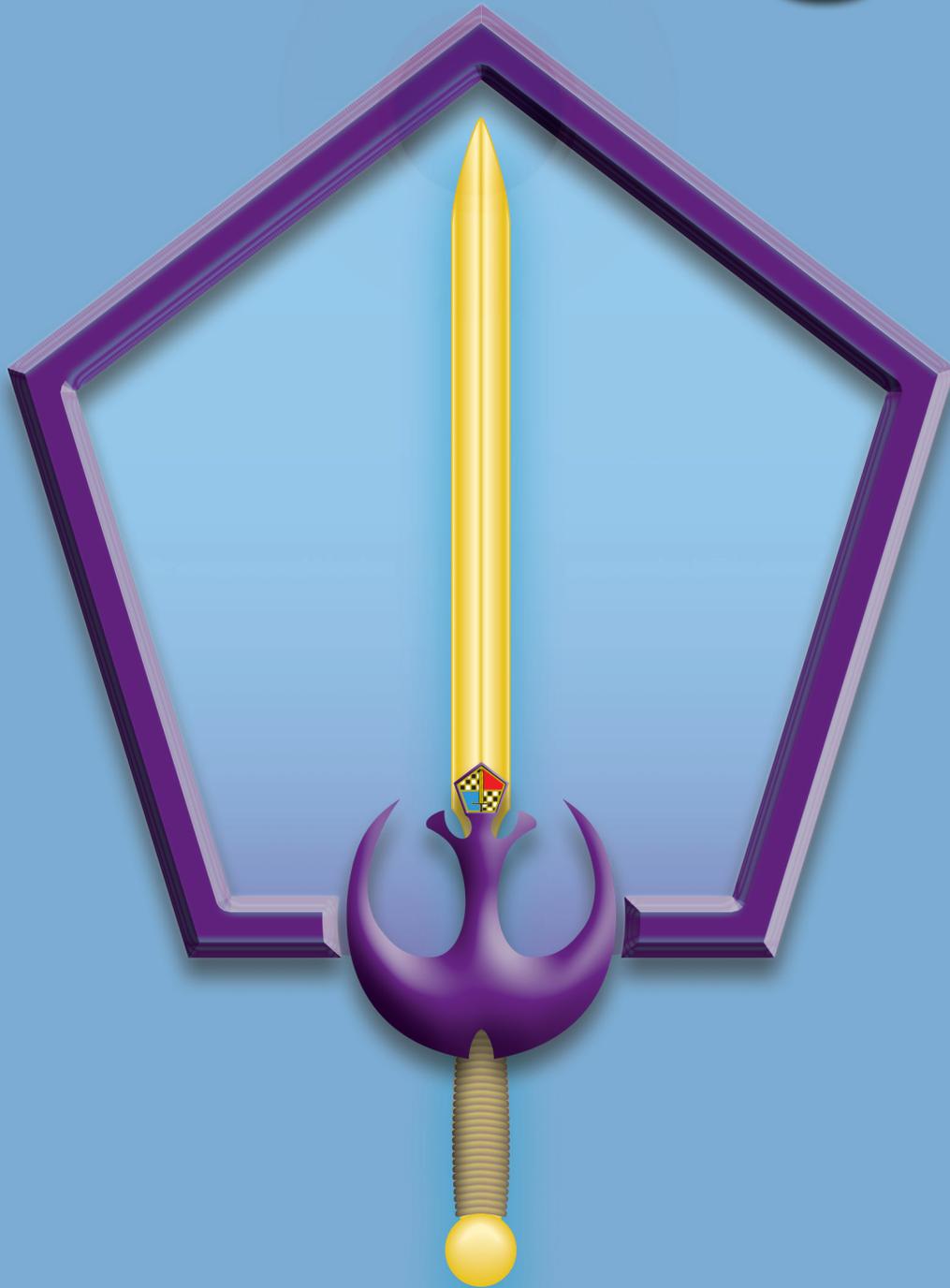


UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 43, NO. 1



USMIRS 1.1

The Future Awakens

COMMANDER'S COMMENTARY

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND



Col. Richard T. Brady

COMMAND VALUES

INTEGRITY

Integrity, doing the right thing when no one else is looking, is the cornerstone of our ability to accomplish our mission. It is also integral to building trust, both within USMEPCOM and with our partners and stakeholders. We will reflect integrity and trust in all we do.

TEAMWORK

Communication, based on trust and accountability, is the foundation of empowered employees functioning as a team. It is imperative we communicate often and robustly, both internally and externally.

PROFESSIONALISM

We endeavor to maintain an environment in which every member of our team can strive for personal and professional excellence every day.

RESPECT

There is no greater calling than the profession of arms. We will endeavor to foster a culture where every member of our team, as well as our applicants, stakeholders, and partners, feels valued and respected for who they are and for their contributions to mission accomplishments.

Greetings USMEPCOM,

It is hard to believe it has been a year since the fight against COVID began. Looking back, it is incredible to think about all we have accomplished as a team over the past 12 months. Not only did we continue our mission to process applicants during a global pandemic, but we achieved what some doubted would ever happen: launching USMIRS I.I.

These were not easy feats. Both required dedication to respond quickly to unforeseen obstacles. USMEPCOM remained committed to its high standard of day-to-day operations while adapting to new requirements and challenges.

COVID-19 forced a reassessment of the timing of our largest modernization initiative, USMIRS I.I. Some even questioned if 2021 was the right time for such a huge endeavor...if we should delay our launch even further. But thanks to bold leaders and the dedication of a talented team, USMIRS I.I launched on February 11th with great success. We know that USMIRS I.I. is key to setting the foundation for our future.

I am proud of the USMEPCOM Rapid Delivery Team and everyone involved in the launch of USMIRS I.I. This issue of *Messenger* is filled with stories about USMIRS I.I and the team effort it took to make this initiative successful.

Our march towards innovation and modernization is not complete. Medical modernization will be the command's focus of main effort over the next 18-24 months. Gaining access to authoritative health information and deployment of Military Health System GENESIS are the next components for the command to reach its paperless processing goal by 2025. Moreover, these systems will change our processes, policies, and mindsets as we continue to deliver best-in-class support to the accession enterprise.

Nearly two years ago, I took command of USMEPCOM. At that time, I stated in my commander's philosophy, "What we do will not change. How we do it can and must change." I am proud to say that as a military community, whether working on the front lines at MEPS, in USMEPCOM headquarters, in the Battalions or Sectors, your contribution to the fight is valuable in every modernization initiative we launch.

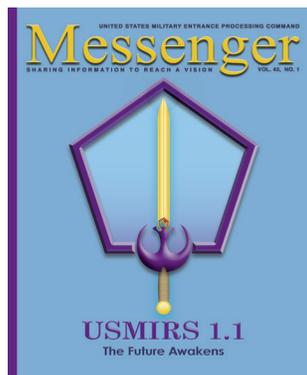
The past year was a "year of agility and resiliency." You have risen to every challenge put forth. Thank you for your dedication and unwavering commitment to maintaining the quality of the all-volunteer force and the United States of America's security.

Richard T. Brady
Colonel, USMC
Commander

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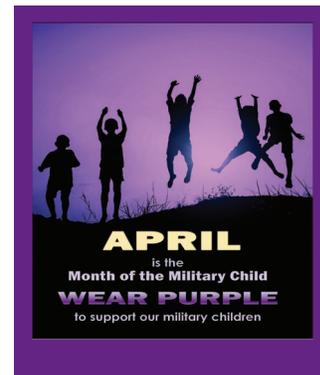
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Design by
Amy Gregorski



Back Cover:
April is Month of the Military Child.

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USMEPCOM
HOMEPAGE



Messenger
Digital Edition



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is what you're capable of doing

MOTIVATION

determines what you do

ATTITUDE

determines how well you



USMEPCOM launches USMIRS 1.1

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

For the first time in 25 years, USMEPCOM has a new processing system.

The USMEPCOM Integrated Resource System 1.1, a cloud-based system that represents a major technological leap for the military accession enterprise, debuted at 65 MEPS across the U.S. on Feb. 11.

“MIRS 1.1 brings us not only to the here and now but also prepares us for the future,” said Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, commander of USMEPCOM. “I am extremely proud of the vision and the dedication of the entire USMEPCOM team who worked so hard to make this happen.”

USMIRS was exclusively housed on local servers and lacked mouse functionality. The new system utilizes cloud and other modern technologies to improve data exchanges with external databases and sets the foundation for achieving paperless process-

ing in the future. Its user interface is intuitive, the infrastructure meets or exceeds security standards, and the coding can be easily modified to meet the accession community’s future needs and requirements, USMEPCOM Rapid Delivery Team director Matt Lince said.

“USMIRS 1.1 is a technological leap forward and it will revolutionize how we do business,” Brady said.

Installation expedited

The installation of USMIRS 1.1 was expedited when USMEPCOM decided to roll out the system to all 65 MEPS at once.

It marked the first time USMEPCOM launched a new processing system since 1996, when USMIRS 1.0 replaced System 80. More than 8 million applicants were processed through USMIRS 1.0.

“It’s a great system that’s done great things for 20-plus years, but we’ve always known that we’ve

needed to upgrade and modernize it,” Lince said of USMIRS 1.0.

Prior to the development of the new system, USMIRS 1.0 was going to be replaced by the Virtual Interactive Processing System.

“VIPS was a five year project that was going to put out a completed, fully formed, fully mature system that had everything you wanted,” Lince said. “Everything is done and there’s nothing more to do than just maintain it.”

Streamlined process

The screening of applicants includes processing data from written tests, medical screening and background checks. Lince said USMIRS 1.1 will streamline the process, which also consists of storing data securely and, when required, sharing it with external entities.

USMIRS 1.1 was designed to emulate commercial online shopping experiences and social media platforms instead of outdated data entry systems that rely on function keys and special characters.

The RDT formed in late summer 2019 and played a crucial role in the development of USMIRS 1.1.

“After standing up just 18 months ago, our RDT has built both the front-end user interface and the back-end system and integrations in a cloud-based environment using the agile development methodology which not only brings us to the present but also prepares us for the future,” Brady said.

Brady said the RDT faced “contracting, cyber, manpower, firewall, funding network, bureaucratic and global pandemic challenges.”

Project faced skepticism

The cancellation of the VIPS project triggered doubts about USMEPCOM’s ability to pull off a massive project like USMIRS 1.1.

“Some people thought USMEPCOM didn’t have the program management skills to do this,” Brady said. “We didn’t have a good track record, either, with the failed VIPS program about 10 to 15 years ago. There were people outside and inside the organization that felt we couldn’t do this and needed somebody outside the organization to do this.”

“A lot of people said, ‘Hey, we have COVID going on right now. Is this the right time to be doing something like this? Should we wait until COVID passes and come back at it?’” Brady said.

The RDT received a three-month extension on the planned Dec. 31, 2020, launch due to the coronavirus and beat the new deadline by 45 days. Lince said the Feb. 11 launch provided redemption after VIPS fell short.

“That failed project to modernize MIRS has kind of been hanging around for a while,” Lince said of VIPS. “To finally get over this hump and get it done feels really good for a lot of people.”

‘Change of mindsets and culture’

Brady credited a “change of mindsets and culture” for the successful development of USMIRS 1.1.

“That’s the No. 1 milestone for the project and the launch is No. 2,” Brady said. “It was the command embracing the agile technology development methodology. It was the command embracing continuous improvement and collaboration tools.”

Brady said Feb. 11 was an ideal time to launch USMIRS 1.1 because of lower projections. The MEPS have between 2,000 and 3,000 projections on a typical Thursday in February, with the number falling to 1,500-1,600 on the Thursday before Presidents Day.

“The recruiting partners just kind of naturally start backing off before a holiday weekend, so we wanted to take advantage of that,” he said.

‘Watershed event’

Brady called the launch “a watershed event for this command – not just from a technological perspective but from an emotional perspective.”



TOP LEFT: Col. Richard T. Brady speaks with Milwaukee MEPS commander Army Maj. Jasmine S. Jallah on Feb. 11 during the launch of USMIRS 1.1.

ABOVE: Staff Sgt. Cloud, Tampa MEPS HR NCO, reconciles applicant check-ins in USMIRS 1.1 on Feb. 11.



Col. Brady visits with Chicago MEPS employees on Feb. 11 during his visit to view the implementation of USMIRS 1.1 application.

“I’m just really proud that I was able to be a part of it and see it happen because it sets the foundation where the command goes in the future,” Brady said. “I’m so tremendously proud of the RDT and everyone involved.”

The \$25 million USMIRS 1.1 project took about four years to build and was assisted by four vendors on three contracts. It was the main focus of the 55-member RDT, which formed in 2019 and consisted of military members, civilians and contractors.

While the system’s launch was the culmination of a four-year process, USMPECOM’s accomplishments during the USMIRS 1.1 development cycle didn’t go unnoticed.

The Headquarters Information Technology Directorate (J6) team earned a 2018 Department of Defense Chief Information Officer Annual Award for Cyber and Information Technology Defense. It received honorable mention in the team category for “delivering dramatic improvement in the command’s cybersecurity posture, enhanced protection of personally identifiable information, end-to-end data encryption, and exchange of electronic documents with recruiting services,” the DoD said.

Features to be added on regular basis

USMIRS 1.1 was created as a minimal viable product and described by Lince as a “clean house containing the bare basics of what you need in order to get it out of the door and working.”

“An MVP doesn’t have power windows,” he said. “It doesn’t have a sunroof and it doesn’t have heated seats. It’s got just the basics.”

Unlike a basic new vehicle, features will be added to USMIRS 1.1 on a regular basis.

“We’ve told the services, partners and our users, ‘Hey, what you’re going to get is the first draft. It’s not the finished product, but what will happen every two weeks after that is going to be a little bit better and a little bit more with added features,’” Lince said. “After a year or so, their reaction will be, ‘Wow,’ but at first it’s going to be barebones and basic. The (MVP) is frequently used in the private sector, but it’s very different in the federal government to do it that way.”

Lince lauded the versatility and potential of USMIRS 1.1.

“With the old MIRS, you couldn’t improve it anymore,” he said. “It had hit its ceiling in terms of technology. You could keep it going, but that’s about it. With the new MIRS, you can add on and do all kinds of stuff.”

Program prepares MEPS for new system

More than 3,000 MEPS employees and recruiting personnel participated in a pre-launch USMIRS 1.1 upskilling program, which included instructor-led webinars, on-demand videos uploaded to mil-Suite, and computer-based and self-paced training sessions. The webinars featured real-time interac-



FROM FRONT TO BACK: Jay Kippen, Brad Chaffee, 1st. Lt. Eric Hamilton and Capt. Esselyn Mendez confirm the functionality of USMIRS 1.1 at Syracuse MEPS prior to processing a group of shippers.

tion, hands-on practice and facilitators from USMEPCOM, sectors and MEPS.

Some of the workers noted missing features, but praised the system's user-friendliness and modern design.

"One of the main reactions was, 'Wow, this is incredibly easy to use. I feel like I'm shopping on Amazon,'" Lince said. "That's what we wanted because (USMIRS 1.0) was developed using late '80s, early '90s technology. It's very, very different than what any of us use today in most apps and websites."

Lince said the system's learning curve for new MEPS employees won't be nearly as steep as USMIRS 1.0.

"If you've been in the MEPS for less than a year, you'd love this thing because you've been pounding your head trying to memorize all the special codes and fonts," he said. "You'd have to have a guidebook and a big, thick user book to learn the old system. When you look at USMIRS 1.1., you say, 'Wow, I can learn this in a day or two instead of six to eight months.'"

That might not be the case right away for long-time MEPS workers.

"If you're someone who's been there for 20-plus years, you became comfortable and familiar with the old system," Lince said. "You know how to use it and what it does, so the new system is a radical change for you. I think, over time, it will be a good change for them, though."

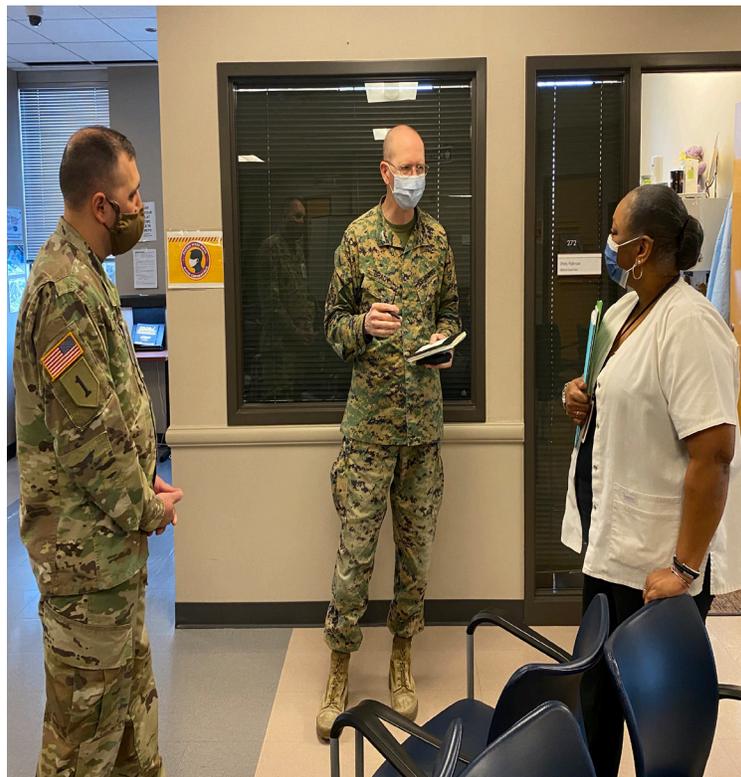
Long-term outlook

It could be another 25 years or more before USMEPCOM replaces USMIRS 1.1, Lince said.

"We kind of approached 1.1 as if it's never done. It will always be fresh and always be renewed. If it does happen where it gets completely replaced, it should be a long, long time from now," Lince said.

Brady agreed with Lince.

"I really think MIRS 1.1 will be the core system certainly for a couple of decades if not 25 years or longer," Brady said. "I can't underestimate the significance of legacy MIRS to USMEPCOM. If you had told someone early in the '90s that they were going to develop a system that was going to be around 2¹/₂ decades or longer, people would've thought you were crazy. It's been a workhorse for us and has served the accession community very well, but it's time for us to move on and MIRS 1.1 is that system." ■



Col. Brady visits Chicago MEPS Feb. 11 for the deployment of USMIRS 1.1. USMIRS 1.1 replaced MIRS 1.0 after 26 years of use at MEPS.



Patricia McNeil, Tampa MEPS HRA, fingerprints an applicant for the first time using the new EFC on Feb. 11.

Milwaukee MEPS played critical role

Early USMIRS 1.1 demonstrations assisted in success of widespread launch



Milwaukee MEPS successfully conducted deployment of USMIRS 1.1. The event was attended by the USMEPCOM Command Team, USMEPCOM staff and Eastern Sector personnel.

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

USMIRS 1.1 debuted in Milwaukee and 64 other MEPS on Feb. 11, nearly 34 months after the Department of Defense marked a major milestone with the demonstration of USMEPCOM’s first new processing system in 25 years at Milwaukee MEPS on April 10, 2018.

As a result of the demonstration, Milwaukee MEPS played an instrumental role for the birth of USMIRS 1.1, a cloud-based system that represents a major technological leap for the military accession enterprise.

“A lot of the initial input USMEPCOM received about USMIRS 1.1 was from Milwaukee MEPS, so that was a plus,” Milwaukee MEPS lead human resources assistant Frank Schwartz said. “We were lucky enough to be one of the places the new system was tested and that worked out good for us.”

As a 34-year Milwaukee MEPS employee, Schwartz used System 80, USMIRS 1.0 and now USMIRS 1.1. Ditto for lead health technician Linda

“It’s been a long time coming, I was looking forward to this change and I’m glad they’re doing it.”

-Frank Schwartz said of USMIRS 1.1.

Jacobson, who started working at Milwaukee MEPS in 1994.

2018 demonstration

Schwartz and Jacobson were among the long-time Milwaukee MEPS workers in attendance when a Defense Digital Service-led team demonstrated USMIRS 1.1 three years ago. The event enabled Air Force liaisons and MEPS personnel to see firsthand the ease of use an operator could expect of the interface software in recording aptitude, medical and processing information.

The other attendees included Department of Defense Director of Accession Policy Stephanie Miller, Navy Capt. David Kemp, then-commander of USMEPCOM, and Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, current commander of USMEPCOM.

“That was my first real introduction to MIRS 1.1,” Brady said. “It was kind of the front end, stripped-down version of the system. We processed an Air Force applicant to basically kind of prove that this technology would work with a single applicant.

“Then we sat down and talked about where to go

in the future.”

From there, Brady said the “customer viewpoint, business processes and ecosystem all kind of came together for USMIRS 1.1.”

“The most important thing to me is customer viewpoint and what I saw in Milwaukee in 2018 is the users quickly pick up on it,” he said.

The demonstration moved the command closer to the goal of paperless enlistment processing, an objective that came to fruition Feb. 11.

Brainstorming sessions

In the few years leading up to the launch of USMIRS 1.1, system developers traveled to Milwaukee MEPS on a weekly basis before the coronavirus hit the U.S. The visits included brainstorming sessions focusing on potential errors and how the new system would benefit MEPS staff and liaisons.

“Milwaukee was kind of like ground zero for what the new system looks like today,” said Army Maj. Jasmine Jallah, Milwaukee MEPS commander. “It was just a really great thing when they were coming up here.”

USMEPCOM staff was also on hand at Milwaukee MEPS for the launch of the new system. Jaime Clayton, USMEPCOM enlistment testing program manager, and John Butler, USMEPCOM operations officer, assisted MEPS staff as 29 military recruits were processed.

Clayton and Butler were later joined by Brady, who traveled to Milwaukee for an afternoon visit after spending the morning at Chicago MEPS.

“My intent was to observe and get a sense of the mood on the ground,” Brady said.

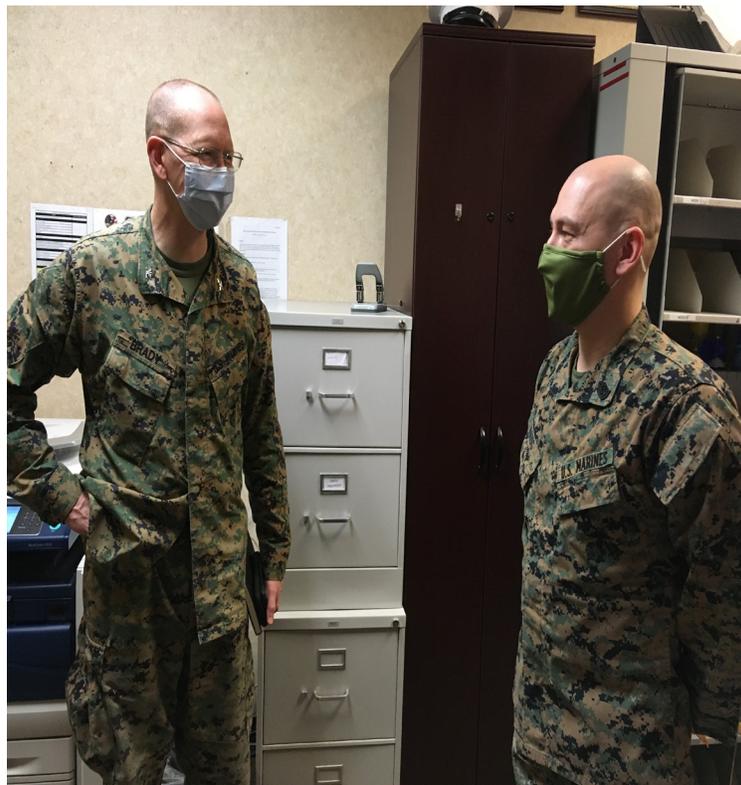
Like just about any computer system launch, the debut of USMIRS 1.1 wasn’t flawless.

“It’s not like we’re reinventing the wheel, but a new computer system is a new computer system,” Jacobson said. “It helps that we have a lot of workers who have been here a lot of years.”

Upskilling sessions pay off

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Samantha Loris, a Milwaukee MEPS health technician, said upskilling sessions held by USMEPCOM helped prepare staff for the launch.

“We had great turnaround from when we requested info and received it,” she said. “It’s been easier because we’ve been exposed to it. We’ve seen these screens before and know where to go.



Col. Richard Brady visits with fellow marine Gunnery Sgt. Justin Haug on Feb. 11 at Milwaukee MEPS. Senior leadership visited with Milwaukee MEPS staff and were able to see the launch of USMIRS 1.1 software firsthand.

“With my staff here, I wouldn’t want to be at a different MEPS with this rollout. I definitely rely on them a lot. I love my staff.”

Loris noted some of the upgrades USMIRS 1.1 offered.

“When you initially open applicants for a file, you see everything,” she said. “I can see the test score and don’t have to look in a record for it. Everything is on the page for you and you know everything right off the bat about it.”

USMIRS 1.1 was launched as a minimal viable product, meaning it debuted without the bells and whistles of a fully developed system and will be improved on a regular basis.

USMEPCOM workers visit MEPS

In addition to Milwaukee, USMEPCOM sent command teams to MEPS in San Juan, Puerto Rico; San Antonio; Memphis, Tennessee; Boston; and St. Louis for the system launch.

“Some MEPS had more challenges than others, but when you put everything together, it was much more positive than negative,” Brady said of the launch. “It became very clear within about three or four hours that the launch had been successful.”

That was the case for the Milwaukee MEPS, which successfully completed its processing mission Feb. 11.

“I’ve been hearing about USMIRS 1.1 from the second I took command at Milwaukee MEPS,” Jallah said. “To be here when it actually launched and to see what’s been talked about for so many years manifest in a way in which we’re using it is really cool. I’m fortunate to be here to see it go live.”

Bright future

The potential of USMIRS 1.1 has test control officer Elizabeth Scozzafave excited about the future, especially since it replaced a 25-year-old system.

“It provides us hope that we’re actually progressing into current technology because the old MIRS was functional, but there was certainly room for improvement,” said Scozzafave. “Getting anything fixed on the old MIRS was incredibly difficult. Now, in theory, if there’s a glitch they can fix it instead of having to manually do things, so it’s kind of nice.”

As a longtime Milwaukee MEPS medical technician, Helen Smith has been through the installation of two new processing systems -- USMIRS 1.1 and its predecessor.

“Us older employees will probably find 1.1 more difficult because we’re used to doing it the old way,” Smith said. “It’s different, but I think we’ll be fine. It’s definitely going to be easier for new employees to understand what to do just by looking at it.”

Launch day was business as usual for Smith, who said she wasn’t worried about transitioning to a new system.

“There was a lot of buzzing going on because of the change, but I’ve been here long enough where I wasn’t going to worry about it until it gets here,” she said. “We tried to mentally prepare ourselves by reading handouts sent to us. I knew there might be a glitch here or there, but there would be people to help us try to figure it out.

“The system is quite easy to pick up.”

Brady also touted the system’s user-friendliness. “It’s not a system you need two weeks of training on,” he said. “It’s intuitive and, almost immediately, employees raved about it and said, ‘Oh my gosh, this is so much easier than what we’re using right now. I can’t wait until you build this out and we see more.’” ■

USMIRS 1.0
1996-2021



By Susan VanBoening
Messenger Editor

USMIRS 1.0 internal hard drive, age 24, formerly of MEPS locations throughout the United States, found eternal peace on Feb. 19, 2021, inside the shredder on the first floor of USMEPCOM in North Chicago, Ill.

No funeral services will be held. Burial will be in a landfill somewhere in rural Illinois.

USMIRS 1.0 came to life at MEPS in 1996. Other notable events of 1996 include: The premiere of the movies *Twister*, *Scream*, *Independence Day* and Oscar-winning film *Braveheart*. Hotmail began its free email service and Microsoft released Internet 3.0 on Aug. 13, 1996. Kobe Bryant became the youngest (at the time) player to make an NBA debut after he signed a three-year \$3.5 million rookie contract. The first person to stream their life on the internet was a 19-year-old woman, who at her peak got 7 million hits per day, a significant proportion of the internet at the time. Rapper Tupac Shakur and American pageant princess Jon-Benet Ramsey were both murdered in 1996.

Things many wished 1996 would have never given us: The Macarena dance. Tickle Me Elmo. The Spice Girls.

USMIRS. 1.0 is survived by USMIRS 1.1 and is preceded in death by System 80.

In lieu of flowers, USMEPCOM requests a big sigh of relief as they usher in USMIRS 1.1. ■

Honoring Women's History Month



Courtesy photos: Shreveport MEPS Women's History Month display.



By Susan VanBoening
Messenger Editor

This spring, Shreveport MEPS had a unique feature in its main lobby and applicant's waiting area.

March 1 marked the start of Women's History Month. Leadership at Shreveport MEPS is known to take special steps in recognizing cultural observances and awareness events. Not just Women's History Month but also Native American History Month, Black History Month and National Hispanic Heritage Month.

"We've been doing the displays for a few years now, and every year they seem to grow just a little bigger," Shreveport MEPS commander Army Maj. Joy Crowder said. "MEPS staff have grown accustomed to seeing the displays and they're proud of our commitment to recognition."

While Crowder considers each monthly observance as unique in its own right, she feels particularly proud of women's contributions throughout history.

Crowder is happy to see Shreveport MEPS take the initiative to recognize those contributions women have directly made in our armed forces.

"We're the boots on the ground (at Shreveport MEPS) and women here grind through, then they go home," she said.

"But I do see the women working at MEPS who have served, and as they pass the display, they do take the time to talk about or show their photos or memorabilia of their service, they say, 'Hey I'm a female, and I do contribute to the mission.'"

Today, over 200,000 women serve on active duty in the U.S. military. Women's History Month has not always been an annual event. This yearly observance began in 1981 when Congress passed legislation recognizing women's vital role in history. President Ronald Reagan originally asked for a one-week observance starting March 7, 1982. By 1987, Reagan asked the American public to make the observance a monthlong event.

Crowder says that even though she's personally proud of Shreveport MEPS's effort to create the displays throughout the year, Women's History Month is one of her favorites.

"Every day, we wake up and we hustle just like the men." ■

After battling COVID, Dallas medical technician makes vaccination decision

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

For Dallas MEPS medical technician Claudia Cavazos, the decision to receive a coronavirus vaccination was a no-brainer.

Cavazos missed 2½ months of work after contracting the coronavirus in June.

“I’m a pretty healthy person, but I had to go to the hospital because I couldn’t breathe,” she said.

The after-effects of Cavazos’ coronavirus included a severe upper respiratory infection that caused persistent coughing. She returned to work in September and didn’t think twice when she had the opportunity to sign up for a vaccination.

“Actually, I was kind of excited to get the shot,” she said. “Some of my co-workers were like, ‘You’re crazy. You’re excited? What if you get sick?’ I told them, ‘No, I have confidence and faith that I’ll be good.’”

Cavazos drove 2½ hours to Fort Hood’s Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center for her coronavirus shot Dec. 23, nine days after vaccinations rolled out across the U.S.

The shots were made available for MEPS medical personnel as part of the Department of Defense’s phased vaccination plan.

Dr. Susan Moore, Jacksonville MEPS chief medical officer, received her first vaccination Dec. 21 and her second in January.

“I was glad I was able to get it early,” said Moore, who reported no side effects from the vaccinations. “One of the reasons I jumped in to get it is because I feel like it’s my civic duty to do so. Not only am I protecting myself, but I’m helping protect my co-workers and trying to protect everybody else. If I don’t get COVID, then I can’t pass it to somebody else who could potentially have a bad outcome from it.”

Similar to Cavazos, Moore said she “had no reservations whatsoever about being vaccinated.”

“My husband and I have a special needs daughter, so we have been very, very, very careful because we don’t want to bring anything home to her,” Moore said. “We’re very religious about wearing our

masks and washing and sanitizing.”

Moore felt it was also important to be vaccinated due to her role at Jacksonville MEPS.

“I specifically have to be very safe because we have so many applicants coming through,” she said. “We’re trying to make sure we’re following guidelines to prevent any spread between staff or applicants or putting anybody at risk.”

Safety was also at the core of Cavazos’ decision to be vaccinated. “In my heart, I feel I’m keeping myself safe,” she said. “My children are all grown up, but I’m keeping them safe if I see them. I’m keeping my coworkers safe.

“By no means am I going to preach to anybody to go get the vaccine because that’s completely on them. I’m very proud of myself, though, because, knock on wood, hopefully I’ll never get the coronavirus again.”

Cavazos, who returned to Fort Hood for her second vaccination January 13, said she felt fine the first time around.

“My arm was sore for a couple of days, just like regular shots when you’re a kid and get vaccinated for school,” she said. “I drove home after the vaccine and I was great. I didn’t have any other side effects.



Dallas MEPS medical technician Claudia Cavazos receives a coronavirus shot Dec. 23 at the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center

I feel great and I'm ready to get the second shot."

Cavazos received mixed reactions when she told friends and family members of being vaccinated.

"I said, 'Sure, give me the shot. I'll be the first one in line,' and others were like, 'Oh no, you're going to die or grow a third arm or something,'" she said. "A lot of people I know wondered how it felt and many asked, 'Well, how can I get the shot? Where can I go to get it?'"

"In my heart, I feel I'm keeping myself safe"

- Claudia Cavazos

As a health care worker who was vaccinated before most Americans, Moore said she's "had just a lot of people who are really jealous I've already gotten the vaccine because they're wanting it to get it themselves and having to wait."

Moore is hopeful MEPS personnel will sign up for vaccinations.

"I strongly encourage people to really consider getting it, especially because we're working with applicants," she said. "If we're able to get the vaccine, that helps protect the population of applicants that we're dealing with that are then going into the military and working to protect our future. So I think it's very important we take that into consideration as far as trying to get the vaccine goes."

Moore advised people apprehensive about receiving the vaccination to seek guidance from their doctors.

"People who have other medical conditions really do need to talk to their doctor just to make sure it's safe for them to take the vaccine," she said. "If somebody doesn't have health conditions but are on the fence, either talking to someone who's had the vaccine or going and seeing their doctor is the way to go. Discussing their fears and concerns with their doctor and getting valid science-based answers is really the way to go."

Cavazos urged others to sign up for vaccinations.

"I realize people are apprehensive, but I feel like

everybody should get it," she said. "There's so many more things in life to worry about and get sick off of other than the vaccine.

"People want the cities and states to open back up and want things to go back to normal. I feel like nothing is going back to normal if everybody doesn't get vaccinated. Get vaccinated and we can all go back to normal."

Moore noted "it's probably going to be mid-to-late summer before the general population is vaccinated."

"I wish we could say we're turning the corner, but the numbers say otherwise," she said of the pandemic. "Unfortunately, I think we have a number of months to go before we can start looking and saying we're out of the woods." ■

For more information visit:



The resource **vaccines.gov** offers reliable information from the federal government on vaccines, immunizations, and vaccine-preventable diseases.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™



Visit **cdc.gov** for clinical resources for each COVID-19 vaccine.
Find information for COVID-19 vaccination administration, storage and handling, reporting, and patient education for each specific vaccine.

MEPS commander firsthand account of COVID-19 vaccination

**By Lt. Cmdr. Luke Freeman
Commanding Officer**

Amarillo MEPS

Being separated from our closest military medical treatment facility by 112 miles, 1st. Sgt. Morrison and I made it a priority to explore local options for receiving the COVID vaccine. Touted as one of the most efficient vaccination clinics in the country, we decided to explore whether the Amarillo Civic Center would support vaccinating all of our personnel.

While many employees and military members responded they were willing to get vaccinated, many seemed hesitant. Morrison and I felt we needed to lead from the front and show our people it is safe to get vaccinated.

Upon arriving at the Civic Center, we were immediately welcomed by firemen from the Amarillo Fire Department. They were extremely supportive of our effort and stated they were willing and ready to vaccinate all of our personnel.

After a few minutes of filling out screening forms, Morrison and I were administered the Moderna vaccine in a very safe and professional manner. The shot was painless and after a 15- minute wait, we immediately returned to work without issue.

The Civic Center vaccination clinic truly lived up to the hype and was an extremely well-run and efficient operation.



Lt. Cmdr. Luke Freeman receives his first dose of the Moderna vaccine at Amarillo Civic Center on Jan. 26, 2021.

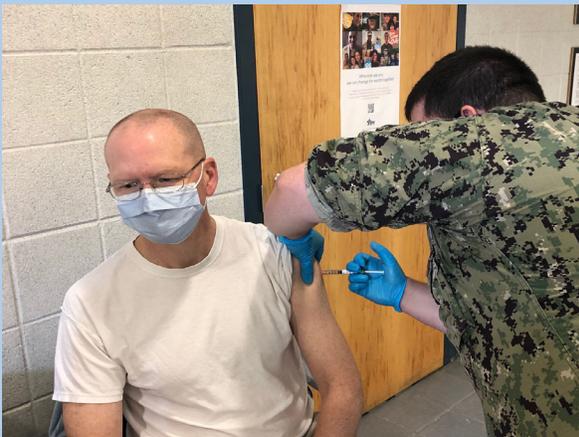
The only side effects we experienced in the 24 hours following the vaccine were slight pain at the injection site and a brief experience of minor fatigue and chills, none of which prevented us from working.

After we communicated our experience to the team, we saw an immediate, significant uptick in vaccinations of our personnel.

Overall, the experience was pleasant and well worth the effort to increase the number of vaccinated personnel within Amarillo MEPS.

In the coming weeks, many of us will receive our second dose and we'll continue to encourage everyone to get vaccinated in our effort to achieve a 100% vaccination rate. ■

Leading by example



USMEPCOM commander Col. Richard T. Brady receives his coronavirus vaccine.



Western Sector Medical Officer Dr. Colleen Murphy gets her coronavirus vaccine.

USMEPCOM changes fitness program

USMEPCOM Health Promotion Program



By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

The civilian fitness program has expanded at USMEPCOM.

The voluntary program now allows full-time Department of the Army civilian employees to receive up to three hours of administrative leave per week, with no more than an hour per day, to participate in physical fitness activities and preventative health events.

“We at USMEPCOM care about all our employees’ health and wellbeing, and this updated policy puts that care into action, providing our people opportunity to build up their health and resiliency,” said Jo Anne Cunningham, USMEPCOM deputy commander and chief of staff. “Of course, mission comes first, but I hope personnel across the command will make good use of this program.”

Prior to April 5, the program limited employee participation to six months but can now be used indefinitely.

“The other major change is a medical certificate from a doctor isn’t needed, but participants are required to certify they aren’t aware of any medical condition that could put them at risk or harm while participating in the program,” USMEPCOM wellness and readiness program specialist Mischelle Magmanlac said.

The program is outlined in Chapter 7 of USMEPCOM Regulation 608-1. It closely aligns with the

Army Civilian Fitness and Health Promotion program, which superseded Army Regulation 600-63 for health promotion when it was released in January.

Under the USMEPCOM program, physical fitness activities must be specifically targeted at improving fitness levels or body conditioning.

“An hour of fitness can really invigorate a person emotionally and physically, especially during the pandemic,” said Magmanlac, who added the program is also open to teleworkers.

Program participants can also learn about health promotion topics such as nutrition and exercise principles. Other subject areas include smoking cessation, substance abuse, diet and nutrition, exercise, back care, cholesterol management, mental health, stress management, weight control, cancer prevention and hypertension control.

“The program emphasizes education and preventive measures, not pre-existing conditions,” Magmanlac said.

The goal of this program is to establish and sustain a climate that promotes and reinforces health and wellness. It also seeks to raise awareness of programs that support a holistic approach to wellness and identify innovative ways to provide opportunities for civilian employees to participate in command-sponsored physical fitness events, evaluations and education.

Supervisors are encouraged to support program participation by promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors, facilitating employee enrollment, monitoring and tracking employee participation, and discussing fitness and wellness as part of daily communication with employees.

Magmanlac expects the program’s expansion to spark an increase in participants.

“Not only people at headquarters, but people at MEPS are so excited about this,” she said. “I think we’re going to have a lot of support on this one and a lot of employees will take advantage of the program’s benefits, especially if the supervisors really emphasize the importance.”

For more information about the program, contact Magmanlac at mischelle.m.magmanlac.civ@mail.mil. ■



USMEPCOM Workforce Development

IDP Workshops

An individual development plan (IDP) is a tool to assist employees in career and personal development. Its primary purpose is to help employees reach short and long-term career goals, as well as improve current job performance. An IDP is not a performance evaluation tool or a one-time activity. It should be looked at like a partnership between the employee and the supervisor. It involves preparation and continuous feedback.

DATES:

- April 15 & 29
- May 13 & 27
- June 10 & 24
- July 8 & 22

LOCATION DCS **TIME** 10:00 a.m. & 1:30 p.m. CST **CONTACT** Reinaldo Rosado reinaldo.rosado.civ@mail.mil
847-688-3680 ext. 7154

Employee Education and Engagement

April 27 Critical Thinking

June 3 Conflict Management

July 1 Stress Management

May 6 Communication & Leading Across Generational Barriers

June 17 Emotional Intelligence

CONTACT Patrick Cusi patrick.r.cusi.civ@mail.mil
847-688-3680 ext. 7844

LOCATION HQ Auditorium & DCS **TIME** 11:00 a.m. & 2:00 p.m. CST

**Please note that events are subject to change*

Mentorship Programs

Consider joining the USMEPCOM Mentorship Program. There are currently 83 participants in this program and placement is ongoing. Welcoming new mentors or mentees year-round.

⇒ **71%** of people with a mentor say their company provides them with opportunities to advance their career.

⇒ **87%** of mentors and mentees feel empowered by their mentoring relationships and develop greater confidence.

CONTACT Leti Ramirez leticia.m.ramirez.civ@mail.mil 847-688-3680 ext. 7156

Thank You 2020 Presenters

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Col. Richard T. Brady | Ms. Sara Crow |
| Mayor Lawrence Wallace Jr. | Ms. Kacey Gibson |
| Ms. Sherrell Reed Master | Sgt Maurice Ingram |
| Maj. Rockie Ventura | Ms. Michele Sayre |
| Ms. Florence Wells | Mr. Patrick Cusi |

DID YOU KNOW?  is changing!

Microsoft Teams is here to stay. **HOWEVER** beginning in June, Teams will be hosted on a new cloud based platform.

For more information contact:
Dainis Kiusals, J-6/ MEIT
(847)688-3680 ext. 7283

Leadership holds town hall



Col. Richard T. Brady



Col. Nick Wittwer



Col. Arthur Cajigal



William Reinhart

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger Editor

On April 1, USMEPCOM leadership conducted a virtual town hall to address new and occurring issues that impact MEPS locations.

A year into the pandemic, COVID-19 was still the focus of the conversation.

“We all recognize the continued and increased strains these sustained operations are putting on our workforce,” said Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander.

“Federal guidelines are saying right now that it is not time to relax our COVID standards,” he said. “We need to continue to operate in our response matrix and follow our infection control workflow for the foreseeable future.”

The rising positivity rate around many MEPS locations was also of concern to leadership.

“43 of 67 MEPS locations are operating in areas of increasing COVID rates. We have to be prudent in the actions that we take over the next few months,” said Brady.

Army Col. Nick Wittwer, command advisory group chief, briefed attendees on recent CDC data.

“The U.S represents 4.2% of the world population but represents 23% of the cases in the world,” said Wittwer.

USMEPCOM compiles two weekly briefs to have a pulse on the situation. Wittwer said these briefs are helpful to monitor COVID’s impact on the MEPS community. In recent weeks data has shown upward trends, which pose more challenges.

“We can see that everything has been ramping up quite a bit,” he said. “That presents an increasing problem for all of us. We have to have an increased

vigilance.”

The USMEPCOM COVID-19 medical vaccination program has been instrumental in battling the pandemic within the MEPS community. Command Surgeon Army Col. Arthur Cajigal gave an update on the vaccination response state.

“As of March 31, we have a 67% opt-in rate which is pretty darn good,” said Cajigal. “The vaccination is completely voluntary. Individuals have to decide based on the benefits and risks to themselves.”

William Reinhart, director of J-3/5/7, thanked everyone for taking the necessary steps to balance risk against mission accomplishment.

“OSD is not ready to relax anything yet,” said Reinhart. “We are constantly looking at the data, looking at any decisions to modify what we are currently operating in terms of existing measures that are in place.”

Brady closed the town hall with great appreciation of the MEPCOM community’s response over the last 12 months.

“The men and women who make up USMEPCOM continued to work when others did not,” he said. “They continued to work through fear, anxiety, and emotion and acted with professionalism, integrity and respect to ensure military readiness.”

“People are going to look back through history. You will remember where you were and how you responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. You will be considered amongst the heroes that responded and rose to the challenge during this pandemic,” said Brady.

The next town hall meeting is slated for late June. ■

Rapid Delivery Team leads USMIRS 1.1 rollout

Collaboration and preparation make launch day a success

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

From happiness to relief to tears of joy, the Feb. 11 launch of USMIRS 1.1 brought out a wide range of emotions from the team behind USMEPCOM’s first new processing system in 25 years.

“This has been an effort that had gone back four years and I have tremendous pride in the team,” said Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander. “It was an intense effort, especially over the past 21 months. To see the collective team, the Rapid Delivery Team and USMEPCOM as a whole achieve this accomplishment is probably for me the No. 1 thing that came out of it.”

Army Lt. Col. Brian Wire, RDT deputy, described the launch as liberating and emotional.

“I had some pretty late nights of work running up to it,” he said. “I got home at 9 the night after the system launched, sat on the couch and just started crying. My wife looked over and asked, ‘Are you crying? I’ve been married to you for 11 years and never saw you cry.’ I said, ‘Yeah I’m crying.’”

‘Emotional rollercoaster’

While some workers traveled to MEPS across the U.S. for the launch, RDT director Matt Lince and Wire remained in North Chicago to oversee a third-floor USMEPCOM office space that was transformed into a war room.

Due to the coronavirus, the war room was staffed by a combination of USMEPCOM employees working on site and teleworkers. Their mission was the same, though: answer USMIRS 1.1 questions from MEPS workers and develop bug fixes to ensure a smooth launch.

The system’s launch followed 20 months of intense prep work for Wire.

“It’s been an emotional rollercoaster and it was great to see it launch successfully,” he said. “It was invigorating and it felt awesome.”

War room proves successful

War room members were available to answer

questions by phone and Microsoft Teams from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on launch day. Moderators directed questions to subject matter experts from USMEPCOM’s medical, testing and operations divisions.

“The war room was very successful and led to assurance, credibility and trust,” Wire said. “We knew the system would have some bumps and bruises and, sure enough, we did, but getting back immediate confirmations about fixes and issues to MEPS staff and guidance counselors proved to be very valuable to us.”

Meanwhile, management and program analyst Dawn Yoshii and management analyst Lloyd McKinney, both of the USMEPCOM Operations Directorate, spent launch day at San Juan MEPS. With Puerto Rico an hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time, the San Juan MEPS was the first to process applicants with USMIRS 1.1.

“They were very excited about not only being the first ones, but because the focus was on them,” said Yoshii, a 32-year USMEPCOM employee. “They were pretty happy and, when we left, all the staff was there to thank us.”

After assisting San Juan MEPS staff for nine days, Yoshii and McKinney returned to North Chicago to assist the war room.



Lt. Col. Brian Wire, RDT deputy, works Feb. 11 on the launch of USMIRS 1.1.

“The war room was a great idea knowing we had a big bang-type deployment to all 65 MEPS,” said McKinney, who started at USMEPCOM in 2002 and spent the past four years working on USMIRS 1.1.

“In the beginning, 160 to 170 people worked in the war room (virtually and on site) at any given time answering questions from the MEPS. I think it made a whole lot of folks feel better about USMIRS 1.1 knowing they had immediate access to us.”

East Coast debut

An hour after going live in Puerto Rico, USMIRS 1.1 made its debut at MEPS on the East Coast. USMEPCOM acting deputy director of operations Kathryn Browning-Callen spent the historic day at New York MEPS, while Operations Directorate management analysts Ernest Benson and Julie Savage assisted the MEPS in Albany, New York, and Fort Jackson, respectively.

“It was hard to sleep the night before because you were wondering what was going to happen that day,” Benson said. “Albany MEPS came ready to play and the team rallied around to get everything out that day in a timely fashion. It was a jovial atmosphere and I didn’t hear any complaints.”

For Browning-Callen and other longtime USMEPCOM employees, the launch of USMIRS 1.1 was especially rewarding given the cancellation of the Virtual Interactive Processing System.

“When VIPS got canceled, we had to come up with a way forward to get us a new system because MIRS 1.0 was already dated,” said Browning-Callen, a 36-year USMEPCOM worker. “MIRS 1.0 did a great job, but we needed to evolve with current technology.”

Doubts erased

Benson, who also helped out in the war room, had doubts about USMIRS 1.1 after starting at USMEPCOM in October 2018.

“In the beginning, I wasn’t a believer,” he said. “But as time went on, you’re seeing what we saw as USMIRS 1.0 started to move to the side. The new system is so much easier and almost like using Amazon.”

Savage, the Eastern Sector processing chief, said initial apprehension by Fort Jackson MEPS staff was eased early on launch day.

“I taught a lot of services classes during upskilling,” said Savage, who started working at

RDT Spotlight



Ernest Benson, management analyst



Dawn Yoshii, management and program analyst



Jaime Clayton, enlistment testing program manager

USMEPCOM in 2016. “Fort Jackson was open to it, so it was easier to work with them. They really wanted it to work and the launch went well. They definitely took hold of it pretty quick.”

Midwest debut

USMEPCOM staff members were strategically located at MEPS across the U.S. on launch day. Among them were Jaime Clayton and Eastern Sector operations officer John Butler, who spent the day in Milwaukee.

“It was really great to actually see 1.1 come to life,” said Clayton, a 14-year USMEPCOM employee. “There was a lot of collaboration and teamwork between J-3/5/7 (Operations Directorate) and J-6 (Information Technology Directorate), and that’s what actually makes a process or change work.”

Clayton said she was “used as a conduit to the war room to find out solutions to problems.”

“If there’s any issues or concerns or they found something that didn’t work as intended, I was able to help them perform whatever function they needed to do,” she said. “It was fun and all the MEPS personnel worked really well together.”

Management analysts Jeremy Davis and Rosa Lopez-Washington, both of the Operations Directorate, were among the USMEPCOM employees working in the war room on launch day.

“The war room answered question after question and, in the background, developed new things on the spot,” Davis said. “I was extremely busy, but it was definitely rewarding to support the field processing applicants that day. It was amazing to be part of it.”



Kathryn Browning-Callen,
acting deputy director of operations

Teamwork on display

Davis said teamwork played a significant role in the war room’s success.

“It was really, really cool because the policy team, RDT, IT, medical and testing all came together to provide solutions to the field,” said Davis, who also assisted with USMIRS 1.1 upskilling and training. “It was a great day to see everyone come together, from the MEPS to the sectors to HQ.”

Davis, who started working at USMEPCOM four years ago, said his USMIRS 1.1 experience is one he won’t soon forget.

“It’s been amazing because I’ve never been part of implementing a new system before and USMIRS 1.1 has been talked about since I’ve been at MEPCOM,” he said. “To see it actually be successfully deployed was extremely fulfilling and, looking at USMIRS 1.0, it’s really amazing because there’s so much potential for 1.1. It provides the MEPS staff a way to better efficiently process applicants, provides the developers in IT an easier way to make changes and updates, and it provides us in policy a really nice way to develop future policies without some of the issues 1.0 had.”

System updated

As a minimal viable product, or MVP, USMIRS 1.1 launched without the bells and whistles of a fully developed system. That means features and bug fixes will be added on a regular basis.

“In the short term, we’re pushing out daily updates and versions of MIRS 1.1,” Brady said. “Each rollout upgrades and fixes problems.”

Indeed. The 1.291 launch day version of the cloud-based system was quickly followed by updates, with 1.30 released Feb. 12 and 1.31 unveiled Feb. 15.

“Once we get more stability, updates will be made every two weeks,” Brady said. “Systemic issues and cosmetic fixes will be addressed in the short term. Longer term, we’ll look at problems tougher to fix.”

War room activity eases

Lopez-Washington, who starting working at USMEPCOM in 2014, saw a decline in questions in the days and weeks following the launch.

“The war room has quieted down,” she said. “Now we’re getting questions about policy more than, ‘How do I do this?’”

“Kudos to everybody who has worked tirelessly and diligently and really proactively to bring this about,” Browning-Callen said. “Whether it’s identifying requirements, whether it’s identifying user needs, whether it’s doing research about what policies and processes need to be implemented by the system, whether it’s doing the training, whether it’s preparing MEPS for the changed management, there’s just a lot of pieces there and it’s exciting to see all that energy come to fruition.”

RDT leaves legacy of excellence

Wire said the USMEPCOM’s 55-member RDT, which formed in June 2019, could be used as a template for future computer systems.

“USMIRS 1.1 was their sole focus every single day until launch,” he said. “I think government should see what RDT has done and build those into organizations where the resources are available because it proved to be very successful.

“Matt Lince put together a winning team and every RDT staff member was a positive person. Even if we thought we were going to die on the hill, we would say, ‘We’re still going to win,’ and that’s important to any project.” ■

Other key USMEPCOM contributors to USMIRS 1.1

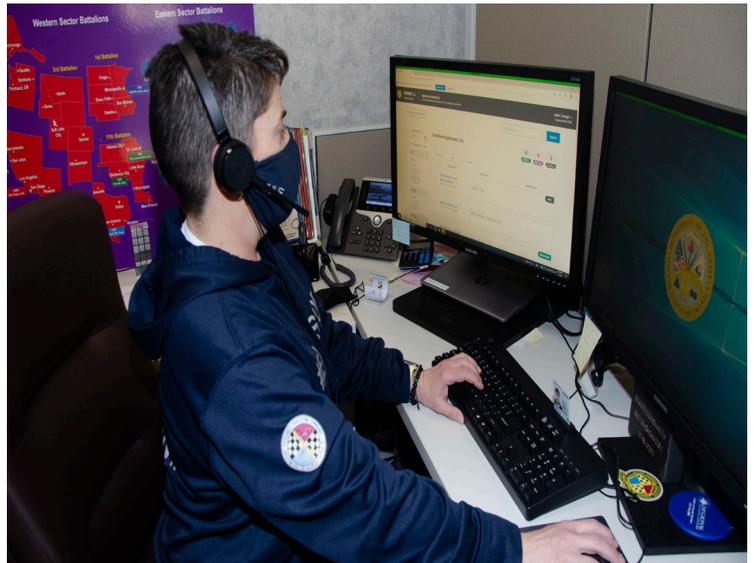
Michael Allen
Joshua Babicz
Tiffany Bivins
Billy Crook Jr.
James Engel
Maple Lee
Kenneth Malley
Matthew Mills
Yocelyn Moreno
Mary Morenz
Meghan Murray

Kelvin Rama
Jason Reatherford
Katherine Restko
Jennifer Reynolds
Jacob Rhodes
Gregory Savage
Michelle Sumwalt
Ashley Toomey
Eladio Valdez Jr.
Smitha Vasireddy
Shawn Wagner

RDT Spotlight



Lloyd McKinney, management analyst



Julie Savage, management analyst



Jeremy Davis, management analyst

Major general visit sparks fire in a push-up revenge mission



Maj. Gen. Neil Hersey and Senior Master Sgt. Edward Jones battle in a push-up rematch at Atlanta MEPS.

By Scott Koker
Messenger Associate Editor

Order has been restored at Atlanta MEPS as Senior Master Sgt. Edward J. Jones challenged and beat Army Maj. Gen. Neil S. Hersey in a push-up contest. Hersey is the commanding general of the Cyber Center of Excellence and Fort Gordan, Ga.

During Hersey’s previous visit, he abused Atlanta MEPS very own pull-up bar.

Since then, Senior Master Sgt. Jones dedicated himself to a training regime day and night which included weight training and mental preparation for the next face off with Hersey.

The new training mission required so much focus by Jones his desk and phone line were moved to the gym.

After weeks of intensive training, Atlanta MEPS is happy to report that the dedication paid off. In a one-minute push-up contest, Atlanta MEPS was victorious.

Although Hersey’s 78 push-ups in the 60-second battle was impressive, that was no match for an angry and revenge-seeking Jones, who did 91 push-ups in the same time. ■



Maj. Gen. Neil Hersey and Senior Master Sgt. Jones share a laugh after a push-up competition rematch.

Former MEPS commander crafts one-of-a-kind gifts

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

The office of Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, has a colorful addition thanks to Navy Lt. Cmdr. Daniel J. Walker.

Walker, the former commander of Oklahoma City MEPS, created a stained glass piece featuring the USMEPCOM logo. He presented the artwork to USMEPCOM Deputy Commander/Chief of Staff Jo Anne T. Cunningham during her Oklahoma City MEPS visit in September.

The stained glass was then mailed to USMEPCOM Headquarters in North Chicago and is now part of Brady's office décor. It's among five USMEPCOM pieces Walker created, including two for Shreveport MEPS and one apiece for Oklahoma City MEPS and himself.

"I figured I'd do one for USMEPCOM because it's a unique design," he said.

Walker's first USMEPCOM piece took about 24 hours to create. The process included tracing the design onto glass, cutting the glass and grinding its edges, foiling and soldering all of the pieces, and framing.

"The first one always takes longest because you have to figure out how you want to cut it and shape it," he said. "It's something that was relatively easy to do and I enjoyed doing it. After the first one or two, it started getting a little tedious, though."

Just about all of the 50 stained glass pieces Walker has created since 2014 took between 10 and 20 hours to complete. However, USMEPCOM's pentagon-shaped logo made his latest handiwork more difficult and time-consuming than usual.

"I cut myself a lot on the first design," he said.

"It's probably one of my more challenging pieces because normally I don't have anything with geometric shapes in it."

Walker initially became interested in the hobby through his grandmother, Hazel, and began creating his own pieces while stationed in her home state of Illinois at Great Lakes Naval Base.

"My grandmother has been doing it for more than 60 years," he said. "She usually makes her pieces for retirement and wedding gifts.

"She's still making stuff and we share pictures back and forth."

Walker's stained glass pieces include a mermaid, train, giraffe and butterfly for his three children. His USMEPCOM artwork continued a tradition he started about seven years ago.

"I like to make them as going-away gifts for supervisors," said Walker, who finished his duties as Oklahoma City MEPS commander Nov. 19, 2020 and is now a Navy-Marine Corps element branch chief at United States Transportation Command in Belleville, Illinois. ■



LEFT: Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, and USMEPCOM Deputy Commander/Chief of Staff Jo Anne T. Cunningham hold a stained glass piece created by Navy Lt. Cmdr. Daniel J. Walker, Oklahoma City MEPS commander. **ABOVE:** Walker presents a handcrafted Eagle, Globe and Anchor stained glass gift.

Miss Wyoming enlists in National Guard

By Scott Koker

Messenger Associate Editor

Beck Bridger’s life was at a crossroads a couple of years ago.

The 2018 Miss Wyoming was in the process of earning her associate degree in fine arts from Sheridan College and wanted to continue her education, but found her options uninspiring.

“I was just checking out schools online and came across the Wyoming National Guard and U.S. Army Band pages,” Bridger said.

While Bridger, 24, hadn’t considered the National Guard as an option prior to her research, the websites attracted her attention because of her aspirations to be a full-time professional musician.

“I clicked the audition link and, lo and behold, all of this information about being a member of the Wyoming National Guard popped up, along with the option and opportunity to sing and perform as a soldier,” she said. “I am very religious and I do believe God kind of led me down that path because it was a day I was feeling a little bit uninspired.”

Bridger set up an appointment to meet with her local recruiter, Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Blascyk of the Wyoming Army National Guard.

“I remember kind of being scared and told my dad, ‘I reached out to the Wyoming National Guard and I don’t want to go to the meeting,’” Bridger said.

“He said, ‘You’ve got to see it through.’”

Bridger is glad she followed her father’s advice.

“The meeting (with Blascyk) was great and I was blown away by the opportunities the Wyoming National Guard would provide me as a band member,” she said. “I’ve been singing my entire life and, since I was a little girl, I’ve always envisioned myself being on stage with a microphone in hand and singing my songs in front of large groups of people.”

After processing through the Butte MEPS in Montana, Bridger was sworn into the Wyoming Army National Guard on Aug. 12 in Butte and participated in a public ceremony at the armory in Sheridan two days later.

“It took me about a year to get in to the Guard,” she said. “Once I was through, it was so exciting. Five of the band members traveled to watch the ceremony and it was so cool.”

Bridger started drills at the armory in Sheridan over the summer and will head to Fort Jackson in South Carolina for 10 weeks of basic training in July.

“Life is so short and I really, really want to say that I’ve done about everything I can and made the most of my life,” she said. “I think that was a huge factor in me (joining the Guard).”



“It’s so much more than a job to me representing the state and my country”

-Beck Bridger

Beck Bridger sings during a Miss America tryout on Oct. 29, 2018.



Former Miss Wyoming Beck Bridger poses for a photo with her recruiter, Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Blascyk of the Wyoming National Guard, during an oath of enlistment ceremony at the Butte MEPS in Montana.

“Instead of saying, ‘Well, why would I do this?’ my question was, ‘Why not?’ I would love to be able to say I could go to boot camp once in my life. A lot of people can’t say that and a lot of people can’t say they’ve competed for Miss America.”

While Bridger gained plenty of experience performing in high-pressure situations as a former Miss America contestant, she described her first audition with the U.S. Army Band “as the hardest I’ve ever had in my life.”

The process required her to select four songs to perform, along with another five she received from the band just a day before the hourlong audition.

“They usually have you go to the MEPS then you audition,” she said. “For me, it was the other way around.”

Bridger, who was balancing schoolwork with audition preparations, didn’t pass her first band test.

“I knew I had to work 10 times harder the next time around,” she said.

Bridger’s perseverance proved rewarding as she passed her second audition and was named lead vocalist for the 67th Army Band.

“That solidified everything for me,” said Bridger, who credited her performance arts coach and Blascyk for helping her pass the audition. “When (the band leader) told me the news, it was amazing and I teared up.”

“For me, it was kind of a spiritual moment and I knew this is exactly where I’m supposed to be right now.”

Bridger took a similar path to becoming Miss Wyoming. After not placing in the 2017 Miss Wyoming USA pageant, she gave the Miss America Organization a shot. The change paid off, with Bridger winning the Miss Northeast Wyoming contest en route to being named Miss Wyoming in June 2018.

“It was so amazing being Miss Wyoming,” Bridger said. “I competed for the title because I wanted to have more professional music opportunities, but it really opened the door for so much more than that.”

As Miss Wyoming, Bridger’s activities included serving Wyoming, advocating for adoption and organizations such as the Children’s Miracle Network, and singing at local schools.

While Bridger didn’t place at the Miss America

pageant, she still reaped several benefits from the experience.

“The travel opportunities were amazing and it really helped evolve me into the woman I am now,” she said. “Competing for Miss America at a national level is a long process and requires patience and professionalism, and in a way helped prepare me for the enlistment process at the MEPS.”

Bridger’s long-term goals include auditioning for NBC’s “The Voice,” releasing an album, earning a master’s degree and becoming an elementary school music teacher.

In the meantime, the self-described alternative country singer with a jazzy voice is looking forward to performing with the 67th Army Band during her six-year Guard commitment.

“I have a passion and a drive to sing and also serve the state of Wyoming and the United States of America,” she said. “I’m very, very hopeful and have faith that the Wyoming National Guard will kind of open some doors for me if I work hard. Hopefully, I’ll get some exposure and have some great performance opportunities.

“It’s so much more than a job to me representing the state and my country. It’s really an honor and it’s been amazing. This really feels like the first step of the professional career I’m looking for.” ■



Beck Bridger reacts after being crowned Miss Wyoming on June 23, 2018 at WYO Theater in Sheridan, Wyo.



Former Miss Wyoming Rebecca Bridger, left, is sworn into the Wyoming Army National Guard Aug. 12 at the Butte MEPS in Montana.



Beck Bridger (right) poses for a photo with fellow pageant winners.

REAL ID

DEADLINE

October 1, 2021



EXAMPLES



Real ID BASICS

To get a Real ID, you need to present documents to your motor vehicle department proving your age and identity, Social Security number and address.

That generally means bringing a birth certificate or passport, a Social Security card or tax form such as a W-2, and two proofs of address. If you've changed your name through marriage, you'll need a marriage certificate.

After Oct. 1, 2021, a regular driver's license won't be sufficient to get a passenger through security and onto a plane.

Every air traveler 18 years and older will need a Real ID-compliant driver's license or another acceptable form of ID to fly within the United States.

The Real ID technically is not mandatory. You can use other approved documents to include:

- U.S. passport or U.S. passport card
- DHS- trusted traveler card
- U.S. Department of Defense ID
- Permanent resident card
- Border crossing card
- DHS-designated enhanced driver's license
- Federally recognized, tribal-issued photo ID
- HSPD-12 PIV card
- Foreign government-issued passport
- Canadian provincial driver's license or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada card
- Transportation worker identification credential
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Employment Authorization Card (I-766)
- U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential

FOR MORE INFORMATION



BE **REAL ID** READY!

DEADLINE: October 1, 2021

Ohio Secretary of State joins Army Reserve



Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose takes the Oath of Enlistment at the Columbus Military Entrance Processing Station in Columbus, Ohio on March 1, 2021.

**Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Joel Quebec
367th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**

It is not uncommon for a soldier to join the Army, do some time, get out to pursue other ventures and come back in. What is unusual is when that soldier comes back after 12 years, college and a family, having risen to the position of Secretary of State (of Ohio).

Frank LaRose never second-guesses his past decisions nor does he look back at the past, with one exception – leaving the Army.

Inspired by his Scout leader, a World War II veteran, LaRose decided around the age of 13 that he wanted to be like that man and be a soldier. He joined the Army right out of high school at 18 years old. He served with the 101st Airborne Division and the U.S. Army Special Forces. After 10 years, he decided to get out of the Army and go to college at Ohio State University. Then he entered the political arena and was sworn in as the Ohio Secretary of State in January 2019.

“Before I knew it 12 years had passed,” he said. “So here I am today, excited to be becoming a sol-

dier again. I’m looking forward to being Sgt. 1st Class LaRose again.”

LaRose stated that he had loved serving but that an economy of time issue had kept him busy with work and family, but he always missed it. The one day while in Washington, D.C., he ran into a soldier with whom he had served and that friend, now a command sergeant major, encouraged him to return to the military and join his Army Reserve unit. The timing was right, so he decided to do it.

***“Being a soldier is part of who I am.
It’s part of me at my core.”***

-Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose

Due to the length of time he was out of the service, there were a few hoops to jump through in

order to return to duty.

“It’s not as easy as I recall from when I was 18, that’s for sure,” he said. Despite the difficulties and unusual circumstances, he and his recruiter never gave up even though there were plenty of opportunities to do so.

“Mr. LaRose has chosen to serve his country in several ways,” said Army Recruiter Sgt. 1st Class Jason Connor. “I think that his getting in the Army and then going to serve his country in a more political way and then deciding to get back in is a display of true love for the country.”

Connor explained that this was the longest he had seen anyone out of the military return to duty. The ensuing process was a difficult one, and since many aspects had not been tackled before, it took about five months. The average soldier can be processed in less than one.

“The first time you look in the mirror and see a soldier looking back at you, it’s something you’ll never forget.” LaRose said, having first had that experience at 18 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

LaRose believes that even though he took that oath over 23 years ago, it was a lifelong commitment. It didn’t end when he took off his uniform 12 years ago, but has continued unbroken, and now he can keep his oath once again wearing the soldier’s uniform.

“Being a soldier is part of who I am,” LaRose said. “It’s not just a thing I did for 10 years. It’s part of me at my core.”

The ceremony took place in March at the Columbus Military Entrance Processing Station and LaRose was sworn in by his friend Capt. Nicholas Dixon, with whom he had previously served. After the hand was raised and the oath taken, a few more documents needed to be signed and LaRose would make a call to the man who was the inspiration for his joining the Army in the first place, a World War II veteran of D-Day, Bill Miller, a recipient of the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star with a “V” device denoting valor and a Silver Star, the nation’s third highest award for valor.

“He will be one of the first calls I make when I get out here,” he said. ■

NYMEPS swears in their first Space Force Recruit

Photo and story by Connie Dillon

USAG Fort Hamilton

Fort Hamilton’s mission partner, the New York Military Entrance Processing Station, swore in its first Space Force recruit Mar. 3, 2021.

The U.S. Space Force, started welcoming its first enlistment in October 2020, just over a year since the nation’s newest military branch was created Dec. 20, 2019. By its first anniversary, over 2,400 Airmen have officially transferred to the Space Force.

Air Force recruiters were relied heavily upon to find new applicants, and these applicants enter the military via one of the many entrance processing stations located across the U.S.

Capt. Preston Giddens, operations officer, was the presiding officer for the Oath of Enlistment.

“It was exciting to be a part of the next iteration of the Department of Defense’s evolution,” said Giddens. “MEPS was aware we would be processing Space Force applicants in the near future, but did not expect it this quickly. It was an honor to be a part of this.”

The new recruit, Fernando Lopez, said he was drawn to the Space Force because of its cutting-edge technology and it was a journey into unknown territory. He added that he will potentially enlist into the intelligence career field. ■



U.S. Army Capt. Preston Giddens, New York Military Entrance Processing Station operations officer, and NYMEPS’ first Space Force recruit, Fernando Lopez pose in front of the Space Force flag on Fort Hamilton, N.Y., March 3, 2021.

In Memoriam



(Courtesy photo)

Russell B. Noffsinger III

1961-2021

Longtime USMEPCOM employee Russell B. Noffsinger III, age 59, died on Sunday, March 7, 2021.

Russell was born November 2, 1961 in Morocco, North Africa to Russell B. and Carol Noffsinger.

He is survived by his loving wife of 25 years, Susan Noffsinger; two beloved daughters, Gianna “Gigi” and Brigitte “Brie”; two sisters, Sue and Donna Noffsinger and brother, Chris Noffsinger. Russell was preceded in death by both parents, Russell and Carol Noffsinger.

Prior to moving to J3/5/7 at USMEPCOM, Russell was in the J-1 Directorate as the safety officer. He held this position for 11 years.

Russell is remembered by his supervisor Bill Boyle as a proud U.S. Navy veteran, a loving husband, father and a dedicated worker.

“Russell was a very helpful person. He was always willing to help anyone else out no matter what directorate they were in,” said Boyle.

Visitation was held on Saturday, March 13 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Marsh Funeral Home (305 N Cemetery Road, Gurnee, Illinois). A funeral service was held on Saturday, March 13 at 4 p.m. at the same location.

Fond memories and expressions of sympathy may be shared at www.MarshFuneralHome.com for the Noffsinger family.



Proclamation



United States Military Entrance Processing Command April is Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Awareness Month

The United States Military Entrance Processing Command recognizes that alcohol abuse and child abuse are a public concern and that prevention is a collective responsibility.

Whereas, alcohol abuse and child abuse and neglect are national problems affecting our community;

Whereas, estimated 95,000 people (approximately 68,000 men and 27,000 women) die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States;

Whereas, alcohol contributes to more than 200 disease and injury-related health conditions, most notably Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) IV alcohol dependence;

Whereas, every child deserves a loving family, a safe home, and the opportunity to grow into an upstanding and responsible member of society;

Whereas, children who experience child abuse or neglect are about nine times more likely to become involved in criminal activity than those who do not;

Whereas, the long-term effects of child abuse include improper brain formation, an inability to trust, low-self esteem, an increased vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder, sexually transmitted disease, heart disease, cancer, and depression;

Whereas, the United States Military Processing Command is dedicated to reducing the frequency of alcohol abuse and child abuse through educational programs and intervention services;

Therefore, We, the undersigned, do hereby proclaim April to be Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Awareness Month. I urge everyone to "Go Blue Thursday," a day to wear blue, the official color of prevention, and remain unified to keep our community safe from alcohol abuse and child abuse.

Dated this first day of April 2021, we the undersigned, do hereby proclaim,

RICHARD T. BRADY
Colonel, USMC
Commander, USMEPCOM



LORENZO R. WOODSON
Command Sergeant Major, USA
Senior Enlisted Advisor, USMEPCOM



APRIL

is the

Month of the Military Child

WEAR PURPLE

to support our military children