

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

February 2024

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!"***

Mark your calendars!

MERT Monthly Meeting

The next Meeting will be on February 17th @ 10:00 am.

See you there!

With the New Year... New Activities Ahead!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

With a new year and our new "Training Skill Book and New Member Orientation Guide" in place, our 2024 weekly meeting activities have changed towards a keen focus on learning and training events, including exercises. I thank all our members for the support and enthusiasm shown during January.

I fully acknowledge last year saw many changes and activities unique and perhaps even unusual too. I never dreamed 2023 would be as incredibly busy as it turned out to be... and that's why all members saw a major shift from prior year's meeting routines.

I know a large majority of our weekly meetings required a keen focus on the planning and work assignments (even homework) necessary to complete a significant number of vitally important challenges from the HUGE tower rewire project, addressing the lightning strike and radio room repairs/rewire, HF radio repairs, adding UPS at every radio, the additional exercises we had (MERT 20 and ARES Service Denied) and the new Mobile Command Center (MCC) and its testing, repairs and retesting. Whew! When you add in major revisions to the MERT IC RED BOOK, Shelter Guide and SHREK radio reprogramming.... it truly was a monumental accomplishment by the whole membership! I am very thankful for everyone's participation and support.

"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

However, as important and vital as all these projects were to our Mission, the most significant and major result I'm most proud of in 2023... was the creation of the new MERT Skill Book combined with the New Member Orientation Guide.

As I've shared personally from my own experience since joining, I was inspired and motivated to do all I could do to help MERT move forward and be successful... but I didn't feel "connected" to the true Mission and future of where MERT was headed.

I fully acknowledge my reasons are perhaps unique as being a new retiree; challenging myself to get my FCC license; being a new ham and learning so much about this wonderful hobby; my career as a telecom engineer always having "plans" and "goals", and my senior years in business responsible for large staffs in helping them all reach their fullest potential.

I sincerely hope the new document can help others like me see a plan, understand the goal, be proud of the small steps taken in the journey learning the basic skills to be ready and qualified to help those needing help... should the unthinkable occur - a devastating hurricane hitting our homes here in Marion County.

And back to the beginning... "With the New Year.... New Activities Ahead!"

Very best regards to all!



MERT needs YOU!

MERT Secretary Position Open

We sincerely thank Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) for being our Secretary the last 2 years. Gray's support included conducting our "MERT Annual Meeting Report" and the report of MERT Highlights of 2022 and 2023.



**Gray Moffett
KC3DWY**

What does the Secretary do? The Secretary completes an annual report of the MERT activity highlights and conducts the Annual Meeting. If you can help for a few hours each year, please let the MERT Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator know you can help!

Thank You Gray for your great support and being our Secretary the last two years!

¿Nos puedes ayudar?

Can you help translate our updated MERT Information Brochure into a Spanish language format? If so, contact Harlan or Bill.

Antennas – Learning more about Yagi’s

As MERT members expand our knowledge and skills through training and exercises like MERT 20 (coming April 27th), we’ve learned much about several unique antennas helping solve special emergency communications (EMCOMM) requirements.

There are many to mention but specifically for MERT’s needs, the Near Vertical Incident Skywave (NVIS) may be one of the most unique as it changes the typical HF long distance transmissions (many hundreds to thousands of miles) into transmissions of medium distances (many tens to a few hundred miles) supporting EMCOMM with FDEM in Tallahassee.

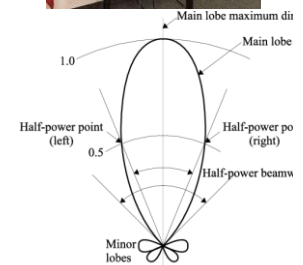
Another is the Yagi antenna. Using most amateur radios, it is capable of highly directional communications with single points over greater distances compared to omni-directional types. Yagi’s are particularly effective in the HF band (3 to 30 MHz) but can be very effective over 2 Meter and 70 cm’s too. Additionally, they can also be “stacked” to deliver even greater transmission and receiver capabilities over much longer distances.

MERT has been gifted NVIS and Yagi antennas for its use should EMCOMM events arise when distant activations occur around Marion County or during deployments. We will be using both antenna units in future Exercises to learn their amazing capabilities while becoming better acquainted with their setup and operation. All members are encouraged to learn more and participate in these very unique antenna resources now available for our organization.

MERT sincerely thanks Leon Jurcyszyn (K8ZAG) past Coordinator and current Technical Advisor for a NVIS HF antenna and Harlan Cook, Coordinator (KN4VRM) for a dual band Yagi antenna (2 Meter/70 cm) for their generous gifts.

MERT adopts **MERT**trak Volunteer Time Reporting System

Thank you for documenting your volunteer hours weekly at mertrak.com.



(Top) – A Yagi antenna built from a kit is shown.

(Bottom) – The propagation pattern showing its typical highly directional radio transmission and receive pattern.

“When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.”

Paulo Coelho



(Top) Dave Welker and special guest Heather Milam, Advent Health.

(Bottom) Presentation slide on HIPAA and Amateur Radio Operators (ARO) responsibilities.

Hospital Emergency Communications Team (HEC) Update

MERT was invited to participate in a special HEC meeting on January 12th where guest speaker Ms. Heather Milam, Advent Health Regional Corporate Responsibility Officer AHO/AHMG Ocala, Zephyrhills, Dade City and Connerton Corporate responsibility, presented a very informative update to all attendees at the meeting. The detailed presentation answered the question how does HIPAA privacy rules pertain to HEC ham radio operations during emergencies? Also, what is Protected Patient Information (PPI)?

As HIPAA Privacy rules have changed several times over the years, attendees learned current regulations detail that Amateur Radio Operators (ARO's) are not responsible for HIPAA patient privacy rule liabilities. Ms. Milam's presentation was eye-opening and included many more details on hospital operations during emergency operations.

MERT enjoyed the presentation and invitation from HEC Coordinator Dave Welker (W2SRP) and invites members to join the HEC Nets on Wed. evenings (2000 hours, 145.270; -600 kHz; PL 123). HEC also takes Winlink and P2P packet messages!

MERT joins Emergency Management Community Update

MERT was invited to participate in a presentation to the Stone Creek community on January 18th about the Division of Emergency Management. Director Preston Bowlin led the meeting sharing an overview of his department by saying "Nobody knows who we are... or what we do." It got many laughs and was a funny way to start a presentation but it set a mood where everyone wanted to learn more!

Of course, MERT members know the significant plans, efforts, work, activities and results that the Division of Emergency Management delivers every year to the MCSO and the citizens of Marion County.

Director Bowlin provided an excellent overview of the diverse and comprehensive responsibilities his division provides preparing for future events which most do not ever see or are even aware of. The residents were attentive and asked several interesting questions which Preston answered with fun but factual information for all to learn.

Following Preston was Henri Velthuisen, CERT Coordinator sharing who CERT is and what they do in the communities after emergencies. Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator followed sharing the unique support their members provide to CERT communities along with the EMCOMM support provided to the Division of Emergency Management.

As a volunteer organization focused on supporting the Division of Emergency Management, our efforts are especially focused on being prepared and ready when emergencies arise. MERT has a complex job to do... correctly the first time... which is why we practice and train regularly. Continuous learning and training are essential for personal preparation and success during emergency activations.

We salute Preston, Erin, Rob, Caitlin and Darien for their dedication and efforts in supporting MERT... while we volunteer our support to them!

When you see them, thank them for their support of MERT!



(L-R) Jimmy Cowen (MC Property Appraiser); Wesley Wilcox (MC Elections Supervisor); MC Sheriff Billy Woods; Harlan Cook (MERT Coordinator), and Preston Bowlin (Director of Emergency Management).



Director Preston Bowlin speaking to the Stone Creek community sharing what the Division of Emergency Management does for the citizens of Marion County.



Nearly 200 residents attended the presentation at the Stone Creek community.

2024 MERT Annual Meeting – January 20th

MERT thanks all the members along with the ARES and HEC members attending the January meeting. We started with a video from Preston Bowlin thanking MERT Members for their 2023 results and contributions which was followed by guest speaker Robert Ethridge, Volunteer Coordinator for the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) who presented a fascinating review of his employment history and personal activities leading up to his current responsibilities with the MCSO. What an amazing path he's taken in life and we are very appreciative of his willingness to share it with us.



**Robert Ethridge,
Volunteer
Coordinator,
Marion County
Sheriff's Office**

Attendees also enjoyed the presentation by Dave Welker, Hospital Emergency Communications (HEC) Coordinator sharing:

- How HIPAA privacy rules pertain to Amateur Radio Operators (ARO) during emergencies,
- HEC upcoming exercises and inviting all hams to participate,
- The importance of participating in the WINLINK digital message system via local Gateways and Digipeaters via packet transmissions.
 - Dave explained how HEC members practice Winlink messaging via these resources along with point to point (P2P) transmissions and encouraged all EMCOMM operators to learn and practice these techniques regularly.

We also enjoyed an update from Hayden Kaufman, ARES Marion County Coordinator on ARES activities. Hayden also introduced the Levy County ARES Coordinator and others joining him.



(L-R) Guest Speaker Rob Ethridge
(MCSO Volunteer Coordinator)



HEC Coordinator Dave Welker
(W2SRP) shares HIPPA update



ARES Coordinator
Hayden Kaufman
(N2HAY)

Training, Training, Training Classes Continue

MERT thanks Bill Gillespie, Leon Jurcyszyn, Bruse Twiss, Kraig Pritts and Pat Davis for their diverse training class on January 24th.

Bill discussed details about the upcoming simplex tests and explained how they are supposed to work with 10 min per Net station. Then about the survey of home equipment, and he made a few notes of things that needed to be refined. After MERT completes the Simplex tests, CERT hams will be included.

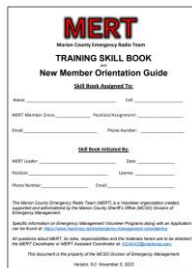
Leon led a class of 8 members in the radio room where he shared copies of the room's map and the antenna photos with the antennas' names on them which I passed out. He spent time fielding questions about the different radios and explained what each one was used for and showed the EOC tower antenna connections, types and cable

identifications. During the same time, Bill Gillespie assisted members with HF Winlink processes and procedures MERT uses during Nets and emergency activations.

Bruce explained what the HEC group does and how they practice Winlink, simplex, and their nets. MERT members are encouraged to join their nets every Wednesday evening at 8:00 PM.

Pat Davis explained the Shelter Manual binders with new members Nick and Phil who reviewed them in detail to learn more on this important resource.

Guest Ray Woody (a former meteorologist with General license) visited and learned more about MERT and our Mission. He shares he has applied to join MERT and is awaiting his background check. Pat Davis provided him a New Member Orientation Guide, MERT 205 and information about the MERTrak volunteer hours reporting system by Kraig Pritts.



Get your Training Skill Book!

MERT's new resource was designed to support a self-directed training effort encouraging Members to gain the knowledge and skills needed to complete critical tasks when activated or deployed. Contact Pat Davis, New Member Manager for your copy.

MERT Coordinator receives “Volunteer of the Quarter” Award

During a surprise visit to the Wednesday, January 31st Check In meeting, Rob Ethridge (Marion County Sheriff's Office Volunteer Coordinator) presented the Volunteer of the Quarter Award to Harlan Cook for the 4th Quarter.

Rob shared this award is in its first year and was being awarded to Volunteers whose contributions have been judged to be outstanding in merit in support to the Marion County Sheriff's Office.

Harlan thanked Rob for the MCSO's recognition but gave credit to the entire membership for their dedication and support to MERT responsibilities and goals of helping others... when they need help and our Mission **“When all else fails, Call MERT!”**



(L-R) Rob Ethridge, MCSO Volunteer Coordinator presents Certificate and uniform ribbon to Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator

SIMPLEX Testing Begins in February!

Preparing for emergencies is what MERT does. However, one area we have not tested is if ALL REPEATERS are offline. While this may sound highly unlikely, we have read reports from Lee County that this is exactly what happened during the major hurricane they experienced. Most interesting, it was caused by all sorts of problems – flooding, electrical shorts, mechanical failures, etc. Yes, stuff breaks and its normally always at the worst time. To be prepared, MERT must create a plan and then practice how we would continue our operations should the unthinkable occur – **local repeaters go offline!**

As all members know, we have a powerful communications device that can be effective if we prepare in advance by using direct transmissions (with no repeater) over the 2 Meter band. It is called SIMPLEX transmissions. However, it has a more limited radius of operation and therefore requires a different type of thinking and operation. MERT will begin SIMPLEX radio tests this month so all of us can learn more about this operation and then creating a PLAN on how MERT operators can use it during emergencies to help stay informed... and continue supporting the Division of Emergency Management.

Member Grid Square	MEMBER (last, first)	License	Member Grid Square	MEMBER (last, first)	License
EL89TK	James Deats	KN9PFD	EL89JC	JOE	KA4NKL
EL89TK	Leann Hutchinson	KR2AG	EL89JC	Allen Abbott	KR1QEL
EL89TK	Kim Shady	KM4MZ	EL89JC	Carl Barry	KC5CMR
EL89TK	James Hamilton	W4W6W	EL89JC	Mike Gordon	W4MNC
EL89TK	William Strickland	AG5C	EL89JC	Harlan Cook	KN4VM
EL89TK	John Abbott	KR1QEL	EL89JC	Bill Cummings	KC2ZKZ
EL89TK	Mike Gordon	W4MNC	EL89JC	James Deats	KN9PFD
EL89TK	Harlan Cook	KN4VM	EL89JC	Bill Davis	KG4RZL
EL89TK	Bill Cummings	KC2ZKZ	EL89JC	Pat Davis	KG4BBW
EL89TK	Joel Strickland	KG4LGL	EL89JC	Dorville Eades	KD2KPD
EL89TK	Robert Gordon	KM4MZ	EL89JC	Joel Strickland	KG4LGL
EL89TK	Phil Lewis	W4EIV	EL89JC	Bill Giblin	KW5BG
EL89TK	Bill Seibel	KW5LS	EL89JC	Robert Gordon	KM4VCZ
EL89TK	John Strickland	W4W6W	EL89JC	Steve Gault	W4PFLH
EL89TK	Pat Davis	KG4RZL	EL89JC	Steve Gault	KR2AG
EL89TK	Pat Davis	KG4BBW	EL89JC	James Hamilton	KR4SDR
EL89TK	Steve Madh	KM4MM	EL89JC	Neil Kilday	W4NFR
EL89TK	Leann Hutchinson	KR2AG	EL89JC	Sharon Madh	KM4MM
EL89TK	Steve Madh	KM4MM	EL89JC	Gray Madh	KC2DNY
EL89TK	Jim Trumbly	KR1AT	EL89JC	Gary Nicks	KX1TK
EL89TK	Tom Trumbly	KR1AT	EL89JC	Gary Nicholas	KC4HGD
EL89TK	Scott Madhert	KC2DNY	EL89JC	Kraig Pitts	K42LHO
EL89TK	Family Williams	W4W6W	EL89JC	Brian Puffy	W4BAP
EL89TK	James Hamilton	W4W6W	EL89JC	Bill Seibel	KW5LS
EL89TK	Carl Barry	KC5CMR	EL89JC	William Strickland	AG5C
EL89TK	Dorville Eades	KD2KPD	EL89JC	Jim Shady	KM4MZ
EL89TK	Joel Strickland	KG4LGL	EL89JC	Bill Seibel	KW5LS
EL89TK	Bill Giblin	KW5BG	EL89JC	Jim Trumbly	KR1AT
EL89TK	Steve Gault	W4PFLH	EL89JC	Steve Madh	KM4MM
EL89TK	James Hamilton	W4W6W	EL89JC	Harley Williams	W4W6W

The Grid Square map (left) will assist Members in locating the stations contacted relative to their home base.

Members will use a “Contact” form (right) to document the stations they were able to speak with in logging their results. From the data, contact lists and “relay stations” can be identified.

MEMBER		GRID SQUARE	GRID SQUARE	CONTACT	DATE	TIME	MODE	STATUS	REMARKS
1	LEANN HUTCHINSON	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
2	JAMES HAMILTON	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
3	JOEL STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
4	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
5	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
6	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
7	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
8	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
9	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
10	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
11	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
12	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
13	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
14	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
15	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
16	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
17	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
18	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
19	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
20	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
21	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
22	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
23	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
24	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
25	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
26	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
27	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
28	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
29	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
30	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					
31	JOHN STRICKLAND	EL89TK	EL89JC	CONTACT					

The Simplex tests will also ask Members to document on a spreadsheet specific information about their home amateur radio facilities to better identify unique capabilities helping create a County-wide “MERT Simplex Plan” for major emergencies. Thank you for your support and participation in these ongoing tests.

TESTING PLANS WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE WEDNESDAY, FEB. 7th meeting.

Interested in learning more about MERT? Visit <https://KG4NXO.com>