

The Dogwood Disturbance

by William S. Statler

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Author's note...

If you happen to be a police officer, or a police dispatcher, or you just spend lots of time listening to police radio traffic on your scanner (like I do), you should have little trouble following this story.

However, my wife (pleading on behalf of normal human beings) has requested that I include some further guidance as to what the heck is going on here. Perhaps this background information will help.

When you listen to the police radio transmissions in a mostly-rural county in the US – and, by the way, this is perfectly legal in most areas, and a great way to learn more about what's happening in your community – you will hear a jumble of conversations containing lots of numbers and abbreviated jargon, usually spread out among a few separate channels. Typically there will be one “primary” radio channel, shared by a dispatcher and perhaps two or three separate police/sheriff agencies. In addition, each city police department or county sheriff's office will have its own private channel, usually called “Car-To-Car” or “Tac-3” or some such. An individual police officer will generally monitor both of these, but can only speak on one at a time.

Someone transmitting on the “primary” channel will generally start off with his identifier (an ID number, not his real name), usually followed by the identifier of the person he's talking to, and then his message presented as briefly as possible. This can sound a bit cryptic if you're not used to it. For example:

“Nora-55, Dispatch, I'm out.”

“Dispatch, Nora-55, I copy, 20:15. RP states the suspect was HBD, and left 3 ago on foot. All parties at the location are 10-4.”

...actually means:

“This is Nellieville Police Officer #55 calling the Dispatcher. I'm getting out of my car at the location you sent me to.”

“This is the Dispatcher calling Nellieville Police Officer #55. I received your transmission at 8:15 PM. The reporting party [the person who called 911] states that the suspect has been drinking, and left 3 minutes ago on foot. Everyone at the location is okay.”

Conversations on the local “Tac-3” channels are often much more informal, especially if the town only has two or three officers on duty at the moment.

Anyway, just think of this as an old-fashioned radio play. Except that it's on two radio stations at once. And some participants can hear both stations, but others can't. And... well, there's more, but I can't go explaining everything for you.

Good luck.

Dispatch, Nora-101.

Nora-101.

Traffic complaint, in the area of 2nd and Beamer, dark-colored passenger car driving recklessly, last seen 2 ago.

Nora-101. Did the RP provide a plate?

Reporting party provided no further information.

Nora-101 copy, I'm in the area, no locate, mark it as clear.

Dispatch copies, 20:59. Dispatch, South-54, barking dog complaint.

South-54. Where's it at?

Area of 9000 block of South Catskill. RP states that neighbor's dog has been barking all evening, ongoing problem.

South-54 en route. Would the RP happen to be Rebecca?

RP wishes to remain anonymous.

South-54 copy, that'll be Rebeccanymous again.

Heh, Dispatch copies.

South-20, South-54, go to 3.

South-54 on Tac-3, go ahead, Jodie.

Hey, Steve, you're goin' after the Catskill Dog again?

Just doin' my job, protectin' the citizens of our fine community.

You're a good man. Maybe we oughta get the Town Council to appoint you Dogcatcher.

Nora-27, traffic.

Go ahead.

That would surely come with a salary increase, wouldn't it?

Well, they couldn't pay you any less!

That's for certain.

Nora-27, stopping on 5th just east of Beamer, white Toyota pickup, license Adam 5 4 trailer-ball 9 3 George.

Received, 21:01.

Nora-16 to back from 10th and Ferguson.

Copy.

South-14, South-54 on Tac-3.

Hey, 14! How's it goin'? How's that broken ankle?

Better. Thanks for asking.

Hey, Dan, you're supposed to be resting, aren't ya?

Well, Jodie, I can't just sit here at home being a couch potato while my two buddies are out alone in the dark scary darkness, now can I?

Awww, that's sweet.

14, that leaves me filled full of fellow feeling, truly it does.

Someone has to set an example.

It's good to hear words like that from a fellow dogcatcher.

Don't you mean dog-kicker?

Hey, it's not nice to pick on an invalid. That was one horrible animal. It broke my ankle!

Dan, it was a Chihuahua.

It tripped me! Stupid mutt!

Dispatch, County-25, animal complaint.

County-25, what kind of animal complaint?

Dispatch, County-25, RP reports three llamas in the roadway creating a traffic hazard, Ridge Road approximately 2 miles north of the highway.

Copy. Can you call Animal Control on that?

Checking.

Cause that's a problem for Animal Control. They should be the ones handling it.

Dispatch is sending Barney out to round up loose llamas.

Don't call him Barney, he doesn't like that.

*Nora-16, Dispatch, I'm out with 27. Correct plate is Adam
54193 George.*

**Nora-16, received, 21:03. Dispatch, County-25. Animal
Control closed at 21-hundred hours. They're only available
for emergencies at night.**

Well, this is an emergency, ain't it? Get 'em out of bed!

Deputy Fife. Is that better? brrrup

Dan!

Animal control will only respond for injured animals at night.

**They're out in the road, they'll be injured any minute now! Aw, never mind, Dispatch, I'll
take care of it.**

Copy, 21:04.

*County-48, County-25, you want a hand with that? I've
worked with llamas.*

I'll take care of it.

Received, disregarding.

I wish I could be there to watch. flip flip Barney versus the llamas! flip flip Uh!

**South-54, Dispatch, in the area. I don't hear any
barking dogs.**

**South-54, received, 21:05. Dispatch, Nora-28, Nora-115,
status?**

*What's with the flip, flip sound effects, 14? You playing
cards?*

**Yeah, uh, it's solitaire. Better than the stupid Sunday night TV shows, anyway.
Hey, do you happen to know if County-25 is married?**

Dispatch, Nora-28, Nora-115, status?

Nora-115, we're 10-4.

21:05.

Yeah, I met Mrs. Deputy Fife last month at the Labor Day picnic. She's real sweet, and he's, y'know, real devoted to her, sorta bossy, but, y'know, that's Barney. They're a cute couple.

South-54, Dispatch, no locate on the barking dog. If the RP calls back, when the RP calls back, if she wants to leave a phone number, I'll contact her. Clear of this call.

Dispatch, South-54, I copy that. 21:06.

Jodie, you know, you're right, we shouldn't be calling him that. He's a fellow officer and a, a human being.

Wow, 14, you're turning into a real softie! What brought this on?

Just, I was just giving it some more thought, that's all. brrrrrup Okay, maybe we'd need a DNA test to verify the "human being" part, but still...

Huh. Whoa, this kid's really movin'!

South-20, Dispatch, stopping.

South-20, go ahead.

*8700 block of South Kettleman with Paul Zebra Queen
194.*

Received, 21:07.

South-54, backup.

South-20, South-54, you can disregard, it's just one of the Tanner kids again.

Copy.

54, you on 3?

South-14, South-54 on Tac-3?

South-54, where aaaaare youuuuu?

Man, I should NOT have to put up with THAT!

Sorry!

*It's numberological harassment, that's what it is.
Thought you learned all about that in Sensitivity
Training.*

Okay, sorry. flip flip I'll give you a big hug next time I see you.

That's better. But the hurt, it goes deep, you know?

Riiight. flip flip Queen of Cups, huh.

Queen of CUPS?

County-40, Dispatch.

Queen of Hearts. Solitaire. I'm playing.

County-40, go ahead.

I'm out with some debris in the roadway, Lewis Road where it crosses the canal. Cardboard boxes.

Received, 21:09.

That's a Tarot deck, Queen of Cups.

Queen of HEARTS.

14, let me remind you I am a highly-trained professional, and although I am many years your junior, I can reliably detect deception from a mile away.

South-20, Dispatch, I'll be clear.

21:09.

All right, Detective Steve. Queen of Cups. It's a Tarot deck.

Who's the Queen of Cups?

It, uh, looks like you are, 20.

Cooooo! I'm the Queen! Jeez, I'm really glad this channel doesn't show up on scanners.

You sure of that?

Yeah, that's what I heard. When they switched us to the new 800-megahertz system, after that, the scanner radios can only receive the Dispatch channel. They can't snoop on us here on Tac-3.

Nora-16, Dispatch, myself and Nora-27 are clear of the traffic stop, and we will be out on break at 8th and Beamer.

Received, 21:10.

So, what deck ya got there, Dan? Rider-Waite?

Golden Dawn.

Ooh, that one's too weird for me, I like good ol' Rider-Waite.

Jodie, no, not you too?

Hey, it's a great tool for thinking outside the box!

A bunch of weird occult cards?

Do Not Mock the Wisdom of the Tarot, Young Master Steven. The Queen of Cups Has Spoken. Hee, hee!

County-25, Dispatch, I'm out on Ridge Road with the animals.

County-25, your exact location?

I'm just north of the entrance to, um, Luh-Lama's Pajamas Luh-Lama Ranch.

Cblf. Hlf. Copy, 21:11.

I cannot believe both you guys believe in this stuff.

It doesn't require any belief, Steve. I don't go for anything supernatural, myself. But the Tarot, it's like little bits, little, um, essences of the way people think and act, and the way the world works, all condensed down into seventy-eight cards.

Right, so you pick some random cards and it's the Barnum effect, you're always gonna see what you want to see.

I hear you, but I think that's why it does work. You're always going to see something that's pertinent to your current situation. And it'll be something different from what you had in mind, so it gives you a mental kick in the pants,

like "Wake up! Maybe things are this way instead of that way." And, y'know, once you've had that kick, now you can think of maybe three or four more ways that things might be.

County-40, Dispatch, I've moved the debris off the roadway. I'll be clear.

Dispatch, County-40, 21:12.

Gosh, 14, I didn't know you were such a philosopher!

Philosopher, right. And I didn't know you used the Tarot.

Poor 54, I think we've left him speechless.

South-54, Dispatch, put me back out on that barking dog complaint. I think I found it running around here on South Dogwood, 9100 block.

Received, 21:13.

The dog's on Dogwood.

Hey, 54, watch out for that doggie now. Specially if it's a little one!

54, I copy, Your Majesty.

It's nice to hear a young man treating his elders with the proper respect.

Hey, who're you calling an "elder", Professor?

My apologies, Your Highness.

Hey, Professor Dan, I don't wanna hear no card-flippin' for me now!

I promise, you won't hear a thing.

Dispatch, Nora-28, Nora-115, physical domestic in progress.

Nora-28.

Nora-28, Nora-115, male-female physical domestic in progress, 1710 West 8th Street, apartment C Charles 106. RP is a child at the location, states his parents are throwing things at each other. Both parents HBD, no weapons.

Nora-28 en route with Nora-115 from 8th and Patterson.

Nora-101 to cover from 5th and Edwards.

Both units, I copy, 21:14.

Hey, Dan, what spread d'you use? Celtic Cross?

For Golden Dawn I like Wang's 15-card spread, but there's never time for that.
So it's usually Six-Card Hungarian.

I don't know that one.

It's just two cards each for past, present, and future. Nice and fast.

Cool! I'll give it a try.

Hey, Steve, how are you doing with Cujo out there?

Yeah, I c tle bastar anded
right in the ditch oaked!

54, your radio's breaking up, do you need some backup?

I'm 10-4, I'm j mud. What a
uppy. Probab my portable too.

54, still can't copy you, I'm en route.

Eight of Pentacles.

I h that!

*South-20, Dispatch, I'm en route to South-54's location.
Sounds like his portable radio's busted.*

Dispatch copies, 21:15. County-48, weapons complaint, area of Cherryblossom and Lewis.

*County-48, I'm about 30 seconds out from that location.
Details?*

County-48, iCounty-40, I just passed that location, I'll b-ACK

County-40, received. County-48, County-40, in the area of Cherryblossom and Lewis, reporting party says he heard three shots about 2 ago. He states it sounded like a 9-millimeter weapon.

Another RP with an ear that can measure caliber.

I've heard you do that yourself, Professor.

Dispatch, County-48, County-40, do you copy?

*outh-54, South-20, verbal distur
dog owner an eporting party, could you*

*South-20, 54, you were broken, copy verbal
disturbance, I'm expediting.*

*Dispatch copies, 21:16. County-48, County-40, did you copy
my last traffic?*

*Dispatch, Nora-28 and Nora-115 are out at 1710 West Eighth.
Could you go again with the apartment number?*

Stand by 1.

***County-25, Dispatch, I'm at the other end of the county. See if City has a unit available to
check on 'em.***

*Nora-27 copies that, I'll be en route from 8th and Beamer.
Dispatch, what was the last location for County-48 and 40?*

*Dispatch, Nora-27, they were en route to Cherryblossom and
Lewis on the weapons complaint. Nora-28, your apartment
number is C Charles 106.*

*Nora-28, co*South-20, Dispatch, I'm out with 54, we need
Fire to respond to this location.**

South-20, do you need a medic or a fire engine?

Nora-101 is out.

*Nora-101, received. South-20, South-54, what equipment do
you want Fire to dispatch?*

*54, we have a tree on f of 9103 South
Dogwood, send odie, what the hell?! Put it
down! Look out for the bird!*

*Dispatching medic and engine to 9103 South Dogwood,
21:17. County-48, County-40, status?*

Nora-101, Dispatch, we need more units!

Nora-16, from 8th and Beamer.

Copy.

MOMMYYYYY!!! Nora-115, Dispatch M0MMYYYYY!!! we
havM0MMYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!

Nora-115, you're unreadable.

It's a WAAAAAAAHHHH!!!! Quiet, kid! Dispatch, it's a
MOMMYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!

Nora-101, Dispatch-haa-haa-haatch! Oh God! Situa-gh heh HA
HA HA HA HA

County-48, Dispatch, we're 10-4.

Dispatch Nora-16 to units on West Eighth, what's going on
down there?

Dispatch, County-48, confirm both you and County-40 are
10-4.

Confirming, County-48 and 40 are both 10-4, mark us both
unavailable, and would you dispatch the next two
available tows to the S-curve on Lewis Road a quarter mile
south of Bing.

Nora-28 to Nora-16, it appears we've raided a pillowfight here.

Jodie, Steve, you guys 10-4?

Dispatch copies, 21:19. County-48, confirm you and County-
40 have had an MVA?

**County-40, Dispatch, yeah, she T-boned me. Both vehicles are
out of commission.**

54 on 3, did I find a working radio yet?

Yeah, Steve, I copy you, are you guys OK out there?

Yeah, we're fine, hang on a sec.

County-48, Dispatch. There may be more than one
account of this incident in the final report. Oh, and you'd
better re-dispatch the original weapons complaint.

South-54, Dispatch, the Dogwood disturbance is
under control, South-20 has a minor injury, and
we've got a small uprooted tree on fire, not
threatening any structures at this time.

South-54, received. County-40, County-48, I copy your traffic also, 21:20.

Nora-27, Dispatch, I'm in the area, you can assign me the weapons complaint.

Copy.

County-25 to 40 and 48, what the hell you guys doin' out there? Two cars are wrecked?

14, you still on 3?

Yeah, what happened to Jodie?

20 here. It's just a scratch, Professor, don't worry 'bout me.

County-48, County-25, that is correct.

Great! That's just great! The Sheriff is just gonna love this! Go to Car-To-Car.

Dispatch, units at 1710 West Eighth, confirm your status is 10-4?

How'd you manage to light a tree on fire?

Nora-28, Dispatch, we are all 10-4, except it looks like the four-year-old reporting party beat the crap out of 115 here, I think he's gonna need a few band-aids. There was no physical domestic, just Mom and Dad having some drinks and a pillowfight to, uh, get in the mood.

That was Rebeccanonymous started the fire. I drive up, an' she's out there arguing with the dog-owner, and Mud-Man is between 'em trying to calm things down, an' "MUD-MAN"?! They call me "Mister Dogcatcher"! Your Highness.

Dispatch, Nora-28, received, 21:21.

Nora-16, I copy also. 28, you sort it out, I'm going back on break.

Dispatch copies.

Sorry, "Mister Dogcatcher"! So I see Rebecca flick a cigarette over her shoulder, and it gets caught in this stupid little tree by the front porch, right in a bunch of dry leaves, and, 5 seconds, whoof, the whole tree's on fire. Oh, the medic is here.

You let 'em patch you up, now, I'll tell him. Man, 14, you shoulda seen this! Officer Amazon Queen here comes running up and yanks this flaming tree out of the ground!

Hey, don't nobody mess with the Queen!

County-25, Dispatch, I have rounded up the luh-lamas, I have instructed the owner on the proper use of gate latches, and I am clear of this incident, en route to the damn demolition derby.

Dispatch, County-25, received, 21:22.

So picture this: Mighty Jodie running across the lawn carrying this giant tree-torch, and the rest of us scatter, cause she looks like, like, I dunno what.

Ace of Wands.

You're kidding. Did that come up for me? Your deck has that weird Ace of Wands with the flaming tree-branch-thing with all the colors, doesn't it?

Yeah, got that card for you about 15 ago. And 9 of Wands on this incident.

More wands. The nine? Mighty Amazon Queen, yup, that's me!

Okay, yeah, you looked all very mythological and all that, very impressive, but you know you really ruined the effect when you tripped over that plastic flamingo.

A flamingo? The Queen's pink... ibis?

Great, Steve, now you got the medics laughing so hard they can't bandage my leg!

South-2, South-20 on Tac-3. Are you injured?

Nora-27, Dispatch, I'm out at Cherryblossom and Lewis.

Dispatch, Nora-27, 21:23.

South-2, South-20 on 3.

South-20, hey, Captain! It's just a scratch, medics say it won't need stitches or anything, I'm fine. Uh, I guess

these pants have had it, though. So, welcome back! How was your trip?

We just now got home. The trip was mostly pretty boring, but the kids liked it. My youngest brought along his new scanner radio, so we had that to listen to on the drive. It's amazing how much scanner information that kid can find on the Internet.

He seems like a very bright boy, sir.

He's good with technical stuff. You know, he found the talkgroup code for our Tac-3 channel in about ten minutes. But he tells me that the scanner can search for new talkgroups itself, so even without the Net he would have been able to find this channel.

That, uh, that is very valuable information to be aware of, Captain.

I knew you'd think so. We had some interesting listening over the last half hour.

Nora-101, Dispatch, I'll be clear from 1710 West Eighth. Nora-28 and 115 will be on scene a few more minutes.

Dispatch copies, 21:24.

South-14, South-2 on 3. Welcome back, Captain! It's been a bit crazy around here.

A bit crazy. Llamas on the loose. Two County units have an MVA with each other on Lewis. Four City officers get called to a pillowfight. But our town, we take the prize. We really do. Three of our finest, taken out by two small dogs and a plastic flamingo.

Yes, sir.

You know, Deputy Barney Fife got those llamas all rounded up by himself without incident?

County-25 is, is a very skillful officer, Captain.

He is also the only officer in this county who has never had to take time off for accidental injury.

I was not aware of that, Captain. That is a very impressive record.

It happens that County-25 will be teaching a 2-day course on officer safety next month. I think it would be valuable for all three of you to attend.

Yes, sir.

I can arrange ambulance transportation to the event if any of you should happen to require it.

I don't think that will be necessary, sir.

I'll plan on attending the course too, Captain.

Right. 54, you still on Tac-3?

Yes, sir. I'll sign up for it tomorrow.

Good. And, 54, you might like to try Salvador Dalí's Tarot deck. Dalí doesn't seem to have taken the Tarot all that seriously, so his deck might be perfect for you. Interesting artwork, too.

Received. Dalí. Sir. I'll check out, uh, into that.

14, you should spend a bit more time learning your own deck. Sounds like you've developed some skill with it, but as long as you're out with that busted ankle, get some practice in, okay?

Yes, right, Captain, I'll do that.

Good. I want to be sure we can use all the skills of our officers at their peak level of ability. 20, how are the medics doing with that leg of yours?

All patched up and ready to go, sir! They even taped up my pants for me, so I won't be scarin' the citizens.

Good. Can you still fly?

Sure, no problem, it's really just a... What?

Because I want to use you on aerial patrol for Hallowe'en next week.

What, are we gonna borrow a helicopter from State?

Why do we need a helicopter? You said you can fly.

Oh, har, har, very funny, Captain. You oughtn't to take advantage of me when I'm still loopy from getting the wind knocked out of me.

How many fingers am I holding up?

Three. But... aahk! DAMMIT, Captain! What are you DOING? I thought you just said anyone could scan this channel?

Oh, I'm a firm believer in transparency and openness. The citizens benefit from knowing more about our operations. In fact, I believe I can firmly predict that vandalism this Hallowe'en will be greatly reduced from last year's levels.

But, shit, how, how did you find out?

It's my job to know the capabilities of my officers. All of their capabilities.

Huh. Looks like I'll have to keep a close eye on you, Captain.

You do that, 20, maybe you'll learn something. And now, I'm really tired from that drive, so if you all think you can manage a few hours without any more crises, I'm going to get some sleep. I'll be a real monster in the morning if I don't get some shuteye. Good night, all.

Good night, what, AAAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

Jodie, wha20, what is it? It's the matter?!

He, he just, the Captain, he just, hhh, hhh, hhh, oh God!

He what?! What happened?

It's, it's nothing, just something I thought I saw, nothing real, nothing, I guess I'm still whacked from that fall. I'm okay. It's nothing.

Dan, I think I'd better drive her home, let her get some rest.

Yeah, Steve, you do that. You go get some sleep, now, Jodie.

Copy, rrroger wilco. I'll be fine, don't worry 'bout me.

Dispatch, Nora-101, traffic complaint.