

Messenger

WINTER
2024

New ***Strategic Plan***
Drives Command Into **2033**



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the **MEPS** p. 16

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Happy New Year Teammates,

The start of a brand-new year is a great time to evaluate the past and decide what habits and attitudes we want to keep and those we want to let go of. Even if you don't make a resolution, creating a simple goal, and following through feels great any time of year.

A goal to make into the New Year could be to explore new training opportunities. Page 10 answers some questions to help get you started. On page 15 you'll find some of the proposals that came from our Senior Leader Offsite in Nov. Some of those topics covered will be on the horizon this year, helped by our Innovation Facilitation Team (IFT).

The resiliency and strength reflected throughout our command in 2023 will be tough to top, but I think we can keep the momentum going for an even better 2024. Our new Strategic Plan will help guide us as we move forward (page 4). You may notice the goals have not shifted, but our objectives and command values have.

One of those values is to process empathetically. Some of you do know what it feels like to be in the shoes of an applicant, as we have many veterans supporting our mission. Applicants who feel a purpose to serve don't want to be held back from the opportunity. By being empathetic, and taking on new perspectives, we can not only better support our partners and applicants, but each other.






I have great pride in everything we accomplished as a team last year. As we begin 2024, let's focus on keeping the momentum going – providing Red Carpet Treatment to our applicants and best support to recruiting. Thank you for all you continue to do at "Freedom's Front Door."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan B. Stallings".

Megan B. Stallings
Colonel, USA
Commanding

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ON THE COVER:

USMEPCOM updated their objectives and values in the new Strategic Plan. Check out more info on page 4.

New Strategic Plan Drives USMEPCOM Into 2033



By Derrick Noack

USMEPCOM launched its new Strategic Plan at the FY24 Senior Leader Offsite (SLO) in mid-November. A command's strategic plan outlines the operational approach for its personnel moving forward. It does so by identifying goals and objectives, rather than specifying concrete projects.

"What the Strategic Plan does is lay out a collective vision for everybody in the command to understand when they see a change happening, what it is leading us toward," said Robert Bowen, J-8 futures division chief and strategic plan lead. "Now that we have this plan, we have to do the work to actually turn those goals and objectives into programs and policy changes."

The previous strategic plan focused heavily on medical modernization. Groups like the Medical Modernization Team and Rapid Delivery Team were born out of that plan. USMEPCOM's new ten-year strategic plan (2023 – 2033) will guide projects aimed at increasing processing efficiencies. Efforts include reducing the number of visits per

applicant, enabling the command to be responsive to applicant population shifts, improving system integrations and recruiting and retaining an upskilled workforce.

"The strategic plan is going to help us stay on the cutting edge of modernization that we've just got to in the past couple of years," said Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander. "It helps not only to drive that change forward but keeps us transparent. Our IRC partners can see what we're trying to do to make ourselves better through the plan."

The plan is presented in a concise 10-page document that can be viewed [online](#). The core goals focus on medical, testing, processing, human capital and resource management. Compiling and refining the objectives within those five main goals required extensive research and input from all directorates.

"Representatives from all of the directorates provided input as we did the initial analysis," said Bowen. "We did not change the goals from the previous

strategic plan, but we modified their language and focus and then developed the objectives underneath each of those goals. We drafted those changes through the Senior Leader Council. We held about 10 sessions to hash through the specifics and make revisions. From those agreed upon objectives is where we will derive the projects, policy changes and whatever else we think needs to be done."

Some of the efforts already underway to get after the renewed plan include the development of Artificial Intelligence to aid in prescreen reviews and a new Talent Acquisition Division (TAD) which will focus on growing human capital by bringing in and retaining new talent to USMEPCOM.

"The Strategic Plan is all about allowing people to be more efficient and effective in their jobs," said Bowen. "We want our partners to have it easier, but we also want to make it easier for applicants to process through the system. In the end, we want as many people as possible that are qualified to serve in the military to get that opportunity." ■

Goals & Objectives

Technology advancements will continue to accelerate, continually creating new opportunities to improve applicant evaluation. The workforce, our processes and our IT infrastructure must keep pace to remain at the forefront of efficient and effective application for our recruiting partners.

GOAL 1 Medical

Flexible, accurate, consistent & timely medical qualification decisions.

Objective 1.1

Establish HIPAA Compliance Capability.

Objective 1.2

Create MHS GENESIS and USMIRS Interface and Standardize Digital Processing Tasks to improve medical processes and reduce redundancy.

Objective 1.3

Centralize & Automate Applicant Medical Prescreen Process and establish an Artificial Intelligence capability to enable prescreen and other medical decision support.

Objective 1.4

Virtualize Medical Processing Tasks.

Objective 1.5

Non-MEPS Medical Processing.



GOAL 2 Testing

Additional Non-MEPS aptitude screening options.



Objective 2.1

Modernize core testing management applications.

Objective 2.2

Improve the Intermittent Test Administrator (ITA) program.

Objective 2.3

Optimize MET sites and MET site utilization.

Objective 2.4

Expand CEP iCAT.

Objective 2.5

Expand PiCAT usage for improved aptitude pre-qualification.

Goals & Objectives

GOAL 3 Processing

Optimal applicant processing operations.

Objective 3.1

Digitize applicant processing, enhance the electronic personnel record and initiate an applicant portal.

Objective 3.2

Enact Electronic Signature.

Objective 3.3

Re-Establish Identity Management Verification and expand applicant tracking and external agency checks.

Objective 3.4

Increase Remote and Non-MEPS Processing.



GOAL 4 Human Capital

Acquire, develop, employ and retain our professional workforce.



Objective 4.1

Talent Management - Workforce Planning, Organizational Design and Position Management.

Objective 4.2

Talent Management - Talent Acquisition.

Objective 4.3

Talent Management - Talent Development.

Objective 4.4

Talent Management - Talent Employment

Objective 4.5

Talent Management - Talent Retention.

GOAL 5 Resource Management

Proactive, integrated and responsive resource planning and decision-making capabilities.

Objective 5.1

Contract Management.

Objective 5.2

Facility Management.

Objective 5.3

Financial Management.

Objective 5.4

Digital Innovation and Development.

Objective 5.5

Strategic Risk Management.



USMEPCOM's values are the framework for the organization's standard of excellence. The Command's values outline the professional tenets for USMEPCOM's workforce. They present the core philosophy for how we approach our work, each other and our customers, partners and stakeholders.

Perform Professionally:

We take individual ownership, do the right thing, build and strengthen cohesive teams to deliver professional results!

Provide Value:

We earn trust through responsive, timely and uniform application of standards.

Drive Change:

We lead innovation for the accession community; never remain stagnant; always be uncomfortable.

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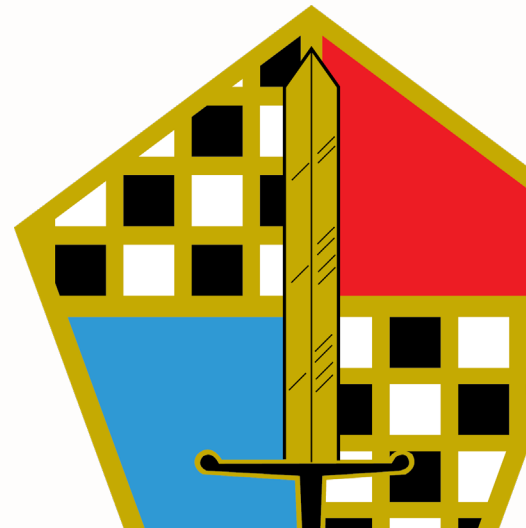
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Process Empathetically:

We anticipate recruiting partner's needs by welcoming and quickly processing applicants in compliance with qualification standards.

Improve Processes:

We continually seek out process improvements by encouraging open sharing of ideas to spur innovation.





Albuquerque MEPS USO: A Milestone for the Station and New Mexico

 By Air Force Maj. Blake Hamilton, Albuquerque MEPS commander

On Dec. 7, a historic moment unfolded at Albuquerque MEPS, as the state welcomed its first-ever USO center. The opening ceremony at the MEPS marked a significant milestone, offering a new haven for applicants as they await their processing into the Armed Forces.

The USO has a tradition of supporting the morale and well-being of service members, and the addition of the Albuquerque MEPS USO adds to its heritage and reach across the United States. The grand opening brought together military members from USMEPCOM and Kirtland AFB along with representatives from the USO to celebrate this momentous occasion.

This USO aims to provide a welcoming space for new applicants during their processing. From comfortable lounge chairs to video games and snacks, the center is equipped to cater to the needs of those about to enter the military and properly welcome them to the military family. This focus on fostering a sense of community aligns with the broader mission of the USO, which has been a pillar of support for military members and their families since its beginnings in 1941.

As the ribbon was cut, symbolizing the official opening of the center, there was a sense of pride and accomplishment as this 15-month effort to open this facility was finally achieved thanks in large part to Army 1st Sgt. Pablo Galicia, Albuquerque MEPS SEA. The USO, with its legacy of more than 80 years, continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of the military community, and the Albuquerque MEPS USO is a testament to that adaptability.

Fort Jackson MEPS Marine Takes Home the Gold

 By Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Jesse Johnson, Fort Jackson MEPS SEA

Marine Corps Sgt. Joe Stone enlisted in 2019 and hails from Memphis. He vividly recalls taking a keen interest in basketball at the age of three. Throughout his childhood, he has played the sport and continuously honed his skills on the court.



ACROSS THE MEPS



Stone reported to Fort Jackson MEPS in March 2023 and currently serves at the Testing NCO and treasurer for the Family Readiness Group (FRG). He has quickly become an invaluable asset to the command.

On Oct. 3, Stone was notified of his selection to try out for the men's All-Marine Basketball Team. Try outs took place from 14-28 October and he was one of 12 final Marines selected to compete with the team. Competition took place from Oct. 28 – Nov. 5 at Fort Moore, Georgia. Through tournament play, Stone and his team battled branches of the Armed Forces to include Army, Navy and Air Force teams. After several days of play, the Marines defeated Navy in the championship game, 73-71, to clench gold in the men's sector while the Air Force took gold for the women. Through several games, Stone recounts his highest scoring game of 17 points.

When asked what he enjoyed most about his experience he stated, "The bonds that were created and our ability to come together and play as a team!"

Way to go Sgt. Stone! Fort Jackson MEPS, 12th Battalion, Eastern Sector and USMEPCOM are extremely proud of you!

San Antonio Spooktacular

 By Army Lt. Col. Brandon Fridia, San Antonio MEPS commander

On the night of Oct. 31, 2023, ghouls, ghosts and the living dead descended upon San Antonio MEPS for an unforgettable Halloween bash that will haunt the memories of attendees for years to come.

San Antonio MEPS, usually bustling with prospective recruits and military personnel, transformed into a haunted haven, complete with cobwebs, skeletons and eerie decorations that would make even the bravest soul shiver. All four sections - HQ, Testing, Medical and Processing - embraced the spirit of the season and participated in the "Best Decorated Section" competition. It was a frightful frenzy of creativity, but the Medical section emerged as the overall winner, proving that when it comes to spooktacular decorating, they have the prescription for success!

The highlight of the night was undoubtedly the costume contest. The competition was fierce, and attendees put their monstrous imaginations to the test. Brianna Long, from the Human Resources department,

stole the show by dressing as a "deranged pig woman," winning the coveted title of "Best Halloween Costume."

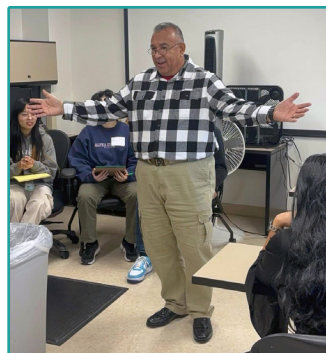
It was clear that Ms. Long's commitment to her creepy character was hogging the spotlight!

Of course, not all costumes could be a scream-worthy success. Ismael Orona, test clerk, was awarded the "Worst Halloween Costume" title for his unique interpretation of Adam Maitland from Beetlejuice. He may have been the butt of jokes, but he certainly left an impression that will linger like a ghostly apparition.

On a lighter note, Chris Anderson from the IT department took home the prize for the "Funniest Halloween Costume" with his witty portrayal of Mr. Clean, proving that cleanliness is next to hilarity.

The Halloween festivities weren't just about costumes and decorations. The night was also filled with spooky treats, as participants brought a "Halloween Potluck" that was to die for. From mummy-wrapped hotdogs to ghostly cupcakes, the potluck was a graveyard of delicious and ghoulish delights.

It was a night to remember, reminding everyone that even in a place as serious as the MEPS, there's always room for some hair-raising Halloween fun.





**J-1
Training &
Conferences Branch
Chief, Anthony
Bongco, shares all
you need to know
about training!**



Q: Does training have to be related to one's job or position description?

A: Command-funded training should be related to one's current job or position and within the scope of the individual's professional responsibilities.

There are other developmental/training opportunities that don't necessarily directly adhere to one's current position – but still offer professional development in the scope of management, leadership and communication development courses. When in doubt, have that conversation with your direct supervisor to identify opportunities to learn and develop both professionally and personally.

Q: What qualifies as training?

A: Training covers a wide range of activities aimed at enhancing an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities. There are many forms of training, from formal courses to workshops and seminars, on-the-job training (OJT), webinars and

virtual learning, e-learning, certifications and credentials are some examples.

If requesting to attend training, and the expense is Command-funded and the training GPC must be used, then it must be commercially available, off-the-shelf training (COTS) and within \$25,000 per course.

Anything specialized or not readily available to the public may require contracting actions.

Academic Degree Programs require a separate approval process and can be funded with either Command funds or Career Field/Career Program.

Q: Where is the best place to go to find training?

A: The best place to find training depends on the individual's specific goals and interests. Some of the most common sources to explore include:

- Online learning platforms (Udemy (see side box), Coursera, Khan Academy)
- Professional organizations
- Industry-specific associations

often provide training and development opportunities related to their field

- Army Civilians can research their Career Field (Career Program)

- Universities and Colleges
- Workshops
- Courses specific to an individual's current position

- Open Online Courses (Examples include MIT Open CourseWare, Stanford Online)

- Government agencies/initiatives

- OPM has training opportunities

Note: If the Command is paying for these types of requests, it cannot lead to an academic degree.

Q: Are you allowed to partake in training during work hours?

A: Generally, yes. However, this is dependent on the length of the course. Anything exceeding 40 hours and long-term training and education programs more than 160 calendar days may necessitate Command approval and a continuing service agreement.

Q: What are the steps to take BEFORE applying for training?

A: Assess your needs.

Identify your current skills and knowledge gaps.

Determine what skills are essential for your career goals and the needs of the Command.

Set clear goals.

Define specific objectives you want to achieve through training.

Align your goals with your Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Review your IDP.

Refer to your IDP to understand your short-term and long-term career goals and aspirations.

Research training options.

Discuss your goals/IDP with your mentor, supervisors.

Solicit input from your supervisor/mentor.

Seek advice on how the training fits into your IDP.

Budget/Resources

Are there costs associated with the training?

Can the Command pay for this training?

Do you have the necessary resources to take the training (i.e., technology, etc.)?

Create a plan.

Review the schedule for the course availability.

Prepare all necessary documents (i.e., SF182, application, etc.).

Execute your plan.

Submit the necessary documents.

Follow-up.

Plan for how you'll integrate what you've learned.

Review your IDP after the course and set new goals based on your training experience.

Q: What should you know WHILE taking training?

A: Identify the learning objectives.

Familiarize yourself with the course content. How is the knowledge being disseminated?

What are the different modules?

Actively participate in discussions, group activities.

Take notes on key points, concepts to help reinforce learning.

Ask questions.

Group discussions and activities are opportunities to network to gain new contacts and gain new insights.

Q: Is there any action one needs to take AFTER training is complete?

A: If needed, ensure training completion is documented in your training record.

Q: Is there a limit on how much you can spend on training?

A: If the Command is paying using the training government purchase card, then the single purchase limit for direct training costs is \$25K.

Q: Is there a time limit?

A: There is a time limit for Funding for training that is paid by the Command. Generally, current FY funding must be used during the FY the training is being taken.

Current FY funding cannot be used to pay for courses that start in the new FY.

However:

Training may be paid for in the current FY for training received in the next FY only if date of payment received in the current FY is a condition of obtaining a seat for the training in the next FY.

Example: FY25 funds may be used if payment must be received within two weeks before the training class begins on 10 Oct 2025 (FY26).

Or, payment must be received by

30 September 2025 to guarantee a spot in a class beginning on 1 Nov 2025, (FY26). In this case, ensure no other class at a later date is an option.

In all cases, the situation should be obtained in writing from the vendor.

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instructions
sent to your
email address**

Houston MEPS

Organizes first

Operations Symposium

✈ By Marine Corps Maj. Christopher Szcapanik, Houston MEPS commander

As geographically dispersed organizations, separate from, but in direct support of recruiting partners, IRC relationships can sometimes be contentious. This can make the employees feel frustrated, the recruiters distrustful of or misunderstanding of DoD regulations and policy, and as a result the partnership works like a highly dysfunctional group of individuals with separate interests and goals instead of the partnership is it structured to be.

Your MEPS's relationship with your IRC partners is one of the most important things you will work on during your tour at the MEPS and can have an incredibly important impact on the climate and effectiveness of your station. Houston MEPS is particularly adept at managing their relationships with their IRC partners and are constantly looking at ways to build relationships, decrease misunderstanding and build a productive partnership with the recruiting services. We recently took our normal IRC meetings and phone calls to a whole other level and hosted our first IRC symposium.

This symposium took all the IRC partner operations officers to Camp Swift, Texas for a two-day, three-night event that included classroom instruction and physical team building events. The Recruiting Services and MEPS military personnel were able to operate in a field environment and achieve synergy by having productive discussions in the classroom over commonly

misunderstood policy such as MDC/A, common recruiting improprieties and prescreen requirements.

Significant buy-in from the collective IRC is required to conduct an inter-service training exercise of this nature. This began by identifying and assessing our service partners' communication methodologies as it relates to applicant processing. The Houston MEPS commander revealed that Service Operations teams had little to no direct training of internal MEPS functionality. In the event of escalating applicant processing issues, knowledge deficiency typically results in the reporting of unfiltered and often [mis/dis] information to the recruiting partner commander. These issues are the primary source of discontent and are detrimental to establishing and fostering positive supporting relationship with our service partners.

The assessed knowledge gap within the Service Operations teams was the primary catalyst generating the requirement for the Houston IRC Operations Symposium.

Prior to the planning and development of the Houston IRC Operations Symposium, the Houston MEPS Commander conducted in-person discussions with each IRC commander to receive their concurrence and commitment support the training event: each service agreed to



▲ Navy Lt. j.g. Derron Alleyne (R) completes a rope obstacle during a unit cohesion event at the first Houston IRC Symposium. (Courtesy photo)

provide two to three members of their operations teams.

Secondary to the knowledge deficiency but equally important was the necessity to enhance and foster more effective working relationships at the operations level of IRC interfacing.

Given the nature of the environment, our command and operations teams are geographically separated and typically limit interactions to impersonal emails and phone calls, preventing the development of interpersonal relationships between members of the MEPS Operations teams and the Service Operations teams.

The desired end state of the Houston Operations Symposium focused on two main goals: increase service comprehension to mitigate the escalation of applicant issues and enhance relationships among members of the MEPS and Service Operations teams to foster a more positive and efficient working environment.

METHODOLOGY

The Houston Operations Symposium was held at Camp Swift in Bastrop, Texas, an austere Texas National Guard training facility approximately 100 miles west of Houston MEPS. The training venue and lodging were under our Texas National Guard partner's unit identification code and were free of charge.

The austerity of the site, minimal cellular or internet connectivity and geographically separated location of the venue mitigated work related distractions from parent units.

Training was conducted along two lines of operation: Unit Cohesion and Classroom Instruction/Discussion; all classroom instruction was led and facilitated by a USMEPCOM Officer with additional support provided by Denver and Nashville MEPS, courtesy of 3rd and 8th Battalion commanders.

Overall, the training met its desired end-state and since the conduct of the Houston Operations Symposium, escalated applicant issues have reduced from two to four per week command team level escalations to one to two per month.

CLASSROOM TOPICS COVERED THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

1. MEPS Mission and Orientation
2. Common Applicant Issues
3. Health Information Exchange
4. IRC Roles and Responsibilities
5. Maximum Daily Capacity Allocation
6. Prescreen Process
7. PUHLES Overview
8. Recruiter Impropriety
9. Service Perspectives Working Group

UNIT COHESION EVENTS CONSISTED OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. 2.5 Hour transport to venue – IRC members equally distributed into three vans
2. Four mile rope carry
3. Co-habitation in 12-person rooms
4. Breakfast and dinner pre-coordinated and ate together
5. Meals Ready-to-Eat for noon
6. Leadership Reaction Course (12 Scenarios)
7. Group Dinner at Local Establishment (Culminating Event)



▲ Attendees of the first Houston IRC Symposium participate in a casualty drill as part of a unit cohesion event. (Courtesy photo)

462 DAYS, ONE HOUR, ONE MINUTE & 42 SECONDS: DAUGHTER OF BUFFALO MEPS TESTING CLERK DETERMINED TO SERVE

✈ By Navy Lt. Cory Flament, Buffalo MEPS commander



1. (L) Jill Manson, Buffalo MEPS testing clerk, poses for a photo with her newly-enlisted into the Air Force daughter, Jamie, and husband Steve.
2. Jill Manson gives parting words to applicants, including her daughter Jamie, before they head to basic training.
3. Air Force applicant Jamie Manson hugs her father goodbye before leaving Buffalo MEPS (where her mother works) for Air Force basic training. (Courtesy photos)

Raising your right hand and swearing an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America is the most critical decision a service member will make. Especially considering only 1% of the population will take that oath and join the strongest military in the world.

Now imagine serving your country, raising a family and becoming a civilian employee working at a MEPS. One day, your child decides they also want to answer the call. For our testing clerk at Buffalo MEPS, Jill Manson, this was her reality.

"It's one thing to serve and be proud of that accomplishment, but when your child approaches you and says I'm ready to join, it kind of makes your heart drop," said Jill. Jill and her husband have over 30 years of service and had a sense of accomplishment knowing they served so their child wouldn't have to. Their daughter Jamie knew since kindergarten that she wanted to "be just like mommy," as Jill recalls, and as she got older, the desire to follow in her mother's footsteps only grew.

Jill and her husband Steve told her she couldn't join until she was mature enough. The maturity benchmark set by Jamie's parents was a last-ditch effort to deflect the fact that Jamie was, in fact, serious about joining. Then, "Suddenly, the day of maturity arrived," said Jill, and the journey began with talking to all five services. Jill wanted to ensure her daughter was making a well-rounded decision before, as faith would have it, deciding on the Air Force "just like mommy."

This journey wasn't without challenges. Jamie had to lose over 100 pounds to join and from start to finish, as tracked by Jamie's cousin, took 462 days, 1 hour, 1 minute, and 42 seconds before she could DEP in and then ship out Nov 20, 2023.

As the commander of Buffalo MEPS, being a part of many young people's journey to become service members is very rewarding, and facilitating the second step in the DOD accessions triad presents its challenges to ship these young men and women off to basic training. We make it a point to send each shipper off to their perspective services with a little

Eastern Sector "Beastly motivation," as Army Col. Janelle Kutter would say.

This shipper sendoff was unique being one of my staff members was sending their child off. Jill frequently watches and claps as other young people are given the "fall out" order from myself and head out the doors past the building's two bronze buffalos. You can just about hear each footstep as they enter the bus, embarking on a new chapter of their lives.

This time was a bit more special as I invited Jill to say a few words being that her daughter was amongst the shippers. "It was 33 years, since I was in your shoes," said Jill with a tremble in her voice, doing everything she could to prevent herself from tearing up. "Each of you have decided to serve your country and I am proud of each of you." Finishing her speech with "fall out", she watched her daughter take the steps she witnessed many others take, including herself.

It's been a few weeks since Jamie left for boot camp, and I followed up with Jill to get her overall recap of the events. Jill said, "I now know how my mom felt. When I joined, I was looking from the lens of an Airman; I joined the Air Force on December 14, 1990, as a medic. Jamie's dad served six years as an Air Force PJ (pararescue). We never really thought she would join the military."

I asked her how she was handling her daughter being at basic training and she said, "I'm doing well, and I found a terrific support group on Facebook, Air Force Wing Moms." The support group shares information with parents to include week-by-week details of training evolutions. In closing, I asked Jill if she had any words of encouragement for other parents who have served to send their children off to boot camp, and she said, "Take a deep breath and support them; remember your encouragement is the air beneath their wings so they can soar".

Buffalo New York MEPS is committed to providing the red-carpet treatment for all applicants. It's a fantastic feeling to witness the process and validate our objectives. I am proud to lead my team in this critical step in the accession triad. ■



FY24 SENIOR LEADER OFFSITE

Battalion commanders, senior enlisted advisors and executive directors joined HQ leadership and subject matter experts at the FY24 Senior Leader Offsite (SLO), Nov. 13 –16, to discuss various problem sets the command faces and brainstorm long-term solutions. Four working groups, comprised of about 20 personnel each, developed proposals to get after difficult problems. The common goal was to seek better ways of achieving our mission using tools within reach.

"The topics selected are ones that are in more of our control," said Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander. "These proposed solutions will help develop our plans in the coming months."

GROUP 1 - REBALANCING HUMAN RESOURCES

Group 1 focused on human resources at the MEPS, now and for the future. Key discussions honed in on analyzing and understanding manning and workload trends based on personnel data to identify deficiencies.

As a result, two approaches prevailed for addressing manning deficiencies; **spaces** (the number and type of current openings) and **faces** (who will be needed to fill those roles and what conditions would make employment at USMEPCOM their career choice).

To truly understand the needs of spaces, a HR manpower evaluation will be conducted so that additional manpower models and data can be considered across MEPS locations. To work towards getting the faces needed, one initiative has already taken flight, the Talent Acquisition Division. Their attendance and efforts in new areas of the recruitment landscape will make new talent aware of USMEPCOM and the analytics from their LinkedIn provides additional insight into prospective talent.

GROUP 2 - BETTER COMMAND, CONTROL & COMMUNICATIONS

Group 2 focused on communications and knowledge management across the command. The main communication avenues discussed were ETMS2, Microsoft Teams, SPEAR and ServiceNow.

As a result, a handful of changes were proposed which would allow for more focused communication through the four channels, aiming to streamline each. To help with the details of each solution, a task force working group was approved by Col. Stallings.

Moving forward, the Knowledge Management Working Group, led by Marine Corps Lt. Col. Nicole Bastian, 8th Battalion commander, and Marshall Smith, HQ Public Affairs Officer, will focus on the specific details from each proposed solution and aim to have staggered rollouts of the new solutions, with the highest priority items first, starting in early 2024.

GROUP 3 - FUTURE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE PROCESSING

Group 3 focused on short and long-term planning for continued modernization. A key part of discussions was keeping flexibility in mind to accommodate every type of MEPS.

As a result, six courses of action were presented that would result in better data mining, the use of artificial intelligence, USMIRS 1.1 and MHS GENESIS integration, improving existing system feature buttons and better policy creation tools.

The Innovation Facilitation Team (IFT), led by Matt Lince, will manage many of the COAs proposed if enacted. Personnel at the MEPS can look forward to better speed, transparency, flexibility, standardization and predictability when it comes to applicant processing.

GROUP 4 - BUSINESS PROCESS REENGINEERING

Group 4 focused on solutions to current prescreen process issues to better allocate resources and save time for medical SME's across all MEPS.

Multiple courses of action were proposed to include planning for short, mid and long-term process changes.

Discussion included planning for refamiliarization of the current prescreen process for med techs, providers and HRAs as well as the plan to develop a new prescreen workflow based on current technology that would bridge the gap before reaching AI initiatives.

Race/Distance:
The Dopey Challenge - 48.6 miles
over four consecutive days.

Location:
Running through the theme
parks in Orlando.

Purpose:
I chose this race to run for Catch a
Lift Foundation (CAL) which helps
those who have served and been
discharged medically through
roadside bombs or loss of limb(s).
CAL provides them gym
memberships or home gyms.
My plan was to raise \$1,500
but support from my family,
friends and coworkers helped to
raise approximately \$5,000.

COLLEEN MALEK
USMEPCOM HQ

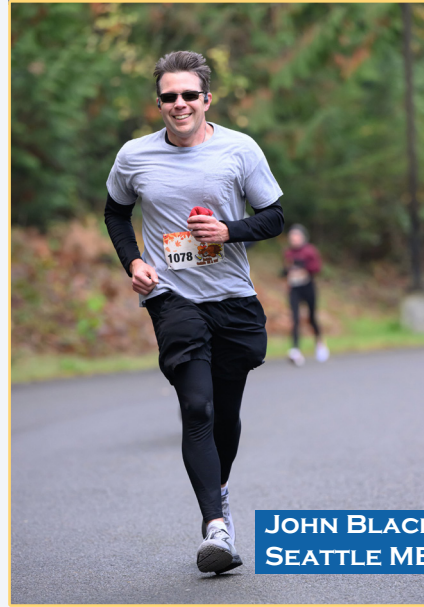


Race/Distance:
6th Annual Gobble
Gobble, 10K

Location:
Pierce Community
College in Puyallup,
Wash.

Purpose:
The campus is pretty,
but I never have time
to get over there to
run. Also, I have to
justify the amount of
food I'll eat later [on
Thanksgiving].

JOHN BLACK
SEATTLE MEPS

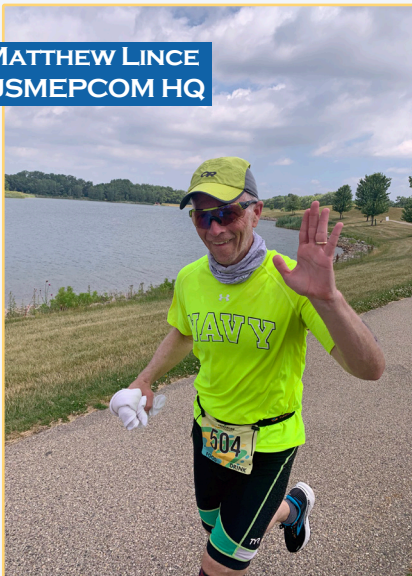


RACING AROUND THE MEPS

As we start the new year, we are feeling inspired!

Across the USMEPCOM landscape, goals were set and accomplished - sometimes more than once - as many of you participated in races across the Nation.

MATTHEW LINCE
USMEPCOM HQ



Race/Distance:
Pleasant Prairie Triathlon,
1,000 - meter swim, 30K bike
ride and 10K run.

Location:
Pleasant Prairie, Wis.

Purpose:
This was my 11th triathlon. I
get bored easily and love the
challenge of three different
events in a triathlon!

(L) ARMY LT. COL.
MARIA E. SANCHEZ
CHICAGO MEPS



Race/Distance:
Army Ten Miler
(10 miles)

Location:
Washington, D.C.

Purpose:
"Because every
Soldier should." The
Army Ten Miler is the
second largest ten-mile
race in the Nation.
Held every October,
proceeds from the race
benefit Soldier MWR
programs.



(R) KIM JOHNSON
USMEPCOM HQ

Race/Distance:

Multiple races to include Spartan races, half marathons and in support of my husband and Navy sister-for-life, a full marathon with them each.

Location:

Various

Purpose:

Initially, I started running after getting foot surgery and doctors telling me I'd never be able to run again. After my 14th half marathon, I stopped counting. When my Navy sister-for-life was diagnosed with cancer, I asked how I could support her. She asked me to run the Marine Corps Marathon with her. I had to pull her across the finish line, a memory I now cherish in a framed photo that was taken as we crossed.

JENNIFER CELLO
NAVY PO2 IAN PETERSON
ARMY 1ST SGT. LORENZA WHALEY
NAVY PO2 KYLE FISHER
EUGENIA BRYANT
ABEL PADILLA
FORT JACKSON MEPS



Race/Distance:

University of South Carolina Veteran's Day 5K

Location:

Downtown Columbia, S.C.

Purpose:

As Veterans (Cello, Bryant and Padilla) and service members, we ran to honor other Veterans, active duty service members and their families. All proceeds from the race went to support the Range Fore Hope Foundation. Their mission is to foster and encourage its participants to use golf as a therapeutic resource and an adaptive alternative to combat the effects of PTSD.



HUSUN DAVIS
NEW YORK MEPS

Race/Distance:

New York City Marathon, 26.2 miles

Location:

We ran across Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx and Manhattan

Purpose:

NYC was my first marathon ever. I wanted to do something challenging but also represent for the people who look like me and run at a slower pace. I trained for more than 20 weeks and went from sitting on my couch to running a marathon and did it again in California a month later. Next year I will run the marathon at Disney and am going to Berlin in the Fall of 2024 to run one there. There are no limits to greatness!

HOW FAR IS THAT?

1,000 METERS = .6 MILE

5K = 3.1 MILES

10K = 6.2 MILES

HALF MARATHON = 13.1 MILES

FULL MARATHON = 26.2 MILES

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO START RACING!
THE AVERAGE AGE OF RACE PARTICIPANTS
HAS INCREASED STEADILY SINCE 1986,
WITH AN AVERAGE 5K RACER AGE OF 40.



GUNNAR SHELDON
SYRACUSE MEPS

Race/Distance:

Loop the Lake, 13.1 miles

Location:

Syracuse, N.Y.

Purpose:

Loop the Lake is part of "The Great New York State Marathon Weekend." Funds raised benefit research in the field of vascular anomalies.

Military Members of the Year Compete in Boston

By Ashley Toomey

The 2023 USMEPCOM Military Members of the Year (MMOY) competition brought nine finalists to compete in a weeklong event in Boston. After contending through multiple rounds of competitions, five winners were named.

The winners and their categories are:

Company grade officer: Navy Lt. Robert C. Hock III (San Juan MEPS)

Battalion senior enlisted advisor: Navy Command Senior Chief Justin E. Boop (7th Battalion)

MEPS senior enlisted advisor: Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Juan Osuna Jr. (Beckley MEPS)

Senior noncommissioned officer: Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael R. Robida II (New York MEPS)

Junior noncommissioned officer: Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Myron A. De Sa (Miami MEPS)

“The service members here reflect the values of Freedom’s Front Door beyond expectations, and they deserve all the recognition and praise,” said Army Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander. “It’s a privilege and honor to be here in person to congratulate and celebrate the competitors here today.”

The journey for these contenders was a test of their mental and physical capabilities, with the competitions starting at the battalion level. As they continued to compete and progressively advance through the layers of command, the field narrowed until only the most resilient and dedicated group of nine individuals remained to face the final challenges.

As competitors prepared for the final events, USMEPCOM leadership shared final well wishes to each individual finalist.

“I’m excited for each of you and this week you will have the opportunity to showcase your physical strength, intelligence, knowledge, and leadership skills, and I have no doubt that you will excel in each aspect,” announced Army Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline



▲Finalists at the USMEPCOM MMOY competition use teamwork to pull a cannon. (Photo by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore)

Symonette, USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor. “This competition is not only about winning, but also about discovering more about yourselves and pushing your limits.”

Upon arriving in Boston, the finalists’ schedule was nothing short of demanding. Their week started with a rigorous physical fitness test. They were then tasked with refining their communication and leadership skills. This was demonstrated through an engaging oral presentation, where they needed to convey their knowledge effectively. Each competitor was also required to craft a personal leadership plan, outlining their vision for leadership development.

Finally, their journey led them to a formal board interview, where their readiness and suitability for leadership roles were put to the test. The trials challenged the competitors on multiple fronts, preparing them for leadership roles.

“The most challenging part has been adapting and thinking on our feet. It’s hard when not knowing what the next day will look like,” said Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Juan Osuna Jr., MEPS Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Year.

Competition judges Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore and Army Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Rendon, Eastern and Western Sector senior enlisted advisors respectively, had to make difficult decisions to choose the 2023 MEPCOM Military Members of the Year.

“This is my first MMOY and I wasn’t expecting to see this level of competition,” said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore, Eastern Sector senior enlisted advisor. “It was very inspiring to see the incredible amount of individual competition and the incredible teamwork between all the finalists. The enthusiasm and teamwork you all showed inspired me.”

While the competition was fierce,

the contenders supported each other and built connections and camaraderie through networking during their time in Boston. When not participating in events, competitors were able to share knowledge.

“I think the wonderful thing about the events that we’ve done is that we had a chance to meet and learn different aspects of all the different branches. The important thing is just knowing that we all have each other’s backs. It doesn’t matter what branch you are, we’re still brothers and sisters in arms and fighting the same fight to ensure our families are safe here at home,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Jacob Madrid, San Diego MEPS and Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year finalist. ■



▲MMOY winners pose for a photo at the award ceremony, held on the final day of the week long competition (Photo by Ashley Toomey)

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 USMEPCOM OUTSTANDING CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Angela Minor
Chicago MEPS
GS-10 & Above



Michael Cramer
Beckley MEPS
GS-07 - GS-09



Carla Franco Durant
San Juan MEPS
GS-06 & Below

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 HQ USMEPCOM OUTSTANDING CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Katherine Restko
Technology Development Division
Information Technology Directorate
GS-10 & Above



Jeri Torre
Public Affairs Office
Command Advisory Group
GS-07 - GS-09

Are you a hiring manager with job openings?

Send them to the Talent Acquisition Division!

Find their contact information at bottom of the page.

Talent Acquisition Division USMEPCOM



Meet US where YOU are

No matter where you're at professionally or geographically - we've got you covered.

With opportunities for recent college graduates to those looking for a career refresh and even retirees, we offer endless potential with over 100 different career paths.

From Honolulu to Boston, Anchorage to San Juan

and everywhere in between, our sprawling selection of locations offer you the chance to work for one team, anywhere.

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support all areas of life from wellness to finance, time off, family and more, so you can focus on the mission knowing you're taken care of.

Where can **WE**
meet **YOU?**

The Talent Acquisition Division (TAD) is comprised of our dedicated applicant advisors, in a holistic, strategic approach to finding the best talent for MEPS and HQ, USMEPCOM.

They invite applicants to "meet us where you are" professionally and geographically, as USMEPCOM offers opportunities for every point of a career journey and in all areas of the U.S.

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U.S. Department of Defense

Talent Acquisition Division, HQ USMEPCOM, North Chicago, IL

Chris Carr - Director
christian.j.carr.civ@army.mil

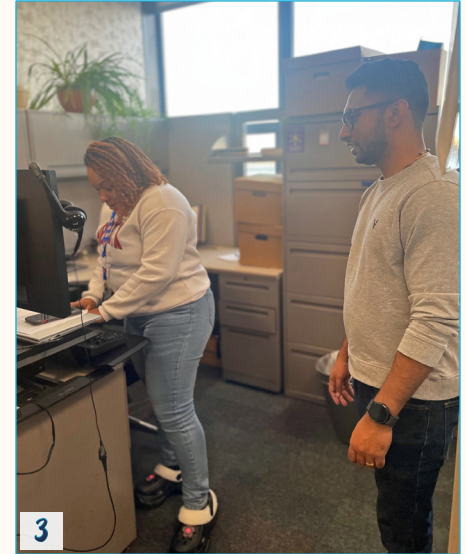
Liz Fonk - HR Specialist, Recruitment
elizabeth.f.fonk.civ@army.mil



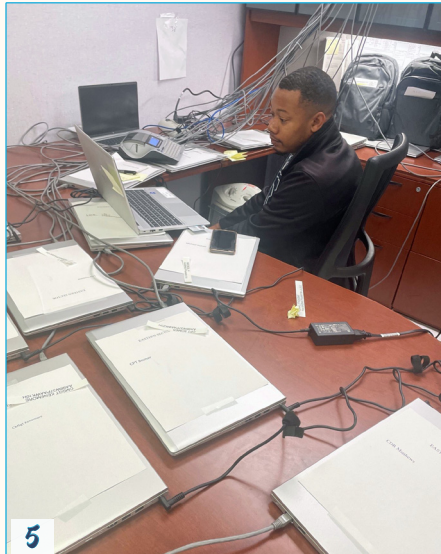
Modernizing Technical Infrastructure

By Denise Lucena-Martinez, J-6 Project Management Office - IT Support Branch Chief

The Hardware Refresh Project at USMEPCOM is a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing operational efficiency and ensuring the reliability of critical systems. This comprehensive endeavor involves the systematic replacement of outdated hardware components. By integrating state-of-the-art technology and upgrading infrastructure, the project aims to optimize performance, reduce downtime and enhance the user experience. The meticulous planning and execution of this project reinforces USMEPCOM's commitment to maintaining a robust and cutting-edge IT environment, ultimately supporting the organization's mission with a modernized and secure foundation. The team successfully completed this arduous task, deploying nearly 400 new laptops in just one month.



"From vision to reality, the Hardware Refresh Project showcases the power of collaboration, expertise and leadership. It's a transformation that positions us for a future of technological excellence." - Lucena-Martinez



1. The Hardware Refresh Project team gathers to collaborate and discuss beginning phases of the initiative.
 2. Christopher Martin, Logistics Management Specialist, J-4, organizes a shipment of new equipment.
 3. (L) Denise Lucena-Martinez, IT Support Branch Chief, J-6, provides guidance on the Hardware Refresh Project to Ebin Regi, IT Specialist, J-6.
 4. (L) Jeffery Miller, Knowledge Manager, J-6, empowers a user to navigate the new hardware confidently.
 5. James Styles, IT Specialist, J-6, meticulously configures new computers for deployment.
 6. Hardware Refresh Project members and key personnel pose for a photo to commemorate the completion of the project.
- (Courtesy photos)

Junior Enlisted Council is Wheels Up for Year Two

By Tyechia Price

The Junior Enlisted Council (JEC) was first introduced in the Spring 2023 issue of the Messenger, outlining aspirations for its first year and why a specialized group for junior enlisted was essential.

The JEC exists as an outlet and opportunity for junior enlisted service members, ranked E6 and below, to come together to share perspectives, gain advice, receive mentorship, learn and use tools for future leadership and create lasting friendships across the service branches while assigned to USMEPCOM.

“Effective leadership is essential in all aspects of any organization, and having a council dedicated to fostering leadership qualities within our junior enlisted members not only benefits them as individuals but also contributes to the overall strength and capability of USMEPCOM,” said Army Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette, senior enlisted advisor of USMEPCOM.

The first year proved to be one of tremendous growth for JEC as its monthly meetings saw up to 60 attendees per meeting and total membership across USMEPCOM swelled to 150, a number which continues to grow. The JEC maintains a cabinet, with members having been voted in, consisting of president, vice president, secretary, public affairs officer, Western mentor and Eastern mentor, with the two mentors being senior enlisted.

“Two to three times a week someone will send me an email and reach out and say, ‘hey what can I do to be a part [of JEC],’” said Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Megan Decker, JEC president and Omaha MEPS medical technician.

The uniqueness of the geographically diverse command and the opportunities available to junior enlisted who are serving at a joint service command, a rarity assignment, is what prompted Decker to outline the plan for JEC, harnessing her experience with the Navy’s Junior Enlisted Association (JEA) as the backdrop for staging the beginnings of joint-service council. Senior USMEPCOM leaders gave full support to the standup of JEC.

Looking towards the future, the JEC aims to grow and deepen its membership, with initiatives such as a Facebook group for support, an awards ceremony designed specifically for junior enlisted and the implementation of a targeted distribution list with meaningful communications.

“I believe the experienced gained from being part of the JEC are self-confidence, strong leadership traits and valuable relationships, to name a few which are instrumental in one’s career. By joining the JEC they open themselves to gaining the chance to enhance their leadership traits, create and foster relationships and further their personal and professional growth,” said Symonette.

Discussions for a training retreat are also on the forefront of plans to come, an enjoyable yet necessary meetings for the next generation of military leaders.

“My vision from the very beginning has always been for us to potentially have a training retreat [with] as many service members as we could get up there to HQ, or even just our cabinet members. Most opportunities we don’t get to always go to, training academies or leadership courses, until we get to that point where it’s expected of us,” said Decker.

The longest-term goal for JEC is to see it last long after its start and for it to become a permanent fixture and tool for junior enlisted for years to come.

“JEC is serving as a compass for junior enlisted,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Lynda Stone, JEC public affairs officer and El Paso MEPS testing NCOIC.

That compass will not only provide the leadership skills, but life and career-long benefits.

“The experiences and connections gained can shape and support their future as a senior NCO. I highly encourage our junior enlisted members to take advantage of this amazing opportunity,” said Symonette. ■



▲ Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Megan Decker, JEC president and Omaha MEPS medical technician, hosts a monthly JEC meeting on Teams. (Courtesy photo)

JEC Council

President

HM2 Megan Decker, Omaha MEPS

Vice President

SSgt Brittany Pickens, Ft. Gregg/Adams MEPS

Secretary

TSgt Brianna Wilson, Butte MEPS

Public Affairs Officer

Sgt Lynda Stone, El Paso MEPS

Western Mentor

SMSgt Edward Malone, Sacramento MEPS

Eastern Mentor

SCPO Ramie Ellender, Milwaukee MEPS

Ready to be part of
the JEC? Contact
them today to join!

HM2 Megan Decker,
JEC President
megan.m.decker3.mil@army.mil
Or

SSgt Brittany Pickens,
JEC Vice President
brittany.c.pickens.mil@army.mil

Educational Field Trips, Group Outings & Purposeful Training Foster Connectivity

✈ By Giselle Santiago, Tampa MEPS IT Specialist

Known for its annual concentration of lightning strikes from June to Nov., West Central Florida was named "Tampa" from the Native American meaning "Sticks of Fire." During the hurricane season, Tampa MEPS ensures preparedness in collaboration with all members of 10th Battalion. Hurricane Maria in 2017 taught 10th Battalion the importance of collaboration through unity and planning.

Following that disaster, Tampa MEPS now incorporates training from the Red Cross during annual training days. Red Cross Regional Preparedness and Partnerships manager, Jose Bueno, visited Tampa MEPS recently to share his wealth of information to assist in the planning and protection of the MEPS family during hurricane season.

Evacuation plans were updated, and kits were planned. Go-Kits should contain three days of supplies for self-sustainment to include medical supplies and a Stay-at-Home Kit should contain enough supplies for two weeks. Another recommendation shared was the importance to keep personal, financial and medical records safe.

Amidst the whirlwind of hurricane preparedness, processing and applicants enlisting, it's necessary to take time to come together and celebrate the holiday season. This is the season of festivity, a time when hearts brim with gratitude and warmth, seeking solace in connection and shared merriment.

We took the time to thank our employees for their undevoted efforts this past year, celebrating on a Yacht Cruise. We sailed around the Greater Tampa Bay, visiting our most cherished spots. It's the people who bring our organization to life, executing tasks, driving innovation and making decisions that ultimately determine our organization's success. As we sailed across the Tampa Bay, gratitude like the holiday scents, filled the air. We raised our voices in thanks for the hands that hold ours, for the shoulders we lean on, for the laughter that fills the room.

We gather, not just around tables with feasts, but around stories shared, memories rekindled and gratitude expressed to those we appreciate the most. May we weave kindness into every interaction, offer a helping hand where needed, and let our appreciation be a melody that resonates long after the carols fade. For in the symphony of human connection, there is no greater joy than the chorus of "thank you" sung with sincerity and joy.



(L) Jose Bueno, Red Cross Regional Preparedness and Partnerships manager, leads a training on hurricane preparedness at Tampa MEPS.

(R) Tampa MEPS personnel celebrate the end of 2023 on a Tampa Bay cruise. (Courtesy photos)

✈ By Army Capt. Sean Duffy, New Orleans MEPS Operations Officer



In Dec., New Orleans MEPS employees traveled to Baton Rouge and toured the Louisiana State Capitol. They received a guided tour through Memorial Hall, the Senate Chamber and the area containing offices for the Speaker of the House and Speaker Pro Tempore.

In the area near the offices, MEPS personnel observed the plaque and glass display on the spot where infamous Louisiana politician Huey P. Long was assassinated (bullet holes can still be seen on the walls). During their tour, one group met both State Representative Rick Edmunds and Major General Lee W. Hopkins (Assistant Adjutant General of the Louisiana National Guard).

Following the tour, MEPS employees traveled up to the 27th floor observation deck, where they could admire the sights around Baton Rouge from the tallest capitol building in the U.S. After leaving, MEPS employees enjoyed a delicious lunch before returning to New Orleans MEPS.



(Top) New Orleans MEPS personnel tour the Louisiana State Capitol.

(Bottom) During a tour of their state capitol, New Orleans MEPS personnel view the location where politician Huey P. Long was assassinated. (Courtesy photos)

A YEAR OF Triumph

✈ By Army Maj. Latecia Brown, Atlanta MEPS commander

In a world filled with tales of resilience, strength and triumph over adversity, few stories shine as brightly as that of Paula Nesmith, Atlanta MEPS travel assistant. Since 2004, Ms. Nesmith has worked in several MEPS locations which include Amarillo, Tampa and currently, Atlanta MEPS. Everyone that has worked with her states that she is a beacon of light.

Atlanta MEPS just celebrated a remarkable milestone – one year of Paula Nesmith's triumphant journey as a breast cancer survivor. Nesmith's battle with breast cancer was nothing short of courageous. She faced the diagnosis with unwavering strength, determined to overcome the formidable adversary that is cancer. Her journey over the past year has been a testament to the power of the human spirit.

Like many others facing such a diagnosis, she experienced fear, uncertainty and doubt. However, what set her apart was her unyielding determination not to let this disease define her. With the support of her family, friends and an exceptional medical team, Ms. Nesmith embarked on her journey towards recovery. Throughout her battle, she became a beacon of hope for others facing similar struggles. Her willingness to share her story, vulnerabilities and triumphs inspired countless individuals to face their own challenges with newfound strength.

Her positivity has been infectious. Her ability to find light in the darkest of moments and to maintain a sense of humor in the face of adversity has uplifted everyone fortunate enough to know her. She has demonstrated that maintaining a positive outlook can be a powerful weapon in the fight against cancer. In addition to her own journey, Ms. Nesmith has been a tireless advocate for breast cancer awareness and support. She has actively participated in fundraisers, support groups and awareness campaigns, offering guidance and solace to those still navigating their own battles.

As we mark one-year of her cancer-free status, we not only celebrate Ms. Nesmith's personal triumph but also the countless lives she has touched along the way. Her resilience, grace and unwavering spirit serve as an inspiration to us all. As she enters this new chapter in her life, Atlanta MEPS stands beside her in celebration and anticipation of the many more years of happiness, health and boundless opportunities that lie ahead. Her journey reminds us that with strength, perseverance and a positive attitude, we can conquer even the most formidable of challenges. ■



▲ Paula Nesmith, Atlanta MEPS travel assistant, poses for a photo before the Breast Cancer Awareness Walk. (Courtesy photo)



▲ The Atlanta MEPS team poses for a photo after the annual Breast Cancer Awareness Walk. (Courtesy photo)

USMEPCOM Continues to Innovate Medical Processes with Natural Language Processing

By Ashley Toomey

In December, USMEPCOM began the exclusive use of a Natural Language Processing (NLP) capability within the Joint Longitudinal Viewer (JLV) to streamline applicant prescreens while developing a more robust [AI capability](#).

NLP highlights potentially disqualifying conditions within an applicant's health history while also filtering out information unrelated to an applicant's ability to serve in the military.

"The natural language processing is an HIE (health information exchange) document filter that's built into the JLV community health summary and documents widget," said Dr. Gary Fagin, JLV/NLP lead. "I like to think of this tool as a bridge towards AI."

As of December 2023, USMEPCOM medical providers have been exclusively using the JLV in conjunction with NLP to review applicant medical history during prescreen. This transition simplifies and expedites the electronic validation process by using available technology. During the pilot phase of JLV/NLP, there were significant decreases in timelines for prescreen review.

"In one review, it took 630 seconds, or 37 seconds per encounter, for manual review and it took just 50 seconds, or 3 seconds per encounter, for the NLP review," said Fagin. "Significant savings of time was achieved using this tool."

Now that JLV/NLP is fully implemented, USMEPCOM expects an overall reduction of contact-to-contract time for all services. ■



NEW YEAR NEW SPEAR

A new & improved SPEAR
intranet platform is
launching in early 2024!
Keep an eye out for more info.

USMEPCOM SPEARHEADS COMMUNICATIONS FOR ACCESSION TRIAD

By Ashley Toomey

The Leaders Professional Development (LPD) event brought USMEPCOM Eastern Sector leadership together with Marine Corps Reception and Initial Entry Training personnel to learn and share new perspectives at Parris Island, South Carolina, Oct. 10-13.

Marine Corps Lt. Col. Nicole Bastian's, 8th battalion commander, planning allowed several USMEPCOM leaders, including Army Col. Janelle Kutter, Eastern Sector commander, and Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore, Eastern Sector senior enlisted advisor, to visit Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island to learn more about USMEPCOM's role in reception and initial entry training and how to better support the other commands within the Accession Triad.

The Accession Triad, made up of USMEPCOM, Military Recruiting Services and the Military Training Reception Centers, must work cohesively to meet enlistment goals for the U.S. armed forces.

In tackling the challenge of bringing different commands together, Bastian found strength and value in the unique perspective each command offered to improve communications and processes across the Triad.

"The event was an amazing opportunity that brought us together, allowing us to understand the vital role each segment of the Accession Triad plays," said Army Col. Kutter. "It was a nostalgic trip down memory road for some of us and we can't thank everyone enough for their contributions. This experience 'Unleashed the B.E.A.S.T' and strengthened our commitment to working cohesively and making a real impact in our mission."

The event taught USMEPCOM participants how to better support the other commands within the Accession Triad.

"The event was fantastic and allowed us to gain exposure to see how our product from the MEPS affects the bootcamps, see what their friction points are and what we can do to better support them from our side. It was a very eye-opening experience to see the other side of the MEPS process and how it fits in with the Accession Triad," said Navy Cmdr. Richard Yates, 10th BN commander.

While learning about the intricacies of reception and initial entry training, participants shared current and upcoming medical processing initiatives, including the introduction of Artificial Intelligence for use with medical prescreens.

"We were able to discover some trends at reception that created a burden on their staff, specifically behavioral



▲ Army 1st Sgt. Jamar Harris, USMEPCOM 2nd BN senior enlisted advisor, discusses trends with a drill sergeant at a Leaders Professional Development Event. (Photo by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore)

and medical issues of new recruits that may not have been identified during their initial medical evaluation," said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore.

The Leaders Professional Development provided leaders from USMEPCOM and Initial Entry Training along with Interservice Recruiting Committee (IRC) members new perspectives to understand how each essential segment of the Triad works together.

"Lt. Col. Bastian went above and beyond in planning this, and Col. Kutter helped strengthen our relationship with the IRC partners and the recruiting side of the house and the event was beneficial for all parties in the Triad," said Yates.

At the conference, some leaders also reminisced on their own experiences going through the MEPS, reception, and initial entry training.

"I arrived July 1, 1996, at Parris Island and I remember the drill instructor coming onto the bus. He said there were yellow footprints and to find a pair and put our left hands to our heads," recalled Yates.

Yates enlisted in the Marine Corps at Baltimore MEPS and then went on to receive his commission from the United States Naval Academy in 2006.

"I was about halfway down the bus, and everyone was filling in the footprints and I was trying not to be in the back or on the outside, so I found those footprints, and I found those exact spots during the LPD and got to stand there. It was fantastic to be able to relive those memories all these years later." ■



▲ Navy Cmdr. Richard Yates, USMEPCOM 10th BN commander, stands on the same yellow footprints he stood on at his own reception during a Leaders Professional Development event. (Photo by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daniel Kenemore)



▲ Attendees of the Leaders Professional Development event pose for a photo following Morning Colors. (Courtesy photo)



▲ USMEPCOM Eastern Sector leadership pose in front of quote, "Through these portals pass prospects for America's finest fighting force, United States Marines" at a Leaders Professional Development event. (Courtesy photo)

MEPS MENTION

Email derrik.lnoack.civ@army.mil with MEPS Mention submissions!



Name: Jack Weldon

Position at the MEPS: Medical Supervisor

Time at Montgomery MEPS: 37 years

Words of Wisdom: Weldon inspires everyone to come to work with a positive attitude and strive to be the best at what they do. He embodies The Golden Rule of treat others how you want to be treated and is thankful for all that he has. Weldon will retire after nearly four decades of service to Montgomery MEPS. He said "Working at MEPS has been a blessing. Serving this great Nation and having a job that you look forward to is something that I will always appreciate."

Plans after retirement: Spending a significant amount of time with his grandsons, coaching football and relaxing on the beach.



Name: Jonathan Dixon

Position at the MEPS: Lead Medical Technician

Time at Detroit MEPS: 23 years

Contribution: Dixon served 20 years in the Navy, three of those as a Navy liaison at the MEPS. As the longest-tenured Atlanta MEPS employee, Dixon helps support continuity in all portions of the medical section. He trains and mentors new employees, ensuring processing is maximized for the third-largest MEPS. He consistently uses his expertise and experience to support others.

Giving Back: Dixon is the president of Kappa Lambda Chi Military Fraternity Inc., a national non-collegiate service that caters exclusively to military members of all branches. The program allows service members a platform to engineer social and environmental change.

Personal Mantra: Every day, strive to become 1% better.



Winter Safety Tips from Rex the Rhino

Conserve energy and prevent ice dam formation by ensuring you properly:

Winterize the home interior

- Add insulation in walls and attics.
- Caulk doors and windows.
- Install weather stripping.
- Install double-pane windows or storm windows.
- Cover sliding doors and windows with plastic sheeting from inside.
- Inspect and flush water heater if needed.

Winterize the home exterior

- Clean out rain gutters from debris and repair roof leaks.
- Drain and clean sprinkler systems and outside pipes and hoses.
- Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls.
- Shut off valves to outside lines.
- Bury or insulate exposed water pipes to prevent them from freezing or bursting.

Prevent slips, trips, and falls

- Connect electric lights and decorations before snow or ice are present.
- Keep steps and stairwells located outside free of ice, snow, and water accumulation by shoveling or removing ice and snow.
- Use sand or other environmentally friendly materials outdoors when the removal of snow or ice is not possible.
- Use adhesive stripping material or antiskid paint.



Home fires occur more in the winter than any other season. To prevent fires ensure that you are aware of the proper usage of:

Electrical equipment

- Electrical issues are the leading cause of home fires, approximately 45,000 are reported each year.
- Use light bulbs that match the recommended wattage.
- Plug only one heat producing appliance directly into a wall outlet.
- Never use an extension cord with a heat-producing appliance.
- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from any heat source.

Heating equipment

- Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires and third leading cause of home fire deaths.
- Check your CO detector, fire alarm, and fire extinguisher monthly.
- Have a qualified professional clean and inspect your chimney and vents every year.
- Store cooled ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep it outside at least 10 feet from your home and any nearby buildings.
- Use portable generators only outside and at least 20 feet from the home, away from windows and vents to allow proper ventilation. Portable generators were involved in the majority of carbon monoxide (CO) deaths with 74% occurring in homes.

Decorations

- More than 1/3 of home decoration fires are started by candles, approximately 7,400 are reported each year.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that burns or use battery-operated flameless candles.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for the number of light strands to connect.
- More than 1 in every 5 Christmas tree fires were caused by a heat source being too close to the tree. Keep trees at least 3 feet apart.
- Ensure pets and children are supervised and/or tree and decorations are out of reach.

Seventeen percent of all vehicle crashes occur during the winter. Exercise extreme caution and prevent vehicular accidents by properly conducting:

Preventative maintenance

- Have car regularly tuned and checked on a regular basis.
- Install winter or all-season tires.
- Ensure tires have adequate tread and air pressure. Replace any worn tires and fill low tires with air to the proper pressure recommended for your car (typically 30-35 psi).
- Ensure windshield-wiper fluid is replaced with a wintertime mix and check the antifreeze fluid level.
- Remove snow and ice from the windshield, side, and rear windows, mirrors, headlights and taillights.
- Prepare an emergency safety kit.

Defensive winter driving techniques

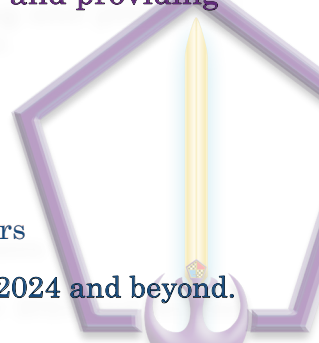
- When driving on snow or ice, use 10x more distance to come to a complete stop.
- Maintain extra distance between you and the vehicle in front of you, and slow down.
- Be aware that the bridge and overpass surfaces freeze first and thaw last.
- Do not lock wheels when breaking to prevent sliding and loss of control of vehicle.
- If you start sliding, turn the steering wheel in the direction you want the front of the vehicle to go. Do not oversteer. Take your foot off the accelerator. Do not brake until you regain control of the vehicle.

While the launch of USMIRS 1.1 redefined what innovation meant for the Accession Community, it hasn't stopped the USMIRS development team from keeping momentum strong and providing continuous improvements for end users and service partners alike.

In 2023, the USMIRS development team:

- Developed and refined the medical notifications feature
 - Enhanced homepage performance
- Restructured the DD93 form per DOD guidance
 - Aligned systems with base renaming efforts
- Processed, solved and closed almost 600 ServiceNow tickets from end users
 - Coordinated updates to integrate with all service partner systems

The updates don't stop there! The USMIRS development team has even more planned for 2024 and beyond.



InstaMEPS



Submit photos highlighting personnel at your MEPS to derrik.l.noack.civ@army.mil

1. (R) Rosalyn Horacek takes her Oath of Enlistment at Los Angeles MEPS. Horacek didn't have to travel far to the ceremony room, as she was serving as a medical technician at the MEPS when she decided to join the Air Force.

2. Atlanta MEPS personnel visit Fort Jackson to better understand the Accession Triad, specifically focusing on the Military Training Reception Center. During the visit, MEPS personnel observed applicants walk into the Army's largest Reception Center, Fort Jackson's 120th Adjutant General Battalion (Recruiting), which serves as a starting point for basic training.

3. Congrats to Portland MEPS testing clerk, Carlose Montes-Bravo (L), who was promoted to Navy Petty Officer 1st Class. (Courtesy photos)



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4. Applicants Timur Balandin and Anastasia Balandina, husband and wife, shipped to Army basic training from New York MEPS. Born in Russia, they are using National service as their route to improving their English and becoming citizens through the Foreign Language Recruiting Initiative Program.

5. Air Force Lt. Col. Justin Smith, Boise MEPS commander, provides the red carpet treatment to Miss Idaho, Reagan Yamauchi, during a visit to the MEPS where she spoke with staff and applicants, observed an oath and got a tour of the facility.

6. (L to R) Army Lt. Col. Devanie Johnson, 11th Battalion commander, and Army Maj. Kesia Lloyd-Brown, New Orleans MEPS commander, greet Army Gen. Randy George, Chief of Staff of the Army, who toured the MEPS, participated in a Oath of Enlistment ceremony and discussed various recruiting initiatives. (Photo by Army Sgt. Natalie Pantalos)

7. Army Lt. Col. Maria Sanchez, 6th Battalion and Chicago MEPS commander, and Army 1st Sgt. Jeremy Norris, 6th Battalion and Chicago MEPS SEA, take a selfie with Mayor of Chicago Brandon Johnson at a Veteran's Day event. (4, 5 & 7 Courtesy photos)



black history month

African American Trailblazers

1-29 February 2024



Harlem Hellfighters - Soldiers assigned to the 369th Infantry Regiment, an all-black regiment under the command of mostly white officers, pose with their awards for gallantry in combat, 1919. The 369th served on the front lines for 191 days during World War I, longer than any other American unit. In that time, soldiers of the regiment, known as the "Harlem Hellfighters," never gave up any ground it captured.



Doris Miller - Dorie Miller stands aboard the USS Enterprise in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, wearing the Navy Cross he just received, May 27, 1942.



Emlen Tunnell - Emlen Tunnell, the first African American to play NFL football for the New York Giants, also posthumously received the Coast Guard Silver Lifesaving Medal for his actions in World War II



John L. Canley - Retired Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. John L. Canley, the 298th Marine Medal of Honor recipient, speaks at the Pentagon, Oct. 18, 2018.



Tuskegee Airmen - Advanced instruction turned student pilots into fighter pilots at Tuskegee Army Airfield, Ala.



Women's Army Corps Cpl. Alyce Dixon poses with members of her unit during World War II. She and about 850 other Black women served in England and France with the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only all-Black Women's Army Corps unit to be stationed overseas during World War II. In 2022, President Joe Biden signed a bipartisan bill to award the 6888th the Congressional Gold Medal.