

Military Auxiliary Radio System

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The **Military Auxiliary Radio System** (MARS) is a [United States Department of Defense](#) sponsored program, established as a separately managed and operated program by the [United States Army](#), and the [United States Air Force](#). The United States Navy-Marine program has been closed. The program is a [civilian auxiliary](#) consisting primarily of licensed [amateur radio](#) operators who are interested in assisting the military with communications on a local, national, and international basis as an adjunct to normal communications. The MARS programs also include active duty, reserve, and [National Guard](#) units; Navy, Marine Corps, and [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) ships, and [Coast Guard cutters](#) and [shore stations](#).^[u]

MARS has a long history of providing worldwide auxiliary [emergency communications](#) during times of need. The combined two-service MARS programs (Army, and Air Force), volunteer force of over 3,000 dedicated and skilled amateur radio operators provide the backbone of the MARS program. The main benefit of MARS membership is enjoying the amateur radio hobby through an ever-expanding horizon of MARS service to the nation. MARS members work by the slogan "Proudly Serving Those Who Serve".

Military Auxiliary Radio System



Abbreviation	MARS
Motto	"Proud, Professional, and Ready"
Formation	November 1925; 91 years ago
Purpose	To provide contingency communications support for the United States Department of Defense and Military Services
Region served	Worldwide

History

QSL card sent by US Navy MARS station NSS for a cross-band radio contact with W2LV on Armed Forces Day 1969



The organization that led to the Military Auxiliary Radio System was called the Auxiliary Amateur Radio System (AARS). AARS was created in November 1925 by a few dedicated pioneers in the [United States Army Signal Corps](#) led by Captain Thomas C. Rives. His original intent was to enlist the talents of volunteer [amateur radio](#) operators who could train soldiers in the then-new technology of radio, as well as pursuing radio research and development to improve radio equipment within the Army. This support would be particularly useful during the mobilization of forces by providing a pool of trained radio operators. Their efforts were successful, and the present-day MARS program is the direct descendant of the work of those early pioneers.

Between 1925 and 1941, the AARS continued to operate and functioned more or less as an extracurricular activity for members of the Army Signal Corps, with its scope limited by budget cuts during the [Great Depression](#). The AARS organization continued to operate until the United States entry into [World War II](#) on 7 December 1941, at which time radio amateurs were denied the use of the airwaves, and the amateur service and the Army Amateur Radio System were deactivated. Following WWII, the US Army recognized the importance of reactivating the AARS to train vitally needed communications personnel at a relatively low direct cost to the government, and in 1946 the AARS was reactivated.



MARS Operator at [Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany](#), 1983.

The AARS functioned as such until the creation of the Military Affiliate Radio System in November 1948 with the establishment of separate Army and [Air Force](#) MARS programs, reflecting the creation of the Air Force as a separate service. The program's name was changed to the Military Affiliate Radio System on 2 September 1952, in recognition of the organization's changing nature with the growing number of civilian volunteer members. Eventually, the [Navy-Marine Corps](#) MARS program was established officially on 17 August 1962, and began

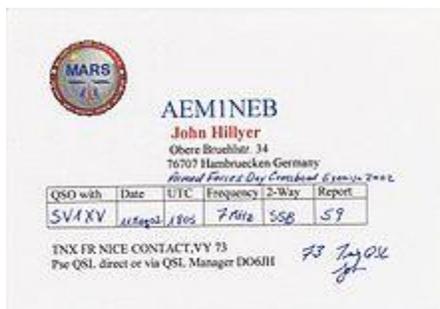
operations on 1 January 1963. This followed the Cuban Missile Crisis and [President Kennedy's](#) concern for viable and extended communications capabilities.

During the [Korean War](#), [Vietnam War](#), [Cold War](#) and [Gulf War](#), MARS was most known for its handling of "Marsgram" written messages and providing "phone patches" to allow overseas servicemen to contact their families at home.

The program's name was changed again to the current Military Auxiliary Radio System on 23 December 2009.

MARS continues to be active today. Its primary mission is to provide contingency communications to the Department of Defense and Military Services. MARS is also available to provide communications for Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) such as FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. Under DSCA, MARS may also available to assist state and local emergency response agencies.

On a day-to-day basis MARS members are available to handle messages to and from service men and women: active duty, reserve, guard, or retired and certain employees of the [federal government](#) who are stationed outside the US.



QSL card from MARS station AEM1NEB

Missions

Military Auxiliary Radio System provides Department of Defense sponsored emergency communications on a local, national, and international basis. MARS also provides auxiliary communications for military entities only. One major mission that MARS has had for many years is to handle morale, welfare, and official record and voice communications traffic for [Armed Forces](#) and authorized [U.S. Government civilian](#) personnel stationed throughout the world. MARS establishes programs to create civilian interest, recruit qualified volunteers, and furnish training in military communications, techniques, and procedures.

Every year, MARS conducts an appropriate military and amateur radio cross-band exercise as an integral part of the annual [Armed Forces Day](#). They provide a reserve of personnel trained in military radio communications, techniques, and procedures as well as to initiate efforts to

improve radio-operating techniques. MARS members test state-of-the-art technology through experimentation and testing.

Armed Forces Day Crossband Test



Navy-Marine Corps MARS station, NAV-4, operating on Armed Forces Day

MARS celebrates [Armed Forces Day](#) annually with a traditional military to amateur crossband communications test and a message-receiving test. These tests give [amateur radio](#) operators and [shortwave listeners](#) an opportunity to demonstrate their individual technical skills and receive recognition from the [Secretary of Defense](#) or the appropriate military radio station for their proven expertise. A [QSL card](#) is provided to those making contact with one of the military stations. Special commemorative certificates are awarded to anyone who receives and accurately copies the digital Armed Forces Day message from the Secretary of Defense.

Participating military stations transmit on selected military MARS frequencies and listen for amateur radio stations in the amateur bands. The military station operator will announce the specific amateur-band frequency being monitored. Usually, the military MARS stations are at places such as [The Pentagon](#),^[2] [Fort Huachuca](#), [Andrews Air Force Base](#), [Nellis Air Force Base](#), and various Navy and Coast Guard locations.

MARS Today



MARS Operator, AAT3OT, using a radio to communicate with the [U.S. Army Reserve](#) in the MARS Emergency Communications Unit trailer.

The Military Auxiliary Radio System is still active today. Morale and welfare messages are no longer the largest activity in MARS due to the increased use of the Internet and e-mail by deployed military personnel. MARS had an increased role in providing interoperability communications between [Army National Guard](#) and [Air National Guard](#) forces and civilian state agencies. However, this service providing interoperability communications was terminated as of May 2015 based on a decision by USAF and ARMY MARS. MARS also provides testing of Military Standard communication modes for use by MARS members.



MARS Operators erecting an [HF](#) antenna at [Fort Meade](#) for [Grecian Firebolt 2005](#).

MARS participates in exercises such as Grecian Firebolt to help support military communications. MARS members from all around the world played a role in Grecian Firebolt 2005 by sending exercise Essential Elements of Information (EEI) reports through the MARS radio network. The EEI's consisted of scenario disaster information. When the EEI's were received, they were sorted and sent to [Army Military Intelligence](#) centers. MARS played a large part in reporting up-to-date information on disasters and requesting military assistance using a dispersed and redundant radio network.

MARS also supports government agencies such as the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#), and participates in programs such as the Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications [SHARED RESOURCES](#) (SHARES).

The traditional land or sea based MARS Radio Phone Patch is largely a thing of the past because land and sea based MARS stations have been dismantled in favor of Satellite Phones. However, modern military aircraft are still equipped with HF radios, and many military aircrews still use MARS Phone Patches as a backup or substitute to Satellite Communications. The [USAF MARS Phone Patch Net](#) provides 24/7 HF Radio Phone Patch service to all branches of United States military aircraft worldwide.

A dispatch issued in May 2009 announced the shutdown of the Navy and Marine Corps MARS program by September 30, 2009.^[3] However, Navy-Marine Corps MARS continued to function until September 30, 2015.

Department of Defense Instruction 4650.02, dated 23 December 2009 changed the status of MARS from an affiliate to an auxiliary (equal in status to the [Coast Guard Auxiliary](#) and [Civil Air Patrol](#)). This change in status saved the Navy-Marine Corps MARS program from being shut

down and put it back in line with the Emergency Communications mission of its sister services (Army and Air Force MARS).