

Chief, Army MARS Net Notes, 27 February 2009

Good evening, Army MARS members and guests from Navy-Marine Corps and Air Force MARS, and fellow amateurs monitoring this net.

During the past few days, members, you have received your personal copy of the road map for the future of Army MARS. If you haven't seen it yet or want a color copy, visit the HQ Army MARS website and you'll find the Road Ahead and MARS 101 Documents on the front page ready for downloading as .pdf files. These cornerstone documents for the future of Army MARS are a short and easy read -- the Road Map document, all nine pages of it, plus the separate introduction to MARS 101, just over two pages.

By yesterday you should have received my CAM 05-09 with the details formally putting the program into effect. That's three pieces of information and all of it important—all interrelated. Make sure you received all three.

Now that's an awful lot of homework to be studied over the next week before the MARS 101 interactive course gets underway, and "study" is the precise word for what's required. I know that you are all busy living life, fulfilling other obligations to family, career, etc. But, you are all members of Army MARS because of your passion for Amateur Radio, helping your neighbors in an emergency, and helping our nation when needed. Unlike times past when MARS was looking for something useful to do – today and in the future we are teammates with our Federal and State Partners to provide EMCOM support in real-life disaster response situations. So, IMHO, we need to not only be Army MARS, we must be a relevant EMCOM service provider that our Federal and State Partners come to for support and assistance. The next 12-weeks' training will require we all be flexible and supportive of this training initiative. It is going to be arduous—but be certain, it is achievable. The least I can do to help now is to apply "minimize" to the rest of my comments this evening. I'll try to be brief and to the point.

There are two broad topics for this net tonight: the ice storm that bore down on Kentucky just a month ago, and some additional information on the *Road Ahead* program.

Kentucky Ice Storm: Jointness Works!

As a model of response to a grim emergency, the response of the Kentucky Army MARS team and its Winlink partners from Tennessee and the amateur community at large will be hard to beat.

The ice storm cut off normal life in much of the state beginning the night of 25 January and continuing for more than a week. It was a civil emergency far more dramatic than news accounts could portray. And so was the awesome

collective performance of amateur radio, the three MARS branches and state EMA personnel.

I'll set the scene in the words of Patrick Compton, AAM4TKY, who wears the twin hats of Army MARS state emergency operations officer and a local district ARES coordinator. I quote from his news release written for the state EOC's ham station:

“In the grip of an ice-encased nightmare, the Kentucky emergency response networks were jammed with traffic or totally shut down . . . Over 750,000 people were without power and up to 55 water districts were off-line for days. Ice also caused many areas to experience communication issues including no landline phones, no cell phones, public safety radio disruptions--including parts of the state microwave radio system--and even satellite radio systems were disrupted by the thick layer of ice. For some city and county officials in far western KY, the only means of communication was amateur radio. The State EOC located at Boone National Guard Center, in Frankfort KY, utilized ARES and MARS radio operators to reach out and assess the damage.”

Barry Jackson, AAA4KY, our state director, got the first request for support on Monday morning 26 January as the combined onslaught of ice and snow blasted across the long state. The communications supervisor of the Kentucky Department of Military Affairs, Bob Stephens, WA4CMO, requested HF/VHF net activation. Jackson launched MT-63 operations on HF while Compton activated the VHF repeater at Frankfort, the state capital.

As the situation worsened, MARS was asked to supply shift operators so AAN4EKY/KY4EOC could remain on the air “until further notice.” There was a request to monitor the state's P25 land mobile network and render assistance.

A new encrypted VOIP voice-linking system under beta-test was thrown into the communications pool. Jackson reports, “This circuit really came in handy when HF ‘went long.’ ” Out-of-state operators were able to receive traffic and relay it to the EOC via VOIP.

Another request came for MARS operators to man the KY National Guard HF net serving the convoys delivering relief supplies. Among the KY National Guard's missions: security backup at the State Penitentiary in Eddyville, which was without power.

By Thursday (29 January), the EOC workload reached the point requiring outside help. EOC Pat Compton reports: “Traffic was heavy and two operators could not log traffic, answer all radios and phones, and run traffic in/out of the EOC at the same time. I chose to call in help from our next door neighbors in Tennessee . . . Many TN ARES and MARS stations jumped in and helped relay traffic. . . TN operators took net control duties and relieved us to receive more traffic on other channels and catch up on logs.”

Later that day, TN Emergency Management, which had been on alert, dispatched the first of what would total 11 teams across the state line to assess damage in the eight beleaguered Kentucky counties. They were deployed till the

next Sunday, some 30 operators. Comms chief Wolfe noted in his log, “It is an honor and joy to work with the fine MARS and EMA folks in Kentucky.”

That’s a whole new chapter in MARS-ARES-EMA collaboration using Army MARS Winlink and I will cover it on my next net.

MARS 101’s Debut

Getting back on the Road Ahead: The first unit in the training series will be released to the field in the next several days. It runs about three pages single-spaced. A fourth page is devoted to a “Self-Quiz.” You know the game plan: study the e-mailed lesson, jot down any questions that come to mind, also make a note of any comments you’d like to share with others on your training net. Then join your state’s designated 101 net and be ready to participate in a live discussion. I say again: be ready.

Going to school via HF radio will be a challenge for everyone involved. Net time is limited, poor propagation may be a factor too. Yet the whole point is for everyone to have a chance to participate-listen and learn from each other. Checking in right on time is important. Net discipline is important. And everybody keeping comments brief is important.

If you don’t get an immediate opportunity to speak up, I suggest writing the thought down so it doesn’t get away. I have asked that **all** training nets throughout each week give priority to the MARS 101 training topics.

Now I have to say this: Please note that my focus is on **how** best to participate, not **whether** to. One hundred percent completion is not just a goal, it’s the only acceptable outcome. These Training nets will not be for members to express their disagreement with my leadership, the direction we are heading or the weakness(s) of the training material. I have total confidence that state directors, training officers and members can work together achieving the goals I’ve set forth. The next item explains why I’m confident.

More Reaction from the Field

My message CAM 05-09 which was sent out Wednesday took note of positive and enthusiastic comments about the *Road Ahead*. I’m fully aware there also are many members seriously concerned about completing MARS 101 or meeting the other requirements.

I’m going to quote some of their issues and give what I hope will be received as reassurance. Here goes:

From one member: “It seems like they’re trying to freeze some of us out, always adding something new.” Unquote. My response: The “something new” is the environment in which Army MARS operates. Technology advancement is one of our missions – look at WinLink as one result. Winlink is a tool in our toolkit that is taking center stage in EMCOM and one of the main tools we offer that no other EMCOM service can offer. Our Federal and State partners like it

and want to use it. We didn't add something new, it grew out of our efforts to be relevant—it is our mission to be relevant. In any case, “freezing somebody out” certainly isn't my intention. It's not going to be the result either. No way.

Another concern: “Many of us are getting up in years. We can't move around the way we used to.” Unquote. My response: If you can operate the rig, and can join the nets, and in an emergency can get EEI information and relay it, then moving up in years is not an issue. Just as younger MARS members have always helped out their elder colleagues repair antennas and otherwise stay on the air, I'm sure they'll be there to help any way they can with the *Road Ahead* requirements. What is required of us all is time, energy, commitment, knowledge and skill.

Here's another: “There's one thing in the plan that may cause my resignation next year.” Unquote. This member didn't specify what that one thing is, but I'm going to guess he means the requirement for upgrading his FCC license. To all of you concerned about the General Class exam I say this: One of the finest traditions of ham radio is the way the more advanced amateurs help others achieve their licenses. If you need assistance and extra time, that can be arranged, but you must make the effort. Know this: Army MARS leadership at all levels will be monitoring progress and will help when needed. The rest is up to you.

Just one more: “MARS is now in conflict with my work. I'm often deployed with no radio and on top of that, to keep my job I have to do graduate work on the side. There simply isn't enough spare time in my life.” Unquote. I'll give the same assurance as before: For members who do their best to meet the requirements—including MARS 101—the program can be flexible on deadlines. But please understand me, extensions will not be automatic nor without good cause. I'll add, each of us has to prioritize what we spend our “Free Time” doing. Whether it is spending quality time pleasing your spouse, or riding your bike, jogging, bowling, throwing darts, attending night school to enable a better income, etc., we each make a choice. You also know that as our lives evolve from young carefree single people, to building and caring for a family, into becoming empty nesters, we have to reprioritize what we do with our free time. Each of us needs to assess our responsibilities, our desires and manage our free time. It is not Army MARS responsibility to alter its credentialing criteria to fit your priorities, it is you who must decide what your passion is and what takes priority in your life now and in the years ahead.

You know the old World War II motto, “can do.” Let's update it: “Can do TOGETHER.”

The ‘Home Run Drive’ in Michigan

That's the subject line on the OPorder Michigan state director Dave Bock AAA5MI sent his members last week to launch the *Road Ahead*: “Home Run Drive.” As a game plan it's a winner.

I'll tell you what caught my eye right off: "Seven MI MARS members have one year to upgrade to General. . . AAM5TMI is tasked to provide additional training . . . to assist those who need the training . . . All members are asked to assist and mentor . . ."unquote.

There are specific taskings for the state staff and cell coordinators. That's what I call thorough planning in the best military tradition, which is to say delegating and sharing. And I commend Dave's summation: "This director's reading of the *Road Ahead* and MARS 101 clearly shows that MI MARS is already well on the road thanks to the efforts of the two previous state directors . . . There is little coming that should be of concern to any member. It will be both specific enough to guide our operations and flexible enough to allow for a common sense approach to those conditions that may arise. . . This will be, indeed, fun and what we have long waited for." Unquote.

Operational Security and MARS 101

My final *Road Ahead* comment is primarily addressed to webmasters, but all leaders and members please take note. In order for the advance-study units to completely cover their topics, they may at times contain information that might be considered FOUO—For Official Use Only. That means MARS 101 textual material must not be posted on web sites accessible to the public nor otherwise circulated outside the MARS community. Neither are 101 documents to be altered during relay. I ask that any questions about handling or use of MARS 101 material should be directed to the 101 Team Leader Bob Mims, AAA1RD.

Conclusion . . . I said I'd be brief. I believe I was.

We know what must be done, let's all put our backs into this new mission, and together, then just three months from now, we'll be better prepared to support the next emergency awaiting America.

Until two weeks from tonight, TCAMO and GOD BLESS.

CAM Out