

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

May 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!"***

MERT Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on May 18th @ 10:00 am.

All Amateur Radio operators are Welcomed!

The time for MERT



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

"Through the indomitable human spirit, we can achieve incredible feats, and we can inspire others to do the same. We can be a source of hope and inspiration for those who are struggling, and we can help others to find the inner strength and resilience that resides within them.

Ultimately, the indomitable human spirit is a powerful force that lives within all of us. It is the source of our resilience, determination, and perseverance. It is what allows us to continue pushing forward in the face of adversity and to emerge stronger on the other side."

The Indomitable Human Spirit – Ben Petroff

As we continue our training and preparations for the start of another hurricane season, I thought it valuable to focus on the significant objectives and support MERT members provide to the citizens of Marion County. Last month I offered how important Volunteers are in many organizations from schools and churches to hospitals and our local governmental agencies like the Division of Emergency Management. This month, I offer the "why" you and I do it as a trained volunteer member of MERT.

First, we share a unique combination of abilities, skills, knowledge and amazement

"Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you're willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it" — Lou Holtz

centered around our interests in amateur radio. We each challenged ourselves in many ways to pass the FCC test (or multiple tests) and then put that knowledge into practice. Next, our common interests in wanting to do more with our new skills to... **help others when they need help**... was sparked by a personal desire and the indomitable human spirit to join an organization solely focused... on that objective. That was followed by even more challenges securing the specialized training from FEMA and passing more courses in learning details on formal emergency communications (EMCOMM) practices and procedures... to become a “MERT Member”.

And now, as a full member we put all that specialized knowledge, unique abilities and the indomitable human spirit... into the preparations and willingness to go to a school shelter and be the THE PERSON... who can help everyone in a time of need. That is the “Why” we are MERT Members. Our motto says it all... *“Call MERT... When all else fails!”*

I thank everyone for your interests, skills, commitment to help others when they need help... and your personal indomitable human spirit in supporting MERT!

Best regards to all!



Meeting Documentation Manager Position Open



We sincerely thank Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) for filling this position over the last 2 years. Gray’s support included conducting our “MERT Annual Meeting Report” and the “Annual Highlights” Summary of 2022 and 2023.



Gray Moffett
KC3DWY

What does the Meeting Documentation Manager do? This individual completes an annual report of the Annual Activity Highlights and conducts the Annual Meeting. If you can help for 5 hours **per year**, please contact the MERT Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator. ***Thank You Gray for your great support over 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.

“You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.” – John Bunyan

April Training Exercises – Hurricane Season and MERT 20

Training classes and hands on practice events have ramped up in April as we move closer to the start of the 2024 hurricane season and the MERT 20 Special Event Exercise.

Hurricane Season Preparations

Members focused on the process of passing official communications via radio practice events by using the FEMA ICS-213 “General Message” form. This document is used by all emergency communicators (EMCOMM) in documenting the details of official messages. Messages can be sent verbally over the airwaves or digitally via the Winlink format.

GENERAL MESSAGE (ICS 213)			
1. Incident Name (Optional):			
2. To (Name and Position):			
3. From (Name and Position):			
4. Subject:	5. Date:	6. Time:	
7. Message:			
8. Approved by: Name:		Signature:	Position/Title:
9. Reply:			
10. Replied by: Name:		Position/Title:	Signature:
ICS 213			

ICS-213 General Message Form

Shelter Emergency Radio Kit (SHREK) Audit & Testing

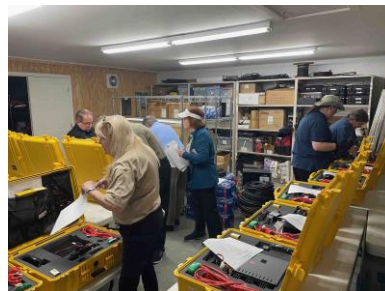


MERT SHREK Kit

In preparations for this years’ hurricane season, members conducted an audit of all SHREK kits hardware along with testing the equipment radios and batteries in simulated operations. These events reacquaint members to the hardware within each Go Kit along with actual operating time of the ICOM ID-880H dual-band D-Star radio. As in prior years, some hardware requires repair or replacement which can be completed before the season starts.



Thanks to all the Members participating in the SHREK Kit audits.



We thank Pat Davis (KQ4BRW) Administration & New Member Manager for her leadership in organizing and conducting multiple training events in March and April. Awesome job Pat!

Monthly Meeting – April 20th

MERT wants to thank Bill Gillespie, MERT Assistant Coordinator for leading the April Monthly Meeting. The training portion included passing ICS-213 General Messages in the classroom. Gary Nicholas did a fine job as the EOC IC (and his wife Christina was very

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Mahatma Gandhi

busy as his scribe). Thanks also go to Hayden Kaufman (Marion County ARES Coordinator) for his contributions during the training .

Bill Gillespie then led the participants in a session on tips adjusting the Icom ID-880H Dual-band D-Star radios. This training is necessary as MERT's Shelter Radio Emergency Kits (SHREK) all include this specific radio that few members own today. The session included the ID-880H radio guide created by Leon Jureczyn, MERT's Technical Advisor.

Note: Members can check out a SHREK kit to gain more knowledge and skill using the ID-880H radio at home. Please contact the MERT Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator for assistance.



Speakers included Bill Gillespie (MERT Assistant Coordinator) and Hayden Kaufman (Marion County ARES Coordinator). Thank you all for your presentations!

MERT 20 Training Classes

Here are notes from Kraig Pritts on the training class held on the 24th....

“Today's session went well and included (as did last Wednesday) a lot of questions and answers with discussions among the majority of the people present throughout the morning.

We did a quick reflection on last week. Then moved forward with our first exercise - coming cold into the MERT room with no radios connected to power and/or antennas identified with the barber “safety poles” at each station showing they were power and antenna clear. First: I asked the participants to form groups of two or three and mix experienced with relatively (or completely in some cases) new people in the mix. As in last

week, involving those with experience and not only hearing from me helped everyone be a part of the training. Next: Come into the radio room and get a station ready to operate from the MERT room. This was a true learning experience where the doing vs hearing differences were evident in a positive way.

After discussion they went back out to the pit area with directions to come back in the same teams but go to a different radio and do the same task. While they were at the various FM radios we reflected on last week's "pile up" exercise (which we did again at the start of this session) and did a "compare and contrast" to similar situation but this time with multiple people keying on a repeater at the same time-discussion followed.

We went through the spotting process which, I think, brought some clarity to how other operators will find MERT 20 participants on the air. Phil and Nick shared thoughts on the outside portable setups and how we would maintain band separation to avoid interference in the HF operations. We discussed our logging documents (modified 214s like last year) and I showed them how NOT to submit a log--my written log was a challenge due to the not so neat writing... and that is the one I showed with the caveat of "don't be that guy!"

Things ended with a lot of general discussion, what ifs and more as I encouraged others to answer the questions presented. This allowed the new people to understand there are many different styles and methods of operations so the mixed input from the group seemed to give many some sense of comfort.

Additionally, I will be there for support questions and encouragement and will also assist with spotting. I look at MERT20 in a similar manner as I used to tell my administrative interns.... My job is to let you dip your toes in the water but not let you drown!

For MERT20, it is time!"



Members working together and participating in the MERT 20 training classes. (L – R) Photo 1: Gary Neron, Dee Seagraves Photo 2: Rene Perron, Bruce Twiss Photo 3: Ray Woody, Mike Condon, Nick Kiddey, Randy Williams Photo 4: Nick Kiddey and Ray Woody.


MERT 20 – 2024 Review

On Saturday, April 27th, MERT conducted its second MERT 20 Special Event Exercise focused on conducting radio operations from every radio at the EOC along with setting up “field” radios around the EOC. The goals of the exercise are:

- A) Conduct multiple radio operations concurrently in simulating an actual emergency event over an extended timeframe of at least 8 hours.
- B) Introduce/refresh members knowledge of multiple radios they may not use except while on duty at MERT.
- C) Refresh or expand members knowledge of radio operations using multiple bands, modes (SSB, FT-8, D-Star, USB, LSB) and via digital transmissions (Winlink).
- D) Confirm all MERT repeaters, radios, cabling and antennas are operationally working in good order.

The event was led by member Kraig Pritts this year. Here’s his update:

MERT 20 2024 Report



MERT20 Special Event Station-2024 KG4NXO
Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT)
April 27, 2024 (1200 UTC) - (0000 UTC) April 28, 2024

Home About MERT Frequencies Schedule Certificate MERT Member Sign-Up

Welcome to the 2024 edition of the MERT20 Special Event website celebrating more than two decades of the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) service to the Marion County [FL] Sheriff's Office. We are extremely proud of our service providing emergency communications service to the Division of Emergency Management.

MERT has a well equipped radio room embedded in the Emergency Operations Center with operating capabilities on FM, SSB, CW and digital modes. There are several MERT FM and D-Star repeaters throughout the county to maximize our capabilities when called into service.

When shelters are opened during declared emergency situations, MERT members deploy to these shelters as well as off site emergency locations to support communications back to the Sheriff's Emergency operations Center.

All members are FCC licensed Amateur Radio Operators who have completed FEMA/NIMS and Incident Command System (ICS) training. Every member has also been fully vetted /background checked through the Sheriff's Department. We stand ready to serve during critical events including hurricanes, tornadoes and other emergency events as requested by the Director of Emergency Management.

Thank you for your interest and participation in our 2024 MERT20 Special Event operation. Look around this site to sign-up and operate (MERT members only) see a sample of the 2024 certificate and how to receive one via email, how to find us on the air and the various frequencies/modes we will be using to help you be a part of our celebration.

We look forward to meeting you on the air!

[Click here for more details about MERT!](#)

Summary

- **Hours:** 9 hours
- **Participants:** 22
- **Total Contacts:** 37
- **Modes Used:** SSB, FT-8, D-Star, FM, USB, LSB
- **Bands Used:** 75 cm, 2m, 10m, 12m, 15m, 17m, 20m, 40m, 17m
- **HF contacts:** 21
- **FM Contacts:** 16
- **States Contacted:** 8-FL, MA, ME, PA, SC, TX, VA, WV

“Thank you to everyone who hung in there during the day of MERT 20 which began with set up at 7:00 am and ended with all radios off at 5:30 PM.

Overall, I am pleased sharing we met all the objectives of MERT 20 - but in ways which were unexpected and surprising. In review, last year we experienced a major Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) which made all our HF radio operations impossible due to the interference. This year... D-Star operations on 2 Meter and 70 cm carried the day. Additionally, we experienced multiple radio challenges (under investigation) that by the afternoon, had us limited to only two radios functioning properly. The D-Star radio that brought in most of the FM calls and the Icom IC-7100, which did a great job with the

Florida QSO Party folks on the HF bands. (Note: the ICOM IC-718 was limited to 20 watts due to high SWR and was removed from service to prevent damage.)

Thank you again all for your support, patience and persistence during the day. Despite the disappointments, there were exciting positives.

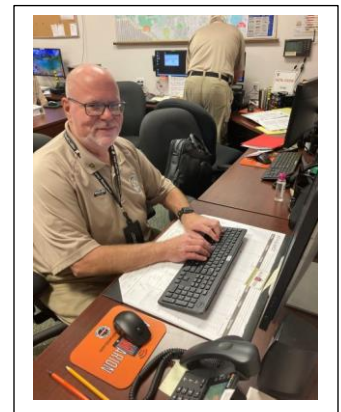
- Unlicensed and Technician licensed members were able to get on the air and HF bands with a Control Operator at their side helping get past mike-fright.
- Two new members with licenses made Florida QSO Party contacts with the support of MERT members. Thank you to Carl Berry and Gary Nicholas for helping those newcomers break the ice and get on the air.

For me personally, the priority is getting people out of their comfort zones and experiencing new challenges and different aspects in being an amateur radio operator. But remember the question? What would you do if you were in a shelter and most EOC radios were offline as we experienced during MERT 20? Let's work together to answer this topic for the future.

Kraig Pritts KA2LHO

A VERY SPECIAL THANK You to Kraig Pritts....

Two years ago, Kraig offered a suggestion for MERT to conduct a special event exercise in expanding and refreshing members operational on-air skills before the hurricane season started. It also included other critical goals towards our preparations (see above) in helping MERT achieve its mission. As this was a totally new idea, he led the way in detailing the goals, objectives and necessary steps in its planning and hundreds more hours in providing the training supporting a successful experience.



From everyone at MERT, we share our gratitude to you for positively influencing the learning experience every member received who participated. We sincerely thank you for your leadership and passion to help grow our skills and capabilities

Learn more about MERT at... KG4NXO.com

24 05 Communications Update

"Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day." – Sally Koch