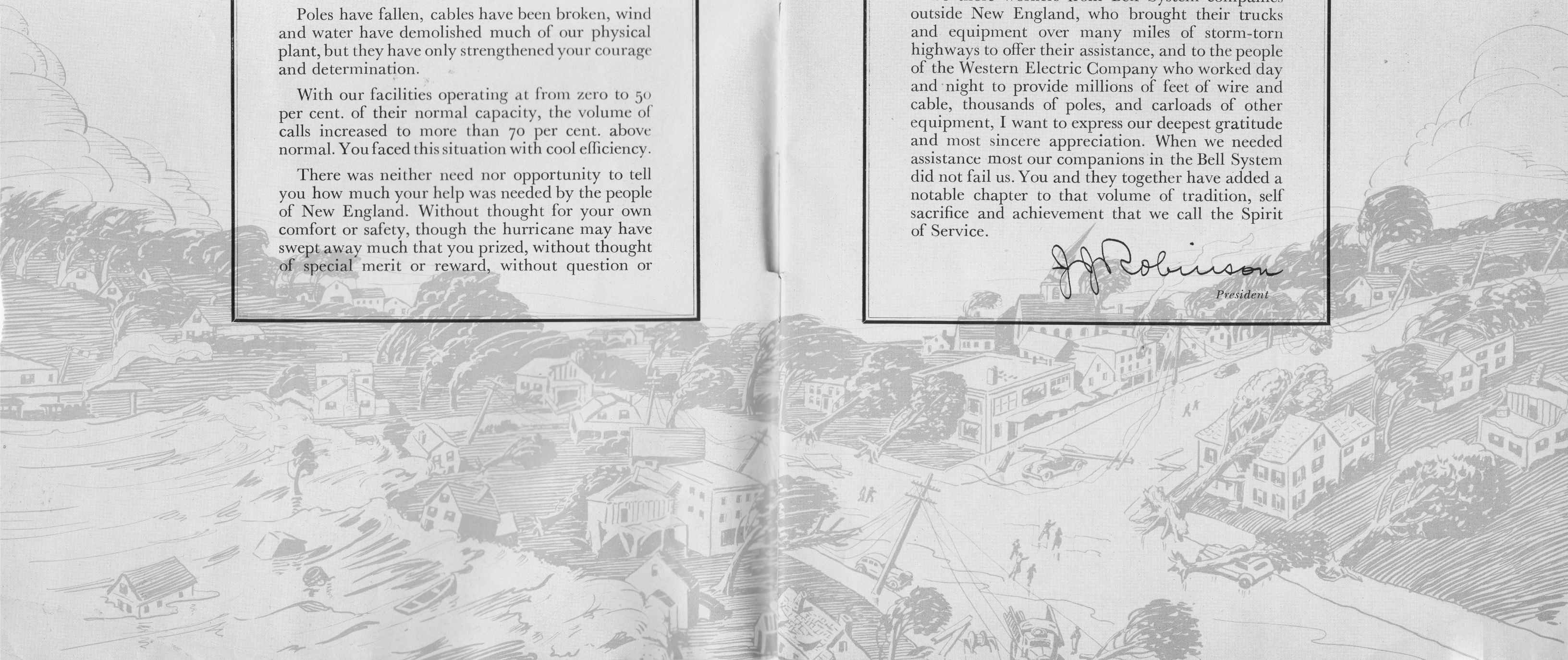
There was neither need nor opportunity to tell you how much your help was needed by the people of New England. Without thought for your own comfort or safety, though the hurricane may have swept away much that you prized, without thought of special merit or reward, without question or

doubt you offered all your skill and experience, all your time and your thoughts to meet this public need.

It is not within my power to thank you — that is a public task. I can only express my own great admiration for the job you have done so well. More vivid than any other impression left by the storm is the picture of our men and women working side by side with a single common purpose — to supply telephone service when and where it was more needed than ever before.

To those workers from Bell System companies outside New England, who brought their trucks and equipment over many miles of storm-torn highways to offer their assistance, and to the people of the Western Electric Company who worked day and night to provide millions of feet of wire and cable, thousands of poles, and carloads of other equipment, I want to express our deepest gratitude and most sincere appreciation. When we needed assistance most our companions in the Bell System did not fail us. You and they together have added a notable chapter to that volume of tradition, self sacrifice and achievement that we call the Spirit of Service.

J. F. Robinson
President





This bewildered man stands in front of our central office at Southbridge, Mass., watching the flood waters sweep down Main Street in ever-increasing waves.

DIVERTED from the usual seaward path of hurricanes by a high pressure area off Nova Scotia and swept inland with the phenomenal speed of 50 miles an hour and wind velocities as high as 186 miles an hour, New England's first real hurricane whirled through the five states we serve on Sept. 21, leaving behind it the most serious and widespread destruction any company of the Bell System has ever faced.

A tidal wave from 14 to 30 feet high, pushed up by the terrific wind pressure, demolished whole settlements along the coast, and inland floods of major proportions, resulting from the heavy rains that accompanied the storm, inundated hundreds of square miles of cities, towns and farm lands.

Even pictures fail to give any adequate conception of the magnitude of this disaster. At least a thousand persons lost their lives, damage ran into hundreds of millions of dollars, hundreds of persons lost all they possessed, travel facilities were completely disrupted and communications systems were wiped out in many sections. Reconstruction is less a matter of repairs than of rebuilding from the ground up in some places.

The picture of the damage to our own facilities is almost beyond comprehension. A quarter of our 1,223,000 telephones without service, New Hampshire, Vermont and sections of Massachusetts virtually "off the map" as far as reaching them by telephone from outside was concerned, more than 350 communities isolated from telephone contact with the world, most of our major cable routes shattered, whole sections of our plant entirely demolished—it is difficult indeed to

FLOODS AND HURRICANE RAVAGE NEW ENGLAND

Desolation and Throughout our Blasts Swirl

realize what that five hours of wind and rain and tidal wave meant to us.

A list of the materials for repair may help to picture the damage. Four hundred miles of cable, 31,000 poles, 72,000,000 feet of wire, fifty carloads of telephone hardware—much more material than we would require for a whole year of normal maintenance were required practically instantly for replacements. It was the job of the Western Electric Company to supply it all.

In this emergency, the men and women of our Company met the supreme test of their loyalty and skill. Terrified by the storm and destruction, our customers depended on the telephone to give them news of relatives and friends. Hospitals in urgent need of medicines and supplies depended on the telephone. Doctors with patients who needed their help, newspaper men, public officials and relief workers making desperate efforts to meet the situation, needed the telephone to give them the information they required. With our facilities operating at from zero to 50 per cent of normal capacity, the volume of calls increased to more than 70 per cent above normal.

Operators struggled through falling trees and wreckage to reach the exchanges where their help was so badly needed, linemen and splicers started repairs long before the hurricane had blown itself out, engineers and department heads gathered at a swiftly organized emergency bureau at 50 Oliver St., Boston, to arrange emergency circuits, re-route calls, estimate the damage, send the forces where they were most needed.

Then help arrived from outside as the Bell System

Destruction Spread Company, as Deadly up the Coast

organized its resources for the assistance of wrecked New England. Fifteen hundred men and 350 motor vehicles, from points as far as Georgia, Texas and the Dakotas, sped here across storm-torn highways to lend their assistance in the greatest cooperative effort toward reconstruction in all economic history.

Working side by side with our own courageous men and women, using the skill and experience that marks the Bell System worker wherever he may be, these men assisted in creating from almost helpless chaos and disorder a chapter of telephone tradition that can never be forgotten. No such cooperative effort has ever been required or has ever been accomplished. These men, with our own loyal workers, set out with grim determination to restore order and comfort through telephone service. All but four companies of the Bell System were represented.

"Action" at the Western Electric Distributing House at Watertown, Mass. Hundreds of miles of wire and cable being loaded on trucks to be sent to devastated areas. Because the building was without electric power these men had to carry all materials down seven flights of stairs because the elevators were stalled.



Gilbertville, Mass., flooded by waters which caused the abandonment of our central office during the early hours of the storm.

The work of these repair crews out of doors was the subject of comment everywhere as the people of New England, bewildered by the disaster, traveled about to see the scenes of wreckage. But within the exchanges, where flashing lights were the only visible indications of conditions outside, the telephone women of our





This cable crew from the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania are at work near Wakefield, R. I. Notice the aerial ladder for cable work, one of the many kinds of Bell System equipment which were rushed into New England.

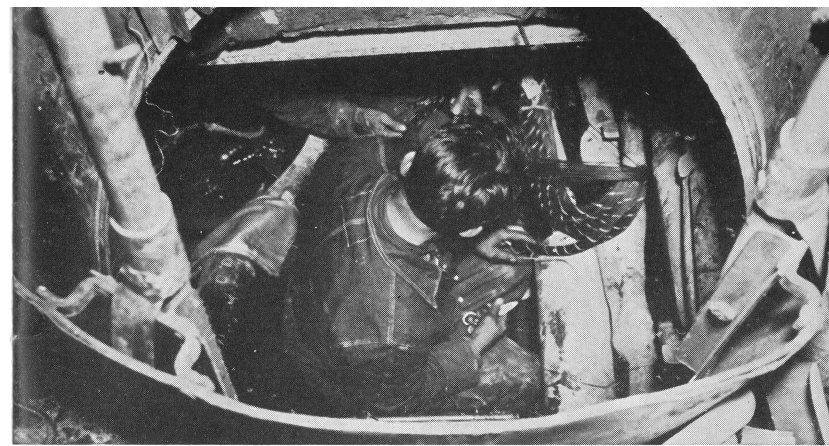
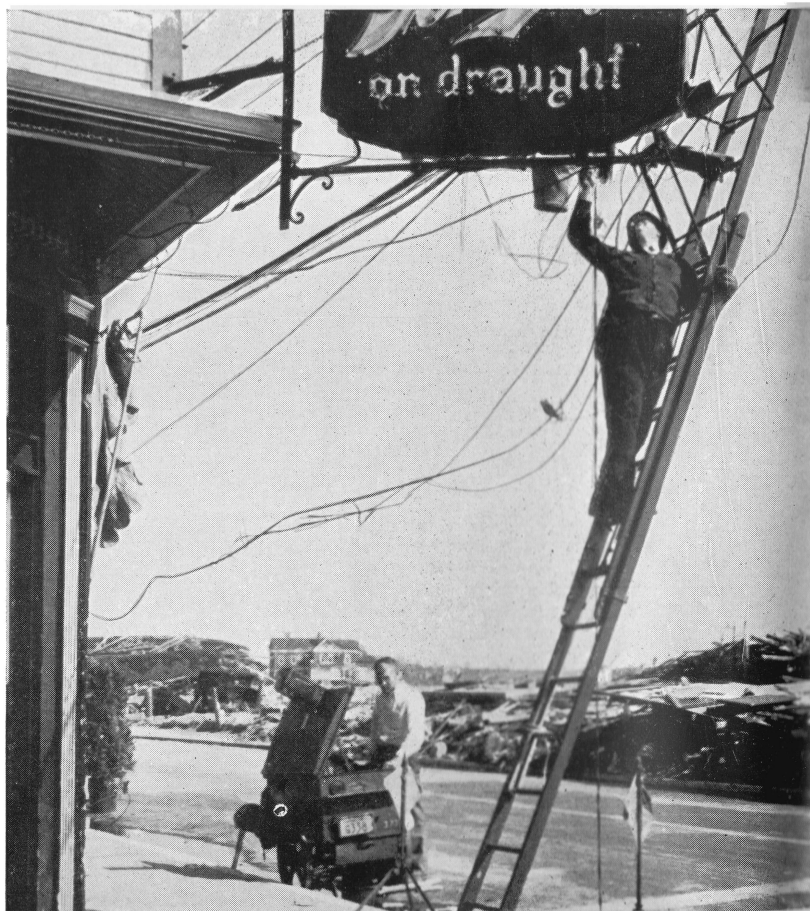


This was the main entrance of our central office at Orange, Mass., at the height of the flood. Small wonder our operators were forced to abandon their positions.

Cable truck and crew from the Diamond State Telephone Company of Delaware at work on Depot Street, Easton, Mass.



This refreshment sign spells no relief for this cable crew from the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania, at work near Narragansett Pier, R. I.



Splicer at Providence, R. I., who went down into flooded manholes to dry out our cables before the water had been completely pumped out.

Company, assisted by a few skilled switching operators brought here by plane from other companies, carried on coolly, efficiently and courteously—each one too busy to realize the extreme urgency of the work she was doing.

What the combined efforts of these workers meant to the people of New England can never be determined. Within a few days after the flood service had been restored to all hospitals, police and fire departments and relief agencies, within nine days every isolated exchange was back in contact with the world again, and at the end of ten days individual residence and business telephones were being restored at the rate of 25,000 each 24 hours. As *Topics* goes to press such progress has been made that in some sections all telephone users are back to normal service. Permanent repairs will require many months of arduous labor.

In the incomprehensible magnitude of the whole story, details of how service was restored are almost lost.

At Chicopee Falls, where the most important cable route serving Vermont was disrupted by the destruction of a bridge, a coast guard crew shot a line across the turbulent stream with a Lyle-gun after a line dropped from an airplane had been parted against a rock in midstream. The line was used to drag a cable across the river.

Short wave came into its own for bridging gaps where all normal facilities had been demolished. Short wave equipment supplied by our own Company or other companies of the Bell System was used between Block Island and the mainland, between Hardwick and Irving and in several other sections. Over a short wave gap set up between Keene, New Hampshire, and Boston 200 messages of the utmost importance passed within the first two hours after it was set in service, including one call to San Bernardino, California.

Two yachts equipped for marine radiotelephone service played an important temporary part in the

A section of Boston "Long Distance". Every position was filled as emergency calls flooded the office and operators from Associated Companies were rushed to assist these girls.

telephone system by passing important calls, from Falmouth and from Block Island, to the Company's ultra short wave station at Green Harbor.

In many communities, where the normal sources of power failed, automobile batteries and even gasoline-operated welding machines were hired to supply the current necessary to carry messages along the wires.

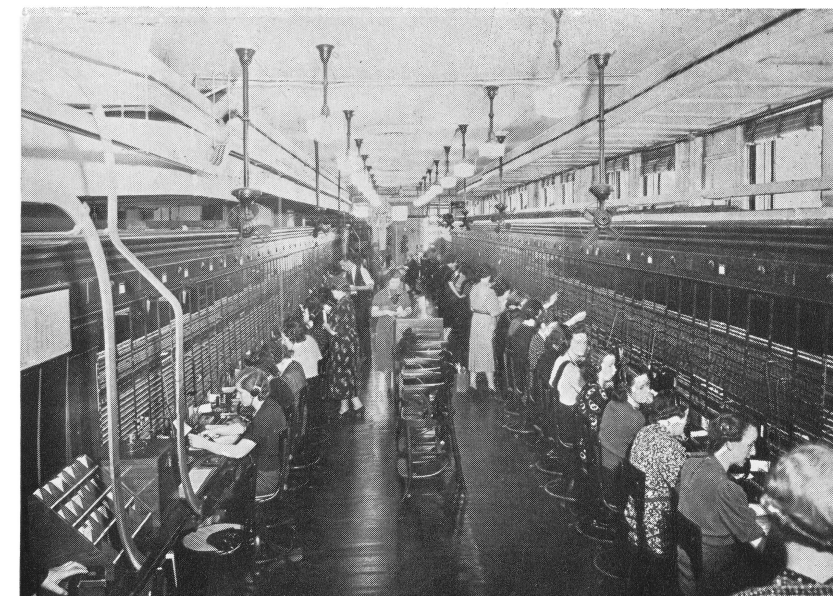
Telephone men were often the first visitors to towns that had been cut off from contact with the outside world by floods or wreckage across the highways. By boat, by automobile and on foot, sometimes using axes to clear a path through the heavy litter, they made their ways to stricken communities, collected from town officials, druggists, doctors and others information as to what supplies were most urgently needed, and telephoned in the requirements from the nearest available telephone instrument. At the same time they gave swift reports of the condition of the local telephone plant.

Damage to a bridge at Danielson, Connecticut, disrupted service between Boston and New York by cutting off all but two of the total of more than a hundred circuits. From New York came word that despite this limiting of facilities, operators were handling five times the normal number of calls from New England. Most of the calls were re-routed over circuitous paths between the two cities.

The most important cable breaks in our territory were at Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts; Irving, near Orange, Massachusetts; Wareham, Massachusetts, and West Boylston, Massachusetts. As a result of these breaks large sections of Vermont, New Hampshire and Cape Cod were cut off from service with the rest of the world. These were among the first repairs completed within a few days after the storm.

There are countless stories of individualism and narrow escapes, of sacrifices made by our men and women in order to remain at the posts where they were needed and of the ingenuity they displayed in meeting conditions without precedence. Those will be told by word of mouth for many years to come.

Telephone Topics this month attempts to tell the story largely through the pictures which our own people have gathered and sent in from their emergency posts in the field.





The Orange, Mass. central office at the height of the flood. Water washed over the third row of jacks on the switchboard, despite the fact that the board was raised.



Monson Academy boys clearing wreckage from Washington St., Monson, Mass., after the hurricane.



Uprooted poles and falling wires made lower Hampden Road impassable at Monson, Mass.

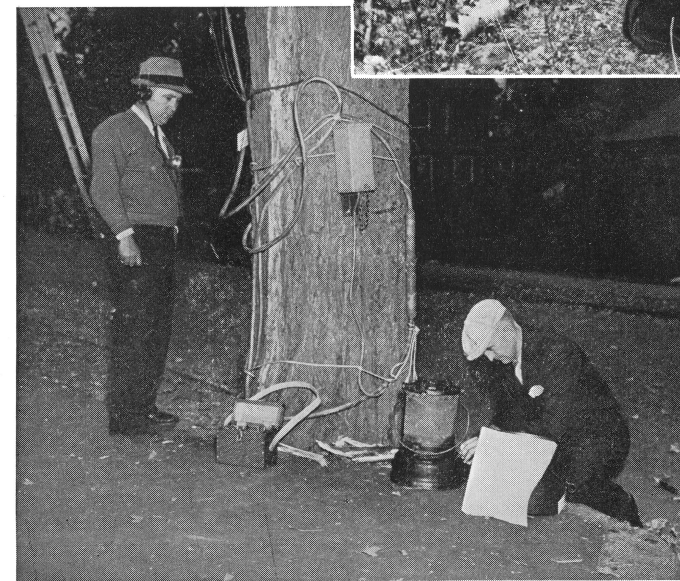


Flood waters washed away half of Central Street, Southbridge, Mass., imperiling houses and crippling telephone service.

A crew of telephone men work feverishly to repair lines at Hall and Governors Avenues, Medford, Mass.



A Chesapeake and Potomac Company lineman does his part in the job of reconstruction at Melrose, Mass.



Using this tree as a telephone pole, our men set up the necessary wires and cable to provide the Melrose Hospital with emergency service during the night of the storm.

Chesapeake and Potomac linemen's crew at Melrose, Mass.



All the way from Grand Rapids, Saginaw and Kalamazoo, Michigan, came these men with their trucks to help us rebuild our tangled plant.



Short wave emergency control station on Troy Road, near Keene, N. H. Over this radio-bridged gap calls were passed to all parts of the United States, including San Bernardino, Cal.

