

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 31, No. 2

Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation



Messenger *Sharing information to reach a vision*

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Strategic Planning and the command's journey to **VIPS**

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St. Louis MEPS takes biometrics on the road
Capt. Terri Zuber verifies a poolee's social security number, on the day a few of the St. Louis MEPS staff brought biometrics to a Marine Corps mini-boot camp.

U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command

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Messenger

Vol. 31, No. 2
published in August 2009

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Commander's Commentary

This is an exciting time to be working at USMEPCOM, and I'll tell you why. We're in the midst of making significant changes to our business processes that will improve the service we provide to our customers, and develop our work environment. Call me an optimist? So be it.

Since I arrived 15 months ago, I've talked about our four customers – the services, applicants, our nation and ourselves. We stay on course by remaining conscious of these customers in everything we do. This holds true for strategic planning, transformation and the Virtual Information Processing System as well.

This issue of the *Messenger* focuses on these three subjects. All of which bring change and improvement. Although they each have unique definitions, they share the common goal of continuous improvement.

Transformation is the big picture — an overall evolution, in line with the transformation taking place in the Department of Defense.

Transformation is a general term for the integration of new concepts and technologies. It's the "future concept" of what we do. Effective strategic planning and the accomplishment of VIPS will help us achieve transformation.

The command has been on its strategic planning journey for more than 15 years. In that time, it's aligned itself with government requirements, and made strides in critical, long-term thinking and planning. It's something that's always going on during the accomplishment of our mission. The article on page 5 outlines the command's progress in this area.

Part of strategic planning includes ensuring we stay on course to reach

our vision. And I'm a firm believer in the essence of USMEPCOM's vision, "... to be a customer-centered, future-focused learning organization driven by best business practices and cutting edge-technologies." I challenge you to name a part of the vision that isn't beneficial for everyone involved.

When it comes to our vision, there are two key ingredients — people and communication. It is you — the dedicated professionals who accomplish our mission, who will also help shape VIPS. So, with that said, what does all of this mean for you?

It means change. And I realize that change can be unpleasant at times. Yet I offer a suggestion on how to get more comfortable with change. I invite you to be open. That's all — open to change. All of these initiatives, especially VIPS, will have some growing pains, but the result will be improved military processing and a better work environment.

Improved how? Well, in general, VIPS will make our efforts more effective and efficient. We'll gain the ability to access more data from additional databases. We will undertake initiatives that will someday enable "anytime, anywhere processing," and a reduced number of visits per MEPS, for both recruiters and applicants.

Also, we will improve ourselves, one of our four customers, as well. We, as employees, will be developing new skill sets. And, remember, if we're not self-employed, we're employees. So learning new skills can only increase our value, both to ourselves and USMEPCOM.

So, in very general terms, VIPS will improve our way of doing business and ourselves. There's a lot to it so I couldn't possibly spell it out here, on one page. An article that



Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr.

begins on page 8 provides a foundation for understanding VIPS.

The last piece I want to mention is communication. The first step is for everyone getting on the same page about strategic planning initiatives and VIPS. The articles in this issue are a good start. Also, the articles refer to other documents that are available on the MEPNET and the command's Internet pages. As you read this issue, I believe you will see that these truly are exciting times for USMEPCOM.

As Winston Churchill said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Please join me in seeing these great opportunities!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mariano C. Campos Jr.".

Mariano C. Campos Jr.
Colonel, USAF
Commanding

agility
 mission adapt
 technology goals lead enable
 measure plan study
change **Strategic** **Planning** **communicate**
transformation business processes
Virtual Interactive Processing System
 human capital **future**
vision

How'd we get here?

by Christine Parker
Messenger Editor

It takes quite a few words to even begin to define “strategic planning,” many of which have a business-like, buzz word aura. However, it turns out the basis of strategic planning, “strategy,” is a word that’s older than you may think and has its roots in the military.

“Strategy” derives from the Greek word, “strategem,” which comes from “stratos,” meaning “camp,” or “army,” and “agein,” meaning “to lead.” A simple idea — leading the camp. Tried and true, as well, because, hundreds of years later, in a Department of Defense agency, we still find ourselves “leading the camp.”

The origins of strategic planning

Fast forward to the United States during the 1920s. It was at this time that the Harvard Business School developed the Harvard Policy Model. Businesses began using this model to shape a “strategy,” or, in other words, the purposes and policies that defined the business itself. It was based on the simple premise that, if a business defined these things, it would become more effective.

Of course, for the purpose of this article, these are generalizations about business and strategy. They’re made to pinpoint the origin of businesses establishing “strategies” that evolved into what we know today as strategic planning.

Such planning remained in the private sector until the mid-1980s. It was at this time that federal agencies began to join in. One example of this is the enactment

of the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. The purpose of this act was to bring “more effective general and financial management practices to the Federal Government ...” Also, at the same time, the government began instituting better “business practices,” including strategic planning.

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 solidified the ideas. It stated that, “no later than September 30, 1997, the head of each agency shall submit to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and to the Congress a strategic plan for program activities.”

That plan needed to include a mission statement, general goals and objectives, and a description of how the goals and objectives would be achieved.

The times, they were ‘a-changin’

During the 1990s, overall, the government began to take a closer look at its business practices, and USMEPCOM followed suit. With the military drawdown, the recruiting services were enlisting fewer people than in past eras and fewer young men and women were passing through Freedom’s Front Door. Although there weren’t any wall signs announcing “big changes,” they were taking place gradually.

In 1992, USMEPCOM’s leadership enlisted the help of the Army Management Engineering College to begin guiding its personnel through the first steps of strategic planning. By 1993 various members of the command began studying and implementing the principles of Total

Strategic planning — it’s been around ...

“ Strategic planning is about staying in business, whether it’s in private industry or the government. It’s about looking at what we do and enabling ourselves to adapt to change. It’s about everyone in the organization being involved in improvement.

“ Strategic planning is a ‘work in progress.’ It’s a continuous effort. It’s a plan that tells us the direction in which the command is headed and why.”

—Excerpt from a 1997 Messenger magazine

Quality Leadership. Trainers shared the concepts with everyone in the command.

Also during the 1990s, command leaders were taking a close look at USMEPCOM's structure. In 1990, the command closed two MEPS and a sub-station. By 1993, the command realigned from three sectors to two, and closed three more MEPS. The command completed a workload analysis study and a 100 percent audit of the MEPS workforce. Also, the command underwent several realignments that were followed by a "settling out" period.

USMEPCOM jumps in

In 1995, in order to fulfill the requirements of the GPRA, leaders within USMEPCOM wrote the command's first mission, vision, guiding principles and strategic goals. By October of that year, USMEPCOM published its first Strategic Plan, also known as Order 96-1. From the beginning, the command's then-termed "Program Analysis and Evaluation Directorate" took the lead in strategic planning.

Soon after the first strategic plan was published, work on the next one began. Part of this process included taking a

closer look at the command's customers, and interviewing them about the quality of service the command provides, and asking about the customers' future requirements.

In 1996, then-USMEPCOM commander, Col. Wanda Wood, said, "Strategic planning is the framework of long-range organizational direction." She was correct.

"Strategic planning will give us more than just a snapshot of what's down the road," Wood said. "This is the first time the command has a solid plan for the future."

By 1997, more and more command employees were getting involved in strategic planning efforts. In fact, leaders had agreed upon 13 strategies, four goals and 56 objectives. In general, strategies outlined how to accomplish goals. The four goals focused on human resources, process improvement, customer relations and accurate and timely accession information. The 56 objectives within the goals were measurable.

Since these beginnings, the command has continued the work begun with the first strategic plans. The following is an excerpt from the most recent strategic plan, published in March, 2009.

"USMEPCOM's Strategic Plan, along with USMEPCOM's workforce, advances the mission and vision, providing superior service and support to the Armed Forces Recruiting Commands and the men and women who want to join the Armed Services. It presents a significant shift in thinking about how men and women are qualified for service. The mission of USMEPCOM remains the same — 'Ensure the quality of military accessions during peacetime and mobilization in accordance with established standards.' What will change is the way we perform that mission. We will see the effects of this change as we implement transformation goals, strategies, and objectives driven by the command's vision."

One thing leads to another

In 2002, then-USMEPCOM commander, Col. David Slotwinski recognized the command had been doing the same thing, the same way, for a very long time. Also, he recognized the need for more military entrance processing "standardization."

So, in 2003, the command began a top-to-bottom review of three primary areas of its mission — processing, medical and

How the command's mission lines up with Department of Defense

Department of Defense Mission

- To defend the United States
- To deter aggression and coercion forward in critical regions
- To swiftly defeat aggression in overlapping major conflicts
- To conduct a limited number of small scale contingency operations

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness) Mission

Ensure human resources are recruited, trained, capable, motivated, and ready to support the DoD mission so that the Department remains capable of responding to the broad continuum of emergent threats, both now and in the future.

USMEPCOM Mission

Ensuring the quality of military accessions during peacetime and mobilization in accordance with established standards.

testing, in an “A - Z processing review.” The command continued to reach out and communicate with its accession community partners — military recruiting and training — to work for the betterment of the entire military accession process.

The first talk of ‘transformation’

By 2004, command leaders began reflecting the Army’s talk of transformation — modernization and the integration of new concepts and technology. The goal of USMEPCOM’s transformation initiatives was providing faster, better service to recruiters, trainers, applicants, DoD organizations that rely upon processing data, and, ultimately, the American taxpayers.

Simply put, transformation included improvements to business practices, technology and the workforce and workplace culture. The big push was on improving technology. Installed in 1995, the MEPCOM Integrated Resource System had become outdated and the command needed to build systems that would operate more efficiently and cost-effectively, with built-in agility to keep pace with society.

Focusing on technology

Like private industry, USMEPCOM was working to find ways to keep up with technology. Also like private industry, USMEPCOM gave these efforts a name — System to Standard.

It was a consistent theme — establishing ways to improve the three primary areas of military recruiting — processing, medical and testing. E-Records, e-Medical and e-Security were parts of StS.

E-Security efforts include biometrics, the capturing of an applicant’s photograph, fingerprints and signature. This year will be the last year applicants sign their

enlistment contracts with a pen-and ink, or “wet signature.” The first applicants swore in using biometrics at Baltimore MEPS in April 2008. This year, USMEPCOM completed the 100 percent phase-in of e-Security at all 65 MEPS.

In September 2008, applicants participated in a test of a web-based version of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or ASVAB, referred to as “i-CAT,” or internet computer-assisted test. On June 17, six more applicants participated in the second test of i-CAT. The integrity of the test and test-taker will be provided by e-Security. The i-CAT is the first step on a road leading to applicants taking the ASVAB “anytime, anywhere.”

The goal of e-Records is to reduce data entry and conversion of paper files to electronic images. E-Medical includes improvements in manipulating and transferring data. With a system as large as military processing, e-Records and e-Medical include massive, far-reaching changes.

Keeping it all ‘together’

Following a fall 2008 strategic planning offsite meeting, USMEPCOM Commander, Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr. established a “transformation office,” temporarily staffed with various headquarters specialists.

Their work and discussions determined there was a need to “transform” the command’s Program Analysis and Evaluation Directorate. So, in April, the commander approved the restructuring of PA&E and renamed it the Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation. It became one place that truly brings strategic planning and transformation together in action and in name.

The directorate’s main focus is strategic planning and transformation, yet has four

teams to accomplish and support this — strategic planning, change management, business transformation and decision support.

In addition to OSP&T, USMEPCOM has strategic planning and VIPS-related working groups. Two of those are the Strategic Outreach and Communication Working Group and the Human Capital Working Group. The SOCWG published a VIPS Strategic Communication Plan in December.

Army Col. Larry Larimer is the director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation. “The Strategic Communication Plan is great, but it doesn’t have execution-level detail,” Larimer said. It will be Larimer and his staff who fill in the blanks. That work has already begun. “At the offsite last September, we identified some short-term initiatives to position ourselves for the future,” Larimer said.

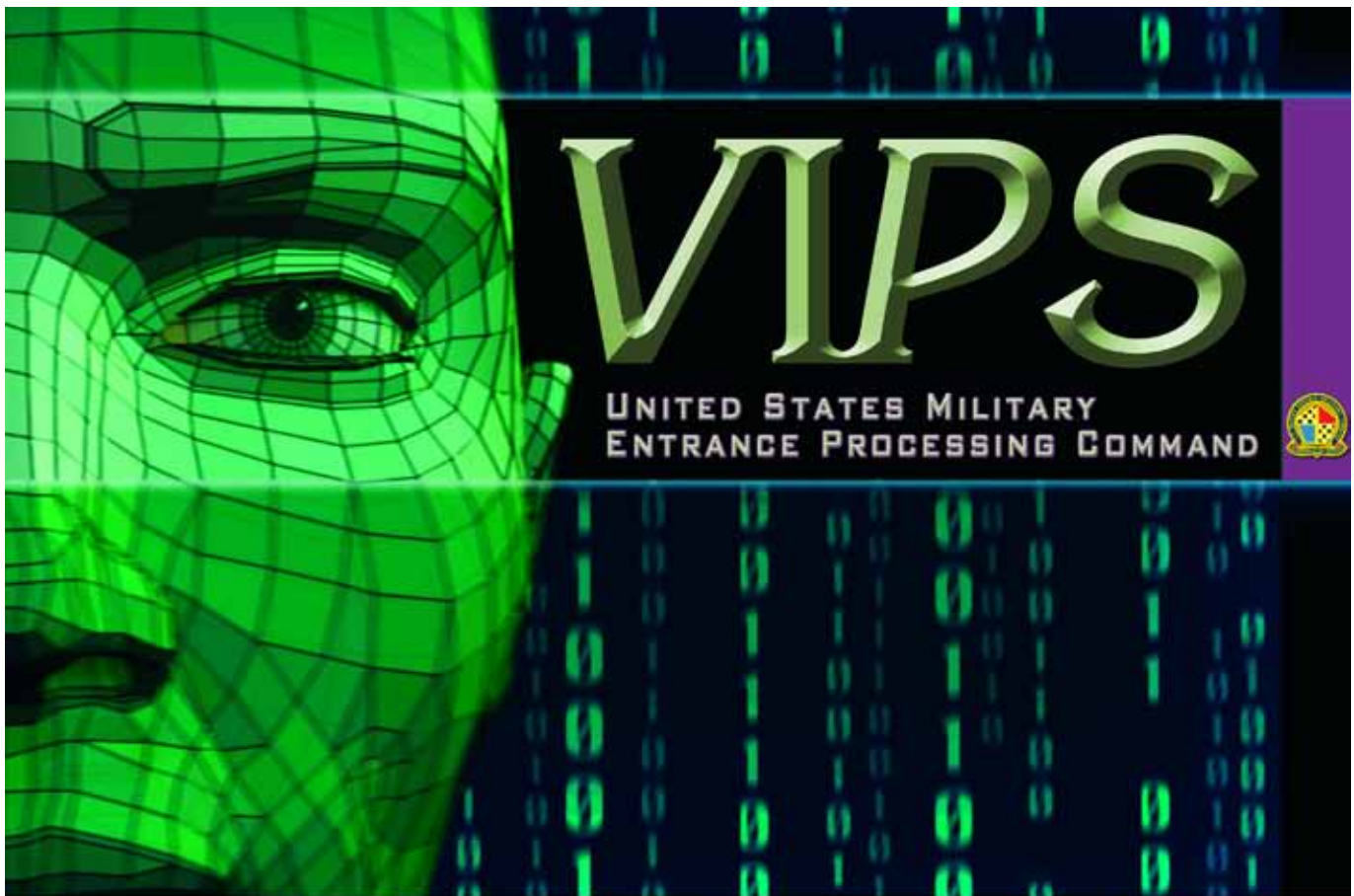
“It’s important to point out that OSP&T is just beginning its work and responding to various existing and emerging requirements,” said Rick Cox, deputy director and senior analyst, OSP&T. Cox has worked at USMEPCOM since 1998. Prior to his civilian positions, he was an Army major assigned to the command.

“Today’s USMEPCOM transformation includes the following — improvements to technology and business processes and practices, and the elements of leadership, command workforce/workplace and culture and communications,” Cox said. “All these pieces will take the command to ‘anytime, anywhere processing.’”

The technology piece of transformation includes the Virtual Interactive Processing System, or VIPS. An “800-pound gorilla” in its own right, VIPS is only part of transformation, but one that deserves its very own spotlight (see article beginning on page 8).

USMEPCOM Vision

USMEPCOM is recognized as a customer-centered, future-focused learning organization driven by best business practices and cutting-edge technologies, providing real-time entrance processing and qualification.



VIRTUAL INTERACTIVE PROCESSING SYSTEM

by Christine Parker
Messenger Editor

Yes, it's the command's latest, greatest acronym – VIPS, the Virtual Interactive Processing System. Many have tried to explain it ... and they usually take a deep breath, or at least pause to think before doing so.

The truth is, there's a lot to say about VIPS. First, realize that "orderly" military processing has been evolving for about 100 years. VIPS is the most current portion of this evolution. USMEPCOM's mission will not change, but the way the command performs its mission will change as it moves toward its vision of "anytime, anywhere processing."

This is an understandable, simple definition, but it doesn't spell out all the complex details of VIPS. With VIPS, the command will change the way it does business, and each change will have a ripple effect.

At this point in time, there are two factors that significantly affect the success of VIPS — money and communication.

USMEPCOM is the proponent for VIPS. However, VIPS is a Department of Defense acquisition program in Acquisition Category I, or ACAT I. Being labeled as such indicates that the program is subject to all the ACAT I rules and conditions, meaning DoD holds the purse strings.

In addition to funding, command leaders realize the importance of communicating the details of VIPS to their internal audience — more than 2,900 people who work in USMEPCOM, and their external audience — the command's partners in the accession triad and its many customers.

How will VIPS affect USMEPCOM employees?

In May, the USMEPCOM Commander, Col. Mariano Campos Jr. sent out a message about VIPS to all employees. He addressed a primary concern to some

people — how VIPS could affect their employment. The first paragraph of Campos' message stated,

"VIPS represents a new way of doing business. Let me first say that once VIPS is fully fielded in 2013, I expect to still have all 65 current MEPS facilities. With regard to personnel, I do see the potential for new skill sets driven by new business processes. While training of MEPS personnel will likely be required to develop the necessary skills to operate in a VIPS environment, it is not presently anticipated that MEPS personnel/positions will be lost to offset the cost. I believe a strong future exists for those who are willing to adapt to change and grow along with the Command."

"When we build VIPS," Campos said, "quite honestly, we don't know exactly what it's going to look like. We have a vision and we have a good idea of what it's going to do, and that it's going to make us a lot more efficient."

When Campos visits one of the 65 MEPS, he asks employees, "Who got up

early this morning? What time did you get up? What time did you show up for work?" Often he gets answers like, "I got up at 4. I got to work by 5:30." To that, Campos replies, in jest, "I know you love doing that. I bet it makes your day to do that!"

He uses this one example to explain that, in constructing VIPS, the command will analyze how it accomplishes its mission and find and implement better business practices.

With VIPS, "we still have to check in people, process them, test them, do physicals ... but maybe we won't need to show up at five in the morning anymore. Maybe we won't have the same paperwork drills. Maybe applicants can fill out forms online, ahead of time. But you're still going to need people at the MEPS to make the process happen," Campos said.

What will VIPS mean to the bottom line?

Campos has seen the military's efforts in strategic planning and quality improvement since the early 1990s. He was a member of the U.S. Strategic Command, where they planned from a combat perspective. He worked with planning at the Armed Forces Staff College and, while assigned to the Air Force Recruiting Service, in Plans, Programs and Resources, he was involved in strategic planning for the future Air Force.

"Whenever you develop a system, one of the first things that happens is that people look for savings. Do I believe VIPS will save money?" Campos asked. "Absolutely," he answered. "VIPS will save money, time, fuel, electricity, paper ..."

During his command, Campos wants to ensure USMEPCOM is careful about how VIPS impacts what he sees as the most valuable resource — people.

"The question of manpower savings always comes up. 'What are you saving there?' Campos counters these common questions with another, 'Why would I want to give up manpower? That's where all my expertise is!'"

Campos said that he's seen other organizations learn expensive lessons. In cases where they eliminated manpower, built new programs, and then realized they really needed the manpower after all.

"I don't want to go down that path," he said.

VIPS location on the path, and one of its 'tour guides'

If you'd like to understand USMEPCOM's transformation — where we've been and where we're going — you can learn a lot from talking to Rick Cox, who was recently named the deputy director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation. Cox has worked at USMEPCOM for more than 10 years, first as an Army major assigned to the Program Analysis and Evaluation Directorate. He's been working in strategic planning and transformation as a civilian employee since 2003.

Cox explains that VIPS and the entire acquisition process are complex. "We struggled to get to VIPS Milestone A, and we're struggling to get to Milestone B, but we're going to get there."

Recent Changes

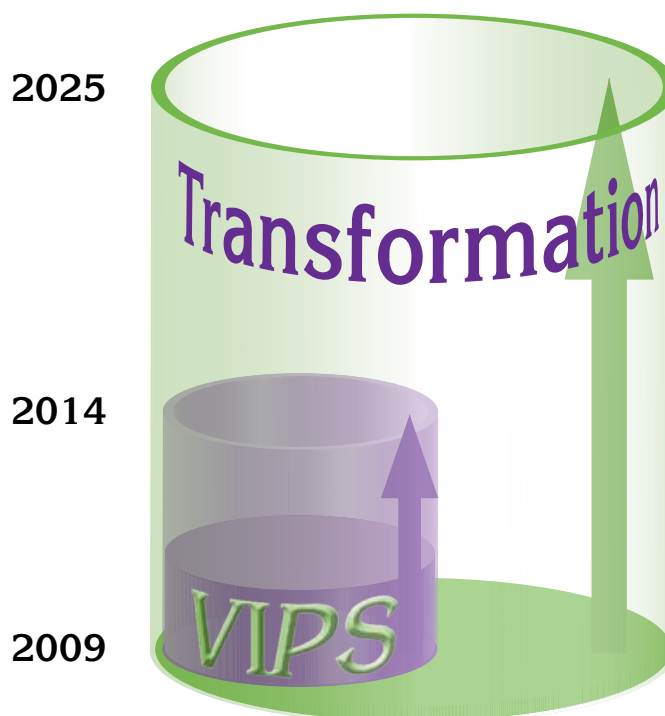
There have been two recent significant impacts on VIPS. One, Department of Defense transferred executive oversight for VIPS to the Business Transformation Agency. Also, DoD designated VIPS as an ACAT I program.

The mission of the BTA is "to guide the transformation of business operations

throughout DoD and to deliver Enterprise-level capabilities that align to warfighter needs."

When DoD transferred executive oversight for VIPS to the BTA, Campos created a transformation office. This office had the mission of working with BTA to address the major issues associated with the transfer. During their work it became apparent that the command's transformation encompasses more than just VIPS. Instead, it includes any and all issues affecting the command's strategic vision. The command needed an office that would focus on the command's movement toward its vision and one that would oversee strategic planning and transformation, which included VIPS. With this realized, Campos approved the restructuring of the Program Analysis and Evaluation Directorate and renaming PA&E to the Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation.

Cox made note of the fact that VIPS was recently designated as an ACAT I program. This designation means USMEPCOM will now receive a lot more help and oversight from DoD. This involvement may mean the changes will take more time. "They are interested in us," Cox said. "I'm pretty sure we'll get more and more visibility."



Referring to Ralph DiCicco, Cox said, “we have a great program manager [at BTA].”

“He knows the business, especially with 30 years experience,” Cox said. “We have a great relationship with him, and that is so important in pulling this off.

“He is a key player. We are a key player. There are a number of others, especially all of our customers.”

The impact of people, people, people

When it comes to transformation efforts, including VIPS, Cox has a knack for returning to the subject of the importance of people.

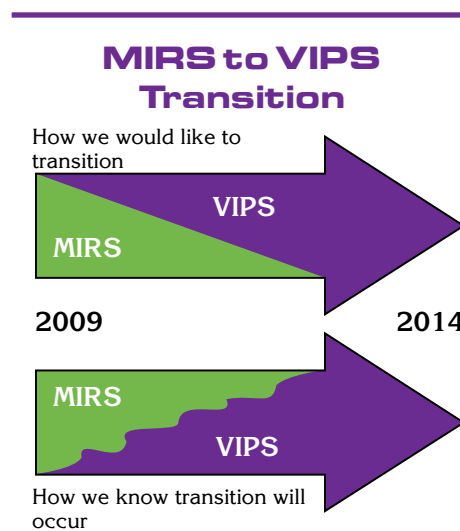
“That’s another long pole in the tent,” he said. “In order to transform this organization, we have to grow our people.”

And it’s not just rhetoric. Cox explains the specifics. “We must get the right mix of military members, civilians and contractors. We must get the right mix so that the overall MEPCOM team is professional and up-to-speed on technology. We must develop the right balance of knowledge, skills, and abilities in our workforce.” On the subject, he adds one more point. “And we must ensure we are truly a learning organization.”

The basics of the process

Currently VIPS includes a focus on six major areas. They are: prequalification, biometrics, remote testing, prequalification/validation, electronic medical records and automated shipping. They can be explained as:

- Prequalification: allowing applicants to provide information online, from home or any chosen device
- Biometrics: a total, high-tech MEPS experience
- Remote testing: aptitude testing from many locations, close to recruiters, close to applicants’ homes
- Prequalification/Validation: Reviewing and validating information without an applicant present
- E-medical records: Initiate service member lifecycle medical records
- Automated shipping: Booking travel via the Defense Travel System, with centralized support



The changes could bring about the following military process: applicants enter their prequalification information from their own computer or device, test at a remote location, have their information reviewed and validated without being present, have their medical records collected and reviewed online, and have their travel plans automated before passing through Freedom’s Front Door. And, then, when they pass through the door, they are greeted with the most up-to-date, high-tech experience possible!

MIRS to VIPS transition

Currently USMEPCOM accomplishes its mission using the MEPCOM Integrated Resource System, or MIRS. The transformation from MIRS to VIPS is taking place. The graphic (above) depicts how command leaders would like the transition to occur as compared to how they predict it will occur.

Will VIPS be fielded by 2013, as planned?

“We have a lot of things in place. The reality piece of this is that dollars drive VIPS,” Campos said. “I’m optimistic that we can accomplish VIPS by 2013, for several reasons. One is that the technologies for it already exist. What we’re going to do is blend existing technology with our mission.

“I’m also optimistic in this regard, because we have BTA and its program manager with us. These people are great partners and DoD wants to make VIPS happen.”

“So, we’ve got the great support, we’ve got the funding, the technologies are out there — now it’s a matter of putting it together.”

Will there be road blocks?

“Oh heck, yeah,” Campos replied, honestly. “It’s like anything else. Is it going to be perfect? Absolutely not. When you’re dealing with new technologies and when you’re dealing with changing a culture, it’s not going to be perfect.”

He offers a case in point. “Look at e-Security right now. Generally speaking, it’s working in the field. People are getting used to it. We’re still having bumps along the road,” Campos said. “It’s not perfect yet.”

At first, when the program was piloted, “some people said ‘this is going to take too much time, it’s going to be too difficult.’ But now, people are saying ‘this isn’t as hard as I thought it would be,’” Campos said.

Current and future concepts of operations

Fiscal 2008 processing data indicates that USMEPCOM accomplished:

- 588,000 enlistment tests
- 373,000 medical exams
- 333,000 USMEPCOM qualified and service waivers
- 328,000 initial oath and behavioral assessments

And, from 678,000 applicants who made 1,124,000 visits to MEPS, a total of 259,000 young men and women enlisted and shipped into the armed forces. Of those 259,000, 230,000 completed basic training.

The VIPS concept of operations — with a projected workload — means USMEPCOM could accomplish:

- 250,000 enlistment tests, tailored medical exams and biometric verifications
- 240,000 initial oaths and behavioral assessments

And, from 250,000 applicants, who will make 250,000 visits to MEPS, a total of 235,000 young men and women will enlist and ship into the armed forces. Of those 235,000, 230,000 will complete basic training. (A graphic depicting these numbers is on page 12.)

VIPS' effect on business relationships

With VIPS, the largest chunk of the command's customers will get a better product. Those customers — applicants, recruits, guidance counselors and recruiters — will receive faster, more customer-focused military entrance processing services. They'll make fewer trips to MEPS, wait less, and complete fewer forms.

For example, the current average number of visits to a MEPS is 2.6 per applicant. For decades, linear or "batch"

processing results in "hurry up and wait" processing. Not surprisingly, applicants often make comments about the amount of time they had to wait for each portion of processing.

And, although military processing has had a reputation for "hurry up and wait" for decades, today's applicant — most of whom have grown up with technology — can't help but be surprised and put off by "the old way of doing business."

Therefore, USMEPCOM must keep up-to-speed with applicants. Today's

young adults grew up with high-tech video games, text messaging, and purchasing items and searching for information online. Even in most grade schools and high schools — theirs is a high-tech environment. For many of these young adults, USMEPCOM is their first real "taste" of the military. In today's world, young adults are expecting it to be high-tech. And it needs to be.

The USMEPCOM staff — at headquarters, sectors and MEPS — will benefit as well. They will use VIPS to

Command can see government's strides in medical record keeping; and is jumping on board

by Christine Parker
Messenger Editor

American health care and its associated technology are hot topics. So much so that, in May, the nation's new health information technology head indicated the government is going to be required to "nudge" the private sector's efforts in improving their electronic health records. Something different, perhaps? The government making strides in health care technology in order to push forward the same effort in private industry?

The man who addressed these issues was Dr. David Blumenthal, the new head of the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

And, when considering VIPS, USMEPCOM is making strides in jumping on board this technology wagon.

In fact, to gain a broader perspective, Rick Cox, deputy director of the command's new Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation, attended a national medical information conference in June.

He said, "I was totally blown away by the hundreds of vendors who are out there solving some of the problems that we were looking at five years ago, wondering, 'how are we going to get through this?'" Cox added that DoD and Veterans Affairs have already created a working electronic medical record and they're exchanging data seamlessly.

While at the conference, Cox visited with representatives from the Social Security Administration as well. "They're doing a pilot program where they obtain medical information electronically from providers and they intend to be part of the National Health Information Network," he said.

Cox explained that the SSA is working on a program that will allow people to file disability claims and get a decision within hours or minutes, instead of months or years.

"So here we are trying to do the same thing in our lane," Cox said. "We're a small part of DoD with a critical role. We're trying to find ways to get access to information so that

we can prequalify people before they visit a MEPS. When that happens, we'll have to do less manual labor at the MEPS and the applicants will need to make fewer visits to the MEPS."

In doing this, USMEPCOM will be producing the same results — enlisting and shipping the same number of applicants — in a more efficient and effective manner.

"In fact, we may ship more qualified applicants, because our work will be based on better data," Cox said.

In addition to VIPS improving pre-qualification, its initiatives will advance both the inception and maintenance of service medical records.

When MEPS ask critical questions about applicants' medical histories, they're doing two things. One, they're collecting the necessary information that is used to determine if an applicant is medically qualified for military service. And, two, they're starting that service member's medical record, one that will — hopefully — remain with them for the rest of their military career.

However, there are some traps into which medical records can fall. Occasionally, either recruits or the accession "system" loses a medical record as the individual moves through training. And, two, paper-generated medical records must be input into Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application. Any repetitive input of data can increase the chances for errors and missed entries. The initiatives within VIPS could potentially play an important role in the future defense health information systems. The better we contribute to AHLTA, the better it will become.

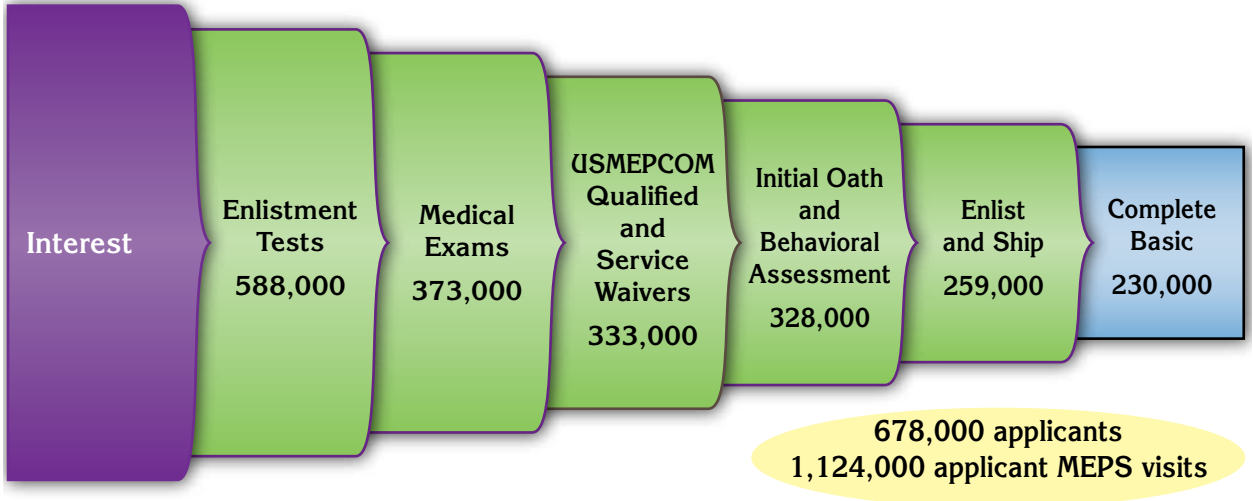
With this said, it becomes obvious that USMEPCOM needs to ensure it has the best technology systems to put that individual service member on the right track when it comes to not only their medical records, but potentially, their medical treatment over the course of a lifetime.

"It's going to be a long process to have truly seamless electronic health information across the country — it's an enormous undertaking," Cox said. "But we're moving that way — it's happening."



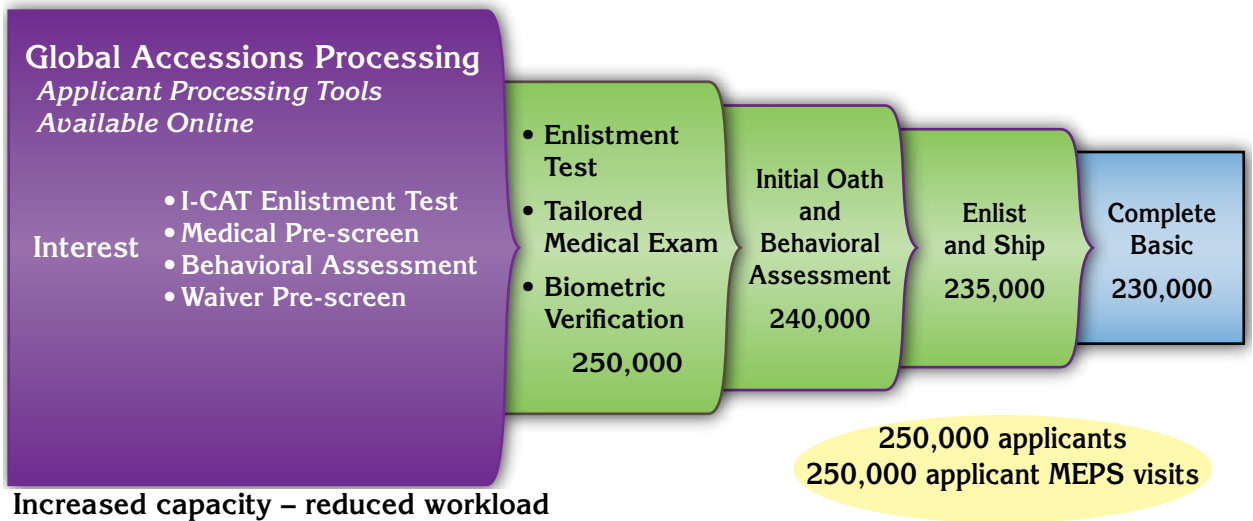
Current CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS



Fiscal Year 2008 Processing Data




Future CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

Projected Workload



 External Process  MEPS Process

deliver faster, customer-focused applicant processing services.

The headquarters staff will have more timely, accurate, and “customizable” information to manage business processes, manage resources, make decisions, implement management controls, and evaluate performance of business systems and programs. Also, the headquarters staff will be able to support operational needs for people and resources while overseeing and sustaining VIPS.

Where the rubber meets the road – key goals

There are six primary goals within VIPS. They are: one visit, one accession; paperless processing; positive identification of applicants; enhanced data accessibility; validation of self-disclosed information and compliance with DoD information technology mandates.



One visit, one accession

In fiscal 2008, applicants visited MEPS more than one million times, with more than two visits per applicant. With VIPS, some of those visits will become unnecessary. Why? Because some of those applicants — those who are unqualified — will find that out without ever stepping foot in a MEPS. It’s unfortunate that they’re unqualified, but it’s unnecessary to make them visit a MEPS to find out.

In 1997, the Government Accounting Office completed a study for Congress that suggested DoD could save millions of dollars in the accession process by reducing attrition. In order to do this, DoD needs to collect more information on future service members — up front, at the very beginning of the accession process. Further, DoD needs to collect this information with less reliance on self-disclosed medical histories and criminal backgrounds.

With improved pre-qualification, MEPS and recruiting personnel will be able to devote their resources to determining — beforehand — who will

qualify. Also important, personnel will be able to transfer those unused resources to assisting qualified young men and women.

Improved pre-qualification will result from the use of existing sources of information stored in various databases. Some of these databases reside with medical providers, insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, law enforcement, etc. The goal is for USMEPCOM to be able to reach out to these databases to pre-qualify people, similar to how a credit card company pre-qualifies someone online.

Paperless processing

Eliminating paper benefits all. It complies with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980, in Chapter 35 of Title 44 of the U.S. Code. Also, it results in the elimination of hard copy packets for enlistees to bring to reception and training centers. Not to mention saving trees!



Positive identification of applicants

The value of identifying applicants from their first contact is obvious. Most importantly, it prevents fraudulent enlistment that could be achieved through identity misrepresentation. It also provides better tracking of applicants within MEPS. The command has begun positive identification with biometrics — collecting an applicant’s electronic fingerprints, signature and photograph, captured with digital face recognition software (read more under “Focusing on technology” on page 7).

Enhanced data accessibility

With this initiative, the command will continue to improve making its data accessible to its accession triad partners — recruiting and training. This is achieved in a service-oriented architecture, or SOA environment. Essentially, SOA is a collection of data services that communicate with each other.

The communication can involve passing simple data or using two or more services to coordinate the passing of data. An example of SOA is an automated teller machine. When ATMs were initially introduced, a person could only use the ATM at the specific bank of the ATM card. Today, we use our ATM cards in any ATM — because of SOA.

The more USMEPCOM can improve its data exchanges with its partners and customers — the better!

Validation of self-disclosed information

Currently, applicants make handwritten self-disclosures of information. With automated self-disclosure, first, MEPS personnel will no longer need to decipher handwriting. More importantly, MEPS personnel can spend their time — less time — accessing and assessing the information electronically and then making a determination on the applicant’s probability to qualify.

Compliance with DoD information technology mandates

In addition to all of the above, VIPS will ensure the command meets all the attributes of the net centric checklist as defined by the National Information Infrastructure. Also, VIPS will be the framework that enables the command to share information with other architectures within DoD and the federal government.

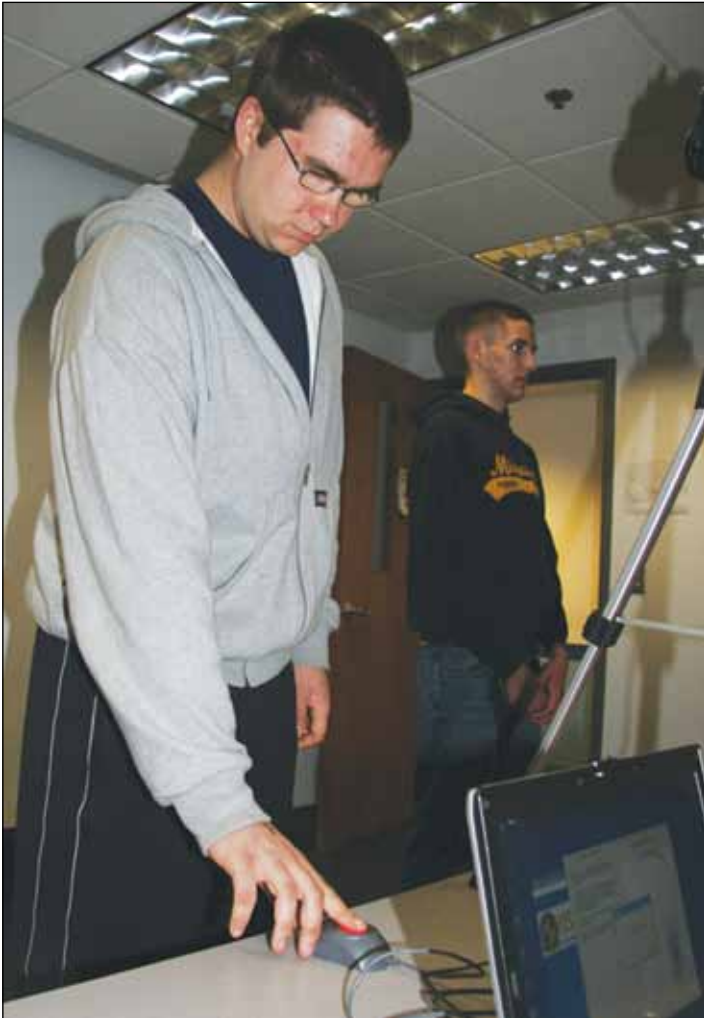
The future of military processing

One visit per accession, paperless processing, positive identification and enhanced data accessibility ... what’s not to love?

Everywhere — technology is changing the world. This holds true in USMEPCOM as well.

On any workday, across this nation, MEPS are verifying applicant identities using biometrics. Can we stretch that out — take it further? Applicants taking the ASVAB and completing their medical and overall pre-screen online, and the MEPS validating data without applicants present, electronically tracking applicants in a MEPS, completing the enlistment contract or taking the oath online? With proper planning and a lot of hard work, it’s possible.

It’s an evolution of the way in which applicants process for enlistment in the armed forces.



A Marine Corps poolee applies his fingerprint.

St. Louis takes biometrics to mini-boot camp to enroll 200 Marines before summer surge

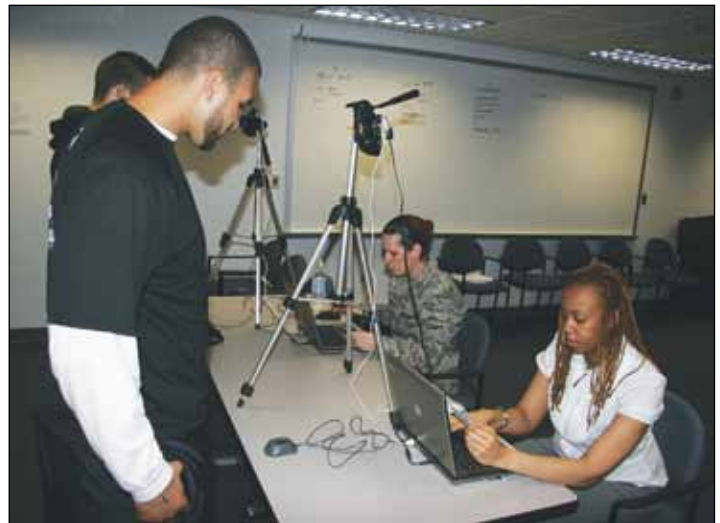
In May, St. Louis MEPS staff took biometrics to the applicant when they coordinated with the St. Louis Recruiting Station, 9th Marine Corps District, to be part of a mini-boot camp the district holds for poolees.

The MEPS staff took this opportunity to do an off-site e-Security enrollment of these applicants to minimize the impact of having to take the time to enroll them during the heavy summer shipping season. They were able to enroll more than 200 applicants projected to ship this summer.



Straight from Parris Island

U.S. Marine Corps drill instructors traveled from Parris Island for the mini-boot camp.



St. Louis MEPS human resources assistant, Melanie Phelps, and operations officer, Capt. Terri Zuber, enter e-Security data.



St. Louis Recruiting Station Marines check in applicants.

Learn more about transformation, strategic planning and the Virtual Information Processing System

On the Internet

Strategic Plan

- Go to: www.mepcom.army.mil
- Click on **Headquarters**
- Scroll down and you will find a link to **USMEPCOM Strategic Plan 2009**

Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation

- Go to: www.mepcom.army.mil
- Click on **Organization**
- Scroll down and click on **Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation**

VIPS

- Go to: www.mepcom.army.mil
- Click on **Organization**
- Scroll down and click on **Office of Strategic Planning and Transformation**
- Scroll down and click on the **VIPS** logo

On the MEPNET

An internal site for USMEPCOM employees only

Access the MEPNET through the MEPNET icon at the top of your Microsoft Outlook e-mail page

- On the MEPNET, click on **Headquarters**, then **J-5/MAE**
- Scroll down and click on **Home**

This page contains links to everything associated with transformation, strategic planning and VIPS, including the VIPS Strategic Communication Plan

On the Internet

Business Transformation Agency

- Go to: www.bta.mil

UNUSUAL ENLISTMENT

First sergeant's daughter upholds tradition

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

Tonitta Wynn is following family tradition.

Her mother, 1st Sgt. Pamela Wynn is the senior enlisted advisor at the Charlotte MEPS. Her father, Tony, is a retired command sergeant major.

Not only is Tonitta Wynn following her parents into the Army, she's going into the same military occupational specialty as her mom — human resources management.

Maj. Ott M. Siebert, Charlotte MEPS commander, performed the enlistment ceremony July 23. He held her back from an earlier ceremony and administered the oath of enlistment with her parents in attendance. Other than that, Siebert said, it was a normal ceremony.

"The ceremony was extra special, because it continued a legacy of fine Americans in the Wynn family and reaffirmed their commitment to our country," Siebert said.

First Sergeant Wynn, who will transfer to a new assignment in January, said she is "Very proud."

"Since her MOS is the same as mine, she'll not only carry on the tradition of the Wynns, she's following in mom's footsteps."

Tony Wynn said he, too, is proud his daughter chose to follow in his footsteps and equally proud of his son, Steven, a sergeant stationed in Germany after a recent deployment to Iraq.

In addition to the family's history of military service, Tonitta cited the same reasons for enlisting as many other young people.

"(I'm enlisting) because of the benefits and I think it's a good start," she said. "I'll also be able to sharpen my people skills."

In addition to Tonitta taking the oath of enlistment, her mother reaffirmed her oath.



Maj. Ott Siebert, Tonitta Wynn, retired Command Sgt. Major Tony Wynn and 1st Sgt. Pamela Wynn.

First Sergeant Wynn said she wanted to "reaffirm my commitment as she commits herself to three years. I wanted to reaffirm that commitment with her."

Tonitta's parents, despite their experience, had some simple advice for their daughter. "They said, just try my hardest at basic training, and don't give up," she said.

She will start basic training at Fort Jackson in September and remain there for advanced individual training.

Two brothers, soldiers, reassigned for injured brother

Wounded warriors pitch in at San Jose MEPS

By Skip Wiseman
 Messenger Associate Editor

The Army goes to great lengths to make sure the families of wounded warriors can be nearby during their treatment and recovery. That's how the Castro brothers ended up at the San Jose MEPS.

Spc. Brian Castro had been deployed to Iraq for about 14 months when a sniper shot him in the top left side of his head in October 2007. His brothers, Specialists Benjamin and Vincent Castro, were at Fort Hood, Texas, and headed for new assignments. The Army stepped in and put them on compassionate reassignments so they could be near their brother while he recovered at a trauma center in California.

Vincent Castro said his brother was on patrol in Baghdad when his unit encountered an unidentified van. He and a sergeant dismounted to check it out.

"As they turned around to let his patrol know they cleared the vehicle, his NCO said he heard a gunshot and saw my brother hit the ground."

The Army's best solution was to station Benjamin and Vincent at Fort Irwin, Calif. The only problem was the fort was seven hours away from where Brian was being treated. That's when the command sergeant major at Fort Irwin got involved.

"I got a call from (human resources) at Fort Irwin, who was prompted by the post command sergeant major who said, 'This doesn't make sense. I know there are recruiting stations. I know there is a

MEPS in San Jose. Call them,'" 1st Sgt. Jason E. Scott, San Jose MEPS senior enlisted advisor, said. "That's where the ball started rolling."

Although they made some procedural errors, Scott and the Fort Irwin human resources people saw to it the brothers were reunited as soon as possible and unwound the red tape later. The transfer put them about 10 minutes from the trauma center where Brian was a patient.

"They were attached here in January but didn't get officially reassigned until April 2008," Scott said.

The brothers' parents and sister were able to join them from Guam, so the whole family was reunited in California, although not under the best circumstances.

"It's been good," Vincent said. "They gave us a whole year to figure out my brother's condition. I'm glad the Army did what it did to get us closer to him. Since I joined the military it's been rare that (the family has) been all together."

Brian will be medically retired because he will always have some short-term memory loss, but is making a good recovery. When his brothers first arrived, he was bed-ridden, but starting walking and talking a few months later.

Scott said the brothers have benefited the MEPS "a hundredfold." He told them to take care of their brother, but they insisted on doing their part in the MEPS.

"I said, 'You guys' first priority is to do whatever you need to do as it concerns

your brother, because that's why you're compassionately reassigned. You are here to take care of him. Everything else takes a back seat as far as I'm concerned,'" he said.

"They came in and were open to anything," he said. "They came in and said, 'Hey, Top, we're ready to do whatever you need us to do. Just teach us.' It took maybe a month and they had it down pat."

Vincent's Army job is in administration, so his learning curve was a little less steep than that of his brother, who is a field artilleryman by trade. But both got up to speed quickly.

"Vincent is the transportation specialist. That place doesn't work without him," Scott said. "Benjamin works at the control desk and he's been the one training our new (human resources assistants) as they come in, taking them through the MIRS screens and e-Security process.

"They've really been a godsend," he said. "I couldn't have asked for two better soldiers, even though it was under horrible circumstances."

Vincent and Benjamin are continuing their Army careers together. Both re-enlisted and are assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis Wash., — Vincent in the 3rd Brigade and Benjamin in the 4th.

The Army did right by the Castro brothers, after a little nudge from a ticked command sergeant major. Now they're repaying the favor.

Wounded Warrior Program in its fifth year; USMEPCOM assists in the effort

The Army Wounded Warrior Program — AW2 — has been in place for five years, to improve wounded warrior care and expand national services for severely wounded soldiers and their families.

Through the program, soldiers receive a "triad of care" and a personal advocate. As of April, more than 4,000 severely wounded soldiers have returned from the Global War on Terrorism.

Upon injury, a soldier is assigned an AW2 advocate and placed in a Warrior Transition Unit, to focus on healing. The advocate serves the soldiers and families by understanding their needs, addressing their concerns, and

supporting their goals for as long as it takes, even post-medical retirement.

The advocate supports the WTU "triad of care" team that consists of a primary care physician, nurse case manager and a military squad leader.

Sometimes the AW2 Program includes a compassionate assignment to USMEPCOM, as detailed in the story above.

Over the past months, USMEPCOM has been getting involved when it's placed soldiers in numerous MEPS. The next *Messenger* will cover the command's expanding role in AW2.

Fort Dix test coordinator gets his dream job helping wounded veterans

By Rebecca O'Donnell
Fort Dix MEPS

The Fort Dix MEPS said “so long” to Bill Cooper with excitement!

The MEPS staff is pleased Cooper resigned. He accepted a position helping veterans, working for Congressman Chaka Fattah, 2nd District of Pennsylvania, through the Wounded Warrior Program, one of his dream jobs.

Cooper came to the MEPS less than a year ago. He started his civilian career as a human resources assistant and just a few months later was promoted to test coordinator.

He is excited about the opportunity. “I’d like to be able to help as many veterans as possible. If you asked my ROTC command what I stated on my information card regarding what was my dream job, before I even left high school or became a veteran myself, it would say that I wanted to work with veterans.”

After a crushed tibia and fibula in his right leg, crushed ulnas and radiuses in

both forearms, an injury from a projectile that passed through his groin lodging shrapnel in his pelvis, replacing his teeth and other injuries, Cooper, an Iraqi veteran, understands veterans who need help because he is a 90 percent disabled veteran himself.

Fattah, serving his eighth term, welcomes Cooper to his staff.

“The Wounded Warrior program ... is an important way to honor those who have served so well and sacrificed so much,” Fattah said. “William Cooper is a great addition to our staff and we look forward to him providing vital service to our constituents, especially those who require assistance in dealing with veterans and military-related issues.”

“I will be able to help wounded veterans,” Cooper said. “I can assist them in processing through the Veterans Administration, help them with medical re-evaluations and living assistance, such as, housing, job placement, modification to homes for handicapped needs and transitioning their family.

“I am very happy that people like our commander, Maj. Jerry Brooks, pushed me to not settle and pursue my goals” Cooper said. “I found the MEPS atmosphere very supportive and the friendships that I established are invaluable.”



Bill Cooper

Boston hosts its first bring your child to work day

The Boston MEPS hosted its first bring your child to work day, a special opportunity for kids to

see where their parents go and what they do after they say goodbye in the morning.

The departments created

specific activities designed to help the next generation to start thinking about their futures.

The younger attendees benefited from the experience by being able to visualize where mommy or daddy are when they are not with them and to understand what “going to work” actually means.

Activities were planned from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. regarding the daily operations of the Boston MEPS.

The festivities started with children visiting the liaisons’ offices. The Army, National Guard, Marine, and Navy liaisons gave the children mementos including T-shirts, a backpack, and stress balls.

After “trick or treating” with the liaisons, each child went to testing, where staff

took their photo either alone or with their parent. Afterward they visited processing and got copies of their fingerprints. Then they went to medical to play “Simon says” to orthopedic movements, and received their vitals.

The children then gathered to decorate their photos with donated art supplies and had a pizza and ice cream party.

To conclude, Cmdr. Kristin Strong, MEPS commander, held an all hands thanking everyone for visiting the MEPS and celebrated its monthly birthdays with cake and ice cream.

Twelve children from ages 2 to 14 attended the activities and one child even asked if he could come to work every day since they had so much fun.



Children of Boston MEPS staff members take the ortho-neuro exam as part of the MEPS first bring your child to work day.

Headquarters staff members proud to be big losers

By Joni Platt
J-7/Medical Plans and Policy Directorate

Being a loser can have its advantages ... as in winning the USMEPCOM Headquarters' Biggest Loser competition by losing a combined 325 pounds.

What does it take to be a winning loser? USMEPCOM "Team Slimpossible" lost 73 pounds thanks to Jessica Clark and Chris Jacklin from J-8/Resource Management, John Song from the J-4/Facilities Directorate and Paul Clark from J-6/Information Technology Directorate.

The team received a certificate of achievement from Col. Mariano Campos, USMEPCOM commander, for its efforts, along with lifetime memberships to the newly inaugurated gym located in the headquarters' building.

"The goal of the competition was to make participants more aware of their

health and hopefully get them interested in working out and leading a healthy lifestyle," Campos said. "We wanted to educate and encourage our employees to lose unwanted and unneeded pounds."

The competition started Jan. 12 and ended March 30. It was based on the television show of the same name, but unlike the television show, competitors were living their lives rather than being sequestered and separated from temptation. The big prize: fewer pounds and better health.

Paul Clark, chief of the customer support branch walked away as the individual USMEPCOM Biggest Loser.

"Win or lose I'm happy I lost weight and I feel much better!" Clark said. "This sounds corny but everyone who lost weight and/or exercised was a winner."

"Because of my weight loss I had to buy new clothes and I feel the difference. I realized I had put on weight, but I lost

more than my three year old weighs, a total of 44 pounds. I can look at my little girl and see how much weight I lost."

Clark has worked at USMEPCOM for two years. This was his first time participating in a weight-loss competition. His wife, Jessica Clark, who he credits for his weight loss, was on his team.

"I'm very lucky to have my wife, Jessica. She made it possible for me to tough it out. She was my trainer. I was way too heavy, with my weight creeping up over the years.

"Jessica did a wonderful job ensuring my family had nice healthy meals. Jessica is the reason I was able to be so dedicated to the challenge," Clark said.

Another team member, John Song, engineering technician for J-4 has worked at USMEPCOM for five years. To prepare for the competition Song developed a workout schedule consisting of a balance



Headquarters staff members show off their new physiques after they lost a combined 325 pounds using the biggest loser program. (Front row, left to right) Jessica Clark, John Song, Kathy Davis, Roy Perez, Dawn Yoshii, Eladio Valdez, Cathy Vick, Berletney House, Lt. Col. Philip Jussel, Capt. Daniel Papajcik, Ed Mills, Col. Thomas Kenney, John Butler (second row) Linda Hoover, Chris Jaklin, Joni Platt, Lorene Roth, Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Theberge, George Doroshko, Maj. Ricardo Bravo, Dee Varga, Marshall Tetterton, Sharon Collins, Caroline Oncken, Rebecca Porinsky (back row) Gordon Rogers, Paul Clark, Connie Ross, Steve Weller, Lt. Col. James Burdick, Richard Harris, Jeff Zeller.

of cardio, weights and stretching. He also planned a balanced diet of mini meals during the day.

"I'm very proud to be a part of this team," Song said. "I was never in it for the winning, just to stay in shape and be healthy."

"My biggest challenge was to stay committed to the workout program I developed," he said. "Even now that the competition is over, I will continue to work out and use our top-notch gym. Everybody needs a balanced workout, especially all the desk jockeys sitting around all day."

Participants were granted three hours administrative time each week to train in the headquarters' fitness center.

For another participant, joining the competition was the result of serious health issues.

Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Theberge, administrative NCO for the J-7/Medical Plans and Policy Directorate was told by his doctor that he was at a very high risk for a heart attack. This spurred him to join the competition. His recent weight loss has halved his cholesterol levels.

"Instead of eating two meals a day I ate six to seven times a day and drank at least 100 ounces of water each day. I bicycled 20 to 40 miles a day and worked on my abs during my workout routine," Theberge said.

Theberge has been at USMEPCOM for more than a year. Although Theberge did not reach his goal weight he feels better about himself.

"The end of the competition will not stop me from continuing my progress," he said. "I'm going to continue with my program and will incorporate more weight training to tone up besides my regular work out routine."

His dieting tips include "Googling" types of foods and snacks that help burn fat. He planned his snacks and meals from the list. He also credits the diet and nutrition class hosted by the headquarters at the start of the competition for pointing him in the right direction on how many calories would help maintain or lose weight.

Some team members were already diet veterans and had battled with weight loss long before the competition started.

Dawn Yoshii, AIP team leader, senior

management analyst, J-3/Operations Directorate, said the competition provided the motivation she needed to win her "constant battle" to lose weight.

"I used to be an expert at losing weight, but I would return to my old habits and put the weight right back on. Now my habits are totally different and I try to stay within a certain bracket," she said.

Yoshii has worked at USMEPCOM for more than 21 years. Even though she didn't reach her goal weight she believes almost any lifestyle change can help.

"Always make sure your goals are obtainable and maintainable. I would suggest choosing a method one can stick to, and then figure out how to maintain it," Yoshii said. "Also, the need for increased activity, when it becomes a habit, will definitely help them reach their goals and maintain them."

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The first wealth is health." Campos' support and vision enabled his staff to focus on improving their overall health and quality of life by participating in the USMEPCOM Biggest Loser competition.

Spokane MEPS marks 21st year in Bloomsday Race

For more than 30 years, the city of Spokane, Wash., has held a 12-kilometer race to mark the start of spring.

The Spokane MEPS has taken part in the event for more than 20 years and the race has served an excellent springboard for getting in shape for the warmer months.

Bloomsday 2009 was held May 3 and boasted more than 50,000 participants.

The Spokane MEPS team included staff members, liaisons and family members for a total of 27 participants and volunteers.

Ross Yalung previously participated in three races as a Navy liaison and now six times as the Spokane MEPS command secretary.

Although Yalung doesn't run competitively any more, he still thoroughly enjoys walking with 50,000 other friends and being part of the volunteer crew that organizes the event.



Back row (left to right) Petty Officer 2nd Class Paul Williams, Capt. Patrick Webinger, Lorna Willard, Leaf Rich, Don Jones, Dorothy Yeager and Sgt. 1st Class Donald Buckley. Front row (left to right) Mary Kay Hayes, Ross Yalung, and Cmdr. Richard Obregon.

Girl Scout cookies, a plane ticket, New Mexico green chilies ... First sergeant's mom continues 15-year tradition of sending care packages to deployed troops

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

It started with sending care packages to her soldier-son when he deployed to Honduras in the mid-'90s. Since then, Lisa Norton's avocation of helping take care of deployed troops has taken on a life of its own.

First Sgt. William Apodaca-Fisk, former senior enlisted advisor for the Boise MEPS, was the first to benefit from his mother's

generosity. Since then, friends and relatives of friends and co-workers and even complete strangers have received cards, care packages, thank you notes and letters from Norton and her co-workers at Yeats Petroleum. At one point the company owner kicked in some soccer balls for Iraqi children and the company covered postage on care packages for a time.

Norton said the company has been supportive and that many employees have actively supported the

cause. The company allows them to send e-mails to raise funds to support the troops and supports the program in other ways, especially around Christmas.

"We had collection points down in the lobby," she said. "We had stuff stacked all over the place from donations. They were very good to allow us to do that."

"We've got about 300 employees," Norton, Yeats' environmental division di-

rector, said. "I would say there's a good 20 of them that help all the time and, periodically, I'll bet everybody in the company has contributed something."

"My son has been in the military for 19 some odd years," she said, "and over those years he has been deployed about half his career. The folks I work with are just great and whatever he'd been doing, we've been involved in."

"For example, when he was in Honduras in about 1994, he was doing

"As time went on and the conflicts became more and more difficult for military people, I saw that we needed to expand this beyond just sending things for William to distribute," Norton said, "so I started getting the names of family members and friends of Yeats Petroleum employees and we started sending periodic care packages and cards and encouragement to all those folks."

Although the group originally concentrated on sending large packages, it has

since discovered that it could support more service members if it sent smaller packages more often.

"We've found out that the U.S. Post Office has a box about the size of letterhead paper that you can pack quite a bit of stuff in and the postage is really reasonable," Norton said. "It's about \$10. It doesn't matter how much it weighs; you just pack in as much as you can."

Norton keeps a running list of who the group supports.

At one time it was about 25 people, but now it's down to less

than 10. As the numbers have changed, so have the items deployed people appreciate the most.

"We try to mix it up," she said. "At Easter, I sent all my deployed guys phone cards so they could call home. When William was deployed with the special ops, it was pretty primitive. He told me at one point he went for six weeks without a



(Left to right) Debbie Garcia, Roxanne Sallee, Lisa Norton and Tendayi Thorson hold shipping boxes they use to send care packages to troops around the world.

some volunteer work at a small orphanage," she said. "The folks I work with took that orphanage on. We sent literally hundreds of cases of supplies the orphanages needed."

When Fisk deployed to Saudi Arabia, his mom and her co-workers sent large boxes of things the soldiers might enjoy, like New Mexico green chilies. He distributed them to his fellow soldiers.

continued ...

Stop, thief!

Pretty plastic flowers solve vanishing pens mystery

By Rebecca O'Donnell
Fort Dix MEPS

There are geniuses among us. Freud, Aristotle, Einstein, Plato, daVinci and Mozart were geniuses of different and shared studies. Now, there is a new genius. Kara Bowman — a creative genius and human resources assistant at the Fort Dix MEPS.

An issue arose about the increasing costs and need for pens. Yes, pens.

As silly as it sounds, it was causing a lot of drama and needed some attention. So the MEPS NCOICs set out to solve the problem of replacing so many pens.

"I just put it out there and asked my group to see what they could do," Sgt. 1st Class Norman Love, Fort Dix MEPS operations NCOIC, said.

Bowman put her creativity to work. She taped silk flowers to all the pens in her area. After all, who would want to walk around, undisguised, with a big pink or purple flowered pen hanging out of their pocket? Her efforts paid off.

"We haven't had to ask for pens in over two months now," Bowman said. "I have all my flowers right here," she added, pointing to a flower pot.



Kara Bowman is saving the Fort Dix MEPS money by putting plastic flowers on pens.

"It's like the MEPS going 'green,' kind of. We all should make efforts to reduce waste and costs in these economically hard times and it's an opportunity to be creative. It doesn't matter how small the project," Bowman said.

Maj. Jerry Brook, Fort Dix MEPS commander has noticed the difference.

"We were going through two or three boxes of pens a week at the front desk, and that has stopped," he said. "I don't know what a box of pens costs, but it adds up over a year."

Others have picked up on Bowman's idea.

"I think it was a great idea. I'm going to see what supply can buy for us on the medical floor to implement the same great idea," Sgt. 1st Class Wendell Kirkland, Fort Dix MEPS medical NCOIC, said.

USMEPCOM Commander, Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr., recognized Bowman's idea during his visit to Fort Dix MEPS, as well.

Care packages ...

shower, so we were sending baby wipes, hand sanitizers, lip balm and those types of things.

"It's changed now," Norton said. "We send everything from a deck of cards to a CD to a book to beef jerky. They all seem to like beef jerky. We always have Girl Scout cookies. It's an array of things. At Christmas time we thought it would be fun for each of them to get their own little Christmas ornament." One of her co-workers hand-knit stocking caps for each of the 10 people who got packages.

The Yeats group gets some help from outsiders, like her brother who lives in Hawaii and got the Kona Coffee Company to donate packages of coffee. The group teamed up with other groups for larger projects, including the West Texas Troop Salute in Midland, Texas.

"They initiated a 'Christmas for our Troops' effort the last couple of years and we participated in it this year," Norton said. "A lot of people in town did, too, and we had a local veteran who organized it. It ended up that gift boxes were sent to 1,275

troops. It was a huge effort and it was so successful. I was so proud of it."

Norton says she and her co-workers have sent "literally thousands" of small packages to deployed service members.

Although she started sending care packages to support her son, Norton says her motivation runs deeper and further back than just that.

"I'm a Vietnam-era mom and I saw how a lot of military people were treated when they came back from Vietnam," she said. "I just never wanted to see that kind of hurt on military personnel, and my son in particular, ever again when they came back from missions and overseas deployments."

The team realizes deployments are tough on families, too, and tries to help out there as well. She says helping out with special needs that come to their attention is "a natural thing."

"We had a young guy who works in our (information technology) whose brother was recently deployed," she said.

Although the soldier's wife and children were with him in Alaska, he wasn't going to be able to visit his parents and brothers in New Mexico and Texas.

"They were pretty upset," Norton said, "but the cost of a ticket to fly him from Alaska to New Mexico when he finally realized he was going to get a few days leave was just unbelievably expensive. He just plain couldn't afford it.

"I just sent out a couple of calls to people and within two days, the people here at Yeats had raised \$700 and bought him an airline ticket so he could come home and see his mom."

So how long will Norton and her group keep this up? "As long as we've got soldiers deployed," she said.

Norton's personal connection with the Army doesn't look like it's going to end anytime soon, either. Her grandson, Alex, joined the National Guard after his junior year of high school and will attend specialty training this summer before entering college.

Beckley gives back to local veterans

Members of the Beckley MEPS staff recently took part in Veterans Appreciation Day held at the Raleigh County Convention Center in hopes of helping other organizations get the word out to local veterans to what programs and benefits are available to them.

Organizations such as United Way, American Red Cross, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, VA claims center, Troops to Teachers and Workforce West Virginia set up information booths and conducted interviews to help local veterans both young and old.

MEPS personnel served as booth setup coordinators, greeters and clean up crew.

More than 120 local veterans came out to take advantage of the information fair and all organizations involved spoke of directly helping individuals on the spot or setting up follow up appointments with as many as 10 people.

"If we help just one veteran, then it was worth it," a United Way member said.



Even young residents turned out to show their support for veterans.



West Virginia veterans in the Raleigh County area were able to learn about services available to them at a Veterans Appreciation Day event. The city of Beckley is the Raleigh county seat, so Beckley MEPS staff helped out at the event. (Photo, above, center) Two MEPS volunteers are Sgt. Giovanna Garrison and Petty Officer 2nd Class Mark Marquez.



Fort Dix MEPS
Maj. Jerry Brooks

Hometown: Freedom, N.H. “It’s a quaint little town kind of like Mayberry RFD. There’s church, a small village store and that’s about it. There are about 3,600 folks. It’s in the White Mountains of New Hampshire about 125 miles north of Boston.”

Fond childhood memories: “Every year we have old home week. There is a small carnival sponsored by the fire department. The summer population quadruples because we have a large lake, Lake Ossipee, and people have summer homes on the shore. There are also six summer camps on the lake where kids come to spend the summer. All the camps get together and build floats and there are all kinds of activities.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “I think it was my bike. It gave me a lot of freedom. You could get to the ball field. You could get to the swimming hole. You always had a ball glove and a bat to throw over the handle bars.”

Education: Bachelor of science degree in physical therapy from the University of New England School of Osteopathic Medicine, Biddeford, Maine.

A checkered past: “When I was 17, my high school senior year, I dropped out of school and joined the Navy. Back then if you scored high enough

on the ASVAB they would waive the diploma or GED, so my dad signed me in. My dad was a prior Navy Seabees and I joined the Seabees also. I came home from the Navy in 1986 and was asked by the local police chief if I wanted to be a police officer. I got my GED because you couldn’t get into the police academy without one. My dad is in construction, so I worked there and joined the active Naval Reserve.”

You’re busted! “I was also working as a police officer and had the good fortune of getting selected to work undercover for two years on a task force. I actually saw some drug deals go down. We ended up doing the second largest drug bust in Maine history at the time.”

From cop to therapist: “I started at the University of Southern Maine criminology program. I thought I was going to go into federal law enforcement, FBI, CIA or something. I heard about the physical therapy program and talked to the dean of admissions. I took a boat load of adult education courses. I also got my high school diploma. I took a full load of classes in physics, biology, chemistry and all that. I put in an application to University of New England. They only have 60 seats a year. They take in 1,500 applications a year.”

Uncle Sam wants you: “About four months before graduation, I was getting all kinds of calls from the Army. They were trying to get me a commission in the physical therapy program. I checked with the Navy and they only had one position and 40 applications. So I called the Air Force and they had eight positions for that year. I built a package and I called my old commanding officer, from when I was on active duty with the Navy. By then he was the admiral in charge of all the Seabees. I talked to his exec and told him who I

was. The admiral called me back personally. I told him I was trying to work toward a commission in the Air Force. He said I had to come down to D.C. to see him. I put on a tie and went in there. He called the director of physical therapy at Andrews Air Force Base and set up the interview. I got over there and they treated me like a visiting czar. The colonel gave me a full personal tour of the hospital at Andrews. It was only three days until I was accepted. I know it was because the admiral called. I always tell people I’m a commissioned officer in the Air Force at the hands of a Navy admiral.”

Previous assignment: Military personnel flight commander at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass.

Favorite assignment: Teaching ROTC at the University of New Hampshire. “The cadets are phenomenal.

They were always trying to stump the captain. They’d give reports and briefings. I looked forward to Tuesday nights when we had leadership nights. Some of them are flying in Afghanistan and Iraq now. Some of them still shoot me e-mails all the time. I remember seeing them as juniors and seniors in college and now they have flourishing careers. I still have a flag that they flew and when they brought it down they all saluted it. It’s my most treasured flag and will probably go in my shadow box when I retire.”

Future military career plans: “I’m an old horse who’s right on the bubble of do I continue to another assignment or retire. I’m still reviewing it. Part of me says one more shot, but I turn 47 this summer. My ultimate goal was to be done when I was 50 and have one more shot at another career.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I think I might go on to teaching, instructing in some capacity.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “I travel around. I’m pretty famous for moving around on the weekends. D.C is two hours away. I have no problem calling down there, getting a room and spending the weekend. I go to New York City and go to plays. The days here are long sometimes, but I like moving around, travelling, seeing stuff. I’m only five hours from home, so I go home to see my son and daughter.”

What’s your leadership style? “I cover the full spectrum from stern to laid back. It depends on the circumstances. I would say firm, but fair. I’m a play by the rules kind of guy. If the day starts at 8 a.m., I want you through the door at 8, not 8:15 or 8:20. If you ask some of my people they’d say I’m too easy, others would say ‘He’s crazy.’”

What do you like best about your job? “I always say it’s the hardest easiest job I’ve ever had. It’s challenging to do it right. The easy part comes because it’s a great job to put people into the military. I could potentially swear in a young applicant who earns the Medal of Honor or goes on to be a general or CEO of a big company. I think we can make a big impact on military people here. They are out there sacrificing. It has an impact — you shake their hands and they go out of here and go to boot camp.”

What do you order when you eat out? “Seafood. Lobster. If I can stick a fork into a lobster, that’s what I’m after. I go to a place on Portsmouth, N.H. I bought a 23-pound lobster and they had to cook it for me there. The claws were as big as dinner plates.”

No pigs in sight: His daughter got married in Mexico on Cinco de Mayo. “Nobody died of the swine flu. The wedding was spectacular. Crystal blue skies and the ocean. The sun

was going down. There were about 30 of us and very few other people. I was speaking with the people at the resort and they said their revenue had dropped by 80 percent.”

What’s your guilty pleasure?

“Travel. I go through some money travelling. I’ve taken personal trips to Australia and New Zealand.”

What is your least favorite sport?

“Competitive walking. I was watching it on the Olympics and said what the heck is this? Cricket maybe, because I really don’t understand it.”

Tell me something people would be surprised to know about you.

“I like being around kids. I like the few times a year when the staff bring in kids. I enjoy that. They amuse me. Kids are funny people.”

Tell me three things that are on your desk.

“My radio, coffee cup and a spare pair of eyeglasses. Sometimes I wear my sunglasses on the way to work and forget my glasses, so I keep a pair here so I can see the computer screen.”

What kind of music do you like?

“I’m the guy that’s stuck in the late ‘70s and ‘80s. I’m a big Eagles fan, Bruce Springsteen, Fleetwood Mac.”

What is the last book you read?

“I just finished an Einstein biography. What an interesting man.”

What’s your ideal vacation?

“It’s on my list. It’s gonna happen. Fly to Germany, go to Austria and into Switzerland. Train tours through the alps. I’m a pretty avid skier, so I don’t know if I want to go when I can get some skiing in or do it when the weather’s warm. I’m leaning toward when the weather’s warm. Maybe I’ll do it in the fall so I can catch the early part of the ski season.”



Milwaukee MEPS
Maj. Marcos Suarez

Hometown: Fajardo, Puerto Rico. “It’s on the east coast, a beautiful beach area. Roosevelt Road Naval Base is right next door.”

Fond childhood memories:

“My favorite place was the beach. We used to go at least once a week.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “The one I remember the most is a Buck Rogers pinball machine.”

Education: Bachelor of business administration with an emphasis on accounting from the University of Puerto Rico, Humacao Campus; master of arts degree in human resources management from Webster University.

Why the Army? “It was available at my university.

It’s what I was used to seeing. I was in the Puerto Rico National Guard and then decided to go ROTC, so I did the simultaneous membership program. I was in the National Guard and ROTC at the same time.” He was a personnel action specialist during his four years in the Guard. He was responsible for making sure awards and other entries were posted to personnel records. “We visited all the armories in Puerto Rico getting their records up to speed.”

Previous assignment: Fort Sill, Okla., with the 95th Reception Battalion. “I did two company command tours and two years as the battalion (executive officer.)”

Favorite assignment:

“Command. Company command and this command. I love to command. It’s an opportunity to shape personnel, especially when I was with the troops at Fort Sill. You get to be an early influence on those soldiers of tomorrow.”

Future military career plans?

“I hope to get a battalion command. If I get what I want, I would like to go back to Fort Sill and command the reception battalion.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I would like to teach at a university, probably teach human resources at some college. Again it’s an opportunity to shape people’s future.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “Spend time with the family. Just play with the kids. We watch movies, play outside. We teach the kids to do sports. We go to amusement parks.” He has three sons, 12, 3 and three months.

What’s your leadership style?

“I think I’m relaxed. I’m more of a coach. Kind of guiding people into answering their questions. I try to get them fully engaged, try to make them realize they want to do it because it’s the right thing to do, not because I’m telling them to do it.”

What do you like best about your job? “Again, I have to say it’s being able to influence people, touch people. Being able to manage all these resources we have, especially the human resources. You can get people to do things and do great things for each other as well. I use the authority I have

to help others rather than to try to help myself. You have to use the power you have as a leader to get people to do things.”

What do you order when you eat out?

“We go to my wife’s favorite restaurant, Olive Garden. I get seafood Alfredo.”

What’s the best present you ever got?

“I have to go back to that favorite toy — the Buck Rogers pinball machine. That has always stuck in my head.

That was probably the greatest Christmas I ever had. I was about 6 or 7.”

What’s your guilty pleasure?

“Budweiser select.” He discovered it at a beer tasting at Busch Gardens.

What is your least favorite sport?

“It has to be NASCAR, I just can’t sit and watch cars going around and around. I can’t see myself watching cars go around 500 times.”

Tell me something people would be surprised to know about you:

“I was a wrestler in college.” He wrestled at 154 or 167. Now he’s close to 200 pounds. “You know what they say, muscle weighs more than fat.”

Tell me three things that are on your desk.

“A nice soldier field artillery statue that was given to me by my previous boss and a little stereo. Right next to my desk is a globe made of rocks. It’s made in Puerto Rico.”

What kind of music do you like?

“My favorite is Salsa. It has good rhythm.”

What’s your ideal vacation?

“I have to say go back to the Caribbean on a cruise. On a cruise you stop at the beach, you have all you can eat. A cruise has just about everything I want to do on a vacation.”



**Oklahoma City
MEPS**
Lt. Cmdr.
David Nikodym

Hometown: Rapid City, S.D.
Fond childhood memories?

“Spending a couple of summers at a beach cottage in Rhode Island and several trips to Yellowstone. It was a zoo where the animals could eat you.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “Hot Wheels. Me and my brother used to beat the crap out of each other with the tracks.”

No degree? No problem: “I was commissioned through the limited duty officer program. There were no degree requirements.” He has an associate degree from the University of Maryland and is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in general studies from Excelsior University. “I’m probably the most senior person in the United States military without a bachelor’s degree.”

Why Navy? “I walked into the Navy recruiting office and they seemed more receptive. I talked to the Army and Marine Corps, and the Navy seemed more receptive to me joining the organization.”

Fast burner: He did 10 years enlisted time and made chief yeoman in 8 years. “I rode submarines for the first nine years of my career.”

Under the sea: “It was a challenge. You lived an 18-hour day instead of 24 hours. You were on watch

for six hours and off for 12. They cycled the meals so you weren’t eating the same meal all the time.”

Previous assignment?

Training officer on the USS Abraham Lincoln.

Favorite assignment? “I was assigned to the USS Dolphin — AGSS 555 — the world’s deepest diving submarine.”

The Dolphin was recently decommissioned. He was Sailor of the Year in 1993, which is “kind of like being Sailor of the Year with the Blue Angels.” And how deep did the Dolphin go? That’s one of those ‘if I tell you, I have to kill you’ kind of things.”

Future military career plans?

“I’m heading to Afghanistan in March. I’ll be officer in charge of national police training and recruiting. Not your typical human resources kind of assignment.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I want to be a longhorn rancher. I have longhorn cattle. We just started buying longhorns since we got here.” They have 10 head and lease pasture now, but will likely buy a ranch when he retires. “Being raised in South Dakota, you’re always around cattle,” but he had no real background as a rancher. “We like longhorns because they’re not all the same. You look out in a field and see a bunch of black cows, but every longhorn is different.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “I’m the vice chair of the local Federal Executive Board. That keeps me very busy and I’m the father of two young children.” His kids are 5 and 7.

How does the MEPS benefit from being involved with the Federal Executive Board?

“We get a lot of training we otherwise couldn’t afford. We get administrative professional and leadership training. We get into joint efforts with other federal agencies for situations like the swine flu outbreak.”

What’s your leadership style? “Engaged but not over-engaged. I try to let people do their jobs and make sure they have the tools to do their jobs.”

What do you like best about your job?

“The opportunity I’ve been given to be commanding officer of an organization and the responsibility to move it forward.”

What do you order when you eat out? “We eat a lot of Japanese or Chinese food. My daughter was born in Japan, so she was born eating rice.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “My daughter was born on Father’s Day in Yokosua, Japan. That will always and forever be the best present I ever got.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Cigars. Padrone Cigars.”

What is your least favorite sport? “I would have to say soccer. Cowboys don’t play soccer.”

Tell me something people would be surprised to know about you. “I’ve been to the north pole on a submarine, the Queenfish, in 1988.”

Tell me three things on your desk: “My feet, (hey, telephone interviews are supposed to be relaxed) my calendar, and a picture of my wife in her wedding dress.”

What kind of music do you like? “Both kinds. Country and Western.”

What’s the last book you read? Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times, by Donald T. Phillips.

What’s your ideal vacation?

“I’ve traveled the world, been in the Navy for 25 years. Yellowstone is my favorite place in the world to visit.” They were headed to Yellowstone this summer and planned to stay in a lodge that overlooks Old Faithful. “This is the third time for both of my kids to be there, so they have Yellowstone memories, just like I have from when I was a kid. That’s really cool.”



**Anchorage
MEPS**
1st Sgt.
Rodolfo Lozano

Hometown: Paducah, Texas. “It’s a small farming community. The population is about 8,000 and dropping drastically. It’s near the Oklahoma Panhandle. It has one red constantly blinking stoplight. That’s all.”

Fond childhood memories: “Most of the roads in Paducah are dirt roads. The street behind where we used to live would get washed out and had a steep grade. My brothers and I would build ‘go-karts.’ We would take the lawnmower wheels or bicycle wheels and there you go. Just a plank and a couple of wheels and brave that washed out road. There was nothing but barbed wire at the end so it was a challenge. The only way to stop was to roll off.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “My brother’s bicycle. He’d kind of loan it out. He was the only one who had a bicycle. He showed me how to ride a bike and kind of held that over me.”

Education: Associate of arts degree in general studies from the University of Maryland.

Why Army? “My first exposure to the Army was while we were doing a road trip to San Antonio. I saw a convoy stopping at a McDonalds. The troops were all out there sitting in their

BDUs with the rolled-up sleeves. That left an impression.” He was 8 or 9.

Previous assignment: Fort Bragg, N.C. “Jumping out of airplanes with the 307th Brigade Support Battalion.” He served two deployments to Afghanistan while he was assigned there.

Favorite assignment: Being an NCO academy instructor at Fort Richardson, Alaska. “The job was demanding. There were a lot of long hours but, the people there worked well together. It was a lot of group effort, a lot of camaraderie.” The students were specialists and sergeants. “You see a lot of good people, meet a lot of great people and see their leadership styles and you know they’re still developing. It’s good to know we’re in good hands.”

Future military career plans: “I’m not ready to stop. I enjoy this profession. It’s extremely rewarding. I have some assignments I’d like to get to. I’d like to work in aviation or armor.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve talked that over with the other ‘kids.’ I’ve always thought I’d like to go into teaching, to work with kids.” He probably wants to work at the junior high level. “It’s an awkward and tough period for teens. Now I know why my teachers smiled at our troubles. If only we had known what troubles lie ahead. I’d like to be in a position to offer a little more guidance than I got.”

What do you do when you’re not a senior enlisted advisor? “Bike ride, running. I’m a father and husband.” His daughters are 17 and 6. His son is 12.

What’s your leadership style? “It changes. It has to change. You have to be able to wear the different hats and use

the leadership style that best fits the situation. You can’t stay rigid.”

What do you like best about your job? “Getting to work with the people. It’s all a challenge. Everyone has character, I like to say. Everybody has their quirks and manners. It’s all about getting past that and working together.”

What do you order when you eat out? “I really don’t do that too much. Fruit smoothies.”

What’s the best present you ever got? A concert ticket for Third Day, it’s a Christian rock band.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? The TV show Breaking Bad. “The main character has no clue what he’s doing. As smart as he is, he’s got no clue.”

What is your least favorite sport? “That would be just most of them.” (He doesn’t really follow mainstream sports.) “The least favorite would be baseball.”

Tell me something people would be surprised to know about you. “I have a fear of heights. I’m still fascinated with looking down, but being in the open does it for me. My father was a carpenter. I used to go to the job sites and go up the ladder. It was cool, but then you have those sloped roofs. Not too long ago, I went back to the house we lived in when I was a kid and got up on the roof. It’s really not that high.”

Three things on his desk: “A photo of my kids, the checklist to prepare for (staff assistance visit) and taskers that need attention.”

What kind of music do you like? “Any rock and roll.”

Last book you read? Right now it’s *Cryptoquips*. It’s coded sayings or famous quotes and you have to break the code to find out what it says.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Spend some time in the Virgin Islands on a beach, enjoying the sun and a cool breeze.”



Lansing MEPS
1st Sgt. Wanda Gipson

Hometown: Holly Springs, Miss. “It’s a mid-size little city. It used to have two black colleges in the area, Rust College and Mississippi Industrial College, which no longer exists. They were two big historically black colleges.”

Fighting for rights: “I travelled with my daddy to get folks registered to vote (in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s). This was back in the Jim Crow days. My daddy would go out to rural Mississippi and show them how to fill out the application to vote. That has always stood out with me. As a child you don’t always understand what’s going on, but with what’s happening today, it’s awesome.”

“On my honor I will try”: Her association with the Girl Scouts were also a part of her formative years. “We did a lot of community service work. Our leader was known as Momma Leslie. She taught us how to be productive citizens and how to act like ladies. We would provide services to the local nursing homes, take them little gifts and dance for them. We attended one of the first Girl Scout Camps where they had little black girls and little white girls going to day camp together. Of course, we sold cookies. One time I decided I was going to sell cookies to Mayor Sam Coopwood. My sisters said he wouldn’t even

see me, but he did and bought every cookie I had.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “The Crissy doll. The best thing was she had hair you could make longer or shorter.”

Education: Bachelor of science degree in biology (premed) from Rust College. She is pursuing a master’s degree in human resources from Central Michigan University.

Why Army? “That is a very good question. I always loved the Army. When folks would join the Army and come back, (I admired) the image they projected. I got the physical training, the discipline, the motivation and the desire to succeed. I thought it was a step for success. One thing that stood out with the Army was they always let you know what you need to attain the next level.”

Previous assignment: Senior human resources sergeant for the 46th Engineer Combat Battalion, Fort Polk, La.

Favorite assignment: Drill sergeant at Fort Jackson, S.C. “I liked the fact that I had the opportunity to really turn a civilian into a soldier. You’re with them from the time they get up until they go to sleep. What you see is amazing. Being a drill sergeant improved my skills as a leader. When you work with (recruits) when they first come into the Army, you are molding these people into the type of soldier you want to serve with, either in combat or in garrison, because you know they’re going to live up to the standard.”

Future military career plans: “I would love to be a command sergeant major. That is my goal. I would also like to one day have the opportunity to serve with U.S. Africa Command.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I think I would like to be a physician’s assistant at a hospital.”

What do you do when you're not a senior enlisted advisor? "I put in time with my daughter, who will be graduating from Holt (Mich.) high school this year, so I'm going to savor the moments."

What's your leadership style? "I've had to do a lot of adjusting based on the environment here. Right now it's a participative one, because I want to get all my leaders involved in what we do. I don't want to be dictator, so I get more participation. I believe a true leader has to adapt to the environment they're in."

What do you like best about your job? "I like that I've been given the opportunity to be in a joint environment. This is another part of the spectrum. At one time I was a drill sergeant training the recruits. Now I see what it takes to get one applicant to qualify."

What do you order when you eat out? "I'm into the salad thing. I eat salad almost every other day. We're on this health thing here in Lansing."

What's the best present you ever got? A pair of earrings that my daughter made me when she was in preschool. And, yes, I wore them. I wore them to church. She made them for Mother's Day. They were in the shape of birds. She was four years old. She was so proud."

What's your guilty pleasure? "Potato chips — ruffled sour cream and onion."

What is your least favorite sport? "Football, because I don't understand it. I really don't quite get it all together."

Tell me three things on your desk: "A certificate of achievement from a volunteer ceremony we just had, the Serenity Prayer and pictures of my family."

What kind of music do you like? "I like all types of music from gospel to jazz to a little bit of country."

What's the last book you read? "Confessions of a Shopaholic," by Sophie

Kinsella. It's about this female who is so in love with shopping. She's addicted to shopping. She has all these credit cards and is trying to wean herself off them, but it's very hard."

What's your ideal vacation? "To go on a cruise to the Bahamas and just relax. Enjoy the moments of the day, the whole life. Not travel around, just be on the beach and enjoy the ocean."



**Miami MEPS
Master Sgt.
Walter Thomas**

Hometown: Bartow, Ga. "It's a small town. One person is the sheriff and postmaster and he does it all. The population is less than 1,000."

Fond childhood memories: "I grew up on a farm. I would get on my father's tractor and run over rattlesnakes. I spent a lot of time hanging out with my family growing up. We had a hog farm and a cow and 300 acres of crops." They grew watermelons, peas, butter beans, squash and corn and sold it at the farmer's market.

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? "A Tonka truck. When I was 5 or 6, I hauled dirt and made my own interstate. I had never been on the interstate, but I pretended because of what I had seen on TV."

Why the Marines? "I recall when I was 15, my brother-

in-law was in the Army and worked for the president. He was going overseas and he was in his Army uniform and waiting for my sister at the terminal. I recall this Marine sergeant walking down the terminal with a sea bag. Everybody stopped and watched him. He had this aura about him. That's when I said, 'That's what I want to be — a Marine.'"

His daughter is an airman: His daughter has been in the Air Force since December 2007 and is in security forces. "That was my recommendation. She's not an 'Oohrah' type. She's more the book type, so I said go to the Air Force."

Previous assignment: Administration chief, for the 8th Communications Battalion, Camp Lejuene, N.C.

Favorite assignment: Drill instructor at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S.C. "You got a chance to mold boys into men in three months. Their parents saw a huge difference. It was a life changing event for those young men."

Future military career plans? "First to see if I get selected for E-9. I plan to go to back to Camp Lejeune or Okinawa."

What do you want to be when you grow up? "An entrepreneur. I'm thinking of going into the hotel business." He'd like to own a hotel in the Southeast. "But north of Florida. Definitely not Florida."

What do you do when you're not a senior enlisted advisor? "I spend a lot of time with my family at home or we just go out and enjoy the city of Miami, eating out or just strolling along the malls."

What's your leadership style? "It depends on the situation. I can be authoritarian or I can let my subordinates do what they need to do to get the job done. I'm looking for the result, the desired outcome, regardless of how I get there."

What do you like best about your job? "I get a chance to mentor young men and women, not only working in the MEPS, but the ones processing through here. I can show them where I came from to get to where I am today and tell them 'Never give up on your dreams.'"

What do you order when you eat out? "Normally I would have a nice, well-cooked juicy steak."

What's the best present you ever got? "When I re-enlisted in 2004, I purchased myself a CLK 55 AMG Mercedes-Benz."

What's your guilty pleasure? "Eating vanilla ice cream late at night on the weekend."

What is your least favorite sport? "Hockey. It's a sport I just never got into. Seeing guys slide around on the ice and fighting all the time. The fighting I can deal with, but the ice skating, never. I never played it, so I'm not going watch it."

Tell me something people would be surprised to know about you. "I love to listen to country music."

Tell me three things on your desk: "Hand sanitizer, my handy dandy Blackberry and the sequence of events for the change of command program I'm working on for my commander."

What kind of music do you like? "It depends on my mood. I like jazz, R&B and I listen to country."

What's the last book you read? First to Fight by Gen. Charles Krulak, former commandant of the Marine Corp. "It's a history of the Marine Corps in past wars and conflicts and lessons learned."

What's your ideal vacation? "I want to go to Korea where my daughter is stationed and spend some time with her for at least two weeks. And of course go on a shopping spree."

Base officers pitch in to help Shreveport during shortage

By Lt.j.g. Dan Frias
Operations Officer
Shreveport MEPS

Imagine you're entering the heat of summer surge and you've just lost your operations officer and assistant operations officer to permanent change of station moves — on the same day!

That's exactly what happened at the Shreveport MEPS last summer.

Fortunately, Barksdale Air Force Base is just 10 miles down the road, and 1st Lt. Kenneth Byrd came to the rescue.

When he became aware of the critical manning shortage, he immediately began to coordinate with company grade

officers assigned to Barksdale to volunteer their services to conduct enlistment ceremonies.

The lieutenant's efforts led to 26 Barksdale officers playing a pivotal role in swearing 1,082 applicants into the Delayed Entry Program and 1,329 enlistments of recruits into all branches of the armed services, ensuring the oath of enlistment was conducted with honor and dignity.

Because of his efforts, Maj. Steven T. Downey, Shreveport MEPS commander presented Byrd with a Joint Service Achievement Medal, awarded by Col. Charles S. Dunston, Western Sector commander.



Maj. Steven T. Downey, Shreveport MEPS commander (right) congratulates 1st Lt. Kenneth Byrd after presenting his Joint Service Achievement Medal.

Downey also presented certificates of appreciation to every officer from Barksdale

who volunteered for their contribution to the MEPS' success.

SPECIAL VISITOR

General attaches streamer during visit

By Tifarah Cunningham
El Paso MEPS

Maj. Gen. Howard G. Bromberg, commanding general of Fort Bliss, Texas, and the U.S. Army Defense Artillery School, visited El Paso MEPS recently.

During his visit, Bromberg attached a streamer — representing the Joint Meritorious Unit Award — to the El Paso MEPS' guidon. USMEPCOM received the award for the period January 2005 to December 2007, when the command enlisted more than 758,000 applicants in the armed forces.

El Paso MEPS is one of 65 MEPS to receive the unit award. Bromberg stood with Maj. Matthew Burton, El Paso MEPS commander, while placing the unit streamer on the El Paso MEPS guidon as Lt. Matthew S. Bird read the citation.

Bromberg visited the service liaisons and sections throughout the MEPS to discuss upcoming changes in the El Paso MEPS and USMEPCOM. He spoke with applicants and asked them about their

aspirations and ambitions and encouraged them to aim high and reach for their goals.

Bromberg and Burton addressed the expansion at the MEPS, due to the increase of applicants and their families, and the growth of Fort Bliss. El Paso MEPS has seen a 12 percent increase in applicants for each of the last five years, and that is without considering the growth of Fort Bliss due to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

By anticipating the increasing flow, the MEPS will be ready to accommodate the influx, which includes supportive military families, and continue to meet its mission by putting qualified men and women into the armed forces.

Other issues like the ASVAB Career Exploration Program and addressing H1N1 flu were also important topics. El Paso MEPS has met its ASVAB Career Exploration Program goal for total students tested, but still is working to spread the knowledge that career exploration is important to students as they plan their future.

Bromberg acknowledged Maria Torres, the longest-serving MEPS employee,



Maj. Gen. Howard Bromberg, Fort Bliss commanding general, Maj. Matt Burton, MEPS commander and Sgt. Elvis Mendoza show the El Paso MEPS' Joint Meritorious Unit Award streamer after attaching it to the unit guidon. Photo by Jamie Elliott

for 37 years with the organization and presented her with his commander's coin. He also thanked the applicants, employees and liaisons for what they are doing in support of national security and to surrounding communities on Fort Bliss and in the El Paso area.

Character, not plaque shows winner's true colors

By Capt. Michael Harper
New York MEPS
Operations Officer

More than 300 federal executives and employees from the greater New York City area gathered on historic Ellis Island on a cool, overcast Thursday morning to recognize greatness in public service during the New York Federal Executive Board's annual awards ceremony.

Representatives from more than 150 agencies in the city attended the event, including the FBI, Internal Revenue Service and Department of Labor.

The New York MEPS represented itself well as Jacqui Burwell, a lead human resources technician, won the Distinguished Government Service Award.

Burwell's recognition is a reminder that the work of the MEPS is an important and relevant part of federal service for the nation.

During his remarks to the group, Denny Chin, U.S. district judge for the Southern District of New York, referred to federal employees as

"everyday, unsung heroes and trailblazers who help build better lives for all of us."

The events immediately following the awards ceremony showed how Burwell's character fits this mold.

As she walked across a busy street with her father, mother and sister, a strong gust of wind coming off the Hudson River sent her father's hat flying in the opposite direction.

Instinctively, she chased the hat down the street and reached to grab it before it wound up in the river. Fingertips fully extended to retrieve the fleeing hat, the exquisite glass plaque she received from the ceremony fell to the ground and broke into several pieces, one of which cut her diabetic mother's leg.

Hat retrieved, plaque broken, and mother's leg cut, Burwell loaded her family into her car to make for the nearest hospital. But New York traffic, as is often the case, was at a crawl. So Burwell stopped her car on the side of the highway and treated her mother's wound before taking them home. At the end of the day the plaque, as nice as it was, didn't

matter to her as much as taking care of those who needed her help.

Burwell's actions symbolize her career of helping others through service. While the daily interactions at the MEPS rarely achieve the high drama of flying hats, breaking glass, bloody legs and emergency care on the highway, Burwell approaches her work with the same level of calm and focus. She has provided expert customer service to applicants and their families, service liaisons and her co-workers every day for more than four years. She executes the mundane and routine operations with equal parts grace and aplomb, bringing a contagious cheerfulness that spreads through the staff.

Burwell returned to work the next day. She didn't boast about the ceremony, nor

did she display shards from the glass plaque and recount her story over the office coffee pot. Instead she did what earned her the distinguished award in the first place — processed applicants, helped liaisons, and mentored her co-workers and supervisors — and she did it all with a smile.



Jacqui Burwell and her Distinguished Government Service Award.

Western sector selects first leadership award winner

Spc. Jessica Griego of the Albuquerque MEPS is the first recipient of the Western Sector Command Sergeant Major Leadership Award. The award was presented for the first quarter of fiscal 2009.

Griego's personal and professional drive and initiative to advance in both the military and the Albuquerque MEPS medical section helped the section achieve outstanding ratings with zero critical hits in the October 2008 Inspector General Inspection in medical and help Albuquerque earn the MEPS of Excellence Award for the 4th quarter of fiscal 2008.

She takes on tasks outside of her area of the patient administrative clerk. She willingly performed other duties throughout the MEPS including filling in as a pro-

cessing clerk and test administrator during critical manpower shortages, while still performing her regular duties. She also filled in for all MEPS' sections as needed.

Her normal duties include entering applicants' medical data into MIRS; verifying and recording drug and alcohol and HIV results; performing quality reviews of medical records; scheduling consults and arranging transportation for applicants who need further medical appointments; measuring blood pressure and pulse check; observing drug and alcohol testing; demonstrating orthopedic and neurological examinations; recording daily medical statistics on the numbers of physicals, inspections, and service count; and generating disqualification letters and positive drug and alcohol testing letters for medical review and follow-up.



Spc. Jessica Griego holds the Western Sector Command Sergeant Major Leadership Award.

MEPS of Excellence

The MEPS of Excellence Program acknowledges military entrance processing stations that obtain a level of excellence based on criteria related to USMEPCOM core processes (medical, testing, applicant processing) and general military readiness.

The two requirements to become a MEPS of Excellence are:

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

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

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

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

Second Quarter, Fiscal 2009

Category 1
Jacksonville MEPS
San Antonio MEPS
Tampa MEPS

Category 2
Oklahoma City MEPS
Pittsburgh MEPS
Detroit MEPS
Des Moines MEPS

Category 3
El Paso MEPS
Amarillo MEPS
Beckley MEPS

Third Quarter, Fiscal 2009

Category 1
Montgomery MEPS
Jacksonville MEPS
Raleigh MEPS

Category 2
Milwaukee MEPS
Miami MEPS
Pittsburgh MEPS

Category 3
Fargo MEPS
Portland, Maine MEPS
Beckley MEPS

Best of the West Award

Western Sector commander, Col. Charles Dunston (right) presents the 2nd Quarter "Best of the West" Top MEPS award to Lt. Cmdr. David Nikodym, commander, Oklahoma City MEPS. The new professional achievement awards program in Western Sector has spurred some competition.

APPLAUSE

Headquarters, USMEPCOM
 Gale Adderly, Civillian of the 3rd Quarter

BOISE MEPS
 Sgt. Kodie A. Thomas, promoted

Air Force Technical Sergeant Selectees
 Staff Sgts. Erin D. Calahan, Buffalo MEPS;
 Chelsea D. Crump, Baltimore MEPS;
 Timothy L. Langten, Portland, Ore., MEPS;
 Jennifer L. Mattas, Salt Lake City MEPS;
 and William J. Roskopf IV, Phoenix MEPS.



NEW FACES

Fort Lee MEPS**Jason Patrick Alls**

Medical Technician

Last assignment: Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

Diversions: Outdoors

First impression: Fast paced, busy.

Jamarr Tobias

Administrative Services Technician

Last assignment: Walter Reed Army Medical Center, D.C.

Diversions: Motorcycles, sports and family

Joseph Watson

Lead Medical Technician

Last assignment: Kenner Army Health Clinic, Fort Lee

Diversions: Reading

First impression: Busy

Omaha MEPS**Jacob Tieskotter**

Information Technology Specialist

Years of service: Army (4) and Navy (7)

Last assignment: Help desk contractor for Army Corps of Engineers.

Diversions: Spending time with daughter, Brittany, and girlfriend, Kim; riding his Ducati 999, and reading and studying different areas of interest such as computer security.

First impression: "Very good. The people that work here are a great group of people, and I am looking forward to working with everyone in the future. Things are quite different from when I went through the MEPS when I entered the military, and I am glad to be working here."

Chief Petty Officer William J. Molitor

Medical NCO

Years of service: 17

Last assignment: USS Carl Vinson

Diversions: Spending time with his wife and children, reading, music.

First impression: Very impressed with the friendliness and knowledge of the staff.

FOND FAREWELLS

OMAHA MEPS**JoAnn T. Pechar**

Information Technology Specialist

Departing for: Retirement after more than 28 years of service

Future plans: Enjoy her 16 grandchildren and life after the MEPS.

Parting thought: "This job has been great. I met lots of nice people. My co-workers at Omaha MEPS have been the greatest people in the world to work with."

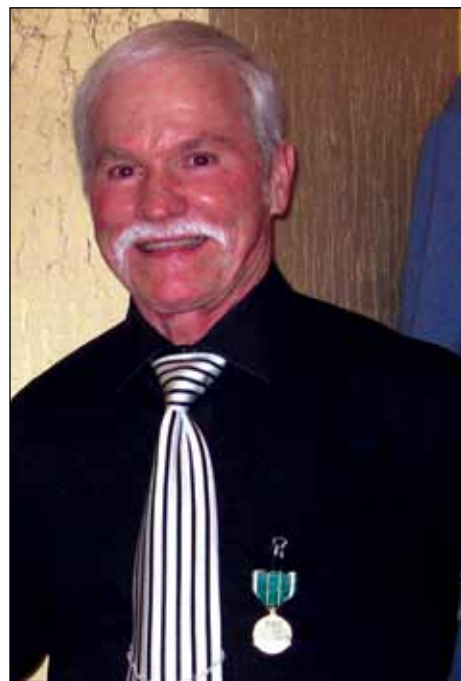
RECOGNITIONS

Spokane employee wraps up second 23-year career

Jerry L. Hayes retired April 30 after 23 years of loyal service at the Spokane MEPS. He started working at the MEPS in December 1985 after completing a 23-year career in the Marine Corps.

Hayes initially worked in medical for two and a half years before transferring to the processing section for the rest of his time at the MEPS. He said he enjoyed working with the applicants and seeing young people achieve their dreams of military service. He positively impacted the lives of more than 36,000 service members during his tenure and provided a wealth of knowledge to the staff.

Hayes plans to spend part of this summer cruising the famed Route 66 in his immaculately restored 1957 Ford Fairlane. He will also now have plenty of time to visit his four sons and seven grandchildren in Alaska, Florida, North Carolina and nearby Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He and his wife Mary Kay, also a long term Spokane MEPS employee, are looking forward to starting this new chapter of their lives.



Jerry L. Hayes

Spokane chamber honors NCO

Sgt. 1st Class Zane C. Sheets, Medical NCOIC for the Spokane MEPS, was named as the Senior Military Member of the Year for 2009 by the Greater Spokane Incorporated, the local chamber of commerce.

Sheets was selected for his accomplishments including the efficient processing of more than 3,500 enlistees annually and helping Spokane achieve its first MEPS of Excellence award in more than three years.

His background as an Army Ranger, sapper, and field medic set him apart from the other nominees. He was also honored at the All City Civic Military Luncheon and rode in the Spokane Lilac Festival Parade as a VIP.

Sheets and his family transferred to Germany in June.



Sgt. 1st Class Zane C. Sheets

Upcoming Celebrations

Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
Hispanic American
Heritage Month

October
National Disability
Employment Awareness Month

November
National American Indian
Heritage Month

HISPANIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



*Embracing the Fierce
Urgency of Now*