

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 43, NO. 3



What we do
hasn't changed



How we do it **WILL**

The building blocks begin with . . .

Freedom's Front Door



Commander's Commentary



Greetings USMEPCOM,

Here we are in the summer of 2021. My time as USMEPCOM commander is drawing to a close.

My years at USMEPCOM, including my time as Western Sector commander, have gone in a heartbeat. But, whether it's two years, four years, or even my almost 32 years in the United States Marine Corps, each phase has been an opportunity to make choices towards a better future.

Many who have heard me speak know my affinity for history. When I talk about history and traditions, it's not an effort to relive the past or make a case for staying where we are. Instead, it's an attempt to see history as a building block for the future. If we are humble enough and discerning enough, history can not only guide us but also give us insight into the direction we're going.

Past generations weren't perfect. We can't assume that we're perfect either. At the same time, we must know that future generations will come along and judge us by our choices. Historical perspective allows us to approach new endeavors with humility on how our decisions will impact others today and in the future.

This Messenger magazine is full of people and their moments in history. You will see stories about service academy cadets beginning their military careers, faithful civil servants retiring, female Marines breaking barriers, initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion and service members navigating unexpected natural disasters. These people are USMEPCOM; they are our legacy.

When I started my military journey at Kansas City MEPS in 1989, I never could have imagined my career path concluding at Freedom's Front Door. I am profoundly proud of the service members and personnel at USMEPCOM. Your professionalism, resiliency and commitment to the mission are the foundations for USMEPCOM's future journeys.

As I turn over command of USMEPCOM to Army Col. Megan Stallings on Aug. 13, 2021, please know that my final thoughts will be of the men and women of USMEPCOM.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RTB'.

Richard T. Brady
Colonel, USMC
Commander

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USMEPCOM
HOMEPAGE



Messenger
Digital Edition



United States Military Entrance
Processing Command



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Please send "Letters to the Editor" submissions to:
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Summer 2021

USMEPCOM WELCOMES CADETS



Academy cadets participate in operations and evaluation research program to support USMEPCOM

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

Summer is the perfect time for college students to swap out the classroom for the workplace and gain experience to complement their studies. This summer, USMEPCOM provides a unique internship opportunity for three service academy cadets to gain knowledge and real-life military expertise.

Cadet Kristen Kerrigan (U.S. Air Force Academy, class of 22'), Cadet Nicholas Greiff (U.S. Air Force Academy, class of 22') and Cadet Nathan Jose (U.S. Military Academy, class of 23') are all calling North Chicago, Ill. home this summer while participating in the cadet summer research program.

The six-week internship allows cadets to explore career options, learn more about professional military working environments and develop the skills they need to succeed in the United States armed forces.

"These cadets have always added some value to our thinking and our planning," said Dr. Rick Cox, deputy Command Advisory Group USMEPCOM.

"They bring fresh ideas and fresh ways of thinking, a little bit of innovation, and occasionally they challenge how we think. It's a worthy way of supporting USMEPCOM."

Kerrigan shared her sentiments about what she's looking to gain from this experience. The Austin, Texas native hopes to learn from both civilian and active-duty

personnel at USMEPCOM.

"I would like to gain expertise and knowledge from the people I am working with," she said. "I want to listen to their experiences and guidance and incorporate that into my research project."

While at USMEPCOM, cadets will be working on individual research projects. Kerrigan, a business management major, is researching factors contributing to variations in applicant processing. Greiff, who is also a business management major, is focusing on evaluating the self-reported medical history information received from MEPS applicants. Jose, a systems engineering major, will provide USMEPCOM with a model to increase application efficiency for scheduling when applicants enter a MEPS.

Initially established in the early 2000s, the USMEPCOM cadet summer research program partnered exclusively with the U.S. Military Academy. Over time, USMEPCOM began partnering with other service academies to provide this valuable internship opportunity to interested cadets.

Last year due to COVID restrictions, two Air Force academy cadets successfully participated in the summer program through telework. ■



Cadet Kristen Kerrigan



Cadet Nathan Jose



Cadet Nathan Greiff



▲ Army Col. Nick Wittwer (left), USMEPCOM Command Advisory Group chief, and Army Cadet Nathan Jose (right) abide by tradition and wield a saber to cut birthday cake in celebration of the 246th Army birthday on June 14, 2021. Traditionally, the youngest soldier present joins the oldest soldier present in cutting the Army birthday cake. The young soldier symbolizes the future of the Army while the old soldier symbolizes the Army's history and past. (Photo by Israel Molina).

CHANGING COURSE

From the guard booth to the IT desk, former USMEPCOM security guard makes career leap thanks to natural mentor

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

USMEPCOM's newest IT employee is a familiar face to many in the building.

In May 2019, Pdraig Lindel began working as a security guard at USMEPCOM. The Waukegan, Ill. native, never knew what the building was until he was looking for a job after college.

"We would pass this building all the time as a kid. Even though I've seen it my entire life, I didn't know what it was," said Lindel.

Lindel left the area for college but eventually moved back after earning a master's degree in music from the University of Northern Illinois. After graduation he began looking for available employment in the area.

"I took the first job I could find closest to home," he said.

Lindel became comfortable at the security guard desk. But, over time, he knew he wanted to venture into a new field. After interacting daily with USMEPCOM employees, he started to consider the possibilities of making a career leap.

"I would talk to everybody that would come to the security guard desk and ask them what they do here, and people would tell me, 'hey, you should apply here too,'" he said. "The department I saw people getting into the most was IT, so I started studying for it because I saw it as a thing I could do."

Because of his familiarity with the military, he knew he could be a good fit inside the building beyond the guard's desk. Lindel's father was a 17-year Navy veteran. Lindel himself is a specialist in the Army Reserves.

Lindel knew the first step to working in information technology was to gain A+ certification. During this process, he gained some helpful guidance along the way.

TJ Mumbower, enterprise network branch chief, USMEPCOM information technology directorate, stepped in and became a mentor for Pdraig during his application process. Natural mentorships form organically between a less experienced individual and a more seasoned individual within their existing communities.

Lindel credits Mumbower for making the learning and application process more manageable.

OLD STOMPING GROUNDS

Pdraig Lindel poses in front of the security guard booth with old coworkers at USMEPCOM in North Chicago, Ill. (Photo by Susan VanBoening)





▲Lindel shows the drummer perspective of the percussion at the VPOC Concert for the Common Man 2014 in Chicago. (Courtesy photo).



"TJ was a super help," he said. "He would ask me, 'hey are you studying?' And I would be like 'yeah totally.'"

Mumbower lauded Lindel for being a self-starter in trying to break into the IT field. In addition, he offered encouragement and accountability for him during the process.

"Padraig had already been on track and had been pushing hard to get into the IT field," said Mumbower. "I came into it later in the process because he had already been studying. At that point, I got there with him and set some goals with him to get his A+ certification, which is a necessary first step to get into IT."

Mumbower explained the steps to get a government position and went over questions that could come up in an interview. This helped alleviate any apprehension Lindel might have had.

"I was glad that he was there. I had taken the first test, and he encouraged me to apply for the next job advertised," Lindel said. "I knew an interview could happen and that this could be good for my resume."

After less than two years as a security guard, Lindel became an official USMEPCOM employee in the IT department on March 1. For Mumbower, helping Lindel was an easy thing to do.

"Mentorship to me is a relationship between another person that I'm trying to help out and me," he said. "I try to use my experience and my knowledge to make a connection and help them

get farther along to better themselves."

Learning from others is something Mumbower credits to his military service.

"Being 20 years Navy, every chief, every supervisor I had I didn't specifically call them mentors, but I looked at their leadership style, and I looked at how they took care of their people. So I took the good things from them," he said. "And I saw the bad things they did too. So I realized that's not how I want to be as a manager and as a leader."

Mumbower also praised many he calls his mentors within the USMEPCOM community today.

"It wasn't something I had just when I was younger. I still have mentors," he said. "Some at the command that I can name is Clay Sump. He was excellent. Scott Hutchins was such a good hiring manager, so I talked to him, and I learned from him how he did his job because he was good at it. Matt Lince, even before he was a J-6 director, I was talking to him before he moved to RDT. Leti from J-1 has been helpful too."

Learning through experience has Mumbower promoting a comprehensive mentorship approach to all supervisors.

"I encourage all managers to be mentors to their people," he said. "You should be talking to your personnel about not just their growth in their job but how things are going in their life. Making sure everything is going okay across the board. That's the way I look at it. You have to try to let them grow and teach them what you can."

Now officially paired together in the USMEPCOM mentorship program, Mumbower hopes for Lindel to always reach out and get advice.

"I hope that even as the years go by and I'm not an official mentor to Padraig, he can come back to me at any time and say, 'hey, how's it going? I have this issue. Can you help me?'" he said.

"I will always help him." ■

New
◆

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Leadership supports new endeavors to address diversity and inclusion at USMEPCOM

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

A new advisory group at USMEPCOM aims to address inequity and promote inclusion in the workplace.

Chartered in January 2021, the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group (DIAG), is the brainchild of Air Force Master Sgt. Shajita Rios, equal opportunity strategic advisor, USMEPCOM Western Sector, and now retired Air Force Master Sgt. Maurice Ingram, former equal opportunity strategic advisor, USMEPCOM Eastern Sector.

After seeing a rise in social unrest and an influx of political protests across the country, Rios and Ingram became inspired to see how USMEPCOM addresses diversity and promotes inclusion within their system.

Rios found that command leadership was responsive to digging deeper on issues that may impact the USMEPCOM workforce.

"The diverse makeup of USMEPCOM's military staff and civilian employees is one of our greatest assets in supporting the accession process," said Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander.

Brady is proud of the creation of the DIAG and is hopeful that these groups

can have a long-term and lasting impact within the USMEPCOM community.

"I, along with other senior leadership at USMEPCOM, embrace programs and support initiatives that promote inclusivity in the workplace not just today, but for the foreseeable future," he said.

There are two components of the DIAG: an advisory panel and a platform of four initiatives.

The first component is a 12-person panel comprised of a representative from each MEPS battalion. Each representative was required to have been with their current MEPS for six months and have at least six months remaining in their tour. In addition, founding DIAG members were also asked to commit to a few hours a month of continuing education by completing reading assignments and attending monthly meetings.

The DIAG's four initiatives (see infographic) aim to take a streamlined approach to address various issues about diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

DIAG representatives had their inaugural meeting in November 2020 and completed their official charter in January 2021. With the group still in its

infancy, Rios is already encouraged by the conversations she sees taking place around the MEPS.

“The group is becoming familiar with one another and gaining a greater understanding of what diversity means, what inclusion means, what the EO and EEO programs do,” she said.

Rios also emphasized one of the most important steps a person can take within the USMEPCOM community to support inclusion is to participate in the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey. Results from this survey better prepare leaders to address specific concerns that people have within the workplace.

“I hope that the things people see in the survey, that they feel are a barrier in their workplace, people include on the survey,” she said. “The group will be able to sit down and look at those things from the survey and see trends. For example, some trends we may see is that people don’t feel included based on gender or race or that there’s a trend of a division between military and civilians.”

In the end, Rios is optimistic that we can make a change for the better in promoting diversity and inclusions.

“We want to know what we can do to help at our level and execute that across the command.”

For more information about the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group please contact Master Sgt. Shajita Rios at shajita.l.rios.mil@mail.mil ■.

Learn more about the DEOCS survey below:



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES

THE USMEPCOM DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ADVISORY GROUP (DIAG) IS A STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP RESPONSIBLE TO THE HQ USMEPCOM COMMANDER. IT IS CHARGED WITH ENSURING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE WHERE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE VALUED AS FORCE MULTIPLIERS, ALLOWING EACH INDIVIDUAL TO CONTRIBUTE TO MISSION SUCCESS WHILE UTILIZING THEIR UNIQUE ABILITIES, EXPERIENCES, SKILLS AND STRENGTHS.

TAKE A CLOSER & HONEST LOOK



Provide a transparent and public review of possible disparities.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION WORKGROUP

Encourage innovation. Gather assets of diverse backgrounds, education, status, rank, paygrade, race, gender and functional areas.



DIVERSITY DOWN DAY (D3)



Demonstrate command's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

EVERYONE HAS A STORY



Connect employees through shared experiences of adversity and lessons learned.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

For Chicago native, decades long career of service comes full circle at USMEPCOM

By Scott Koker
Messenger associate editor

Jerome Hurst completed tours of duty in six states and Japan during his 20-year Navy career, but there's no place like home for the Chicago native.

Hurst returned to Illinois after retiring from the Navy in 2004 and remained in the Chicago area, finishing his civilian career at USMEPCOM as an instructional systems specialist May 31.

A May 29 retirement ceremony at USMEPCOM was a fitting finale for Hurst, who started his military career with basic training in North Chicago in 1984 after processing through Chicago MEPS.

"I traveled all around the world and ended up coming back," he said. "And I started and ended my DOD career in the Chicago area."

Hurst joined USMEPCOM's Workforce Development, Training and Conferences Division nine years ago after launching his civilian career as an academic advisor for his alma mater, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and working as training officer for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command.

Hurst said his USMEPCOM highlights included playing a key role in bringing a learning management system to the command and being one of just a few instructional service specialists to be published in

Army Learning Management System, Joint Knowledge Online and DefenseReady.

"I have a passion for training, supporting and serving people," he

said. "It was really fulfilling to be able to work for MEPCOM because that was my first choice after being on active duty and working for a university. I ended up going to NAVFAC first, but it happened for a reason because there was a lot of things I learned there that were very instrumental in what I was able to accomplish at MEPCOM."

USMEPCOM recognized Hurst for those accomplishments and many others with the Department of the Army Achievement Medal for Civilian Service, letters and certificates of achievement, on-the-spot awards, teamwork certificates and Human Resources Directorate Superstar of the Month.

Hurst also received several awards in the Navy, including the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with three gold stars, Navy Good Conduct Medal with four bronze stars, National Defense Service Medal with a bronze star and a Fleet Marine Force pin.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in vocational education and a Master of Science degree in workforce, education and training from SIU Carbondale, as well as a North Carolina teaching license, prior to arriving at USMEPCOM.

Hurst had a quick answer when asked what he will miss most about working at USMEPCOM.

"The people and camaraderie – not just in Training Division, but throughout the entire building and the MEPS," he said. "I really enjoyed interacting with the people."

Hurst's short-term retirement plans include either running for an Illinois state Senate seat or "snowbirding" with his wife Mary between their home in South Holland, Illinois, and Arizona. Either way, he won't be far from his native state for too long.

"My wife and I live in one of the nicer towns in the south suburbs of Chicago and we love it here," he said. ■



◀Jerome Hurst (right) receives his certificate of appreciation from USMEPCOM Chief of Staff Jo Anne T. Cunningham (left) on May 29. (Photo by Darrin McDufford).

CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES JOIN IN ON SAVINGS

*Shopping benefits
now extended to
DoD and Coast
Guard employees*

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

On May 1, military exchanges extended benefits to more than half a million DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees. These civilian employees can now shop at any of the 4,000 facilities that operate in 32 countries, 50 states and four U.S. territories. This new benefit applies to appropriated fund and non-appropriated fund civilian employees.

Previously, in-store exchange access for DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees was limited to those on service agreements and those assigned overseas.

This is the third exchange privilege expansion since 2017. In January 2020, all veterans with service-connected disabilities became eligible to shop exchanges in person. Additionally, beginning on Veteran's Day 2017, all honorably discharged veterans were welcomed to shop tax-free at ShopMyExchange.com.

Military uniforms, tobacco products and alcohol are excluded for purchase in the newest phase of this benefits program. Family members of civilians won't be

EXPANDED BENEFITS



allowed to use these shopping privileges, but authorized shoppers can make purchases for themselves and their dependents.

To new shoppers, gaining access and making purchases inside a military exchange is similar to the process military personal and dependents have been familiar with for years. Depending on the store, customers must show a valid civilian Common Access Card at either the cash register or at the front door.

The exchange has a long history of serving military personal and their families. First established in 1895, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service exchange is responsible for

providing roughly 60% of earnings supporting quality-of-life programs on military installations worldwide. Listed as the 61st largest retailer in the United States, over the last 10 years, military exchanges have distributed more than \$2.2 billion to support military readiness and dependent resiliency programs.

For more information, visit shopmyexchange.com. ■



NATURAL DISASTERS

HURRICANES • WINTER STORMS • FLOODING • TROPICAL DEPRESSIONS • POWER OUTAGES • WATER SHORTAGES

After encountering three natural disasters in two years, Houston MEPS operations officer shares his tale of weathering the storms

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

June 1 marked the official beginning of hurricane season for the United States. For many, people, June also marked the time they dusted off their family disaster plan, or in some cases, created one.

Procrastinating crisis planning is not the case for MEPS and USMEPCOM. Disaster preparedness for hurricane season is just one component to ensuring the continuous operation of the accession process. With more than two dozen MEPS located in coastal regions on the southern and eastern seaboard, planning for natural disaster events like hurricanes is less an “if” scenario but more an inevitable “when” scenario.

In recent years, hurricane season has grown in both length and the number of storms that make landfall. The typical window for experiencing a hurricane is between August and October, with an official season-ending date of late November.

Records from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration show twelve Atlantic named storms made landfall in the continental United States in the 2020 hurricane season. A record-tying three Atlantic named storms formed in November alone (Eta, Theta and Iota). The previous record was nine hurricanes in 1916. Also, in 2020, six of these 12 storms were official hurricanes which means they had sustained winds greater than 74mph.

Hurricanes heavily impacted the Gulf Coast in 2020, with Louisiana experiencing an incredibly challenging year. Hurricane Laura was just one of the five storms that made landfall in that state. Laura produced maximum sustained winds of 150 mph in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, tied with the Last Island Hurricane of 1856 for the strongest winds for a Louisiana hurricane landfall on record.



▲ Coast Guard shallow-water response teams from Marine Safety Unit Baton Rouge conduct rescue operations near Beaumont, Texas, Sept. 19, 2019 due to flooding caused by Tropical Depression Imelda. (Courtesy photo by 653 U.S. Coast Guard).

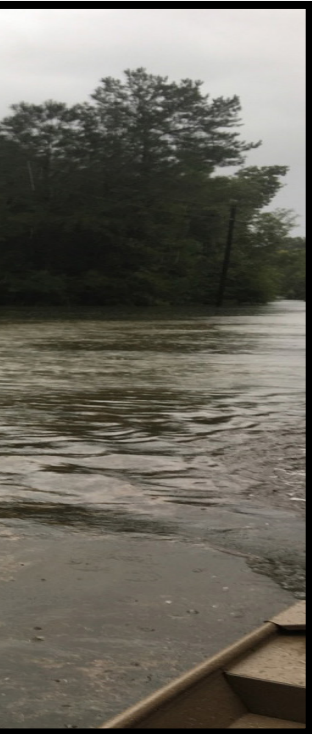
The USMEPCOM community is keenly aware of the devastation and disruption natural disasters like Hurricane Laura can cause. These weather events disrupt the processing mission, slow the chain of administrative operations and impact personnel and service members living in affected areas.

MEPS personnel who have first-hand accounts of navigating through these crises offer unique insights that can help others. Houston MEPS operations officer Navy Lt. Cmdr. Emmanuel E. Mamaril has a rare perspective when it comes to natural disasters. After facing three natural disasters in two years, Mamaril shared his experiences with the Messenger staff.

Mamaril's account of navigating hurricanes, tropical storms, winter snowstorms, flooding, power outages and water shortages brings up an important question...is your MEPS ready for the next catastrophic event?



▲ Bushes and trees froze during the winter storm in Texas, Feb. 11-18, 2021. (Photo by Capt. Faith Brodkorb, 93d Air Ground Operations Wing).



◀ Water pools on the flight line after hurricane Laura at Barksdale Air Force Base, La, Aug. 27, 2020. (Photo by Senior Airman Max Miller, 2nd Bomb Wing Public Affairs).

Messenger: When did you arrive at Houston MEPS?

I reported to MEPS in July 2019 and was new to the Houston area. My first storm was two months later. I was not familiar with the weather on the Gulf Coast.

Messenger: What natural disaster events have you faced?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

Aug. 2020- Hurricane Laura

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm

(Unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

Messenger: How much time did you have to prepare for these crises’?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

On the morning of Thursday, Sept. 19, Imelda made its way to the Houston area. It began pouring rain in the area around the Houston MEPS. Local news reports started to issue closures due to road/street flooding. The two Houston international airports closed. The mayor of Houston issued an emergency declaration that caused many city businesses to close their offices and buildings.

The National Hurricane Center classified the weather system as a tropical storm. The storm weakened as it made landfall. Reports indicating the weather system weakened gave me a false sense of security. I also had a limited understanding of storms impacting the U.S.

southeast region (Houston area).

Aug. 2020- Hurricane Laura

We began tracking Hurricane Laura on Aug. 22, when it made landfall on the Virgin Islands. The NOAA models projected path and shifting projections of the storm meant we could not pinpoint an exact path until the week of Aug. 22. During that week, the MEPS command and operations teams began working with battalion and sector leaderships to devise a plan for closure and safe reopening.

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm (unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

Winter Storm Uri had a massive impact on the state of Texas and the Houston area. My commanding officer notified me on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 12, to have a plan prepared as the storm was unprecedented and historic. We were aware we would encounter icy road conditions and frigid temperatures in the Houston area.

The storm brought freezing rain and snow into the Houston area from Saturday, Feb. 13, to Sunday, Feb. 14. Texas was caught off guard for Winter Storm Uri as this area does typically not experience snow, ice and freezing conditions.

Messenger: How did the storm impact the MEPS, and what procedures did you have to help you in this process?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

Houston MEPS closed its operations early on Thursday, Sept. 19.

My commanding officer was on temporary duty, but we were in contact about the storm and I informed him of the need to close early due to potential flooding.

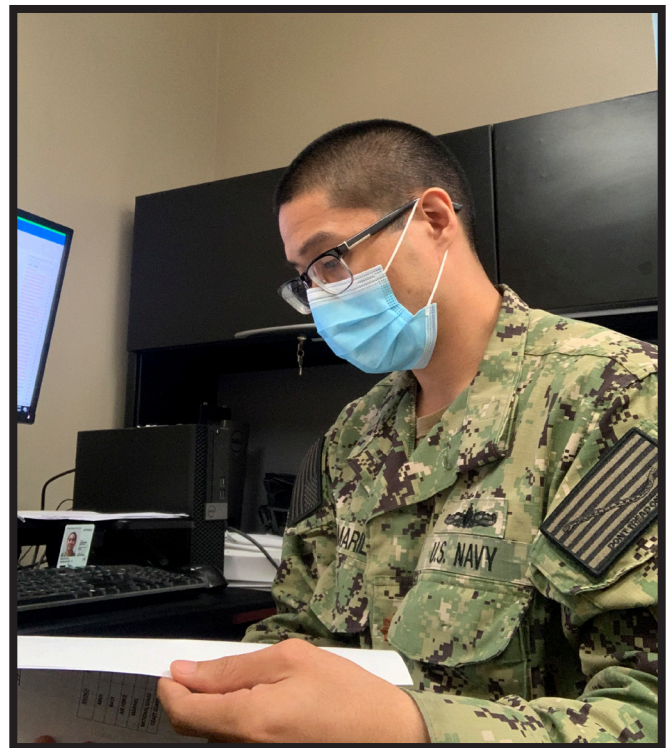
I called a meeting with the senior guidance counselors of each liaison office and the MEPS section supervisors. We began issuing instructions to have applicants and employees start departing the MEPS before road conditions worsened.

In this situation, I relied on USMEPCOM's reporting procedures regarding MEPS closures. These procedures provide the necessary justification to receive approval to close MEPS early and allows applicants and employees to leave the MEPS early to travel under safe travel conditions.

Additionally, it became essential to apply our MEPS recall roster. The roster, which lists all MEPS employee phone numbers, allows for the proper accounting of MEPS employees and confirms their safe arrival back to



▲Service members from the Texas Army, Air and State Guards worked in support of the Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas Division of Emergency Management during Winter Storm Uri Feb. 12-20, 2021. Service members transported personnel to safety, assisted stranded motorists, cleared roadways, manned warming centers, transported critical infrastructure personnel to work, and delivered basic commodities like water, food, blankets and oxygen to Texans in need. (Courtesy photo).



▲Navy Lt. Cmdr. Emmaunal Mamaril, Houston MEPS operation officer, sits at his desk in Houston, TX on June 12, 2021. Mamaril stressed the importance for MEPS to evaluate safety procedures in place to respond to natural disasters. (Courtesy photo: Houston MEPS).



◀Firewood secured and donated from local community members is packed into a vehicle in San Angelo, Texas Feb. 15, 2021. The 17th Training Group commanders and base members worked together and delivered wood to families without power so they could heat their homes. (Photo by Senior Airman Abbey Rieves, 17th Training Wing Public Affairs).

their residences.

Despite Imelda bringing over 40 inches of rain to the Houston area, there were no reported damages to the MEPS building and zero reported safety personnel mishaps.

Aug. 2020- Hurricane Laura

We were proactive in tracking this weather system. After a meeting with battalion and sector leadership on Wednesday, Aug. 26 we received approval for the MEPS to close on Thursday, Aug. 27. Hurricane Laura made landfall as a Category 4 Hurricane.

We again utilized our MEPS recall roster and attained 100 percent accountability of our employees with no issues.

We also offered additional applicant walk-ins and night testing for Friday, Aug. 28. Houston MEPS reopened on Saturday, Aug. 29, to help make up for the lost processing day.

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm

(unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

Winter Storm Uri greatly affected the Houston MEPS. The freezing temperatures caused water pipes to burst, leaving the Houston MEPS's building without water.

The cold weather impacted Texas' independently-run electrical grid, which resulted in rolling blackouts and leaving Texas residents without power for days. The Houston MEPS was closed from Tuesday, Feb. 16, to Friday, Feb. 19. When the MEPS reopened on Monday, Feb. 22, we discovered office spaces flooded with water due to possible pipe bursts from within the winter storm.

During this event, the procedures we emphasized were utilizing our recall roster to ensure all MEPS employees were safe and accounted for. At times, it became a challenge to receive timely responses. We attribute this to the loss of electricity/power in the

Houston area that affected cellular towers.

Also, due to the extended MEPS closure, it became essential to communicate with our MEPS employees, higher headquarters and keep our Interservice Recruitment Committee partners informed. I updated the service liaisons and service operations officers daily on when the MEPS planned to reopen. I coordinated with key subject matter experts in the MEPS processing section to develop a plan to provide the necessary flexibility to make up for the lost processing days due to the winter storm. I also worked with the MEPS transportation assistant to reschedule flights to minimize the impact on shippers.

Messenger: Have you gone through natural disaster events like this before and knew what to expect?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

My previous duty stations of California, Japan, Washington D.C., and Kansas did not have severe rain and flooding events as Imelda. I did not know what to expect.

Aug. 2020- Hurricane Laura

Based on my experiences with Tropical Depression Imelda, I was better prepared for Hurricane Laura. Fortunately, the weather system decided to travel more toward the Texas and Louisiana border, away from the Houston area.

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm

(unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

Since I previously lived in Washington, D.C., and Kansas, I had experience with freezing temperatures and snow, so I felt more prepared to handle these types of weather events. However, what made Winter Storm Uri a challenge was not the snow accumulation but the

loss of electricity/power and water for an extended time.

Messenger: How did these natural disasters personally impact you?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

Tropical Depression Imelda did not personally impact me.

However, I dedicated most of my time to ensuring our applicants were properly fed and housed during that weekend. Early on in the storm, road closures from flooding prevented 12 applicants from traveling safely back to their residences. The roads to the applicant's contract lodging facility were also closed, making matters even more complicated.

I contacted the applicant's CLF point of contact at USMEPCOM to arrange an emergency use hotel near the MEPS. I also coordinated with USMEPCOM to transport the 12 applicants to the emergency CLF

At around 6:00 pm, Thursday, Sept. 19, I escorted 12 applicants to the selected emergency CLF. I stayed with the applicants and ensured they received meals provided by the hotel and showed them their hotel rooms.

I returned to the emergency CLF on both Friday, Sept. 20, and Saturday, Sept. 21, and coordinated the pick up of the applicants by their recruiters.

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm

(unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

I was personally without power from Tuesday, Feb. 16 to- Thursday, Feb. 18. I was also without water from Wednesday, Feb. 17 to- Sunday, Feb. 21.

I spent a lot of that time going to the Houston MEPS building from Friday Feb. 19- Sunday Feb. 21, to help coordinate applicant scheduled visits and prepare shipping records for the MEPS reopening on Monday, Feb. 22.

Messenger: Is there any person or protocol in place that helped you through the storm?

Sept. 2019- Tropical Depression Imelda

Sue Benson, USMEPCOM's Meals & Lodging Program manager, was instrumental in arranging transportation and securing an emergency CLF for the 12 applicants who could not safely return to their residences during Tropical Storm Imelda. Benson's actions guaranteed the applicants received hot meals and a safe and dry place to sleep, bringing peace of mind to many throughout the stressful ordeal.

Feb. 2021- Texas Winter Storm

(unofficially referred to as Winter Storm Uri)

Despite losing power and water to her residence, Bridget Lindsey continued to coordinate with the Defense Management Travel Office to ensure shippers could still report to their IET locations. Lindsey's efforts

resulted in 12 Air Force shippers reporting to their initial training locations despite the week-long MEPS closure.

Ms. Lindsey's actions led to the successful shipping of over 100 plus recruits when the MEPS reopened on Monday, Feb. 22. Her hard work and commitment to the applicants significantly minimized the negative impact of the MEPS unexpected one-week closure due to the unprecedented winter storm that crippled the state of Texas.

Messenger: In hindsight and reflecting on your experiences with these natural disasters, have you changed procedures towards disaster preparedness?

These events have reinforced the importance of Houston MEPS to continue to revisit our Emergency Management Action Plan at least once every year. We continue to conduct quarterly recall roster drills to ensure our supervisors have the most up-to-date contact information for our MEPS employees. Additionally, we are revisiting our existing memorandum of agreement with a local military unit to use their spaces if the Houston MEPS building is not accessible or operational. We intend to conduct a concept of operations to see how we would process applicants at this alternate location.

Messenger: Do you have advice for other MEPS or military personnel in preparing for a natural disaster?

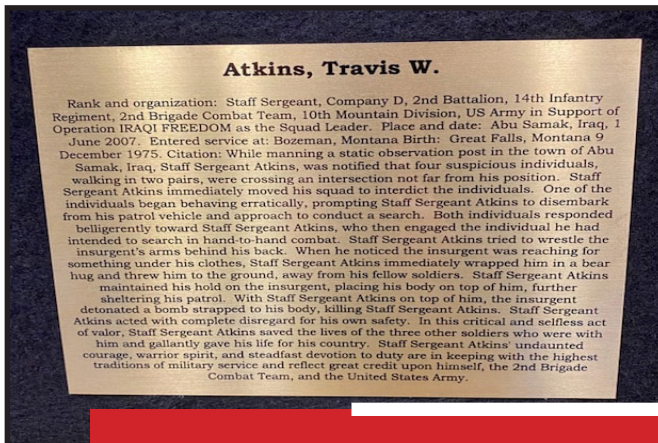
Be proactive, have a plan, be flexible and over-communicate.

Being proactive means utilizing resources such as the NOAA weather system models to help identify the projected track of the weather system and the potential impacts on your MEPS and the surrounding areas. Continually monitor the weather and local news reports. Ensure employee recall rosters are up to date. Additionally, it becomes crucial to have discussions with MEPS employees, service liaisons and IRC partners regarding their actions and pre-planned responses for different types of natural disasters.

Develop a plan that prioritizes the safety of applicants, MEPS employees, service liaisons and other stakeholders.

Be flexible. Natural disasters and weather systems can be very unpredictable so ensure that you are flexible and can adapt to changes as they arise.

Communication up, down, and across the chain of command becomes important before, during, and after a natural disaster event. Keeping USMEPCOM leadership at all echelons and IRC partners informed helps ensure the MEPS receives support for the decision to close and the plan to reopen. In addition, having good communication with the MEPS employees keeps them informed during these stressful situations. ■



MEDAL OF HONOR

MEPS rededicates ceremony room

On May 3, Butte MEPS rededicated its ceremony room to Medal of Honor Recipient Army Staff Sgt. Travis W. Atkins. Atkins' memory was honored by conducting the first enlistments into the United States Army and United States Marine Corps in the presence of the Medal of Honor.

USMEPCOM and Butte MEPS are continuously humbled by the sacrifice Staff Sgt. Atkins made to save his fellow soldiers' lives and support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

Courtesy photos: Butte MEPS

USMEPCOM AWARDS



FY21 1ST QUARTER WINNERS

CATEGORY 1

TAMPA 100%
JACKSONVILLE 100%
DENVER 100%

CATEGORY 2

LOUISVILLE 100%
SEATTLE 97.93%
NASHVILLE 96.3%

CATEGORY 3

DES MOINES 100%
BUTTE 100%
FARGO 100%
JACKSON 100%
PORTLAND, ME 100%

UNIT PENNANT

FY21 1ST QUARTER

CATEGORY 1

PHOENIX 99.67%
ST. LOUIS 96.4%
BALTIMORE 95.85%
FORT JACKSON 91.6%
MIAMI 91.39%

CATEGORY 2

SAN JUAN 95.27%
MINNEAPOLIS 93.8%
KNOXVILLE 93.8%
KANSAS CITY 92.17%
CLEVELAND 91.98%
OKLAHOMA CITY 91.3%
PORTLAND, OR 90.01%
NEW ORLEANS 90.01%

CATEGORY 3

ALBUQUERQUE 99.4%
ALBANY 95.65%
AMARILLO 95.65%
OMAHA 95.65%
SIOUX FALLS 95.65%
BECKLEY 94.51%
HONOLULU 93.75%
PITTSBURGH 91.3%
SYRACUSE 91.3%

These MEPS are authorized to display the unit pennant for the quarter.
MEPS who achieve a 90 percent score or higher, but do not achieve top three status in their category, qualify to display the pennant.

MEPS of Excellence Program

The MEPS of Excellence (MOE) Program acknowledges military entrance processing stations that obtain a level of excellence based on criteria related to USMEPCOM core processes (medical, testing and applicant processing) and general military readiness. Stations recognized as MEPS of Excellence are also authorized to display the unit pennant. MEPS are divided into three categories based on historical data and remain in their designated category the entire fiscal year.

Requirements to become a MEPS of Excellence:

Be one of the top three MEPS in each category
Meet the overall threshold

The MOE points system measures up to 10 of the following criteria per quarter:

Test loss compromise School market penetration Drug specimen processing HIV sample processing
CLIP Accuracy of fee-basis provider work hour data Citibank CBA Citibank IBA
Mandatory/ training compliance Supervisor training ATAAPS Civilian performance plans



Employee, Education & Engagement

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT • TRAINING • UPSKILLING • MENTORSHIP

*Amid COVID restrictions,
workforce development team
perseveres to grow programs
for MEPS and USMEPCOM*

By Scott Koker
Messenger associate editor



Leti Ramirez, USMEPCOM Workforce
Development Division (Photo by Susan VanBoening)

When the coronavirus spread across the U.S. in spring 2020, Leti Ramirez had a difficult decision to make about an upcoming USMEPCOM Employee, Education and Engagement (E3) event.

Like many live events, the near future of E3 was cast into doubt by the pandemic.

"I wasn't sure whether to hold the event," said Ramirez, supervisor of the USMEPCOM Human Resources Directorate's Workforce Development Division. "One of my colleagues said, 'Yeah, there's probably more important things than your E3 event.' I pondered it and said, 'No, we're going to go with it and see what happens.'"

Ramirez's decision proved successful as the event attracted more than 50 USMEPCOM and MEPS employees, most of whom attended virtually via Defense Collaboration Services.

"I think it kind of gave them a sense of normalcy," she said. "Maybe being online during a (Defense Collaboration Services) session and surrounded by 49 other people gave some the feeling they were still at work and not stuck in their homes."

Through the use of DCS and teleworker-friendly programs like Microsoft Teams, Ramirez, Patrick Cusi and Reinaldo Rosado ensured the events didn't miss a beat. The Workforce Development Division trio even expanded the E3 offerings from 12 to 16 this year.

"Those two gentlemen are constantly making things happen and I really appreciate their hard work," Ramirez said.

The expansion continued a trend of sorts for E3, which evolved from "Mentoring Matters" and "Lunch and Learn" sessions in 2018.

"We wanted to give the sessions a new branding and a refresh," Ramirez said. "I really liked the concept of 'Lunch and Learn,' but E3 seemed to have a little more flair and added a little more definition on what you could gain from it."

The change helped spark a sharp rise in attendance. The previous sessions, which were limited to lunch hours, averaged about 10 attendees – far less than the 50 to 60 who turn out for E3 events. Ramirez attributed the increase to E3 events being more flexible with attendees' work schedules.

The events are held at least once a month, with the audience typically consisting of about 60 percent USMEPCOM employees and 40 percent MEPS workers.

"We'd love to get it to 50-50 and obviously with a large audience," Ramirez said. "But we think we're moving in the right direction, especially by moving the events from Thursdays to Wednesdays, which tend to be lighter shipping days, and offering more times."

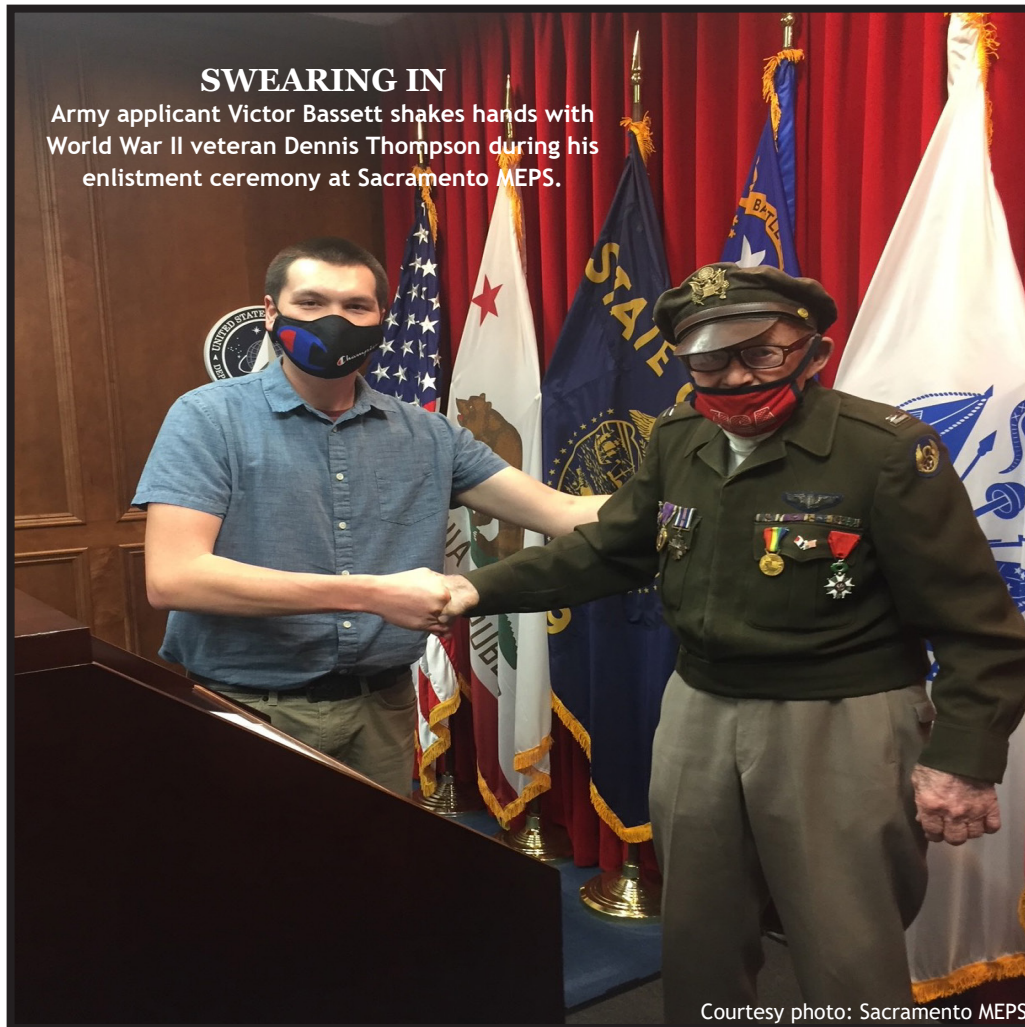
A leadership session featuring Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady, USMEPCOM commander, during the pandemic easily shattered an E3 record with more than 200 attendees. A stress and fatigue management session led by USMEPCOM training support specialist Brian Voller in March also attracted a large turnout.

"It was a good one, especially during COVID, because I think we're all dealing with stress and it's inevitable," Ramirez said. "It was good to be reminded of tips on how to manage it."

Ramirez emphasized that her team is open to suggestions from USMEPCOM and MEPS for future E3 session topics.

"If anyone feels they have a topic they feel would make an impact, we will help when it comes to doing dry runs and being there to help drive the conversation," she said. ■

WWII VETERAN ◆ LEADS OATH ◆



War hero, local author ushers new Army warfighter

By Scott Koker
Messenger associate editor

A highly decorated World War II veteran was on hand for the Sacramento MEPS enlistment ceremony March 26.

Dennis Thompson, a retired Army first lieutenant, enlisted Army applicant Victor Bassett into the Delayed Entry Program after mentoring him for the past five years.

“For (Thompson) to actually swear

him in on his oath was huge,” said Jill Main-Paterson, Bassett’s mother. “He’s an amazing mentor for Vic as he comes from a long line of family who served as combat veterans.

“Both Vic and I are so honored to have had Denny swear him in on



Army applicant Victor Bassett is sworn in by World War II veteran Dennis Thompson at Sacramento MEPS.

Courtesy photo: Sacramento MEPS

oath.”

Prior to the ceremony, Thompson met with Army Maj. Pak Y. Lee, Sacramento MEPS commander; Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Michael I. Murphy, Sacramento MEPS senior enlisted advisor; and Army Maj. Alfredo Carino-Rivera, Sacramento MEPS operations officer.

Thompson said the applicants and workers enjoyed his visit.

“They were really excited about it and certainly honored to have me there,” Thompson said. “Everything went well during the ceremony and Victor was tickled to death to have me there representing him.”

Thompson described his Sacramento MEPS experience as surprising.

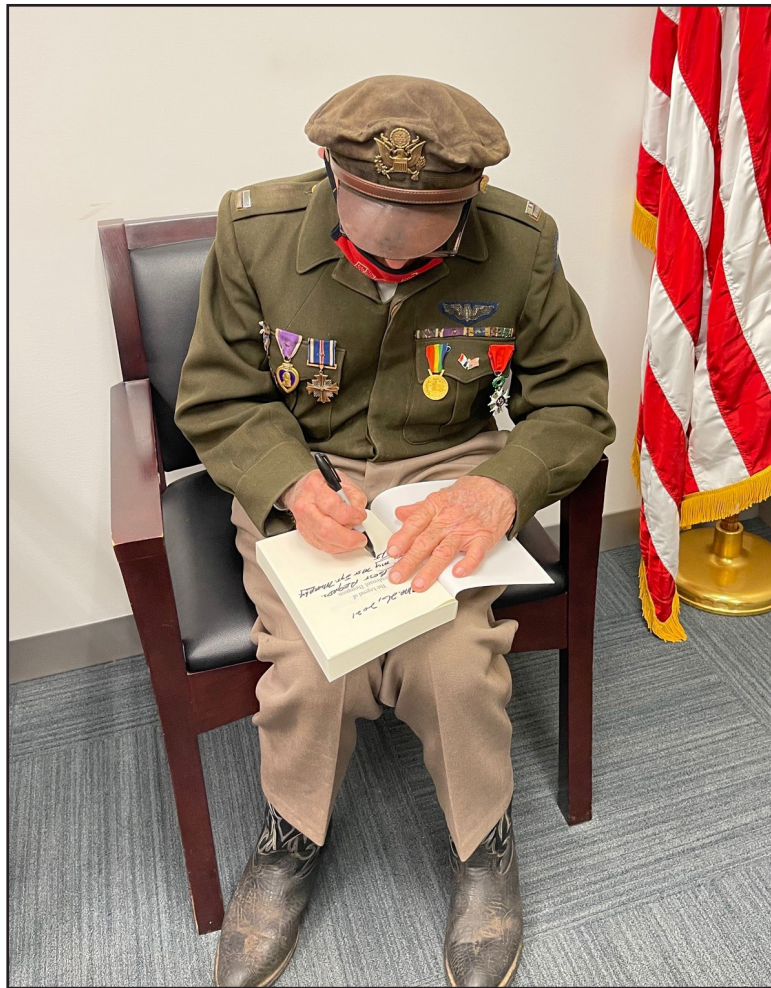
“I didn’t know what I was getting into when I went down there, but it was great,” he said.

Following the ceremony, Thompson gave about 20 copies of his signed biography, “The Legend of Lieutenant Thompson: World War II,” to applicants and Sacramento MEPS staff.

Thompson, who turned 99 in July, served as a B-17 and B-24 bomber pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps. His career included 30 operations over Germany and France, with three occurring during the D-Day invasion.

Thompson, a three-time Distinguished Flying Cross recipient, was wounded in action twice and earned two Purple Hearts, four Air Medals, four Bronze Stars and a French Freedom Medal. He was also recommended for the Silver Star.

Bassett and Thompson struck up a friendship and mentorship through Main-Paterson, a retired Army staff sergeant who works as a veterans advocate in Twain Harte, California.



◀World War II veteran Dennis Thompson signs a copy of his book at Sacramento MEPS. (Courtesy photo: Sacramento MEPS).

“He’s an amazing man and a very good friend of mine,” Main-Paterson said of Thompson. “We talk every day and I help him with a lot of things.”

Bassett, 23, who traveled to Georgia for boot camp at Fort Benning, had no shortage of inspirations prior to enlisting in the Army. In addition to his mother retiring from the Army with four Iraq campaign medals, Bassett’s stepfather Richard Paterson, great grandfathers David Carlton Main and John Yatroussis, aunts Joy Queen and Janis Main-Slezak, uncles Andrew Newman, David Slezak and Brian Apgalo, great aunt Connie Main, and great uncles Bud Mehler and David Main Jr. served in the U.S. military.

“Vic kind of wanted to follow in mom’s footsteps,” Main-Paterson said. “He’s not going to let anybody down.”■



▲The cover of a book about decorated World War II veteran Dennis Thompson.

IN MEMORIAM

ARMY SGT. MAJ. MARY KATHERINE REED

1983-2021

By Scott Koker
Messenger associate editor

Although her time at Chicago MEPS was short, Army Sgt. Maj. Mary Reed left a lasting impression as senior enlisted advisor.

"From the day she arrived at Chicago MEPS, she was like a ray of sunshine during our working hours," Chicago MEPS human resources assistant Terri L. Putnam said.

Reed, who was described by Putnam as having a "heart of gold," died April 12 at age 38.

"If you knew Mary, your life will never be the same," Chicago MEPS mission support specialist Debra L. Ray said. "She will always be remembered as the Energizer bunny. She just kept going and going to create a positive atmosphere and outcome in every situation."

Army Sgt. 1st Class Brian Gutierrez, Chicago MEPS non-commissioned officer in charge, said Reed's "operational insight provided guidance to her staff, resulting in a more streamlined process that was felt across every branch of service."

Putnam credited Reed for treating her with respect, kindness and compassion.

"I feel her absence every day I am in this building," Putnam said.

Reed was born April 12, 1983, to Barney and Jane Reed in Everett, Washington.

She graduated from Marysville-Pilchuck High School in Marysville, Washington in 2001, enlisted in the Army at Seattle MEPS about a year later and completed basic combat training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina.

While stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Reed served as a mechanic for 3rd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Attack Reconnaissance Regiment; training non-commissioned officer and brigade administrative assistant for 525th Military Intelligence Brigade; senior human resources sergeant for 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, 82nd Sustainment Brigade and Military Personnel Division, U.S. Special Operations Command; and platoon sergeant for 18th Human Resources Company, 82nd Brigade



Support Battalion.

During her time at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Washington, Reed served as platoon sergeant for 22nd Human Resources Company; operations non-commissioned officer in charge of human resources for 7th Infantry Division; and senior human resources sergeant for 16th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Reed's military education included completion of the following courses: basic, advanced and senior leaders; army retention; unit prevention leader; equal opportunity; master resiliency; and contracting officer representative.

In addition to receiving various unit and service medals and ribbons, Reed earned two Bronze Star medals, two Meritorious Service medals, five Army Commendation medals and three Army achievement medals.

Reed received an associate degree in general studies from Texas Central Community College and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from American Public University in Charles Town, West Virginia.

Reed was preceded in death by her father. She is survived by her sons Trent, Tyler and Kendal; her mother; and her siblings Annette (Tim Rice), Mark (Penny), Ken (Michelle), PJ (Anjanette), Beth (Jason Hauck), Sam (Karin) and Zach (Caitlin); and the father of her sons, Delwayne Kirkland.

A celebration of life Mass for Reed was held at Immaculate Conception Church on April 26 in Everett. ■



THE FEW, THE PROUD

U.S. Marine Corps Private Miranda Femenella with Lima Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, poses with her eagle, globe, and anchor aboard Camp Pendleton, Calif. April 22, 2021. The Eagle, Globe and Anchor Ceremony takes place after the Crucible and signifies the transformation from recruit to Marine. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Alina Thackray)

Marine Corps

◆ BECOMING ◆ THE FIRST

Female Marines graduate from west coast bootcamp

By Susan VanBoening
Messenger editor

Marching into military history, on May 6, a platoon of 53 women at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, became the first to graduate boot camp on the West Coast.

Until recently, male and female recruits never trained side-by-side. Instead, women underwent training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina. Male recruits attended boot camp in South Carolina or San Diego, but not concurrently with the female

recruits.

Six platoons of Lima Company—one female and five male—began their 13-week training on Feb. 9. The culmination of Marine boot camp was completing the “Crucible,” a 45-mile hike while carrying a 55-pound bag with rifles in 54 consecutive hours. Unlike their Marine counterparts on the East Coast who battle the humid swamplands in South Carolina, those on the West Coast contend with California’s steep and rocky terrain.

In 2019, the Marines took the first steps towards boot camp integration when the first co-ed companies were

introduced together at MCRD Parris Island. This change was motivated by the congressional order to the Marine Corps to fully integrate women into both its boot camps. Congress gave MCRD Parris Island a 2025 deadline to meet integration requirements. MCRD San Diego was expected to meet these requirements by 2028.

With just 8% of Marines being women, the lowest percentage among the US military branches, Marine Corps brass moved quickly to integrate the troops and exceeded in meeting both deadlines. ■



LIMA COMPANY

Marines stand at attention while welcoming special guests and families

U.S. Marines with 12th Marine Corps District, Marine Corps Recruiting Command, stand in formation during the Morning Colors Ceremony at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego on May 6, 2021. Every graduation week there is a special ceremony with the commanding general, or a representative, in order to provide special thanks to families of Marines of the graduation company and introduce them to the tradition of honoring our Nation's flag. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Sarah Ralph)



MCRD- SAN DIEGO

Company leadership addresses new Marines and guests during graduation


U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Amber Staroscik, the senior drill instructor with Platoon 3241, Lima Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, speaks to media after the Lima Company graduation ceremony aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, May 6, 2021. Graduation took place at the completion of the 13-week transformation including training for drill, marksmanship, basic combat skills, and Marine Corps customs and traditions. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Alina Thackray)



LIMA COMPANY

Lima Company, 3rd RTB leadership stands at attention

U.S. Marines with Platoon 3241, Lima Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, participate in the Lima Company graduation ceremony aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, May 6, 2021. Graduation took place at the completion of the 13-week transformation including training for drill, marksmanship, basic combat skills, and Marine Corps customs and traditions. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Alina Thackray)



U.S. Army

MOTHER- DAUGHTER- WOMAN-WARRIOR

*MEPS commander reflects on
journey in the military*



By U.S. Army Sgt. Keegan Costello

Women's History Month sheds light on the struggles and achievements women have made throughout the history of the United States. In the military, we put special emphasis on the contributions women have made in service to the Armed Forces. Whether providing support during our Nation's founding years or serving on the front lines during modern conflicts, women have provided a wealth of strength that our military draws on to reinforce its values and define service and sacrifice. But more than icons or symbols, these women are real people with responsibilities,

dreams, goals, and others who depend on them.

Army Maj. Sharleen L. Morgan, a Chicago native and Milwaukee MEPS commander, is just one of many women who staff high-profile positions, whose experience and expertise make them invaluable additions to the team.

"I have been in the Army for 16 years," said Morgan. "I entered the Army as a Pfc. and became an officer in 2009, and yet it seems like only yesterday I'd taken the oath to serve and protect. I can honestly say much of the joy has been in the journey."

Morgan was inspired to join the

Courtesy photo

military shortly after her mother suddenly passed away. It was then she was faced with the decision to either let life happen to her or to actively follow a path that would make her mother proud. She realized the Army would allow her an opportunity to stand up and stand out, to accomplish her goal of finishing college and join an organization that had the potential to fulfill most if not all of her dreams, develop skills, enjoy world travel, and work with others as driven as herself.

But her road was not without challenges and adversity. At times she encountered gender-bias, and while these incidents were quickly reported, they persisted. "I was born a fighter, and even when I'd find myself in uncomfortable situations, I would find the courage and fortitude to continue on and fight," said Morgan. "The Army has made significant strides through the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Prevention and Equal Opportunity Programs. The Army has created an environment of inclusion where they provide equal opportunity for its soldiers to be successful in any military occupation. This initiative facilitated thousands of opportunities that never existed."

But when times were tough, Morgan would fall back on her support network. A father who served in the Air Force, a brother-in-law who served in the Army, three

children, and great friends. Together they formed the foundation of her emotional strength and provided her with the insight and knowledge necessary to keep pushing forward.

"It has been an honor to serve this country as the first female in my family to join the military," said Morgan. "Every day I have a smile on my face, and a mission to do my very best and help as many people as I can, regardless of the capacity. My service has shaped my life in ways

"It has been an honor to serve this country as the first female in my family to join the military."

that are unexplainable."

Army Sgt. Siarra Clark, Morgan's daughter, decided to follow in her mother's footsteps and enlisted in the Army in 2015 as a 92Y Unit Supply Specialist, currently serving with the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, GA.

This month, in a rare circumstance where a mother and daughter are part of the same Army ceremony, Morgan was able to travel to Fort Benning to reenlist her daughter as she pledged 4 more years of service to the Army. Clark raised her right hand and repeated the oath of enlistment as her mother had done 16 years before.

"I am especially proud of this

momentous occasion as it has confirmed for me Siarra's commitment to focus on an achievable goal of her own," said Morgan. "By choosing an organization that offers so much potential with the capability of honing one's skills and developing others makes me extremely proud. My daughter is meeting the demanding world of today and tomorrow poised to set a precedent for females in the military. That is impressed upon her two

daughters as well. It is extremely gratifying knowing that in some small way I've helped shape the future of a great woman who will be even greater as she continues on this chosen path. I know that when 'SiSi'

sets her mind to do something, nothing and no one will hinder that objective."

Morgan believes that just one month to celebrate the achievements of women is not enough.

"In many ways, women have been the glue for the American family," said Morgan. "Women birth us, clothe us, and feed us both spiritually and physically, and in some cases, they go to war for us. A month is far too short a time to celebrate everything that women are, and all we have accomplished. I am proud to be a woman and proud that I am able to inspire others." women, both military and civilian, every day. ■

CREATING BEST PRACTICES A LEADERSHIP APPROACH

MEPS education service specialists adapt to COVID protocols, continue to lead successful ASVAB CEP program



Dr. Serena Patterson



Crystal Mehta

By Dr. Serena Patterson
and Crystal Mehta

Amid the pandemic, educators across the nation had to quickly determine the best way to educate America's youth safely. MEPS education professionals came together and brainstormed ideas to implement best practices. As a result, MEPS found a way to offer a quality Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery- Career Exploration Program while adhering to safety precautions and guidelines.

Early on in the pandemic, Dr. April Wise, education service specialist, USMEPCOM Eastern Sector, and Beverly McCullough, education service specialist, USMEPCOM Western Sector, brought together a dynamic group of professionals from the field to advise and establish protocols for the CEP.

This group included Dr. Nathaniel Grandberry (Indianapolis), Misty Calhoun (Montgomery), Johnathan Allen (Lansing), Collin Henry (New Orleans), Tony Schmoker (Dallas) and Jeannie Meyer-Hoagland (Sioux Falls).

The group formulated best practices for marketing, test administration and post-test interpretations consistent with COVID safety protocols, focusing on outreach and relationship-building strategies to connect with recruiting service partners. These practices included reaching out to high school Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps instructors, building bridges with school counselor programs and

coordinating with classroom instructors.

Creating additional flexibilities for testing was the priority to maintain and maximize participation amidst the pandemic.

These accommodations included:

- Touchless delivery of test materials to schools.**
- Increased test sessions and alternate test venues to accommodate social distancing.**
- Allowing students from more than one school to test in the same session.**

Additionally, Dr. Serena Patterson, education support , Kansas City MEPS, and Crystal Mehta, education support specialist, Fort Dix MEPS, assembled a team of MEPS education support specialists to lead virtual Center of Influence events.

This team of MEPS personnel from across the country included Colin Henry (New Orleans), James Sanders (Shreveport), Emerita De Souza (New York), William Morris (Albany) and Larry Young (Denver).

Incorporating various types of virtual technology to share information was valuable for applicants, parents, school personnel and MEPS employees. Virtual Center of Influence events were both well received and well attended. The education support specialist group efficiently utilized virtual meet-ups to create a safe informational platform. These events also linked military representatives with school districts, superintendents and counselors into one virtual classroom to overview the ASVAB CEP.

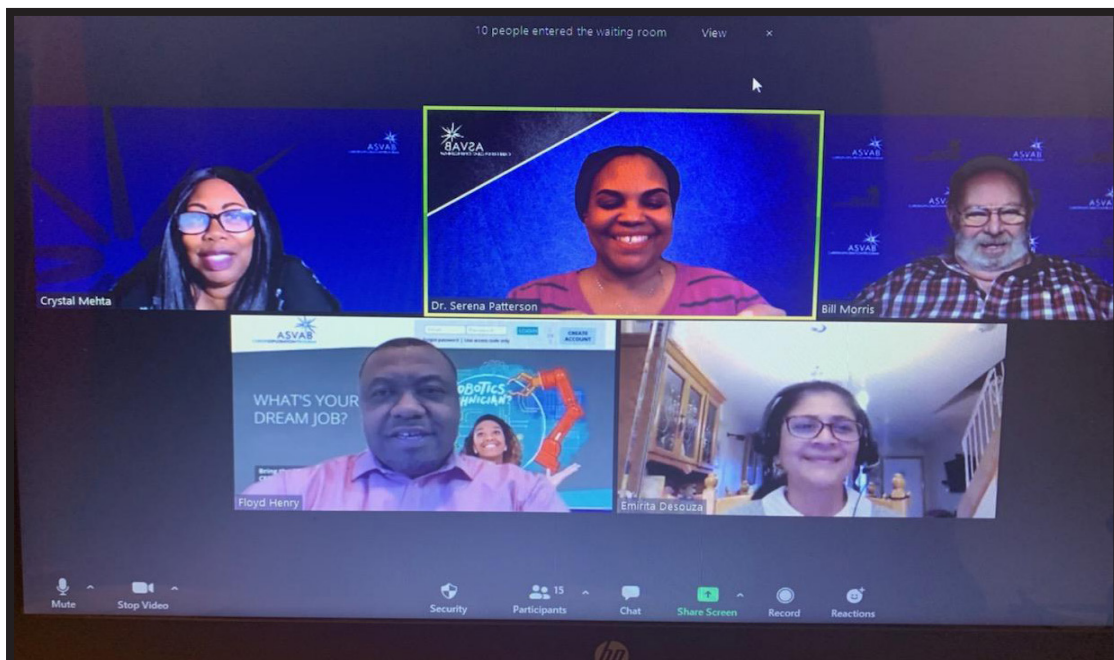
Utilizing virtual platforms kept school officials informed about programs, offered new insight into the benefits of the ASVAB CEP and reinforced the availability of resources free online. In addition, the program showcased how counselors can use the ASVAB CEP in their schools to ensure students understood various pathways to their military careers after departing high school.

Events hosted for parent and student events would consistently see over 30 participants. As a result, students felt at ease and comfortable asking questions. These events gave parents a chance to better understand the benefits of the program and start a conversation with their students about post-high school plans.

The pandemic created many obstacles for the ASVAB CEP. However, MEPS education support personnel came together to develop and implement strategies to overcome the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Thanks to their integrity and teamwork over 143 educators and 135 parents and students participated in the CEP.

The positive feedback has prompted additional sessions to be added this summer and early fall for parents, students and educators.

About the authors: Dr. Serena Patterson is an education support specialist, Kansas City MEPS. She can be contacted at serena.i.patterson.civ@mail.com. Crystal Mehta is an education services specialist, Fort Dix MEPS. She can be contacted at crystal.e.mehta.civ@mail.mil. ■



▲A team of MEPS education support specialists meet virtually to establish best practices for the ASVAB Career Exploration Program. Pictured: (top, left) Crystal Mehta, Dr. Serena Patterson, William "Bill" Morris, (bottom, left) Floyd "Collin" Henry and Emirita De Souza. (Courtesy photo).



FAIR V as FOLLOW

Over three decades of service, USMEPCOM commander

By Messenger staff

Two major chapters in the life of Marine Corps Col. Richard Brady will conclude Aug. 13.

It will mark the final day of Brady's tenure as USMEPCOM commander and the end of his 32-year military career.

Brady reflected on his time as commander and other topics during a 30-minute interview with Messenger associate editor Scott Koker.

Messenger: How does it feel going into your last few months as USMEPCOM commander?

Brady: Professionally, I feel good about everything we've accomplished as an organization. Personally, it's tough to go and I'm sad to be leaving because it seems like I just got here. It's amazing how fast time flies. When you're in the thick of it from day to day, it doesn't really seem like time is moving too fast. But when you take a step back and reflect on it, two years goes by in a heartbeat and four years, for that matter, because I had the two years down in Western Sector prior to coming up here. Looking back over four years, it really has gone by too quickly.

Messenger: What are your plans after USMEPCOM?

Brady: I will be retiring after my time here at USMEPCOM. I thought pretty long and hard about what I wanted to do next



▲Recruit Brady is pictured in his boot camp photo at Marine Corps Recruit Depot- San Diego in Aug. 1989. (Courtesy photo).

WINDS and ING SEAS

r shares insights and gratitude heading into retirement



and there were some opportunities for me to go back to the Marine Corps, back to the Pentagon. But just kind of sitting back and reflecting on where I wanted to go after USMEPCOM, I have to retire in a few years anyway and I've decided I kind of wanted to leave while I'm on top at a place like USMEPCOM. It allows me to finish where I started. I started my career at Kansas City MEPS back in 1989 and there's probably no better place that I'd rather end it than the headquarters of USMEPCOM in 2021.

Messenger: Where will you be moving to after your retirement and what are your future career plans?

Brady: The Washington D.C. area because that's where my wife and daughter are. My background is in financial management and accounting, so I'll likely move back into that world in the private sector. I do not at this time plan on staying in government, but it likely will be in a role where I'm supporting government in some way.

Messenger: What are some of the top USMEPCOM accomplishments during your time here?

Brady: I think the first thing I'd have to mention is the response to COVID-19. Coming into command in May 2019, COVID-19 wasn't on anybody's radar. It really wasn't on our radar until January 2020. That was when we had our first insight into it. The pandemic probably defined in many respects my tenure as



▲Col. Richard T. Brady, commander USMEPCOM, will retire on Aug. 13, 2021 after serving 32 years in the United States Marine Corps.

commander of USMEPCOM. You don't necessarily get to choose the environment you operate in. You have to adjust to the environment as it evolves in front of you. USMEPCOM continued to provide flexibility to the recruiting partners and continued to support them in meeting their recruiting and in-state goals. As they tell me when I go and talk to the recruiting leadership and OSD leadership, being open when many DOD organizations closed was big. We as an organization generate a lot of political capital and goodwill with the services, service recruiting partners and service recruit training partners by remaining open and keeping the accession pipeline open. And having a direct strategic impact on service readiness because if you close that accession pipeline even for a couple of weeks, it has disproportionate impacts at the end of the pipeline, which goes from MEPCOM to recruit training to initial entry training and then to the operating forces. It can have a butterfly effect where small changes on the front end can have disproportionate impacts on the back

end. By staying open, we were able to ensure that the services and OSD maintained operation readiness.

Secondly, obviously MIRS 1.1 and the ability to deploy it during the pandemic. Legacy MIRs was a great system and served its purpose for 25 years, but it needed to be replaced. To be able to do that and launch successfully into the cloud is a monumental event. Ninety percent of IT programs in government fail to launch and USMIRS 1.1 is one of those in the 10 percent that succeeded. So we cannot help but look back at that as just an overall tremendous accomplishment for the entire accession enterprise and it's a system that will likely be in place for another two to three decades.

Finally, the third major accomplishment was working to change the mindset and culture within USMEPCOM. As I said when I took command, what we do will not change. We're going to continue to assess all applicants based on established DOD standards for service in the armed forces, but how we do that can and must change and our mindset in how

we approach that has to change. Being much more responsive, being much more proactive when it comes to change and embracing transformation and change within the organization to drive the organization forward. I think you can see the difference in attitude, the work layout and how we're performing when you walk around the headquarters here. It's changed in a positive way. It takes time and I'm not saying we've accomplished everything there, but it's moving in the right direction and I have no doubt the next commander will be able to come and take it to the next level.

Messenger: On a personal level, what was it like to lead the command through a pandemic?

Brady: Initially, it was very exhausting with long days and a lot of uncertainty every day. For the first couple of weeks, we were operating on a decision cycle in terms of hours and looking maybe a half day or full day out because you really didn't know what the next day was going to bring you. It wasn't until probably

mid-April that we finally started to kind of get into our battle rhythm, get our feet underneath us and start to put together some longer-term plans, which was basically preparing for summer surge. The pandemic was unpredictable and organizations, whether they're military or private, relied on their instincts initially and what they've been through in the past that was somewhat remotely similar to drive them through this pandemic. For us, it was establishing a battle rhythm within here at the headquarters, creating the task force, getting the decision cycle set up and just moving forward and making decisions. Some were



▲Marine recruit Brady takes the oath of enlistment at Kansas City MEPS on July 8, 1989. (Courtesy photo).

the right decisions and some were the wrong decisions. In hindsight looking back, you can Monday morning quarterback a lot of things and some of those were not the right decisions, but they were the best decisions at the time based on the information we had.

On par, what you're looking for is to be making more right decisions than wrong decisions, but the most important thing is you're making decisions in an environment like that because you've got to move the organization forward. We were able to do that. Again, those first four to six weeks were pretty tough and very stressful for the organization and our employees. Nobody knew how dangerous this virus really was ... and it was a very stressful time for everybody. As I look back, I just can't help but marvel at the resiliency, the persistence and the courage of USMEPCOM employees to stay in the fight each and every day and come back in because I know it was stressful and tough for them and their families. In some respects, it still is tough, but we're a long ways from where we were a year ago at this time.

Messenger: What will you miss most about being commander of USMEPCOM?

Brady: Clearly the people. In any organization, it's not about the systems. I'm not going to be thinking about MIRS 1.1, MHS Genesis, HAIMS or any of the other systems and policies. You remember the people – that's what you always remember. What I like to do more than anything here is to walk around the headquarters and talk to the people. I like to see what's going on and what they're working on, and have an opportunity to let them tell me what they're doing for USMEPCOM. That's probably the highlight of my day is to get out of this office or get out to the MEPS and talk to the employees out there. For me, the best part is the people and always will be.



▲Marine Gen. Glenn M. Walters presents then Lt. Col. Brady with the Defense Meritorious Service Medal at the Joint Staff Awards Ceremony in July 2009. (Courtesy photo).



▲Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen presents the Joint Staff Action Officer of the Year Award (2009) to then Lt. Col. Brady. (Courtesy photo).

Messenger: What is the biggest change at USMEPCOM since you took over as commander?

Brady: The culture and mindset here. When I took over USMEPCOM, there was kind of a monkey hanging on everybody's back and it was known as VIPS. It was the predecessor to USMIRS 1.1 and supposed to replace legacy MIRS. MEPCOM spent about five to six years and upwards of \$100 million to \$120 million developing VIPS and it failed to launch. It was one of the 90 percent that didn't make it. There was kind of a negative attitude hanging over a lot of people

in the organization who felt like we couldn't do something like USMIRS 1.1 because we've tried this before and failed. That's why, looking back on MIRS 1.1, it was important we were successful at that and it was important that we designated that as the focus of our main effort. We poured all of the resources we could into it to make sure it was successful. We were going to die on the beach on this one. We absolutely had to make sure we were successful because there was no turning back on this. From what I've seen from that success is success builds on

success. Once we were finished with MIRS 1.1, it was almost immediately that I started hearing from people here, 'What can we do next? What's the next big thing we can tackle?' That's something I hadn't heard in the previous three years. Before that, everything was just very responsive to problems that cropped up. This was a very forward-leaning attitude. We want the next big thing and the next big thing is medical modernization. It's MHS Genesis. Within a week of launching MIRS 1.1, I was briefing OSD on plans for MHS Genesis. They were kind of taken aback like, 'Whoa, wait a minute. Are we sure MIRS 1.1 is done?' I said, 'Ma'am, we've got work to do on USMIRS 1.1, no doubt. But now that we've got momentum, we need to maintain this momentum and get the team focused on the next thing, which is medical.' We've spent over the past 90 days preparing for the establishment of the medical modernization team, which stood up officially on June 1. They're building their team and, over the next 18 to 24 months, they're going to launch MHS Genesis and take us to that next level.

I'd say that was one of the biggest changes I saw that's a positive change – a change of mindset and just how we approach problems and challenges in a changing accession environment here at USMEPCOM.

Messenger: What was it like to transition into your role as USMEPCOM commander after leading the Western Sector?

Brady: From a knowledge standpoint, it was pretty easy. I already knew most of the regulations and how the MEPS operate. I had seen all 31 plus one MEPS in the Western Sector, so that was very helpful in stepping into the role. Probably the biggest challenge was to avoid the tendency to get back down into the tactical and operational level and solve problems that came up from the MEPS. That's why we have the sector commanders. It's their role to be kind of down and in looking operationally and tactically at the organization. My role as MEPCOM commander is to be more of the operational strategic role and looking more up and out. But just

my comfort level coming from the sector was, 'Hey, when one of these issues comes up at the MEPS level, I want to dive down and in.' I had to fight that inclination to want to do that because I would be stepping on the toes of Capt. King or Col. Ratliff. That's their job and I want to give them the opportunity to lead their sectors. I know if you ask them that question, they would probably say I still do that probably too much. I'm still fighting that inclination, but I do recognize that the different roles have different areas of focus and my area of focus really needs to be at the operational levels here at the headquarters and strategically looking up and out – working with the recruiting partners, recruit training partners, OSD and our external stakeholders to drive MEPCOM initiatives.

Messenger: How much did your experience as Western Sector commander help you in your role as USMEPCOM commander?

Brady: Having that view at the tactical level helped. It's important



▲ Future recruit Richard Brady stands outside USMC - Recruit Station St. Joseph, Mo. in May 1989. (Courtesy photo).

to get out and see how policies and processes that are envisioned up here at USMEPCOM headquarters, or even at OSD, are being implemented at the tactical level because there's always this gap in a large organization like this where you've got 67 subordinate units spread all across the United States, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. What you're expecting to happen up here when you write something down in a policy document isn't necessarily how it's implemented out there. Likewise, when you're crafting a policy, your view of how things are operating out there may not be entirely accurate because things change at the tactical level.

In addition to just kind of having a basic knowledge of the terminology and policies, just understanding that work environment at the MEPS is very important and each one of them is very different. They're all alike in some ways with standard processes, structures and things like that, but every one of them is unique in their own way, whether it's a facility layout issue or where they're located in the city. There's always a unique aspect at each and every MEPS. When you have an issue at a MEPS, it's very helpful being up here to be able to sit back and envision what that MEPS looks like. You get a better appreciation of the issue. If you haven't been out there, you don't have a vision of what that MEPS look like and how they operate. You're never really going to understand the problem or be able to come up with some solutions to solve the problems. So that's why it's really important for not only the MEPCOM commander to get out regularly, but the staff up here, sector commanders and battalion commanders to get out there and see what each of the MEPS looks like.

Messenger: What are some of your favorite memories as USMEPCOM commander?

Brady: It's having the opportunity to go out and visit the MEPS, and visit the offices right here at headquarters and talk to the people doing the mission. That is without question my favorite memory: just going out there, visiting each of the locations and having the opportunity to stand in front of the great people who work within USMEPCOM and thank them for what they do and present awards to them and recognize them for what they do. This is a tough job, without question, if you think about it. It can be somewhat mundane in some respects because every day you come in, applicants come in, you process them through, you go home, the next morning you come in and you have more applicants coming in. So it takes a certain amount of persistent resilience to work in an environment like this and to understand at the same time the impact that USMEPCOM and our mission have on national security and really a strategic level of readiness of the Department of Defense. That's probably the thing I'm going to miss the most – to be able to go out and talk to people and visit our stations and hear what's going on out there and helping them get

the resources and authorities they need to do their job better.

Messenger: I found the history you mentioned in each of your speeches here interesting. When would you say you became a history buff?

Brady: I probably picked it up during my time in the Marine Corps. As you know, the Marine Corps prides itself on its history and traditions. In some respects, we may even be held back at times because of our history and traditions. When I talk about history, it's not an effort to necessarily relive the past or refuse to change or stay what we were. It's really an attempt to recognize that history should be viewed as a building block. As I like to say when I talk to the team here, it's important for us to reflect on where we came from and put that in perspective of where we are today and help us understand where we are today. I like to say that if we're humble enough and discerning enough, it may help us get some insight where we're going into the future. Past generations weren't perfect and we can't assume that we're perfect either. Future generations are going to come along and judge us somewhat harshly, and I think understanding that helps kind of put things in perspective enough and humble us a bit. It shows there is a brighter future out there and we can continue to build off what's happened in the past with what we're doing today. I like to say that I'm a dissatisfied optimist. I always look at the current situation and say, 'We need to change things,' but I'm very optimistic about the future that we as individuals, we as an organization and we as a society can and will improve.

Messenger: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time here at USMEPCOM?

Brady: I want to express my extreme gratitude for all the people in USMEPCOM. When I leave North Chicago for the last time driving down Buckley Road toward the highway past headquarters here, my last thought will always be of the men and women of USMEPCOM, and that's what I'll remember well into the future.

Messenger: On a totally different note, what's your prediction for the Kansas City Chiefs next season?

Brady: That's an easy one. Playoffs are a certainty. I would say the Super Bowl is highly probable and I would say a Super Bowl win is definitely in the cards. We're definitely going to be in the running this year. ■

THE FUTURE IS ALL OF US

EQUALITY IS A HUMAN RIGHT



AUGUST 26th
WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY