

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Div. of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

December 2022

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County during declared Emergency events. We also support EOC and emergency personnel along with Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) with voice, image and data communications resources. "Call MERT.... When all else fails!"

Please check the calendar for changes to the meetings scheduled the rest of this year. <https://kg4nxo.com/mert-calendar/>

Mark your calendars!

MERT Monthly Meeting

The next Meeting will be on December 17th @ 10:00 am at the MCSO EOC (692 NW 30th Ave, Ocala, FL 34475).

See you there!

Hurricane Nicole Notes



Harlan Cook, KN4VRM,
MERT Coordinator

Another Month... *Another... **WOW... What a month!!!!***

For the second month in a row, I extend my sincerest praise and thanks to the many MERT Members who assisted in the preparations and deployment activities before and during this Activation for Hurricane Nicole.

We fulfilled our Mission and were congratulated by EM Director Preston Bowlin for our response and readiness.

Special recognition for supporting MERT's Activation goes to:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Kraig Pritts – KA2LHO | HF FDEM State Net |
| Gary Neron – KS4TSX | 2M & 70 cm KK4DFC & SARnet |
| Hayden Kaufman – N2HAY | HF SHARES & backup |

I also acknowledge the activation preparations and planning support by Assistant MERT Coordinator Bill Gillespie (KW5BG) and Past Coordinator Leon Jurcyszyn (K8ZAG).

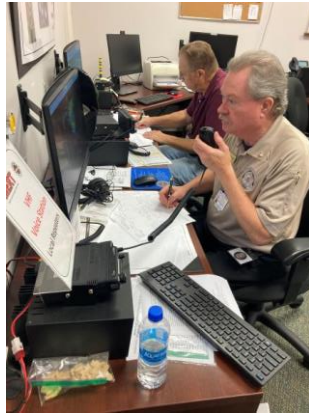
Gentlemen, thank you for your dedication, experience and many hours of time prior to MERT's activation on November 10th.

"The broadest, and maybe the most meaningful definition of volunteering:
Doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good." ~Ivan Scheier

MERT “STARS”!



Gary Neron & Kraig Pritts



Harlan Cook & Gary Neron



Hayden Kaufman



Gary Neron receives a “Standing Ovation” on his NET Control results during Hurricane Nicole Activation (11/10/2022)

MERT thanks each of these Volunteers for accepting the 0600 – 1645 Duty Assignment at the MERT Radio Room in the EOC.



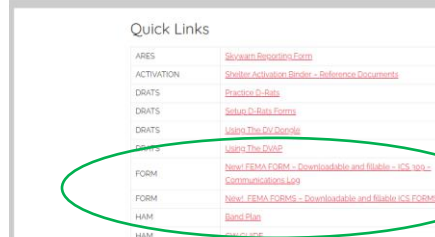
Scenes from inside the EOC during the Hurricane Nicole Activation. The WebEOC event screen tracked power outages, fallen trees, road closures, flooded streets, etc.

This events report contained 32 pages consisting of FEMA required ICS Forms, supporting documents along with MERT’s experiences and key recommendations for improvements expected during future activations.



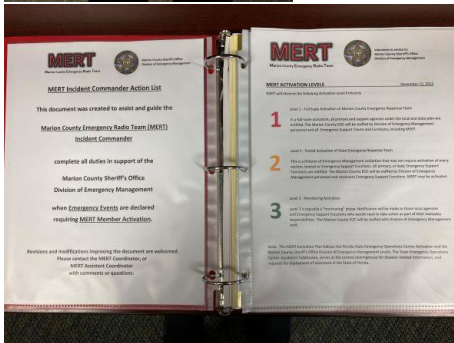
Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT)

Remember the Net Report after each net. Thank you!



*Of special note was many MERT Members used online resources to complete the ICS forms. These links are now available on MERT’s website KG4NXO.com. Click the “Quick Links” tab and then FEMA Forms. The “200” forms and “309” are available.

Fillable and downloadable FEMA Form links now available on KG4NXO.com



Red Book Update

After Hurricane Ian, MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook shared his first Activation was a significant learning experience and acknowledged he had missed some steps before and during the event. As such, he wanted to create a “reference document” for his use in the future while “... the experiences were still fresh on his mind.”

Since Ian, he took on the challenge of crafting it with help from Members and updated everyone at the Nov. 2nd “Check In”. During the meeting, it was recommended the resource being available to all Members in the Radio Room and called the “**Red Book**” for anyone filling the position of MERT Incident Commander (IC). Using the Red Book will help guide the IC through the Pre-Activation, Activation and Post-Activation steps.

Since Hurricane Nicole quickly followed Hurricane Ian, the “**Red Book**” was actually tested even though it was not yet complete. However, the added experience of the Nicole Activation so soon after Ian contributed greatly to building a better “**Red Book**” result with several additional steps documented and added.

Today, the “**Red Book**” has been completed and is available to all Members. Find it next to the SHREK Kit binders in the bookcase top row. The new resource was reviewed by EM Director Preston Bowlin who requested a second copy for reference by all EM personnel. In the future, a “softcopy” will also be available at our website...

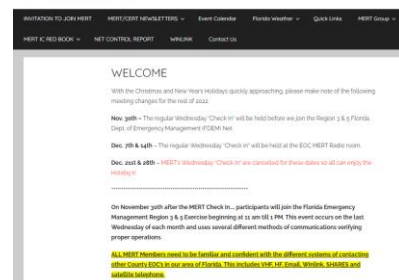
KG4NXO.com. Harlan asks all MERT Members to review the “**Red Book**” and continue offering improvement recommendations after every MERT Activation experience in supporting MERT’s Mission in the future.

[CHECK OUT.....KG4NXO.com !](http://KG4NXO.com)

MERT Members are reminded about an excellent resource available at KG4NXO.com. Log in and get timely updates on meetings, calendar events and useful resources like FEMA ICS forms. Future updates will include the **Red Book** and the MERT Taskbook!



Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT)
Remember the Red Report after each Red Report!





MERT Member Paul Blystone (WB4QQN) at his home "radio shack".

MERT MEMBER SPOTLIGHT **Paul Blystone (WB4QQN)**

Paul serves as Net Control Manager and Winlink Manager. His leadership in both responsibilities provides a guide to all increasing their skills and expanding their capabilities. Here is his memorable career in his own words:

"I graduated from New Smyrna Beach High school in 1954. The Florida East Coast Railway Co. was short of telegraphers and offered a night course at our high school. I signed up for the course, "Railway Telegraphy and Station Accountancy." I took the railroad test, passed and was hired in late 1955. After about 5 years I was drafted into the US Army, and wound up doing 3 years of service. I was sent to communications school and ended up in the Signal Corps. After getting out of service and going back to the railroad there was a strike called and that ended my railroad days. I wound up in the produce business in the farming area around Lake Okeechobee.

I didn't want to lose my ability to do Morse Code, so I decided to take up amateur radio. I received my General Class Amateur Radio License. I was mostly interested in keeping up with the code and did very little voice radio for years.

After working several years in shipping, then in sales, I had a chance to put together a group and bought the company. I retired at age 59. While in the produce business and doing very well, I had the desire to learn to fly. I got my pilot's license in 1978. After retiring I decided to join Civil Air Patrol, an auxiliary of the Air Force in late 1995. I was heavy into flying for them for about 21 years and was also into communications.



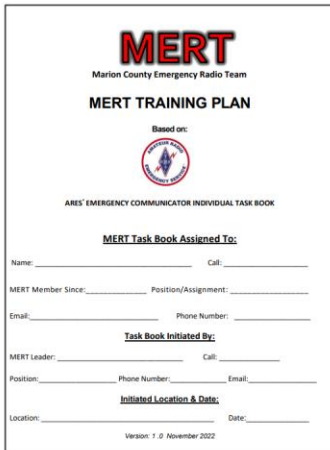
I was Director of Communications for CAP's Florida Wing, from 1999 to 2005. I joined the UFO (United Flying Octogenarians) at age 80 and flew 5 more years before giving it up this August.

We moved to a new location here in the Ocala area about 5 years ago and that is when I began looking for ham radio operators, found a HAM in the neighborhood and he invited me to MERT. I joined and began learning a lot of new ways to communicate, i.e., D-Star, D-Rats, Winlink, etc. The hospital group was offering a class on Winlink (sending

email over radio). After learning the system fairly well I was asked to start helping others. This is where I am now and enjoying it.

I also became a member of CERT (Community Emergency Response Team). I try to stay active with all three; CAP, MERT AND CERT. All three organizations are first responders and all meet at the Sheriff’s Emergency Operations Center.”

MERT is fortunate to have Paul Blystone as a MEMBER sharing his rich experiences and constant desire to keep learning. Thank You Paul for your leadership!



A “MERT Taskbook” draft was shared. It is being created for Members to track specific skills and capabilities they accomplish.

MERT Taskbook

During the Oct. 26th “Check In”, Harlan shared he was interested in tracking his own learning experiences in growing his amateur radio knowledge while also increasing his emergency management skills.

To that goal, he shared he had reviewed the FEMA AUXCOMM and ARRL/ARES Taskbooks and liked the format and many of the learning elements they included. He shared that by including specific MERT skills, it might be useful for Members wishing to do the same.

After Members reviewed the Taskbook and following a general discussion, all attendee’s supported its continued development and future use by MERT.

During the Monthly Meeting on Nov. 19th, a newer version (3) was shown which included specific MERT experiences. The discussion that followed supported its continued development. Harlan asked all MERT Members to forward him recommendations and suggestions to be included and stated the completed document will be reviewed and approved by MCSO Director Preston Bowlin before a MERT rollout.

MERT Wednesday Check-In’s

“Check-In’s” (0900 to 1200 Hrs.) Summary for November....

October 26th Meeting – (12 members)

- ✓ Harlan Cook (KN4VRM) Mert Coordinator, presented a preliminary document, “MERT Coordinator Action List”, and asked for everyone’s review and input. He is creating a Red Book to guide the MERT Coordinator through an activation.
- ✓ Harlan also asked for feedback on what specific training items should be in the MERT Taskbook. The handout he produced listed several topics for training and stirred much discussion.
- ✓ Bruce Twiss (KI4NFA), HEC Liaison, brought safety vests his group has adopted. the Hospital Group discovered that has pockets for ID. He stated that CERT uses green and Hospital Group uses orange. The group discussed MERT’s colors and needs. Bruce also pointed out the radios and antennas need to be removed from the old MCC.
- ✓ Harlan, Bill Gillespie (KW5BG) and Leon Jurczynsyn (K8ZAG) talked about the poor condition of the wiring on the antennas at KG4NXO. The black jacket on the coax is cracking and coming off, and some of the connections were never soldered. The wire and connectors are being added to the funding request.
- ✓ Leon stated he will schedule Thursday practical sessions for the hands-on training.
- ✓ Harlan also stated that he has again asked for MERT members’ badges and funding for safety vests. Leon requested that a safety vest also be added to each Shrek kit.
- ✓ Paul Blystone, MERT Net Manager and Winlink Advisor (WB4QQN) reminded the group of the Thursday P2P practice on Winlink and of the importance of following directions exactly.

November 2nd Meeting – (15 members)

- ✓ Harlan stated that Preston Bowlin has okayed monies for replacing cables on the tower at EOC. MERT members will be working in teams to replace cables and make good connections.
- ✓ Harlan passed around a Red Binder for EOC Procedures and stated that is a work in progress. Leon and Bill G both stated that there should only be the one binder so it stays as the latest version.
- ✓ Gary Neron (KS4TSX) has been working on sat phone directions and will be emailing them to MERT members to print out for their personal binders. He created a checklist for the calling on satellite phone procedure from start to finish. We will use this



phone and procedure book on the next satellite phone testing time. MERT is now responsible for the testing and maintenance of all the satellite phones.

- ✓ Bruce made a document with the current radios in the old MCC. He made suggestions for the new MCCs 2 new go kits, which includes Yaesu FT-857D (capable of HF, VHF, UHF) there was discussion of modifying it for use with Shares channels. Icom IC-2820H (VHF, UHF, D-STAR) with Pelican or Apache (cost less) plastic case.
- ✓ Leon pointed out that the old pelican kits were too heavy, and Bill G stated that it is not necessary to have cables and power supplies in the kits. Leon wants new carts and Hayden Kaufman (N2HAY) said bungee cords should be added to them.
- ✓ MERT will be manning a table at the Hamfest on Dec. 3rd.
- ✓ Bruce pointed out that the phones in the radio room need to be tested to ring or go to answering machine. They should also be in the Red Book.
- ✓ Kraig requested that names be taken off the MERT roster who never report hours.
- ✓ Leon suggested we do away with QR code for checking in. Members can't check their hours and it is not accurate.
- ✓ Kim Shulby (KM4JMZ) pointed out that Dunnellon HS has no generator, so flashlight, pen, and battery fan could be added to that Shrek kit. She also said shelter managers need to know IS 213 forms. Gary Neron said that Fort McCoy needs 100' of cable added to Shrek kit.
- ✓ Bill Sobel (K1WLS) stated he couldn't do KG4NXO morning check in because of the noise on HF.
- ✓ Hayden stated that he will sign off on ARES task books first meeting of the year.

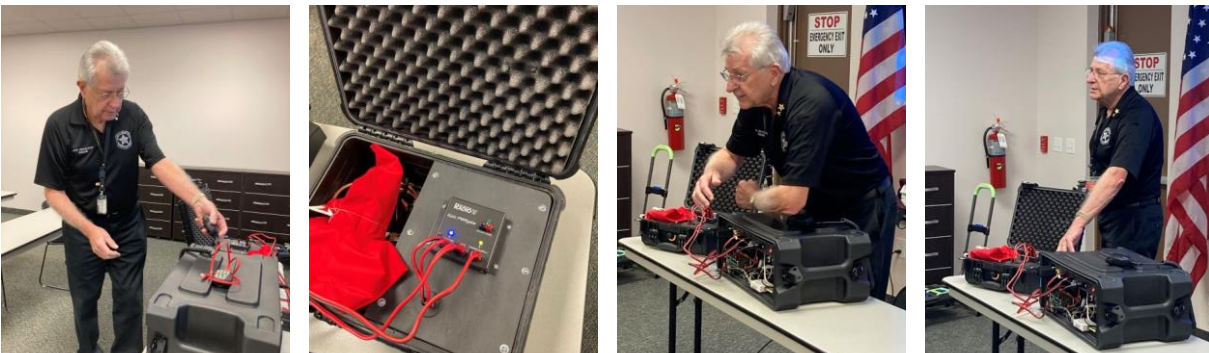
November 9th Meeting (13 members)

- ✓ Harlan explained the Levels of Activation – we are at level 2 with Tropical Storm Nicole coming. He passed around a colorful hurricane chart. No shelters are being opened. The Multipurpose room is being set up for special needs people with 40 stations. They are expecting 75 special needs people. It is opening at 1100h.
- ✓ Hayden stated that our EOC needs to monitor EOCs of other counties. AUXCOMM is being state adopted and will use HF exclusively.
- ✓ Harlan said we will have a directed net with 1–2-hour check ins. All MERT members should monitor CERT 145.330 and DStar 146.790. Anthony will be backup if needed. Hayden said we need to schedule a test to see if that repeater

can reach the East Coast. He said to use Skywarn forms to report weather incidents.

November 19th Monthly Meeting – (17 people)

- ✓ Harlan talked about how members handled Nicole and how our KG4NXO was not in good shape for that storm. The radios were not receiving clear signals because of the bad shape of the wiring, and the recent power hit had taken out some of the computers. The IT guys got 4 of the computers running before the MERT activation at 600 hours.
- ✓ Some discussion was made as to what the duties of MERT should be when activated during an emergency. KK4DFC is for MERT use only and school shelters. 145.610 is for ARES with backup being 145.330.
- ✓ Kraig explained that the radio signals got weaker as the storm moved through because of bad connections getting wet. He also had to crawl around under the desks to tighten antenna connections to the radios but did correct the antenna cable feeding the IC-7100 radio at Station #5 and working great!
- ✓ Harlan talked about and passed around the new training plan “MERT Taskbook” which passed with unanimous vote.
- ✓ Leon did a Show & Tell of his personal Rado Go Kit. It was extremely well thought out and very professional in its construction. It was incredibly assembled with much skill.



Leon Juncyszyn (K8ZAG) shares design, feature and construction details on his Radio Go Kit. Outstanding!



MERT November Monthly Meeting attendees enjoy Leon's Show & Tell.

MERT at Community Events



MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook participated in several events in the Stone Creek community in Oct. and Nov. He participated in the Fall Festival, Club Fair and a CERT Meeting sharing who and what MERT is and how individuals can join in helping Marion County Amateur Radio operators support Shelters during emergencies. Harlan invites all Members to keep him updated on other Community Fairs and Festivals so MERT can attend.

Hospital Communications Team (HEC) Update

From Dave Welker(W2SRP): Here's our summary and After-Action Report/Improvement Plan from the Nov. 11th Exercise.

The Primary objectives and tasks of this exercise were to:

1. Test the ham radio equipment.
2. Complete CORE capabilities
3. Test the communications using VHF Voice and Winlink e-mail (if available).

The exercise was successful as it identified the problems and successes. It will enhance our training objectives to meet the goal of the H.E.C Team. By focusing on "Voice" tasks before testing Winlink, the exercises will build skills using informal and formal communications.

There were three notable issues found:

1. WINLINK Radio Email and P2P mode problems persist.
2. Following the HICS 205a Communications List and HEC Tactical CH/FREQUENCY Plan was problematic to some operators.
3. Station Call signs for voice and Winlink coordination was a problem during this Exercise.

Issues found by our team members along with recommendations for improvement, will be discussed further at the next Hospital Emergency Communications HAM team meeting. Issues that must be resolved will be tested in the next HEC Team Exercise.

For MERT Members....if you are also a CERT Member, your reports on helping your local group are invited.

On Top of the World (OTOW)

Submitted by Bruce Twiss KI4NFA

CERT Activity Summary for November 2022

Hayden Kaufman N2HAY visited our monthly meeting and discussed the successful Fort Myers rescue due to MERT's involvement. Hayden also explained the role of ARES and interoperability among area ham radio groups. Several rounds of spontaneous applause occurred during Hayden's presentation.

Deployment for Tropical Storm Nicole

Group activated on Wednesday morning November 9th and monitored weather reports and prepared for deployment.

Leader opened OTOW Command Center and deployed Cert teams on Thursday afternoon November 10th. Survey teams used FRS/GMRS walkie-talkies to communicate with Command Center without success. Stand down order given after hotwash at 1700 hours local.

At regular monthly meeting, leader reviewed response to Hurricane Ian and Tropical Storm Nicole. Opportunities for improvement discussed. Bruce KI4NFA collected the 9 walkie-talkies for troubleshooting. At home he removed squelch and program codes. Tested/verified every device for sending and receiving.

Great News!

I am very happy sharing Member Kim Shulby is back home from her emergency hospital stay and surgery. Friends and Church members are watching over her. MERT sent a Get Well card and we thank Gray Moffett for picking it up.

We Miss You. GET WELL soon KIM!



Kim Shulby (KM4JMZ)

MERT meetings are open to all interested Amateur radio enthusiast, CERT, ARES, Skywarn members and the General Public who are interested in learning more about participating in this important volunteer Amateur radio organization.

Interested in learning more about MERT..... Visit
<https://kg4nxo.com/>