

## Strays – Ham radio for the military

The US military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Space Force, and National Guard) have their own radio services that are officially recognized and strictly regulated. Is it possible, then, that military radio and amateur radio can ever cross paths? If you are in the service of our country in a military capacity, can your skills and privileges carry over into the amateur world? A fair number of service men and service women want to participate and enjoy the craft as much as anybody else.

Amateur radio, by its nature and definition cannot be used for military purposes. Yet, the US government has come to recognize the value of amateur radio in disaster communication performed by an army of trained and skilled operators, and has partially bridged that gap by an auxiliary group. MARS ([Military Auxiliary Radio System](#)) is a non-military organization sponsored by the Defense Department to redundantly assist the military on a regional and national level when access to traditional forms of communication becomes unavailable.



Many specifically allocated frequencies can be used by MARS operators, but the primary ones are 13.927 MHz USB, 7.6335 MHz USB, and 11.407 MHz USB. To operate on them, a person must hold a valid FCC amateur radio license and must have been accepted into the MARS program, but does not need to be a member of the military. Most amateur radio transceivers are unable to transmit on MARS frequencies because they are outside the amateur bands. To accommodate them, many amateur transceivers can be wired to allow transmission on MARS frequencies, an alteration known as a **MARS mod** or modification.

Membership in the armed forces **does not automati-**



**cally qualify a person to transmit on the amateur bands;** the operator must hold a valid FCC amateur radio license to transmit on them. Yet any member of the military can enjoy the hobby of ham radio by passing the Technician exam to obtain an FCC amateur radio license, just like you and me.

Normally, we amateurs are prohibited from using amateur equipment to communicate with a person using another radio service, such as GMRS. Once a year, however, civilian licensed amateur radio operators and are permitted to freely communicate with members of the American military outside the MARS program using amateur radio frequencies on [Armed Forces Day](#), per [Part 97.111\(a\)\(5\)](#). This interoperability exercise, at one time declared a communication test, is now a [crossband test](#), allowing civilian amateurs like you and me a unique opportunity to participate using unmodified amateur radio equipment.

As an increasing number of military personnel move into our area, an accompanying increase in amateurs will be bringing their skills and their questions with them. Likewise, an increase in military folks also means more of them will want to become licensed as amateurs out of the fun of the hobby or even out of sheer curiosity. As they do, we should a) not assume that they have any more knowledge about ham radio than us civilians and b) be armed with answers to their questions when they ask about the need for licensing and in what ways they can participate.

We welcome our military friends, neighbors, and family members to Utah, and invite them to become part of our growing family of radio amateurs. And to those who are serving our nation in a military capacity, and have served in the past, **thank you for your service to our nation and our families!**