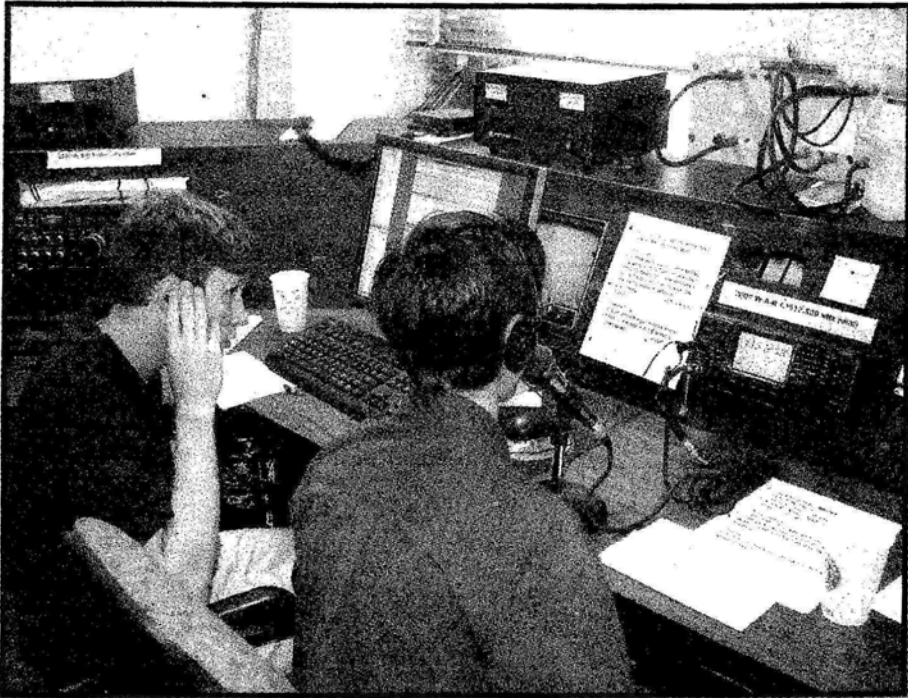


Amateur Radio at the Pentagon: A Homecoming for Station W-A-R

Bill Sexton, NIIN/AAA9PC



At the Pentagon, Amos Scott, KB3OQK, (MARS call AUX3AE) of Millville, DE, and Justin Kates, KB3JUV (AAT3OT), of Lewes, DE. Photo by Kirk Brown, KA2P.

As descriptive radio call signs go, this one could take the prize: W-A-R. It's a historic call, originally the property of the War Department, as the Department of the Army was known from 1789 to 1947. And once a year, Ham Radio operators have a chance to put "whiskey-alpha-romeo" in their logbooks.

The occasion was the annual cross-band communications test sponsored by the Army Military Affiliate Radio System. The 58th running took place on 12 May, a week ahead of Armed Forces Day to avoid a conflict with the Dayton Hamvention on 19 May.

And what's it all about? Many amateurs lovingly collect "QSL cards," which are personalized postcards confirming they've communicated with stations in faraway or otherwise interesting places. Military frequencies are, of course, off limits to Ham operators. So once a year U.S. military stations listen on designated amateur frequencies for calls from

Hams who are listening for a response on military frequencies. Thus "cross-band." It actually works, and it's splendid training in operating technique.

Military stations in action this year ranged from WAR at the Pentagon to ALM in Alaska and ABH in Hawaii.

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The 14 participants represented all three armed services—for instance NAV (Williamsburg, Va.), one of six Navy-Marine Corps stations, and AIR (Andrews AFB, MD) of the two Air Force participants.

Chief Army MARS Stuart S. ("Stu") Carter said the six participating Army stations logged 1,356 Ham contacts during this unusual challenge of tuning agility. In addition to specially decorated post cards confirming their contacts, there's a certificate for those who successfully copied a digitally transmitted text message from the Secretary of Defense.



Operating WAR at the Pentagon (left to right): Ken Heitner, WB4AKK/AFA2PB, and Gary Sessums, KC5QCN/AFA2PG, of Arlington, VA, on the 20 Meter voice crossband and at Station 2 farther right on the 40 Meter voice crossband are Hugh Katz, K3HU, of Bowie, MD, and John Croft Jr., K3NJ, of Silver Spring MD, both from the Voice of America. Photo by Justin Kates, KB3JUV.

For station WAR, 2007 was particularly significant. Thanks to an invitation from the Pentagon Amateur Radio Club K4AF (AAN3PNT), the memorial call sign came home after a long exile at Ft. Detrick MD. Army MARS is the assigned guardian of the old War Department call, and its Eastern Area gateway station, AAA3USA, had been the scene of cross-band operations until MARS closed down that station last year in an economy measure.

Navy Capt. Rick Low, N6CY (AAT3GP), one of the MARS members



Joseph Lowenthal, WA4OVO, of Memphis; Frank McDowell, KA4SJM (NNNØANX), Bartlett, TN; and Alexander Hilliard, W4GMM (AFA2FL), Memphis install the rooftop 14-MHz beam antenna at WUG-231, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers station near Memphis. Photo by James Pogue KH2AR.

who had volunteered at Ft. Detrick for previous cross-band operations, is a member of the Pentagon Amateur Radio Club and he arranged the move.

PARC members are military and civilian personnel stationed at Defense Department headquarters plus retirees who served there. The club was founded in the 1970s by two of Amateur Radio's all-time greats, the late Gen. Curtis LeMay and Sen. Barry Goldwater.

The decision to host WAR was accompanied by an invitation for MARS volun-



It wasn't Field Day! Joseph Lowenthal, W4OVO, and Pat Lane, W4OGQ (AAA9EC), the Army MARS Emergency Coordinator, both of Memphis, set up this forward position at the Corps of Engineers station to prevent interference with colleagues operating on a nearby frequency at the main (indoor) site. Photo by James Pogue, KH2AR.

teers from the region to help operate the club's radio equipment (which is entirely separate from the Defense Department's). Club members also volunteered their time arranging security clearance and escort service into the Pentagon where the club shack is located (on the top floor, for antenna access.)

Club president Eugene Kaiser, KI4BUI, is a civilian engineer assigned to the National Military Command Center (NMCC) and a 35-year veteran of government service. He speaks with special pride of the Pentagon club's history. "Older members remember all the activity back in the 1970s when PARC supported the troops overseas," he recalls. But "after that, activity pretty much fell off," according to Dr. Kaiser.

Then 9/11 happened.

"I was in the Pentagon that day in the NMCC," Kaiser continues. "I very quickly became aware there easily could have been no way to reach my family." In fact, as he realized, the newly dem-



Atop the roof 25 feet up, Alexander Hilliard, W4GMM (AFA2FL), of Memphis checks the beam mounting of the Corps of Engineers station. Photo by James Pogue, KH2AR.



Gary Weatherford, N4LGY (AFA2HB), of Collierville TN operating the 14.486 MHz position at Army Corps of Engineers base, Memphis. Photo by James Pogue, KH2AR.

onstrated need for emergency backup communications was much broader than that. Kaiser set about reinvigorating the club. That included Captain Low's acquisition of an Army MARS club license with the active-duty military call sign of AAN3PNT. (The FCC club call K4AF dates back to when there was a separate Air Force club at the Pentagon.)

28 March 2007 brought another milestone for PARC. MARS station AAN3PNT provided a key messaging link during Operation Sidewinder, the first wide-scale demonstration of Army MARS collaboration with the Transportation Security Administration for providing emergency communications at U.S. airports.

PARC's 50-odd members have their own "shack" within the Pentagon security perimeter. It replaced a former 1,000-watt rig on the public concourse. You could compare the new installation with a well-heeled multi-op contest station with typical Ham equipment inside but, paradoxically, possessing only one vertical antenna and one dipole on the Pentagon roof. "We're hoping to get a beam before too long," says Kaiser.

And then Iraq happened.

The old MARS mission of supporting the troops returned to the fore, with a twist. "A lot of personnel stop off here temporarily on their way to Baghdad," Kaiser recounts. "Quite a few are Hams, and K4AF is a place they could get on the air and keep in touch. The shack is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it gets a lot of use."

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Hams at the Pentagon are Hugh Katz, K3HU, of Bowie, MD, and John Croft Jr., K3NJ, of Silver Spring, MD, both from the Voice of America. Photo by Justin Kates, KB3JUV.

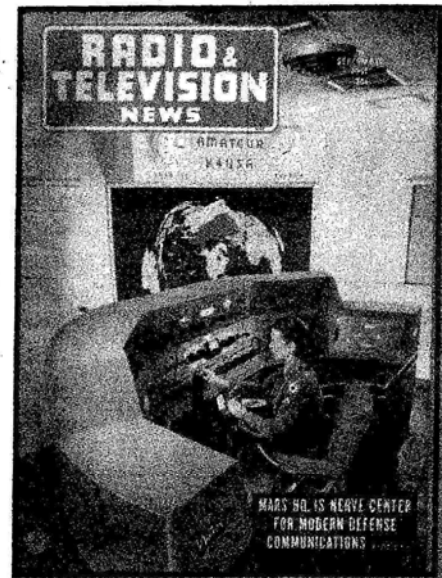
During the Armed Forces Day commemoration, the atmosphere at AAN3PNT was much that of an amateur contest. "It was very noisy," commented Justin Kates, KB3JUV (AAT3OT), a student from Newark, DE. "But operating this event for four hours really served as great practice in communicating and made me pretty smooth by the time I was done." MARS members from all three services participated.

At Ft. Wainwright, Fairbanks, AK, Chief Warrant Officer, Rod Mitchell, the ALM team leader, listed Australia, Spain and Portugal among the 125 contacts logged during the station's 16 hours on the air. AAA9USA, the MARS headquarters station at Ft. Huachuca AZ, counted 264 contacts from 48 of the 50 states and several countries overseas.

For participating amateurs the day's biggest challenge was capturing the message from Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates. It was transmitted digitally during very narrow windows, allowing scant time for adjusting equipment and thus good training for emergency operations. Gates messaged:

ON THE FIFTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL ARMED FORCES DAY WE LOOK BACK ON A YEAR THAT HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT ON

OUR MILITARY MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH ONGOING COMBAT DEPLOYMENTS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN. AS ALWAYS, DEDICATED AMATEUR RADIO AND MILITARY AFFILIATE RADIO SYSTEM OPERATORS HAVE WORKED TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEPLOYED MILITARY MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. YOUR EFFORTS IN SUPPORT OF EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS DURING NATURAL DISASTERS AND ELEVATED TER-




Magazine cover from 1951 shows the brand-new MARS Station at the Pentagon operated at that time by uniformed personnel from both Army and Air Force. The annual Armed Forces Day cross-band project was only two-years old.

RORIST RISK HERE AT HOME HAVE BEEN EQUALLY IMPORTANT. YOUR SERVICE TO OUR NATION AND OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM IS VERY IMPORTANT AND I EXTEND MY SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR A JOB WELL DONE.

/S/ ROBERT M. GATES,
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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