New Chief, New Ideas, New Energy: The Future Unfolds at Army MARS

COMMENTARY

By Bill Sexton, N1IN

“In my simple words, here is why you are important to our national defense and security. It is because you are organized, and, most important, you are already members of and located in virtually every community in our nation.” — Stephen G. Klinefelter, informing the members of his appointment as Chief, Army MARS

A young officer just back from overseas combat has a new stateside assignment involving Homeland Security. This is what he knows about Army MARS:

It’s a small “component command” that consists entirely of civilians. They come and go as they please. They bear no arms and they collect no pay. With rare exceptions, they’ve never seen their commanding officer in the flesh. They sound like Mission Impossible with their HF rigs and giveaway software. This officer — actually, he’s a figment of my imagination but the observations are real — doesn’t find MARS mentioned in his unit’s contingency plan.

Little wonder the active-duty brass has trouble getting their minds around the Military Auxiliary Radio System. Lots of hams do, too.

Long gone is the glory day when MARSgrams linked grateful warfighters with family and friends; when ocean-spanning HF radio was the way to go and the mission was loud and clear. Nowadays, email and satellite communications haul the traffic. MARS operators work hard and fruitfully at civil support, but it’s the Defense budget that pays the bills and spending on MARS has dropped to a trickle: Members don’t just provide their radio gear; if they want hard copy of SOPs (standard operating procedures) and training documents and operations orders, they have to pay for paper and ink cartridges, too.

The unkindest cut of all happened last December when the cyber protection authorities in the Pentagon blacklisted Winlink 2000, the free messaging system MARS provides to many state and municipal emergency response forces. It had failed to win certification as sufficiently guarded against hostile penetration. Needless to say, MARS members, the Winlink Development Team, and quite a number of the civil agencies erupted in protest.

Actually, that unwarranted assault on the Winlink system may have been the best thing that ever happened to MARS. At least lately.

The Big ‘Unintended Consequence’

Eventually the ban was annulled. But the bureaucratic skirmish roused a chain of command that seemed to have slept through the auxiliary’s energetic response to homeland security ever since September 11, 2001. Finally, somebody recog-

Photo A. Incoming Army MARS Chief Stephen Klinefelter, right, poses here with his chain of command at the Ft. Huachucia, Arizona MARS Gateway Station. The three men on his left are staff of the Network Enterprise Technology Command (NETCOM). From left are Jack R. Ratliff, head of the Army Telecommunications Division; Al Melito, Chief, Long-Haul Communications Branch; and David McGinnis, recently promoted from volunteer member to fulltime MARS Operations Chief. All report to Klinefelter, deputy operations chief at NETCOM HQ. (Courtesy of U.S. Army)
nized how closely the onsite, ever-ready backup offered by MARS operators meshes with the U.S. Army North mission of responding to domestic contingencies.

It helped to have a supportive intervention by Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-PA), the chair of a powerful House Military Affairs Subcommittee. When the dust settled, the Army’s Chief Information Officer, Lt. Gen. Susan Lawrence, was moved to reassure him: “The Army deeply appreciates the MARS volunteer workforce, and recognizes all the assets they bring to the table,” the general said.

As this is being written four months later, Army MARS HQ has just acquired an adventurous new Chief and is setting out to restructure its leadership model, inaugurate a new two-way communications style with the rank-and-file and restore some of the organizational tools lost to past cost-cutting: Items as basic as disaster response ID for members and security clearances for leaders so they can be more fully aware of the auxiliary’s total mission. How’s that for starters?

**A Defense for All Amateur Radio**

Subscribers of *WorldRadio Online* may recall the name of Stephen G. Klinefelter, who figured so prominently in the April 2012 issue’s account of the WLT2K fiasco. He convinced the Pentagon’s cyber-defense chiefs that the benefits of amateur radio, not just MARS or Winlink, far outweigh any risk of enemy hacking.

Klinefelter, 61, *Photo A*, is a retired colonel with 31 years of uniformed service in the Signal Corps. Since 2007 he’s been a civilian hire in the responsible post of deputy operations officer at HQ Network Enterprise Technology Command. Tacked onto that busy job is overseeing the mostly autonomous Army MARS HQ.

With the concurrence of NETCOM’s commander, Major General Jennifer L. Napper, he determined after the WLT2K furor to give himself the Chief Army MARS post. That would avoid a leadership void following Jim Griffin’s retirement as Chief (2009-2012). Griffin was about to end a remarkable 55 years in government service.

**Quick Off the Mark**

Thanks to his central role untangling the WLT2K mess, Klinefelter pretty well understood how MARS works, and he’d spent hours on the phone calling to get key leaders across the country. This ex-colonel with the Ranger badge and parachute training didn’t just hit the ground running; it was clear he already had a Plan (which, after all, is what G3 officers do for a living).

The Plan included recruiting a retired officer with amateur radio experience to join the MARS HQ staff as fulltime MARS Program Officer. Nominations are welcome, but there’s no mad rush. MPO candidates no doubt will be looked over as potential future Chiefs.

“I’m going to put myself in as Chief until we get stabilized and everything is running well,” Klinefelter explained in a telephone interview. “For now it’s an issue of building up authority and confidence in the field. Until we can claim some success and people believe in our success I believe I have to do this.”

The “everything” on his list of initiatives is impressive:

- Drafting a MARS Charter (“I don’t like ad hoc decisions.”)
- Establishing a MARS Executive Governance Board (MEGB) composed of the 11 Region Directors to initiate and approve measures involving the membership (“There are lots of decisions that can be made at the volunteer level, like equipment and software preferences.”)
- Creating a Facebook page for round-trip communication (“I need a portal the members can have access to.”)
- Convening government-funded semiannual conferences of Region Directors held on a rotating basis in each region with local state directors attending and rank-and-file invited to one or two open sessions (“That will really foster a sense of togetherness, of teamwork and the importance of what we’re doing.”)

**A Question of Time**

But would he have time to bird-dog all these projects while also dealing with the war-fighting and other global issues on NETCOM’s G3 agenda — and now cyber-defense, too?

“The honest answer is no,” Klinefelter responded. “I’ll just have to divert the time. For the foreseeable future, policy issues and organizational issues and new initiatives need to be in my hands. But I know how to delegate and I have good help.”

Case in point: Early in December in one of his phone consultations he was told of the longstanding complaint about the lack of photo IDs. He responded without blinking an eye: “We can afford that.” Within a couple of days MARS HQ was researching the details. Three months later, in time for the announcement of his appointment as chief, the mechanism was already in place to process the cards. The chief’s first message alerted the troops to get their photos taken.

At NETCOM, another G3 civilian, Al Melito, serves as day-to-day liaison with MARS HQ. He is the chief of the Long-Haul Communications Branch, Army Telecommunications Division. It was Melito’s warmly-phrased New Year’s message to the
Chief Stephen Klinefelter's Self-Portrait: 'Intense'

By Bill Sexton, NIIN

When Stephen Klinefelter arrived for freshman week at Virginia Military Institute in 1970, cadets worked with typewriters and slide rules. By the time he graduated in 1974, they were using computers. Poised to become a second lieutenant, he sensed where the future was headed and chose Signal Corps over Infantry.

Today the Signal Corps operates most of the Army's computer systems and data networks as well as its space-age communications. Klinefelter, Photo B, spent 31 years in the thick of it before retiring in 2005. After a two-year break as a civilian contractor in Iraq, he resumed the military's intense pace as a civilian staffer carrying a full colonel's responsibilities at NETCOM headquarters, Ft. Huachuca, Arizona — his current base.

Along the way he was Chief of the Global Network Operations Center for the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) outside Washington DC; after that deputy commander and then commander of DISA European operations based in Stuttgart, Germany. Early he had served for varying periods with four mechanized infantry divisions and earned a master's degree in computer science at the Naval Postgraduate School. His last uniformed post was chief of IT (Information Technology) at the U.S. Military Academy.

He and his wife Heidi, a high school counselor, have two sons and a daughter in school.

One son is preparing for a career in medical mechanics with both medical and engineering degrees. Their other son is studying mechanical engineering. The Klinefelters' daughter chose business administration.

The Klinefelters met through the church they attended while Steve was stationed at Ft. Riley, Kansas.

How he came to choose a military career in the turbulent 1960s when so many of his peers were protesting the Vietnam War tells a lot about the man.

Before he was born, his father had been pulled out of college during World War II and sent overseas to General Alexander Hatch's Seventh Army, which was fighting its way across southern France in a pincers move against the German homeland.

A lieutenant up front, he was grievously wounded during the 1944 push to join up with the Third Army of Gen. George S. Patton. The elder Klinefelter spent three years in Walter Reed Hospital and emerged painfully disabled, but nevertheless held down a federal librarian's job at the Library of Congress. Steve was a small boy at the time.

"I had two reasons for going into the Army," the younger Klinefelter said in a telephone interview. "I wanted to do my father the honor. And I love working with people — particularly young people." A local paper in Sierra Vista, Arizona, site of Ft. Huachuca, carried this further quote: "Everyone has to be a leader in the Army, and the good ones know they are always serving something greater than themselves. It follows that you take an interest in people."

During his very first posting as a fresh lieutenant at Ft. Huachuca, Photo C, Klinefelter's platoon sergeant wondered if he would help out reviving his son's Boy Scout troop, the local paper reported. "Steve got hooked and his work helping young people has never stopped." At West Point, where he served two tours, he mentored younger cadets. In retirement he serves as a volunteer court-appointed special advo-

Photo B. Stephen Klinefelter spent 31 years in military service before retiring in 2005. (Courtesy of Stephen Klinefelter)

Photo C. Lt. Steve Klinefelter, left, found an unlikely "Elmer" (mentor) at his first command: An understanding NCO who became his lifelong friend. First Sergeant Charles Hedgpherd was a ham, KETNQO, and guided Klinefelter, who was in his early 20s, past the pitfalls lying in wait for a green company commander. That was in 1975. Klinefelter says they exchanged calls and visits regularly right up to Hedgpherd's death a few months ago. Both had retired in the Ft. Huachuca area. (Courtesy of Stephen Klinefelter)

cate for youngsters in troubled circumstances in addition to taking other young men into his home.

Klinefelter's initial intention had been to attend West Point, but while waiting for a response, Virginia Military Institute offered a full scholarship through the Reserve Officers Training Corps. He took it. Later he served two tours at the Academy: One as chief of the Academic Computing and Consultation Branch and later as Chief Information Officer — seven years in all.

Those were his favorite, he said. He hadn't been able to become a West Point cadet, but he got to teach them and some of their instructors in subjects as varied as ethics, officership and computer science.

 Asked for a one-word self-description, Klinefelter replied: "Intense." MARS leaders who participated in his telephone conferences during the winter would probably agree. He typically opens with a warning that he'll be speaking very quickly. And he does. These conferences could last an hour or more.

He revealed in his first message as Chief that before his marriage he obtained his Novice ham license, acquired a non-operating surplus military set (GRC-5a) and restored it to working order. "I did love to DX during my single years," he wrote. "Eventually I didn't even have enough time for that and gave [the rig] to a young man who was my 'Little Brother' in the Big Brother program." — Bill Sexton, NIIN
members — at the height of the WL2K melee — that first spoke of light at the end of the tunnel. “It was not all bad,” he wrote of the Internet firestorm. “It definitely let it be known that the Army MARS volunteer force is very much alive and kicking. That is a good thing.”

Klinefelter and Meltzo have strong partners at MARS HQ. A new Operations Chief, David McGinnis, has just replaced the longtime AAA90 incumbent Grant Hays upon the latter’s retirement. At age 43, McGinnis represents a generational handover on which the future of MARS depends as much as anything. He also is the first since the 1990s to advance from volunteer status to full-time HQ staff, having been Montana State Director and national training coordinator until December.

McGinnis left a 20-year career with the Missoula County Sheriff’s Department where he specialized in communications and statewide emergency response, notably in wildfires. Working in tandem with McGinnis, DeWayne (“Smitty”) Smith is the longtime Gateway Station Manager and Frequency Coordinator.

Understanding the Volunteer Mindset

Klinefelter brings an exceptional attribute to MARS: Unlike many career officers, he has solid experience dealing with volunteers (I mean “volunteer” in the civilian, not military sense), having participated in his church as a diocese-wide youth program executive. Since taking off the uniform he has also served as a volunteer, an active Court-Appointed Special Advocate.

Ops Chief David McGinnis: From Fire Lines to Ft. Huachuca

By Bill Sexton, NIIN

The Pentagon gave Army MARS two distinct jobs: Supporting active-duty military units and supporting civilian public agencies. The auxiliary’s new leadership brings together rare expertise for each of those tasks: Operations Chief David McGinnis on the civilian side, Chief Army MARS Stephen Klinefelter on the military.

McGinnis, 43, Photo D, came to Army MARS HQ after two decades as a Montana deputy sheriff — the last 10-or-so specializing in emergency services. As a senior deputy in Missoula County — which covers more land than the state of Rhode Island — he worked on emergency management planning, wide-area radio design and other technology for public safety.

One of the first assignments involved a P25 mixed-mode simulcast radio system with more than 60 repeaters plus associated microwave and other facilities, all linked to cover 2,600 square miles of rugged mountain country. With that under his belt he has been assisting other municipalities with UHF-VHF installations and served as frequency manager for the state’s public safety agencies.

As a rookie officer fresh out of college in 1992, he found himself assigned to the bomb squad that covered calls statewide. This involved working closely with the FBI and ATF. “My electronics and amateur radio background brought a unique skillset,” he said in an email interview. “I became proficient at defeating electronic booby traps and ignition systems.”

McGinnis worked big-scale emergencies, as well. “Wildfire is part of the landscape in Montana,” he said. “So working in a large incident environment was something most public safety people were taught and experienced throughout their careers. The Incident Command System came from wilderness firefighting in the West.”

The new operations chief grew up in Maplewood, New Jersey, within easy reach of New York City. Citizens Band was all the rage and it whetted his interest in ham radio. “The township civil defense group offered the (amateur radio) Novice course and test,” he recalled, “so you can say I got into EmComm at a very early age.” He was 14. In high school he opted for electronics courses.

Later McGinnis majored in sociology at the University of Montana with special emphasis on juvenile crime. A part-time job with the Sheriff’s Department while attending school led to full-time employment in 1992 and he’s been answering emergencies ever since — everything from marauding wildlife to hostage situations.

He said it wasn’t unusual to have national incident response teams working in his sprawling neighborhood. Even so, there’s one peril he’ll need to bone up on for the new job at Ft. Huachuca. Out in the Rockies, there wasn’t much opportunity to study hurricanes.

— Bill Sexton, NIIN

Photo D. David McGinnis, who learned about emergency response in 20 years with a Montana Sheriff’s Department, served as state director and then national training coordinator of MARS before joining the full-time MARS HQ staff. His experience in civil support ranges from bomb squad service to UHF-VHF system design, with frequent NiMS operation during Rocky Mountain wildfires. The metal building behind him in the distance is MARS HQ. That’s an M2 5- to 30-MHz antenna in the left background. (Courtesy of Juanita Portz)
Reshaping How MARS Governs Itself

Working through the confusion and anger touched off by last December’s WL2K debate gave new MARS Chief Klinefelter an intimate look into the auxiliary’s inner workings.

He told associates he became dissatisfied with two aspects of what he calls the auxiliary’s “governance.” One was the tendency to make ad hoc decisions, the other the absence of a charter to guide leaders in the field.

In the April 2 announcement of his appointment, the ex-colonel indicated he’d decided on a major restructuring to address these issues. The key points, in his words: “I want to organize the regional directors into a voting Army MARS Executive Governance Board (MGB) supported by special staff reporting through the board to the CAM.”

The intent is to foster:

- More participative policy development
- Information sharing about the unique aspects of each region and state
- Information sharing from the federal agencies directly to the board rather than have us filter it to you
- More transparent adjudication of membership issues

(CASA) in the youth protection project of the Arizona Supreme Court. That’s important. The traditional drill-ground approach to training and leadership in the fulftime Army isn’t comfortable for the mature professionals and problem-solvers that populate the auxiliary.

Clearly the ex-colonel enjoys the role of innovator. In that he’s accepted a handoff from a predecessor, Stu Carter, who was the first NETCOM staff to appoint himself Chief in a crisis situation. (He was also the first full-term appointee stuck with doing the job on a part-time basis). Carter made that move in 2006 upon learning of a proposal to eliminate MARS from the next fiscal year budget. His response was a stepped-up training program to meet the new DoDI 4650.02 requirements. He backed it up with aggressive publicity of Army MARS accomplishments. By the end of his three-year term, the new WL2K modality had firmly established MARS in the civil support business.

Steve Klinefelter’s challenge is to achieve the same level of high-visibility usefulness to the active Army. It’s just a personal opinion, but I’d say he got off to a terrific start rescuing WinLink last winter. Completing the task won’t be easy. In the nature of things, MARS would probably do its best work — we’re organized and we’re there — when everything else has fallen apart in some unforeseeable future catastrophe. Who wants to draft an Oorder for that?  

— Bill Sexton, N1IN

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