Session 1. May 7, 2020.

When our ARES Net activates it requires a formal net with an NCS. Nancy, Jo Ann and I have agreed upon a preamble and NCS Guidelines, the preamble which you heard this evening.

Also, the NCS now have a net preamble for activating the net in Special Session, Emergency Session or SKYWARN Session. We've already used the SKYWARN activation on Apr. 24 and 28.

We have all become comfortable checking into the net, so we were ready to update our procedures to include net activation.

The procedures we are developing here are based on experience with other ARES organizations, Traffic nets – that work emergencies - and operating in conjunction with the Texas State Operations Center (SOC).

I want us to develop our skills and operating procedures along the lines of currently used methods, such that an agency listening to our net would recognize the methods and terminology we are using. Furthermore, this will train each of us to be able to operate effectively on other nets.

Please pay attention to the words and phrases used in the preamble; they are chosen to fit with standard operating practices.

A few I want to emphasize;

When operating on the HF bands, you should ask if the frequency is busy before starting a QSO or net. However, on a repeater (which has a control operator) it is not appropriate to ask if the freq is in use. But rather you should ask if the repeater is in use. Or, in the case of the ARES net, it is scheduled with the approval of the control operator, therefore the NCS is free to open the net at net time. If the repeater is in use, the NCS should politely ask the QSO to conclude or move;

The Net Control Station or NCS or just Net Control are the proper phrases. Please refrain from using "net control operator" and do not use "net controller";

But remember, we are all learning and developing; something I've never been able to do without making mistakes. So, no big deal if you slip up or get confused and don't say the correct words or phrases. But try to pick up these habits as we develop.

Next training session will work on our net activation call-up plan.

Session 2. May 14, 2020

I had planned tonight's training to be a working session putting together a call-up plan for ARES activation. But, I think we will build on last month's proper terminology and procedures. In the mean time, give some thought to how a call-up plan might best work.

As we discussed last week, we have implemented new net preambles for both the training nets and special session nets. I had thought about special training just for the NCS and soon realized we all need to participate in NCS training regardless if we ever call a net or not.

It was brought to my attention, last week, that I did not explain net procedures very well, so let's see if I can get a passing grade tonight.

Our two type nets are very different. A training net is called at a relaxed pace that allows the net operation more freedom in who says what when. Still under the control of the NCS – always, but after all we are hear to learn, enjoy and contribute.

The NCS always, for training or special session nets should acknowledge the station checking in. Otherwise the station does not know if he was heard and may continue to check in, or just take his ball and go home.

Now, the NCS will give criteria for checking in and all stations should follow that. On training nets it is nice to have a short greeting between NCS and the station checking in. We want to have an inviting net, just not a silly one.

But a greeting of good evening, you sound good or similar is nice. As well, all stations should also provide what NCS asked for in the preamble, for instances your call phonetically and traffic or QST you may have.

A special session net may be more strict. If the net is working an incident that requires minimum clutter, then stations checking in should limit there comments to those requested by the NCS.

An example may be; the NWS has activated SKYWARN and our skywarn coordinator has been asked to get severe WX reports from a certain area in Upshur county. The NCS only wants those stations with a valid report to check in. We all have the urge to say we have rain and wind, but if they do not meet the criteria being asked for, we need to sit on it.

And if you do have a report, give it and only it concisely (of coarse your call always).

Jo Ann always tells the stations on the 7290 Traffic Net – you never know who is listening, so behave so that a passing listener is impressed. We are volunteers offering our services but also we want to enjoy our hobby as we use it to help. Being professional actually makes ARES more enjoyable as we are proud to be a part of it.

Any questions or comments. Remember there are no dumb questions, we're all learning here.

Session 3. May 21, 2020

I asked last week that you give some thought to a call-up plan for activating the ARES net in special sessions. Thus far we have simply called members on the phone.

Problem is we don't seem to answer our phones regularly anymore. Some have suggested text messages are more likely to be read than a phone call answered. Others have suggested an app that can be installed on smart phones.

So, along those lines I would like to answer the questions;

1. How can members be reached quickest?

2. Does everyone have a method by which they can even be reached quickly?

3. Do you keep your phone on at night and can you hear it?

4. Is there a non-network dependent method to alert members?

5. Do we need to use a call-up for the regular Thur ARES Training net?

6. Are all members agreeable to being called up?

Survey Results;

AB5X   No phone, no text, but yes on email;
K5GDM   Text or email;
KA5AZK A-Tone;
KG5UGY Ring tone specific;
KT8TOR   Text, email, and have your radio on;
N5TQI   A-Tone;
W5QZB   Agrees with previous;
KJ5ZW   Email, text.

The group will need to address this again at a latter date. For now we will stick with phone and maybe add email.

Session 4. May 28, 2020

Traffic Handling. I invite everyone to participate in handling ARRL radiogram traffic. We practiced this awhile back so dust off your memories and let's try passing some more on the net.

I hope to accomplish two things with this. First, to refresh our skills using the ARRL radiogram and second, to send missing-you messages to our members who have not checked in for a while.

Jo Ann has written a message for us to send to our absent members. She used an HXCE handling instruction which means the delivering station is requested to get a response form the recipient and report the date and time the message was delivered.

The delivering station will then write up a reply message for the recipient and send it, on the ARES net, back to the EC.   The recipient may want to say something like, "I have rig problems but will be back on soon", as well as to report the date and time delivered.

Use an ARRL radiogram form, if you need to, so that you know what is coming next as Jo Ann sends you the traffic. Remember in the message heading, the name of the blocks are not normally sent, so you need to know what is coming next.

I invite everyone to take one or more of these messages for both practice and so we can quickly reach our missing members. This is "book traffic" which means everyone copies the same heading and text. The only unique parts are the address and message number.

Do not worry about being rusty or making a mistake. The main reason we meet here every Thursday is to learn and practice the operation of our stations. I can't seem to learn without a few mistakes – after all most of us learn more from our mistakes, so making them in training is far better than making them when we need to handle traffic in an emergency or critical situation.

Turn back to KT8TOR so she can work the traffic.

1 for Jefferson
1 for Big Sandy
1 for Ore City
4 for Gilmer
1 for Kilgore
1 for Longview
1 for Tyler

AG5FJ, Joe in Jefferson,
K5KYN, Gorden in Big Sandy,
K5QPL, Dub in Ore City,
K8EFI, Rachel in Gilmer,
K8KP, Joe in Gilmer,
KG5PZR, Mary Jane in Kilgore,
KG5SAV, Paul in Gilmer,
KG5WEB, Jason in Longview,
N5LFH, Greg in Gilmer,
WA4KKO, Ray in Tyler.

Session 5. June 4, 2020

EC receives replies from last week's missing you messages.

After replies are finished; I hope we can encourage folks to check in on Thursday's net. It is important for several reasons; to become comfortable on the radio, to get to know one another, check out station equipment and hear and participate in the training.

As we go forward, there will be minimum participation requirements established. Hopefully we can make our ARES group the type organization folks want to be a part of, as we are all here of our own free will. In order for the ARES group to function, the members must participate – and as I just said that will only be because they want to.

We will discuss minimum participation and call up more as we continue our on the air training.

Session 6. June 11, 2020

Net activation call-up method.

Our discussion during the May 21st net, regarding net activation call-up method produced roughly these preference results;

5 email
3 text
3 A-tone
0 phone.

So, what are we doing for call-up today? Phone of coarse!

Now, A-Tone requires hardware, having your radio on (but muted) and within ear shot, but text message and email seem to be preferable.

Any discussion? Please give your call and wait for net control to pick you up.

I don't have a smart phone so it is difficult for me to text even the simplest single text to a single person.

I can email the group. I wonder how many of you can read email on your smart phones?

When I send emails, very few reply. I have no idea if anything I email is received. I've noticed changes to the roster are not always being used and I wonder if it is because my roster update email was never received.

I want to complement Bill W5QZB for doing what Nancy KT8TOR suggested, when bad WX is about – listen to the repeater, which is what he did to report hail last Tuesday evening.

Session 7. June 18, 2020

Last week we talked about how to activate Upshur County ARES. After talking about this for awhile it became apparent either text or email were our best options.

George KG5UGY offered to text the members once the EC or Assistant EC calls him. He has a special ring-tone for calls from either. He then will send a text to the other ARES members which states "Upshur County ARES ACTIVATION".

Only the EC or Assistant EC activates ARES. If any other member sees the need for activation, he/she should contact the EC or AEC.

When you receive the text message, you should immediately (according to your circumstances) listen to the Upshur County Repeater for additional instructions.

A typical activation might involve a SKYWARN net due to severe weather. Listen for criteria to check in. This might be specific, like minimum reporting criteria or just high wind reports, hail or whatever. Often we take general check-ins during SKYWARN just so we know where we could get reports from, if needed.

Any discussion on this plan? Please go through NCS to make comments, and Net Control will check you for your comment and then turn it to me for a reply.

While this process is not needed for tonight's discussion, it is good training for working an incident where this is the required process. Net communications should almost always go through NCS.

Session 8. June 25, 2020

I would like to talk about minimum member participation requirements. While ARES is an ARRL program and sets standards for ARES members, we have to adapt those to the needs of our local ARES group.

We have started training sessions on our Thursday evening nets, are participating in SKYWARN training and have had traffic handling training.

We also have trained and practiced checking into a net and procedures related to net operation.

Now, this may not include all the aspects of training that ARRL specifies for ARES, but I feel it is appropriate for Upshur County ARES.

My concern however, is those stations that are not participating in our training. As EC, I want to keep our training in an adult learning format where it is enjoyable and non-threatening, and as such, easy to participate in.

But, bottom line is, ARES is a volunteer member program for those that wish to **participate** in public service using their radio equipment and operating skills.

I realize I preaching to the choir, because those listening are the ones already participating, but I need your help to encourage those not participating to join us.

I have mailed 2020 membership cards to those who have participated during my few months as EC. In 2021 I hope we can add pictures to your member cards.

In 2021 all members who participated during my watch will receive a 2021 card and be included in the ARES Roster.

But, going forward minimum participation requirements will be used to determine membership. Visitors and occasional check-ins will always be welcome, after all one needs to check us out before they know if they want to join.

I have some idea of what minimum participation needs to be, but I want your input as to what you think it should be, after all, you are the ones participating.

In a latter training session we will discuss everyone's ideas and my hopes for minimum participation.

Session 9. July 2, 2020

I want to talk about our ARES Kit this evening. I don't mean an ARES Go Kit, that is another topic.

An ARES Kit is the items, documents and equipment you use to check into the ARES net and use during an activation.

Obviously, it includes your fixed station radio and hand held if you use one and a copy of your FCC license. But also there are a few more items you should have available when operating in ARES.

First, you need a way to be alerted of ARES activation. For now, we have settled on text and email notification. I hope, in the future, we can develop an activation procedure that does not rely on infrastructure.

Second, it is good to have an up to date ARES Roster. You may well need to have at hand contact info and location of the other stations.

Third, operator manuals for the equipment used for ARES. If you know every aspect of your equipment including how to set power, tone, freq and offset, maybe you don't need them, but most of us do.

Fourth, it is a good idea to have your ARES ID card with you. We have not deployed yet, but when you do operate mobile or portable, you may well find yourself in need of ID.

Fifth, a log book and or journal and pen or pencil with which traffic, notes or instructions may be recorded. You paperless types can adapt this to your electronic storage as you wish, but I like paper copies – they don't erase as easily.

Sixth, ARRL radiograms and Traffic Handling Training book. We do not handle enough traffic on our training nets to stay proficient, so we need to have these handy.

Seventh, if you do not have the ITU phonetics memorized keep a card handy.

There are many other items that probably should be included as well. I will leave that to each of you to decide what you need for your particular kit.

If anyone needs Time Conversion, ITU Phonetics or other items I handed our during this training a couple of years ago, let me know and I'll get them to you.

Session 10. July 9, 2020

Purpose of Upshur County ARES. A little about the county;

Upshur County is considered a rural county having a 2010 census population of less than 40,000 living in approximately 600 square miles.

The population density is 60 people per square mile compared to Dallas County with almost 4000 people per square mile.

The county does not have a hospital, however it does have an emergency care center now.

Red Cross serving the county is head quartered in Tyler, Smith County.

So, as ARES serving this county we have a unique situation compared to more populated counties.

Going forward, I want to see us develop our capabilities and train ourselves to provide a service tailored to our rural county.

We already have a coordinator to the NWS SKYWARN program and have began to support it with ARES activations.

I hope we can grow our capabilities and support of this program.

As well, I hope we will identify county and city needs for which we are able to train ourselves to support.

For next weeks training, I want each of you to identify communications needs in the county that we can train ourselves to support.

We will then compile and prioritize those needs to identify ones we should train to support.

Session 11. July 16, 2020

Last week we talked about Upshur County demographics regarding a rural county.

I asked you to consider how our ARES team can train to provide a communications of value in this setting.

I intended to discuss your ideas this week, but I think we will take another week for you to think about these some more.

Remember, the request is for everyone to think about the needs a rural county may have for emergency communications, that is the type an ARES team can provide.

Be specific if you can of who, what and how. For example, is there a need for communications, that we could help with, if one of the VFD in the county is battling a wild fire?

Remember, our support to the community is for communications only. We are not trained (at least as an ARES team) as first responders. We never want to interfere with paid or trained personnel. We never want to become part of the problem.

We had an offer a couple of years ago to set up an ARES station in the Gilmer Fire Station, but we need to train and operate some exercises before we pursue further.

Please put some effort into this. I intend us to build our continuing training on these ideas.

Session 12. July 23, 2020

Input from members on training needs and support we can provide.

List responses. Turn net back to NCS. (that's me) ask for responses with each going through NCS.
Expect doubling. Explain this is normal and something NCS and all stations must learn to deal with. In an emergency, we will not always be able to use role call.

Describe public service events and emergency activation.

Public Service: Bike Race, 5k and 10k races, Yamboree, parades, etc..

Emergency Activation: SKYWARN, evacuation shelters, main-stream communications disabled, first responder support, disaster communications, etc..

How many are willing to participate in public service activities and emergency activations?

For Red Cross support, we can establish a contact with Smith County ARES to support Red Cross when serving Upshur County.

For SKYWARN it would be nice if we could establish a contact in neighboring counties, Wood and Smith often send us WX.

Upshur County has an Office of Emergency Management. The Emergency management Coordinator probably will be our contact. However, I do not want to approach him until we establish and demonstrate are capabilities.

Once we work our way through the basic training, that we are working on now, and determine how many of us are willing to participate in communications during an event, we will consider offering our services.

Session 13. July 30, 2020

Last week we talked about activities in which Upshur ARES might provide communications support.

Forest Service, VFD and Upshur County Emergency Operations were noted. However, we also may help in local parades, foot or bike races, Yamboree and other non-emergency activities. It was also noted we need incident specific training, after we master our basic training.

However, the basic training we need to complete first is appropriate to any and all of these functions. Therefore, lets continue with the basics and that which we can offer will become clearer as we progress.

The most important aspect of Training is that you participate. Those who are here this evening are not the ones I'm referring to. I need all of you to help me reach our non-participating members.

Some may need help in order to get back on the air, or may have personal issues or may no longer be able to participate. I want to us to encourage anyone who may wish to participate to do so, or help them to do so.

Those who can no longer participate will not be included in 2021 Roster. I know that seems a while off, but it will be upon us before we know it.

For our training to be effective, we all need to participate in it. So, our first order of business is to include everyone who wishes to be a part of Upshur ARES.

Our Thursday evening Training is not exclusive, everyone is welcome to study on their own, but we all need at least to participate in this training and actual radio operation.

Reading about how to do it is fine, but no substitute for doing it.

Gary K5GDM sent me a link to what appears to be an excellent video training for NCS, by W3GWM, Eastern PA SM. You can search U-Tube videos for him, or contact Gary or myself for the link.

I had not scanned it before sending out this month's Roster or I would have included it.

I did not view the entire video (over an hour long) but watched sections and found it to be worthwhile for both NCS and participating stations.

I appreciate Gary sending this link.

Session 14. Aug. 6, 2020

Last week I asked for help contacting our members that are not participating. If you contacted someone, please give your call (only). Then I'll come back to you for information on those you contacted.

Well, I've had some luck hearing from folks. Please take the opportunity to contact any of our missing members if you have it. The minimum requirement for Upshur ARES for 2021 will be to check into the Thursday evening training nets. Participation in exercises or incidents is not required. I'd rather you know how and not show up than to show up and not know how.

Next week I want each station to give some information when checking in.

1. Type of emergency power your station has,

2. Type antenna in use,

3. Transmit power of your station,

4. Do you have a mobile 2M station or 2M HT,

5. Did your receive Aug ARES Roster.

So, if you are uncertain about any of these items, please find out before next week.

The purpose of this exercise is two fold; 1st for me to update station info on everyone and 2nd to introduce us to sending reports to NCS or other stations. I suggest you make a note, if needed, so you can simply read it without having to remember all the items.

Session 15. Aug. 13, 2020

Response to last week's questions.

1. Type of emergency power your station has,

2. Type antenna in use,

3. Transmit power of your station,

4. Do you have a mobile 2M station,

5. Did your receive Aug ARES Roster.

Use Roster to collect data.

That's it for this weeks training, thanks to all that participated.

Session 16. Aug. 20, 2020

I want to review our ARES Kit this evening. I still don't mean an ARES Go Kit, that is another topic.

We have already talked about our ARES kit a few weeks ago. But, having those items at hand is a key part of our stations being ready for an exercise or activation.

Obviously, it includes your fixed station radio and hand held if you use one and a copy of your FCC license and ARES membership card. Also a few more items you should have available when operating in ARES.

Now, we have settled on TEXT message and email notification for activation. You need to keep your phone or device you use for receiving the alert near you at all times. I am not comfortable with using infrastructure for alerts, but on the list of needs our team has, a non-infrastructure means is a ways off.

You need an up to date ARES Roster. I keep a printed copy in my ARES notebook. But, you are free to use whatever device you like. Just give some thought to dead batteries, extended time without power, electronic failure and such when you decide what to use.

Keep operator manuals for the equipment used for ARES at hand. If you know every aspect of your equipment including how to set power, tone, freq and offset, maybe you don't need them, but I do.

A log book and or journal and pens or pencils with which traffic, notes or instructions may be recorded. You paperless types can adapt this to your electronic storage as you wish, but I like paper copies – they don't erase as easily.

ARRL radiograms and Traffic Handling Training book are needed. We do not handle enough traffic on our training nets to stay proficient, so we need to have these handy. We are going to work more on traffic handling in the future. If you do not have Jo Ann's Traffic Handling Training book, please contact her and she will send you one free of charge. You'll need in coming weeks of training.

If you do not have the ITU phonetics memorized, then keep a card handy. They actually are easy to memorize if you use them regularly.

There are many other items that probably should be included as well. I will leave that to each of you to decide what you need for your particular kit. As a matter of fact, next week I want everyone to have a list of items in their ARES kit. I'll once again ask each station to list the items in their kit as you check in.

This again trains us to compile information and pass it on the radio. Also, it allows everyone to hear what others have thought of for an ARES kit.

If anyone needs Time Conversion, ITU Phonetics or other items I handed our during this training a couple of years ago, let me know and I'll get them to you.

Session 17. Aug. 27, 2020

Last week we talked about ARES kit, that is the items you have at hand when operating on the ARES net.

I had intended that we each report our individual ARES kit contents on the net, so we can get ideas from one another, as well as train on sending reports.

However, let's take another week to work on our reports and send them on next week's net. We've had a busy week with the tropical storms. Maybe I'm the only one not ready, kind of embarrassing for the EC, but it happens - maybe I'm not alone.

Does anyone need me to review the basics for an ARES kit?

Does anyone need handouts or Traffic Handling Training book?

Questions or comments?

Session 18. Sep. 3, 2020

My ARES Kit;

1. 2M fixed station, 2M mobile and 2M HT
2. FCC License
3. ARES member card
4. Drivers License
5. Roster
6. Notebook
7. Pencils and pens (in pencil bag)
8. ARRL radiogram forms
9. Traffic Handling Training Book
10. Upshur county map
11. Texas map
12. Gilmer map
13. ARES District Eight county list
14. ITU phonetics
15. Repeater Directory
16. Time conversion
17. Band Plan
18. Operators manuals
19. ARES documents and Training Log
20. Loose leaf binder
21. Small desk set

a. clear tape
b. masking tape
c. mini binder clips (paper clips)
d. small stapler
e. small hole punch
f. pencil sharpener
g. ruler
h. simple calculator
i. clip board
j. other items to suit individual needs

Session 19. Sep. 10, 2020

Signal strength measurements this evening are in support of improving the repeater coverage.

 Our repeater came on the air one year ago today!

The Upshur County Repeater is height challenged. The tower is at 347 ft. (above MSL) on a 65" tower, so elevation above MSL is 412 ft.. We currently are using a Ringo Ranger which is two phased 5/8 sections used to lower the angle of radiation.

Jerry WA5OKO has donated a new DB224-E which is a 21 ft. broadband, vertically polarized VHF antenna designed specifically for repeater operation. It has four phased folded dipoles arranged for omni-directional coverage.

We are working on an arranging an antenna party in the next several days.

We also have been donated 160 ft. of Andrews 7/8" hard line with type-N connectors. We are on the look out for an opportunity to move the antenna and repeater to a site where we can improve height using the hard line.

Session 20. Sep. 17, 2020

Last week I asked everyone to think about a possible meeting date/time in the October time frame.

I have in mind an ARES meeting where the agenda has several items we can't do over the air;

1. Take a group photo
2. Take individual ID photos for 2021 member badges
3. View our ARES kits (please bring with you)
4. Hand out any documents and/or print any you may need
5. Workshop for antenna and equipment check out – antennas and rigs you want checked
6. Not least of all, fellowship and yarn swapping.

I suggest we meet at my QTH where we have the equipment and printers we may need.

We'll have refreshments and suggest Thursday evening in place of on the air meeting.

I'll also have our past training notes, even though they will lack the on the air content, printed for those who want them.

I also want to go over my 2021 plan for ARES. We have been working on the basics of net procedure and I want us to move on to the next level. However, I'm tailoring Upshur ARES around the participants and the needs of our rural county.

I need, at that meeting your input on what Upshur County ARES should become.

I want to discuss minimum participation requirements, SKYWARN, local ARES exercises and discuss who might be willing to deploy.

Session 21. Sep. 24, 2020

Last week we discussed an eyeball ARES meeting. The consensus was a Thursday evening in place of our on-the-air training session. I suggest October 22, 2020 in my shop. Let's plan on meeting around 6:30PM.

I'll publish an agenda latter, but it will basically follow the items we discussed last week. So, please put 10-22 into your schedule.

This evening lets continue our basic training applicable to whatever we eventually plan to do in terms of public service.

We have yet to determine how many of us will be willing to deploy, once we reach the training level to do so. But, regardless even if you are willing to only operate from home QTH, this evening's training still applies.

When we are involved in communications support for a third party, it is our responsibility to treat any information we pass on their behalf as private or restricted information. Even though transmissions by an Amateur Radio station can not be encrypted, so anyone monitoring can hear our message, that is beyond our control (FCC regulation).

Within our control, we must never disclose any information we pass on behalf of an agency or entity we are helping to the news media, gossips or especially not to social media!! We must never pass on information we hear from news media, hear-say and especially not social media!!

We are not public relations for those we help, it is not our place to talk about what we know, or think we know. The agency will take care of releasing whatever public information they wish.

Within practical limits, we should also document as much of the information passed as possible. Formal request should be written and if leaving our immediate ARES group put into ARRL radiogram form.

Now at times, the situation may not lead itself to formal communications, but be sure that is the case and not that we are just being lazy.

We should document from/to, date, time and any other details pertinent to the communication. Remember the items we are to have in our ARES kit.

These "keep your head down and do your job" rules apply to all third party Amateur Radio communications. However, the agencies we eventually are allowed to assist, will likely have other requirements which we will need to learn and abide by.

We, never, ever should become a burden or hinder in anyway First Responders or agencies we are trying to help. At the end of the day, the agencies are the ones responsible for public safety.

Session 22. Oct. 1, 2020

First, a reminder that we plan an eyeball ARES meting in my shop Oct. 22, 2020 at 6:30PM.

Please bring you ARES kit to show off. Hopefully we also will be able to look at rigs and or antennas that are portable enough to bring.

This evening I want to talk about the Net Control Station. I thought early on, that this would be reserved for those who wish to become an NCS. But then I decided that we all need to hear what the NCS is doing in the back ground while calling a net.

Of coarse we are all familiar with the net preamble that the NCS starts the net with. After awhile I'm sure most of us don't even hear what it says anymore, but new stations or stations from other agencies will learn from the preamble how our net operates.

For example, some nets require membership prior to checking in. Ours of coarse does not. Some nets require stations have specific information before checking in. Ours does not on training nets, unless otherwise announced, but may during SKYWARN or other actual operational nets.

To minimize confusion, we use a roll call for training nets. So the NCS is using the roster in the back ground, keeping a log of those present for the net. During an actual operational net, the NCS has an addition task of hearing, copying and recording calls of stations randomly checking in.

This is a time when the NCS may put a stipulation on which stations are to check in. Bear this in mind and give only your call, but slowly and articulate well, plus whatever the NCS asked for. When giving information, be precise – no extra verbiage, and again articulate well.

The NCS not only is having to copy your info, but record the time and put it where it can easily be found when next the NCS needs it.

Any extra burden on sorting out stations calling or lengthy transmissions make this task more difficult.

During operational nets, please listen even more carefully than during training to be sure you only transmit when the NCS asks for info you have. Do not give "clear weather" reports; that is to say don't state the obvious or transmit other non related information to the task being worked. Now, if the NCS asks for clear weather reports you, of coarse, may proceed.

The NCS is responsible for maintaining order on the net. If relays are needed, or a communication in process is not successful then the NCS is to take charge and attempt to successfully complete the task at hand.

Often the NCS needs stations on the net to speak up if a relay is possible from their station. Just your call and "relay" or "recheck" and wait for the NCS to acknowledge your station. Then give your information after the NCS acknowledges you.

The NCS should have a strong, clear signal. After all the NCS is in charge of the net and all other stations on the net are looking to the NCS for instructions. If during the coarse of a net, the NCS is no longer making the repeater, then it is appropriate for another NCS to offer to pick up the net. The first NCS is credited for calling the net on that occasion with an assist from the second NCS.

As communicators, we need to not give up. We don't need "can't copy so that's that". That may end up being the case, but we should only let it be so after we try other methods.

While performing all the above tasks, the NCS is also remembering to be courteous and polite while still being friendly and welcoming. We are Amateurs, but we want to sound like "professional amateurs". We need not sound like a MARS but we should sound like we are trained and respectful. We never know who is listening to our nets.

Session 23. Oct. 8, 2020

Importance of ARES Training.

Probably the single most important aspect of ARES Training is to check into Thursday evening nets. I've heard it expressed that small arms proficiency is a perishable skill, well so is radio communications.

Several reason exist making this true;
1.   being comfortable operating and knowing your radio operates,
2.   knowing the procedures for net operation,
3.   knowing the stations who participate and their capabilities,
4.   absorbing the "common knowledge" that is hearing the same instructions and information as the rest of the team,
5.   staying current on ARES related topics,
6.   and probably most importantly the discipline to meet the requirements of our volunteer service.

Starting in January 2021 Upshur ARES members need to check into 60% of the Thursday evening training nets to remain members. Case by case proxy check ins will still be acceptable as long as the EC or AEC are notified before the missed session. For now the requirement will be applied to the entire year.

Keep in mind however, if we become associated with an agency the requirement may be applied biannually.

This will be the primary requirement for the foreseeable future. The training we do during these evening nets needs to be heard and practiced. Individual training is always a good thing, but not required.

One last requirement for membership is to participate in Upshur ARES exercises. This does not include exercises outside Upshur county. If you wish to participate, as an individual in outside exercises, that's fine, but not required. Hopefully a time will come when we will, as Upshur ARES, be able to participate, but for now we need to simply participate in Upshur ARES exercises. If you're thinking what exercises…. Well, we will soon have our first.

I do not expect anyone to deploy that is not comfortable doing so. Fixed stations can and are very usefully to those who deploy. Deploying is a long ways off for all of us at this time. We have not even started training for that possibility yet and certainly must do so before we contemplate it.

Nor is there any requirement that you participate in actual incidents. Obviously that is for what we train; but, I'd rather you be trained to participate and not; than to **not** be trained and try to do so.

One last item concerning Upshur ARES participation, although obvious, to be a member a station must be able to communicate with the Upshur County Repeater. Hopefully the coverage of the repeater will continue to improve, but each station is responsible for making sure their station can make the Thursday evening net.

As we approaching deployment, this will entail a more complex issue, but for now one only needs to ensure their station can make the repeater during training.

Session 24. Oct. 15, 2020

Everyone who plans to participate in Upshur ARES in 2021 should attend our in-person ARES meeting October 22 at 6:30 PM in my shop. We will take pictures for our 2021 badges at that meeting.

Among other agenda items, the most important is WA5OKO will be set up to test equipment and antennas. Please bring any you want checked. Also, don't forget your ARES kit to show off. This is not an inspection of your kit, its just to share ideas with one another for ARES kits.

Which leads us into this evening's training. As we continue to prepare ourselves for public service, we need to improve our ability to communicate. Communication involves more than just talking. I talk to myself all the time, but never have been able to communicate with myself….

What I'm doing right now isn't really communicating. It's talking or preaching or monologue or some such thing, even maybe hopefully training; but it is not communicating. Communication begins before, or regardless, of the mode used to move thoughts from one person to another. We may communicate face to face, over the phone, over the radio or even in more subtle ways.

However it is that we communicate, it requires two individuals. One is conveying a thought, but the communication only occurs when the other is involved and UNDERSTANDS what is being said. Any part of that missing and no communication occurs.

Now, add radio communication to that process and the process only becomes more difficult. Remember the subtle ways I mentioned? Some of those are lost when the radio removes facial and body expressions. Or add the internet (email) which then removes all expression, even tone of voice and lighthearted expression.

But, back to radio communications. So, the radio already complicates communications – not helps it. So what happens when the radio communication is adversely affected by propagation, noise or interference? Well, you needn't answer that, it was rhetorical.

So our task as ARES is two fold; 1st learn the methods to improve communications face to face (that is learn terms, procedures, radiogram format and other tools used in emergency communications to accurately move information from one station to the other) and 2nd improve or ensure our radio, antenna and repeater provide reliable radio "communications" so the result is an effective ARES communication.

Both of these tasks are ongoing. We don't talk about them a couple of times and move on. I read somewhere the difference in an amateur and a professional is simple. "The amateur practices a task until he can do it correctly, the professional practices a task until he can never do it incorrectly".

In this case, we as Amateurs, need to emulate the professionals. Sometimes you hear this referred to as; one can do it in one's sleep, or with with eyes shut, or it's second nature.

We have been working on the first task for several weeks now – and will continue to do so; but, we also need to start more seriously on the second – and hence the meeting next week.

Session 24. Oct. 22, 2020

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ARES Meeting
October 22, 2020

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1. This is the first time we have met since I was appointed EC, or was the slowest runner in the herd and got ate.…I really want to tell you how much I appreciate you all putting up with me and the work you are doing to prepare Upshur ARES for operation.

2. For those of you who have served in other ARES groups or participated in RACES you may wonder about my training method. Just to be clear, I'm not off the reservation but rather have a slightly different agenda than the big city organizations. We have several specific needs I'm trying to address; 1. new to Ham radio members, 2. the needs of a large but rural county and 3. contributors that have different levels of participation to offer.

3. In the big metro areas, most ARES interfaces with segments of FEMA, Homeland Security or other Federal and state agencies. Most use the ICS, Incident Command System. They also train almost like CERT teams where they do more than radio communications. Nothing wrong with that, I congratulate them. But, I don't think we have a pressing need nor the type members who want to train for that service.

4. I have some problems even with those groups. Unless, like some of them are, they have members who already serve in as First Responders or members of government EOCs I see liability issues. Much more training is required to operate effectively in those environments than what I feel is appropriate to ask of you.

5. Those groups train on and use the ICS213 form. This ICS form is an integral part of the system and allows unlimited text, attachments and sensitive information to be passed. Now, as long as it is used on digital modes the first couple of items are not too important; however, the passing of sensitive information on Ham Radio (even digital) compromises the integrity of the message contents, I'm surprised we have not seen problems already.

6. For Upshur County ARES, I see us developing into an assets that agencies can use outside the ICS. Even though we may become involved in some aspect of and even train on some aspects ICS, I think our focus should be on pure communications and even present ourselves as that and not wannabe first responders.

7. So, where are we going? I think in 2021 we will have trained and had sufficient exercises to approach an interested public service function, perhaps the Gilmer Fire Department. Before we do so, we need to ensure we are capable both technically and operationally to provide assistance. This includes the willingness to participate in drills or incidences for which we are needed.

8. Not to be left out, SKYWARN is already functional in Upshur ARES. We are fortunate to have Gary K5GDM as our SKYWARN Coordinator. I want to encourage participation by all ARES members in this function. This is an easy opportunity to provide public service

with very little additional training other than a Storm Spotters Class and our weekly ARES training.

9. For the rest of this evening I want us to;
    1. Take our ID photos
    2. Take group photographer
    3. View our ARES kit – you may make comments about you kit as you wish
    4. I have hand outs for you to take, look through them and take what you want
    5. Check out your rigs and equipment
    6. While doing all of this swap a yarn or two and visit – **it is an important part of our training**