

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

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The New Branch of Service

UNITED STATES SPACE FORCE



FIRST MISSION:
PROCESSING

Messenger

Sharing information to reach a vision

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Headquarters reorganization

Jo Anne Cunningham, USMEPCOM deputy commander and chief of staff, discusses the reorganization the headquarters is going through. It is a two-phased plan, the first phase centralizing the medical, testing and processing functions and the second realigning the command's Information Technology Directorate. Turn to Page 8 for the whole story. (Photo by Amy Gregorski)

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Commander's Commentary

As we enter this new year, I'd like to reflect on what our command has experienced and learned in 2020, and also discuss what we will carry into 2021.

It's hard to believe we've been in COVID-19 operations for more than nine months. Like they say, time flies – especially when you're busy. We responded to the immediate impact of the coronavirus by developing adjusted protocols and procedures, building capability and capacity, then quickly jumped into and executed summer surge. Throughout it all, we continued military processing – to support the accession community and join them in maintaining our nation's military strength.

With the new fiscal year in October, we were able to adjust operations by discontinuing Saturday processing, reducing maximum daily capacity to normal calculation based on MEPS resources, and returning the Guam accession medical mission to the Guam Naval Hospital. We also made further modifications, such as leaving extended hours up to the MEPS commander's discretion.

We've moved back to business as usual in some areas, including our resumption of the MEPS of Excellence Program, Inspector General visits, and Student Testing Program execution where school accessibility allows.

We are building on what we learned this summer, for example, by continuing to operate the remote processing station in Riverside, California, allowing contracted Military Entrance Test sites to augment permanent MET sites, and continuing applicant provided consults for five specialties.

Particularly during these challenging times, we realized communication is (always) key and we will continue necessary meetings and training, and continue to hold quarterly town halls.

We continue to modernize military processing overall, and

specifically within our testing and medical areas. Throughout the challenges of 2020, our Rapid Delivery Team has been readying MIRS 1.1 for deployment. In testing, improvements include WINCAT and special test migration to the Cloud. In medical, modernization includes the Prescription Medical Reporting System, or PMRS, the Joint Legacy Viewer, or JLV, and preparation for MHS Genesis (PMRS is consumer medical reporting for non-prior applicants and JLV allows access to DoD records for military dependents and prior service applicants).

On page 8 of the magazine, you will learn more details about the reorganization that was executed on June 1 at USMEPCOM Headquarters. We know our 65 MEPS and two remote processing stations faced difficult challenges this year, and when you read about the reorganization, you'll learn our Headquarters staff stepped up to some trials, as well.

In the next months, as we continue to operate under Phase 3 of the COVID-19 Response Matrix, we also continue to protect the health and welfare of applicants, employees, contractors and our accession community partners. On a weekly basis, we assess the prevalence of COVID-19 throughout the United States and in each MEPS location. Based on these reports, we make a recommendation to the Office of the Secretary of Defense about whether or not to continue to operate in Phase 3. We will continue these assessments until we see a consistent downward trend in COVID cases across all MEPS locations. We also continually assess new technologies and procedures to enhance protections in our facilities.

None of the work of 2020 could have been done without your tremendous perseverance, resilience, and can-do attitude. In my discussions with Office of the Secretary of Defense and military recruiting officials, I have received overwhelming praise and admiration



for your performance. In particular, during a meeting with the Vice Chief of Staff and Under Secretary of the Army, the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Lt. Gen. Theodore D. Martin personally recognized the efforts and impact USMEPCOM had on the Army in not only making recruiting mission but also making its end-strength goal (485,000 soldiers) in Fiscal 2020.

The work related to accomplishing our mission during this pandemic is not over, so "perseverance" must be our watchword. I'm not able to thank each of you individually, but I hope you know how much I truly appreciate the tremendous efforts you've made, and will continue to make, as we work together at Freedom's Front Door.

Richard T. Brady
Colonel, USMC
Commanding

Space Force processing launches

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

For the first time in 73 years, a new U.S. military branch began processing applicants Oct 20.

The U.S. Space Force welcomed its first applicants with four enlistments at the Baltimore MEPS and three at the Denver MEPS.

"I'm really proud of the work the Baltimore and Denver MEPS teams have done to prepare for this event," Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander, said in an interview before the ceremonies. "They understand the historical significance of it and they're doing everything they can to make sure they roll out the red carpet and show what USMEPCOM provides to the nation through these enlistments."

The presiding officers of the oath of enlistment ceremonies were Air Force Gen. David D. Thompson, Space Force vice chief of space operations, in Baltimore, and Air Force Lt. Gen. Stephen N. Whiting, commander, Space Operations Command, in Denver.

"We routinely get VIP visits at USMEPCOM, but to have VIP visits coupled with a historic event like this is very unique," Brady said.

Stephanie Miller, director of military accession policy, was part of the Baltimore ceremony while Brady attended the Denver event.

"Personally, it's definitely an honor to be part of this historic moment," Brady said. "From an organization perspective, it also reflects the uniqueness of our mission here at USMEPCOM and what we do. We're the only organization that has the mission of qualifying effective, able-

bodied personnel in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Space Force.

"It's a big moment for the organization and I'm really looking forward to being part of this event."

The seven new enlistees will join more than 2,400 Air Force personnel selected to transfer to Space Force.

"The numbers will start out relatively small," Brady said of new enlistments. "We expect they will grow over time. As the Space Force gains in capability and capacity, they will establish larger numbers of projections coming into the MEPS for accessions."

The last time a new military branch processed its first applicants occurred shortly after the National Security Act of 1947

created the Department of the Air Force.

"I'm looking forward to meeting the three (new Space Force enlistees) in Denver and getting a sense if they have a real sense of the historical significance of this event and their role in it because their pictures and stories will live on forever in Space Force history," Brady said. "They're unique and very fortunate to be part of this day as well."

Space Force was formed in December as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. President Donald Trump appointed Air Force Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond as chief of space operations. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Roger A. Towberman was named senior enlisted advisor.



Chief Master Sgt. Roger A. Towberman, Space Force senior enlisted advisor, gives basic training tips to Space Force applicants at Baltimore MEPS.



Gen. David D. Thompson, vice chief of space operations, administers the Oath of Enlistment to the first Space Force enlistees.

"I think it makes sense," Brady said of Space Force. "Space as a warfighting domain is gaining in significance and importance. From a military and a geopolitical standpoint, it makes sense to have a dedicated force that's looking after that warfighting domain."

Space Force turned to Air Force Recruiting Service to fill more than 300 enlisted positions next year.

"We've gotten away from a checklist-driven mindset to where we are lean and agile and our young airmen have to think on the fly sometimes to outmaneuver some of our adversaries," Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Randy Magdaleno, manager of Space Force Special Programs Division, said of the recruiting strategy. "As an example, we have young airmen sitting in the 2nd Operations Squadron flying the GPS satellites and what a lot of people don't know is our Air Force and, now our U.S. Space Force, do the satellite command and control and operate our GPS systems out there for the world."

As for processing, Brady said Space Force's medical testing is no different from the other military branches.

"The biggest hurdle for USMEPCOM was on the system side of processing," he said. "A lot of what we've been doing to prepare for Space Force is more on the tactical level, including working on the processes we'd use to enlist them in and making sure the coding in our system is right and paperwork is correct."

"We're rewriting some of the system software to account for a new service."

Most Space Force jobs will "focus on orbital warfare, space electronic warfare or space battle management," said Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Daniel Hill, Space Force manager for the 1C6 Space Systems Operators Air Force Specialty Code. "We fly satellites, keeping them in position or repositioning them if a threat is detected. We use radar to detect missile launches and track space debris to protect our assets in space."

According to the Space Force website, the branch's mission is to organize, train and equip forces "in order to protect U.S. and allied interests in space and to provide space capabilities to the joint force."

The Space Force's responsibilities "include developing military space professionals, acquiring military space systems, maturing the military doctrine for space and organizing space forces to present to our Combatant Commands."



Space Force applicant Amy Biggers signs her enlistment contract.

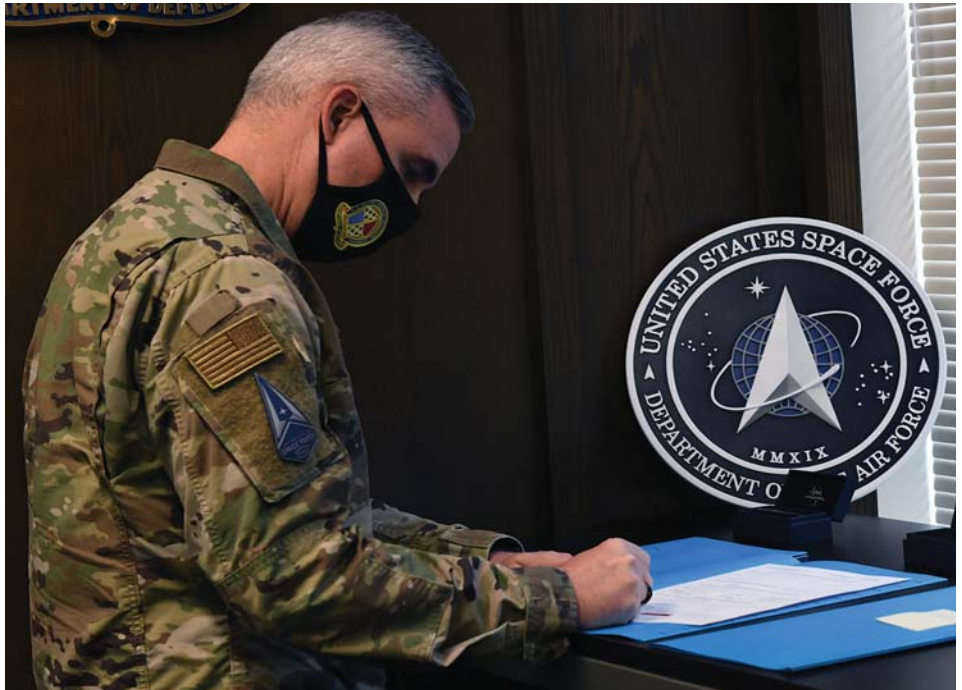
Three Space Force applicants sign on in Denver

The Vice Chief of Space Operations Gen. David D. “DT” Thompson swore in the first four Space Force recruits at the Baltimore MEPS Oct. 20, placing them on a direct path to Basic Military Training and marking another milestone in the new service’s growth and development.

The ceremony was followed hours later by a similar ceremony in Denver for three additional Space Force recruits. All seven are bound for basic training at Air Force BMT, at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

While the number is modest, the actions are both meaningful and symbolic of the Space Force’s evolution since it was created Dec. 20, 2019, as the nation’s newest military branch.

“Today is an important milestone as we stand up the Space Force,” Thompson said. “Until now, we’ve been focused on building our initial ranks with transfers from the Air Force. With these new recruits, we begin to look to the future of our force by bringing in the right people directly to realize our aspirations of building a tech-savvy service that’s reflective of the nation we serve.”



Lt. Gen. Stephen N. Whiting, commander of Space Force’s Space Operation Command, signs an enlistment contract in Denver.

Space Force boot camp will capitalize on the existing foundation of Air Force BMT and will incorporate space-specific curriculum to create the Space Force experience.

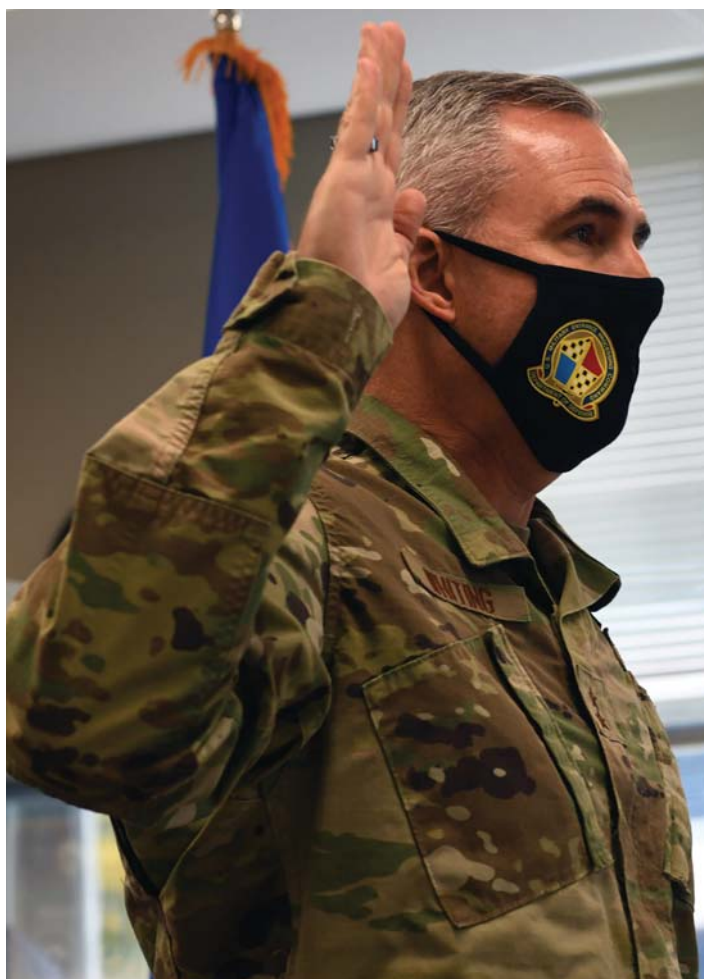
“We’re excited to see this happen,” Chief Master Sgt. Roger A. Towberman, Space Force senior enlisted advisor, said. “The Air Force team at



Shane Brown, Elijah Engelby and Nathan Ramage take the Oath of Enlistment at Denver MEPS.

Basic Military Training has been outstanding and deserves most of the credit for making this happen quickly. To watch these first Space Force recruits take their oath for the first time is something I will never forget. They are the future, and it’s incredible to be in their service!”

Stephanie Miller, director of military accession policy, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy joined Thompson and Towberman, along with MEPS and Air Force Recruiting Service regional leaders, in Baltimore. Space Force leadership has previously said diversity among its ranks is one of its priorities in standing up the new service. Among the new recruits, there



Lt. Gen. Stephen N. Whiting, commander of Space Force's Space Operation Command, conducts the enlistment ceremony.

are two women and five men; two African Americans and five caucasians. The recruits hail from Colorado, Maryland and Virginia, and their ages range from 18-31.

The events in Maryland and Colorado offer a tangible, real-world example of the next phase of the Space Force's development. After months of painstaking planning and important actions to establish policies, procedures and doctrine, the induction of the seven Space Professionals is evidence that the force is proceeding forward as senior leaders expected.

By the end of fiscal 2021, the Space Force is expected to have about 6,500 active-duty members. The goal is to have about 2,500

members in space operations career fields in the service by the end of 2020. Beginning Dec. 1, active duty senior enlisted airmen in cyber, intelligence, acquisitions, and engineering career fields will begin transferring, with officers and other enlisted members in those career fields beginning transfers Feb. 1. From there, the size of the force is expected to grow consistently over time until it reaches 6,500.



Chief Master Sgt. John Bentivegna, Space Operations Command command chief, Lt. Gen. Stephen N. Whiting, commander of Space Force's Space Operation Command, and Chief Master Sgt. Tina Timmerman, Space Training and Readiness Delta, pose with Denver applicants.



Gen. David D. Thompson, Space Force vice chief of space operations, Stephanie Miller, director of Military Accession Policy, and Chief Master Sgt. Roger Towberman, pose with the applicants after the enlistment ceremony in Baltimore.

Headquarters reorganization will realign

Most quotes about change make two points – that it's both necessary and difficult. In the midst of COVID-19 operations, no one suggested reorganizing USMEPCOM headquarters would be without challenges.

This year the command took on a two-phased reorganization — the first included centralizing the medical, testing and processing functions, and the second realigns the command's technology directorate. Neither endeavor easy, but both necessary for the good of the military processing mission.

According to Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, "To support a constantly evolving operating environment, the command must respond to increased efficiency and remain relevant. Without restructuring, we will not be able to maximize the use of new systems or leverage the new technologies and the policies and processes that support them."

Operational and technological agility and preparation for an all-digital environment can better serve the accession triad of military recruiting, processing, and training and the command's internal and external partners.

Two years ago, setting the stage for the reorganization, the command introduced a governance program, which included forming working groups for various headquarters functions. The working groups align with the functional areas of the command, such as contracting, financial management, information technology and medical transformation.

The governance program facilitates decision making, leadership participation and a better understanding of who makes decisions, why decisions are made and how those decisions are fed into the resourcing process.

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Without restructuring, we will not be able to maximize the use of new systems or leverage new technology.

— Col. Richard Brady
USMEPCOM commander

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After establishing the governance program and working groups, Col. Nick Wittwer, Director, (former) J-5/Strategic Planning and Transformation Directorate, led the nuts and bolts planning for the first portion of the overall headquarters changes. At the conclusion of analysis and coordination with other directorates and special staff offices, the plan was completed and the first portion of the organizational changes went into effect June 1.

The J-3/Operations, J-5 and J-7/Medical directorates merged as the new J-3/5/7 – Operations Directorate.

"Merging the J-3/5/7 had the biggest impact, because it affected the largest number of people to align all operational functions under one leader," Jo Anne Cunningham, USMEPCOM's deputy commander and chief of staff, said.

In the past, the command's non-medical processing and medical processing were in separate directorates, but some of their processes overlapped. Transition pieces occasionally got lost and then created inefficiencies in the MEPS.

By aligning medical and processing under one directorate, the command is better able to coordinate overall processing functions.

Adding portions of the J-5 was the final step in assembling J-3/5/7.

"The addition of (portions of) the J-5 created an analysis group within the operations directorate, so we are able to provide real-time data to Ms. (Stephanie) Miller, (director of military accessions policy), or the Army or whatever organization requests it," Cunningham said.

That information could include how many applicants were projected, how many were qualified, qualification rates, and other data, all in real time.

Other J-5 staff were reassigned to the Futures Division of J-8/Resource Management Directorate. They will assist J-8 in assembling the Program Objective Memorandum, or POM, which outlines future funding requests.

"Those who create the plans and strategies should also formulate the resource requirements for those plans and strategies," Cunningham said.

"The strategic plan should inform the strategic resourcing plan (POM), which should inform

offices that support military processing

the budget and in-year execution to achieve strategic goals. One office overseeing this multi-year process just makes sense.”

The remainder of J-5 went into the Command Advisory Group, or CAG, combining analysis and innovations and public affairs functions.

“Before something becomes a strategy, it is a strategic vision,” Cunningham said. “What does the commander want to do? What does the commander want the next commander to do?” she said. “When you talk strategy, you talk strategic messaging. Strategy is nothing unless you communicate it both inside and outside the organization.

Other changes included forming an Acquisitions and Contracting Special Staff Office, changing the name of the Equal Employment Opportunity Office to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and moving some functions from the J-1/Human Resources Directorate to other parts of the organization. The command established a new Internal Review Office about two years ago.

The command established the A&C SSO to centralize and ensure a common methodology in these areas.

Some J-4/Facilities and Logistics Directorate personnel moved to the A&C SSO and the command supplemented the staff with other contracting officer representatives for various existing contract areas.

The command also grouped Equal Opportunity and the Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention, or SHARP Program into the Office of D&I to create a special staff office that addresses more than EEO issues.

“I’d call it a merger,” Cunningham said. “When you think of EEO, you think of complaints. Complaints are a negative thing. Diversity and Inclusion is a softer sound. It’s

inviting. The Army is going in that direction.”

Cunningham credits Geoffrey Garner, head of the office, for coming up with the idea. “It was a great idea to leverage those people programs in one office,” she said.

Additionally, the Office of D&I moved down the street to Naval Station Great Lakes, away from the headquarters building, primarily for privacy.

Now the office accepts meetings “by appointment only,” rather than what was mostly “drop ins.”

This ensures sensitive discussions can take place in private, and avoids unnecessary or counterproductive rumors.

Many years ago, the command had an internal review function, but it came under a different Army organization. There was another entity looking at the command’s operations, making sure controls were in place. The command re-established an internal review function about two years ago.

While the Inspector

General makes sure the MEPS are meeting standards, Internal Review examines the headquarters.

“We had nobody looking at the headquarters to make sure we were in compliance,” Cunningham said. “It doesn’t give a commander or chief of staff a ‘warm and fuzzy’ when we don’t have assurance we’re doing things right.

“I think we’ve accomplished six or seven audits,” she said. “All of them reveal things we need to do better, but we didn’t fail anything.

“It’s more difficult to keep track if someone’s not watching you,” Cunningham said. “It’s good to get a nudge every now and then, and better to get that nudge from within.”

Another important part of the reorganization was moving most of the Medical Directorate to J-3/5/7 and removing the command surgeon from day-to-day operations.

“It’s not unusual for the senior medical officer to be out of the operational realm,” Cunningham said. “That’s what we did. The deputy command surgeon is the

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Organizations must always self-evaluate and evolve to remain relevant and rise to the challenges of tomorrow.

— Col. Nick Wittwer
Chief of the Command Advisory Group

”

head of the medical processing team under J-3/5/7.

The current command surgeon, Col. Arthur Cajigal works directly for the USMEPCOM commander on all things medical, including policy, staff wellness, COVID-19 measures, etc.

He can now focus his attention inward as well as remain involved with operational policies from an oversight perspective.

Being separated from so many day-to-day operational concerns also gives him the time and ability to see things more objectively.

The reorganization also saw the Human Resources Directorate spin off some of its responsibilities.

Les Bandy, who is responsible for Congressional, Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act programs, now reports to the deputy chief of staff.

The command's security specialists and antiterrorism officer now report to J-3/5/7, because most of the issues they deal with impact MEPS operations.

The physical security people are in J-4 because they deal with the physical security and guards at the MEPS. They will also work with the J-4 on physical security when a MEPS relocates.

Overall, the goal is to be more collaborative, ensure better understanding by the staff and greater communication to the field.

"Captain (David) Kemp's (former USMEPCOM commander) big initiative was to decrease the distance between the headquarters and the field," she said. "He felt, I felt and Colonel Brady felt when he got here, we were missing something.

"No matter how many courses we have up here, no matter how many times we get out there, unless we're constantly, almost daily, communicating something about the headquarters or about the field, they feel isolated," Cunningham said. "Sometimes I felt isolated here at the headquarters.

“If you dislike change, you’re going to dislike irrelevance even more.”

– Retired Gen. Eric Shinseki
Former Army Chief of Staff

"Do we feel what's happening at the MEPS?" she asked. "Not usually, but we do see it every day on Facebook now. We're getting much better at doing that. I foresee, in the future, the different types of social media people can engage in and better understand our mission."

So far, there has been minimal negative feedback from recruiting partners, training bases or headquarters staff, Cunningham said.

"We communicated what we were doing," she said. "I've been here maybe a third of the time that some people have been here. I expected more negative feedback from those who have been here a while and are very comfortable in their way of doing things."

The only complaint Cunningham has heard is that there are more meetings.

"People, by nature, don't enjoy meetings," she said, "but we've gotten into the routine of meetings. Each working group reports to the deputy director of a directorate. Everybody, directors, deputy directors or working group members, are having their voices heard. It wasn't that way in the past.

"People see that and, over time, are buying into it because they're participating and seeing things happen," Cunningham said.

Cunningham has been monitoring the changes, particularly in J-3/5/7, by taking note of USMEPCOM Operations Center tickets.

"It streamlines the process. In

the past, if I wanted to know if an applicant processed somewhere, I couldn't tell if I had to go to J-5 for the archives or J-3 for their files. Now it's one stop shopping."

The first portion of the reorganization is in place. The final piece is in the works and focuses on changes to the J-6.

Similar to the first portion of reorganization, Wittwer and the CAG began researching, developing and coordinating plans for the J-6 reorganization in July.

The importance of doing this is clarified in what Brady stated, "Without restructuring, we will not be able to maximize the use of new systems or leverage the new technologies and the policies and processes that support them."

The new J-6 will have not one, but two deputies – simply put, one will lead the enduring IT systems and another will plan for emerging and ever-evolving operations.

Both functions are important – keeping legacy MIRS working to accomplish today's mission and also leveraging the momentum and agility established by the Rapid Deployment Team, while keeping an eye on what's next as well.

The RDT looks to field MIRS 1.1 in February 2021. Most of the J-6 changes are taking place behind the scenes, will include upskilling as necessary, and should be solidified by next summer.

"We will always be in some sort of transition, and we should be," Cunningham said. "Systems change. Policies change. So the organization has to change.

5th Battalion welcomes new commander

The Seattle MEPS and 5th Battalion, USMEPCOM welcomed a new commander at a July 24 ceremony.

Navy Cmdr. Jay N. Hyler assumed command from Navy Cmdr. Christine L. Fletcher during the ceremony hosted by Navy Capt. Nathan J. King, USMEPCOM's Western Sector commander.

Staff at each of the 65 MEPS across the nation "carries out an evaluation process on every applicant who walks through Freedom's Front Door," King said. "The process has three main portions – medical, aptitude, and a background investigation."

King recounted the 5th Battalion's accomplishments under Fletcher's command – "conducted nearly 25,000 physical exams, worked with more than 1,200 schools in the coordination and administration of the (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), administered more than 78,000 student ASVABs, and sent more than 15,000 new enlistees to the nation's nine basic training sites in the past two years while keeping the highest standards of 'Red Carpet' treatment."

In her remarks, Fletcher commented on her tenure as the 5th Battalion and Seattle MEPS commander.

Despite snowstorms, earthquakes, civil unrest, missile threats, murder hornets, and the COVID-19 pandemic, "we have never closed our doors," she said.

"We build our military. Everything we do makes a difference to our country. We must always face forward and look over the horizon. [America does] have enemies and it's with the work we do here that



Sideboys salute as Navy Cmdr. Jay M. Hyler is piped aboard for the 5th Battalion change of command ceremony.

we can assure the safety of our citizens and our United States of America."

Fletcher will head the Department of the Navy's Force Manpower and Assessments section in Washington, D.C.

Hyler recently graduated with a master's degree in Strategic Studies and Joint Professional Military Education from the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

A University of Washington alumni, Hyler said "To the 5th Battalion and Seattle MEPS team, in the short time that I've been on board, you demonstrated high levels of pride, support and professionalism.

"I'm humbled by this opportunity to be your commanding officer. You all should hold your heads high for your accomplishments and outstanding support you provide to the enterprise.

"I look forward to maintaining that continued level of excellence."

King imparted an order to Hyler before the ceremony was complete.

"I charge you to lead 5th Battalion and Seattle MEPS well, as they accomplish the nation's business of ensuring the quality of those who choose to become tomorrow's soldiers, Marines, sailors, airmen and Coast Guardsmen."

As commander, Hyler is responsible for the day-to-day operations in the Seattle MEPS, with operational and strategic oversight of the MEPS in Anchorage, Alaska; Honolulu; Portland, Oregon; and Spokane, Washington, and more than 200 personnel. His area of responsibility spans more than 15 million square miles, including four states, three U.S. territories and three sovereign nations.

Command welcomes new senior enlisted advisor

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

USMEPCOM has a new senior enlisted advisor.

Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson took over the role from Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr during an Oct. 16 change of responsibility ceremony at USMEPCOM.

Woodson became familiar with USMEPCOM as senior enlisted advisor at Syracuse MEPS before assignments at Army Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and 95th Adjutant General Reception Battalion at Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

“While I’m sad to depart my previous unit, I’m happy and excited to be joining for the second time such a great one,” he said during the ceremony. “When I departed USMEPCOM over four years ago, I never thought I’d return as one of the top three senior enlisted advisors. I truly look forward to being part of this great organization once again.”



Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson addresses the audience at his change of responsibility ceremony.

Woodson’s awards during a 26-year career include the

Bronze Star Medal, two Defense Meritorious Service Medals, four Meritorious Service Medals, four Army Commendation Medals, Joint Service Achievement Medal and four Army Achievement Medals.

His professional military education includes the Basic, Advanced and Senior Leader Courses, U.S. Air Force Airlift Planner, Drill Sergeant School, Equal Opportunity Leaders Course, Airborne School, Master Resiliency Course and Class 67 of the Army Sergeants Major Academy.

Woodson earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Columbia Southern University in Orange Beach, Alabama, and a Master of Arts in leadership at University of Texas at El Paso.



Command Sgt. Maj. Lorenzo Woodson accepts the unit colors from Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, signifying his accepting responsibility as senior enlisted advisor.

“Your background, skills and abilities have brought you to this point,” Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, told Woodson. “We know you will do well here and we look forward to working with you. Please know you have the full support of every team member here.”

Carr, who succeeded Command Sgt. Maj. Earla Reddock in April 2018, began his next assignment at Army Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Eustice, Virginia.

Brady credited Carr for being instrumental in selecting senior enlisted advisors at the battalion and MEPS levels, improving the Military Member of the Year competition and spearheading a leader development program.

“His day-to-day guidance of mentorship, leadership, teamwork and friendship he showed every team member within USMEPCOM will be missed,” Brady said. “The initiatives he put in place will continue to grow for years to come at USMEPCOM.”

Carr lauded the MEPS senior enlisted advisors he worked with over the past two and a half years.

“I appreciate all your teamwork in building our leader development program from scratch,” he said. “Watching it evolve has been truly inspiring. I love visiting MEPS and just witnessing the phenomenal development that goes on at their buildings.”



Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, pins a decoration on Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr, outgoing USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor, during the change of responsibility ceremony.

Military Members of the Year compete in Boston

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

This year's Military Member of the Year competition had the potential to be a disaster.

With coronavirus cases spiking in Milwaukee, event organizers scrambled to find a new location for the event with less than a week to spare. They chose Boston for the Aug. 24-28 competition.

"We had two full days to plan the event in Boston," said Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr, then USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor. "It was extremely challenging."

The decision paid off in a big way, with Carr describing the event as "the best we've had in my three years (at USMEPCOM)."

While Boston is located about 1,000 miles from Milwaukee, the city's rich history made it a logical plan B for organizers.

"I felt Boston had more history

to offer than any other city, given the myriad historical events and symbolism along the Freedom Trail," Carr said.

In addition to the location, Carr said the competitors made this year's event a cut above the rest.

"It was my third year running it and the caliber of this year's competitors exceeded the previous two years," he said.

The cream of the crop at the event were Battalion Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Year Army 1st Sgt. Shervonne James of Boston MEPS, MEPS Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Year Army 1st Sgt. Charmaine Hughes of Omaha MEPS, Officer of the Year Navy Lt. Karlton Mitchell of San Juan MEPS, Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year Army Sgt. 1st Class Megan Rodriguez of Denver MEPS and Noncommissioned Officer of the Year Marine Corps Sgt.

Dominique McDaniel of Fort Lee MEPS.

"They were put to a test, nominated by MEPS and they surpassed every level of competition," Carr said. "(James and Hughes) were truly the best leaders in their position that we have in this command."

Runners-up were Marine Corps Master Sgt. Erwin Johnson, St. Louis MEPS senior enlisted advisor; Navy Command Senior Chief Christopher Owens, Fort Jackson MEPS senior enlisted advisor; Army Sgt. 1st Class Sekiah Bailey of Knoxville MEPS; Army Staff Sgt. Jamie Rahm of Albuquerque MEPS; and Air Force Capt. David Supowit of Honolulu MEPS.

"The thing that stood out the most in Boston was the quality of competitors each battalion produced and that is really a tribute to the senior enlisted advisors of all 12 battalions," Carr said.

The group of 10 advanced to the Boston competition with stellar performances at the sector level. The event was open to military members stationed at the MEPS and USMEPCOM.

With scenic downtown Boston serving as the backdrop, the finalists' week included a physical fitness test, a USS Constitution staff ride, a USS Theodore Roosevelt letter review, development of a leadership plan and a formal board. Enlisted members were also required to write a leadership-style essay and vision, while officers presented a command philosophy.

The physical test was held at Castle Island and consisted of



From left: Navy Lt. Karlton Mitchell, San Diego MEPS; Marine Corps Sgt. Dominique McDaniel, Fort Lee MEPS; and Air Force Capt. David Supowit, Honolulu MEPS; hold muskets aboard the USS Constitution during the Military Member of the Year competition in Boston.

components from four military branch fitness assessments, including the Marine Corps 30-pound ammunition can lift and the Navy and Marine Corps two-minute plank.

A tour of the USS Constitution followed the physical test. Competitors climbed the shrouds aboard Old Ironsides, fired muskets and participated in simulated gun drills on a ship cannon.

The group split into two squads, Eastern Sector and Western Sector, and hit the 2.5-mile Freedom Trail for a five-hour, team-building event on the final day of the competition.

Led by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Michael Page, USMEPCOM Eastern Sector senior enlisted

advisor, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Jackson, USMEPCOM Western Sector senior enlisted advisor, the competitors delivered presentations about 16 of the trail's significant locations.

"The quality of presentations was just unbelievable," Carr said. "Their research was thorough and they had amazing oratorical skills."

A married couple from California even mistook the presenters for Freedom Trail tour guides.

"We said you're welcome to join us for the rest of the tour and they followed us the entire time," Carr said. "They thanked us and the lady started crying

because she couldn't believe the experience. We all kind of jerked a few tears when that happened. It was a heart-felt feeling."

After a panel consisting of Carr, Jackson and Page picked the winners, the competition was capped by a dinner that featured an awards presentation led by Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander.

Brady was also on hand for the Military Member of the Year ceremony Oct. 15 at USMEPCOM.

"It was a tough year to hold the competition, but we felt it was important to do," he said. "They put together a very rigorous competition so that we were able to choose the best of the best."

Brady said each of the winners' "professionalism, initiative, experience and military bearing substantially enhanced the mission of the command."

Carr credited Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Edgar Jimenez of USMEPCOM for playing a major role in organizing the Boston competition.

"He was the superstar of the event," Carr said.

Along with Carr and Jimenez, Army Sgt. 1st Class Christine Heinlein of USMEPCOM; Army Sgt. 1st Class Alejandro Torres of USMEPCOM; Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Ivon Johnson, Minneapolis MEPS senior enlisted advisor; Navy Command Senior Chief Karyn Sigurdsson, Milwaukee MEPS senior enlisted advisor; Navy Command Senior Chief Casey Wheeler, Denver MEPS senior enlisted advisor; and Army 1st Sgt. Mary Reed, Chicago MEPS senior enlisted advisor, also assisted with the event.



Navy Lt. Karlton Mitchell, San Diego MEPS, climbs the shrouds of the USS Constitution during the Military Member of the Year competition in Boston.

Houston MEPS heroes: Rising to the challenge in response to COVID-19

By Navy Lt. Emmanuel Mamari
Houston MEPS Operations Officer

In late February, USMEPCOM released information regarding COVID-19 and the virus' impact to the organization.

As the pandemic evolved, the command implemented a Coronavirus Response Matrix to help ensure the safety of employees, applicants and recruiting partners.

The response matrix was continually revised based on updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Department of Defense.

It consisted of measures that helped facilitate the safe and continued operations of USMEPCOM and its 65 MEPS amid the pandemic.

The measures included actions such as only allowing mission-

essential personnel in the MEPS and requiring personnel protective equipment such as face coverings for all applicants and employees.

Applicants and employees wearing face coverings became an important response due to Houston MEPS' building configuration, which made it impossible to keep the applicants six feet apart at all times.

Despite challenges posed by the MEPS layout, Ponciano Cortez, lead human resources technician, took the initiative and placed markers in MEPS hallways to help space out applicants and help incorporate physical distancing during applicant processing.

"It becomes important for us to do what we can with the resources we have available to ensure a safe environment

for the staff and the applicants while they process at the MEPS," Cortez said.

Through his initiative, the place markers throughout the MEPS became a cost effective and innovative response to help facilitate physical distancing and caused little to no impact on applicant processing.

Overall, Cortez's leadership and initiative allowed the MEPS to process applicants with as little interruption to processing and the mission as possible. His response and motivating attitude inspired the staff to remain diligent while still offering Red Carpet Treatment.

To help the MEPS maintain a clean workplace, USMEPCOM scheduled routine enhanced cleanings using an electrostatic disinfectant fog/spray.

However, this periodic special cleaning did not dissuade Mark Wilson, medical technician, from conducting additional daily cleaning to ensure the safety of his co-workers and applicants.

Every morning, at the beginning of his shift, Wilson sprayed and wiped touch spaces throughout the hallways and elevators leading up to the MEPS.

In addition, before applicants arrived to process at the MEPS medical section, Wilson used disinfectant spray throughout the MEPS hallway that leads to the MEPS medical section ensuring applicant and staff safety.

"I know the building gets a special cleaning, but safety requires all of us to participate and I am doing my part," Wilson said.

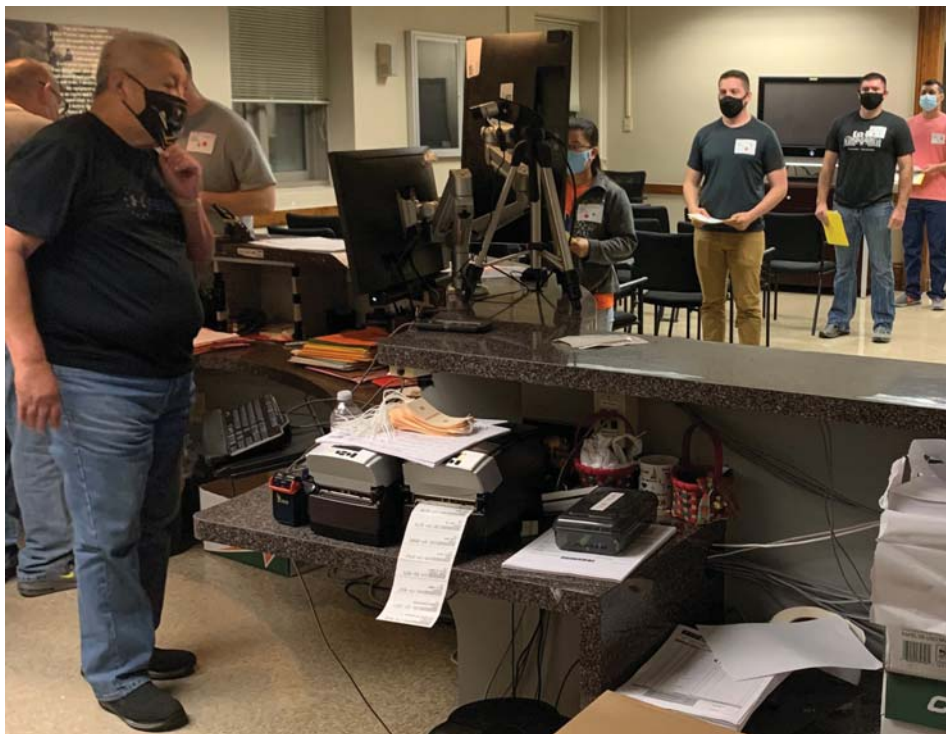
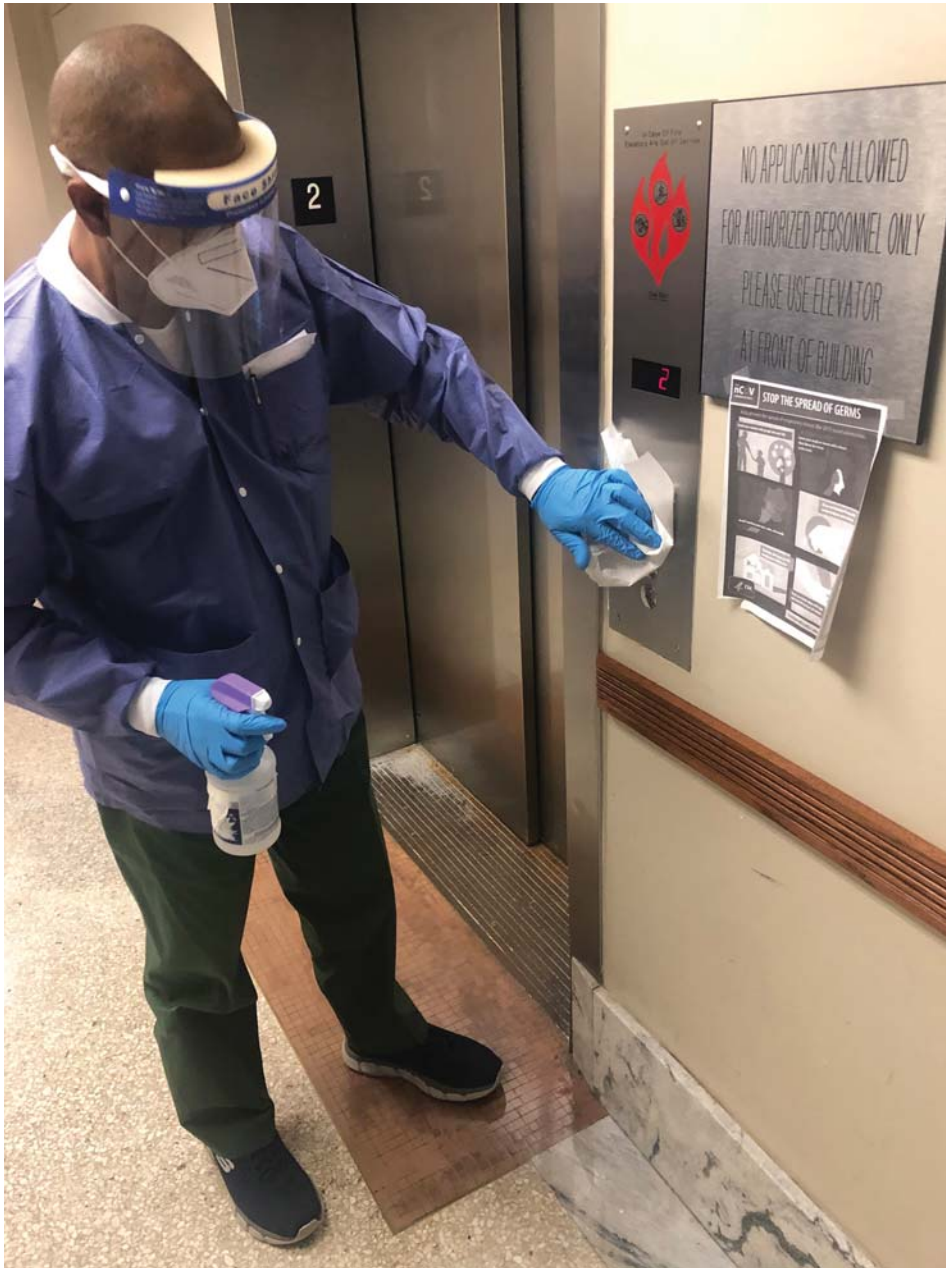


Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Reynaldo Sanchez

Ponciano Cortez, lead human resources technician, checks in applicants.



Mark Wilson disinfects a high-traffic area.

Photo by Quadrai McClain

Wilson's actions provided reassurance to the MEPS staff and applicants that the Houston MEPS is a clean and safe place.

Another key USMEPCOM response was implementing COVID-19 screening procedures for applicants, employees and other mission-essential personnel entering the MEPS and the applicant contract lodging facility.

The additional COVID-19 screenings helped identify and deter COVID-19 symptomatic applicants, employees and other mission essential personnel from entering the MEPS.

These COVID-19 screenings included temperature checks and reviewing or completing COVID-19 questionnaires that aligned with CDC guidelines at the applicant contract lodging

facility as a primary location for screening and then at the entrance of the MEPS facility as a secondary screening location.

The COVID-19 screenings provided the MEPS a defense in-depth approach to help mitigate transmitting COVID-19 in the MEPS, but it made added work for the MEPS staff.

When the requirement to conduct COVID-19 screenings was released, Houston MEPS experienced challenges regarding the available personnel to conduct screenings.

These challenges were captured by Marine Corps Maj. David Traxler, Houston MEPS commander, who said, "The timing of the additional duties associated with USMEPCOM's COVID-19 response matrix was a challenge because we had a shortage of personnel. Specifically, four of our eight medical technician positions were vacant. We did not have a medical supervisor and were without a chief medical officer and assistant chief medical officer."

"On top of the shortages in our medical section, the majority of Houston MEPS employees identified as being high risk as defined by the CDC," Traxler said. "These factors limit the number of available personnel to conduct the COVID-19 screening duties at the MEPS and at the applicant contract lodging facility and certainly served as a major concern."

As a result of these personnel challenges, the military personnel assigned to the Houston MEPS took on these additional COVID-19 screening

Please see "Heroes," Page 18

“Heroes,” from Page 17

duties while also performing their regular duties.

At the beginning of March all Houston MEPS military personnel from the commander to its most junior enlisted member took shifts to conduct screening in the evenings and the early mornings at the contract lodging facility. The military also conducted screenings at the entrance of the MEPS. After a few weeks MEPS leadership determined that conducting screening solely by the few military personnel was not sustainable.

“We don’t know how long we will have to continue to apply the response measures, but we can expect that the MEPS will continue to operate in this global pandemic environment for the foreseeable future,” 1st Sgt. Ashley Simpson, Houston MEPS senior enlisted advisor, said. “Having the military conduct the COVID-19 screenings was a short-term solution to a long-term problem, so we have to come up with a more sustainable plan because with all the stress with the pandemic we will burn out our military personnel due to being overworked.”

Traxler also recognized the need to change the way Houston MEPS was using its personnel to support the requirements of the COVID-19 response matrix and charged supervisors with finding creative long-term solutions.

“COVID-19 is not going away anytime soon,” he said. “We need help from the other personnel in the MEPS to take on these additional duties

associated with the COVID-19 response measures. The military personnel assigned to the MEPS served as an initial answer to the COVID-19 problem, but we now needed to look at other options to equally share and distribute the additional COVID-19 duties and workload.”

One creative solution came from Houston MEPS test control officer Cathy Carter, who suggested using intermittent test administrators to assist with the COVID-19 screening duties.

“The suspension of the Student Testing Program as a result of COVID-19 in early March hindered the ITAs from being able to administer school test sessions and negatively impacted their livelihood,” she said. “So to ensure that our ITAs remained gainfully employed while the Student Testing Program was suspended I presented them the opportunity to receive hours and work as COVID-19 screeners at the applicant hotel and at the entrance of the MEPS.”

The idea to use ITAs aligned with suggestions and best practices from other MEPS, battalion, and sector leaders who emphasized that ITAs can serve as a valuable resource to help implement COVID-19 response measures.

When Carter presented this opportunity to receive hours working as COVID-19 screeners a number of ITAs volunteered.

One ITA, Gregory Walker, said, “I understand that working as a [COVID-19] screener puts me at greater exposure to the virus, but I wanted to do my part to help where I can during these challenging times.”

Another Gena Stuchbery, who



Photo by Sylvester Gordon

Gregory Walker, an intermittent test administrator, takes an applicant's temperature.

volunteered to screen applicants, employees and other mission essential personnel at the contract lodging facility and at the MEPS said, “Our response evolved as the situation changed as more information on the virus was made known.

“Senior military leaders worked through the issues that surfaced with regards to processing recruits for training that went beyond us screening applicants at the MEPS, but included changing how we safely transport recruits to basic training and figuring out how to modify boot camp as well,” Stuchbery said. “We’re the pipeline, and a part of a much bigger process that had to be assessed and modified as the situation changed.”

“The challenges associated



Photo by Quadrai McClain

Eric Shumaker screens an employee entering the Houston MEPS.

with COVID-19 that were imposed on MEPS leadership required a great deal of flexibility on everyone's part," she said. "Overall, I think we did a good job with trying to stay flexible as things changed."

Between March and August, ITAs like Walker and Stuchbery alternated every other week where one week they worked evening shifts conducting COVID-19 screenings for applicants at the contract lodging facility and the next week conducted screenings at the MEPS entrance.

The ITAs' willingness to work as COVID-19 screeners provided the much needed reprieve to the Houston MEPS military personnel and directly contributed to keeping the

Houston MEPS a safe and healthy workplace.

Michael Smith, another ITA who volunteered to assist with COVID-19 screenings, described the importance of following CDC and USMEPCOM guidelines saying, "You should isolate yourself if you are sick, quarantine when required, wash your hands often, avoid close

contact with others, cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, cover your coughs and sneezes, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and most importantly, monitor your health daily."

Smith's words served as a much-needed reminder that the Houston MEPS employees, applicants and recruiting partners could not become complacent with their adherence of the COVID-19 response measures.

When the Student Testing Program was reinstated the ITAs were needed to conduct school test sessions.

To relieve the ITAs from their additional duties, medical department employees took charge of conducting COVID-19

screenings for applicants at the entrance of the MEPS.

To accommodate the change, the supervisory medical technician and lead medical technicians found ways to ensure coverage of the daily workload in addition to the new tasks.

By emphasizing open communication and teamwork, medical staff members took pride in sharing the responsibilities.

"Our ITAs really rose to the occasion and stepped up to fill in gaps during our personnel shortages," Traxler said.

"Not only did our ITAs step up, but its actions such as the innovative thinking by Mr. Cortez to place markers on the ground to help with physical distancing and the initiative by Mr. Wilson to conduct daily disinfectant spraying of common spaces that embodied the spirit of USMEPCOM's 'Red Carpet Treatment.'"

"The actions by these employees only offer some examples that highlight the MEPS staff quality attitude and their willingness to go above and beyond," he said.

"All of our employees are committed to ensuring that the Houston MEPS fulfill its mission to provide superior customer service to our applicants through professionalism and much needed flexibility to achieve the needs of our service partners, especially during such trying times."

"It is an understatement to explain how vital our employees are in ensuring Houston MEPS continue its operations amid the COVID-19 pandemic," Traxler said. "I am extremely fortunate to have such a great team of employees be a part of the Houston MEPS. They are all Houston MEPS heroes."

Partnership with Guam Naval Hospital resumes

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

United States Naval Hospital Guam has resumed control of military processing on the island.

The hospital temporarily closed its MEPS site March 16 after most of the staff joined the USS Theodore Roosevelt coronavirus support mission, Air Force Capt. David Supowit, Honolulu MEPS executive officer, said.

Eight days later, the Guam Military Entrance Test site closed “due to Guam territory and local stay-at-home guidance in order to slow down community spread of COVID-19, which had just seen a significant increase for the island,” Supowit said.

With a big boost from USMEPCOM, the Guam MET operations resumed May 19 and

598 tests. Eighty-nine applicants were shipped to basic training during the stretch.

“I’m very satisfied and extremely proud of Honolulu MEPS, Seattle MEPS and the Western Sector for putting this together,” Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander, said.

With the departure of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, control of processing in Guam transitioned back to USNH Guam on Oct. 1. The transition capped a successful mission for USMEPCOM, which had less than six weeks to prepare and execute its Guam plan during a pandemic.

“It was an incredibly short amount of time to do a lot of detailed planning, get equipment over there to the island, find a facility they can operate out of and get personnel in there while working through the quarantine requirements,” Brady said.

He lauded USMEPCOM’s overall efforts during the coronavirus, which included carrying out the Guam mission,

setting up a remote processing station in Riverside, California, and conducting Saturday processing.

“Across the board at USMEPCOM, our personnel have shown a tremendous amount

of resilience, flexibility and perseverance in accomplishing the mission under these very difficult times,” he said. “USMEPCOM stepped up and really made a name for itself in a positive way during COVID-19.”

Army Col. Arthur Cajigal, USMEPCOM’s command surgeon, assisted in the restart of Guam processing from May 26 to June 5. He served as the primary MEPS medical provider and helped train two Guam Army National Guard physician assistants on how to conduct applicants’ physical exams.

“The applicants were kind of stacking up and we had to take care of them,” Cajigal said. “Colonel Brady said, ‘Hey, let’s take matters into our own hands because we can handle this temporarily.’”

“The progress that was made during my time in Guam was amazing. The PAs started to get used to the battle rhythm. They got pretty good with decision-making and it was real neat seeing them progress and seeing the process evolve over the two weeks.”

Army Sgt. 1st Class Eric J. Sargent, Honolulu MEPS medical supervisor, played a major role in getting Guam operations back in full swing.

“He’s a great, wonderful leader,” Cajigal said. “He was the one who made it happen on a day-to-day basis and it was only possible because of him.”

Along with Cajigal, USMEPCOM Western Sector medical officer Colleen Murphy, Honolulu MEPS chief medical officer Coswin K. Saito, Honolulu MEPS assistant chief medical officer Frank Reynolds and Army Sgt. 1st Class Tammy Slone,



Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Jackson, Western Sector senior enlisted advisor, left, and Navy Capt. Nathan King, Western Sector commander, listen during a briefing on Naval Hospital Guam.

physical examinations began a day later.

Over the course of 97 days in Guam, Honolulu MEPS eliminated backlogs and processed 513 applicant visits, 69 inspections, 337 physicals and

Seattle MEPS medical NCOIC, were essential to helping Guam medical operations resume.

“(Murphy) did the final certification to say, ‘You two physicians are good to go with running the physical exams,’” Cajigal said.

The group faced the challenge of setting up medical operations in a building much smaller than most MEPS.

“When I worked at the MEPS in Charlotte, San Jose and Columbus, everything you needed was there,” Cajigal said. “In Guam, the conditions were a little more spartan. The layout of the building wasn’t necessarily ideal, but you made do with what you had because you had a mission.

“Sargent did a marvelous job of setting it up based on the building he was given.”

USMEPCOM’s role in the Guam mission also included visits by Navy Capt. Nathan King, Western Sector commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Jackson. They met with Guam National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Esther Aguigui on May 18 and

provided a commander’s update on coronavirus operations to Gov. Lourdes Aflague Leon Guerrero on May 23.

Brady said the Guam Army National Guard played a major role in the resumption of operations.

“We couldn’t have done the mission without Guam National Guard,” he said. “They provided the facilities and additional manpower support. They really opened up their arms to help us and we couldn’t have done it without their support.

“It was a great example of partnership and teamwork, which is a hallmark of USMEPCOM. We have a great relationship with the National Guard, particularly in Guam.”

Guam’s government was

receptive to the mission.

“Guam’s government wanted us there because there was a backlog of applicants waiting to get processed,” Cajigal said. “They welcomed us with open arms and said, ‘Hey, here’s a building for you to do this in.’

“They were absolutely wonderful and it was a great experience. I honestly don’t think we could do this without the red carpet treatment they gave us.”



Army Col. Arthur Cajigal, USMEPCOM command surgeon, inputs information into his laptop.



Unlikely pairings prove effective in USMEPCOM Mentorship Program

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

On the surface, Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr mentoring Army Capt. Moveta Davis and Robert Dotson may seem unusual.

After all, Davis, an operations officer at Miami MEPS, has a higher rank than Carr and Dotson is a retired Army colonel who spent 26 years in the military before becoming deputy director of USMEPCOM's Resource Management Directorate.

However, the pairings are far from uncommon in the flourishing USMEPCOM Mentorship Program. Mentor-mentee matches are made after program newcomers fill out a pairing worksheet that focuses on skills and goals instead

of ranks and government grade levels.

"The worksheet doesn't even mention grade because I wanted it to focus on skills," USMEPCOM Workforce Development Branch Chief Leti Ramirez, the program's action officer, said. "What I found is when it came to skills as far as gaps go, it kind of worked itself out in terms of rank or grade level, and who was their mentor or mentee."



“Once trust is there you're able to talk about anything.”

— Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr
on mentoring

The worksheet covers topics such as communication, technical, management and self-management, number and creative/artistic skills.

"Basically, the pairings come from skills and interests of the mentor that parallel the skills and interests of the mentee," Carr, former USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor, said.

Carr, who enlisted in 1993, said he mentored "quite a few captains and majors" before his stint at USMEPCOM.

"It may be uncommon in other services, but not in the Army," he said. "In the Army, senior (noncommissioned officers) at E-9 rank often mentor junior officers."

Dotson, a GS-14, joined the program shortly after starting at USMEPCOM in 2018 and was matched with Carr in early 2020.

Dotson said Carr helped him gain a "broader perspective so I realize I have to step out of my own comfort zone of dealing with numbers and realize mine isn't the only game in town and that the command group is focused on other things on a regular basis."

"This is the first organization I've been a part of where I feel like there was a mentorship program that was accessible, so I definitely jumped on the chance to give it a go," Dotson said.

Dotson lauded the program's application process.

"The questionnaire gauges how they would pair up folks in nontraditionally atypical situations like me and command sergeant major," he said. "I think that's really brilliant

because it leads to some matches you wouldn't expect."

Dotson does double duty in the program as the mentor for a MEPS operations officer.

"It's a matchup you wouldn't expect, but it's worked out very well for both of us," he said. "One of my fortes is dealing with lots of numbers, so I've already been able to help him with some of that."

Carr said there was "no awkwardness whatsoever" in mentoring Dotson because both knew each other from working at USMEPCOM.

"We had already kind of established a baseline repertoire with each other prior to the mentorship program," Carr said.

Davis, on the other hand, had never communicated with Carr before their mentorship began early this year.

"It was more comfortable and more natural with Mr. Dotson because we've worked at the same site for a while versus mentoring a complete stranger over the phone," Carr said. "It took a couple of calls for (Davis and me) to get comfortable with each other and build a foundation of trust, but we had almost a built-in inherent respect right away."

"Captain Davis was all for it and so was I."

The advice Carr gave his mentees had similarities.

"With Captain Davis, I shared with her the best practices on how to take a leadership approach with the section she was getting ready to take over," he said. "I provided her some counseling and leadership techniques."

"I gave Mr. Dotson a perspective on leader



“

It may be uncommon in the other services, but not in the Army.

– Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr
on a senior NCO mentoring those of higher rank

”

development for his section."

Carr described the key to mentoring as "establishing mutual trust."

"That's the main center of gravity to mentoring," he said. "Once the trust is there, you're able to talk about anything and it's very fulfilling and purposeful."

While this marks the first time Carr has participated in a formalized mentorship program, he's been offering guidance to mentees since his days as a staff sergeant in 1999.

"Your level of mentoring or your scope of mentoring just grows with each rank you make," he said. "It's kind of expected as you continue to move up the enlisted ranks. By 2004, I was really comfortable

mentoring people and helping them overcome personal and professional challenges."

Carr was a natural fit for the program, which launched in its current format in 2018.

"I volunteered to participate because I enjoy mentoring and leader development," he said. "It's the one thing I'm most passionate about."

While Carr's official involvement in the program ended when he began his next assignment at Fort Eustis, Virginia, he plans to stay in touch with Davis and Dotson.

"Our conversations will continue," he said. "If you're truly passionate about mentoring, that should be a natural action. If you stop, I don't think you're in it for the right reasons."

USMEPCOM Mentorship Program soars in popularity

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

The USMEPCOM Mentorship Program has skyrocketed in popularity over the past year.

Fifty-four USMEPCOM and MEPS employees signed up for the program in 2020, a sharp increase over the 12 participants a year earlier.

"I loved it," USMEPCOM Workforce Development Branch Chief Leti Ramirez said of the increase. "It definitely sets the bar for next year."

As the program's action officer, Ramirez manages the mentorship/mentee pairings. The matches are made after program newcomers fill out a worksheet that focuses on skills and goals. After pairings are established, the program aims to offer leadership development and networking opportunities to participants.

The program, which was revised in 2018, primarily matches military members with civilian employees.

"We don't have many military/military pairings," Ramirez said. "I think military personnel appreciate meeting with civilians because they can get a different perspective on things that are going on in the MEPS or HQ, and vice versa."

Other potential pairings include MEPS and USMEPCOM civilian workers and military members.

Program participants from the MEPS are also matched at times.

"MEPS have been able to share some best practices with each other on ways to maybe do a process better because they were able to talk to someone from a different MEPS," Ramirez said. "The networking opportunities are big. Anytime you can network

within your command, you're always going to find a further network. I think the transfer of knowledge is really positive."

Ramirez credited the increase in participation to continuous support from Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, and word of mouth.

"Colonel Brady and his command team being 100 percent on board has made people more aware of the program," Ramirez said. "Having more people aware of it and spreading the knowledge has helped."

Brady and USMEPCOM Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff Jo Anne T. Cunningham will speak at an end-of-year party in December. The event celebrates relationships built by the program, which has thrived in 2020 despite hurdles posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think (Human Resources Directorate) and Ms. Ramirez have done a phenomenal job ensuring the mentors and mentees have stayed connected throughout COVID," Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr, former USMEPCOM senior enlisted advisor, said. "I think (the coronavirus) has probably presented the biggest challenge in communications because everybody is dealing with so much personally and at work."

Carr's mentee, USMEPCOM Resource Management Directorate Deputy Director Rob Dotson, said "the program is probably more than just trying to help employees figure out how they can come up the ladder in their career group, whether it be military or civilian."

"It transcends that," Dotson said. "It's an opportunity to develop some hard and soft skills that will help you regardless of

what you do with the rest of your life.

"I think it also gives an opportunity for the mentor to check in with the mentee and that helps with morale. It's amazing just to feel like you have a non-attributional environment that you can just sit down and talk about things."

Ramirez said the bonds formed through the program go beyond the mentoring phase.

"The participants anticipate their relationships will be lifelong and not just for the time of the program," she said. "That's really rewarding for me to know that they've created kind of a battle buddy for life."

Ramirez would like to see the program's participation numbers continue to rise.

"I'd hope to say we can grow even more, especially because I know that the impact we're having on those partnerships is going to benefit the command," she said. "It's definitely bridging gaps and that's why I'd love to see it grow even more."

Ramirez encouraged people interested in signing up for the program to email her at leticia.m.ramirez.civ@mail.mil or call (847) 688-3680, ext. 7156.

"It's never too late to sign up," she said. "The program has open enrollment throughout the year, so you can sign up anytime."

Dotson, a retired Army colonel, urged civilians and military members to join the program.

"I could see the program growing even more and I would encourage more people to get involved because it's more than just your own career progression," he said. "It's truly about making you a better employee and a better person."

Former Sacramento senior enlisted advisor competes for Sijan Award

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

Leadership has been a staple of Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Samuel J. Matthews' military career and his skills were on full display over the past year as Sacramento MEPS senior enlisted advisor.

Matthews' many accomplishments included leading his station through multiple health protection condition changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic. He played a key role during a stretch in which Sacramento MEPS conducted more than 6,000 COVID-19 screenings.

For his efforts, Matthews was named one of 12 winners of the Air Force District of Washington's 2020 Lance P. Sijan U.S. Air Force Leadership Award. The group advanced to the prestigious award's final round.

"It feels great to be recognized for hard work and leadership," Matthews said.

Sijan, a 1965 Air Force Academy graduate and combat pilot, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his intrepidity while evading capture by the North Vietnamese and during his subsequent captivity as a prisoner of war.

The Sijan award recognizes the accomplishments of officers and enlisted leaders who demonstrate the highest qualities of leadership in the performance of their duties and the conduct of their lives.

It marked the fifth time Matthews won the award, but this is the farthest he's advanced in the process.

"It's very competitive," he said.

Matthews, a Baton Rouge, Louisiana native, has racked

up several awards since enlisting at New Orleans MEPS in 2000. They include a pair of Meritorious Service Medals, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, three Joint Service Achievement Medals, the Air Force Achievement Medal and numerous unit and service medals and ribbons.

Matthews said his latest Sijan award ranks "a close second" to earning the Air Force Recognition Ribbon as a "12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year" finalist nominee in 2002.

"It's pretty humbling," he said. "It says people think a lot about me and I appreciate that."

The citation accompanying Matthews' Sijan award said he "led 79 personnel in performing over 426,000 actions to evaluate 14,364 future warfighters for military service. His leadership was pivotal in sourcing nine basic training centers nationwide and improving the readiness of all service branches."

Matthews' actions during the coronavirus "guaranteed a continuous flow of recruits, which prevented the Department of Defense from implementing the 'stop loss' policy," the citation said. "The distinctive accomplishments of Matthews reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

His non-military accomplishments include chairing three foreign outreach events in the Dominican Republic. He managed 28 volunteers and \$3,700 in donations, which enhanced 34 marginalized families' quality of life.



Senior Master Sgt. Samuel J. Matthews

For Matthews, leadership is "about making the decisions that can't be delegated and developing your team to the full potential."

"It's always about helping others not just become better service members, but also better members of society," he added. "My mentors helped me out a lot and I want people to say I paid it back."

"There's nothing better than seeing one of your team members get recognized or promoted."

Since arriving at Sacramento MEPS in 2017, Matthews managed two reorganizations and three continuous process improvements. His work on same-day applicant processing helped prevent 813 revisits and save \$231,000.

"It's been very fulfilling to see positive change happen (at Sacramento MEPS)," he said.

Matthews took his leadership skills to Fort Eustis in Newport News, Virginia, for his next assignment in October.

Columbus takes a staff ride

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

Traveling across the United States has become commonplace for Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Carr, but his visit to Columbus, Ohio, MEPS was far from routine.

As senior enlisted advisor at USMEPCOM since May 2018, Carr has visited 49 MEPS and participated in 18 staff rides, which have played a key role in his leader development program.

“They’re valuable when it comes to development, oral communication, presentation skills and learning about history,” said Carr, who recently left USMEPCOM for his next assignment in early October. “They help people develop public speaking and research skills among other things.”

Carr was joined on the Columbus trip by Army 1st Sgt. Mary Reed, who recently

became senior enlisted advisor at Chicago MEPS. After touring the Columbus MEPS and participating in unit physical training, they joined a staff ride led by Navy Command Senior Chief Brandon Fullmer.

Fullmer, the senior enlisted advisor at Columbus MEPS, had organized one staff ride prior to Carr’s August visit.

“The first one didn’t go so well,” Fullmer said. “Being a Navy guy, I didn’t understand it as well as I do now.”

Fullmer learned from the experience and his second staff ride was described by Carr as “unbelievable.”

“He’s probably one of the most well-rounded, engaged SEAs that I’ve seen during 49 MEPS visits,” Carr said of Fullmer.

Carr was most impressed by the wide variety of staff ride participants. Officers, noncommissioned officers, Army

National Guard soldiers and service liaisons joined the group for the day’s activities.

“That is an unprecedented feat,” Carr said. “Most staff rides don’t have that level of involvement, which is extremely contingent on the individual MEPS team. If the climate is struggling and there’s not a lot of teamwork, fewer people will show up.”

“In order to garner as much support as he did, (Fullmer) has to be a pretty well-rounded leader.”

The staff ride reflected Fullmer’s efforts to increase teamwork since arriving at the MEPS about a year ago.

“It’s something we’ve really tried to improve,” he said. “I decided to go all in with the staff ride and we got a lot of support from civilians and leadership. We had a lot of buy-in and people wanted to participate.”



Warren Motts, director of Mott’s Military Museum, discusses a fire truck crushed during the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11.



A memorial to military working dogs at Mott's Military Museum.

In addition to the participation rate, Carr lauded the group's trip to Motts Military Museum in nearby Groveport, Ohio.

"I've been to several military museums and that one is like no other," Carr said.

The group's self-guided tour featured exhibit presentations by Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Shawn Porter, Fullmer, Marine Corps Sgt. Colin Messer, National Guard Spc. Justin Cox, Army Sgt. Patrick Edwards, National Guard Cpl. Tessa Kolman, National Guard 1st Lt. Drake Snell and National Guard Sgt. Jasmin Szuch.

"They delivered phenomenal presentations," Carr said. "The preparedness of the group overall was probably the best I've seen on a staff ride.

"I've been on a lot of staff rides where the presentations were good, but this was definitely a cut above the rest."

Messer's presentations on World War II and the Korean War were selected as the best of the bunch by Fullmer, Reed and Porter.

"His depth of knowledge, confidence and presence were impressive," Carr said. "He didn't even read from a paper."

The 5,100-square-foot museum also includes exhibits about the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, Vietnam War, Desert Storm, NASA, military medals, prisoners of war and

Tuskegee Airmen.

"It has every era of war history," Carr said. "The combat vehicles there are absolutely amazing."

A fundraiser is underway as part of an effort to house what museum director Warren Motts called the second largest collection of artifacts from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"When we're finished, we will have the biggest collection of 9/11 artifacts outside of Ground Zero in New York," Motts said.

According to the museum's website, mottsmilitarymuseum.org, the 9/11 artifacts include a fire truck that was crushed during the collapse of the WTC towers, a 20-foot piece of the antenna from the WTC's North

Tower and two damaged police vehicles. Motts said WTC marble slabs he acquired could be used for flooring in a new museum building.

The staff ride marked Fullmer's second visit to the museum.

"For one person to put that together, it's amazing how much stuff the museum has," Fullmer said of the museum. "We were there for two hours and could've spent a lot more time there."

The group's visit and exhibit presentations left a lasting impression on Motts, who spoke about some of the museum's artifacts during the tour.

"They were fantastic," said Motts, a Vietnam-era Army photographer. "They were smart as a whip while giving presentations and had great questions for me.

"It was an honor to be able to talk to them. It makes you realize we're in good hands because if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have the freedoms we do."

Carr would like to return to the area and the museum someday. In the meantime, his first Columbus staff ride was an experience he won't soon forget.

"I would say (my Columbus visit) is tied for first with a visit I took to Denver MEPS," Carr said.



Staff ride participants pose in front of a fire truck crushed during the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11, now on display at Motts Military Museum.



Navy Lt. Cmdr. Mike Genta and Rose Choneska pose in front of her great uncle's name on the USS Oklahoma Memorial after her enlistment ceremony.

Honolulu employee enlists in the Coast Guard

Rose Choneska, a test clerk and human resources assistant at the Honolulu MEPS, enlisted in the Coast Guard Aug. 28.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Mike Genta, Honolulu commander, administered the Oath of Enlistment.

She chose the USS Oklahoma Memorial on Ford Island as the location for her enlistment ceremony.

Choneska, a Mescalero Native American, grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She joined the MEPS staff in April 2019. Choneska shipped to basic training Oct. 19.

She continues a family legacy of service inspired by her great uncle, Petty Officer 1st Class Hubert Clement, who was stationed on the USS Oklahoma and died during the Japanese attack on Dec. 7, 1941.

Honolulu MEPS is proud of her decision of continued service.



Hubert Clement's name on the USS Oklahoma Memorial. Clement was Rose Choneska's great uncle.



The facade of the USS Oklahoma Memorial.

Cleveland hosts USSTRATCOM chief of staff

Cleveland MEPS welcomed Army Maj. Gen. Randy Taylor, United States Strategic Command chief of staff, June 29.

Taylor administered the Oath of Enlistment to his nephew Austin Renaldo along with 20 other applicants.

The general addressed the new applicants before he administered the oath of enlistment and shared three key points for their military careers and life moving forward. His advice was:

First, it is not about you, it is about something much greater than just yourself.

Second, always accept responsibility for everything, even if it wasn't just your fault.

Lastly, be positive!

The general also recognized six Cleveland MEPS military members with USSTRATCOM coins. Awardees were Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Arguello, Army Capt. Dillion Lynch, Coast Guard Lt. Ryan DeShazo, Ohio Army National Guard 1st Lt. Alexandra Reich, Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Michelle Coronado, Ohio Army National Guard Sgt. Samantha Aguridakis, Air Force Staff Sgt. Khaliha Love and Ohio Army National Guard Sgt. Kevin Ward.



Maj. Gen. Randy Taylor and his nephew, Austin Renaldo, after the general administered the Oath of Enlistment.



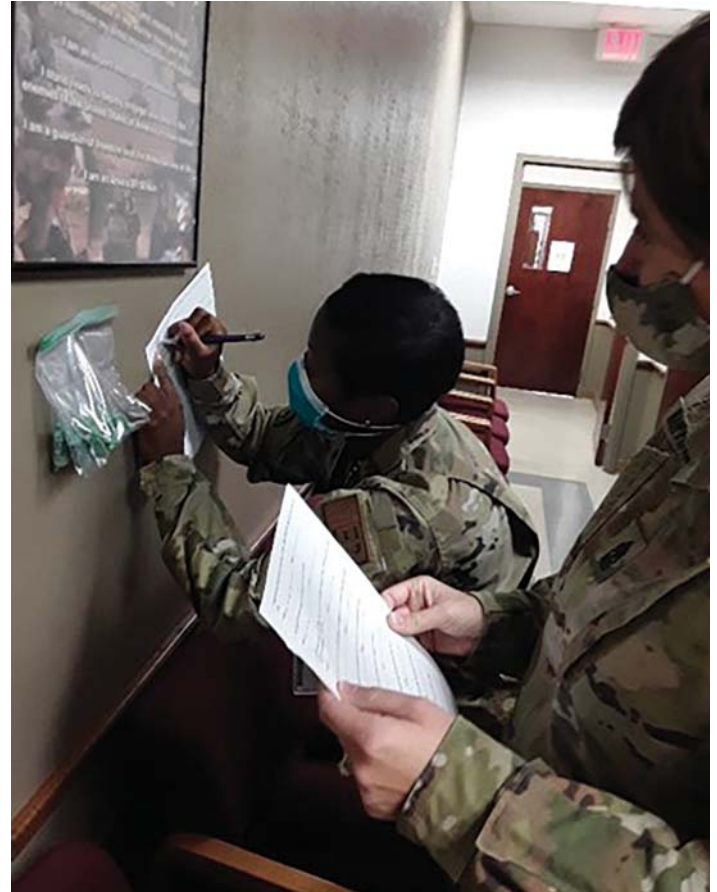
Taylor poses with three of the six MEPS staff member to whom he presented USSTRATCOM coins.

Shreveport MEPS treasure hunt a team-building event

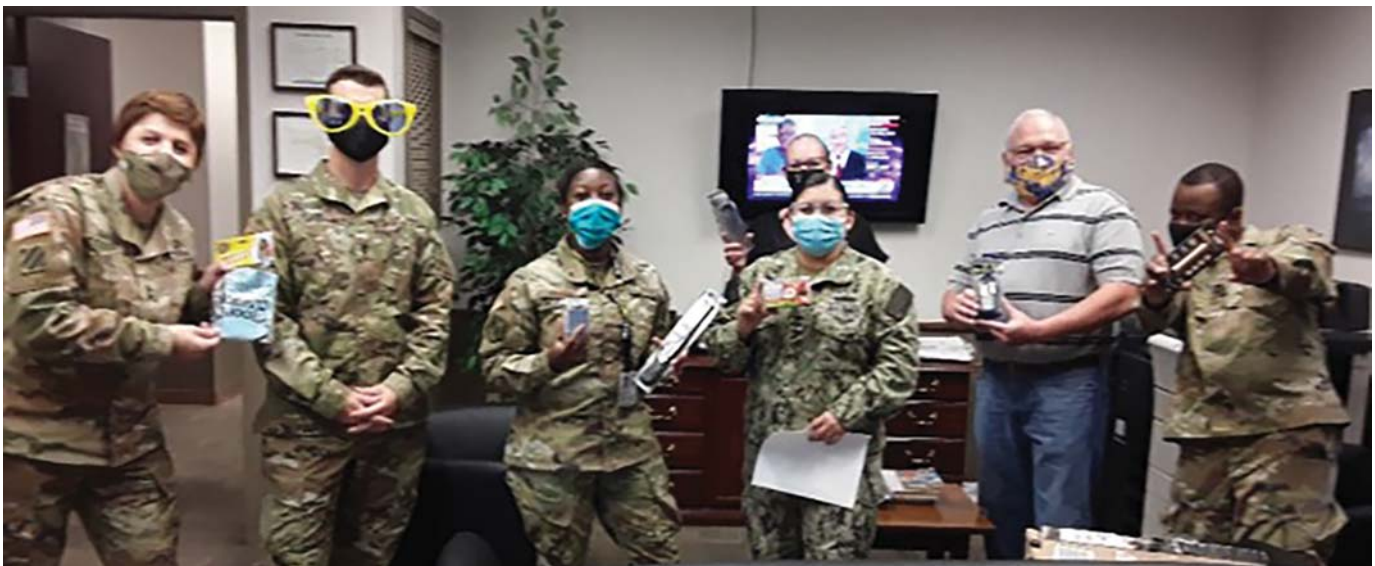
Shreveport MEPS held the “Shreveport MEPS Treasure Hunt” Oct. 1.

MEPS staff members and liaisons had to solve riddles to find items throughout the station.

The team-building event was held to boost team performance, motivation, morale, communication and problem-solving skills.



Left: Mark Vanardsdall and Army Capt. Othello Mugugu search the employee break room for items. Above: Army 1st Sgt. Jennifer Martinez and Air Force Staff Sgt. Josalyn Anthony mark a riddle off the list after they found toy soldiers in the Army liaison office. Below: Scavenger hunt participants receive their prizes for completing the challenge.



Shreveport MEPS holds blood drive for local center



A technician adjusts the needle in Army 1st Lt. Austin Clark's arm.



Army 1st Sgt. Jennifer Martinez, MEPS senior enlisted advisor, completes her questionnaire before donating blood.



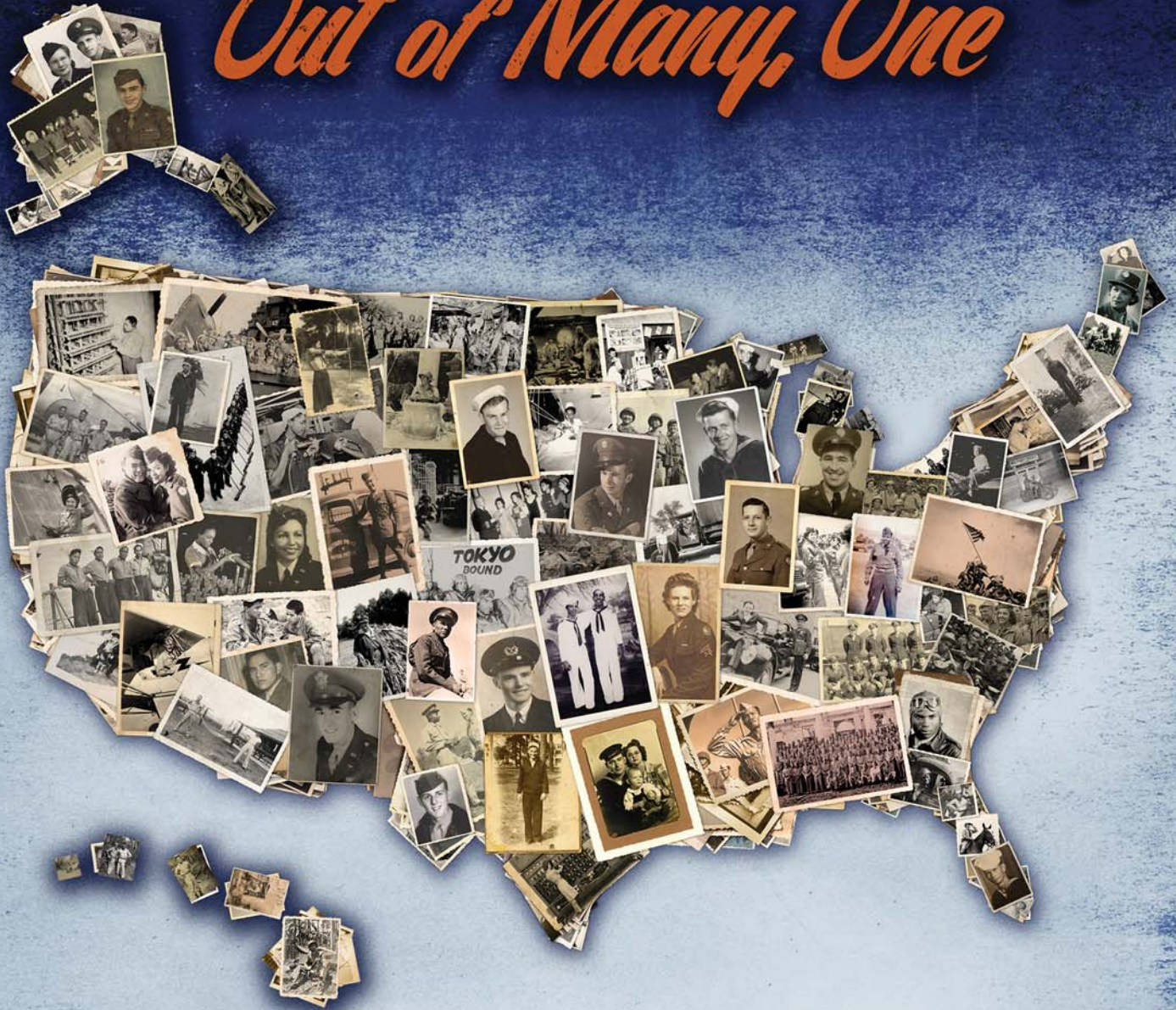
Army Liaison Sgt. 1st Class Tamara Darraugh-Taylor surfs the net on her phone while donating blood.



MEPS employees Sarah Kline and Wendy Glover organize and recruit volunteers.

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Out of Many, One



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