

Chief Army MARS – Net Notes, 25 Sep 2009

Good evening, Army MARS members and guests from Navy-Marine Corps and Air Force MARS, and fellow amateurs. In my e-mailed Net Notes last week I promised you a special net tonight, and it certainly will be that.

Three years ago this autumn I was breaking in the Deputy Director of Current Operations at 9<sup>th</sup> SC9(A) G3. Responsibility for oversight of Army MARS was a small and seemingly low-impact part of my new job back then. By year-end I perceived the MARS program needed to be resurrected. Army North was just standing up at that time to provide support to Civil Authority in CONUS during emergencies—that is the same mission I perceived Army MARS was uniquely positioned to do.

I requested the Commanding General appoint me Chief of Army MARS so I could implement changes to make our critical resources available to America for Civil Support. We—you and me—immediately went to work and MARS did rise from the ashes to become a viable civil support capability from the Department of Defense and the Army.

I'm here tonight three years later, together with my able and trusted deputy for two and a half of those years, Jim Griffin, to announce another change of leadership. Let me read from this news release just issued by HQ 9<sup>th</sup> SC(A):

Ft Huachuca, AZ—Veteran Army communicator Jim Griffin (KE7LJA) is the new Chief of the Army Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS).

Maj. Gen. Susan S. Lawrence, Commanding General of the 9<sup>th</sup> Signal Command (Army), named Griffin to succeed Stuart S. Carter who held the Chief's post since December 2006. MARS, the Defense Department-sponsored organization of amateur radio operators who volunteer for communications support in emergencies, is a component of the 9<sup>th</sup> SC(A).

As a uniformed member of the Signal Corps and subsequently a civil servant, Griffin has amassed 52 years in government service. Before this appointment, he had served for two years as Deputy Chief of Army MARS with special responsibility for construction of its new gateway communications station at Ft Huachuca.

"It has been a fast three years, and I believe we've positioned Army MARS to better support the missions of the Army and to provide critically needed communications capabilities to Civil Authority when needed," retiring Chief Carter said in a message to the force. Carter, a retired Air Force communications officer, will continue in his concurrent post as Chief, Sustainment Operations, 9th SC(A) G3, with continued oversight for MARS as well as for Force Protection and Antiterrorism responsibilities for 9<sup>th</sup> SC(A)'s Global force of 22,000 military, civilians and contractors.

"I will remain Jim Griffin's number 1 supporter."

Griffin's career spans both the modern era of radio communications and the global reach of American military commitment. "My early days of radio were in the army as a Fixed Station Repairman," he recalled in a broadcast greeting to MARS members. "I started out with vacuum tubes, filament voltages, resistors, capacitors and other items that are found in

museums today. I have been stationed in some of the more interesting places of the world such as Japan, Vietnam, France, Germany, Thailand and Italy. I have run a gamut of positions in radio, microwave, AUTODIN and satellite as a technician, Installer and instructor.”

The new chief, a native of Hawaii, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1956. Joining the Army in 1959, he developed a personal specialty of quality control/assurance at major installations around the world. He retired from active duty in May 1979 with a total of 23 years military service and became a civilian staff member in December that year.

The change of command at MARS HQ comes just as Army MARS completes an intense eight-month retraining program in preparation for the Army’s expanding support for homeland security. The three years of leadership by Carter and his deputy saw almost daily change as MARS adjusted to the government’s rapidly-evolving homeland security structure.

The MARS role includes operation of an e-mail-over-radio backup system for participating federal, state and local agencies as well as HF radio command-and-control nets in all 50 states, both capabilities maintained in constant readiness in case commercial circuits became severed by natural or manmade disaster. MARS also provides trained members to assist state and local emergency operations centers.

Because of its dual responsibility to both the Army and the civilian agencies supported by the military in emergencies, MARS members undergo training in both military and civil communications procedures.

Carter presented his successor on the Chief’s Friday evening broadcast net and presented Chief Griffin an Emergency Vest with a Giant MARS logo on the back and the words “Emergency Communications” on the back. Formally assuming command with the MARS call sign AAA9A, Griffin told the national linkup of MARS stations:

“We are on a steady course based on the ‘Road Ahead’ planning document that Chief Carter published last February. In fact, this week marks the completion of re-training of the entire Army MARS membership to meet the plan’s long-term goals.

“Now the work really begins,” he said.

UNQUOTE