

2020: Response to U.S. embassy Baghdad attack

2017: Operation Sentinel

2014 - 2015: Operation Inherent Resolve: Intervention against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

2011: Operation Neptune Spear

2011: Operation Odyssey Dawn

2010 - 2011: Operation New Dawn

2003 - 2011: War in Iraq: Operation Iraqi Freedom

2001 - 2014: War in Afghanistan: War on Terror, Operation Enduring Freedom

1999: Operation Allied Force

1999: Operation Desert Fox, Operation Infinite Reach

1997: Operation Silver Wake

1996: Operation Noble Quarrel

1996: Operation Desert Strike

1995: Operation Deliberate Force

1995 - 1997: Operation Unified Protector

1993: Operation Gothic Serpent

1992 - 1996: Operation Provide Promise, Operation Daring Flight

1992: Operation Silver Anvil

1991 - 1996: Operation Provide Comfort

1991: Operation Desert Storm, Operation Desert Sabre

1990: Operation Desert Shield

1989 - 1990: Invasion of Panama, Operation Just Cause

1989: Operation Classic Resolve

1988: Operation Golden Pheasant

1988: Operation Praying Mantis

1987 - 1988: Operation Earnest Will, Operation Prime Chance

1987: Operation Noble Archer

1986: Operation El Dorado Canyon

1983: Operation Urgent Fury

1980: Operation Eagle Claw, Operation Bright Star

1973: Operation Nickel Grass

1968 - 1970: Operation Commando Hunt

1965: Operation Power Pack

1962 - 1975: The Secret War

1962: Cuban Missile Crisis

1961: Bay of Pigs

1955 - 1975: Vietnam War

1950 - 1953: Korean War

Post WWII occupations

1955: Austria, 1952: Japan, 1949: Germany, 1947: China, 1946: Philippines

1941 - 1945: WWII

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

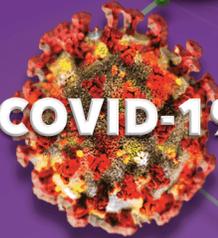
Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 42, NO. 1

Processing through the Pandemics

2019 **COVID-19**
Novel Coronavirus triggers a pandemic



2009 **H1N1**
Viruses distantly related to the 1918 virus triggers a pandemic



1968 **H3N2**
Viruses distantly related to the 1918 virus triggers a pandemic



1957 **H2N2**
New flu virus triggers a pandemic



1920 - 1956
Seasonal circulation of the flu



1919 **H1N1**
Third wave of flu pandemic



1918 **H1N1**
Influenza pandemic waves



Messenger

Sharing information to reach a vision

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Eastern Sector welcomes new commander
Army Col. Joe A. Ratliff accepts the Eastern Sector flag from Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander. Ratliff assumed command during a June 12 virtual ceremony
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U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command

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Commander

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Commander's Commentary

Teammates of USMEPCOM,

In the opening to this edition of the Messenger, I aim to briefly address our recent COVID-19 operations, and acknowledge the dedication, resiliency, and commitment you have shown through it all.

In the early weeks, as the coronavirus began to spread across the United States, the Defense Department declared our mission – the military processing mission – mission-essential. USMEPCOM is the only Department of Defense organization that processes applicants for enlistment into the Armed Forces.

If we had closed our doors, military accessions would have ceased. For the defense of our nation and the readiness of our Armed Forces, that wasn't an option.

Looking back on these past few months, USMEPCOM's response to the coronavirus has provided a textbook example of crisis management.

There are many models for handling a crisis. They are helpful, but every crisis is unique. No one model is "one size fits all."

One theory states there are four levels of uncertainty in a crisis. Level one is "a clear future." You basically know what's in front of you.

Level two is "alternative futures." You have a couple of possibilities, but you generally know the direction in which you're headed.

With level three, "a range of futures," predictability starts to wane. You know the direction, but there are lots of ways to reach the end state.

Level four is true "ambiguity." If you look back to early March, the global coronavirus situation was incredibly ambiguous ... it felt as if we were standing on sand. We were gaining new information and adjusting operations by the hour.

Since then, we have gradually gone from level four back to

level two. We have a clearer understanding of the COVID threat. We have policies and procedures in place. We are building capability and capacity. We could see a spike or a fall, or there may be a second wave, but we have a better sense of what the future holds.

As we faced COVID-19 operations head on, the first thing we did was set priorities based on the day-to-day situation.

To do this, we assembled a COVID-19 Operational Planning Team/Task Force. The story that begins on page 4 tells the story of the people and activities that made up that Task Force.

At MEPS, civilian and military employees showed their dedication, resiliency and commitment daily as they worked throughout the pandemic at 65 MEPS and two Remote Processing Stations.

They persevered through daily temperature checks, endless questionnaires, practicing social distancing, wearing personal protective equipment, and taking on many new, additional tasks to prevent the spread of the virus as much as possible. They continued to process applicants because that was what the Defense Department ... and our Nation ... needed.

In addition to the MEPS mission-essential staff showing up to process applicants, the Headquarters and Sectors managed their staffs by having some present in the building while others worked remotely. And they did this with one thing in mind – supporting the MEPS.

Other members of our team, namely the Rapid Development Team, showed resiliency by adapting.

When the team's contractors were locked out of their offices and forced to work remotely, they used technology to achieve results.

They overcame a change in plan when the DoD travel ban shut down the plan to bring field advisors from



the MEPS to Headquarters for hands-on experience with USMIRS 1.1.

By tackling the problems head on, they showed what resilience is all about. The story that begins on page 7 details how the RDT is moving forward to provide USMIRS 1.1, regardless of current challenges.

It would be impossible to acknowledge every USMEPCOM teammate's efforts. However, as your commander, I can absolutely say that I could not be more proud of how well you performed in the effort to ensure Freedom's Front Door remained open.

The pandemic has fundamentally changed who we are and how we do business, but I believe it has made us more adaptable and resourceful. Thank you for all you have done in these past few months, and for everything you continue to do every day!

Richard T. Brady
Colonel, USMC
Commanding

COVID-19

Command overcoming deadly pandemic

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

A USMEPCOM task force is playing a key role in helping MEPS tackle challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, selected Navy Cmdr. Demetrius Mack, Western Sector deputy commander, and Navy Cmdr. Christopher Carmichael, Eastern Sector deputy commander, to lead the task force while the coronavirus was in its early stages in late February.

“Because of how fast COVID spread across the United States, it went from being, ‘Let’s think about it,’ to ‘We’re in it now,’” Mack said during a May 6 interview with the Messenger. “One day, we’re thinking about it and the next day, it was all hands on deck and let’s get ’er done.”

The task force, which officially began operations March 15, keeps MEPS updated on everything from equipment levels to USMEPCOM’s coronavirus response measures.

“The biggest thing is maintaining the daily battle rhythm,” Carmichael said of the task force’s work. “About half of every day is committed to the coronavirus task force. Every day, we’re doing a teleconference in the morning. In the evening, we present a second battle rhythm to the commander and that lays out what we’ve accomplished for the day.

“Everything we’re doing is completely transparent to the field in an effort to keep them fully informed about our efforts and what’s going on with this COVID-19 response.”

Creating a task force to address a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic was no easy task.

“We’ve never done anything like this before, so there wasn’t a

playbook we could pull off the shelf and say, ‘Hey, you know what? This is what we need to do,’” Mack said. “Summertime is hurricane season along the Gulf Coast and we know what to do because we’ve done that.

“For



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We’ve never done anything like this before so there wasn’t a playbook we could pull off the shelf.

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the coronavirus, there was no checklist,” he said. “I think the biggest challenge was just trying to figure out what was in the realm of possibility.”

The task force kept tabs as the virus worsened across the U.S.

“The Pentagon is sending us data that’s coming from Johns Hopkins University and we’re analyzing the data in a hundred different ways,” Carmichael said. “(The Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate) is using that data to produce heat maps based on our battalions and our MEPS.

The task force closely monitored an ever-changing situation, as

states and agencies reacted to the coronavirus with different rules and regulations.

“(The task force) had to determine who had the authority to make decisions to make the changes that needed to be made and, on top of that, trying to figure out what others were doing,” Mack said. “Other agencies and other commands were initially all lost in the woods together.

“We were getting different directions from states as well as the federal level, and trying to figure out exactly who has the authority. Although we’re a federal agency, the local public health authorities

know what’s going on, so should we follow that local guidance or should we follow the national guidance that kind of puts out this blanket policy that may not truly understand what’s going on at the local level?”

As the coronavirus worsened, Mack and Carmichael shifted resources to focus more on the pandemic.

“Commander Carmichael and I took our sectors, and our staffs literally diverted all the attention from daily operations to now it’s all things COVID,” Mack said. “There were things we had to put on the back-burner and that’s been a challenge.”

The challenges have evolved since the task force’s inception.

“We kind of skipped the planning stage and went right to sprint,” Carmichael said of the task force’s start. “Our center of gravities have changed over the weeks.”

Each day brought new challenges for the task force, including equipment issues at the onset of coronavirus.

“At first, we had some hiccups like possible quality issues with the masks,” Carmichael said. “We then regrouped and made sure what we’re getting is protecting the staff. Now we have over 30 days on hand for pretty much everything and we’re in a good situation. At onset, when we first put all applicants in masks, we were down to seven or eight days of PPE, so basically seven or eight days away from mission failure.

“Every day, there’s something. It’s hard because folks are used to having a rulebook and the rulebook not changing,” he said. “Well, the disease doesn’t have rules, so there’s something new coming from the medical side of the house every day.”

The challenges included doing everything possible to maintain

a safe environment for MEPS employees at a time when many Americans were teleworking.

“Every time we have someone that’s identified as COVID-19 positive that comes through the MEPS, we’re doing a deep cleaning of that MEPS,” Carmichael said. “For the MEPS that didn’t have an enhanced cleaning, we had the military wiping down every couple of hours to message to the staff that we’re tracking this and trying to put in as much risk mitigation as possible.”

Carmichael lauded the task force for adapting to the challenges.

Among the many staff contributions to the task force was

a milSuite website spearheaded by Western Sector secretary Rosalyn Roman.

“In a four-week time period, the website had close to 40,000 views,” Mack said. “Additionally, we’ve had across the board thousands of active users and hundreds of questions coming in.”

“(Roman) and the team have pulled the website together succinctly.”

Each MEPS location is listed on a color-coded map that highlights the website and provides daily updates on the number of confirmed coronavirus cases across the United States.

The website also serves as an

information hub for MEPS employees and includes the sections:

- Hot items, which provides a rundown of the most important MEPS coronavirus updates;
- Col. Brady’s coronavirus operational update;
- Human Resources Directorate for military and civilian human resources topics ranging from leave flexibility to local shelter-in-place orders to hair grooming



“**The more information we share with them the better.**

– Cmdr. Christopher Carmichael on what the task force is telling the MEPS

”

standards;

- Personal and family impact, which offers a list of resources for families in need. The section includes links to websites for child care assistance and a coronavirus book for children;

- Operations Directorate for operations, shippers, testing and applicant diversion plan updates;

- Facilities and Acquisitions Directorate for logistics guidance, including cleaning checklists and updates on equipment such as respirators and facemasks;

- A Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate article detailing the suspension of the MEPS of Excellence Program on March 31;

- Information Technology Directorate, which offers helpful tips on teleworking and cybersecurity;

- Medical Plans and Policy Directorate for medical topics, including coronavirus screening and phone numbers for state and local health departments; and

- Resource Management Directorate for supply news.

The website also offers a user-friendly option to submit questions to the task force and a list of answered questions on topics including volunteers, screening and alcohol testing. The section supplemented the task force's weekly informational town halls.

"(MEPS) aren't asking questions because they're weak," Carmichael said. "They're asking because they've never seen these situations before. The more information we share with them, the better."

A coronavirus guidance/information section details topics such as face coverings and COVID-19 symptoms, and website users can find links to updates from the Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization and Department of Defense.

Teamwork has played a significant role in the task force's



“It’s been a phenomenal effort that everyone’s been pushing forward.”

– Cmdr. Demetrius Mack on the support the task force has received

success, Mack said.

"All of the directors and their deputies have appointed points of contact for the task force," Mack said. "It's a team effort. Headquarters, sector and battalions in the field have all come together united in one cohesive effort to move the ball forward to ensure we're protecting the accessions pipeline. It's been a phenomenal effort that everyone's been pushing forward."

"It's a well-oiled machine."

Leading the task force was an unforgettable experience for Mack and Carmichael.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be able to lead the team through a crisis like this," Mack said.

The task force could help MEPS address future pandemics.

"(Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate) is analyzing the lessons learned from this," Carmichael said. "What did we learn from this? What do we know? What do we not know? And what are we going to do better next time? We're going to give a playbook over to (Operations Directorate), so they have a template on how to handle this type of pandemic in the future."

On June 1, that's exactly what Mack and Carmichael did as they handed over control of the task force to Navy Cmdr. Tony Beaster, USMEPCOM processing division chief, and Operations Directorate.

USMIRS 1.1 moves forward despite COVID-19

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Editor

USMIRS 1.1 is progressing nicely, thank you, even with unexpected COVID-19 challenges.

Despite teleworking, social distancing, the contractors being locked out of their downtown Chicago offices and cancelled travel plans, the work goes on, Matt Lince, Rapid Delivery Team director, said.

The coronavirus has affected the RDT, just as it has everybody else.

“It’s definitely slowed us down,”

Lince said. “In April, we adjusted to the new normal and everyone being 100 percent remote. We were onboarding a lot of new employees and contractors to the team in March and April. Everything took more time to get less done.”

Lince described the first month of operating 100 percent remotely as “chaotic.”

“I keep telling the team, this is what ‘agile’ means,” he said. “The unexpected happens to your project and you have to pivot to a completely

new way of doing things. You can’t just say ‘Oh, sorry. We’re at a standstill. See you in a couple months.’

“You have to find new ways to do it,” Lince said. “And you have to have a project team with the tools, the culture, the workflows to do that. We did, but it was a heavy pivot. It definitely affected us up front, but now we’re actually rolling into it really well.”

One of the biggest early challenges was personal for team members forced to work at home.

“They’re trying to work, with their kids going to school at home, or worried about an at-risk family member, and they’re trying to help with all the stresses and pressures that come with that,” Lince said. “On the work force, that’s where it’s hit the hardest for all of us. I don’t have young kids at home, but for team members who do, it’s been really tough.

“So, it’s us trying to be flexible and agile to what they can and cannot do and giving them what they need to take care of responsibilities at home and at work,” he said. “We’re kind of figuring that out now. We’re climbing back into a good flow.”

“Externally a lot of what we’re doing at this phase of the project is integrating with a lot of other systems that are out there,” he said. “We were in the process in March of actually starting to do side-by-side work with them and their technical developers.

The RDT team made its first visit to the Defense Manpower Data Center in Monterrey, California, in March.

“They’re one of our main systems partners we exchange data with,” Lince said. “Then we came back and the coronavirus travel ban hit and we haven’t been able to travel since. Again, we have adjusted to that and are adjusting to doing things remotely. It has been challenging and has slowed us down over the last two months.”

In addition to keeping the RDT team from traveling, the Department of Defense-wide travel ban also shut down bringing field advisors from the MEPS to the headquarters for intensive training and user testing/feedback for the new system. The



“ I keep telling the team this is what ‘agile’ means.

– On adjustments made due to COVID-19

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first of six groups was scheduled for March 16 through April 10. The plan was to have the group, which included a human resources assistant, medical supervisor, a person from testing and a National Guard liaison, travel to headquarters, get hands-on experience with USMIRS 1.1.

“They were about a week away from actually reporting here when the travel ban hit,” Lince said. “We have incorporated them virtually instead. They haven’t been able to give us as much time because in each of their MEPS they’re incredibly busy right now, so we haven’t pressured them a lot.

“Each of them has participated virtually in different types of user



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We plan to have that in many different formats.

– How USMIRS 1.1 training will be conducted

testing,” he said. “Some of them have participated in our daily meetings.”

The second group will have an even more robust virtual team.

“But again, we’re trying not to put too much pressure on the MEPS, because each of the employees right now have so many other things they’re struggling with,” Lince said. “It’s not working as ideally as we’d like, but we’re able to get their input and have their presence on the team.”

“The testing environments are set up for the system,” he said. “We have reworked that kind of testing environment so we can get more people, like the field advisors, to do more hands-on even if they’re not with us side by side.”

The team is also using Google Hangouts and a program called Jira, a software development tool, to help facilitate collaborative remote work.

“We can do video remotes using Google Hangouts,” Lince said. “We can share screens with Google Hangouts and Jabber. That has helped us be able to say here’s what you’re looking at and get their feedback as well. Jira is a very popular project management tool in (software) development.

“I would call it a project management type of tool, but it’s a lot broader than that. The Department of Defense chief information officer is

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using Jira to get feedback.”

RDT members and a cross section of people from the Information Technology Directorate and other sections completed face-to-face testing before COVID-19 hit and they plan to expand the training and testing to selected people in the field in June.

Meanwhile, the workforce development team in the Human Resources Directorate and some members of the RDT are developing “upskilling” resources for MEPS employees, guidance counselors, service liaisons and anyone else who will use USMIRS 1.1. The learning materials will include not only the system, but how it works, Lince said.

“We plan to have that in many different formats,” he said, “instructor format, online training, video training and hands-on training. Our plan is to bring people to the headquarters (if possible) and do hands-on training for 10-20 people at a time, maybe one or two or three from each battalion and send those folks back into the field to be able to do side-by-side training.”

When the actual deployment nears, the RDT will field USMIRS 1.1 in a “sandbox environment” for everybody to use, Lince said.

“For probably a month or more, we’ll hand out examples of somebody who’s going through the medical process or someone who shows up for ASVAB testing,” he said. “We’ll take them through that in USMIRS 1.1 and have them go into the ‘sandbox’ and play with that.

“We will have some folks who have been up here for training there with them,” Lince said, “but also possibly have some kind of chatbox so people can reach back here and we can get feedback. It’s a whole process from beginning to end our folks in the headquarters workforce development can design out. They’re also in the process of identifying some actual users in the field to be field advisors as well. It’s a multi-functional, multi-layered approach.”

Stephanie Miller, director of Military Accession Policy, granted USMIRS 1.1 Interim Authority to Test in January. The authority ran through the end of July.

“With COVID-19 and some of the slowdowns to our productivity, we decided to go back and renew and extend the Interim Authority to Test through December 2020, but it will be much more robust than what we got back in January,” Lince said. “The new Interim Authority to Test is going to allow us to do much heavier, wider testing of actual live production data. Not just us, but people in the field as well.”

Miller received an update on the program’s status in late April.

“I think she was pleasantly surprised that we hadn’t had more of an impact on the project than we had,” Lince said. “A lot of other DoD IT projects are facing major delays because of COVID-19 and all the challenges that come with that.

“Our project is smaller than some of the really big IT projects that are going on in the Pentagon right now,” he said, “but we’re also fortunate that we had some folks who were ready and able to start working remotely.

“She understood the plan with our IATT,” Lince said. “She’s the one who’s going to sign off on that in the long run.”

Lince said Miller always asks what resources she can help acquire to move the project along.

“Right now,” he said, “it’s not a resourcing issue. It’s work productivity, work flow management, figuring out how to do this with all the restrictions going on now. She’s been incredibly supportive and interested since the project began. It’s great to have committed support from your boss.”

Even before COVID-19 hit, the team had to deal with the being geographically separated, which turned out to be a mixed bag. Having a cutting edge team of IT contractors who were used to

working remotely, some of the things the team had already done, some of the tools it had acquired and some of the processes that were already set up were the good things. Holding meetings with everyone remote required a new way of thinking.

Being geographically separated is very common in the IT field, Lince said.

“This is normal for them to have a team that’s not only geographically separated, but usually international,” he said. “It’s not unusual for people to say, ‘Half my team is in Asia or Europe.’”

Holding remote meetings through the Defense Information Systems Agency was dicey at first.

“Anytime we went to get on a conference line through DISA, they were overloaded and overwhelmed and they locked up,” Lince said. “That’s just an audio line. How do you do a video line where you have 50 people sharing screens and video?”

Even in the IT world, where you have a lot of people working remotely, 100 percent of the team is rarely remote full time, Lince said.

“Even for our IT folks, our contractors, who had been in this business for a while, that was a challenge and proved to be an impediment,” he said. “We are human beings and we sometimes need to be social and be with each other to get things done. That’s just the reality of it.”

The second challenge was that all meetings had to be scheduled and couldn’t be done casually or organically as they would be in a face-to-face work environment.

“Imagine that every conversation you have at work is a formal, pre-determined, meeting,” Lince said. “Guess what happens with the team. They found themselves in meetings eight hours a day.”

After two weeks, Lince took the team’s collective pulse. Their main complaint was they couldn’t get anything done because they were spending all their time in meetings.

There wasn’t time to send or read emails, to spend an hour working on something like an appraisal or other staff work.

“Nobody was doing ‘other’ work, because whenever they had a free moment on their calendar, somebody was slapping them with a meeting invite,” Lince said. “Because we weren’t having those normal conversations, people were inviting more and more people to make sure everybody heard it. We had to do a couple things.

“Now we have ‘no meetings Fridays,’” he said. “Monday through Thursday, we don’t do meetings before nine or after three. We let people alone so they can focus on staff work they have to do.”

The lack of social interaction was another obstacle to overcome.

“The effectiveness of social interaction where you have body language and tone and things like that and not over audio only or a cold computer screen,” Lince said. “You just don’t get the depth or quality of conversation that you do face-to-face.

“This has been a fascinating case study for me to see this,” he said. “Even for people who are long-term ITers, there have been some adjustments that people didn’t realize.”

The RDT still plans on fielding USMIRS in fiscal 2021, targeting the second quarter to deploy to all MEPS and RPS. “We want to have a presence out in the field during deployment,” Lince said. “We will surge to the field and be available. We will also have some super users. Each of the MEPS are going to an important part of this.

“In Matt Lince’s ideal view of the world, I would like to have a live chat capability setup so a user could ask questions and immediately get somebody who can answer those questions.”

In short, the USMIRS 1.1 project is “alive and well,” Lince said.

“We are working through a lot of

hard things right now particularly on the back end, systems integration, getting the new system to talk to other systems, he said. “A lot of really complex technical work is being done.

“A lot of MEPS don’t see anything right now because a lot of the work is being done in the ‘engine room,” Lince said. “A lot of hard work, a lot of technical work, is happening.

“As we get closer to the users interfacing with the system, when the front end and the back end are close to being done, the MEPS will hear a lot more from us,” he said. “I want the MEPS to understand

that even though the command has focused on COVID-19 as a priority right now and on the summer surge, as it should be, USMIRS 1.1 is still the main effort for transformation for USMEPCOM.”

The command couldn’t do what it has talked about for years because the systems it used, and in some cases, its partners were using, didn’t allow for modernization.

“Once we get this new technology stack put in place,” Lince said, “people are going to see things we’ve been talking about for years actually being done – appointment based scheduling in our MEPS, sending text messages to applicants

and recruiters when we have updates, putting (radio frequency identification) wristbands on applicants, no longer carrying around a paper packet, our MEPS employees walking around with tablets. So many possibilities.

“MHS Genesis deployment will be close behind MIRS 1.1 deployment. Once we have both systems in place, we will have the fundamental technological capability to transform into all-digital processing. That’s the part to stay focused on even during the hard part of the transition. All the things we’ve wanted to do as a command, we’re finally going to get to do.”

Rapid Development Team gets new digs

Although issues resulting from the coronavirus pandemic delayed the delivery and set-up of equipment and furniture, USMEPCOM’s Rapid Delivery Team still moved forward by constructing a room that will support its mission of delivering USMIRS 1.1, the command’s future military processing data system.

To support 30 contractors and nearly 20 headquarters staff members dedicated to USMIRS 1.1 delivery, the RDT has created a room with everything from a telephone booth to a 6-foot-long Gantt chart.

The room has it all – on the far right, double-row desks for coders who work in pairs, on the far left, single row desks for designers, in

the center, desks for those who are working data integration, in the back, project managers. On the back wall behind it all, a Gantt chart depicts the applicant process flow – how they move through processing data systems.

“A collaboration space like this – it’s not as noisy as people may think,” Army Lt. Col. Brian Wire, RDT deputy director, said.

If someone does need quiet, they can use the telephone booth, similar to some booths RDT leaders saw when they visited the Air Force’s Kessel Run lab.

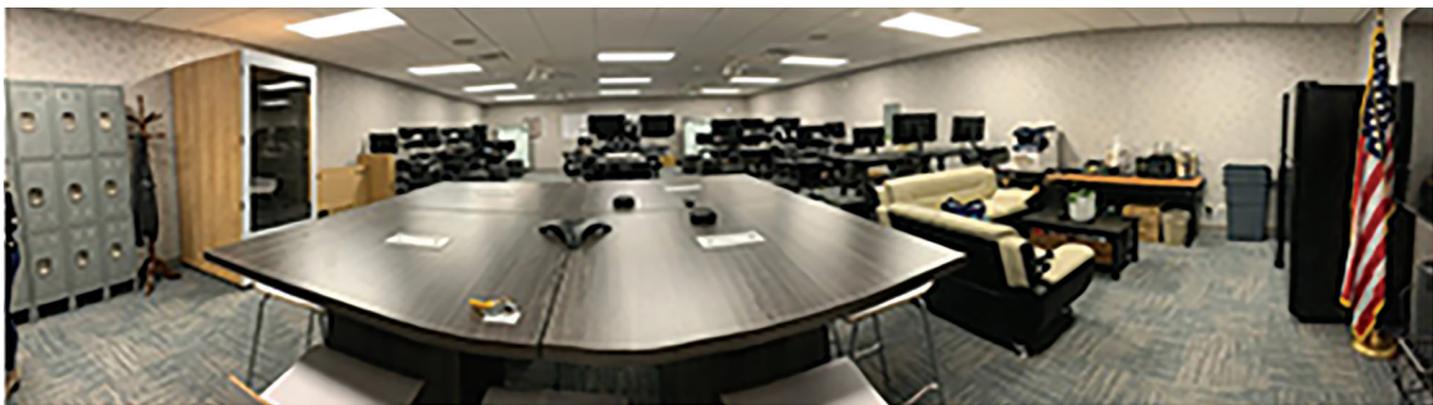
At the forefront, collaboration meeting tables have equipment that enables those in the room to hold virtual meetings with off-site

team members. The room also has creature comforts – lockers, couches, coffee makers, snacks and refrigerators.

After the furniture and equipment arrived, Matt Lince, RDT director, Wire, and a few more staff members hauled boxes and assembled the room.

In February, some contractors had been working in a partially assembled version of the room, until that was halted by COVID-19 concerns that moved them to working remotely. Now, everything is in place.

Although the room doesn’t have the most important piece right now – the people – it’s ready and waiting for their return.



Rapid Development Team’s new home.

Riverside, California, remote processing station opens; will cut travel time for both applicants, recruiters

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

A new remote processing station has opened in Riverside, California.

The Riverside RPS began processing applicants May 26 and swore in its first service member, a National Guard applicant, two days later. With the grand opening, Riverside joined Las Vegas as the only two remote stations in the United States.

The Riverside RPS, which is located about 80 miles from the Los Angeles Military Entrance Processing Station, is in a convenient location for applicants from cities such as Riverside, Anaheim, Victorville and Indio.

"It's a closer drive than Los Angeles MEPS for them," said Army Capt. Travis Odette, the officer in charge at Riverside.

The station has also been a hit with recruiters.

"Every recruiter I've talked to said it's been a big win and they hope it sticks around," Odette said. "They like it because they don't have to travel so far."

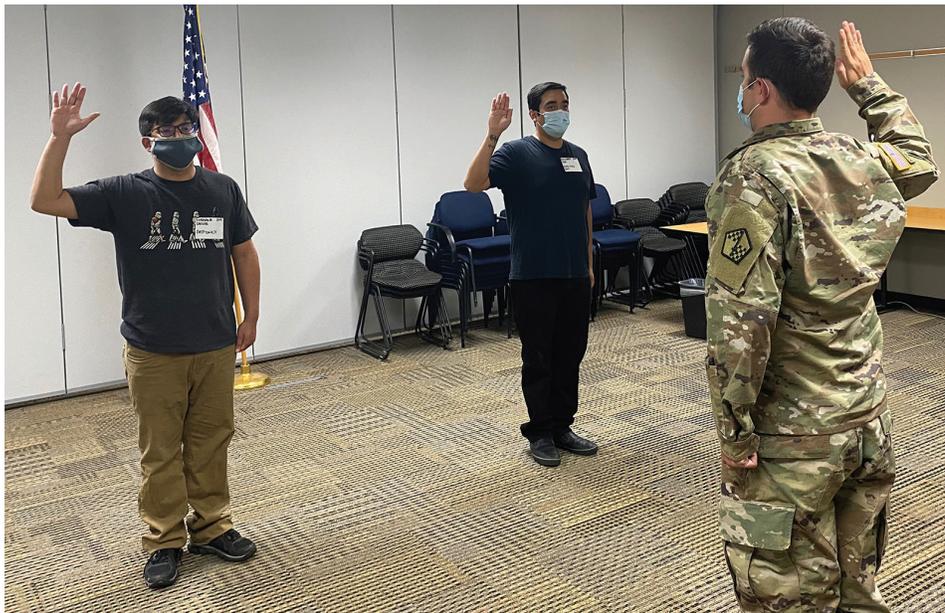
Discussions on opening the Riverside station began April 14, with Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, later setting a target date for June 1.

"(The station) was set up in about six weeks," Odette said. "It was very rewarding to see it come together that quick."

Along with



A medical technician draws an applicant's blood in the Riverside, California Remote Processing Station.



Two delayed entry program applicants take the oath of enlistment in the Riverside, California Remote Processing Station.

Odette, Army Sgt. 1st Class Susan McIntosh, USMEPCOM Western Sector medical officer Dr. Colleen Murphy, building supervisor Levi Kelly, lead medical tech Jessie Hatch and lead human resources assistant Samuel Chism are playing significant roles at the Riverside RPS.

Odette hopes the station, which is in the initial stages of a six-month pilot program, will become a permanent fixture.

"We want to keep processing applicants," Odette said. "It makes it easier for recruits to join the military and for our recruiting brothers and sisters because they don't have to travel into Los Angeles."

Eastern Sector welcomes new commander

By Skip Wiseman
 Messenger Editor
 Photos by Darrin McDufford
 USMEPCOM Public Affairs

Eastern Sector, United States Military Entrance Processing Command welcomed a new commander at a June 12 virtual

change of command ceremony.

Army Col. Joe A. Ratliff assumed command, succeeding Army Col. Leslie E. Darling.

Ratliff assumes command of Eastern Sector after serving as senior personnel policy integrator, Officer Selection Branch, Officer

Division and director of Manpower and Personnel Management, Department of the Army Human Resources, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Darling will assume duties as director of Human Resources, Combined Security Transition Command in Afghanistan.

Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, officiated the event. He thanked Darling during his remarks and noted that Eastern Sector completed 600,000 medical exams and inspects, 1.8 million Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Batteries, 700,000 student tests, 460,000 special tests and 212,000 accessions under her leadership.

“Leslie, your accomplishments, both quantifiable and non-quantifiable, are a testament to your leadership, guidance and mentorship to the over 1,300 men and women – soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen and DoD civilian employees,” Brady said. “Your contributions to Eastern Sector will continue to grow and bear fruit for years to come.”

Brady then turned his attention to Ratliff.

“It is certainly an honor and a privilege to serve in command in the armed forces and we all know you will do very well,” he said. “Please know that you have the absolute support, trust and confidence of everybody in Eastern Sector and USMEPCOM. We wish you the absolute best as you embark on the next two years.”

Darling thanked her battalion command teams and spoke about having the chance to interact with recruiters and trainers.

“To all my battalion commanders and senior enlisted advisors, thank you for riding this out with me and making it incredibly rewarding,” she said. “It’s really a unique opportunity to partner across to the recruiting services. I made some great working and personal relationships with the people on the recruit training side.”

Ratliff thanked the command for



Army Col. Joe A. Ratliff, incoming Eastern Sector commander, is piped aboard for the change of command ceremony.



Army Col. Joe A. Ratliff accepts command of Eastern Sector from Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander.



Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, presents the Maj. Gen. Horace Graham Gold Medal to Army Col. Leslie E. Darling, outgoing Eastern Sector commander.

a warm welcome and said he was “lucky.”

“Lucky. You will hear me use this word a lot today. Lucky that my family is safe and healthy. Lucky that I get to continue to serve my nation as the commander of a great organization. Lucky that I get to follow in the footsteps of so many great leaders who have had this job before me,” he said.

“I am truly honored and humbled to be selected to serve as Eastern Sector

commander,” Ratliff said. “I feel lucky to be afforded this opportunity. Command is a privilege and I look forward to this time being the most challenging, unique and exciting of all my assignments.”

USMEPCOM and Eastern Sector, with headquarters in Building 3400, is a joint command staffed with representatives from all five branches of service and Department of the Army civilian employees.



Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, makes remarks at the Eastern Sector change of command.

Employee has worked at all levels of command as civilian, noncommissioned officer

**By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Editor**

David Davis has worked at every level of the United States Military Entrance Processing Command as both an active duty Army senior noncommissioned officer and as a civilian servant.

Davis is believed to be the only person who has worked at the headquarters, a sector, a battalion and a military entrance processing station. That gives him a unique perspective of the command's inner workings.

Currently the chief of USMEPCOM's Testing Division, Davis joined the command in December 2004 as an Army sergeant first class and was assigned as the command testing NCO. He was promoted to first sergeant in 2008 and served as senior enlisted advisor at the Chicago MEPS and also as Eastern Sector senior enlisted advisor for five months when the position was vacant. After retiring from active duty in 2011, he was hired as the command's first battalion mission support specialist.

Davis returned to the Testing Division to serve in the same position he had held when he arrived in the command until he was selected for a promotion as Western Sector operations officer.

"Then my dream job came open and I came back to testing as the enlistment testing manager," he said. Davis assumed his current duties in September 2018.

Davis was still on active duty at the Chicago MEPS during the planning phase for battalions and began working as the mission support specialist as 6th Battalion was being stood up.

"I was fortunate," he said. "It was about timing. I was part of the process of developing the battalion structure.

"I was going to go down to Chicago and be a Junior ROTC

instructor," Davis said. "I was accepted at the Chicago Military Academy in Bronzeville. I thought that was going to be my second career. The opening came up for the MSS at the Chicago MEPS. I applied for it and was fortunate enough to be accepted for the job."

Being involved when the battalions were established in 2010 has given Davis a front-row seat to watch them mature. He says the battalion structure is "absolutely" the direction USMEPCOM should pursue.

"I was there when we stood up 6th Battalion," Davis said. "Seeing where it was from infancy when we stood it up to where they are now, they've really come into their own, but they still have some growing to do."

Davis' first-hand experience give him a rare perspective on how people at all levels of the command view the operation. One common misconception is that the headquarters staff doesn't know what it's like to work in a MEPS.

"I think what is not known at the lower levels is how much experience we have here at the headquarters," he said. "The people at the lower levels think people at the headquarters don't have any MEPS experience.

"That's actually not true," Davis said. "We have a lot of people like myself. We have a lot of people in (the Operations Directorate) who, in their military capacities, worked at the MEPS. They (transferred) to headquarters. They've been here for a while."

The battalions are still developing and are in a "fluid situation," Davis said.

"They're still determining the resources they need," he said. "They just got the battalion executive officer, which is great. At the battalion level, I think they're still

finding their niche as to where they fit."

The battalions also make an important contribution in mitigating the span of control, Davis said.

"Before the battalions, we only had the two sector commanders and the span of control was 34 MEPS in the east and 31 in the west," he said. "That's a lot for one person to manage.

"Formalizing the battalions is a good thing," Davis said. "We need to resource them properly. We have the logistical, budget and administrative part of it. They have a GS-12 executive officer at the battalions for support. Down the road, should they have a medical asset in the battalions? Should they have a testing asset? Should they be more similar to how the sectors and headquarters are made up?

The sectors' role as the link between the headquarters and MEPS is more well defined and also very challenging.

"The sector is the operational level, where you try to manage the expectations of what the headquarters wants done and, at the same time, what the field is telling you they can support based on the challenges they have," Davis said. "The sector level is very important because you're kind of caught in between the headquarters and the field and trying to manage the two expectations."

The command has made progress in facilitating communication up and down the chain of command, Davis said, but there is still room for improvement.

"The command has done an admirable job of trying to facilitate open communications from the bottom up and top down," he said. "We are limited because we are a geographically dispersed command. Sometimes I ask myself, 'If I give the MEPS this information, what are they going to do with it? How are

they going to interpret it?"

"You always go back to communication," Davis said. "We should always strive to improve how we communicate, what we communicate, how often we communicate. The more information we provide, the better off they are in the field."

"We do struggle sometimes about what information we will provide throughout the different levels, based on not wanting to create rumors or inconsistencies of what we're trying to accomplish," he said. "It's a delicate thing we have to guard against."

Although the command's communications have improved, there is still room for things to get better, especially since the battalions introduced another layer to the chain of command.

"It used to be just the headquarters, sectors and MEPS," Davis said. "Now with that additional level, we need to consider the battalions' expectations and goals and what they're trying to accomplish."

Davis said the message gets distorted sometimes as it makes its way to the field and that how to fix it is "the million dollar question."

"There is a conscious effort from leadership to improve it," Davis said. "We have different forms of how we communicate. We have chalk talks at the headquarters level to talk directly to the MEPS. We've created different forms that provide a level of transparency to the MEPS throughout different levels so they understand what we're trying to do."

It is vital for the higher levels of the command to support the MEPS in every possible way, including upgrading to USMEPCOM Interactive Resource System 1.1, he said.

"They get a lot of backlash about what they're not doing," Davis said. "They get a lot of flak for perceived inefficiencies. That's why we have

the initiative to transform with USMIRS 1.1. We all know we need to move forward as far as our automation. We need to continue to support our MEPS and be candid with them."

Davis has viewed the command from the perspective of a soldier and as a civil servant. He said shorter command tours directly impact how civilian employees do their jobs.

"When I was (at Chicago MEPS) my commander and I served three years together," he said. "When the commander is only there for two years, it impacts civilians because it takes the new commander 8-10 months to learn the job. Then they come up with ideas of what they want to improve, but they're not there long enough to see it come to fruition or see if the idea worked."

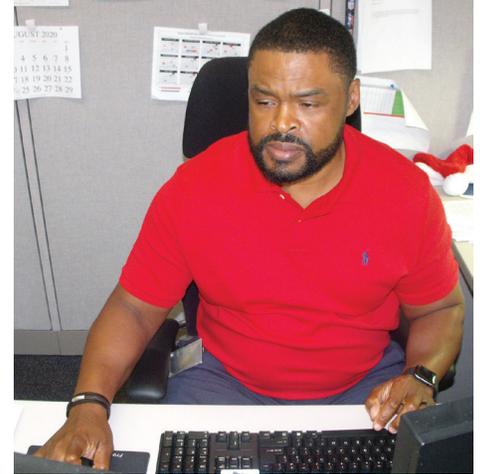
"There's a level of disruption," Davis said. "As a civilian, you've been there long enough to understand what needs to happen, but you try to manage the expectations of the new commander. That happens every two years – a different direction, a different level. Sometimes that's a challenge."

Based on his experience as a senior enlisted advisor, Davis has some helpful hints for people in that role.

"My advice would be to become an agile, flexible leader," he said. "Before I came to USMEPCOM, I was a drill sergeant for three years. Prior to that, I was at Fort Bragg for four years and had deployed to Bosnia and Kosovo."

"Coming to USMEPCOM, I quickly learned that in order to be successful, I had to tailor and adapt and be flexible in my leadership style," Davis said. "I couldn't bring that Fort Bragg Airborne mentality of the hard-nosed drill sergeant mentality to a MEPS where you're leading civilians and get the same results."

"I would tell a senior enlisted advisor who came to USMEPCOM,



David Davis, USMEPCOM chief of testing, has worked at every level of the command.

"This is going to challenge your leadership. This is going to be a different type of leadership and it will make you grow as a leader." Instead of tasking someone, you're asking someone to do something. You get the same result, it's just a softer way of saying it."

Davis also recommends embracing the joint culture. For example, he learned that once sailors achieve senior NCO status, they address each other by their first names when junior service members aren't present.

"In the Army, you don't address anybody by their first name, because your first name is sergeant," he said. "The Navy senior NCO communication style provided the opportunity to get to know each other better. We were more comfortable when we got together at conferences and other events. We were all more open to discuss issues and lean on each other when we need assistance."

"That's one way I adopted another service's culture in the way we led our battalion," Davis said. "I think it was a good thing."

Headquarters, sector, battalion and MEPS, David Davis' hands-on experience with them all gives him a one of a kind perspective on USMEPCOM.

11th Battalion staff members are 'Storm Chasers'

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

An enthusiastic Army Lt. Col. Janelle Kutter, who has been selected for promotion to colonel, took the podium during a May 1 meeting at the St. Louis MEPS and yelled, "Storm!"

Wearing face masks due to the coronavirus, MEPS employees in the audience reacted with a muffled and somewhat subdued chant of "chasers."

Kutter, commander of 11th Battalion and the St. Louis MEPS, followed with a louder chant of "storm!"

Feeding off their commander's enthusiasm, the crowd reacted again with a much louder "chasers!"

The scene has become a familiar one at the St. Louis MEPS since Kutter took command June 21, 2019. She built off her predecessor's "Pillars of the Storm" motto by adding "Storm Chasers" to the mix.

"Storm Chasers" is a meteorologically fitting name for the 11th Battalion, which is part of USMEPCOM's Western Sector that also includes MEPS in Kansas City, Missouri; Little Rock, Arkansas; Oklahoma City; New Orleans; and Shreveport, Louisiana.

"The 11th Battalion has tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, ice and snow," Kutter said. "Hence the 'storm' in our motto."

The motto's "storm" represents the challenges battalion employees, or "chasers," face on a regular basis.

"We need storm chasers to help us do what we need to do to weather that storm," Kutter said. "Storm chasers see the storm coming and pursue it because they want to know what's causing the storm. They face the storm and don't run the other way. They mitigate that storm, overcome it and they get ready for the next one."

Kutter said the motto is a good representation of how her battalion operates.

"We know everyone has storms, but these storms have something in common – the eye of the storm," Kutter said. "In our case, the eye of that storm is the battalion headquarters. The eye is the calm portion of the storm and that's what our battalion headquarters needs to be."

For Kutter, establishing a battalion identity was an important step to increasing teamwork and cooperation.

"I use it as a way to get a team



11th Battalion – Storm Chasers!

motivated," Kutter said. "Before I start a staff meeting, they know when I yell 'storm' that they're going to yell 'chasers' back."

"It gets us in that time frame of getting down to business," she said. "It's to get that excitement and motivation going to do something together, whether it's weathering the storm or doing something fun together. There's pride in being a storm chaser because we have an identity."

The biggest "storm" Kutter's team chased in recent months was the coronavirus.

"We haven't had any serious cases within our MEPS and our battalion, and that really gives us a feeling that we did the best we can and we did it really good," said Marine Corps Master Sgt. Erwin Johnson, senior enlisted advisor of the St. Louis MEPS for the past 2½ years. "That's because of the team we have here and the communication we have."

"There's always room for improvement, but we did a good job of keeping everyone safe."

Johnson credited the 11th Battalion for taking the challenges posed by the coronavirus in stride.

"It was nothing that was really big to us because all the other storms we've had shaped us and helped us get ready for the coronavirus storm," Johnson said. "We adjust to storms, keep our head on a pivot and keep moving closer to whatever storm is closest to the boat at the time. It's been that way since I arrived here."

"Everybody that follows us will use what we did during the coronavirus as some kind of guideline," he added. "We're the ones



Army Lt. Col. Janelle Kutter, commander of 11th Battalion and the St. Louis MEPS, and Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, talk with two applicants.



Army Lt. Col. Janelle Kutter, commander of 11th Battalion and the St. Louis MEPS, addresses the MEPS staff.

who are making that initial change and we're the ones that are going to determine how this happens again."

The battalion's top "storm chasers" receive certificates or challenge coins for their work contributions and volunteer efforts. The colorful coins include the eye of a storm system on one side and the states represented by the battalion on the other.

Kutter recently cited the following "storm chasers" for standout performances: human resources assistant Michelle Faulkner and processing supervisor Randy Brown in St. Louis; chief medical officer Dr. Robert Tenny and coronavirus response lead Army Capt. Josh Hughes in Kansas City; education service specialist Dr. Teresa Taylor in Oklahoma City; human resources assistant Charles Smith in Little Rock; supply administrative services technician Dianne Albert and Coast Guard

Health Services 2nd Class Ethan Etlinger in New Orleans; and education services specialist James Sanders in Shreveport.

The group is part of a battalion that's become accustomed to Kutter's

exuberant "Storm Chasers" chant.

"It's like her little battle cry," said Brown, a Navy veteran and 15-year employee of the St. Louis MEPS. "Everybody is used to it because it's a normal meeting starter now. It gets everybody's attention and it gets them in the spirit of things.

"There's a never-ending battle with putting out the storm opportunities that come up," Brown added. "(The slogan) is a light-hearted way of saying, 'Make sure you get this job done.'"

The chant isn't just heard during staff meetings.

"You just never know with (Kutter) because she's always ready to launch it out," said Air Force Maj. Maria Berardo, operations officer at the St. Louis MEPS. "It can be random and it's a lot of fun. You can see our teammates get a giggle out of it, but I think the buy-in is there because they always chant it back to us. It gets that energy up."

Berardo has been part of other slogans during her nine-plus years of military service, but she described "Storm Chasers" as unique.

"The other slogans have had nowhere near the energy of 'Storm Chasers,'" she said. "It's had a positive impact and a change in our culture.

"As storm chasers, we're going to navigate through challenges and come out of them stronger, focused and ready for the next fight."



Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, talks with a St. Louis MEPS staff member.

Miami receives partnership award from Red Cross

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

Since taking over as commander of the Miami MEPS Miami, Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Kaleb Perez has strengthened the station's partnership with the Red Cross.

Perez's efforts over the past two years didn't go unnoticed by the organization, which recently honored Miami MEPS with the American Red Cross Greater Miami and the Keys Partnership Award. It marked the first time Miami MEPS received the honor.

"It felt awesome for us to win the award," Perez said. "Good things happen to good people and good organizations, and I'm super proud of our team."

The annual award recognizes an organization that has shown commitment and passion to the Red Cross mission through its partnership and support.

Deborah Koch, executive director of American Red Cross Greater Miami and the Keys, informed Perez and Marine Corps Master Sgt. Ibrahim K. Kamara, Miami MEPS senior enlisted advisor, of the award in a June 8 email.

"We are grateful for your cooperation in helping us reach thousands of new recruits and their families with important Red Cross information right from the start of their military service," Koch wrote. "Without a doubt, many families have been positively impacted by this partnership and have been able to get their loved ones home in times of emergencies and are able to access other emergency services as needed."

The award was announced during a June 23 virtual ceremony, which included a speech by Perez.

After becoming commander of Miami MEPS in June 2018, Perez increased Red Cross' presence during applicant processing.

"We made the Red Cross part of our DNA in terms of how we process and brief applicants," Perez said. "Before, (Red Cross) had five minutes to talk to applicants' parents about what they do. I gave them more time because the Red

Cross has always been there supporting the military and I think it's important for parents to understand our partnership."

Other changes included Perez giving MEPS workers a chance to share their Red Cross experiences with parents and the addition of an informational area that features the organization's cards, pins and flyers.

Perez credited Kamara, Army Capt. Moveta Davis, Army Sgt. 1st Class Eric Taylor and MEPS civilian employees Lucky O'Connor and Angela Lewis for playing key roles in implementing the improvements.

Miami MEPS has reaped the benefits of the partnership, including a Red Cross delivery of 350 face masks at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

"That was key to us sustaining our operations," Perez said.

Earlier this year, Red Cross psychiatrists and counselors assisted Miami MEPS with communications and resilience training.

"That was probably one of the best training days we've had," Perez said. "It was outstanding."

Perez, who was a guest speaker at a Red Cross leadership training session for volunteers earlier this year, described the partnership as a "huge win-win situation."

"It's just a tremendous partnership for all the good reasons and it's getting stronger," he said. "It definitely made our MEPS and our people better."

It's important for Perez to help an organization that provided major assistance to him during a pair of family health crises.

The first occurred when Perez was deployed aboard Coast Guard Cutter Tampa in 2002.

"My dad was hospitalized in



Red Cross liaison Jamie Cruz and Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Kaleb Perez, Miami MEPS commander, pose for a photograph after Cruz delivered 350 face masks during the coronavirus pandemic.

critical condition after suffering a stroke and a heart attack," he said. "The only way for my family to contact me was through the Red Cross.

"(Red Cross) really took care of me and paid for my flight home. They go above and beyond when it comes to helping the military."

Five years later, the Red Cross stepped up again for Perez when he was part of a transnational organized crime enforcement operation off the seas of South America.

"My wife was in the U.S. and having pregnancy complications," he said. "The Red Cross delivered the message to me and helped me get home. I'll never forget what they did for me and my family.

"Now I have the honor and privilege of serving in command, and the opportunity to pay the organization back."

10-year-old makes COVID-19 masks for Butte MEPS

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

When Lohgan Dennehy learned of a mask shortage caused by the coronavirus, the 10-year-old Butte, Montana resident took action.

“We were watching the news and there was a story about the shortage,” Dennehy’s father, Jeff, said. “She asked, ‘What can I do to help?’”

Dennehy, an aspiring fashion designer, used a sewing kit she received for her birthday to create masks for military personnel, nurses, cancer patients, police officers and firefighters.

Butte MEPS employees were among the recipients. Air Force Maj. Jason A. Castleberry, Butte MEPS commander, became friends with Dennehy’s parents, when he first moved to the area in June 2019.

“(Lohgan’s) mom reached out on March 17 and said, ‘Do you have a need for masks?’” Castleberry said. “I said, ‘Absolutely,’ and it kind of snowballed from there.”

Lohgan’s charitable act inspired Butte MEPS employees Jamie Somerhalder, Dana McCaffrey and Nikki Hasley, along with Iowa residents Jamie Cole and Sherry Smith, to join the effort.

“These proud Americans have enabled the continued safety of Butte MEPS employees during the COVID-19 pandemic by allowing us to keep open ‘Freedom’s Front Door,’” Castleberry said. The group created more than 150 masks for Butte MEPS employees.

“For me, the end goal was to make sure everybody in the building had plenty of masks,” Castleberry said. “With the help of these ladies, we achieved that goal in less than



Ten-year-old Lohgan Dennehy, left, sews coronavirus masks while her sister Blakely, 5, watches at their family’s home in Butte, Montana.

three weeks.”

Castleberry lauded the group’s effort and teamwork.

“I think it’s a proud moment when people step outside their comfort zone and day-to-day lives to pitch in to help their fellow co-workers and community,” he said.

Castleberry said Lohgan’s contribution was symbolic of Butte’s relationship with the MEPS.

“Making masks to ensure the safety of MEPS personnel and the community is the perfect example of the support this community provides for the MEPS every day,” Castleberry said. “The efforts of these women to help ensure the safety of the MEPS personnel make me proud to be in Butte, America, where we are all in this together.”

“We’re very, very welcomed in the community here and we con-

stantly feel the support from the community and the state of Montana as a whole.”

The effort allowed Lohgan to display her creativity. The Hillcrest Elementary School student made masks with designs ranging from pineapples to pirates to one of her favorite sports teams, the Montana State University Bobcats.

“It was a great opportunity for me to learn about fashion design,” Lohgan said. “It felt good (to help others).”

Jeff wasn’t surprised by his daughter’s initiative.

“It pinpoints her spirit to a tee,” he said. “She’s very kind-hearted and very generous. She goes out of her way to help people.

“It made me feel amazing as a dad. I was overwhelmed with pride and couldn’t ask for a sweeter girl.”

Rep. Greg Gianforte, R-Mont., awarded Lohgan with his Spirit of Montana commendation, a weekly recognition of state residents for their accomplishments, dedication or service.

“She enjoys making a difference,” Gianforte said during a congressional speech. “It was no surprise when Lohgan wanted to help when she heard there was a shortage of masks in Butte.”



Left to right: Air Force Staff Sgt. Tyler Berry, Navy Lt. j.g. TeAshla Moody and Air Force Maj. Jason Castleberry, Butte MEPS commander, pose for a photograph while wearing coronavirus masks made by volunteers.

CHIPPING AWAY *at Inequality*



HONORING THE PAST, SECURING THE FUTURE!

