

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

# Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 40, NO. 1



## OPLAN Update

# Messenger

Sharing information to reach a vision



## Lending a hand

Army Capt. Roderick Brown and Army 1st Sgt. Tommy J. Kaiser of the Shreveport MEPS, adjust the serving tent to increase air flow. Learn more about how the station reached out to the community through the Feeding Allendale Project. Page 16



## Houston adapts

Many people, including the Houston MEPS staff had to adapt after Hurricane Harvey slammed the city. In addition to dealing with the disruption the storm and flooding wreaked on their personal lives, MEPS members pitched in to help others. Page 12

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## Messenger

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USMEPCOM recently achieved two important milestones.

We hosted Stephanie Miller, director of accession policy (and my boss), for a demonstration of USMIRS 1.1. Shortly before that, the command received its best score ever on the Partnership for Public Service's list of Best Places to Work in the Federal Government.

The USMIRS 1.1 demonstration at the Milwaukee MEPS was a giant leap forward toward paperless processing.

The demonstration was a first for USMEPCOM. It was an important day as we proved the new system works and we can proceed with plans to expand it to all MEPS and all the services.

The USMIRS 1.1 upgrade is a joint effort among USMEPCOM, Defense Digital Service and DevMynd.

So what does this do for us?

The existing USMIRS user interface is more than 20 years old and is based on a much older main frame computer. The learning curve for the legacy system is extremely steep. It takes users years to master it.

USMIRS 1.1 will allow a brand new user to sit down at a work station and almost immediately know how to accomplish the task at hand. It is designed to provide user feedback to correct and prevent data errors. It can even show the user the actual progress of a task.

The USMIRS demonstration lets real users see how a well-designed

## Commander's Commentary

application can operate. Users know they are working with a real, government-approved, cloud-based system.

This and other demonstrations show that future users at the MEPS are eager for a new, easy-to-use efficient system.

Although this version of USMIRS 1.1 is what is called a minimum viable product, which means it shows the program's most basic capabilities, its functionality clearly shows the promise it holds. It provides some level of functionality of every area covered by the legacy USMIRS including processing, medical and testing. Test users' most common question is "When are you coming back and when will we get this?"

The program's development has seen unmatched user involvement and feedback. Feedback will be crucial to "getting it right" as the USMIRS 1.1 project moves toward system production release in April 2019.

Our partnership with Defense Digital Service uses Agile Sprint development methods. End users will be able to use the prototype system and give feedback directly to the program manager and developers. Users will see their recommendations put in place in as little as two weeks. The feedback and response loop will continue throughout the program's development, ensuring users' voices are heard and heeded.

We are planning several milestones in the program. The first three months will be at the Milwaukee MEPS for Air Force applicants. After that we will add an additional MEPS and Army and Navy applicants. At nine months, we will add Marine Corps and Coast Guard applicants. At the one-year mark, we will expand the program to a third MEPS. From there, we will receive the completed system and deploy it to the entire command.

The march toward all-digital, paperless processing represents risk and uncertainty as we head into the

cloud. Perseverance and relying on our incredible team make this an exciting time to be in the accessions business supporting our nation's all volunteer force.

One of the reasons I am excited and optimistic about proceeding with USMIRS 1.1 is the incredible teamwork that produced our unprecedented ranking on the Partnership for Public Service's list of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government.

We are ranked 133rd out of 309 agencies in the Agency Subcomponent category. We improved five and one-half points higher than last year's rating, moving from 62.6 to 68.1, which is also two and one-half points higher than our previous high score of 65.5 in 2009.

To quote their website: "The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings produced by the partnership and Deloitte, offer the most comprehensive assessment of how federal public servants view their jobs and workplaces, providing employee perspectives on leadership, pay, innovations, work-life balance and other issues."

The Best Places to Work rankings were first released in 2003. They help leaders measure the engagement of employees throughout the government and at individual organizations. Overall, the survey was completed by nearly 500,000 workers through data collected by the Office of Personnel Management.

Thanks for what you do every single day, keep it up, and remember, we are "Freedom's Front Door!"

David S. Kemp  
Captain, USN  
Commanding



# Steady as she goes

## Command charts course with Operations Plan

By Skip Wiseman  
Messenger Editor and  
Danielle Lieber  
Messenger Associate Editor

A year after its implementation, the USMEPCOM Operations Plan, or OPLAN, is laying the foundation for enlistment processing improvement as laid out in the command's 2016-2026 Strategic Plan.

The command is in the first of the OPLAN's three stages. Stage I is laying the foundation for Stages II and III. Stage II calls for the command to attain all digital processing on a timeline running from fiscal 2019-21. Stage III, from fiscal 2022-26, will fine tune operations and sustain continuous improvement.

As work progresses, the Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate will publish an OPLAN update, which will provide "course corrections" that incorporate modifications based on the command's metrics, changes in external factors and to the OPLAN.

"The majority of OPLAN tasks in Stage I are building blocks for USMEPCOM's transformation to a more efficient, effective business model," Army Col. Nick Wittwer, director of the Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate, said.

Each task in the OPLAN focuses on challenges to the command's ability to plan, organize and execute USMEPCOM's strategic vision and goals over three to 10 years.

Wittwer explained that human capital tasks in Stage I will help the command's work force "grow into the digital work environment."

The command has begun developing a human capital strategy and is making progress improving its learning and development program. Strengthening the command climate

is an ongoing process.

The enlistment and student testing programs are also "going digital."

The Career Exploration Program Internet Computer Adaptive Test, also known as CEP iCAT, is the electronic, adaptive version of the traditional paper and pencil student Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Last year, only slightly more than 2 percent of the command's 680,000 tests administered under the Career Exploration Program were completed using CEP iCAT.

The automated score transfer went live in November, so the number of CEP iCAT tests administered is expected to increase sharply. Much of the anticipated increase, however, will depend on schools having computer labs able to handle the number of tests administered.

The Prescreen Internet Computer Adaptive Test, or PiCAT, is a version of the ASVAB that applicants can take anytime, anywhere, on any personal computer before arriving at a MEPS.

In addition to being a paperless process, it will also save time and resources, while helping recruiters work more efficiently. The use rate for PiCAT more than doubled to 29 percent in the last two years.

"Our goal is 75 percent," Wittwer said. "That will save millions of dollars in meals, lodging and transportation costs, and save recruiters many hours of windshield time because applicants will be able to test at home or in the recruiting office instead of traveling to a MEPS."

USMEPCOM also continues to work toward paperless processing by pursuing Military Health System Genesis, also known as MHS Genesis, and the Joint Legacy Viewer, or JLV.

The goal for these systems is for service members' military medical records to follow them from enlistment throughout their careers and into Veterans Affairs.

Eventually, MEPS' medical elements will establish electronic health records for new military applicants via MHS Genesis.

Before creating Genesis records, some applicant electronic medical records will be available for viewing via the JLV. The JLV is a web-based, read-only viewer of health history information from the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and private sector partners.

JLV's procedural pilot is set to begin in spring, Suzanne Kirchhoff, medical program business manager, said. During this pilot, USMEPCOM headquarters and sectors will learn how to use JLV and decide what features are most useful to USMEPCOM's processes. Policies and procedures to help the MEPS prepare to adopt JLV will be written based on the findings of this pilot.

An operational pilot is planned for the fall at the Spokane MEPS, Kirchhoff said.

For the command's adoption of Genesis, headquarters is currently working on network path solutions for how electronic health information will be securely routed and retrieved.

USMEPCOM and the Defense Digital Service are in Phase II of upgrading USMIRS to a more secure and user-friendly system that will make it easier to process applicants and drastically reduce paper use.

As in Phase I, Phase II uses input from end users to create a better interface.

"Collaboration with USMEPCOM has been and will be critical," Patrick Stoddart, DDS project manager, said.

Referring to USMEPCOM staff at both the headquarters and the MEPS, Stoddart said, "We cannot

do this without your help and input. We recognize we aren't the experts in the accession process. It's your instincts, knowledge and experience that are going to help us execute this vision."

Digitized DD Form 4, Enlistment/ Re-enlistment Document Armed Forces of the United States, commonly known as enlistment contracts, and DD Form 93, Record of Emergency Data, are already in use by the Army, Navy and Air Force.

USMEPCOM has already transmitted more than 300,000 forms to those services. The collaboration between USMEPCOM, DDS and the services has already saved millions of pieces of paper a year.

Digital processing is moving forward, Wittwer said.

"We completed the business process re-engineering project, in October," he said. "We sent our problem statement to Army (Technology and Business Architecture Integration) for the Army's review."

When the problem statement is approved by the Army deputy chief management officer, USMEPCOM will have approval to establish and fund a project management office.

The Phase I goal was to create a USMIRS 1.1 prototype to process one service at one MEPS. USMEPCOM demonstrated the system to Stephanie P. Miller, DoD's director of accession policy, in April at the Milwaukee MEPS.

The goal of

Phase II is to learn from the results of the Phase I test and develop a full product, Marty Allen, deputy director of the Information Technology Directorate, said.

"The progress is promising," Wittwer said, "but we still face significant challenges on the road ahead. Accession processing for all services are planned for March 2019. "Digitizing DD Forms 4 and 93 were the initial products. The end state depends on the DDS team's progress."

Meanwhile, the Resource Management Directorate is working on ways to fine tune oversight of the command's financial management.

The directorate has made more progress than most other areas because it was already working on many of the initiatives in the OPLAN, Willie Mitchell, chief of the Programs and Policy Division, said.

The command is establishing an internal control cell. The function is currently under the management control area, Mitchell said.

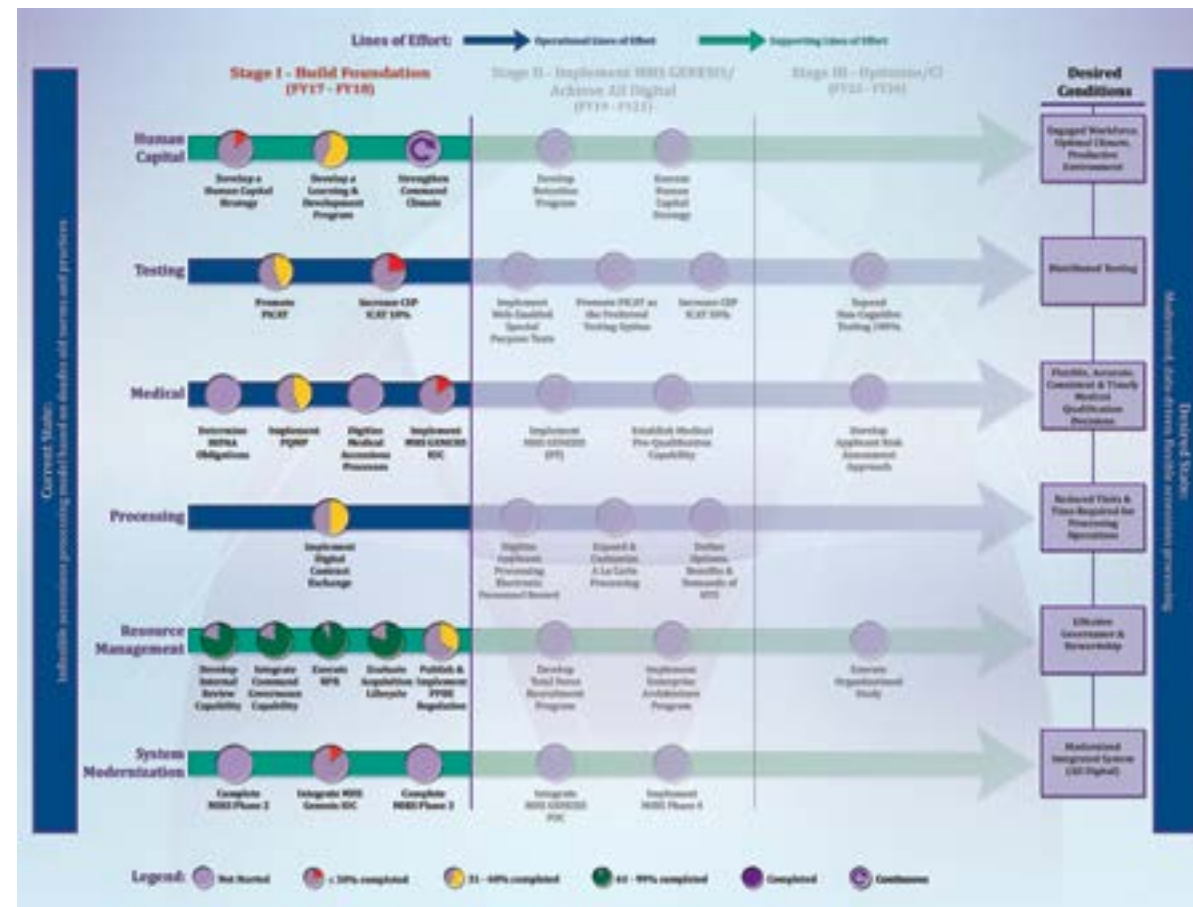
As part of DoD's goal of being

completely auditable, USMEPCOM resource managers have been taking part in Joint Reconciliation Review with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and other external auditors, Mitchell said.

The directorate has developed standard operating procedures for the Program Budget Advisory Committee, which deals with near-term budget matters and the Program Objective Memorandum, which addresses long-term budget planning.

Finally, Mitchell said, the directorate is collaborating with all the headquarters directorates on the Business Process Review. The review is spearheaded by the Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate. Resource management is determining how much it costs to establish a MEPS.

While the first steps in OPLAN are only the foundation, and because much of the "building" will be designed as the OPLAN progresses, USMEPCOM is taking the first steps toward its digital future.





# Been there, done that

Deputy commander/chief of staff understands every level of command from active duty experience as Navy officer at MEPS, sector and headquarters



By Skip Wiseman  
Messenger Editor

If experience with the command was preferred, USMEPCOM hit the jackpot when it hired the new deputy commander/chief of staff.

Jo Anne T. Cunningham, a retired Navy captain, served three tours with the command spanning all levels of responsibility while she was on active duty. She assumed duties as the deputy commander/chief of staff in August, succeeding David O'Brien, who retired.

She commanded the Jacksonville MEPS for three years and later served as Western Sector commander and then became USMEPCOM director of operations.

That depth and breadth of experience serves her well.

"As a MEPS commander, the way you view the staff and our processes is completely different than when you are a member of the staff," she said.

"Being a sector commander was probably the most eye-opening job I've had in USMEPCOM," Cunningham said. "It's very fulfilling in a lot of ways, because when you visit the MEPS, the MEPS personnel really want to present their MEPS in the best light. You really get the enthusiasm of the people who are most closely attuned to the mission right there in front of you. Their pride is evident and energizing."

"Up here, in the Ops job or now as the deputy and chief of staff," she said, "I understand how the staff views things happening in the field, for the most part. That helps me understand the landscape a little better than most people, who don't have that varied kind of perspective."

"It's a positive thing to have the vast amount of diversity we have up here in the staff," she said. "We've got military veterans, MEPS veterans, and non-veterans, and we span at least three generations. The strength of this lies in our ability to view our operations from a number of different customer perspectives. applicant, recruiter, parent, etc."

Cunningham was Jacksonville MEPS commander at a particularly challenging point in USMEPCOM's history.

Being a MEPS commander while

USMEPCOM was transitioning to a largely civilian workforce gave her insight into how the command operates, particularly Saturday openings. After Program Budget Decision 712 took effect in 2005 and positions throughout the command went from a 50-50 mix of military and civilians to 90 percent civilians.

"Unless you're a MEPS commander or senior enlisted advisor, you probably don't understand how difficult it can be to lead a MEPS to execute a Saturday opening or extended hours processing with basically a civilian manpower structure," Cunningham said. "I went through the PBD 712 transition while in command of a MEPS."

"At the end of that time, it was a completely different landscape and structure than when I assumed command," she said. "It was a challenging time, piecing a new staff together in a relatively short period of time, which also had the services recruiting heavily."

Cunningham also stressed the importance of maintaining good rapport with members of the Interservice Recruitment Committee.

"The relationships formed with the IRC at the local level and dealing with the services and peer relationships at the MEPS are something that most people on the headquarters staff probably wouldn't understand," she said.

"One of the worst things in the world is for a MEPS commander to get a call from his/her sector commander with the message that the local commander is not doing the right thing or made a decision arbitrarily without any warning," Cunningham said. "That happened to me once when I was at the MEPS, so I was very aware of that when I came up here."

"The truth is generally somewhere in the middle between the MEPS commander and the recruiting commander," she said. "It can be a difficult relationship at times. You really have to build the underlying relationship and understand each other's missions and constraints."

"The relationship at the lo-

cal level is so important," Cunningham said. "That is forged by the MEPS commander reaching out and making sure all customers are represented any time a decision is made or policy change discussed. Participation in IRC meetings is absolutely crucial to make sure everybody's getting a fair cut of the processing capacity and understands how that is calculated."

Sector commanders and O-6 recruiting commanders come into play when conflicts arise at the local level, Cunningham said.

"USMEPCOM communications, amongst ourselves, and with our recruiting service partners is crucial at every level," she said. "Solid and consistent comms, top to bottom, ensure no one gets crosstreaded with their boss and minimizes differences between quality and consistency of services offered between MEPS."

The link between USMEPCOM and the one and two star recruiting commanders has been strengthened under the leadership of the current USMEPCOM commander, Navy Capt. David S. Kemp.

"Of all the time I've had in USMEPCOM," Cunningham said, "we have what I consider the best, most solid relationship we've ever had at the upper echelon. That's really a credit to Captain Kemp. He



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*It's very fulfilling in a lot of ways, because when you visit, the MEPS personnel really want to present their MEPS in the best light.*

Jo Anne T. Cunningham  
On being a sector commander

”

came in and really participated with the recruiting service chiefs of all services, as well as with OSD and Army senior leaders.

"That benefits not only us here on the staff working with the recruiting service staffs, but sectors working with district and regional commanders, down to the MEPS and the IRC," she said. "Having education and understanding of the mission all the way up the chain of command is crucial to ensuring the relationship is solid at the local level."

Please see "Cunningham," Page 8

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*As a MEPS commander, the way you view the staff and our processes is completely different than when you are a member of the staff.*

Jo Anne T. Cunningham  
On being a MEPS commander

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Photos by Darrin McDufford



**“Cunningham,” from Page 7**

Having served at all levels of USMEPCOM gives Cunningham an understanding of the command few people share.

“Your perspective depends on where you sit,” Cunningham said. “The many different seats I’ve had in this command have prepared me better to assume this position and make decisions that are best for folks around the command.”

Those experiences have allowed her to get a running start on her duties as deputy commander/chief of staff and the diverse responsibilities they bring. She describes them as “coordinated but separate tasks.”

“The hat I wear as deputy commander is to act in the commander’s stead when he’s not here or unavailable, or when we have to be two plac-

es at the same time,” Cunningham said.

“The fact that I’m a civilian plays really well,” she said. “Because as the deputy commander, I’m the continuity of the command. It will be easier to meld the leadership style and goals of this commander with the incoming commander to ensure the best of what we do now remains.”

“The new commander, dependent on his or her level of experience with the military accessions program will likely need a certain amount of education and assistance in acclimating. I envision being here to provide that as well as to introduce him or her to the accession policy staff at the Pentagon and how we integrate with them.”

In her chief of staff role, Cunningham’s main goal is to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

“As the chief of staff, I like to say I work for the commander on behalf of the staff,” she said. “I coordinate the staff elements’ efforts with the sectors, in part, to ensure we’re all working on the same team.”

Being dual-hatted means Cunningham has to be ready to communicate up and down the chain of command, depending on which hat she’s wearing because she communicates “up and out” as deputy commander and “down and in” as chief of staff.

“Captain Kemp communicates up the chain of com-

mand and outside USMEPCOM,” she said, “and I’m more down and in. The idea is to handle internal issues in order to free up his calendar to do the things he needs to do as commander.”

“I’m also the linchpin as deputy commander,” Cunningham said. “I need to maintain a good working knowledge and situational awareness of everything he’s doing up and out. “As chief of staff, my every day focus is down to the staff and what’s going on in the field.”

Cunningham said her leadership style has evolved during her career. Ten years ago, she would have described herself as a participative leader. Now she adjusts her style depending on the situation.

“Leadership really depends on the situation you’re in, the people you’re leading, whether it’s an individual or a group,” she said. “That determines at what level you need to engage, and your role in that engagement.”

“As I’m leading a group – especially here – I’m also learning from that group,” Cunningham said. “There’s guiding, but there’s no direct ‘let’s take that hill.’ It’s guiding the team toward making a decision or creating a product, but also learning as I go.”

“As a MEPS commander, I honestly felt a little isolated and I worried incessantly that I would make a mistake, struggling at times with my own expectations of what I wanted to achieve and balancing that against what I thought was expected of me,” she said. “Those expectations weren’t awfully clear at times, instead they were more communicated as ‘what not to do.’”

“I think we can do better by our commanders than that,” she said. “Communicate expectations, allow commanders to command, and still ensure accountability. Leadership can be difficult, and requires consistent application of the standards, at all levels.”

“It can be completely different when you’re leading O-6s and GS-15s,” Cunningham said. “Everybody comes to the table with a whole bank of experience. I’m more leveraging their experience than I’m giving them the benefit of mine. It’s a com-



“*That helps me understand the landscape a little better than most people who don’t have that varied kind of perspective.*”

Jo Anne T. Cunningham  
On how her experience with USMEPCOM helps her as deputy commander/chief of staff

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“*Leadership really depends on the situation you’re in, the people you’re leading, whether it’s an individual or group.*”

Jo Anne T. Cunningham  
On adapting her leadership style

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pletely different type of leadership style and technique.”

So far, Cunningham finds managing priorities is the hardest thing about being chief of staff.

“There’s a lot of work here,” she said. “There are a lot of things I want to do every day. I have a hard time getting everything done. It’s hard to go at the end of the day and leave it here because I’m invested.”

Cunningham enjoys her new job, but believes the best experiences are still to come because she’ll be able to complete tasks she starts rather than moving to a new assignment before seeing the final result.

“When you’re in the military, you work so hard to accomplish something,” she said. “Then you turn over and you leave not knowing what might happen next. If you do find out later, you’re disappointed because you weren’t the one who got to take the command across the finish line, or your vision didn’t come to fruition. It can be frustrating.”

“In a sense, the thing I think I’ve learned since leaving active duty is that if you make the command about you, the command *will* be about you, and the frustration will continue,” Cunningham said. “If you build the team, lead, teach, then hang on for the ride and monitor, the followers become the leaders and your job is done, to carry on when you go. I wish that revelation would’ve come to me earlier, but there are still pieces that I can use.”

“With all that said, and understanding that my military days are over, what I think is going to be best about this job, as compared to any other job I’ve had, is the ability to see a project through and see the no kidding, real outcome and the positive and the negative from any particular decision.”

“This is my first, and as I see only, civilian leadership position,” Cunningham said. “That is what I think will be the most fun.”



**USMIRS 1.1 demonstration**

Navy Capt. David S. Kemp, USMEPCOM commander, talks with Patrick Stoddart, Defense Digital Service project manager for USMIRS 1.1, during a prototype demonstration of the system. The April 10 demonstration at the Milwaukee MEPS showed the ease of use operators can expect of the interface software in recording applicants’ aptitude, medical and processing information. The demonstration by the DDS-led team, which includes USMEPCOM and Chicago-based software developer DevMynd, was observed by Stephanie P. Miller, DoD director of Accession Policy.



## Command ranking improves in 'Best Places to Work' ratings

USMEPCOM received its highest ranking ever in its category for best places to work in the federal government.

The rankings, by the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte, an auditing and consulting firm, offer a comprehensive assessment of how federal employees view their jobs and workplaces.

The command placed 133rd out of 309 organizations in the agency subcomponent category.

"I am so proud of what you are accomplishing as a team," Navy Capt. David S. Kemp, USMEPCOM commander, said, "and about the improvements we are making.

"We still have a ways to go, but for me, this is another sign we are on the right path and headed for the right direction," he said.

USMEPCOM improved five and a half points over last year, moving from 62.6 to 68.2. It is also two and a half points higher than the command's previous high in 2009.

Organizations are rated based on eight areas of effective leadership, pay, and strategic management, teamwork, innovation, training and development, work-life balance, support for diversity, and performance-based rewards and advancement.

The 2017 Best Places to Work rankings include the views of more than 498,000 federal civil servants from more than 410 organizations.

The first Best Places to Work rankings were released in 2003. They help managers and leaders measure how engaged the federal workforce is as a whole and at individual departments, agencies and their subcomponents.

The rankings also alert leaders to signs of trouble and show how to better manage employees.

More details on the rankings are available at <http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/rankings/detail/ARTM>.



Photo by Darrin McDufford

### Change of Responsibility

Army Command Sgt. Maj. Christian J. Carr, incoming USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor, accepts the NCO sword from Navy Capt. David S. Kemp, USMEPCOM commander. Carr succeeded Army Command Sgt. Maj. Earla Reddock, left, who retired. Although noncommissioned officers no longer carry swords, it symbolizes the authority of Carr's position as the command's senior enlisted member.

## How Houston MEPS survived Hurricane Harvey

By Army Capt. John Wesley Black  
Houston MEPS  
Assistant Operations Officer

It was supposed to be an easy week, it really was.

Houston MEPS was looking forward to a smooth close-out for August.

The summer surge finally started to abate, and the staff ready to focus fully on Mega-Test Day and closing out the fiscal year.

The week of Aug. 21 had some light stuff to accomplish. USMEPCOM Recruit Travel Management Branch was coming for a visit with the travel section.



Some houses were so badly damaged the first step in restoration was gutting them.



A Coast Guardsman makes his way toward a civilian who needs medical evacuation

Marine Corps Maj. Jason Fiduccia, the MEPS commander, was burning three use-or-lose leave days. I even had a day off where I was going to help at my kids' school. The MEPS was going to start training sessions Friday, and roll into New Recruiter Orientation the following week, nice, tidy, and all on the training calendar.

On Aug. 23, the news reported that a tropical system was developing in the gulf that might affect the Houston area.

Fiduccia texted (not even called, just texted) Army Capt. Jaciel J. Guerrero, the executive officer, and told him to initiate Condition of Readiness 4, hazardous weather possible within 96 hours, from the Emergency Management Action Plan, just in case. That was at 7:20 a.m. Wednesday.

Nobody was worried, and the staff complied with a minimum of grumbling over the busywork. In the next 24 hours, however, things got "real" as the storm gradually but relentlessly gained strength.

The storm was getting closer. There was going to be heavy rain and light flooding. The naysayers maintained that it was nothing.

Houston had seen worse.

The MEPS had already experienced Tropical Storm Cindy in June, and she was mild. Despite the lack of urgency, Houston MEPS kept moving preparations forward full tilt.

The storm was now tracking west of Houston, so the area would be on the east (dirty) side of the eye wall. That meant rain and localized flooding.

The MEPS staff members had handled major floods the two previous years so they still were not greatly worried. At the end of the day, the staff had completed all preparations and got ready for the next round on Thursday.

Thursday, started out with schizophrenic weather. It was warm, then cool. Sunny, then overcast, then sunny. Dry, humid, raining, muggy. Repeat every hour.

The staff was now beyond going through the motions of preparing – a storm was going to happen.

At 1 p.m., the National Weather Service announced that Harvey was upgraded from strong tropical storm to category three hurricane. Mild amusement at having a little excitement to change the pace immediately went to full-on crisis mode.

The visitor from headquarters

Please see "Harvey," Page 12





Sometimes the only dry spot to camp was on a rooftop.

#### “Harvey,” from Page 11

decided to return to Chicago early, and when a military travel expert decides to cut out early, you should regard that with the same urgency you would if a member of the bomb squad ran by you at full speed.

The Emergency Management Center was activated. The MEPS was at COR 3, adverse conditions expected within 72 hours.

Sector was considering approving a Monday closure. Evacuation addresses and points of contact were verified. Things were still “real,” but there were plans and checklists.

Aug. 25, was almost anti-climatic. Most people came to work, and were planning for an early closure so employees could get ready for the storm that was expected to arrive that night.

At this point, no one was really panicked. Most of the day was spent managing the recruiting services who were annoyed at having to shut down early and reschedule their Monday shippers for Tuesday.

Harvey went from Category 3 to Category 4 with talk of Category 5.

The MEPS shut down early, and all employees went home to prepare for the storm. The MEPS prepared to close things down for three days including shutting off the server.

When the staff tried to move the government vehicles to a reserve center on higher ground and found

that I-45 was at a standstill, the vehicles were parked at the MEPS.

The flooding started Aug. 26. It was steady but slow. Power outages started sporadically, but nothing really bad occurred. Nothing like our neighbors 100 miles west were feeling as Harvey delivered a Category 4 landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas.

The senior staff conducted daily accountability phone calls. One employee was out of contact for most of the day, but he finally came up on the net that evening. He had been helping neighbors with downed trees and tending to his own property,



Marine Corps Maj. Jason Fiducia, Houston MEPS commander, Army Capt. Jaciel J. Guerrero, executive officer, Army Sgt. 1st Class Levon Franklin, processing NCO, and Army 1st Sgt. Jeremy T. Mullenix, senior enlisted advisor, help with cleanup in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

before he thought to check his cell phone and saw 26 voicemails and a slew of messages.

Starting at around 1 a.m. Aug. 27, Houston saw an up-close re-enactment of the Great Flood. The city received more than 50 inches of rain from Hurricane Harvey. In total the city received over 30,000,000,000,000 gallons of water! There were 156 tornado warnings.

Families huddled in their closets (there are no basements in Houston) for hours as flood waters rose around the city. Water rose to the second story of many homes.

Accountability got bumped to twice a day. Daily syncs started with the sector commander and USMEPCOM staff. Lack of contact with an employee was no longer an inconvenience, it now caused anxiety and worry.

Several employees were out of contact, but suddenly come back up on the net when whatever rainwater that collected in the dishes on the cell tower finally drained.

MEPS members still kept in mind the serious nature of what they were doing Sunday night. They were *all* tracking the weather like hawks, but the human mind can only deal with so much stress before it starts to vent.



Lorenzo Webber, Houston MEPS medical supervisor, mans his aid station.

The staff had been trading photos back and forth, but it was almost purely informational, or at most, “gee whiz!” stuff. There were National Guard vehicles, Coast Guardsmen rappelling from helicopters, buckets showing rainwater levels.

A full five days of constant rain passed in Houston without sight of the sun. Reports started flowing in of staff members helping out their neighbors with disaster relief. Lorenzo Webber, MEPS supervisory medical technician, started a small aid station on his property. Army 1st Sgt. Jeremy T. Mullenix, MEPS senior enlisted advisor, reverted to his days on mess duty and cooked hundreds of meals in his home and delivered them to his neighborhood shelter.

People traded life-hacks about how to keep floodwaters out. Coast

Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Hannah Coveny, a corpsman, temporarily joined Coast Guard Station Galveston, supporting relief operations.

Several MEPS staff members joined demolition crews, to help gut waterlogged flooring and drywall out of flooded houses, while others manned the shelters that housed more than 30,000 people.

Finally, though, the rain stopped. The sun came out Aug. 29 and Houston MEPS personnel began pulling themselves back together.

Despite all

the destruction, the staff got back to work, getting the station operational, as anxious applicants and IRC partners messaged the MEPS asking if they could come to ship.

Plans were put in motion to reopen. Miraculously, there was only the mildest of water damage to the MEPS itself. The server powered up with no issues, which brought forth relief and happiness.

Houston reopened to the general public Sept. 5, and the MEPS reopened for processing. Not one applicant was redirected to another MEPS, and all 69 shippers departed for initial entry training.

Houston MEPS did change, though. Some staff members are still working to rebuild their homes. One military member's home was so badly damaged that it made more sense for her transfer early than start over in Houston.

The city's recovery could take years, but the recruiting business is strong as the citizens of Houston took note of the good works carried out by the Coast Guard, Marines, and Texas National Guard who conducted rescues. Regardless, moving in to the future, Houston MEPS has proven that come hell or high water (literally), we are up to the challenge.



Army Light Medium Tactical Vehicles make their way through a flooded neighborhood.



# Knoxville joins effort honoring veterans from three wars

The Knoxville MEPS, along with other area military units took part in Knoxville HonorAir Flight 26.

HonorAir flights take veterans from World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials built in their honor.

Army 1st Sgt. Yveline Symonette, Knoxville MEPS senior enlisted advisor, served as a volunteer escort for Korean War veteran David Easterly and Vietnam veteran John Rader.



Military members render honors as veterans make their way to board their honor flight.

An honor guard renders military honors for each flight.

Escorts accompany veterans to Washington, during their tours of the nation's capital and back to Knoxville.

HonorAir Flight 26 took 132 veterans to Washington.

The flights have served more than 3,200 veterans.

HonorAir flights from McGhee Tyson Airport.



Army 1st Sgt. Yveline Symonette chats with World War II and Korean War veteran David Easterly and Vietnam veteran John Rader. Symonette was the escort for the two men on their trip to Washington, D.C.



A veteran is wheeled down the concourse on his way to board his honor flight.



Air Force Capt. Ethan Frazier, Knoxville MEPS operations officer, shakes hands with a veteran.

# USO CEO visits San Jose

The chief executive officer of the USO visited the San Jose MEPS March 21.

Dr. Jack Dyer Crouch II was accompanied by Monique August, San Francisco USO Center director, and Amy Eilts, San Francisco/San Jose operations and program manager.

The visitors were briefed on the MEPS' activities and its collaboration with the USO.

They toured each section of the station, met with USO volunteers, attended an enlistment ceremony and spoke with applicants and their families.

Army Maj. Dominic Amantiad, San Jose MEPS commander, presented coins to Crouch and Eilts in appreciation for their efforts supporting MEPS military members, applicants and their families.



Dr. Jack Dyer Crouch II, chief executive officer of the USO, talks with USO volunteer Jack and Sharon Friedman during his visit to the San Jose MEPS.



Crouch greets Air Force Tech. Sgt. Christopher Mascarina, San Jose MEPS medical technician.



Crouch observes an enlistment ceremony.



# Shreveport joins project to feed local community

The Shreveport MEPS partnered with Shreveport, Louisiana's, Abounding Faith Temple and its host, Senior Pastor Bishop Andrew Randall, Jr. Nov. 18 for the Annual Feeding Allendale Project.

The Feeding Allendale Project has taken place since 2013 to meet the needs of hundreds of Allendale/Ledbetter Heights Community residents.

This year, the initiative served more than 200 meals to members of the community who wanted to enjoy a hot meal.

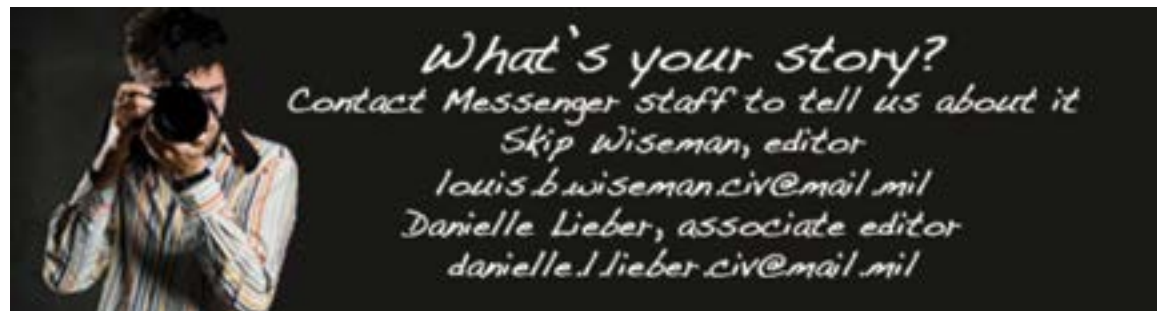
Thanks to sponsors and community partners, the initiative also provided Thanksgiving meals of a turkey and all of the fixings for more than 250 families.

The Shreveport MEPS regularly engages with the community.

This was another service event made possible by the hard work and support of the Shreveport MEPS including Army Capt. Roderick T. Brown, executive officer, and his father, Leon Walker; Army 1st Sgt. Tommy J. Kaiser, senior enlisted advisor; Navy Chief Petty Officer Natasha Mattocks, medical element NCOIC; and her son, Jaylen Johnson, Army Sgt. Kanequa Epps, human resources assistant; Roy Montgomery II, medical technician; Alvin Scott, information technology specialist; and his wife, Laverne Scott; and Beatrice Bailey, test score technician.



Army Sgt. Kanequa Epps, Shreveport MEPS human resources assistant, fishes a soda out of the cooler.



Community members enjoy their meals during the Feeding Allendale Project.



Roy Montgomery II, Shreveport MEPS medical technician, and Beatrice Bailey (center), test score technician, hand meals to a customer.



Army Capt. Roderick Brown, Shreveport MEPS executive officer, and Army 1st Sgt. Tommy J. Kaiser, MEPS senior enlisted advisor, adjust the serving tent to increase air flow.



## Phoenix hosts military attaches from 28 nations

By Air Force Capt. Sandra E. Spoon  
Phoenix MEPS Executive Officer

A group of 30 military attachés from 28 countries visited the Phoenix MEPS Nov. 13.

The visit was part of a week-long tour that also went to the Phoenix Recruiting Battalion ; the Arizona National Guard, Papago Park Military Reservation, Arizona;



Army Reserve Brig Gen. Kevin C. Wulfhorst, senior escort for the group of military attachés, speaks to applicants before conducting an enlistment ceremony.



Derek Smith, lead test clerk at the Phoenix MEPS, explains testing procedures to the visitors.



Celeste Toglana, Phoenix MEPS lead human resources assistant, explains operations procedures.

U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, Fort Huachuca, Arizona; and the 1st Armored Division and 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command, Fort Bliss, Texas.

"The visit to the MEPS allows for us to capture the big business of processing applicants for the military through a relatively unique smaller organization," Finnish Brig. Gen. Pekka J. Toveri, spokesman for the delegation, said.

"The MEPS processes in place allow us the opportunity to take home possible ways to maximize our own unique military entrance processes for our respective countries," he said.

Toveri is Finland's defense, military, naval and air attaché in Washington, D.C.

The group was greeted by Navy Lt. Cmdr. Nicole Serrano, Phoenix MEPS commander, and Army 1st Sgt. Tomesia Woodford, Phoenix MEPS senior enlisted advisor.

After hearing the MEPS' mission briefing, the group split in two to tour the station.

The tour included the medical element, operations element, service liaisons and the USO. Briefings were conducted at each stop by members of the headquarters team and section subject matter experts.

The two groups rejoined in the ceremony room where U.S. Army Reserve Brig. Gen. Kevin C. Wulfhorst, the group's senior escort, conducted an enlistment ceremony.

Wulfhorst is the individual mobilization augmentee for assistant deputy chief of staff. In his civilian career, he is a supervisory intelligence analyst for the FBI in Newark, New Jersey.

**Photos by  
Karen Duffy**

## Second generation joins Idaho National Guard

Lt. Col. Paul Boice raised his right hand and recited the oath of enlistment Nov 2. It was the first time he had ever sworn someone into the Idaho Army National Guard.

Repeating those words back to him was a familiar face: his 17-year-old daughter, Pvt. Simonne Boice.

"It was very powerful and a cool experience when I saw her go to the position of attention and raise her right hand," Boice, staff judge advocate for the Idaho National Guard, said. "I'm very happy and proud of her. The emotions of it didn't set in until I walked up to the podium."

Simonne can't pinpoint exactly what led her to join the Idaho Army National Guard, but her dad and her participation in the Idaho National Guard's Child and Youth Services program played a large role in her decision.

"A big part was because of my dad," she said. "Obviously he's pretty cool and a big influence on me, but I've also been with the youth program my entire life. Being surrounded by the Army my entire life, I didn't see me turning 18 and leaving the house without any military connection."

Her decision to join the National Guard wasn't a surprise to her mother.

"It's something I've seen coming for a long time," Marlayna Boice said. "She's been so involved in youth programs, there wasn't like this whole shocker of a moment when she told us this is what she's going to do."

Simonne has served as the state representative for Idaho's child and youth program since August. Her connection to the National Guard now includes a six-year enlistment as an intelligence analyst.

Her father also joined the Guard as an intelligence analyst when he enlisted into the Utah Army National Guard in 1997. He transferred to the Idaho Army National Guard in 1998 to attend law school at the University of Idaho College of Law and served in the occupational



Lt. Col. Paul Boice, staff judge advocate for the Idaho National Guard, administers the oath of enlistment to his daughter, Simonne.

specialty until he commissioned as a judge advocate in 2003.

Simonne could follow a similar career path herself. She's currently a senior lacrosse player at Boise High School and hasn't decided where she wants to attend college. She hopes to study pre-law before proceeding to law school.

Simonne said she doesn't consider herself an "Army brat" because she never moved growing up.

Though her dad deployed to Iraq in 2003 and 2010 as a judge advocate for the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team, she can only remember his second deployment.

It was during that deployment that she attended her first youth camp, which is held by the military youth program twice a year.

She grew up attending other events the program sponsors but wasn't able to attend camp until she was 10, which she was when her father deployed in 2010.

Simonne is one of at least nine military children who have participated in the program and subsequently joined a branch of the

military in the last four years.

She got involved with the program's youth council leadership when she was 14 and was the program's Boise representative before she was selected by her peers to serve as the state's representative in August. In this role, she works with students from Idaho, Washington, Alaska and Oregon.

"What I love about the program is it creates a really strong bond between all the military children," she said. "Without the program, I feel like I wouldn't have had that strong of a tie to the military."

She said the best part of the program is working with new adult leaders to help them understand how they can best help kids in the program and helping those same kids herself. Simonne said she's excited to start her career and learn new things in the National Guard.

"I can honestly say I feel incredibly good about her joining this organization," Paul Boice said. "I believe in our leadership and have every confidence in the world that she's going to be taken care of and have good strong leaders to learn from."





Applicants take the oath of enlistment at an Alabama State football game.



Marine Corps Lt. Col. Jason A. Johnson, Montgomery MEPS commander, administers the oath of enlistment at an Alabama State football game.



## Montgomery teams with Alabama State for mass enlistment

The Montgomery MEPS conducted a mass enlistment ceremony in conjunction with Alabama State University's annual military appreciation event.

The ceremony was held at the 50 yard line before the football game against Grambling State University on Veterans Day.

Marine Corps Lt. Col. Jason A. Johnson, Montgomery MEPS commander, administered the oath of enlistment for 51 future military members from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Army National Guard.

Afterwards, the participants had the opportunity to watch the football game.

After the ceremony, Johnson met with the University President Dr. Quinton T. Ross Jr.; Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Todd M. Smith, Air University command chief master sergeant; and Air Force Lt. Col. Ann Graham, commander and professor of aerospace studies for Air Force ROTC Detachment 019 at Alabama State.

Grambling won the game 24-7.

## Next generation

Army Brig. Gen. David San Clemente, chief of the Office of Military Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy, Kuwait, administers the oath of enlistment to his daughter, Lorraine, at the Montgomery MEPS. Lorraine San Clemente enlisted in the Marine Corps during the private ceremony.



Applicants take the oath of enlistment during the Veterans Day commemoration at Valley Forge National Historical Park.

## Harrisburg observes Veterans Day with enlistment ceremony at Valley Forge

The Harrisburg MEPS celebrated 2017 Veteran's Day at Valley Forge, where 11,000 Continental soldiers fought under the command of General George Washington 240 years ago to pave the way for the birth of the United States.

The command group of the Harrisburg MEPS participated in the Annual Veteran's Day Commemoration at the Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Marine Corps Maj. John Pico, Harrisburg MEPS commander, administered the oath of enlistment to eight new enlistees from the Army and Navy. The applicants ranged from ages 17-27 and were all from central Pennsylvania.

The Harrisburg MEPS has been an active participant in the Veteran's Day ceremony for the last eight years, which allows new enlistees a unique opportunity to be recognized as the newest members of the armed forces.



Applicants from the Harrisburg MEPS arrive for their enlistment ceremony at the Valley Forge National Historical Park.



Applicants from the Harrisburg MEPS march into place for their enlistment ceremony.



### Las Vegas ribbon cutting

Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, Western Sector commander; Richard Cherchio, mayor pro tempore and 4th Ward councilman for North Las Vegas, Nevada; and Navy Capt. David S. Kemp, USMEPCOM commander; cut the ribbon to officially open the Las Vegas Remote Processing Station. The station, which operates under the guidance of the Salt Lake City MEPS, processes nearly 140 applicants a month. The station was originally opened by the Navy in 2010 in cooperation with the 99th Medical Group at Nellis Air Force Base. The station later moved to the Navy Operational Support Center until early 2015 when it relocated to the Nevada National Guard Reserve Center. The new, stand-alone station opened in August 2017. USMEPCOM took the program over from the Navy in 2013 and expanded processing to all five services.



## MEPS of Excellence

1st Quarter, Fiscal 2018

**Category 1**  
Columbus  
Raleigh  
Tampa

**Category 2**  
Boston  
Knoxville  
Lansing

**Category 3**  
Fargo  
San Juan  
Sioux Falls

The MEPS of Excellence Program acknowledges military entrance processing stations that obtain a level of excellence based on criteria related to USMEPCOM core processes (medical, testing and applicant processing) and general military readiness. Stations recognized as MEPS of Excellence are also authorized to display the unit pennant.

The two requirements to become a MEPS of Excellence are:

- To be one of the top three MEPS in each category.
- To meet the overall threshold.

The 65 MEPS are divided into three categories, based on historical data. MEPS remain in the designated category the entire fiscal year.

These MEPS are authorized to display the unit pennant for the first quarter of fiscal 2018. MEPS who achieve a 90 percent score higher but do not achieve top three status in their category qualify to display the pennant.

Albany, Charlotte, Cleveland, Des Moines, Pittsburgh, Portland Maine, Salt Lake City, San Jose, Shreveport and Spokane.

The MOE points system measures up to 10 criteria per quarter. The criteria are:

- Timeliness of military evaluations and awards.
- Total students tested goal.
- Drug and HIV specimen processing.
- Clinical Laboratory Improvement Program.
- Physical fitness readiness.
- Height and weight standards.
- Electronic fingerprint capture station (unclassifiable fingerprints).
- Incidents of serious misconduct by military or civilian employees.
- Test loss compromise.
- Citibank travel card delinquency rates.

## San Francisco 49ers visit with applicants, staff in San Jose

General Manager John Lynch and eight San Francisco 49ers players visited and toured the San Jose MEPS Nov. 7.

The tour was held in partnership with the USO.

The visitors toured the MEPS and learned about a typical processing day at the station.

The players spent time with applicants and their families as the

applicants took the oath of enlistment and shipped to their basic training locations.

The players signed autographs for applicants and gave shippers high fives as they boarded the transport van en route to the airport.

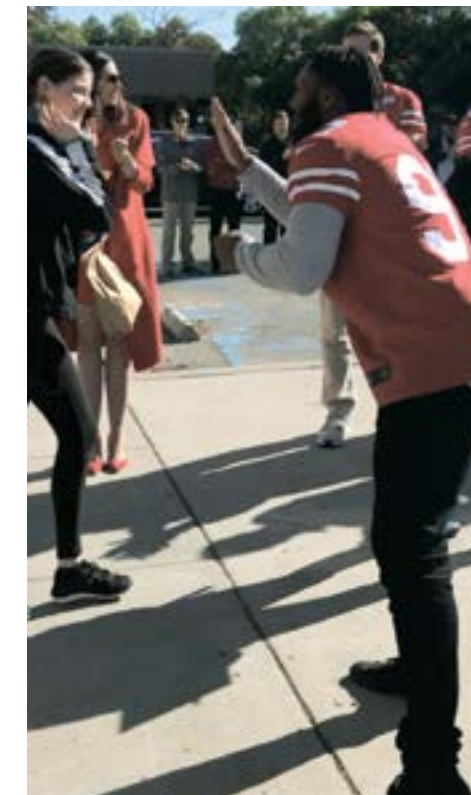
Players visiting the MEPS were Dontae Johnson, Bradley Pinion, Chancellor James, Dekoda Watson, Garret Celek, Joshua Garnett, Pace

Murphy and Raheem Mostert.

Amy Elits, operations and program manager for the Bay Area USO, accompanied the group along with the 49ers community relations team.



49ers players and general manager John Lynch observe an enlistment ceremony during their visit to the San Jose MEPS.



Dekoda Watson, 49ers linebacker, high fives an applicant.



Dr. Gary W. Fagin, San Jose MEPS chief medical officer, jokes with San Francisco 49ers players during their visit to the MEPS.



A graphic celebrating the Fourth of July. The background is divided into three horizontal bands: a top red band, a middle white band, and a bottom blue band. Each band is decorated with white stars of various sizes and orientations. The stars in the red and blue bands have a stippled or textured appearance, while the stars in the white band are solid. The text 'FOURTH OF JULY' is centered in the white band in a large, bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below it, the words 'INDEPENDENCE DAY' are written in a smaller, red, sans-serif font, flanked by two small red stars.

# FOURTH OF JULY

★ INDEPENDENCE DAY ★