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**MOBILE TRACKING AND LOCATION AWARENESS  
IN DISASTER RELIEF AND HUMANITARIAN  
ASSISTANCE SITUATIONS**

by

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September 2012

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**MOBILE TRACKING AND LOCATION AWARENESS IN DISASTER RELIEF  
AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE SITUATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Situational awareness is one of the most important aspects to a commander in any type of mission, be it humanitarian relief, disaster recovery, or armed conflict. Through the past several decades, with the use of technology, we have been able to develop systems that help improve the commander's situational awareness of the mission. One of the major problems with this has been that every organization uses different technology to communicate, which causes interoperability issues and a lack of a Common Operational Picture (COP) between them.

Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) equipment that is relatively inexpensive, easily obtainable, simple to operate, and rapidly distributable to different organizations can help bridge this gap in the overall mission situational awareness. The goal of this research is to explore how to effectively implement Android-based devices to provide the tracking of team members and locations of significant activities/equipment graphically through the use of GPS, Google Maps, and custom overlays to increase situational awareness, thereby constructing a COP to assist in disaster relief efforts.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
A.	BACKGROUND AND NEED .....	1
B.	FOCUS .....	2
C.	ORGANIZATION .....	2
II.	BACKGROUND AND RELATED RESEARCH .....	5
A.	SITUATIONAL AWARENESS TOOLS .....	5
1.	Military .....	5
2.	Civilian .....	6
B.	CLOUD COMPUTING.....	7
C.	SPARCCS .....	8
D.	CLIENT/SERVER .....	10
E.	NATIVE SMARTPHONE SENSORS .....	10
F.	SUMMARY .....	11
III.	DESIGN INFRASTRUCTURE.....	13
A.	ANDROID LOCATION MANAGER .....	13
B.	SQLITE .....	14
C.	GOOGLE CLOUD .....	15
1.	Google App Engine .....	15
2.	Google Datastore.....	16
D.	ANDROID MAP APPLICATION PROGAMMING INTERFACE (API) .....	17
E.	OVERLAYS .....	17
F.	SUMMARY .....	18
IV.	IMPLEMENTATION .....	19
A.	USER LOCATION .....	19
B.	DISSEMINATION OF USER LOCATION .....	22
C.	DISPLAY OF ACTIVE RESPONDER LOCATIONS .....	23
D.	LOCATE ACTIVE USERS.....	26
E.	POINT OF INTEREST ICONS .....	27
F.	USER SETTINGS .....	28
G.	DETERMINE ACTIVE USERS .....	29
H.	SUMMARY .....	31
V.	CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK.....	33
A.	CONCLUSIONS .....	33
B.	FUTURE WORK .....	33
	LIST OF REFERENCES .....	37
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST.....	39

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Design Flow .....	13
Figure 2.	Location Undeterminable .....	20
Figure 3.	User Location by GPS .....	21
Figure 4.	User Location by Network Provider .....	22
Figure 5.	ArrayList Elements Skipped in For-Loop .....	24
Figure 6.	Responder Clicked .....	25
Figure 7.	Responder Icons .....	26
Figure 8.	Points of Interest Icons .....	28
Figure 9.	Points of Interest Icons .....	29

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AGIS	Advanced Ground Information Systems
APK	Android Application Packages
BFT	Blue Force Tracker
COTS	Commercial Off-the-Shelf
COP	Common Operational Picture
HTTP	Hypertext Transfer Protocol
IaaS	Infrastructure-as-a-Service
IDE	Integrated Development Environments
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PaaS	Platform-as-a-Service
SPARCCS	Smartphone-Assisted Readiness, Command and Control System
SaaS	Software-as-a-Service

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND AND NEED

One of the major aspects in military and disaster response situation today is for commanders and team members to have situational awareness. Commanders, team leaders, and team members all need to be able to know where their personnel are at all times. This will enable each member in the field to effectively communicate the ground reality to everyone else related to the mission. These attributes combined with information from the headquarters element make up what is known as a Common Operational Picture (COP).

In the past, the COP has been maintained utilizing cellular, radio, and computer-based communication methods and by updating individual maps. A major problem with this approach occurs when multiple organizations are involved in the same mission and their lines of communications are incompatible. Two relatively recent examples of these types of issues are 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina [1]. During Hurricane Katrina military forces and first responders had issues communicating relief efforts with one another due to a lack of a COP shared between the different entities. September 11th had similar issues even between different first responder organizations (police, firefighters, and medics, etc.).

The ability to create an application that can provide a COP on such a small mobile device would greatly increase situational awareness for both the commanders and the personnel on the ground. Additional benefits of using

smartphones are that they are Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) systems that are continually increasing in capabilities with each iteration and easily obtainable.

## **B. FOCUS**

The focus of this thesis is to demonstrate how to effectively utilize both Android-based devices and cloud computing to provide situational awareness. The main focus is on utilizing mobile Android devices Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) capabilities, mapping functions, and data transfer to track and display user locations in the field to provide situational awareness to the command center, as well as to the individual users on the ground.

## **C. ORGANIZATION**

The following chapters in this thesis are arranged and discussed as follows:

Chapter II (Background and Related Research): The second chapter of this thesis discusses current situational awareness tools that are used by both military and civilian organizations today. It describes the current command and control system upon which this thesis builds advanced capabilities. It also covers several of the technologies that are used in this new type of system.

Chapter III (Design Infrastructure): The third chapter gives a high-level look at how the information is gathered and disseminated to other devices. It describes how each piece of the system works to provide the user critical situational awareness.

Chapter IV (Implementation): The fourth chapter goes into detail on how the original system was altered to incorporate location tracking. It covers which classes and methods were added. It also gives examples of what a user might see on their device while using it in a real world mission.

Chapter V (Conclusions and Future Work): The fifth chapter of this thesis gives an overall summary of what this system provided originally and of what this system is now capable. It also provides a few suggestions on how the system can still be improved upon, and which capabilities would make the system a truly robust system for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance first-responders.

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## **II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED RESEARCH**

A commanders ability to have an accurate perception of his forces and area of concern is instrumental in any operation. With today's technology this same information can be disseminated down not just to the sub-commanders but to each individual team member on the ground. This section covers the concept of situational awareness tools and the technologies used with them.

### **A. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS TOOLS**

The United States Army Training and Doctrine Command defines Situational Awareness as:

Ability to have accurate and real-time information of friendly, enemy, neutral, and noncombatant locations; a common, relevant picture of the battlefield scaled to specific level of interest and special needs. [2]

Situational Awareness tools are now being used by both military and civilian organizations. These tools help the command more efficiently manage their personnel and resources.

#### **1. Military**

One of the main technologies used today by the United States military is the Blue Force Tracker (BFT). BFT is a GPS-enabled system that graphically displays the location of friendly forces. This system has the capability to send and receive text for transmitting reports, battlefield conditions, etc. It also has the ability for a user to manually enter and update enemy forces.

This system was first fielded by the Army in late 2002 during the pre-invasion buildup of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Soldiers were initially reluctant to use the system because they believed it would just be another tool to help micro-manage them.

BFT was later known for being one of the biggest success stories of OIF and has since changed the way our military conducts operations. BFT systems are now used by both the Marine Corps and Air Force, as well as British forces [3].

## **2. Civilian**

The military are not the only ones using situational awareness systems in operational environments. First responders such as law enforcement, paramedics, fire fighters, and homeland security are using these types of systems as well.

One system used by first responders, made by Advanced Ground Information Systems (AGIS), is called LifeRing. LifeRing is an online group collaboration and communication software system for crisis management. LifeRing provides the capability for all first responders to know the location of all other first responders by placing responder icons on a graphical map display. These maps are stored on the local device, or downloaded as needed if they are not pre-positioned on the device. Users are capable of sending text and making voice calls to other users. LifeRing also allows for users to exchange photos and even videos with other users. Each user can note the location of an event on a map and have it sent to other users.

LifeRing is capable of being installed on PDAs, PCs, and tablets. Originally, LifeRing was made to only be compatible with Microsoft operating systems (Windows Mobile 6.5) but has recently been updated to function with most mobile operating systems (e.g., BlackBerry, Android, and Apple). Devices are connected together by a peer-to-peer, many-to-many remote IP server. The LifeRing network can be connected through both cellular or Wi-Fi connections [4].

Another system used in the private sector is GPS Vehicle Tracking from FleetMatics. FleetMatics is a software development company based out of Ireland. It is a GPS-enabled system that provides situational awareness of vehicles for private companies. These types of companies include the service and distribution industries. The system's main purpose is to assist companies in improving efficiency and increase productivity by providing management with accurate and timely data of the locations of their fleet.

The system works by attaching a small device to each vehicle, which transmits its location and other information to a server operated and maintained by Fleetmatics. The server then has a web portal that allows users to view the location and other data from each unit. There is also an application that can be installed on either an Android or iPhone that can be used to access the data [5].

## **B. CLOUD COMPUTING**

The "cloud" is an expression referring to the use of cloud computing, which in turn, is the term used for providing computation, software, data access, and storage services over the Internet instead of through a physical

device possessed by the user. The cloud gives people the capability to utilize these services without needing to understand how it works [6]. In essence, the resources are consumed as a utility, just like electricity, and is normally billed according to the amount of resources used. This allows consumers to only pay for what they need, purchasing more capacity or resources as required making them elastic. This means they can scale up or down easily, without major changes to their own infrastructure and personnel, to meet demand [7].

The services that cloud computing provide can be divided into three basic models. The first, Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) provides virtual server instances. Customers have the ability to access, build, start, and stop their virtual servers and storage. This type of service allows companies to expand rapidly to the size they need while preserving cost. The second, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) makes available the hardware, software, and interfaces to the user. These services can be accessed through a browser or a thin-client. The last, Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS), is where software and product development tools are hosted by the provider. This allows for developers to create and operate applications over the Internet [8].

### **C. SPARCCS**

Smartphone-Assisted Readiness, Command and Control System (SPARCCS) is a command and control application initially developed by Mike Asche and Niki Crewes to demonstrate the operational capabilities that smartphones



and cloud computing provide. It provides for rapid development and deployment capability using COTS equipment.

SPARCCS, in its current state, provides for an array of useful features that can contribute to overall oversight of a mission. Users can create, join, edit and view missions, as well as create, edit, view, and delete points of interest associated with particular missions. Images can be captured edited, viewed and associated with the COP. Information about each user belonging to a particular mission can be displayed. GPS can be utilized to plot missions, points of interest, and images on the COP.

The SPARCCS server-side was designed on the Platform-as-a-Service model, defined earlier. The Platform-as-a-Service model is perfect for a development environment because it is robust, affordable, and scalable. SPARCCS is currently running on Google's APP Engine site. All information collected is synchronized and stored in a cloud database, also known as the Google Datastore. Google's App Engine Site also provides a web interface portal for users.

Users interact with the system in one of two ways. The first is through the web portal, as previously stated. The second is through an Android smartphone application. The Android application allows for users in the field to take advantage of the capabilities of their smartphone for use in an operation. Users can easily add points of interest or images to the COP using the built in camera. Location can even be pinpointed with the use of the GPS antennas that are common in most smartphones on the market. The COP is easily displayed on the smartphone screen using Google Maps and/or satellite imagery keeping the amount of space needed

to install the app minimal. Further, the use of "tiles" associated with Google's cloud computing allow for overlay of custom diagrams, such as floor plans, on Google map images.

#### **D. CLIENT/SERVER**

A common method of distributing information and data services is the client/server computing architecture. The client-server architecture is defined as "a network of loosely coupled computers in which one or more computers are designated as servers to provide specific services" [9]. The most common types of usage for this architecture are print, file, web, and database retrieval services.

The client/server architecture consists of four components: client, server, network, and protocol. The client is a host on the network that requests a server's content or service and is normally utilized by the end user. The server is a host that runs one or more services and shares its resources in response to requests or queries by the client. The network is the infrastructure that allows the communication between the client and the server. The protocol is the standard that is used when exchanging requests or responses between the client the server. An example of a protocol is the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), which is normally used for web services [10].

#### **E. NATIVE SMARTPHONE SENSORS**

Smartphones carry a lot of power. Devices that may be as small as a wallet may contain several different sensors, a powerful processor, a large memory and plentiful storage with a multitude of possibilities for use. These

smartphones are perfect for making every member of a field team a collector of information, as well as a distributor and consumer of such information.

Today's smartphones have built-in cameras, with resolution of more than 8 megapixels providing high-definition quality, and a flash. This is better than some stand-alone cameras on the market, and makes for one less device to carry. Most top-selling phones include at least three different antennas for transmitting and receiving data communications: 3G/4G cellular, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth antennas. The 3G/4G cellular devices are perfect for utilizing current commercial infrastructure and provide for a larger coverage area. Wi-Fi antennas allow for simple, short-range networks to be established with some central gateway providing connection to the outside world, such as a radio-equipped Wi-Fi hotspot. Bluetooth allows for additional external wireless sensors to be connected to the phone, as well as establishing mobile ad-hoc networks. Smartphones also have accelerometers that are used to detect any motion by the device. Furthermore, almost every smartphone is GPS-enabled, which is perfect for obtaining accurate location for incident reporting and even for tracking individual user locations.

These sensors, combined with a dual or quad core processor, 16 gigabytes or more of storage, and 1 to 2 gigabytes of RAM give them plenty of capability to be a perfect field collection tool.

#### **F. SUMMARY**

With the use of smartphones and the cloud, SPARCCS can create a powerful and cost efficient situational awareness

system that has the capability to utilize current infrastructure networks and/or impromptu networks and allow individual team members to communicate vital information to the rest of their team and chain-of-command.

### III. DESIGN INFRASTRUCTURE

This chapter discusses the design, flow, and concepts that will be used in SPARCCS to track and display individual users and points of interest. This will include Android LocationManager, SQLite database, Google App Engine and Datastore, Android Map API, and overlays. Figure 1 is a diagram that shows the basic components that are used in the process.

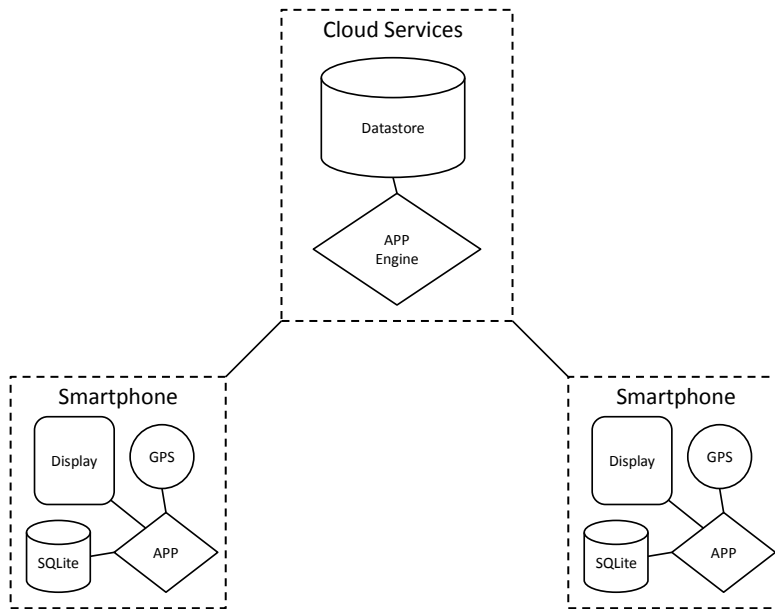


Figure 1. Design Flow

#### A. ANDROID LOCATION MANAGER

The first task in the design of tracking individuals and asset locations is for each element to determine its position. Smartphones include built in GPS, cellular, and Wi-Fi antennas.

Through the use of these antennas and the LocationManager class, applications can determine their device position. Giving permission for an application to ACCESS\_FINE\_LOCATION allows the LocationManager the ability to activate the phone's GPS antenna and acquire its position. Giving permission for an application to ACCESS\_COARSE\_LOCATION allows the LocationManager the ability to determine its location based on local cell towers and/or Wi-Fi access points [11]. Both methods can be used to acquire the location and automatically switched between the two methods as one type loses or regains its position. If both methods are enabled the priority will be given to the GPS acquired location.

Once the application has determined its location through the use of the GPS antenna or network provider, this data must be stored to the local database of the phone.

## **B. SQLITE**

To track the user's own location as well as the locations of the other users accessing the system, there must be a place to store this data. The SPARCCS mobile application uses an SQLite database to store information about responders on the phone. SQLite is an open source database that is embedded into every version of the Android operating system.

SQLite is small, fast, and reliable. SQLite databases do not have a separate server process like most SQL databases. Read and writes are made directly to ordinary

disk files. An entire database of multiple tables, indices, triggers, and views are contained in a single disk file [12].

SQLite supports only three data types: Text, Integer, and Real. A Text is similar to a String in Java. An Integer is comparable to a Long in Java; while a Real is similar to a Double in Java. All other data types must be changed into one of these three data types before they can be stored in the database [13].

Now that the location of each individual user will have been acquired and stored locally on the individual's phones, it must be sent to the other users through some back-end service. SPARCCS utilizes the Google cloud for this.

## **C. GOOGLE CLOUD**

### **1. Google App Engine**

An App Engine allows organizations to run web applications on the Google infrastructure for a fee depending on the requirements of the application. Google App Engine is a PaaS cloud-computing model that allows for the SPARCCS system to be developed and hosted on the Google cloud.

The applications on the App Engine run inside a sandbox, a secure environment that has limited access to the underlying operating system. The sandbox isolates the application permitting it to run independent of the operating system, hardware, or location. This allows for the App Engine to start and stop additional servers across

the cloud to meet traffic needs while simultaneously distributing web request to the associated servers [14].

Data is exchanged with the App Engine through HTTP requests. The App Engine stores the information in the datastore, described below.

## **2. Google Datastore**

The datastore is a scalable storage location for web applications with no planned downtime. Objects in a datastore are called entities. An entity has one or more named properties and those named properties can have one or more values. The data types for these properties can be: integers, floating-point numbers, strings, dates, binary, and more.

A datastore is different from traditional relational databases in that it uses a distributed architecture and is able to scale automatically. Datastore writes scale by automatically distributing data as needed. The reads scale because the only queries supported are the queries that scale with the size of the result. This means the performance for 100 queries is the same over a thousand entities or a million [15].

Once the information has been placed in the datastore, it can be queried and retrieved by the SPARCCS application on user smartphones. Once the user has received the new information from the datastore and has saved it to the local SQLite database, the information can be used to graphically display each user.



#### **D. ANDROID MAP APPLICATION PROGRAMMING INTERFACE (API)**

Once the SQLite database on the local device has been updated with information on other users, it is now possible to display them graphically on a map or satellite image. Google allows Android applications to access their map repository and display them using the Android Maps API.

To be able to access the Google Maps repository, the application must have a Maps API Key. The Key can be obtained by registering an MD5 fingerprint of the certificate that is used to sign the application. A separate key is needed for developmental builds (installed directly from Integrated Development Environments [IDE]) and release builds (signed Android Application Packages [APK]).

The Maps API includes the basic function for viewing maps on a touch screen. It includes the ability for the user to use touch gestures to pan and zoom in and out on the map. Through the use of the Maps library, satellite images can be displayed on top of the map as well.

Once the application has the capability for displaying map or satellite images, the next step is to display the user locations on the map. This is done through overlays.

#### **E. OVERLAYS**

When it is time to actually place icons on the map to represent the locations of the other users or points of interest is analogous to acetate overlays used for planning missions in the military, to plot movements and enemy locations on top of hard-copy maps. Another analogy would be in construction to show water and power lines on

blueprints by having them drawn on translucent paper and placed on top of the blueprints.

Next an itemized overlay will be created that uses an arrayList to hold each object that will be displayed. The data needed for each item can then be gathered from the local database and placed into the arrayList in the itemized overlay. Once the itemized overlay is ready it is added to the overall map overlay. Creating itemized overlays and adding them to a master overlay allows us to dynamically choose which itemized overlays we wish to display.

As the database is updated with new positions for the different users the overlay can be updated. This is done by creating a method that is called every time the database is updated. This method will reload the itemized overlay with the current information from the database, clear the overlay currently displayed on the map, and then redraw the itemized overlay so that it is viewable once again.

## **F. SUMMARY**

This chapter summarized the flow of how object locations that are gathered through the use of the smartphone will be gathered, distributed, and plotted on the local devices. The built in antennas on smartphones provide a great capability for easily gathering the location of the device. The next chapter details how these capabilities are implemented into the SPARCCS system.

## **IV. IMPLEMENTATION**

This chapter discusses the implementations of the responder tracking and display features of the SPARCCS mobile application. This includes determining the device location, dissemination of location to other devices, how and which icons are plotted on the map, how point of interest icons are determined, and how responders are determined to be active.

### **A. USER LOCATION**

As previously stated, to access the user's device location we must use the `LocationManager` class. An instance of the `LocationManager` class, `locManager`, is created during the `onCreate()` portion of the main activity file of the SPARCCS mobile application. This gives the application the ability to access the system location services.

Next, an instance of the `LocationListener` class is needed to receive notification from the `locManager` of when the location has changed; this instance was named `MyLocationListener`. `MyLocationListener` is not just an instance of `LocationListener` but of a custom class of `LocationListener`. This custom class was created so that the location is determined by the GPS receiver subsystem first, and if that fails, to obtain the location from the network provider. It also allows for custom messages to be displayed in the event that the current location is undeterminable (Figure 2) or if the location setting needs to be altered in the phone.

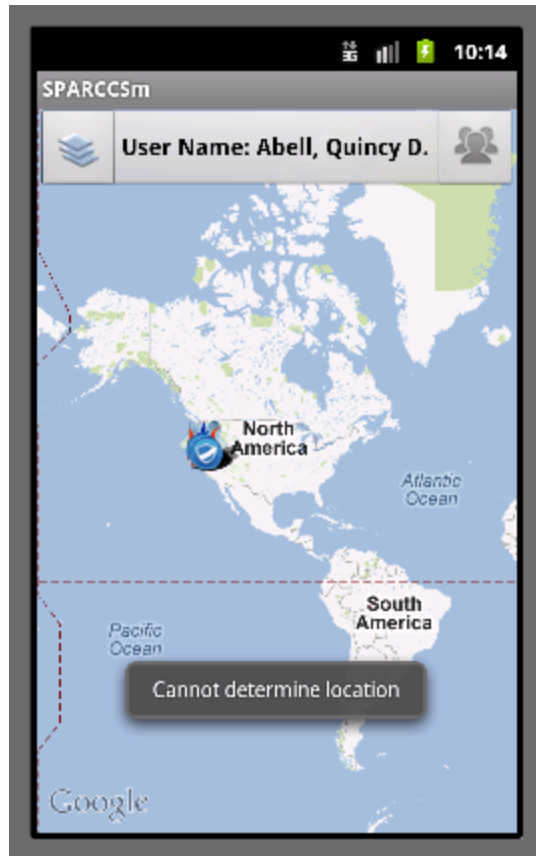


Figure 2. Location Undeterminable

To start using the location data that is now enabled, an instance of the `MyLocationOverlay` class is created, `myLocationOverlay`. The `myLocationOverlay` can then be displayed on the map using the following statement:

```
mapView.getOverlays().add(myLocationOverlay);
```

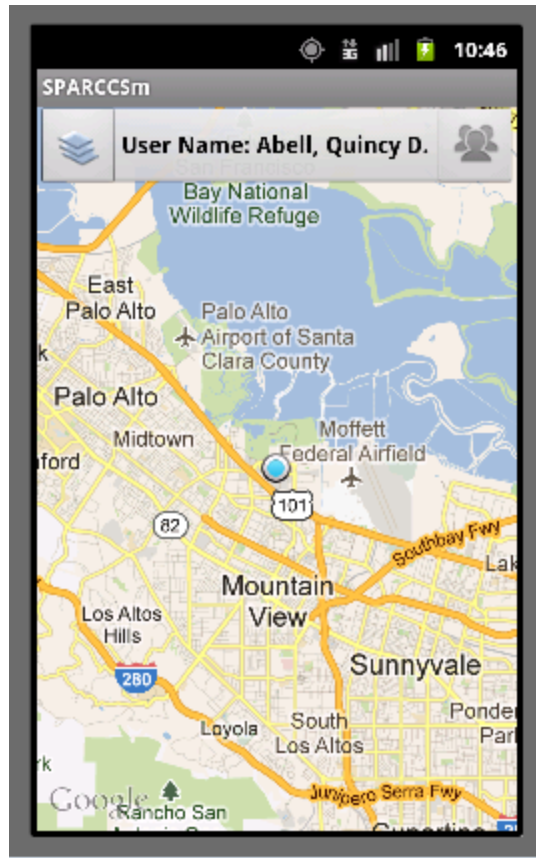


Figure 3. User Location by GPS

The blue and white circle in Figure 3 is an example of how the responder's position appears on their own device if determined by the GPS. If the blue and white circle was surrounded by another blue circle, this would mean that the current location is being determined by the network provider and that the accuracy is within the size of the outer blue circle. An example of this can be seen in Figure 4.

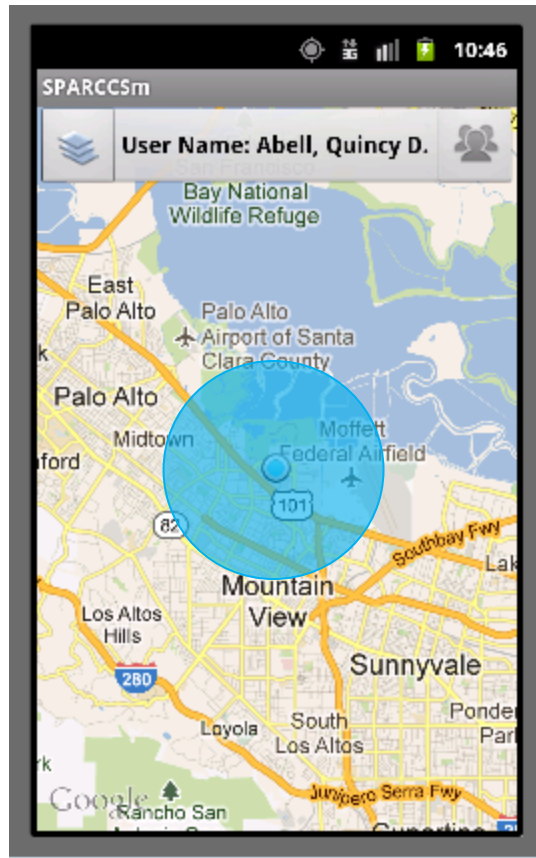


Figure 4. User Location by Network Provider

## B. DISSEMINATION OF USER LOCATION

The current location of the device is gathered using a method named `myLocationToDB`. This method first creates an instance of the `ResponderClient` class with the user's current data. Then it gathers the `GeoPoint`, a single variable that holds both latitude and longitude in microdegrees, of the device by issuing the following command:

```
GeoPoint point = myLocationOverlay.getMyLocation();
```

Once the `GeoPoint` has been acquired, both the latitude and longitude are extracted and placed in separate variables for entry into the database. They are then placed

into the instance of the ResponderClient that was created. The instance of the ResponderClient is then used to update the information of the current user to the local database.

The next time the mobile device synchronizes to the App Engine, the latest latitude and longitude values are updated in the datastore on the Google cloud. During this synchronization, any new location data for other users is received and stored in the local database.

### **C. DISPLAY OF ACTIVE RESPONDER LOCATIONS**

To display other responders on the map, a list of all the active responders must be created. To do this, the buildResponderClassList() method is used. This method builds an ArrayList of type ResponderClient that only contains responders that have joined the same mission and are currently active. Active users are defined as devices that have synchronized to the app engine within 15 minutes.

The buildResponderClassList() method first takes an ArrayList of type ResponderClient and loads it with all the responders listed in the local database. Next, the current user's mission is compared to each responder mission in the previously created ArrayList using a for-loop. If both the responders and the current user's mission matches and the responderLoggedIn field for that responder is set to "true" then a copy of that responder is added to a second ArrayList. This second ArrayList contains the responders that will be displayed.

If the second ArrayList were not used and responders that did not meet the criteria were just removed from the

ArrayList during that iteration of the for-loop, a responder may not be compared against the criteria (Figure 5).

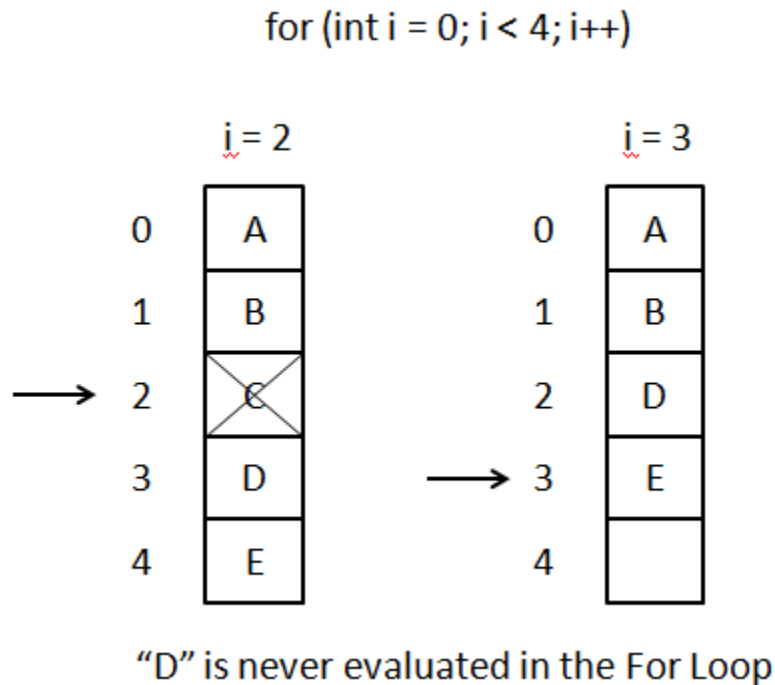


Figure 5. ArrayList Elements Skipped in For-Loop

After the for-loop is complete, the final step in creating the ArrayList is to remove the current user. This is done so that the user is not displayed twice on the map. The method `responderListRemoveUser()` is used for this. The `responderListRemoveUser()` method uses a for-loop to compare the user name with the `respondername` field in the ArrayList. If there is a match, the entry is removed from the ArrayList.

Once the ArrayList of all the users has been created, it can now be used to populate the map with icons representing the locations of these active users. This is



done through the method `responderDrawOverlay()`. The `responderDrawOverlay()` method uses an itemized overlay so that information about each responder can be displayed when the icon is clicked on the map and different icons can be used for each responder based upon their type. Figure 6 is an example of what is displayed when a responder's icon is clicked.

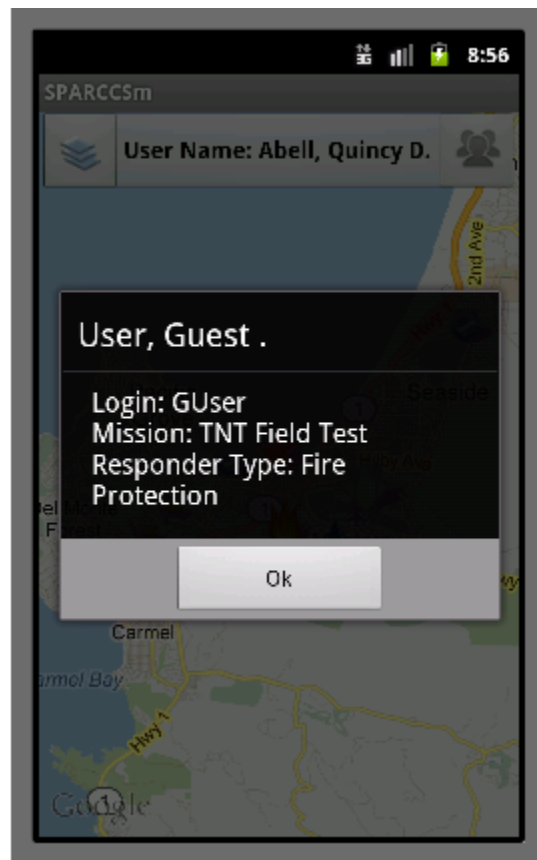


Figure 6. Responder Clicked

The `ArrayList` is iterated through using a for-loop to perform the following functions. The latitude and longitude are extracted and used to create a `GeoPoint`. This `GeoPoint` represents where the icon will be displayed on the map. Then, an overlay item is created with the `GeoPoint` and any

other information that is going to be displayed about the responder. Then, the responder type is compared to determine which icon will be set for this user. Figure 7 shows responders displayed on the map with different color stars representing them as three different types of responders. A green represents military, red for fire protection, blue for law enforcement, white for medical corps, and purple for humanitarian assistance.

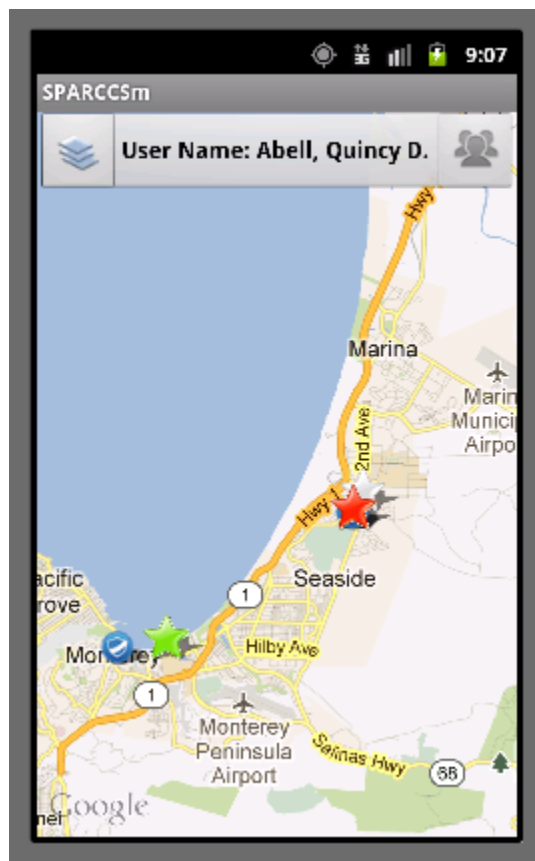


Figure 7. Responder Icons

#### D. LOCATE ACTIVE USERS

Once the responders are plotted on the map they can be located by clicking the responder's button in the top

right-hand corner of the screen. Once clicked, a dialog box will appear listing all active users who are a part of the current user's mission. Click the name of the responder you want to locate and the map will move and center on the location of that user. To center the map on the current user location, click the button at the top center of the screen with the user name on it.

This functionality is provided by the `goToResponderLocation()` and `goToMyLocation()` methods, respectively. These methods use the built in `MapView.getController().animateTo(GeoPoint)` method to center the map on these locations. These methods also set the zoom of the map based on the default zoom level selected in the application setting.

#### **E. POINT OF INTEREST ICONS**

Displaying points of interest using different icons is done similarly to that of displaying responders' icons. The points of interest form from the original SPARCCS mobile code was altered to only allow choices from a spinner object for the description. A spinner object resembles a drop-down list in HTML. This allowed for the description field to be evaluated and a specific icon to be set based on this field. Figure 8 shows different icons for the six points of interest on the map. The flame icon representing a fire location, the water drop representing a water cache, the fork and spoon representing a food cache, and the flag icons used to represent other types of points of interest.

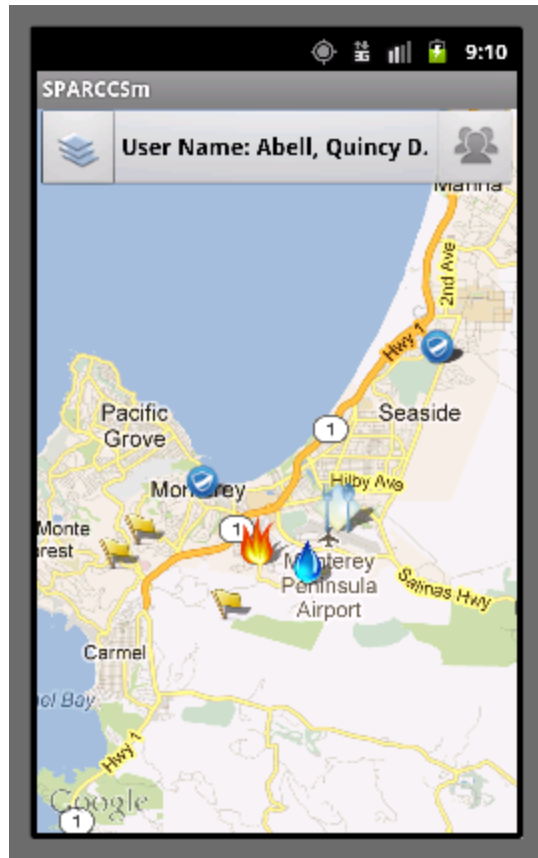


Figure 8. Points of Interest Icons

#### F. USER SETTINGS

The application settings menu is accessed by pressing the device's menu button and selecting settings. This displays the application settings. This display and the variables used in it are created using the shared preferences library included in the Android operating system. Shared preference allows for the storage of private primitive data in key-value pairs. Accessing a variable in shared preference is faster than accessing a locally stored file.

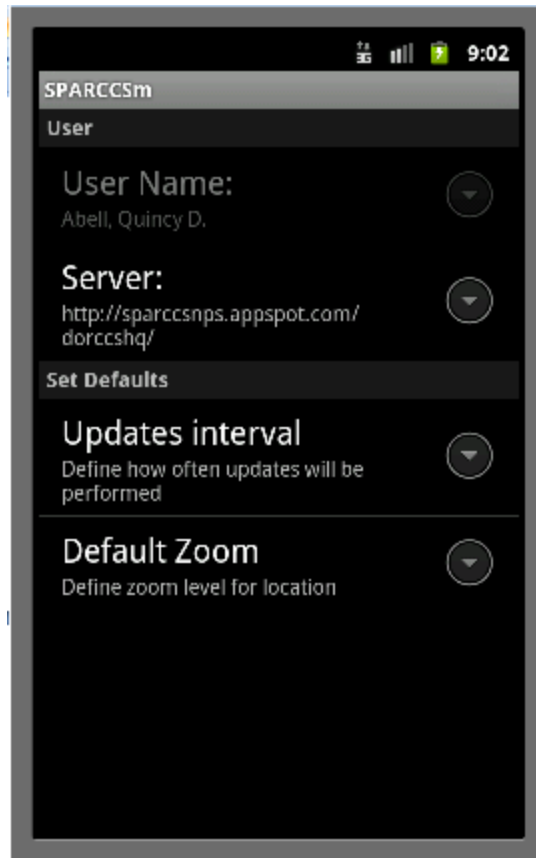


Figure 9. Points of Interest Icons

Under the setting menu, the current users name and the server the application is accessing are displayed (Figure 9). From here the user can change the update intervals and default zoom levels.

#### **G. DETERMINE ACTIVE USERS**

Active users are determined by the Google App Engine. Although the SPARCCS mobile application uses the responderLoggedIn field to determine if the user's icon will be displayed, it is the app engine that sets this field. When a user logs-in from the SPARCCS mobile application the reponderLoggedIn field is set to "True" for that responder in the datastore in the Google cloud.

Whenever the responder's device synchronizes with app engine again, the field is set to "True," ensuring the user is still active.

A responder becomes inactive if their device does not synchronize with the app engine after a specified amount of time. This is done by creating a timestamp field in the datastore. This timestamp field is updated with the current time whenever the user logs in or synchronizes with the app engine. The time used for the timestamp is generated from the app engine and not the mobile applications. This is done to prevent inaccuracies in timing and to be able to account for time zone variations. The timestamp field is checked against the current time every 15 minutes (this time can be modified inside the app engine code). If during this check the difference in the current time and the timestamp exceeds the specified amount of time the responderLoggedIn field is set to "False" for that responder. This is needed because continual transmissions between the app engine and the device are not maintained between synchronization intervals.

Google App Engines run primarily on front-ended instances. This means that the server-side code is running and scaling dynamically, based on incoming requests, and working in a reactive state. So, once a device connects to synch with the application, the processes are then preformed. To create a way for a frontend instance to be called to compare responders' timestamps, the SPARCCS app engine utilizes a "cron" job. A cron is a time-based job scheduler in Unix operating systems. This cron job allows for a regularly scheduled task to be performed at defined

times or intervals. The cron job is set to execute the SPARCCS AutoLogoutCheckServlet every 15 minutes. This effectively sets responders to an inactive state so they are not displayed on the map when not currently participating in the mission.

#### **H. SUMMARY**

This chapter summarized the implementation of the responder tracking capability of the SPARCCS mobile application. This situational awareness capability adds to a units overall potential effectiveness during a mission.

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## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK**

### **A. CONCLUSIONS**

The SPARCCS system was designed to provide a COP to the command center down to the individual responder. Users were able to disseminate information to the command center as well as other responders in a relatively quick fashion and have them depicted graphically on a map.

With the inclusion of the tracking capability into the SPARCCS system, the situational awareness of the all members supporting the mission is significantly increased. Users can now see the proximity of other responders on their mobile devices. This ability allows for more effective use of personnel by the command center and by the team leaders on the scene.

SPARCCS, in its present state, provides a vast set of capabilities to its users utilizing the cloud and COTS equipment that is relatively inexpensive, easily obtainable, simple to operate, and rapidly deployable to different organizations. This can help bridge the gaps in the overall mission situational awareness we discussed in Chapter I.

### **B. FUTURE WORK**

This thesis extended the capabilities of the original SPARCCS system. The addition of the mobile tracking capability to the system enhances the overall situational awareness of the mobile responders as well as the command center. The system is close to being a fully featured

command and control suite but could use a few more capabilities to be more effective. Below are a few recommendations.

- Mobile-to-Mobile Device Synchronizing – Allowing for a mobile device to act as a server to synchronize other mobile devices would alleviate traffic on the long haul connection for missions with limited bandwidth capabilities or restricted access to the Internet. This could also allow for team members to stay synchronized among a local group if connectivity to the Google cloud is temporary lost.
- Push Capability – Currently, the SPARCCS system uses http requests to send and receive information. This means the mobile device is only updated when it requests updates from the app engine and not when updates are made to the datastore. This creates some lag from when the data in the cloud is updated and when the mobile users interface is updated. If updates to the server were disseminated using push capability, mobile devices could display information at close to real time.
- Responder Route Logging – The ability to see where a responder has been would be useful for analysis of mission operations after they are complete.
- Messaging – Communicating with other team members during operations is essential. Having the

capability to send a simple text message to another team member by just tapping on their icon would give them a rapid and easy way to communicate.

- Notifications – As new users join missions or new points of interest are added to the map, the user may not notice immediately. Adding notifications would provide a way to indicate to the user that something has been changed/updated to the current mission.

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