

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

September 2026

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County (FL) during declared Emergency events. We also support the Emergency Operations Center Incident Commander & staff, all cities in the county and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES & MBA) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

"Call MERT... When all else fails!"

Next Bimonthly Meeting

Saturday, Sept. 19th,
10:00 am at the EOC

All are Welcomed!

Meetings conducted in Jan,
March, May, July, Sept. and Nov.

Coordinator's Corner



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

I share (with mixed emotions) in announcing the retirement of Director Preston Bowlin on September 4th. While I am genuinely saddened to see him leave Emergency Management, I am equally grateful and happy for him as he begins the next chapter of his well-earned retirement.

There will be a special ceremony celebrating his leadership and support guiding MERT on September 2nd at MERT's regular Wednesday meeting (9:00 am till 11:00 am).

Members of HEC, ARES, MBS Disaster Relief, SSRC and all amateur radio operators are invited to participate in recognizing his decade of support of MERT and the greater emergency radio community.

Please see the tribute article celebrating his retirement following Ray Woody's Update.

Next, forecasters looking into the Atlantic basin weather for the next month expect a mixed-level possibility of hurricane development resulting from the effects of the strong El Niño in the Pacific Ocean but sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic slightly above average. Time will tell what the future holds.

While the future weather forecasts look mixed for us in north central Florida, our work upgrading the SHREK kits has been very successful. Next in line to tackle are several projects to complete from testing all our SHREK radios; preparing for our new 30 ft. towers adding four (4) new HF antennas to the EOC Capabilities; and then documenting the equipment at all

"The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically." – Kurek Ashley

eight (8) radio stations in moving us forward in our capabilities. The great news is these are all fun projects to tackle!

Last month, I announced the purchase and delivery of two new repeaters (KG4NXO 70 cm D-Star and the KJ4CLL open FM unit at the Baseline Transfer station), replacing units that have served the county for more than 15-years. We remain extremely grateful in the incredible support by Director Preston Bowlin, Deputy Director Erin Miller and the entire staff supporting the replacement of all amateur radio repeaters owned by the Office of the Sheriff, Division of Emergency Management and managed by MERT. This effort was started over 5-years ago under former Coordinator Leon Jurczynszyn and Deputy Coordinator Bill Gillespie. I am extremely proud to see the long-term support we needed to see it completed! I am really tickled to share the great news that both units are installed and now in operation helping MERT's network reach a new benchmark in operational reliability and dependability. Our long-term future is strengthened by this financial support and MERT member follow-through.

Thank you for remembering the spirit of our intentions is shown in the results of our actions. Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters. Please answer the call when it comes.

With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook KN4VRM
MERT Coordinator

Deputy Coordinator Update - MY TRIBUTE TO DIRECTOR PRESTON BOWLIN

Our team is saying a heartfelt goodbye to an exceptional leader. As Director Preston Bowlin transitions into the next chapter of his life, he leaves behind a legacy of dedication at the Office of the Sheriff, Marion County Division of Emergency Management. He will be sorely missed, and I owe him a personal expression of gratitude—he is the direct reason I joined MERT.

In late 2023, Director Bowlin gave a presentation to a Stone Creek community club about the department and the functions of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). He completely captured the audience, as he shared many personal stories that illustrated the demands and responsibilities of emergency management, especially during activations. When he highlighted the vital role volunteer organizations play in supporting the MCSO—with special



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)
Deputy Coordinator

"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

emphasis on MERT—it immediately piqued my interest. I had been looking for a meaningful way to give back to our community.

At the end of his talk, Director Bowlin provided his contact information to the audience along with an offer to provide anyone interested with a tour of the EOC. While I initially thought this might just be a polite gesture; I decided to call his office the next day. To my surprise, he personally returned my call that afternoon and invited me to meet him at the Sheriff's complex the very next morning at 7:00 AM.

Despite his demanding schedule, Director Bowlin spent a full hour showing me everything in the EOC. I could instantly sense his pride when he showed me the MERT Radio Room. Seeing a leader of his stature invest individual time in a potential volunteer completely impressed me. That is when I decided to submit my application!

Director Bowlin has always been a staunch supporter of MERT, as well as its greatest ambassador. He consistently treated our team as a valuable resource within his organization. As a result, he leaves behind a MERT team that is stronger, growing in capabilities, and ready for future challenges. This is precisely the lasting impact Director Bowlin has had on MERT.

Director Bowlin, we thank you for your years of service and your unwavering commitment to our team. Best wishes from all of us.

Ray Woody
MERT Deputy Coordinator

Celebrating Director Preston Bowlin's Legacy of Support and Partnership



**Director Preston Bowlin,
Division of Emergency Management,
Marion County Sheriff's Office.**

While past Directors of Emergency Management have certainly supported MERT, it is difficult to imagine any who have made a more significant and meaningful impact than Director Preston Bowlin. For nearly a decade, he has been one of the strongest champions of MERT, all volunteers, and the broader amateur radio community. His leadership, advocacy, and personal commitment have shaped MERT into the highly capable, well-equipped AUXCOMM team it is today.

Director Bowlin's support extended far beyond his administrative duties. He maintained an open door, a welcoming environment for questions, and a steady willingness to engage in thoughtful discussion. As MERT faced the challenges and difficulties of upgrading nearly

"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." — Audrey Hepburn

two-decade-old radio systems, he regularly met with the Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator to review current activities, evaluate technical needs, and plan for future goals. In every conversation, he demonstrated his focus on MERT's mission, the dedication of licensed amateur radio volunteers, and the critical role that resilient, multi-layer communications plays in an emergency response. Over the years, he championed major upgrades to MERT's infrastructure, training, and operational readiness by securing the funding, essential resources, and county-level support that helped leadership transform our capabilities.

Because of Director Bowlin's continuous support, MERT now stands as one of Florida's premier AUXCOMM teams, equipped with new-generation systems, expanded technical capacity, and a renewed mission focus. These improvements directly contributed to a life-saving outcome during a real hurricane emergency. His belief in our volunteers—and in the amateur radio service itself—made a measurable difference for the citizens of Marion County.

As Director Bowlin steps into retirement, we extend our deepest appreciation for his unwavering partnership, his trust in our objectives, and his genuine respect for the amateur radio community throughout Marion County. His legacy will continue to shape MERT for years to come, and his impact will be felt every time our volunteers key up a microphone and transmit across the upgraded communications systems which serve this county.

On behalf of all MERT members and amateur radio operators across Marion County: Thank you, Director Bowlin, for your leadership, your advocacy, and your heart. You have made a lasting impact on our team and our community!

***A selfless leader sees the value in volunteers long before the world depends on them.
Director Bowlin understood that, and MERT is stronger because of it.***

Marion County Amateur Radio Breakfast

On August 1st, over 20 amateur radio operators met at Mimi's Café on SW College Rd. for breakfast to talk about our hobby and share information about the many clubs & volunteer organizations available within Marion County.

The event was organized by Don Webb (W9EBB) from Crosspointe Church (who is also a MERT member) to see old friends and meet new hams in discussing our hobby.

Members of the hospital group HEC, MBA Disaster Relief Team, Silver Springs Radio Club (SSRC), MERT and ARES shared brief overviews about each organization.



MBA Disaster Relief Team Coordinator Mark Weible (N4GPA) shares more about his organization's activities at the Ham Radio breakfast meeting.

On behalf of the MERT members attending, we all enjoyed participating. Our thanks to Don Webb for organizing the event.

SHREK Safety and Power Supply Upgrades

Over the last two months, MERT volunteers completed several revisions and key modifications improving our SHREK radio kits supporting our Shelter operators during all future activations.

- ✓ New First Aid Travel Kits - Raising our focus on safety, Basic First Aid Travel Kits were added. These packs now include Lense/Cleaning wipes for operators to use should radio screen, microphone or other components need attention. Our thanks to Don Webb (W9EBB) for his suggestion and donation!
- ✓ New Power Supplies - The new solid-state Switching Power Supplies have been placed in our kits resulting in an 11-pound weight reduction. Wow – nice! These units have protected DC outlet terminals in reducing potential electrical short circuits in confined spaces too!



(Above) The new Samlex SEC-1235M Power Supplies are the same power capacity but 11-pounds lighter than the 15-year-old Astron power units.

(L) The new First Aid Travel Kits and the very visible location in each unit – see the lower left pocket of lid cover.

- ✓ All DC power cables have been replaced with new dual-fused types (protecting the radio from potential positive and negative voltage surges) then terminated with Anderson Powerpole (AP) “quick-connect” outlets.
- ✓ All fuses were changed to 15-amp protecting the radios while the power supply connectors were also terminated with ferrules adding strength at the power supply outlets while eliminating any exposed wires in reducing potential short circuits.
- ✓ SHREK spare parts were revised in adding four (4) 15-amp backup fuses should they be needed.



“Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it. Remember, you don’t live in the world all of your own.”— Albert Schweitzer

A BIG thank you to all the members who participated with a special thanks to Gavin Karelitz (K2ETC) for introducing the ferrule termination idea at the power supply outlets. Thanks Gavin! (Ferrule crimp tool kit: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07PJK2VNT>)

Protective Cover for our new Tower Motor

Ray Woody (WB4FKJ) (nickname “Vanna”) shows MERT’s new cover protecting the EOC Tower motor unit which is used in raising and lowering the telescoping second section. This unit was replaced in June by the Div. of EM.

While the previous motor provided 11-years of reliable service, it is hoped the new cover will extend the life of the new unit for a few extra years. Harlan Cook (Coordinator) donated the new water-resistant cover to MERT this month.



Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody shows the new motor cover!

Radio Room Internet Update

I am pleased sharing the Winlink.org port blockages have been cleared allowing full and complete access now. We thank the IT team for their work to resolve this issue.

In the EchoLink service side, the “EchoLink Network Test” continues to show the “STUN test failed” indicating that a router at Lumen’s facility is changing the source port numbers of the outgoing UDP packets. We look forward to getting this resolved ASAP.

Communications Update Editor — Invitation to Grow & Contribute

The *Communications Update* has been a very rewarding project for me for nearly seven years, and now it’s time to open the door for new leadership and fresh perspectives. We’re inviting a volunteer to take on the role of Editor and help shape the next chapter of MERT’s monthly newsletter. Training and support will be happily provided.

For me, sharing the stories of our members, events, and activities each month — in both words and photographs — has been a true joy. Serving as a “history writer” for MERT has been a meaningful part of my volunteer work, and I know you will find the same satisfaction in helping preserve our story. The future of MERT is bright, and this role is a wonderful way to be part of that momentum.



The first edition of the *Communications Update* was in February, 2020.

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

MERT Members Amazing Experiences during the “Cold War”

Member Ray Sherwood (WA9MID) shared the following story which is an amazing look back in time when our country was dealing with unpredictable and aggressive world governments.

My Navy Service Experience...

“In 1964 I got my ham license then in 1966 joined the Navy Reserves as a Communication Technician cryptologist. I also got married to my beautiful wife Carol. What a year!



Ray Sherwood, WA9MID



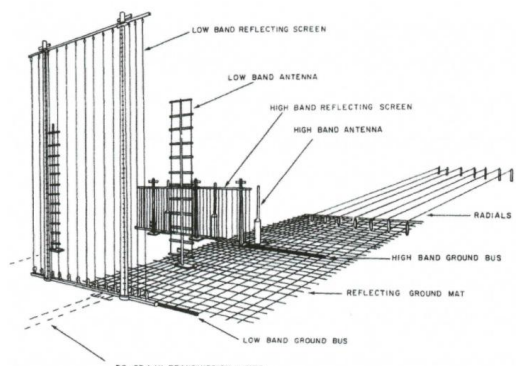
(Far Right) Ray Sherwood, Nov. 1967, Pensacola, FL

In 1967, I was sent to Pensacola for six-months for the "A" school copying CW at 25 WPM on a manual typewriter. In September, 1968 I reported to Naval Communication Station, Honolulu where my wife joined me a month later. About a week after I got there, I was told I would be working in the "elephant cage" ... to which I said, “What is that?” ... the officer said... “You will know it when you see it!”

The next morning, they hauled six of us out through the antenna field of rhombics, discones and satellite tracking antennas. When we rounded the last curve of the road, I saw what they were talking about. The “elephant cage!” (In 1962, it cost \$900,000 and the electronics to run it was estimated \$20 million (\$219 million in '26)! Another amazing fact is the “Navy Security Group” built 14 of them (7 around the Atlantic Ocean and 7 around the Pacific Ocean.)



Circularly Disposed Antenna Array (CDAA) built for HF monitoring & direction finding. Wahiawa, HI



(Above) The CDAA electrical circuit grid designed for radio signal detection and direction finding from 2-30 MHz.

The antenna covered 2 - 30 MHz and there were 40 folded dipoles for 2-9 MHz spaced every 9° for full 360° coverage. There 120 sleeve monopole high-band (HF) antennas for 9-30 MHz monitoring were spaced every 3° for full 360° coverage. The complex had a ground grid with high & low-band ground busses around the perimeter and 360° radials extending out from that.



(Top) The Wahiawa, HI CDAA circa. early 1970's.

The whole sub-basement was RG-85 coax (a 50-ohm Mil Spec version of RG-6 coax [75-ohm]) coming in from each antenna to signal splitters, signal amplifiers and what they called beam formers that could combine several antennas at once to provide up to 15 dB gain. This all fed to a goniometer (the heart of a radio-direction finder) in the electrical center of the antenna. Each feed line was tuned to the exact same electrical length as all the others. The goniometer rotated the antennas electrically several times a second.

I worked in three different rooms, rotating weekly working 2 evenings, 2 days and 2 midnights then 80 hours off. One room was general searching for targets and reporting. Another was sitting in front of an oscilloscope and trying to get a direct bearing fix on suspect radio signals and the other room was for recording and analyzing data afterwards. It was a truly amazing instrument in which you could be in one room and use it as an omnidirectional antenna and go into the next room and use the same antenna as a rotating set of vertical beams.

In 1970, I received an early out and we left Hawaii. However, 6-months later we spent Christmas and New Years in Winter Harbor, Maine operating the CDAA there. Wow – what a change from Hawaii where we experienced 65-inches of snow and -20°F temperatures!

My service days ended in 1972 when I was discharged and returned to civilian life. Thanks for the opportunity to share this with you.”

Ray WA9MID

Thank you for your service, Ray... and for sharing this wonderful story with us!

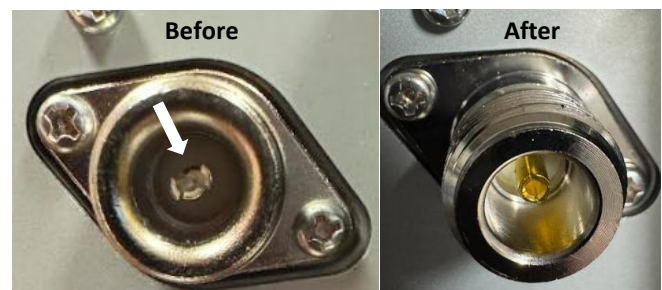
More at Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circularly_disposed_antenna_array



25 ft high-band reflector screens on the left. behind the high-band monopole antenna at right.

MERT Repeater Repairs

I'm pleased sharing the "RF Input" connector on our new Icom repeater has been repaired and is back online. The "N" connector was damaged by an attempt to insert a PL-259 connector which broke one of the center-pins.



August Meetings Update

This month's activities in photographs. Thanks to all the members who joined in on the fun!



Besides the SHREK kit activities, members participated in classes on Identifying common coaxial connectors, DC Cable Fusing, and Polyphaser design, uses and testing.

MERT Receives a Wonderful Donation!

Ray and I were extremely surprised (and excited) when member Bruce Twiss (KI4NFA) shared with us a resident living in OTOW near him asked him if he knew of a public service organization that could use his ham radio, tuner and CW keyer? We are thankful Bruce said... “Yes. MERT!”

When Bruce delivered the equipment, we thought it was brand new. To recognize his donation, Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody crafted the following message to Mr. Eugene Chicoine KA4UXZ.

“Dear Mr. Chicoine:

Thank you very much for your very generous donation of amateur radio equipment to our volunteer Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT).

The Icom IC-718 HF Transceiver and MFJ-969 Antenna Tuner you have provided are invaluable additions to our communications gear. Moreover, these items are in pristine, like new condition. We cannot thank you enough.

Operating within the Marion County Sheriff's Office Department of Emergency Management, our team relies on dependable equipment to maintain vital communications during emergency activations. Your donation strengthens our response capabilities and ensures we remain ready to serve our community when traditional communication systems fail.

We would love to invite you to a future weekly MERT meeting so our team can thank you in person. We meet every Wednesday morning from 9:00 - 11:00 AM at the Marion County Sheriff's Office Emergency Operations Center, located at 692 NW 30th Avenue in Ocala. If there is a Wednesday that works well for you to drop by, please let us know. You can coordinate your visit with either Harlan Cook (MERT Coordinator) at 210-331-3240 or yours truly (Ray Woody, Deputy Coordinator) at 770-328-5459. Our friend and colleague, Bruce Twiss (KI4NFA), is also available for this purpose.

Harlan and I will be showing off these items to our team next Wednesday, August 12. We will take a few photos and share these with you in a follow-up email.

We deeply appreciate your support of MERT and your shared commitment to the amateur radio community. 73 and best wishes!

Ray Woody
MERT Deputy Coordinator
770-328-5459
WB6FKJ

MERT has a similar radio at Station #3A and is analyzing how best to use this wonderful donation as a possible “hot standby” or for other applications as we expand our HF antenna resources. **Thank you, Mr. Chicoine, for your wonderful gift to MERT!**



IT'S TRUE! ICOM Introduces the IC-7110

I just learned from Dave Smith KG5RF about ICOM's latest announcement at the "Tokyo Ham Fair 2026".

They are introducing a new addition to the Icom amateur radio family... the **IC-7110**.

For MERT members, this all-band radio is a perfect match for our operations as it includes D-Star capabilities along with "Dualwatch" dual-receiver scanners.

More new features include simple setup FT8 operation, WiFi and Bluetooth connectivity with real-time Spectrum Scope and Waterfall display.

This is an amazing package of radio features and capabilities built into a touch-screen for fast and easy operations. (No price yet.)



PRE-RELEASE INFORMATION
HF/VHF/UHF ALL MODE TRANSCEIVER
IC-7110



See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onBMk07UHDc>

HF/VHF/UHF ALL MODE TRANSCEIVER
IC-7110

- HF/50/70*/144/430/440 MHz ALL Mode Coverage
*70 MHz for only EU/UK version
- Real-Time Spectrum Scope and Waterfall Display
- CW Decoder
- Comprehensive D-STAR Functionality

- 4.3-inch Large Color Display with Touch Operation
- Dualwatch for HF/VHF and HF/UHF
- Simple Configuration for FT8 Operation
- Wi-Fi® (2.4 GHz / 5 GHz) and Bluetooth® Connectivity



MERT has a new email - Please note it for the future - [**MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com**](mailto:MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com)

All amateur radio operators and the general public are welcomed to attend all MERT meetings every Wednesday from 9:00 am till Noon at the
Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
692 NW 30th Ave., Ocala, FL.

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"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more." - H. Jackson Brown Jr.

"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too." Paulo Coelho