

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

# Messenger

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

VOL. 43, NO. 4

Staying the course  
through

**CHANGE**

REORGANIZE

CHANGE OF COMMANDS

TELEWORK  
MISSION

USMIRS 1.1

MEDICAL MODERNIZATION

COVID 19



## Commander's Commentary



Greetings Teammates,

First off, thank you for the warm welcome for my family and me. I am honored and humbled at the opportunity to lead USMEPCOM and be a part of the accessions process for the greatest fighting force in the world.

For those who attended our town hall in September, I hope you understand a little more about who I am and my priorities here at USMEPCOM. Modernization is still the focus for this command. The launches of MROAD in October and MHS GENESIS this spring mark significant steps forward in how we operate at Freedom's Front Door.

Our Medical Modernization Team is at the forefront of these changes. They have spent significant time coordinating and planning training, upskilling and communicating with our MEPS. I am proud of the work they have done and continue to do. Please take a moment to read about these modernization efforts in this issue.

This fall also marked the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. I'm sure just as I did, you took a moment to reflect on the sacrifices our nation has made in defense of our country. Pages 19 to 25 include reflections from MEPS personnel about their experiences that September day two decades ago.

Also, take a moment to read "An Immigrant Story" which is the story of Army Capt. Mohammad Hossain, Oklahoma City MEPS assistant operations officer, and the opportunities afforded to him by becoming a U.S. service member. This story exemplifies what America uniquely offers: the chance to achieve dreams through hard work and determination.

Once again, thank you for all you do and for being a part of the USMEPCOM team.

*Megan B Stallings*

Megan B. Stallings  
Colonel, USA  
Commanding



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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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# USMEPCOM Change of Command

*Stallings take reins, leads next phase of modernization*



By Marshall Smith

**A**rmey Col. Megan B. Stallings assumed command of United States Military Entrance Processing Command from Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady during a change-of-command ceremony Aug. 13.

The presiding official for the ceremony was Stephanie Miller, director of military accessions policy.

Brady retired after more than three decades of distinguished military service in the Marine Corps, first enlisting in 1989 and later receiving his commission in 1993. He assumed command of USMEPCOM May 24, 2019, after serving as the USMEPCOM Western Sector commander.

During Brady's tenure as USMEPCOM commander, the command made important steps toward modernizing applicant processing, to include the development and launch of MIRS 1.1, a processing system that replaced the 25-year-old legacy system. Brady also led the command through the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively implementing mitigation measures to keep the accessions pipeline open.

Miller lauded Brady on his leadership and accomplishments during his tenure as command and throughout his career in the Marine Corps.

"[Brady] led the command in making – and completing



– significant milestones in its long-term modernization efforts,” said Miller. “Those with whom you served, as well as the countless Service Members and Civilians you have touched, will long remember your dedication, hard work, and loyalty to a calling greater than yourself.”

As one of his final acts in uniform, Brady conducted the oath of enlistment to Britt Ottens, a Marine Corps recruit. He then expressed his appreciation for the men and women of USMEPCOM throughout his tenure as command.

“We have faced every challenge with perseverance, with resilience, and adhering to our core values of professionalism, teamwork, integrity and respect,” said Brady. “When I leave USMEPCOM for the last Time... my last thought will always be of the men and women of U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command.”

Stallings’ prior assignment was as the commander of the Marketing and Engagement Brigade, U.S. Army Recruiting Command. She previously served as commander of 12th Battalion, USMEPCOM; human resources director, United States Military District of Washington and Joint Force Headquarters—National Capital Region; and professor of military science, United States Army Cadet Command, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Stallings spoke directly to the military and civilian personnel of USMEPCOM during her remarks.

“I am humbled to have the opportunity to lead this immense command and proud to be part of the team,” said Stallings. “All of you truly support the defense of our country every day as you qualify young men and women to serve in our all-volunteer Force. The defense of our nation would not be successful without you.”

Through its 67 processing stations across the United States, USMEPCOM evaluates applicants for enlistment into the Armed Forces based on established Department of Defense and service-specific standards; it is the vital link between recruiting and training the All-Volunteer Force.■



▲ Marine Corps Col. Rich Brady, outgoing USMEPCOM commander, addresses the audience during a change of command ceremony held at USMEPCOM headquarters in North Chicago, Ill., Aug. 13. Through its 67 processing stations across the United States, USMEPCOM evaluates applicants for enlistment into the Armed Forces based on established Department of Defense and service-specific standards; it is the vital link between recruiting and training the All-Volunteer Force. (Photo by Israel Molina)

◀ Army Col. Megan Stallings, incoming commander of USMEPCOM, receives the USMEPCOM during a change of command ceremony held at USMEPCOM headquarters in North Chicago, Ill., Aug. 13. Through its 67 processing stations across the United States, USMEPCOM evaluates applicants for enlistment into the Armed Forces based on established Department of Defense and service-specific standards; it is the vital link between recruiting and training the All-Volunteer Force. (Photo by Israel Molina).



▲ Army Col. Megan Stallings, incoming USMEPCOM commander, delivers remarks during a change of command ceremony held at USMEPCOM headquarters in North Chicago, Ill., Aug. 13. Through its 67 processing stations across the United States, USMEPCOM evaluates applicants for enlistment into the Armed Forces based on established Department of Defense and service-specific standards; it is the vital link between recruiting and training the All-Volunteer Force. (Photo by Israel Molina)

# DALLAS MEPS XO AIDS ACCIDENT VICTIMS

*Marine jumps into action, extracts little girls from overturned vehicle*

By Susan VanBoening

**M**arine Corps Maj. Leslie Seaton hopped into his vehicle to make the short drive from his home in Venus, Texas, to a family member's home June 30.

Seaton, Dallas MEPS executive officer, couldn't imagine he would stumble on an accident, let alone rescue two little girls trapped in an overturned van during a routine 15-minute trip.

The Texas native travels the route he took that day frequently. Seaton said his familiarity with the area gave him the initial impression that the car accident, and the situation, didn't appear to be grave.

"At first I passed the accident, I saw a woman and a man standing outside the vehicle," he said. "Everything looked okay. It looked like no one was panicking."

The Marine kept driving. A few seconds passed, then his gut instinct told him to go back.

"I felt guilty about not going to check," he said. "So I turned around. I thought that the people already on-site would probably say 'No, we're good' because no one looked panicked."

But appearances were deceiving.

When Seaton pulled up and stepped out of his vehicle another bystander signaled to him there were kids trapped in the car. After unsuccessfully trying to break through the windshield, Seaton and the fellow bystanders saw the driver's side door facing upward. Together they were able to climb up the vehicle and get the door open,



▲ Marine Corps Maj. Leslie Seaton, Dallas MEPS executive officer. (USMEPCOM photo)





▲First responders provide care to passengers involved in a vehicle rollover accident June 30. (Courtesy photo by Maj. Leslie Seaton)

where they came face to face with the driver.

"I told him to get out of the way, I'll get the kids," he said.

Gaining entrance through the driver's side door and lowering himself down into the vehicle, Seaton felt immediate relief to see the two girls only seemed to suffer cuts and scrapes. They were sitting calmly on the passenger side wall, which had become the bottom of the overturned vehicle.

At the moment, being a seasoned parent helped Seaton extract the first child from the wreckage.

"I reached down for the first child, and I realized that she was buckled in her seat," he said. "Being a dad myself, it only took me a second to figure out the buckle. I got her out and lifted her to hand her off outside the vehicle's top through the driver's door to the other guy. Once she was clear, I crawled down and had to go to the back row of the vehicle where

the other little girl was."

Once everyone was out from the overturned vehicle, Seaton assessed the situation. He was shocked at how fast something he assumed wasn't a big deal suddenly turned into a situation that needed outside parties to help.

"By the time I got the second girl out, I saw a cop pull up. It was probably only 5 or 6 minutes from the time I got there."

Seaton also noticed the apprehension of the young passengers when the first responders arrived.

"The little girls were too scared. They didn't want to let the paramedics talk to them."

Seaton knew one way to calm their fears was to show the girls even though he's a stranger, he has a daughter and knows sometimes she gets scared too.

"I thought to myself, 'these little girls are scared', so I showed them

a picture of my daughter and told them that the paramedics are going to make sure they're okay."

For Seaton, the event lasted less than 20 minutes. He made it to his destination later in the evening and, along the way, took some time to reflect on the entire ordeal.

"I want to say what I did is what anyone would do," he said. "But the reality is, I watched like 10 or 15 cars pass by that never stopped to help them. It's hard for people to want to get involved because you don't know the situation."

At the end of it all, the Marine, who will retire next year out of Dallas MEPS, the same MEPS where he took his oath almost 20 years ago, offers some simple advice to others.

"Go do the right thing," he said. "You never know when someone does need help."■

# MHS GENESIS

## THE NEXT CHAPTER OF MODERNIZATION

*Accession pipeline medical processing readies for major changes, deployment of new EHR set for spring 2022*

By Susan VanBoening

The spring 2021 launch of USMIRS 1.1 was a significant step for USMEPCOM in its mission towards modernization. The next leap in modernizing the accession pipeline is the transition to MHS Genesis for medical processing.

MHS GENESIS is the next chapter of electronic health records (EHR) management for the Military Health System, providing a single health record for service members, veterans, and families. This new record-keeping system enables service members' health records to transition seamlessly from DOD to VA upon retirement. Once USMEPCOM deploys the system, it will ensure the health record goes with applicants as soon as they walk through Freedom's Front Door and onto their service.

In line with congressional legislation requiring interoperability with medical records, MHS GENESIS will enable USMEPCOM to merge its medical processing with EHR systems. Other features include:

- Ability to upload medical forms with upgraded equipment
- Ability to retrieve applicants' established medical records
- Visibility of joint legacy viewers
- Access to authoritative health data



### Medical Modernization Team

Much like the development of MIRS 1.1, the successful deployment of MHS GENESIS across USMEPCOM requires the concentrated focus of a dedicated team. To this end, USMEPCOM stood up the Medical Modernization Team (MMT) in July 2021.

The team, led by Amy Ramirez, is on a months-long sprint to meet the mandated deadline to deploy in March 2022. Before deployment of MHS GENESIS, the MMT has worked with contractor Leidos Partnership for Defense Health to provide extensive upskilling and training for the MEPS personnel expected to use MHS GENESIS daily to process applicants.

The team was introduced to all of USMEPCOM during a town hall in July, where Ramirez spoke about the work ahead for not just the MMT but the entire command.

Ramirez knows transitioning to a new system will impact the MEPS.



“We are deploying GENESIS in the least disruptive way possible to the mission,” she said. “We know you are busy. We are being thoughtful and paying attention to what is going on in the field. We are coordinating with the Sectors to make sure we are disrupting business the very least we have to.”

The MMT uses a toolbox of strategies to connect with MEPS and prepare for the implementation of MHS GENESIS. These tools include videos, pamphlets, posters, flyers, teleconferences, tutorials and, most importantly, training. SPEAR, the command’s intranet platform, plays a central communications role in supporting MEPS to the migration of MHS GENESIS.

Deployment dates of MHS GENESIS have been determined by contracts and congressional mandates; there is no opportunity for extension to the timeline. MMT will conduct a soft launch in February and a full deployment in March.

USMEPCOM and MMT are not modifying training or launch dates.

During her remarks, Ramirez said she prioritizes communications, maintaining support and gathering feedback from the field. She asked for collaboration and communication of needs in the field during the multiphase implementation process. Information pushes are conducted weekly by the MMT.

“There is a lot of big asks right now that fall on the MEPS and battalion leadership,” she said, recognizing this is a comprehensive team effort. “Whatever you need from us to help you transition in the field, please be transparent with us. This is a speed train that is not stopping. We know how important it is to get you what you need in the field.”

To learn more about MHS GENESIS and MMT, please visit SPEAR and click on the Medical Modernization button at the top of the page.■



▲**Bottom Row** (left to right): Nick Cerda (IT specialist), Dylan Van Reenen (IT specialist), Jeff Engel (medical requirements supervisor), Lenny Ostach (MHS GENESIS SME), Josh Babicz (user role assignment coordinator), Amy Ramirez (MMT director). **Top Row** (left to right): Maple Lee (MMT deputy director), Ashley Toomey (admin assistant), Army Capt. Lety Flores (ops officer), Sara Crow (lead training coordinator), Claudia Mora (workflow analyst), Yocelyn Moreno (PMO supervisor communications lead). (Courtesy photo MMT)

# MODEL OF INCLUSION

*Monthly displays, team building activities promote inclusion and positive working environment at Shreveport MEPS*



▲Asian American and Pacific Islander Month display May 2021.  
(Courtesy photo Shreveport MEPS)



▲Shreveport MEPS sentinel logo was used during a team building exercise to showcase when each unit does their part they come together to see a "bigger picture."  
(Courtesy photo Shreveport MEPS)



▲Anti-Terrorism Awareness Month display August 2021.  
(Courtesy photo Shreveport MEPS)



▲Army. Maj. Joy Crowder, Shreveport MEPS commander. (USMEPCOM photo)

By Major Joy Crowder, U.S. Army  
Shreveport MEPS commander

Often times I am asked why Shreveport MEPS has monthly programs. Our MEPS workplace philosophy is to strike a balance of "mission first, people first." Embracing this balance has resulted in a positive work environment for active-duty personnel and civilian employees.

USMEPCOM and the work environments at each MEPS are diverse. Regardless of the location of your MEPS, the mix of military and civilian employees means everyone comes from different backgrounds, beliefs and cultures.

As a leader, I came into our organization knowing the value of differences. One of the first things I did was observe the organizational culture and see what improvements could promote a cohesive and positive work environment.

Investing time in creating a positive work environment can yield many benefits. A positive work environment is more productive and fosters collaboration amongst staff. A cohesive group of team members form more open and positive relationships, create opportunities for more resource and information sharing and prospects for growth.

Shreveport MEPS fosters a harmonious work environment by promoting team-building events, activities and observing cultural and



awareness months. These activities engage staff members and allow us to build upon our differences and strengths. Additionally, it increases mutual respect and understanding regardless of background, beliefs, culture, gender or physical capabilities.

We are proud supporters of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. We recognize the DEOMI observances by creating displays that promote workplace cohesion and respect for one another. I encourage you to explore the resources on the DEOMI website. DEOMI lists only observances established by law, bill or resolutions of Congress.

However, organizations are not required to limit their special observances to just those recognized by DEOMI or DOD. Special observances are designed to

enhance cross-cultural and cross-gender awareness and promote harmony among military members, their families and the DOD civilian workforce. Most recently, Shreveport MEPS recognized LGBTQ+ Pride Month in June, Social Wellness/National Anti-Boredom Month in July and Anti-Terrorism Awareness Month in August.

Team building activities are also something we participate in at Shreveport MEPS. During a recent quarterly training day, I coordinated a painting event that promoted collaboration and teamwork skills. Four groups, each comprised of four to five people, were tasked to paint one quadrant of the Shreveport MEPS sentinel logo. After the task was completed, each group described how their team came together to achieve their mission. Once each group discussed their

job, teams leaders came together to combine their efforts. Each quadrant alone looked unimportant, but the four quadrants together created the Shreveport MEPS logo. The teams were thrilled to see the “bigger picture.” This exercise illustrated we are a team of diverse individuals who can come together and do amazing things.

The military and USMEPCOM are organizations that support enhancing cross-cultural awareness. We have created an organizational culture within our MEPS that strives to treat everyone with dignity and respect. As the Shreveport MEPS commander, I do my part to promote a positive work environment by recognizing monthly observances and promoting team-building activities.

I encourage others to be a positive force that values diversity. ■

# Congratulations

## USMEPCOM & MEPS OUTSTANDING CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021  
RECIPIENTS

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HEADQUARTERS USMEPCOM</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-10 and above category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Leticia Ramirez (J-1/MEHR)</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-07 through GS-09 category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Sara Crow (J-1/MEHR)</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-06 and below category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Elizabeth Fonk (J-1/MEHR)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MEPS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-10 and above category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Anthony Schmoker (Dallas)</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-07 through GS-09 category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Giselle Santiago (Tampa)</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small; color: #002060;">GS-06 and below category:</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: #D4AF37;">Miguel Ortega (San Diego)</p>
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# Would you like to see your team in Messenger magazine?

By Christine Parker

Public affairs specialist, USMEPCOM

In order to better support its 68 locations, the USMEPCOM Public Affairs Office is putting some time, thought and effort into strengthening its Public Affairs Representatives Program.

The constant at MEPS is change... in particular, MEPS commanders and senior enlisted advisors roll in and out within a few years. This requires "corporate knowledge" about many MEPS topics, including Public Affairs. At minimum, having someone who understands the process and can share key points with others will save time.

Per USMEPCOM Regulation 360-1, Sector, Battalion and MEPS commanders are required to name primary and alternate PA Reps. As a first step in rekindling the program, the Public Affairs Office will be emailing an information message asking for those names soon. Next, Public Affairs will invite PA Reps to one or more virtual meetings that will provide guidance on their role.

The PA Rep role is a volunteer, collateral duty. The MEPS commander can choose either a military member or civilian employee, regardless of rank. If you're interested, let your commander know!

Possibly the most important part of the PA Reps' role is acting as the "eyes and ears" of the MEPS to ensure the Public Affairs Office is aware of the stories about individuals, teams and stations. The Messenger magazine accepts stories and photos, but appreciates story leads as well.

When anticipating the arrival of a new commander or SEA, PA Reps can provide incoming personnel with what they need to get their bio written. If the station is planning a change of command ceremony, PA Reps can complete a work order to request invitations and programs – in a timeframe that will minimize stress for all.

There are also routine responsibilities, such as tracking American flag half-staffing and changes to the Chain of Command display. PA Reps can also assist or take the lead with Significant Activity Reports, VIP visit notifications, and media requests.

The PA Rep role is separate from the command's intranet (SPEAR) content editors and social media moderators (also required), but the three can work hand in hand.

Although the requirement for PA Reps has been around for some time, sharing knowledge about it should help everyone involved. ■

## WHY DO YOU NEED PUBLIC AFFAIRS?

Oftentimes, MEPS don't need to hunt down Public Affairs until there's a media inquiry, VIP visitor request, or an upcoming change of command ceremony.

### Top 10 reasons for contacting the Public Affairs Office:

- ① Messenger magazine submissions
- ② Chain of Command display changes
- ③ American flag half-staffing
- ④ Ceremony invitations and programs
- ⑤ Incoming commander and SEA biographies and portraits
- ⑥ Significant Activity Reports
- ⑦ Media requests
- ⑧ Command intranet content management of SPEAR (Sharing Policy Experience and Resources)
- ⑨ Social Media (Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, Twitter)
- ⑩ Work orders for visual information products (posters, etc.)

**We  
want  
you!**

### Considering volunteering for collateral duty of Public Affairs Rep.

You may be asking yourself...

"Why would I do that?"

- ✓ Have your writing published.
- ✓ Share your photography.
- ✓ Promote your MEPS and its people.
- ✓ Gain recognition for your work at "Freedom's Front Door."
- ✓ Expand your network outside your immediate circle.
- ✓ Promote collaboration between staff and MEPS.
- ✓ Upskill your communication skills.
- ✓ Increase engagement on digital platforms.
- ✓ Be able to show your grandma your work made it into a magazine!

To learn more about the Public Affairs Rep. duty contact:

**Christine Parker**

christine.a.parker.civ@mail.mil

(847) 688-3680, ext. 7224





Meet USMEPCOM's newest Team Member:

# Rex the Safety Rhino

*Messenger Magazine sat down with Rex the Safety Rhino to gain some insight into who he is and what he brings to USMEPCOM.*

**Q: Where are you from?**

**A:** Milwaukee County Zoo. I'm sure the staff thought I would end up like all the other rhinos born into captivity there; spending my days grazing and splashing around in the muck for endless school tours. That all changed when I uncovered 12 OSHA violations when I was only three years old. It was then that I, and everyone else, knew I was destined for safety greatness.

**Q: Where can we expect to see you around USMEPCOM?**

**A:** Since everyone can use a little rhino in their lives, I'm pretty much going to be everywhere... Safety training videos, posters and social media.

**Q: What do rhinos symbolize?**

**A:** Determination, resilience, patience, philosophical reflection, efficiency... Pretty much everything you need to be a good safety mascot.

**Q: Why are you excited to join USMEPCOM?**

**A:** Not too many rhinos can say that they are contributing to sustaining the all-volunteer force on a daily basis at 67 locations across the U.S., Puerto Rico and the Western Pacific. The work done here is no small task as we are responsible for ensuring aptitude, medical and personal readiness of applicants for all branches of the armed forces. We are truly the "motor in the middle", driving the transition of individuals from applicants to full-fledged recruits.

**Q: How can I improve my workplace safety?**

**A:** The most common safety hazard that I've seen in the workplace is one of the easiest to fix; the misuse of a power strip. Never daisy chain a power strip and always plug your appliances directly into the wall.

**Q: What would your last meal be?**

**A:** An alfalfa salad with a mix of shredded carrots and apples, topped off with a honey glazed dressing.

**Q: Biggest pet peeve?**

**A:** Poachers! My horn is NOT for sale!!



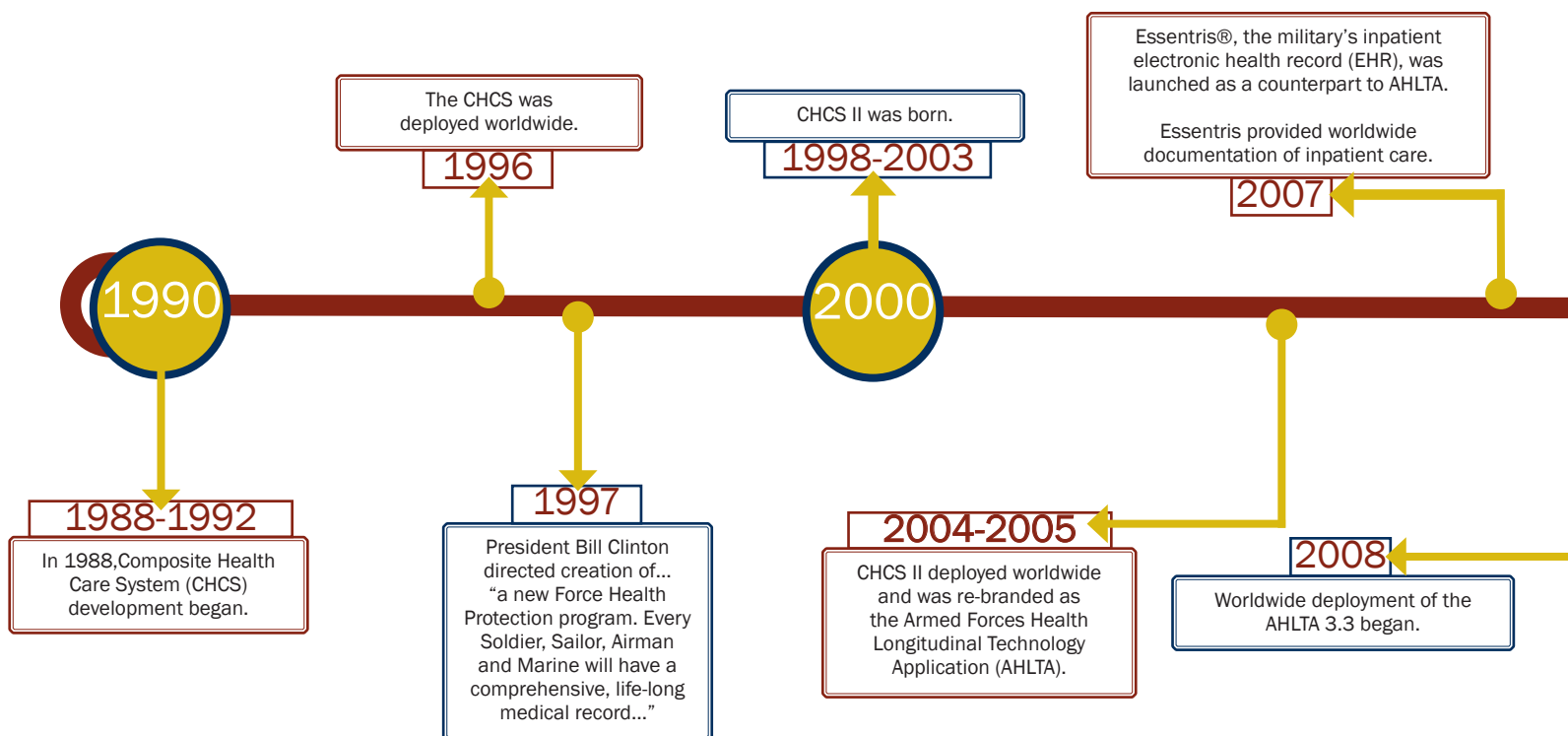
Illustration By Israel Molina

# DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

# MHS

# GENESIS

**MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM**

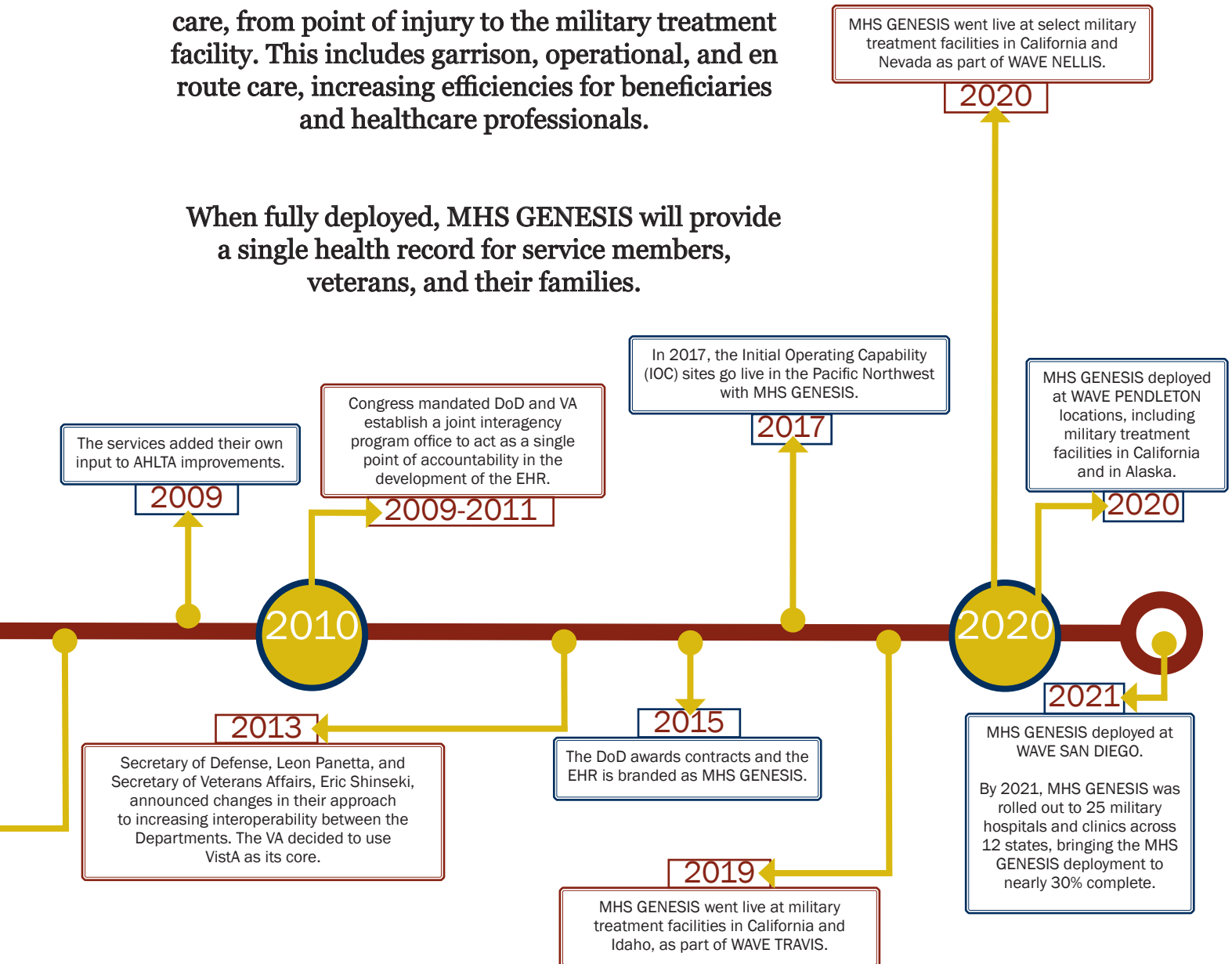




**MHS GENESIS, the new electronic health record for the Military Health System (MHS), provides enhanced, secure technology to manage your health information.**

**MHS GENESIS integrates inpatient and outpatient solutions that will connect medical and dental information across the continuum of care, from point of injury to the military treatment facility. This includes garrison, operational, and en route care, increasing efficiencies for beneficiaries and healthcare professionals.**

**When fully deployed, MHS GENESIS will provide a single health record for service members, veterans, and their families.**



# Western Sector

## CHANGE OF COMMAND



▲ Marine Corps Col. Jesse Sjoberg, Western Sector incoming commander, holds the unit flag during the change of command ceremony July 30. (Photo by Israel Molina)

By Susan VanBoening

Western Sector, United States Military Entrance Processing Command, welcomed a new commander in North Chicago, Ill. July 30, 2021.

Marine Corps Col. Jesse Sjoberg assumed command, succeeding Navy Capt. Nathan King.

Col. Sjoberg assumes command of Western Sector after serving as chief of staff, 1st Marine Logistics Group, San Diego, Calif. Col. King is departing USMEPCOM for United States Southern Command, Miami, Fla.

As commander, Western Sector, USMEPCOM, Sjoberg is responsible for exercising command and control of the 31 Military Entrance Processing Stations located in the continental United States west of the Mississippi River, including one station each in Alaska and Hawaii.

Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, officiated the event. He thanked King during his remarks and commended him for his tremendous accomplishments within Western Sector.

“Western Sector successfully processed and accessed, over the last two years, 184,000 young men and women. That means Western Sector processed roughly one out every six members serving in the armed forces today,” Brady said.

“Amid the COVID situation, Capt. King and his Western Sector team rose to the challenge,” he said. “Not only from a management perspective, and making sure safety and health of all their employees were in place, but also from a leadership standpoint.



Western Sector kept their teams motivated and did whatever it took to accomplish the mission to continue to process men and women into the armed forces. I'm not sure if there is any higher accolade I can give to a sailor than to say 'Brazo Zulu'"

Brady then turned his attention to the Sjoberg and offered seasoned guidance on taking his new command role.

"Your extensive leadership, your experience, education and training have all brought you here," said Brady. "I charge you to seize this opportunity here at USMEPCOM."

King thanked his team and spoke of his time working in a joint command environment.

"Serving alongside Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen and Coast Guardsman is a unique opportunity," King said. "It has been a true honor to serve with each of you. You have made this the most rewarding tour of my entire military career."

The new Marine commander expressed gratitude on day one of his tenure.

"I am humbled, honored and happy to be here today," said Sjoberg. "I am humbled to join such an incredible organization with such amazing people and important mission. I am also deeply honored in the trust that you have placed in me and the opportunity to serve each and every one of you as you perform our vital mission at Freedom's Front Door."

There are two sector commanders at USMEPCOM; Eastern Sector and Western Sector. Sector commanders implement command policies, reviews procedures and recommend changes to the commander, USMEPCOM, for ongoing improvement of MEPS operations. Sector commanders also maintain liaisons with both active duty and reserve Armed Forces recruiting commanders, regional Office of Personnel Management Directors and other Federal agencies. ■



▲ Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady, USMEPCOM commander, addresses incoming Western Sector commander Marine Corps Col. Jesse Sjoberg (left). (Photo by Israel Molina)



▲ Marine Corps Col. Richard T. Brady (on stage, center) presides over USMEPCOM Western Sector change of command ceremony at which Navy Capt. Nathan King (on stage, left) relinquished command to Marine Corps Col. Jesse Sjoberg (on stage, right), July 30. (Photo by Israel Molina)



## *Medical Modernization Team plans training to prepare MEPS for transition to new electronic health records system*

By Sara Crow

Training coordinator

Medical Modernization Team, USMEPCOM

**A**s we prepare to roll out MHS GENESIS, users are at the forefront of our minds. The MMT is constantly monitoring how we can support the field. Asking questions like, "How can we properly arm and prepare them for the new system that will replace paper processing?"

Change can be difficult. We know this. We are taking on this endeavor to work toward a smooth transition with preparation and transparency. The MMT is arming our medical staff through communication and training efforts in preparation for a successful deployment.

We know naturally, this won't be an easy effort ... the training is in-depth, heavy and time-consuming. But it is extremely valuable and informative

MEPS personnel working with MHS GENESIS will be introduced to the system and learn its full capabilities. Medical staff will have the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the system through computer-based courses and hands-on scenarios.

Our focus right now at the MMT is transparency. We want to ensure that confusion about the system is limited.

### **Training**

All training works on a building block system. Each phase must be completed before the next block of training can be added.

Computer-Based Training (CBT), through JKO, will introduce the system and the capabilities of MHS GENESIS. This training is a vital first step that must be completed before access is given. Training will be available to team members in late December.

The second phase is Just-In-Time Training (JITT). JITT walks users through a scenarios with a live instructor. During the 3-4 hour training, the instructor serves as a tour guide. The 2:1 instructor to trainee setting allows users to ask questions along the way. Instructors can watch screens and guide trainees through scenarios seen on MHS GENESIS. This training will run from Jan. 18- Mar. 3, 2022, and

will involve the entire medical team of USMEPCOM. JITT will be a one time training event and will not need annual recertification.

A final assessment is the last phase of training in the MHS GENESIS rollout. A score of 80% is needed to pass. Users will have 3 attempts to evaluate their MHS GENESIS knowledge. After each attempt, users will only see the questions they answered wrong.

MMT will also provide step-by-step guides and working aides. This will assist users through the required inputs they need for their jobs. These guides and working aids will act as a "map" to get acquainted with the new system.

### **Excitement for GENESIS**

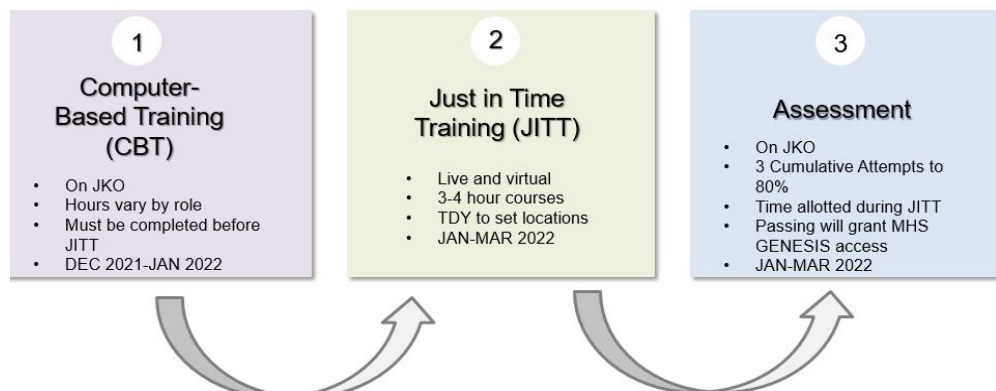
We are excited about MHS GENESIS. EHR benefit both the medical processing community and the service member.

For MEPS personnel, this system will standardize comments and simplify processing while also going paperless.

For service members, there will be no more hunting for documents or fear of losing medical records during a PCS or upon conclusion of military service. Information will all be connected to the DoD ID number.

The MMT is looking forward to the successful deployment of MHS GENESIS and the benefits it will provide everyone connected to the EHR platform.

For more information about MMT training contact Sara Crow at [sara.a.crow.civ@mail.mil](mailto:sara.a.crow.civ@mail.mil).





*September 11, 2001*

# REMEMBERING 20 Years Later

*Active duty  
MEPS personnel share  
personal experiences about  
the day that  
changed America*

By Susan VanBoening

**S**ept. 11, 2021, marks the 20th anniversary of the worst terrorist attack conducted on American soil.

At the instruction of Osama bin Laden, 19 militants with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda, hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks on the eastern seaboard of the United States.

The first attack occurred at 8:46 a.m. EST on a clear Tuesday morning. American Airlines Flight 11, hijacked by five Islamic extremists, crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City.

The plane made impact on the 80th floor of the 110-story skyscraper, instantly killing hundreds of people and trapping hundreds more on higher floors.

Seventeen minutes after the first crash, United Airlines Flight 175 appeared on the New York skyline and turned sharply toward the World Trade Center. Another group of five hijackers piloted

the aircraft into the south World Trade Center building near the 60th floor.

The collision caused a massive explosion. Debris and wreckage showered surrounding buildings and onto the pedestrian-filled streets below.

It became clear America was under attack.

The Federal Aviation Association scrambled to ground airplanes in U.S. air space. Unbeknownst to them, two planes controlled by hijackers remained in the air.

The third group of five hijackers gained control of an American Airlines plane. Flight 77 departed Dulles Airport near Washington D.C and struck the southwest side of the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. The impact touched off a massive fire, taking the lives of 64 passengers and 125 innocent victims in the Pentagon.

The last remaining plane, United Flight 93, departed from Newark, N.J., at 10:03 a.m. Flight 93

crashed in a field not far from Shanksville, Penn. Forty passengers and crew members died instantly.

Intelligence reports determined the hijackers intended target was the U.S Capitol. However, the aircraft crashed in rural Pennsylvania, most likely after the passengers and crew attempted to retake control of the flight deck.

The time between the first attack and the collapse of both World Trade Centers was 102 minutes. America would never be the same.

For service members day-to-day life fundamentally changed when the first plane hit the south tower on that beautiful September day.

Nine members of the USMEPCOM community shared with Messenger magazine staff their experiences being active duty on 9/11 and how their lives and careers have been impacted by the terrorist attacks in the two decades since. ■

## Senior Master Sgt. Ivon Johnson Minneapolis MEPS SEA



### Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:

Airman First Class- USAF  
18th Maintenance Squadron  
Kadena Air Base  
Okinawa, Japan



▲U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Johnson with 18th Maintenance Squadron is pictured in Okinawa, Japan before deployment, 2001. (Courtesy photo)

## 1st Sgt. Michael J. Romero Boise MEPS SEA



### Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:

Lance Corporal- USMC  
Administrative Specialist  
Headquarters Battalion  
1st Marine Infantry Regiment  
Camp Pendleton, Ca.

### ***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

I was getting my bags packed. We were scheduled to deploy to Turkey on the 12th of September.

My wife called me from Idaho to tell me to turn on the TV... I was saddened and shocked. My initial thoughts were, "Here we go, this is what we train for." My mind turned to my job and what we were going to be doing.

Before 9/11, our deployment was planned to be in support of Operation Northern Watch on the northern side of Iraq and Turkey. We ended up deploying the 15th of September. The deployment was shifted from 90 days to 120 days. I remember working at night in Turkey and we were notified we would be getting F-15E Strike Eagles from Lakenheath Air Base, England as they were the first to bomb Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. We did a QT, a quick turn. We landed them, we refueled them, we put bombs

on them and sent them out.

As an airman first class, I trained my entire career for this. Seeing those F-15s land with the cockpits glowing green and knowing that it was a real war, with real bombs, to go and try to take out Bin Laden and carry out the Mission... it was real war.

9/11 was a turning point in our strategic, operational and tactical thinking in planning how we do things. It amped up our focus on who these new threats were. We changed from seeing our enemies as uniformed war fighters to being in an environment to not knowing who we were fighting.

It immediately went from somber to grab our bag and let's go. It made a huge impact on me as it was a moment that framed my career and how we operate.

It was a real job with serious implications. And that was what we trained for. And we said, "Let's go and return the favor to Bin Laden." ■

### ***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

I was eating breakfast at the chow hall.

We thought a plane malfunctioned and hit a building. Then the second plane hit the south tower. At that point, everyone realized it was intentional.

Later in the day, our commander held a formation. He stood in front of the unit and said, "Marines, America is due for a war about every 10-15 years, and it's our turn."

I remember being in our barracks listening to President Bush's national address on the radio. He openly threatened the world of America's powerful military. He said when we find those responsible, there will be no difference in the ones that carried out the attacks from the ones that harbor them. Those words shifted everyone's focus. It was a morale boost.

Our camp was remote and our defensive posture changed. Within 24 hours of the attack, barriers and concertina wire was everywhere. We became a secure compound, looking like a COP or FOB that you see on deployments abroad. (cont.)

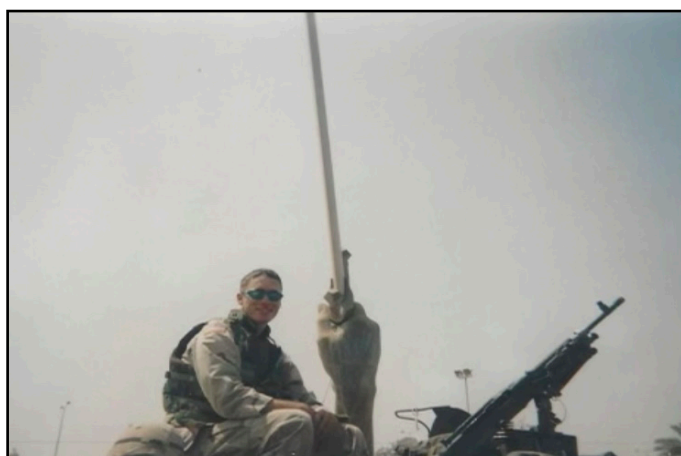


9/11 affected the core of every American. After watching thousands of innocent citizens attacked and killed on our soil, every American paused to reflect on their own morality. There was an immediate feeling of warmth and understanding when interacting with strangers. All walks of life came together to give blood and show support for the victims, first responders and military within their communities.

It was a time when everyone could be proud of their fellow Americans. ■



▲ Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Romero training for deployment in California, 2001. (Courtesy photo)



▲ U.S. Army Pfc. Anderson sits atop a humvee in Baghdad, Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, spring 2003. Behind Anderson is the Victory Arch officially known as the Swords of Qadisiyah. (Courtesy photo)

## Capt. Brian C. Anderson Portland, OR MEPS commander



### Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:

Private First Class- USA  
Calvary Scout  
Eagle Troop  
2d Squadron, 2d Armored  
Cavalry Regiment  
Fort Polk, La.

### ***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

I was in the barracks when the planes hit the towers. I was getting ready to head into work at the motor pool.

I was in shock. There was a lot of confusion what happened. Many were somber. Many were ready to go to war to combat against those responsible. I remember being given a stronger sense of purpose.

The war on terror would be at the forefront of our military efforts. We would be training with goals and purpose in mind.

We were ready to get the call. We prepared and maintained our readiness for 18 months before we deployed to Iraq in early 2003.

Today I think about the surge in patriotism and pride in America following the attacks. I think about how proud I was to deploy and serve this country. I left the Army at the end of 2003, then I came back in 2010 after earning my commission. I still had a lot of pride and a lot of service left to give. ■

## Katherine Murphy

### Deputy Chief of Staff USMEPCOM



**Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:**  
Major- USA  
Mobilization Officer  
USMEPCOM  
North Chicago, Ill.

### Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?

I was working here at USMEPCOM, then suddenly someone said to me, "Go into the director's office."

She had this tiny TV turned on in the corner. We were all standing around the asking, "What are we watching? Is this a joke?"

It looked like out of a movie. The first plane had already hit. We saw the second plane hit on live TV.

All flight routes were grounded. Our division started planning travel plan modifications for applicants.

They still had to go to basic. We had to plan bus routes around the country from every MEPS to basic training. We were working whatever transportation we could find.

I was responsible for reaching out to the services and guaranteeing a chain of command of how processing would work. We worked hard to work with the accession policy and never stopped taking applicants and still had processing days.

We also had an influx of people who wanted to join the armed services. People were showing up at the MEPS door and saying, "I'm here for in-processing." Some had orders from their reserve or guard unit that said to go to MEPS.

But we didn't know what to do because we had no idea who these people were and if they were dangerous or part of another terrorist plot.

We also didn't know if this could happen in Chicago at Sears Towers (at the time). We had concerns about the Selective Service security which houses all the draft notices.

We were thinking right away, "Are we safe? Are we a target?"

That day also happened to be my son's 11th birthday. His dad was flying in to surprise him and we didn't tell him. I remember calling him and saying, "Honey, mom's going to be a little late tonight." He was so upset.

At 20 years, we learned a lot of lessons. Many have forgotten. The new tower is a reminder but... it reminds people who see it every day... people who lost family and

## Senior Chief Christopher Byard

### Cleveland MEPS SEA



**Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:**  
Petty Officer Third Class- USN  
Administrative Specialist  
SHAPE  
Mons, Belgium

### Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?

9/11 was my one-year wedding anniversary. That day, I was supposed to work half-day. I was planning on taking my wife on the train to France. Things changed very quickly.

I came in from lunch and saw my chief watching TV. He was in tears. The TV stayed on, work stopped and that lasted for about two hours.

For folks overseas it hit a little different. We couldn't comfort our loved ones back home. Phone lines were a little shaky for a while. It was scary to not be able to get ahold of your loved ones. We didn't have the type of technology we do today. No Facebook messages or cell phones to call home.

I had no idea what would happen, but at that age and pay grade, we did what we were told. That's when things started to change for a young guy who was never introduced to something traumatic in the military.

We got restricted to base, and security measures were sent through the roof. As an admin guy, I knew I would be standing at a gate because security had tripled on the base.

We went to the armory and were issued Kevlar and weapons (cont.)



▲U.S. Army Maj. Katherine Murphy (center) pictured with U.S. Navy Capt. Martha R. Bills (left), USMEPCOM commander, and USMEPCOM chief of staff Army Col. Maurice Buchanan (right) at the Navy Ball, Great Lakes Naval Station North Chicago, Ill., Oct. 2001. (Courtesy photo)



We were like that nonstop for two weeks.

The following year I transferred, and I was on a destroyer in Hawaii. We started navigating to the war fighting.

That's where it really sunk in. I was numb and naïve. I did what I was told, but I think I had to be scared the whole time, looking back at it. I didn't end up in Afghanistan until 2011, and I was there for a year.

Now at 20 years later, I think about how this impacted MEPCOM at the time. When you think about it today, and when we ask people why they joined the military, they talk about joining the military because of 9/11. With guys like me who lived through this, it's not 9/11 that I'm worried about. It's 9/10. It's the day before. Making sure we are prepared and secured

That's the stuff that can keep me up at night. ■

## 1st Sgt. Benjamin M. Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?

### Bowe Spokane MEPS SEA



#### Rank, job and duty station on 9/11:

Private First Class- USA  
Civilian Personnel Clerk  
2d Battalion, 18th Field  
Artillery Regiment  
Fort Sill, Ok.

I was at the dining facility at Fort Sill eating breakfast. The TVs were on and there was a lot of confusion. We were in disbelief because we were not sure what happened.

After breakfast, we walked from the dining facility to the motor pool for formation. My 1st Sgt. happened to be from New York and he was like, "Hey Yo! They're messing up my state."

Within a few hours, we knew it was very serious. They had locked down Fort Sill almost immediately. Before that day, Fort Sill was completely open ... you could drive on and off with no problem.

From the time the planes hit, everything changed. We were immediately put on details, bomb details and car searches were happening everywhere. Everyone from the top NCOIC to the bottom of the barrel private was spread across post guarding random buildings we had never heard of before. We had to have arms on us at all times. Some of us were sent to protect big propane tanks. From that day forward, going months onwards, it was completely different.

Our guard detail duties were intense until early 2002, when we began gearing up for possible deployment. Training missions ramped up. We were in the field all the time. We went to NTC and Twentynine Palms. We went to Minnesota for training exercises. We had a feeling right away that we were going to end up in deployment.

We ended up in the initial invasion into Iraq in March 2003. For most of my adult life, we have either been at war or in some form of war. Before 9/11, the installations were totally different.

It's hard not to think about the before and the after. ■



▲Byard (right center), aboard ship as part of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, 2002. (Courtesy photo)



◀Photo taken by U.S. Army Pfc. Benjamin Bowes while on a training mission at National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, Ca., spring 2001. During training, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery was visited by then United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (pictured center). (Courtesy photo)

## 1st Sgt. Cody Sidors Butte MEPS SEA



**Rank, job and  
duty station on 9/11:**  
Specialist- USA  
Administrative Specialist  
379th Engineer Battalion  
Missoula, Mt.

### ***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

When I woke up, the first plane had already hit the first tower. I watched the second plane hit the TV live.

I couldn't fathom what was going on. It was shocking to have two planes crash into a building one after another.

I was with my parents at the time. They had been watching this unfold from the initial report and had a mature understanding. They understood the gravity of the situation and how it impacted me more significantly than I realized. We were in Montana, but my parents kept talking about it being New York and knowing how many people this would impact because of the population.

I definitely felt concerned about what my future looked like. When I signed up for the military, no one considered the possibility of deploying or going to war with another country or a terrorist group.

I was naïve enough that I just counted on my training and senior leadership.

My military unit was later recalled. We got briefs on the intel they knew at the time, which wasn't a lot. They told us to be prepared.

So that's what we did...we made sure our lives were in order. We weren't sure what our futures looked like, or if and when we were going to war. ■



▲ U.S. Army Pvt. Cody Sidors.  
(Courtesy photo)

## Command Master Chief Petty Officer Nathan Hon Milwaukee MEPS SEA



**Rank, job and  
duty station on 9/11:**  
Seaman- USN  
Tacintel Operator  
USS Bonhomme Richard  
(LHD-6)

### ***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

I had finished my breakfast and walked in to the ship's signal exploitation space. I sat down at my terminal to begin my morning routine checking message traffic.

I was in disbelief, shocked, confused and I remember shortly after feeling angry. My shipmates were in shock and disbelief as well.

Once the initial shock wore off, I remember immediately preparing to get underway. I did not have a thought about my future other than we would be going to war.

Personally I was considering the safety of my family back home. Wondering what terrorist attack was going to happen next and where.

Professionally, I was preparing to put into action all my training. I was ready to go!

We made ready the ship and embarked all crew members. We then deployed in response to the terrorist attacks. It was a very emotional charged deployment that would last 9 months.

I am still saddened by the events of 9/11. I often visit the 9/11 memorials to pay my respects. Even after all these years, it is still a very tough memory, one that I will never forget! ■



**Dr. Rick Cox**  
Deputy-Command Advisory Group  
USMEPCOM



**Rank, job and  
duty station on 9/11:**

Retired- USA  
Program Analysis and  
Evaluation Directorate  
USMEPCOM  
North Chicago, Ill.



◀U.S. Army 1st. Lt. Rick Cox and his wife, Jolinda Cox, pictured at the U.S. Army Correctional Activity Christmas Ball, Fort Riley, Ks., Dec. 1982. (Courtesy photo)

***Messenger: What was your experience on 9/11?***

I had just retired from the Army and I was working here at USMEPCOM. We would do a color ceremony at the flag pole on the east side of the building. We finished and walked back into the building. On the way in, a couple of people passed us and suggested something was going on.

We had televisions on, people everywhere were stopping to watch this unbelievable scene of the first tower which had just gotten crashed into. We were all fixated. There was typical speculation of what was going

on. But we didn't know. All we knew was a jetliner had crashed into the tower. There was this huge and unbelievable tragedy taking place in front of our eyes. Then the other tower was slammed into. There was a very subdued tone that day. It was a deep sadness. No one knew for some time if that was the leading edge of the attack on our country. We didn't know if there were more to come...

We've learned so many lessons and have to deal with how we responded in the early years.

I am respectful of their decision-making processes. I admire their incredible determination to protect our country. In that situation, anyone can second guess. It's easy to second guess. But when you're in charge, you have to make calls and make hard decisions in such a chaotic environment. It makes me remember how important it is to have people, of good judgment, common sense, and integrity, in those vital decision-making roles when those are the only resources you have.

I think looking back now from this vantage point, the country must remember the lessons we've learned and be prepared. We tend to have a short memory. We tend to forget. We should not forget. Huge payment and huge sacrifices have been made at that moment.

In the ensuing years, the deployment of our military. The costs have been enormous. But we have not experienced another attack since then. ■



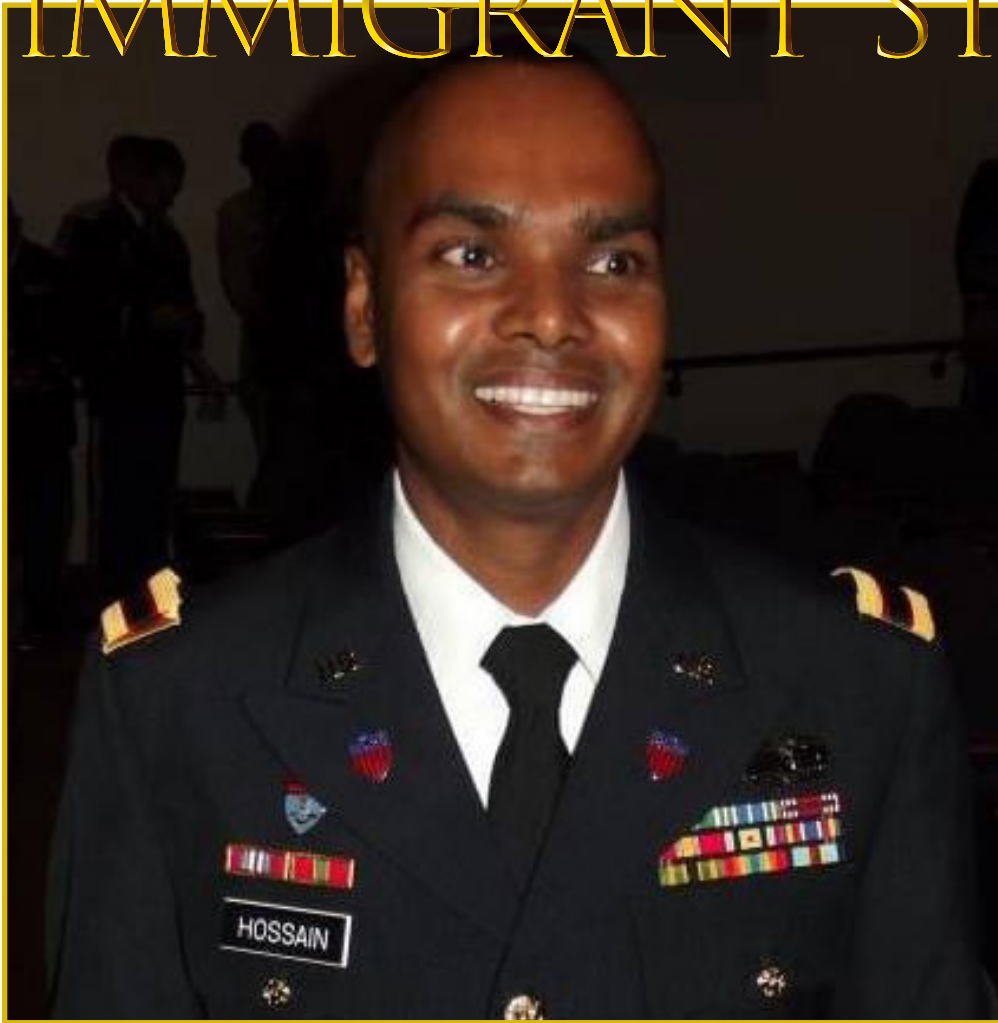
▲The Hon family Aug. 17, 2021. (Courtesy photo)

There's been a lot of soul-searching.

In times of such great tragedy, people in decision-making seats have to make decisions with limited information.

ADVERSITY • AMBITION • AIM

## AN IMMIGRANT STORY



By Susan VanBoening

When U.S. Army Capt. Mohammed Hossain talks about his “dreams,” you sense the gratefulness in his voice and sincerity in his words. When Hossain, a native of Bangladesh and the Oklahoma City MEPS assistant operations officer, tells you his story, you sit in awe of his humble and relentless devotion to his goals and gratitude to the United States of America. His story is the American dream.

### Simple beginnings

Born and raised in a small village in southwest Bangladesh, Hossain was from a traditional farming community. The Hossain family included two parents, four siblings and a large extended family that made their livelihood growing crops and raising animals. Hossain attended local schools and thrived in the classroom, eventually completing a master of laws (LL.M) degree

from Dhaka University.

“I was planning to be a judge in Bangladesh, that was always my dream,” he said. “I was already in the process where I had taken my exams to qualify, and I was selected for the Bangladesh Air Force to be a legal officer.”

“But my life changed all of a sudden.”

In 2003, amid a successful law career, the then



26-year-old Hossain received a letter in the mail from the U.S. Government. Upon opening, he was shocked by what he was reading.

Over a year earlier, Hossain applied for the diversity visa lottery with little thought of being selected. He was chosen for the program that would grant him a green card to come to the United States.

"I was so surprised," he said with a chuckle. "I forgot that I applied for the lottery program."

The decision to leave home proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

"It was a very tough decision because I had a good career in Bangladesh and had a good future there," he said. "I was practicing law in the Bangladesh Supreme Court and getting ready for the government services to be part of the judiciary system."

The appeal of the land of opportunity couldn't be dismissed. He knew what America offered extended beyond himself.

"The U.S. is the number one country in the world, everyone has a dream to come here," he said. "The situation was that I might have a good life in Bangladesh, but the rest of my family ... I knew if I went to the U.S., they could have a chance to eventually come too and live a better life. This gave all of us a chance at dreams."

## Welcome to America

The process of immigrating to America didn't include any hand-holding.

"I didn't know anyone or anything about the U.S.," he said. "I was confused about where to go or who was going to take care of me. You get the green card and everything else depends on me."

With uncertainty of where to go, Hossain was at the mercy of the kindness of fellow Bangladeshi immigrants already in the U.S. Luckily for Hossain, a friend of a friend from law school had come to the states on the same visa program a few years earlier. Before leaving Bangladesh, the mutual friend spoke to Hossain over the phone and offered to pick him up from the airport when he arrived in New York City.

Upon arrival at JFK airport, Hossain was hit with culture shock and coming to terms with leaving his old life behind and being truly alone for the first time.

However, the land of the free did not disappoint when he stepped on American soil on Valentine's Day, 2004.

"New York was a dreamland," he said with great pride. "It was everything that I imagined. I felt like my dream had come true."

The euphoria of the dream was short-lived for Hossain as reality set in. The friend who picked up Hossain worked out an agreement with another Bangladeshi family where he could rent a room from them in Queens, N.Y.

For Hossain, the financials were tight, to say the least.

"I had \$300 in my pocket when I came to the U.S.," Hossain recalled with vivid clarity. "At the end of the month, I had to pay \$400 to stay in that house."

"I woke up the following day, and the first thing I did was I went to find a job."

By day four in the U.S., he was working in an Indian restaurant. The restaurant was fraught with intolerance and disrespect toward minority employees. Hossain stuck it out for two weeks until he secured a position at another restaurant responsible for maintaining the salad



▲23 year old Mohammed Hossain stands in his home in Jhenidah, Bangladesh, 2000. (Courtesy photo)



▲Hossain (left) practices law during a trial in Bangladesh, 2002. (Courtesy photo)



▲Hossain (pictured center) at boot camp graduation, Fort Jackson, S.C., March 2006. (Courtesy photo)

bar in the early part of the day. This routine continued for a short time and allowed him to acclimate to his new land.

After three months in America, Hossain began looking for additional employment. He connected with a hiring manager at a pizza chain in Queens and was hired as a pizza maker. After six months, Hossain was made assistant manager. But he had bigger dreams in mind, both for himself and to support his family in Bangladesh.

“My goal is to be a lawyer.”

With his dream at the forefront of his thoughts, in 2005, the educated Bangladeshi lawyer started taking courses at a Tuoro Law College in metro New York. He only needed 27 credits to make his dream of becoming an American lawyer a reality.

Then a chance encounter changed everything.

### Meeting Mr. Tony

Hossain remembers it was a Tuesday when Mr. Tony, a U.S. Army recruiter dressed in civilian

clothes, strolled into the pizza shop in Queens.

“Mr. Tony came to Domino’s to pick up one of the girls that was working a shift with me,” he recalled. “He was asking me if she was there because he was going to take her to the ASVAB at New York MEPS.”

Next, the recruiter turned his attention to Hossain, asking him what he did and why he worked there. Then he asked Hossain if he wanted to join the military.

Hussain shared his background story. Mr. Tony stopped in his tracks.

“He looked at me and said, ‘you have a master of law degree and you’re working at Domino’s Pizza? Hey man, you can come into the military and be an officer.’”

The recruiter explained the enlistment process and opportunities. Hussain’s interest spiked. He liked the idea of having an expedited path to citizenship, a requirement to become an officer in the United States military.

Mr. Tony advised Hossain to take some time to think about taking the ASVAB exam to enter the military.

The Army recruiter suggested giving himself a month to read and think about the opportunities the military had to offer.

With America in two wars and Hossain motivated to achieve his dreams, he knew he had to take the recruiter’s proposition as soon as possible.

“I knew the war was going on, but I was not scared,” he said. “I was desperate to get out of odd jobs. And so ... I thought about the opportunity to take the test when he was talking to the girl, and I said, ‘Mr. Tony, I can take this exam today. I’m confident I can pass.’”

Hossain called his manager and said he needed to leave to take a test for the military “right now.” The Army recruiter’s offer for a ride with his coworker to MEPS to take a test that would change his life was too valuable of an opportunity to pass up. The manager arrived 15 minutes later.

“I jumped in the car with the girl and Mr. Tony and he took me to the New York City MEPS.”

That same day, Hossain passed





▲ Spc. Hossain on deployment in Iraq, 2008.  
(Courtesy photo)



▲ Hossain (right) pictured with colleague then Staff Sgt. Scedric Moss in Korea, 2016. (Courtesy photo)

the ASVAB with flying colors. The following day, Wednesday, he got the all-clear on his physical and background check. By Thursday of the same week, Mohammed Hossain - Bangladeshi lawyer, American immigrant, law student and Domino's Pizza assistant manager - took the Oath of Enlistment for the U.S. Army.

### Everybody was yelling

In order to complete his semester of law school, recruit Hossain took part in the delayed entry program. On Jan. 18, 2006, Hossain traveled south from Queens, N.Y., to basic training in Fort Jackson, S.C., and culture shock was in store.

"On day one, when I was coming out of the bus, the drill sergeant started yelling at me, 'what are you doing on my bus,' I was surprised how the reception went," Hossain said through laughter, now thinking back.

"I thought, 'this is not my world. I have made a grave mistake in my life.'"

Hossain's panic and remorse lingered while in boot camp. He did not fully understand the structure and culture of the U.S. Army or even what food he should eat. Using a common shower with other soldiers was very new to him.

"This was a different world, everybody was yelling, no one talked to me," he explained. "There was no introduction. I thought to myself, 'I want to be a lawyer, what am I doing here.'"

The physical fitness aspect of boot camp proved to be just one component of difficulty for the recruit. He struggled initially, based on not fully knowing what would take place in initial entry training.

Of everything Hossain experienced at boot camp, he recalls his three platoon sergeants and their roles in his life with absolute clarity. One drill sergeant had ill intentions towards Hossain, but the other two shone like stars in his memory.

"Two drill sergeants somehow loved me and they started helping me on every step," he said. "They briefed me separately. They helped me out. So for the rest of my life ... I thank those two guys."

"When I was moving under the fire in basic training, the drill sergeant got down and said, 'I'll crawl with you, no worries, don't be scared.'"

For Hossain, alone, singled out and ignored at boot camp, this example of kindness left the imprint of what a true Army leader does.

"It changed my whole concept, there are some rude people there, but some good leaders will help you throughout your career," he said. "There's a lot of help left and right. We just have to ask for the right people."

Boot camp graduation came and went. Hossain was filled with great pride and relief as he headed to advance individual training (AIT). There he excelled. His skillset in studying law allowed him to master his coursework. He scored 100 percent on almost every exam he took at AIT.

The Soldier also saw growth in the area he initially struggled with the most - physical fitness. He improved the pushups. He improved the run. He struggled with the sit-ups. But the day before AIT graduation, he finally passed the sit-ups.



▲ Hossain and sons celebrating Halloween at Fort Stewart, Ga., 2018. (Courtesy photo)



▲ The Hossain family in Korea, 2014. (Courtesy photo)

## The Soldier's life begins

By late 2006, Hossain arrived at his first duty station, Fort Polk, La. His platoon sergeant greeted him and shared the news that deployment was on the horizon.

"He says to me, 'hey did you bring everything with you from basic training? We will deploy, and I need to ensure you have everything and are ready to go.' I was like, 'I have no idea what you mean by everything. I literally have nothing.'" They deployed to Iraq.

During his first deployment, the dream Mr. Tony promised in that pizza shop in Queens finally came true.

"Camp Arifjan, Kuwait in 2007, I got my citizenship," Hossain said.

Asked to describe that moment, he paused, then exhaled exuding pride and relief.

"I mean, wow, it was such a proud moment for me," he said. "It was like getting a huge award. I now have access to everything. I was so proud. It opened a new window to me. I was so grateful."

"And I was still thinking, how I was going to submit my OCS packet."

## Officer Candidacy School bound

After becoming a citizen, Hossain remained focused on when he could submit his OCS packet. However, facing back-to-back deployments, his leadership explained doing so would be challenging. Reenlistment followed during his second deployment in July 2009 to Baghdad, Iraq.

After returning from deployment and having a permanent change of station to Fort Meade, Md., the window of opportunity he had long waited for finally arrived. He submitted his OCS packet in 2011 and was selected in 2012.

The early experiences from boot camp prepared the now-seasoned Soldier to persevere. He knew challenges he faced at OCS would get easier over time.

"When I went to OCS, it was like coming back to basic training again," he chimed. "It was a hard time at OCS. But I kept thinking, 'no, keep pushing, I'll get this.'"

Along the way, Hossain acknowledged each moment was part of the vision he had of his new life in America when he stepped off the plane eight-years earlier at JFK airport. He graduated from OCS Aug. 23, 2012, and was finally a commissioned officer in the United States Army.

Yet again, his dream had come true.

"I was so happy... I cannot explain how happy I was," he said.

Since receiving his commission as a second lieutenant, Adjutant General's Corps, Hossain has successfully completed tours in South Korea,





▲ Captain Career Course graduation 2017, Fort Jackson, S.C. (Courtesy photo)

2013-2015, Fort Jackson, S.C., 2015-2017, and Fort Stewart, Ga., 2017-2019, which included a nine-month deployment to Kuwait.

Along the way, other dreams have come to fruition, including marriage, two children born in 2009 and 2014, and a home in South Carolina.

And he never forgot the family he left behind in Bangladesh.

"My family came and settled in upstate New York," he beamed. "Only one sibling is still left in Bangladesh."

### Dreams to come

The Oklahoma City MEPS assistant operations officer since 2019, Hossain knows his journey isn't traditional. He embraces any chance he gets to share his story.

"It is my honor and pleasure to work with young kids who are coming into the military," he said. "I see

immigrant kids who are joining the military. When they see me, they get inspired. They ask me questions and I share my story."

Fifteen years after coming to America and living the American dream that movies are made of, Hossain humbly reflects on all he's accomplished.

"I am truly proud to serve in the U.S. Army," he said. "It's a great honor and pleasure to work in the foremost fighting force in the world. I learn every day. I love my job and want to continue my service as long as I can."

"This is the opportunity that I got to improve my life."

Still, he has more aspirations to come.

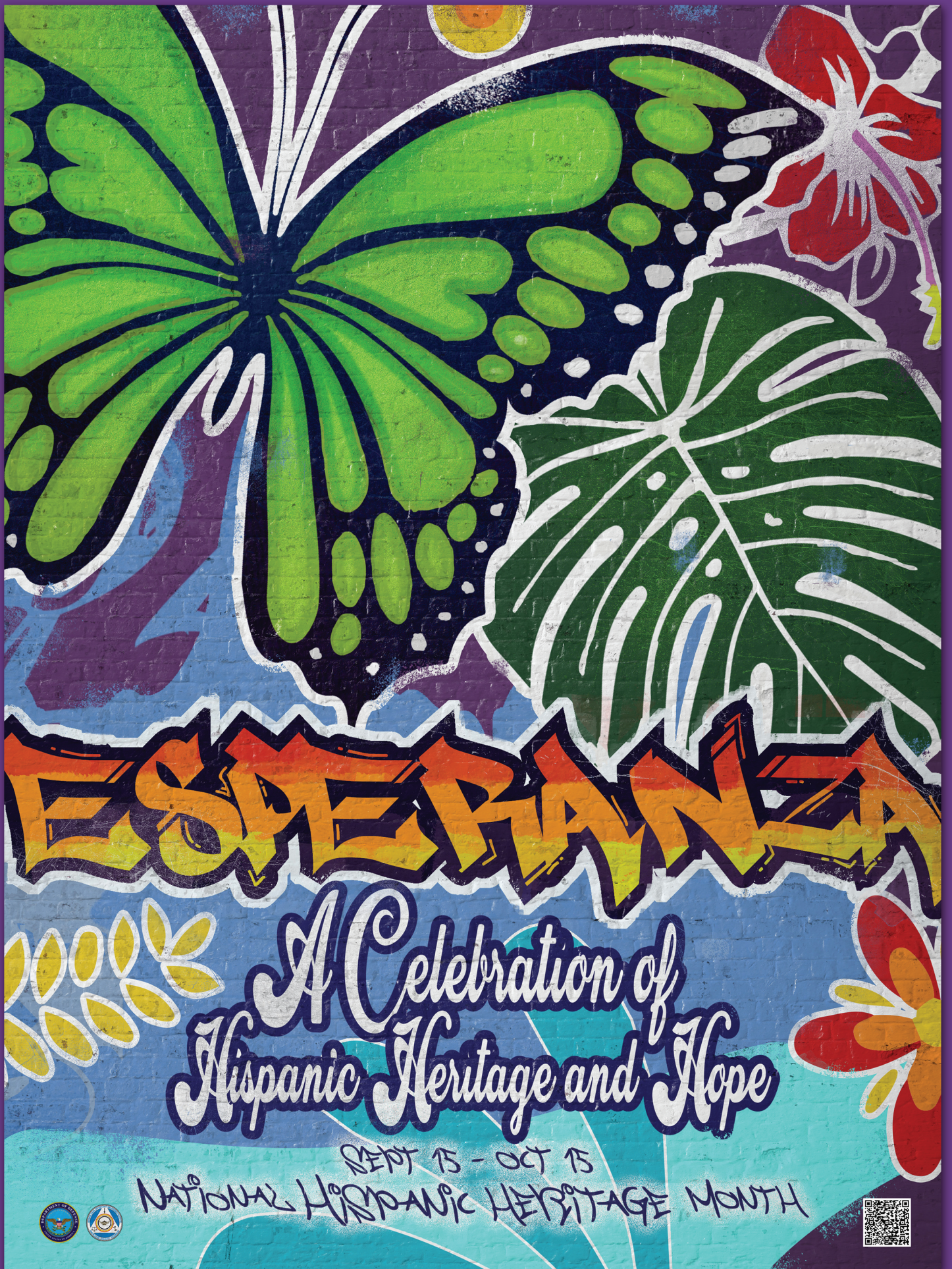
"Law school is the final dream," he said with absolute certainty. "After I eventually retire, I will endeavor to return to my original profession in Bangladesh. I'm going to practice law."

We have no doubt. ■



▲ 2nd Lt. Hossain receives his first salute as an officer from colleague and friend, then Staff Sgt. Scedric Moss, after OCS graduation, Fort Benning, Ga., Aug. 23, 2012. (Courtesy photo)





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