

Messenger

FALL
2023



Bringing
Families Back
To The **MEPS**

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WESTERN
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When I first came onboard, I put out my leadership philosophy and command imperatives. A key element of both is Be a Team Member. To me, there is nothing stronger than a team; we cannot do anything without one another.

As I read through the articles of this issue of the Messenger, this theme of teamwork kept popping up, and I am proud to see how this command works together, internally as well as with our external partners.

One of the biggest stories over the past few months was the Army medical personnel who came to support medical processing during the summer surge (page 18). From the herculean efforts to get them here and train them to the hospitality shown by each hosting MEPS, I am proud of the effort of all our people to get the most out of that opportunity.

Summer is not only our busiest season for applicant processing, it's when many of our uniformed team members change over. Here at the headquarters and Sectors in North Chicago, we said farewell to two SEAs

and one commander and welcomed their successors. Always bittersweet. (pages 10, 21).

Additionally, there are stories of our MEPS investing the time and energy to building and maintaining their teams and team members. OKC MEPS invited their IRC partners out on a field trip (page 8), Dallas dominates the InstaMEPS page with some snapshots of how they stay tight (page 30), and our MEPS commander in Anchorage discusses his story and efforts to build resiliency (page 16).






So thank you. Thank you for all you do to keep this team going.

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

Megan B. Stallings
Colonel, USA
Commanding

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Please send "Letters to the Editor" submissions to:
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Fall 2023

Cover Photo by Derrik Noack
Cover Design by Amy Gregorski

ON THE COVER:

*Army applicant Colby Wingate poses for a photo with his mother and father after swearing in at Tampa MEPS.
Check out more info on page 4.*



Visitor Policy Brings Families Back to the MEPS

By Derrik Noack

As the eight middle-aged residents of Tampa file into the blue-carpeted and wood paneled room and stand against the walls, it's a stark contrast from those who are already standing in the middle. Nearly 20 young adults and older teenagers, whose expressions range from excitement to nervousness, look straight ahead. Those standing on the outskirts of the room have their own array of expressions, with the men looking very proud and the women, teary-eyed and deep in thought, looking toward those in the center.

This summer, USMEPCOM released its applicant guest policy, which allows most applicants two guests to the Oath of Enlistment. Family access to MEPS was restricted when the COVID-19 pandemic forced shutdowns globally. As the world opened back up, USMEPCOM developed a policy to bring in guests inside while ensuring smooth operations.

"I am happy to welcome applicant guests to our MEPS to witness the start of their loved one's military career," said Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander. "As a command we are laser-focused on efficiently processing applicants to support our recruiting partners, and this policy strikes the right balance between allowing guests and mitigating impact to operations."

Active-Duty applicants about to ship to basic training as well as National Guard and Reserve

applicants are allowed two visitors to observe the Oath of Enlistment at all MEPS locations. All MEPS continue to record and post videos of the Oath of Enlistment to their Facebook pages.

Back in the Tampa MEPS Oath Room, the moms and dads, and even a couple siblings raise their smartphones toward their loved ones as they in turn raise their right hand and begin in unison, "I, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies..." After the newest applicants into the Armed Forces complete their Oath of Enlistment, they have just a few minutes to say farewell to their families before heading to the airport to fly to basic training. It will be the last time they see each other until graduation in a couple months.

"We're a team and one of our team members is leaving. We're very attached. For us to be here inside, to be able to see Kevin take the Oath, for us it's very important. It has only been us three since Bryan has been born."

**-Lunice Cruz,
Navy applicant mother**

Lunice Cruz, one of the noticeably more emotional moms during the Aug. 28 ceremony, couldn't imagine not being there to see her son, Kevin Cruz, swear into the Navy. She explains that since the birth of her younger son, 18-year-old Bryan, it has just been the three of them.

"We're a team and one of our team members is leaving," said Lunice. "We're very attached. For us to be here inside, to be able to see Kevin take the Oath, for us it's very important. It has only been us three since Bryan has been born."

"Everybody wants to see him go, achieve his goals and see his growth," said Bryan. "Our friends and family, especially our grandpa will enjoy seeing the pictures we post here today but it was very important for us three to be here together."

When Lunice and Bryan embraced Kevin following the ceremony, the feelings of connectivity and love were palpable. They were cherishing every moment in the MEPS, needing nearly an entire box of tissues for the tears between them.

"We are emotional today," said Lunice. "They are tears of joy, moments like this mean a lot. It is hard because we are very close, but I am very proud of him, this is a big step. I will continue to write letters and support him throughout his Navy career. He will always feel our energy, that we are with him and that we are proud of him."

That support, especially at the beginning of one's military career, is what got many in the service through difficult times. Support from family is important in maintaining stability in the

◀(L) Kevin Cruz, Navy applicant shipping from Tampa MEPS, poses for a photo with his mom and brother, following his Oath of Enlistment. (Photo by Derrik Noack)

demanding environment of the military, and family even has influence on whether service members continue to serve.

"Them being here reminds me of my why," said Kevin. "Why I'm signing up and doing this. It's really just another last-minute surge of strength to see my mom and brother here. I was giving them words of encouragement to stay strong, but also telling that to myself. It makes me want to go harder."

Another mom in attendance compared the day's events to other huge landmark moments in her family's life.

"This is a huge milestone in his life," said Jennifer Doria, whose son, Christian Castro, enlisted into the Navy. "This is just like a wedding or any other big event. He's the last of four kids to leave the house, so it's hard for me to let go. This is a moment that will live in my memories forever."

Although she was also wiping away tears with a hand full of tissues, she expressed that she was very excited her son made the

decision to enlist.

"I've never seen him this excited about anything," said Jennifer. "I couldn't get him to memorize anything growing up and he's already memorized the Sailor's Creed and other information he'll need in bootcamp. It was emotional to watch him swear in and take the next step to be the man he is destined to become. It is hard for us to see him go, but we know it will make his life better."

For those working with applicants daily, they know just how big of an impact that one member of a family enlisting into the military can have. It can make better the life of just that sole individual.

"Seeing the pride and that smile that family members have as they come in, it means a lot," said Adrian Roberson, Tampa MEPS human resources assistant. "They're seeing their child or loved on starting a new career. You can have an applicant come in, and their family doesn't have much. That applicant is going to change their lives by sending money home or by simply

taking care of themselves and their own medical and dental bills."

The doors opening back up to visitors also help remind the staff of the important mission behind every task they achieve throughout the day, and in a way, shines a light on that mission for family as well.

"Seeing the emotions from family members and other visitors reemphasizes the values and traditions of military service," said Patricia McNeal, Tampa MEPS human resources assistant. "It is important for them [family] to witness the oath so they too can understand that patriotism and embrace the important charge their loved ones have raised their hands to uphold."

Applicants may need to coordinate with their recruiter for visitor access to some MEPS. For information about visiting a specific MEPS visit www.mepcom.army.mil/Units/. To view the current Applicant Guest Policy, visit www.mepcom.army.mil/Home/Applicants-and-Parents/Applicant-Guests/-30-/ ■



▲(Center) Christian Castro, Navy applicant, poses for a photo with his parents following his Oath of Enlistment at Tampa MEPS. (Photo by Derrik Noack)



1. (L) Kevin Cruz hugs his younger brother Bryan before shipping to Navy basic training from Tampa MEPS.

2. Applicants say farewell to family members following their Oath of Enlistment in the ceremony room of Tampa MEPS.

3. Family members prepare to watch their loved ones take the Oath of Enlistment in the ceremony room of Tampa MEPS.

4. Navy applicant Arthur Gieseking hugs his parents following his Oath of Enlistment at Tampa MEPS.

(Photos by Derrik Noack)

The Science of Safety:

OKLAHOMA CITY MEPS VISITS CIVIL AEROSPACE MEDICAL INSTITUTE

✈ By Navy Lt. Cmdr. Joel D. Pagán, Oklahoma City MEPS commander



The Oklahoma Federal Executive Board presented the Oklahoma City MEPS team with an amazing opportunity to engage with industry leading experts like Dr. Melchor Antuñano, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) director. Not only is Antuñano responsible for the oversight of FAA programs, but he is also a pilot with decades of experience in the air. Oklahoma City MEPS personnel, alongside IRC Partners, met with Antuñano to learn about the organization that is innovating and instilling changes to aviation rules worldwide that resides in their own backyard.

"CAMI's mission is to support civil aerospace safety through excellence in medical certification, research, and educational programs," said Antuñano. "But this mission is becoming more complex and challenging with the accelerated development of innovative aerospace transportation technologies, which reshape the way people and cargo are transported around the world. CAMI remains focused on studying the complex factors that influence human health and performance in the aerospace environment, seeking to understand and explain their impacts to the nation's civil aerospace community including operators and users. Outreach and networking efforts with other government organizations such as MEPS are very important to increase awareness of our respective programs and activities and make it possible to explore possibilities for potential collaborative efforts of mutual interest."

The group, consisting of military members of Oklahoma City MEPS and three IRC partner representatives, were given an executive brief of the campus and all its responsibilities. Most of the research being conducted there involves analyzing data generated from investigations, scientific testing, training and simulation programs. At CAMI, the improvement of training and in-flight operations is an ongoing endeavor that manages the changes occurring in our technology at an exponential rate.

After the brief, Antuñano led the group on an in-depth tour of the entire campus. First stop was the toxicology lab where the group learned about chain of custody requirements for remains after an accident and the process in which highly experienced technicians test human remains for substances present that may have caused an accident. CAMI's state-of-the-art toxicology lab is the first entity to investigate and receive remains after aviation related incidents occur.



▲ Navy Lt. Cmdr. Joel D. Pagán, Oklahoma City MEPS commander, poses for a photo with a \$250,000 crash dummy at the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute. (Courtesy photo)

After crossing into the restricted retinal-scanner area where the toxicology lab resided, we proceeded to see a portion of the facility dubbed the 'unofficial' museum. On the ground level of CAMI are time capsules in the form of enclosed flight simulators that can make even the most seasoned pilot get a case of motion sickness. In this area, we also found a historical piece that the Smithsonian fought for. It is the world's first crash test dummy, that currently lives inside of a glass box for all to see the "person" that started it all.

As we progressed through the tour, we saw the latest innovation in tower operations: remote towers! These towers are designed to allow air traffic controllers the ability to remotely control aircraft from a much more economical location by bypassing the 35-million-dollar price tag of a conventional tower. The next station was full of high-definition screens and cockpit mock-ups. Pilots will soon be able to navigate complex operations with the movement of their hands and even their thoughts. That technology is here at CAMI, and it is moving at the speed of flight. Night Vision Goggle training is also a must when going through the extensive aviation training.

The next facility housed two paramount concerns to aviation safety: survivability and protection. CAMI has the latest generation water survival facility which will soon replicate 12-foot waves and winds up to 100 knots. There, pilots can get the latest training on procedures to survive an untimely accident over vast waters in any climate. CAMI can also simulate sub-zero temps and no light scenarios where pilots in training must find their way to safety and successfully start a fire with only rudimentary items in its Polar Chamber.

The last piece of the facility is the protection side of the house. A sled that weighs several tons can fire across tracks and stop on a dime, with the help of engineering advancements in pulleys and counterweights. The lucky riders of this terrifying ride are \$250,000 sensor laden anthropomorphic test device's (formerly known as crash dummies). Without these brave steel-boned and microchipped human-look-alikes, crash testing data would not exist. Our final stop was at the FlexSim w/smoke demonstration where the tour group had to demonstrate how to properly emergency egress from a compromised cabin.

Connecting with community leaders is essential in our relationship building with our local agencies and communities that our MEPS belong to. Oklahoma City MEPS and the IRC partners that joined us were beyond impressed with the event and could not have asked for a better host in Dr. Antuñano. His enthusiastic and in-depth tour was a humbling and educational experience. The next time you take a flight to begin your leave or TDY, remember that 100% of all safety procedures and advances were first researched here in Oklahoma City. ■



▲ Oklahoma City MEPS personnel and IRC partners pose for a photo with Dr. Melchor Antuñano, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) director (center) during a visit to the CAMI facility. (Courtesy photo)

USMEPCOM Holds Change of Responsibility & Retirement Ceremony



1

By Derrik Noack

Army Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette accepted responsibility as the new senior enlisted advisor (SEA) of USMEPCOM, succeeding Army Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson, who is retiring after nearly three decades of service in the Army.

While officiating the event, Army Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander, emphasized the vital role Symonette will play in such a geographically dispersed organization.

"It is a unique position, with the special trust and confidence of the commander," Stallings said. "One of the most important things SEAs do is ensure active communication throughout the chain of command. They provide input for the formulation, implementation and execution of policies concerning morale, job satisfaction, discipline, family support and training. In USMEPCOM we have 68 SEAs, and the highest ranking is the USMEPCOM headquarters SEA."

Woodson, who took on the role of senior enlisted advisor in 2020, reflected on his time in service and the unique opportunity to complete his gratifying career at USMEPCOM.

"It's almost impossible to speak of the many events, experiences and great people I have had the opportunity to serve with," said Woodson. "The past 30 months here has been an amazing rollercoaster ride. To all USMEPCOM employees and families, thanks again for allowing me to be a member of your team. I'm truly thankful for the opportunities that Freedom's Front Door provided me in 1994 when I entered through Richmond MEPS (now Fort Gregg-Adams MEPS). It is with immense pleasure to end my career right where it started."

Symonette, who previously served as Knoxville MEPS SEA, concluded the ceremony by sharing her excitement for the years to come as she settles into her new role.

"As USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor, know that I will lead, care for and serve the exceptional members that make up this unique and amazing organization," said Symonette. "I look forward to working with you all and our stakeholders. Let us continue to evolve, work as a team to drive success, overcome challenges and uphold our organization's critical mission. I look forward to serving us – you all – enhancing our organization together to new heights." ■



2

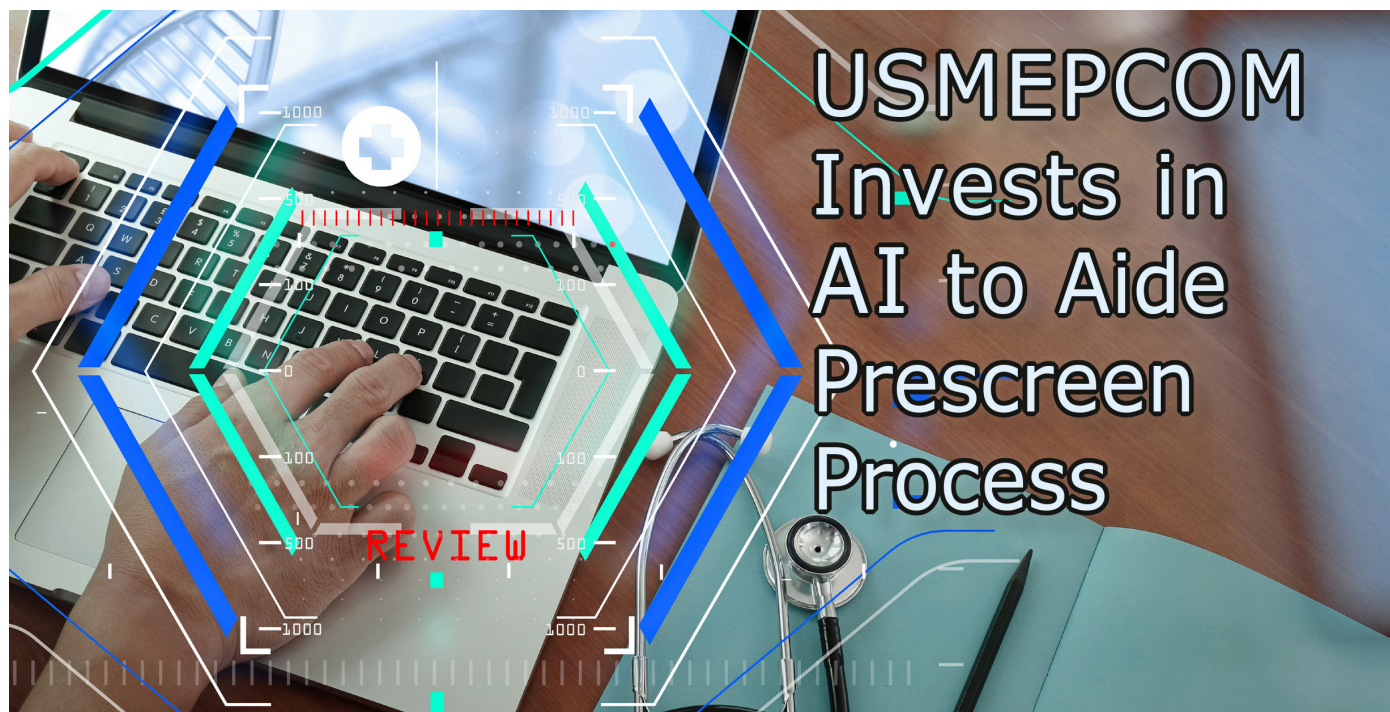
3



4



1. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette addresses the auditorium at USMEPCOM as the new HQ SEA. Symonette accepted responsibility as the new senior enlisted advisor, succeeding Army Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson.
2. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson shares a hug with his grandson during his retirement ceremony.
3. (L) Army Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson is lauded by the crowd, and his eager grandson, following his speech at the ceremony.
4. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette passes the unit guidon to USMEPCOM HQ battalion senior enlisted advisor Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Marc Ascher during a change of responsibility ceremony. (Photos by Israel Molina)



USMEPCOM Invests in AI to Aide Prescreen Process

By Derrik Noack

The 2022 rollout of MHS GENESIS across USMEPCOM brought access to authoritative medical history for applicants to military service. This access has allowed for better medical decision making, but it has also meant an increased workload with more medical information to review for more applicants.

To adjust to this new paradigm, USMEPCOM has updated guidance and policies, utilized virtual capabilities, and even added personnel just to execute prescreens. Currently, it can take up to two hours for a provider to medically prescreen an applicant, but a new capability is on the horizon to significantly decrease that time: Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Led by the Command Advisory Group (CAG), concept development for the AI project began in summer 2022. The objective was to develop and implement an AI capability that would increase efficiency, effectiveness, validity and speed of military applicant medical screening. To achieve that objective, they partnered with the Department of Defense's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO), which will build the software.

"Right now, we're heading into

the execution phase of the project where they're developing the prototype," said Randi McRobbie, CAG program analyst serving as AI project coordinator. "That in itself has a follow-up phase of testing and then that goes into full operating capability."

Initial operating capability could come possibly as early as September 2024, based on timing of AI access to MHS GENESIS data. While still in "phase zero," plans are for the AI to screen an applicant's medical history and place them into different bins based on the complexity of their medical history. For applicants flagged for disqualifying conditions, the AI will highlight those issues to streamline medical provider review.

"The review of an individual's medical history can be quite extensive," said Anthony Cerda, Innovation Facilitation Team (IFT) lead for this project. "AI will review and extract only the necessary data needed for the provider to make a decision. Prescreen review is currently the longest part of the medical process. By giving the providers only what they need, they can more quickly and efficiently make their decision."

The AI will only act as a tool and will not have the capabilities to

make decisions or determine an applicant's ability to serve on the All-Volunteer Force.

"This will only be part of the first stage of the prescreen process," said McRobbie. "This AI capability is limited to determining the significance of the applicant's medical history. It will sort through the data for easier review by medical prescreen personnel to inform medical provider's decisions. A human still makes that determination to schedule a medical exam or if further information needs to be found."

While still in the first phases of development, this first-time partnership between USMEPCOM and CDAO could lead to even more efficient ways to evaluate applicants and thereby sustain the All-Volunteer Force.

"What we hope is that this project allows us to explore other areas that we can use AI," said McRobbie. "This is really groundbreaking for us. It's the first time we've partnered with this type of organization. We are going to look to what it can lead to for the future, not just solving the problem at hand with medical prescreening, but what we can explore later." ■

Tina Siordia

By Derrik Noack

IF YOU WANT MEET WITH THE USMEPCOM COMMANDER, YOU MUST GET THROUGH TINA SIORDIA FIRST. OR, AT LEAST, HAVE TINA ADD YOU TO THE COMMANDER'S CALENDAR. TINA IS THE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE COMMANDER AND ONE OF THE MOST REVERED PEOPLE AT THE COMMAND.

HER REVERENCE WASN'T EARNED OVERNIGHT THOUGH. SINCE 1979, TINA HAS BEEN THE ESTEEMED SECRETARY FOR A TOTAL OF 20 COMMANDERS.



Share stories of personnel with decades of service to the command. Email derrik.l.noack.civ@army.mil

"Before USMEPCOM was created, I worked at U.S. Army Recruiting Command," said Tina. "I left there with part of that operations directorate to establish USMEPCOM provisional at Fort Sheridan. Originally, there were three Sectors: Eastern, Central and Western. I worked for Central first then, in 1979, the secretary to the commander left and I took over. We came to our current building in 1983 and this is where I've been ever since."

Her first computer would come in 1985, two years after the headquarters move. The machine weighed more than 20 pounds and was Tina's first experience with a personal computer.

"I used to have printed files on files...," said Tina. "There are still some in my desk from the 70s. I just haven't gotten rid of them even though I should. Sometimes people are searching for things, and I have a copy, like a forgotten unit award from 1985."

Although it took some learning, she was grateful for the organizational tools a computer provided her. One thing she does miss is old dial phones, an essential device before everyone had a smartphone in their pocket.

"Before cell phones, I would screen calls or reach out on behalf of the commander," she said. "Things would get done much faster that way, especially when you mentioned your boss' name. Now you must wait for a response to an email."

That's not to say Tina doesn't welcome change, she finds it invigorating. And although commanders come and go, as military duty calls for, that doesn't stop Tina from forming lifelong friendships.

"If you don't like someone you work with, and they're military, you know eventually they'll be leaving," she jokes. "But I have been lucky and blessed to work with good people. Every three years they leave, but change can be exciting. Sometimes it is sad when a commander goes, you grow close with them. I usually keep in touch and even visit with a few of them on weekends."

The branch of each commander varies, as is the case at a joint service command, but Tina said Sailors usually bring the most laughs to the office. As for the secret to her 54-year career, it's simple. She just loves what she does.

"From my experience, Navy commanders are the biggest characters," she said. "The commanders each have different leadership styles, but they're all nice to me. I find working with them fulfilling knowing that in some way I am contributing to the freedoms we have. I'm still enjoying every day, otherwise I wouldn't be here." ■

Petty Officer 1st Class
Jared W. Day



room rededication

SALT LAKE CITY MEPS REMEMBERS FALLEN HERO

By Army Capt. Sara Sajer, Salt Lake City MEPS executive officer

On Aug. 18, Salt Lake City MEPS recognized the 10-year dedication anniversary of the Petty Officer 1st Class Jared W. Day Ceremony Room and unveiled updated signage to Day's family and the MEPS community.

"Memory is the bridge between the past and the future and we stand on it in the now, reflecting," explained Air Force Capt. Jeffrey Larsen, Hill Airforce Base Chaplain, during his invocation. "Since the dawn of time, the act of remembering has been a core human commitment that has allowed us to learn, grow and immortalize goodness. Though looking back can be painful, it is noble and necessary."

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Jared Day was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 6, 2011, in the events now known as Extortion 17. Day, a special operations tactical communicator, was among 30 men and one combat assault dog killed while conducting a Navy Seal Quick Reaction Force rescue mission. An enemy rocket-propelled grenade hit their helicopter and killed everyone on board in the greatest loss of American life in a singular event in the war in Afghanistan. Day's parents, Sam and Keno Day, say that their son and hero "died living his dream as an American patriot in an elite unit."

The tribute offered by Salt Lake City MEPS commander, Army Maj. William Hernandez, recounted Day's journey which began in Salt Lake City when he graduated from Cottonwood High School in Murray, Utah and enlisted into the Navy at the MEPS in 2002. Hernandez also stressed unity of purpose. Since the original dedication of the ceremony room to Day's sacrifice and legacy, more than 30,000 Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen and Coast Guardsmen have stood in that spot and raised their right hands.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Brandon Ruedi, Salt Lake City MEPS medical non-commissioned officer in charge, narrated the events of "Extortion 17" and Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Nicholas Sybrosky, Salt Lake City MEPS Navy service liaison, dedicated the Fallen Comrade Table whose empty place setting, now staged in the applicant cafeteria, offers a solemn reminder of those lost men and women. Sybrosky emphasized our special task as storytellers for those who have been



▲(L)The parents of late Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Jared W. Day, Sam and Keno, pose for a photo with the Salt Lake City MEPS Command Team at the rededication of the ceremony room to his namesake. (Photo by Mr. Sean Penman)

silenced, "Our fallen risk being forgotten if we do not tell their stories."

The re-dedication culminated in the unveiling of new signage, which included a door placard, the "I Will Never Quit" excerpt from the Navy Seal ethos and an official narrative of the mission in which Day gave his life. The USO provided refreshments for the family and friends of the late Jared Day and the entirety of the MEPS staff as they took a moment to reconnect with the heart of our enlistment mission.

Army Spc. Shirley Rojas, a Soldier assigned to the medical department through the Army Medical Surge Program, helped coordinate the ceremony.

"We wanted it to be perfect, for both the family to see their son accurately represented and the applicants who will take steps toward service in this special room," said Rojas. "Seeing the Navy Seal ethos, the placard of him with all of his hard-earned medals and the story of his heroism is awe-inspiring and will offer a daily reminder of why I chose to serve and will motivate future service members who pass through Freedom's Front Door."

A Navy applicant who swore in following the rededication described the experience as "emotional and humbling" and said he "got a little choked up after witnessing the ceremony and standing at attention just like Jared Day had." ■

Test Coordinator Gives Back to Community in Coast Guard Auxiliary

By Derrik Noack



▲ Lisa Kalfin, Albany MEPS test coordinator, prepares to manually line handle for an incoming ship on New York's Hudson River as a Coast Guard Auxiliarist. (Courtesy photo)



▲ Lisa Kalfin, Albany MEPS test coordinator, poses for a photo while performing vessel inspections on kayaks during a charity event. (Courtesy photo)

Volunteerism typically increases around Thanksgiving and Christmas, with fundraisers and food drives making huge impacts on communities all over. For Lisa Kalfin, Albany MEPS test coordinator, her community service surges most in the summer. She has volunteered as a Coast Guard Auxiliarist, the civilian volunteer arm of the U.S. Coast Guard, for the past eight years.

Her main roles in volunteering there include conducting vessel inspections for kayaks, jet skis and boats and providing boating safety classes for the community. She has also spent time volunteering at a light house and in the winter, aides in ice breaking missions. In the past year, she has taken on public affairs roles and led press conferences for the Auxiliary – something she credits her role at the MEPS in helping with.

“Going and talking to students and parents as a test coordinator has helped in my public speaking for the Coast Guard Auxiliary,” said Kalfin. “Whether talking about the benefits of the ASVAB, or boating safety, as long as you’re passionate about what you’re talking about it’s easy.”

Kalfin’s appreciation for the maritime fleet began at her first federal job, where she conducted security clearances for the Coast Guard in Boston. When she heard that a coworker at the MEPS volunteered as an Auxiliarist, she decided to come along to a meeting. That same day, she volunteered to join.

“Even though it’s volunteer work, I think it’s important what we do,” said Kalfin. “I enjoy getting to interact with people and help educate them during vessel inspections and safety checks. We want people to have fun on the water, but we also want to keep them safe.”

In her area, Kalfin said there are about 20 Coast Guard Auxiliarists who volunteer throughout the year. They typically meet once a month to discuss upcoming events. Now that summer is over, she looks forward to assisting the Coast Guard’s polar fleet, which are ships that cut through ice with reinforced hulls.

“Summer is our busiest time but here in upstate New York, we have the Hudson River that freezes over in the winter,” said Kalfin. “The Coast Guard comes up to break the ice and us Auxiliarists assist in line handling for them on the dock.”

Kalfin, who has worked at Albany MEPS nearly 20 years, said when she retires soon, she will volunteer even more in her community. She also spends several weekends volunteering at a nearby visitor’s center for a popular trail, where she gets to work with turtles, owls and bees. She said the secret to getting the most out of volunteering is to find something you enjoy.

“As far as volunteering, do something you are passionate about,” she said. “Knowing that you’re helping people and making an impact on your community is very rewarding.” ■

a major fight to destigmatize mental health

By Ashley Toomey



▲Army Maj. Rockie Ventura, Anchorage MEPS commander, poses for a photo in a local coffee shop near Anchorage MEPS. (Photo by Ashley Toomey)

After facing his own mental health struggles, Army Maj. Rockie Ventura, Anchorage MEPS commander, pioneers the way for destigmatizing mental health issues.

Ventura has dealt with his own mental health history and has earned several certifications in relation to his mission to destigmatize and help those who suffer from mental health issues. Ventura is a certified neuro-encoding specialist and certified Brain Health Licensed Trainer. He is continuing to further his education with other related courses and certifications.

Ventura recalled falling into a deep depression while trying to fight generational trauma and personal mental health issues during his time in the Army National Guard Reserves. He felt like he couldn't show weakness to anyone – family, peers or fellow Soldiers.

During a deployment, the then Sergeant (E5) found purpose in leading and being a part of a team. Once Ventura returned home, he thought of the friends he had lost in Iraq and began isolating himself, turning to alcohol and ending up in

a worse mental state than before his deployment. Of that time, he said, “My second depression was even worse than the first.”

During this depression, he saw a flyer at the University of Houston for counseling. He remembers being resistant to the vulnerability counseling requires but being grateful after experiencing a breakthrough.

“I look back at it now and am amazed with her [the counselor’s] ability to do what she did with a person like me,” said Ventura. “I remember thinking, ‘Could I help others this way?’”

Ventura took the lessons he had learned in counseling and had decided to be vulnerable with a group of people for the first time when prompted to share his testimony at church.

“Someone asked me to give my testimony at church,” he said. “My testimony included my experiences with depression, anxiety, and mental health issues. It was super raw. Someone came up to me and asked to speak to their basketball team, and this continued on to me sharing my mental health story to

large groups of people.”

He felt empowered in being vulnerable, a complete turnaround from who he once was. Ever since sharing his first testimony, his mission has been to educate others on mental health and resiliency. This process led to him volunteering to create and lead mental health-based courses to military personnel, USMEPCOM personnel and others in his community.

“There’s more value added to my life each time I teach a course,” he said. “I change the courses a little bit each time based on the feedback from the one before.”

Ventura has a “Overcoming Grief, Trauma, Anxiety and Stress” session scheduled on November 15 at 11:30 CST that can be accessed via Teams for all USMEPCOM personnel.

***"You will fall
in life. You
must choose
whether to be
the egg and
break or to be
the tennis
ball and
bounce back."
- Army Maj.
Rockie Ventura***



▲ Army Maj. Rockie Ventura, Anchorage MEPS commander, teaches a master resiliency course at the USMEPCOM Leadership Conference in May. (Photo by Amy Gregorski)



More information on E3 sessions can be found at [https://spear.mepcom.army.mil/hq/j1/wd/SitePages/Employee%20Education%20%26%20Engagement%20\(E3\).aspx](https://spear.mepcom.army.mil/hq/j1/wd/SitePages/Employee%20Education%20%26%20Engagement%20(E3).aspx).

He is excited to lead courses on leadership, coaching and especially mental health.

Regarding mental health issues, Ventura stated, "Anyone is vulnerable" and emphasized the importance of practicing and strengthening personal resilience with an egg and tennis ball analogy.

"You will fall in life," said Ventura. "You must choose whether to be the

egg and break or to be the tennis ball and bounce back."

Ventura mentioned other resources for those dealing with mental health issues, including Military OneSource for military personnel, which offers confidential services including specialty consultations, non-medical counseling, and crisis support. This resource is accessible via <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>.

For civilian personnel, Ventura recommended utilizing the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a mental health resource. The EAP provides assessment, short-term counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to federal employees, and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Employees may access USMEPCOM's EAP via <https://MagellanAscend.com>, and logging in with company name "MEPCOM" or by calling (866) 580-9046. ■



Freedom's Front Door

Initial Prescreen Review

MEPS/RPS: USMEPCOM

Date: 01/01/2023

Prescreen Processing Determination: METR

Requested METR Documents: SEE BELOW

Depressive episode: Will need all medical treatment and pharmacy records related to depressive episode from January 2021 to present.

1.) DD Form 2807-2 Review

Medications: NO

Allergies: NO

Applicant disclosures: YES

2.) HIE Data

Outside Records Reviewed YES CommonWell status: Enroll

JLV Reviewed YES Community Health Widget (# of documents)

PRESCREEN SUMMARY (DD Form 2807-2 and HIE):

Asthma: per Outside Records applicant seen by provider for asthma exam at Outpatient Clinic. Applicant not admitted but treated in office with DuoNeb inhaler. Most recent refill for albuterol was 11/03/2022. PFTs from 12/20/22 show obstruction. - CD

Right femur fracture: sustained while playing football. Found in Outside Records: ap ORIF 01/01/2021 at Imaginary Hospital. Found in JLV: hardware removal 10/01/2021 at Imaginary Hospital. Follow up imaging shows non-displaced fracture with callus formation. Applicant in care with clearance to resume normal activity and sports on 03/10/2022. - NCD

Depressive episode: Per JLV applicant seen for depressive episode January 2021 by Dr. Minnie M. Fantasy Clinic. No additional records available. Will need all medical treatment and pharmacy records pertaining to depressive episode 2021-present. **OPEN**

RECOMMENDED FOCUSED HISTORIES OR EXAMS AT MEPS:

Right lower extremity exam for strength and range of motion.

Note: Providers will not complete the Problem List, Allergy, or Home Medications Mgen components during the prescreen review.

Complete the requested information

Complete the requested information

Medical condition summaries should include all the relevant information about that condition where the information is significant and any

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SUPPORT THROUGH SUMMER SURGE

By Derrik Noack

The peak season for Military Entrance Processing Stations is summer, often referred to as the “summer surge.” With teenagers graduating in May, it only makes sense that the greatest number of applicants enlisting would be during the months following.

The increased workload during the surge has come to be expected from personnel at the MEPS, but there are only so many medical reviews that can be conducted in a day. The Army sent 85 medical personnel to MEPS across the country to support medical processing during the summer surge.

In June, the Army released a message calling for volunteers to assist with medical processing. Within a month they had assembled a team of 27 providers and 58 medical technicians to deploy to the MEPS. USMEPCOM quickly developed a training plan and picked locations where the medical personnel would make the most impact.

“This was determined by the Sector leadership through reviewing how many prescreens their individual MEPS needed addressed, how many applicants were being held an extra day to complete their examination and the availability of fee-based provider support at the individual MEPS,” said Army Col. Kevin Cummings, USMEPCOM command surgeon. “Once the specific MEPS that most needed support were identified, the higher headquarters supplying the surge providers reviewed the MEPS list and designated their providers for specific locations.”

The technicians went directly to their MEPS beginning July 17, to receive on-the-job training to provide extra support to room applicants, conduct drug screenings and various other tasks to medically process. The providers

will conduct medical prescreens and examinations, and with the technicians, will work at the MEPS before returning to their home duty stations at the end of September.

Of the providers, 19 will work exclusively on Army prescreens, while the rest will conduct applicant medical exams at the MEPS, prioritizing Army applicants but seeing applicants from all services. As a result, increased productivity is expected for all services.

While technicians received hands-on training at the MEPS, the providers came to USMEPCOM HQ for two weeks of training on the workflow within the electronic health record, MHS GENESIS.

“We’re making sure they thoroughly understand the process, so MEPS aren’t having to train all 27 providers as well,” said Army Col. Richard Frear, USMEPCOM prescreen provider. “First, they were taught the mechanics, then we broke out into smaller groups to better understand what decisions to make. Everything from ‘Is this a disqualification? Is it a hold? Does it need to go to the waiver authority?’ They are taking their time and not being graded on speed, rather depth of knowledge. Understanding the effects of their decisions when charting applicants, and how that carries on down the line, is going to have a really big impact.”

“It’s been enlightening to see everything full circle.”

-Army Capt. Trisha Adams, family nurse practitioner

The providers, who work for the Army in various medical roles, are not only contributing to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force, but gaining a deeper understanding of both their roles and the enlistment process.

“It’s been enlightening to see everything full circle,” said Army Capt. Trisha Adams, family nurse practitioner who will provide support at Jacksonville MEPS. “I handle primary care and sick call at Fort Leonard Wood, one of the basic training posts. Newly enlisted Soldiers are my population of patients. Now, I get to see medically where their careers start.”

Air Force Capt. Daniel Strickland, USMEPCOM deputy command surgeon recognized that it wasn’t an easy task to volunteer on such short notice. He said that Soldiers selflessly putting the mission before their own plans led to a strong group, creating a path so all the services could hopefully clear their processing backlogs by the end of the fiscal year.

“This is a big ask for the Army,” said Strickland. “We’re asking these individual providers for basically their entire summer on a short notice. We really are grateful to those who answered the call to come support us.”

USMEPCOM has continually worked to support its recruiting partners and stakeholders. Since the release of MHS GENESIS in March 2022, the command has stood up a Prescreen Support Coordination Center which has grown from a staff of nine to more than 20 personnel. Those on the PSCC can remotely review medical prescreens for all MEPS locations. The command also released updated guidance earlier this year, streamlining medical processing and providing more decision-making power to the providers. Currently, the command is examining the use of developing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to aid in their prescreen review process. ■

Nov. 13 - Dec. 11



Federal Benefits

OPM.GOV/OpenSeason

FEHB

Health Benefits

- Enroll
- Change plan/option
- Cancel enrollment
- Self, Self+One, Self & Family
- Use your agency's online enrollment system or contact your human resources office

FEDVIP

Dental & Vision

- Enroll
- Change plan/option
- Cancel enrollment
- Self, Self+One, Self & Family
- [Benefeds.com](https://www.benefeds.com) or 1-877-888-3337

FSAFEDS

Flexible Spending Accounts

- Enroll
- Re-enroll (it's not automatic)
- Increase/decrease election amount to suit your needs
- [FSAFEDS.com](https://www.fsaFEDS.com) or 1-877-372-3337

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY

Did you know that the Federal Benefits Open Season happens only once a year? Unless you experience a Qualifying Life Event during the year, the Open Season is your only opportunity to enroll, cancel your enrollment or make a change to your enrollment for the participating programs. The Open Season will run November 13 - December 11, 2023. This is the time to review and update your benefits, if needed.

If you do not take any action during the Open Season, your current FEHB and FEDVIP enrollments will automatically continue into the new year. However, FSA enrollments do not automatically continue into the new year. If you want an FSA in 2024, you must make an election during the Open Season.



SCAN THE QR CODE
FOR MORE INFO

Navy Officer Returns to command Western Sector

By Christine Parker

Navy Capt. Christopher Carmichael assumed command of Western Sector, USMEPCOM, succeeding Marine Corps Colonel Jesse Sjoberg during a change of command ceremony June 28 at USMEPCOM headquarters in North Chicago, Illinois.

Sjoberg took command in July 2021, during the command's first months of adaptation to a new processing system, and the need to support a very challenging military recruiting environment. Stallings commended Sjoberg for being "the right person in the right place at the right time."

"His leadership through our modernization was beyond amazing – unmatched by any words I could give it," said Army Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander. "He had an outstanding ability to solve issues across his Sector – finding innovative solutions to day-to-day problems and ensuring MEPS had the medical and processing personnel they needed."

Stallings then turned her attention to Carmichael, stating his "recruiting and processing experience will help you see the whole picture and I'm confident you're fully prepared to thrive as the Western Sector commander."

Of Western Sector, Sjoberg said, "although the leadership may have changed today, the heart of this organization beats on steady and true." He also discussed his regard for the military processing mission.

"I think it's worth stepping back to remember what it is that really happens in our MEPS every day ... Young patriots walk through our doors wanting desperately to become the ideal versions of themselves," said Sjoberg. "They come to be part of organizations where honor, courage, commitment, duty, integrity and service are a way of life."

Sjoberg will next serve at the Pentagon as the Headquarters Marine Corps Comptroller.

Carmichael, who has served in two roles within USMEPCOM already, said "It is an honor to be standing here and addressing you today as the Western Sector commander. There is absolutely nowhere else that I would rather be. ■



△Navy Capt. Christopher Carmichael passes the Western Sector guidon to Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Roger Rendon, Western Sector senior enlisted advisor, during the change of command ceremony.

▽Marine Corps Col. Jesse Sjoberg, outgoing Western Sector commander, gives remarks during the ceremony.

(Photos by Israel Molina)



Getting Acquainted with Captain Carmichael

By Ashley Toomey

Navy Capt. Christopher “Chris” Carmichael returns to the USMEPCOM family as Western Sector commander.

Carmichael, who previously served as Eastern Sector deputy commander and Chicago MEPS/6th Battalion operations officer, brings a unique perspective to the WS. Alongside his two previous roles in USMEPCOM, he also has served three tours in recruiting.

“These tours help me understand the accession triad and how USMEPCOM fits into it,” said Carmichael. “After 31 years in the Navy, I can honestly say there’s no better job than a job in the triad because you get to see every one of those applicants that come from diverse backgrounds, skillsets, religions and you get to see them transform into service members.”

He is excited to bring his experience as well as his newly developed **WARRIOR** mindset (see next page) to his new role. The WARRIOR mindset is a leadership philosophy Carmichael made to guide Western Sector. Along with the WARRIOR mindset, Carmichael also leads with his own personal leadership style.

“My personal leadership style is based on collaboration and teamwork,” he said. “I think the biggest thing is understanding varied perspectives. When you build relationships, you foster an environment of respect and then more ideas come to the table. By everyone having a voice at the table, you come out with a better product.”

By utilizing teamwork, Carmichael wants to emphasize communication

between headquarters and the MEPS to ensure transparency.

“The biggest thing for me is just taking care of people and knowing how I can impact leaders across the 32 MEPS and RPS in Western Sector to make decisions in a way that offers world class customer service. I want to be transparent with the MEPS and be able to receive transparent feedback from them.”

He sees USMEPCOM continuing to move forward in the realm of modernization.

“I got here when USMIRS 1.1 and MHS GENESIS were just a proof of concept and I have loved seeing the transformation. I believe USMEPCOM will continue to fulfill its mission, improve our processes and keep transforming for the better.”

On his off days, you can catch Carmichael watching the show “Suits” with his wife, Barbara. He loves dogs, and more specifically his dogs, Dingo a “chiweenie” and Coqui a “chug” mix. When the weather allows, he loves grilling, working on cars and jet skiing on Lake Michigan. ■



▲ Navy Capt. Christopher Carmichael, new Western Sector commander, poses for a photo with grandson, Asher.

▼ Carmichael poses for a photo with his family. (Courtesy photos)



"BY EVERYONE HAVING A VOICE
AT THE TABLE, YOU COME OUT
WITH A BETTER PRODUCT."



Western Sector
U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command



WARRIOR PHILOSOPHY

World Class Customer Service - Constantly send the message to each customer (Applicant, IRC, Visitor, Employee, etc.) that they are valued, by being knowledgeable and competent, being proactive and always providing a “people-first” attitude.

Accountability - Hold yourself and your team accountable to the standard in every interaction.

We represent every Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airmen, Guardian, Government Civilian serving and the first impression of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard each applicant experiences.

Respect - Foster an environment where everyone feels included, heard and their opinion is valued. Inclusion builds trust and forges strong teams that can weather the storm.

Relationships - Understand opposing views, negotiate compromise, and collaborate. Unity of effort is critical to success both inside and outside your MEPS.

Integrity - Lead by example, take responsibility for your actions.

Oppportunity - Take every opportunity to tell the MEPCOM story, what we do and why it is important to our Nation’s defense.

Red Carpet Treatment - The environment and our team’s treatment of applicants will instill pride in their decision to serve our great nation.

WARRIOR SPIRIT!

BALTIMORE MEPS WELCOMES DVS

✈ By Army Capt. Allison Vierps, Baltimore MEPS assistant operations officer

Raising your right hand and swearing an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America is the first and biggest step a military service member will take. Only 1% of the population will take that oath and become part of today's All-Volunteer Force. Most applicants are sworn in by the MEPS enlistment officer, but a few lucky applicants have the opportunity to be sworn in by a distinguished guest.

Baltimore MEPS is uniquely situated not only on Fort Meade, but near the nation's capital, Washington D.C. Over the years, many distinguished visitors (DV) and VIPs have come through Baltimore MEPS to meet with and perform the Oath of Enlistment for applicants. There can be a lot of moving parts to a DV visit, but ultimately the plan should stem from the objectives and knowledge desired by the visitor.

"The action officer [AO] coordinates with everyone from the DV's travel team to the local garrison public affairs and command teams, as well as to any resource who might be able to provide things like flags and flag stands, microphones, speakers, podiums, chairs, and tables," said Air Force Maj. Joseph Birkhold, Baltimore MEPS director of operations. "We also coordinate with other interested parties, such as IRC partners and USMEPCOM leadership and staff."

Baltimore MEPS was recently honored with two high profile visits: the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, and the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Randy George. Both Secretary Austin and General George were able to swear in applicants and took the time to meet each applicant to ask them what their plans in the military are. Secretary Austin's visit fell on the week of the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force and he imparted his wisdom on 80 of the newest members of the Force.

"We rely on you," he said. "Our democracy relies on you. And your country relies on you. And so, you're here to become something bigger than yourselves and to defend our values, our freedoms, and our constitution."

Two weeks later, General George delivered the Oath



▲ Army Gen. Randy A. George, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, delivered the Oath of Enlistment to 20 U.S. Army, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps recruits at the Baltimore MEPS. Of the 20, three recruits shipped off to basic training immediately after the ceremony, and 17 enlisted under the Delayed Entry Program. (Photo by Gloriann Martin)

of Enlistment to 20 applicants, three of who were immediately departing to their training location in Naval Station Great Lakes. General George, like Secretary Austin, took time to thank each applicant for taking the leap to join the All-Volunteer Force.

Many of the applicants come from military families and fully understand the significance of being sworn in by a senior leader in the military. For those that don't quite grasp it yet, Secretary Austin was sure to point out that 20 years from now, when the applicants have reached senior leadership themselves, they will look back fondly on the experience and opportunity to meet with these leaders.

Baltimore MEPS has been extremely honored to host these leaders and looks forward to the next opportunity to share this special moment with the applicants. ■



To ensure a seamless experience for VIP visitors at your MEPS, Jeri Torre, USMEPCOM Protocol Officer, is available to assist with coordination of protocol requirements.

Follow these steps for VIP visit requests:

1. Upon receiving a VIP visit notification, review the details.
2. Determine the following: **Who** (visitor's name, rank, agency), **What** (purpose of visit), **Where** (MEPS location), **When** (preferred date and time) and **Why** (specific requirements/interest).
3. Provide MEPS POC and the VIP's POC.
4. Email the above information to Jeri Torre at: jeraldine.m.torre.civ@army.mil

Please email Ms. Torre or call (224) 627-0574 for protocol guidance.

1. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III congratulates new recruits at Baltimore MEPS. (Photo by Chad J. McNeeley)

2. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III greets Leonard Litton, Principal Director for Military Personnel Policy, Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander and Army Lt. Col. Christine Moore, 12th Battalion and Baltimore MEPS commander, at Baltimore MEPS. (Photo by Chad J. McNeeley)

3. Army Gen. Randy A. George, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, poses for a photo with 20 Army, Navy and Marine Corps recruits at Baltimore MEPS (Photo by Gloriann Martin)

ASVAB CEP PASSES THE TEST IN TREASURE STATE

By Jeff Poulton, Butte MEPS ASVAB CEP manager

In 1999, the Montana National Guard established the Montana Youth Challenge Academy (MYCA) to aide teens who dropped out of high school or weren't on track to graduate. MYCA works with participants for one year after they graduate from a residential phase to help with college or trade school enrollment or to join the military. They also use the ASVAB Career Exploration Program to learn about their individual skills and interests.

This August, the Challenge Academy decided to leave behind the old days of filling in scantron bubble sheets and embrace the new computer based ASVAB CEP iCAT test. After more than two decades of administering pencil and paper tests, lead MYCA Academic Counselor Ben Stewart decided it was time to make the transition to the adaptive test, meaning how a student responds to a question determines the complexity of the next question.

"I was a little hesitant to at first," said Stewart. "It was tough to move on from the old way of testing, but the transition was incredibly smooth. We were able to test all 116 cadets in this class with no issues, so it was a very successful experience."

The cadets echoed Mr. Stewart's sentiments. "I felt like I was able to relax more by taking the test on the computer. It was definitely less stressful than taking a paper test," said Cadet Merringer. Cadet Clairmont added, "I get distracted easily when I'm taking a pencil and paper test, doing it on the computer helps me stay focused." Cadet Roberts had a different point of view, "I liked that everything was right there in front of me. I could just click on the answer and didn't have to move from my book to the answer sheet."

The success at MYCA is a big step towards the Butte MEPS achieving its internal goal of 100% computer-based testing for all students who do not receive accommodations.

"Montana has moved to mandatory computer-based ACT and SAT testing this year, and we are using this mandate as a vehicle to further expand our iCAT testing program," said Jeff Poulton, Butte MEPS ASVAB CEP program manager. "In order to remain relevant, the ASVAB needs to change with the times as well. The iCAT requires less resources, reduces solid waste and most importantly it gets the kids back into their classrooms faster. It's 2023, these kids have grown up

using technology, they shouldn't be using lapboards and filling in bubble sheets during a 3.5-hour long test. It's my job to make sure our program evolves with the times."

ASVAB testing wasn't the only event happening at Montana Youth Challenge that day. While Poulton and test coordinator Laurie Payne handled the testing, the Butte MEPS commander and SEA were given a tour of the MYCA facilities and had the opportunity to interact and take questions from the cadets. The result was the further strengthening of our relationship with one of our most important community partners. ■



1. Jeff Poulton, Butte MEPS ASVAB CEP manager, assists MYCA Cadets with the iCAT login process.

2. Air Force Maj. Chavery McClanahan, Butte MEPS commander and Army 1st Sgt. Tony Cohen, Butte MEPS SEA, pose with the MYCA class. (Courtesy photos)

MEPS MENTION

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



NAME: Cynthia Bell

POSITION AT THE MEPS: Lead Human Resources Assistant

TIME AT ATLANTA MEPS: 20 years

SERVICE: Cynthia Bell is the daughter of an Air Force veteran and spouse of an Army retiree. Bell supported service members as one of the human resources professionals at the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center in Germany, then later as an Army civilian at Fort Moore in Georgia. The 2003 reduction in force led her to an assignment at Atlanta MEPS, where she has been a valuable team member ever since.

DEDICATION: Bell has immense knowledge and experience and shares what she has learned through the years with her peers, subordinates, guidance counselors, and service liaisons to ensure applicants are processed efficiently. She is known for loving what she does at Atlanta MEPS and she has received numerous accolades for her customer service.

PASTIME: She enjoys traveling, going to concerts and spending lots of time with her three grandchildren.

MANTRA: Have a blessed day on purpose.





Vision Improves Mission Results

By Army Capt. Psalm Odedere, Butte MEPS operations officer



As a new operations officer in Western Sector, with a background in logistics, I have so much to learn about the USMEPCOM mission set and how it gets after it. I understand USMEPCOM's mission is to evaluate applicants by applying established DoD standards during processing for military service. Got it. And the vision, in summary, is to sustain the quality of our force by utilizing state-of-the-art screening processes.

At times, there is confusion about how mission and vision work together. There are a few tenants of the mission set that I will reference to delineate between mission and vision and their collaboration: human resources (that's people, both civilians and military personnel), material resources (equipment and supplies), systems (MHS GENESIS, USMIRS 1.1), and processes (the method or "how" dictated by SOP, policy letters, etc.).

What is a mission, or mission order, as we know it in the military? It is a concise statement of the organization's task and purpose. The mission is weaved into the fabric of an organization. It is the reason the organization was assembled.

Everything that goes into the establishment of the organization supports the organization's mission, including human resources, material resources, systems and processes. For example, when the Army decided to stand up a field-feeding company recently, they first decided the task and purpose of the company and its disposition on the battlefield. With that in mind, they outfitted the company with cooking equipment (materials) and specific military personnel with culinary specialties to support its supported units.

It is possible to accomplish the mission consistently without a vision. But the mission-end state is vulnerable to stagnation, routine, and the status quo without vision. It wasn't that HAIMS (Healthcare Artifact and Image Management Solution) couldn't continue to produce results during medical processing, but the introduction of MHS Genesis is a prime example of utilizing vision to improve systems that support USMEPCOM's mission. With an updated system, the mission of the medical section remains the same, but the section is more effective with a data-rich system on their side.

Vision is not a component of the mission or the concept. Vision exists outside of mission parameters. Vision is a state in the future. It provides

long-term direction on what the organization wants to achieve in the future. Hence, vision does not drive the mission; people do, but vision can motivate people to drive the mission.

As the mission belongs to the organization, the vision belongs to the leaders. Vision is a construct of the visionary, the leader. The vision could change while the mission remained the same. Vision is going the extra mile when you could accomplish the mission with just the miles you are given.

Allowing family members to witness their loved ones' enlistment ceremony is vision. Vision is finding ways to conduct computer-based testing in remote locations with no Wi-Fi access or requesting personnel to support the testing section. Visions are the steps we could do without but chose to do nonetheless to improve the end state. That's why visionary leaders breed teams of innovators that exemplify discipline initiatives, cultivate a culture of creative thinking and ingenuity at the user level, and nurture, encourage and reward innovations. Modernization of systems and processes is a vision propelling mission results, and while mission statements may remain the same for organizations like USMEPCOM, the visions will continue to grow. ■

USMEPCOM: AGENCY OF THE YEAR

By Ashley Toomey



1. Dr. Katie Helland, director of Military Accession Policy, presents Chicago Federal Executive Board's Agency of the Year trophy to Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette, USMEPCOM SEA. (Photo by Amy Gregorski)
2. MMT members Ashley Toomey, Leticia Flores, Jeff Engel, Maple Lee and Claudia Mora pose for a photo at the Chicago Federal Executive Board's Employee of the Year Awards. (Photo by Derrik Noack)

USMEPCOM won the Agency of the Year Award at the 2023 Chicago Federal Executive Board (FEB) Employee of the Year Awards ceremony.

The FEB Agency of the Year award recognizes one agency for achieving an outstanding level of success in the implementation of federal initiatives to provide public service to citizens in their community. The Chicago FEB represents 43 agencies, 178 organizations and 50,000 employees.

During a town hall August 17, Dr. Katie Helland, director of Military Accession Policy, congratulated USMEPCOM on receiving the Chicago FEB's 2023 Agency of the Year award for its deployment and implementation of MHS GENESIS and presented the trophy to Col. Megan Stallings, USMEPCOM commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Yveline Symonette, USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor.

"This is the first time MEPCOM as an agency has won the Agency of the Year award. This is a huge accomplishment," said Helland. "This year, it was given to USMEPCOM for achieving outstanding success with the deployment of MHS GENESIS, which was a Congress-directed initiative."

The adoption of MHS GENESIS was a whole-of-command achievement and a strategic step toward transforming and digitally modernizing applicant processing.

"MHS GENESIS truly has transformed the accessions enterprise and how we process applicants into the military service. Thank you all for your efforts and leading us up to and the deployment of MHS GENESIS as well as your steadfast continuous focus on helping us normalize the way ahead," said Helland. ■

Processing Policy Guidance Updates:

- ConDEP (Update 6) - Sept. 14
- USAREC "Service Prescreen" Pilot Program (Expansion) - Aug. 22
- Space Force Processing (Update 6) - Aug. 14
- Non-MEPS Processing (Update 1) - Aug. 3



Publication Announcements:

- AMESOP (Update 4) - Sept. 5
- FedEx Migration (Update 1) - Aug. 25
- ConCEP Transition (Update 3) - Aug. 17
- Desktop & Laptop Lifecycle Replacement Equipment Guidance - Aug. 2

InstaMEPS



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



1. (L) Air Force Lt. Col. Stargell Mosley, 3rd Battalion and Denver MEPS commander, passes the guidon to Air Force Maj. Blake Hamilton, incoming Albuquerque MEPS commander, during a change of command ceremony at Albuquerque MEPS. (Photo by Air Force Airman 1st Class Spencer Kanar)
2. Triplets Colton, Rylee and Jaden Joiner pose for a photo before shipping out from San Antonio MEPS. The Joiner triplets, from Hutto, Texas, all enlisted into the Air Force Security Forces. (Courtesy photo)
3. (L) Marine Corps Maj. Julia Weber, Dallas MEPS commander and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Porsha Lorick, Honolulu MEPS commander, reunite at the Summer 2023 USMEPCOM new commander training. Weber and Lorick are both 2020 graduates of the Naval Postgraduate School. (Courtesy photo)
4. Army Maj. Joshua Woodke, Kansas City MEPS commander, administers the Oath of Enlistment to 16 applicants during a joint service swear-in ceremony at Spratt Memorial Stadium on the final day of the Kansas City Chiefs training camp. (Courtesy photo)



5. Ava Hough passed away after dedicating 44 years of service to Dallas MEPS. A strong representation of current and former Dallas MEPS employees pose for a photo following Hough's celebration of life service in Dallas. (Courtesy photo)



6. Dallas MEPS personnel concluded their Org Day with a bowling tournament. The winning team included Raul Camacho Zubia, test score technician; Kimberly Belk, human resources assistant; Army Lt. Col. Benjamin Walker, 9th Battalion commander, and Daryl Moment, administrative services technician. (Courtesy photo)



7. New Orleans MEPS led members of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan, with interpreters, and State Department representatives, on a tour of New Orleans MEPS. The tour is part of an ongoing partnership that brings coalition forces together by reinforcing readiness and building enduring friendships. (Courtesy photo)



8. Navy Cmdr. Jay Hyler (right) receives the Defense Meritorious Service Medal from Navy Capt. Christopher Carmichael at Seattle MEPS. Hyler served as the 5th Battalion and Seattle MEPS commander from 2020-2023. (Courtesy photo)



CULTURAL
AWARENESS

OBSERVANCE



OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH



Led by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) recognizes the contributions America's workers with disabilities make each day across our Nation.

In recognizing NDEAM, the Department of Defense's reaffirms its commitment to recruit, retain, and advance these individuals throughout the workforce.

This important national observance dates to the end of World War II. In 1945, with the return of thousands of injured Service members, the U.S. government pushed to educate the public about issues relating to disabilities and employment and made specific efforts to assist these individuals in a variety of ways.

Congress enacted Public Law 176, declaring the first week of October each year as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.

In 1962, the word 'physically' was removed to include contributions of people with other disabilities.

The federal legislature expanded the week-long observance to a month and changed the name to NDEAM in 1988.

In 2012, Alaska Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Maddamma, a pararescueman, sustained an injury that shattered the bones in his lower left leg.

He spent years in the hospital, undergoing multiple surgeries, and physical therapy to regain the full use of his leg. Eventually, he chose to have his leg surgically amputated, enabling his return to military service.

When asked how NDEAM unites the community, he spoke about how people can be an "iceberg" and what a person knows about their own coworkers they see every day is just the tip of their life experience.

"These awareness months bring people together, opens doors, and draw attention to things," said Maddamma.

Each person brings distinctive skills and capabilities to their employment. Ensuring equity, dignity, respect, and cooperation among all individuals are essential values in the DoD work environment. The Defense Department recognizes past achievements as it strives to build an inclusive future workforce to achieve total force readiness.