

Messenger

UNITED STATES MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING COMMAND

SHARING INFORMATION TO REACH A VISION

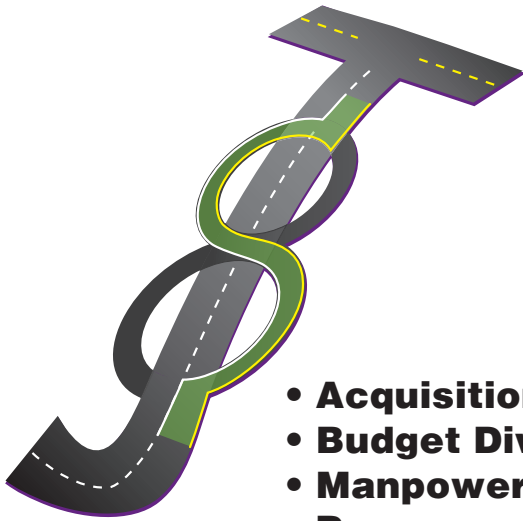
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Resource Management



Messenger

Sharing information to reach a vision



Resource Management:

The force that propels the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command

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U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command

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Messenger

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Commander's Commentary

Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seatbelts. We may experience some turbulence.

No, that's not an inside Air Force joke. The possible upheaval will be related to our budget.

As Operation Iraqi Freedom begins to wind down, with an anticipated withdrawal of combat troops by August 2010, funding for the Global War on Terror will rise this year and then drop by nearly two-thirds in fiscal 2011. With this decrease, the supplemental budget on which we have depended will end.

The president's proposed Defense budget represents a 4 percent increase over this year's total, but things are a bit hazy after that. Will the economy continue to suffer which, in turn, will likely mean cuts throughout the government? How quickly will the economy recover and will adequate funds be available to fund programs at the desired levels?

All of this, of course, comes at a time when USMEPCOM can expect to be busier than ever. The Army, Marine Corps and, to a lesser extent, the Air Force, are all scheduled to increase their end strengths over the next couple of years. That translates to the MEPS being busier than ever in a time of potentially declining budgets.

How does one do more with less? Ultimately that is impossible, but there are ways to get the most out of our budget. First, we must hope for the best, expect the worst and plan accordingly.

Execute your budget on time. Spend the money the taxpayers provide wisely. Before you disburse funds, ask yourself, "Is this something we need to have, or is it just nice to have?" If the answer is the latter, then save the funds until you come across

items in the former category. Set priorities when you make budget decisions and be on the lookout for things you can do without.

Look for ways to save money. When you go TDY, do you look for the lowest airfares and the best value in lodging? Yes, we sometimes have to travel on short notice, which means paying a premium, but in most cases we know well in advance and can save substantial dollars with advanced booking.

During these challenging times, we will rely even more upon the expertise of our Resource Management (J-8) professionals. They are one of the pillars of the command, and rarely get the recognition they deserve. Quite often they are derided as bureaucrats when they demand that things be done properly — and legally. I depend on them to keep me out of trouble. You should, too. And you should thank them when they do.

Through the hard work of the J-8 manpower branch and J-1 civilian personnel division, many MEPS positions recently were upgraded to higher pay levels. These folks captured all the tasks you do and gave me the justification to give you a raise. You earned it with your hard work, dedication and can-do spirit.

The J-8 acquisition and logistics division helps you buy what you need and supervises the contracts that allow you to do your job.

The J-8 budget division keeps you on track and steps into the breach whenever you need help, whether it be a question about a particular disbursement or filling in to help keep your books when a position is vacant.

The J-8 programs, policy and systems division makes sure the funds will keep flowing in future years,



Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr.

taking into account the changes in how we do business and securing the dollars to keep our doors open.

These are, indeed, challenging times and I foresee a very real possibility that they may become even more so. As we stride boldly ahead, we do so knowing that, as the guardians of Freedom's Front Door, we are vital to our national defense. I am confident that our leaders recognize this and will allocate the required resources. I am equally confident that the J-8 professionals will provide the expertise to allow us to be good stewards of the money entrusted to us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mariano C. Campos Jr.".

Mariano C. Campos Jr.
Colonel, USAF
Commanding

Resource Management:

— providing the drive to move the command forward

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

If you think of USMEPCOM as a vehicle, then Resource Management is the engine and drive train.

Like the mechanical components of a car, each of the four divisions — acquisition and logistics, budget, manpower and management, and programs, policy and systems — meshes with the other three to make sure the whole mechanism is greater than the sum of its parts.

The directorate, known as J-8, is largely unseen in everyday operations, but without it the command doesn't move. In addition to moving the whole vehicle forward, it also powers the accessories.

"We're completely a support function," Jeff Zeller, Resource Management director, said. "There isn't one directorate or special staff organization we don't touch in some way. Everybody needs paper, everybody needs money for civilian pay, everybody needs money to go TDY."

Each division interacts with the MEPS and headquarters staff throughout the year, Zeller said, and all provide direct support to the MEPS.

"Anytime you have a hiring action, it's going to go through (Manpower and Management) to ensure the funding is there," he said. "They're also monitoring workload, because as the population shifts throughout the United States, the workload may be dropping in one location and increasing in another."

"Logistics is dealing with them on a day-to-day basis on everything from procuring supplies to vehicles to property book," Zeller said. "Budget deals with them on a daily basis, too."



Jeff Zeller, Director, Resource Management

Programs, Policy and Systems has the civilian payroll, so most people are concerned about that every two weeks."

The people keep everything humming along, Zeller said, and joked he "doesn't really do anything."

"I've got a phenomenal group," he said. "I'm just lucky. I belong to a great team. They are making it happen every single day. I have complete faith in them and they never let me down."

Zeller has some advice for those who disparage the directorate's staff as bureaucrats.

"I know resource managers and logisticians both get called bureaucratic," he said, "but if you look up the definition, it's a very positive thing. Ultimately we do what is necessary. We will make sure it is done correctly so we can all stay out of jail."

Resource Management can help its customers "buy almost anything, but we can't buy everything," Zeller said. His biggest concern is if the purchase is legal.

"That's the one thing that matters most," he said. "That's the main emphasis. Is it legal, is it proper and is it properly accounted for? Is it in the accounting system? Is it on a property book? Is it authorized? To me those few words answer the whole question."

The budget is also a consideration.

"(The command) only has so much money," he said. "We have \$265 million. We don't have one cent more than we're authorized. We can't spend \$265 million and one cent, because that's not legal."

And the old military saying, "It's easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission" often turns out badly when dealing with resource management issues.

"Ask first," Zeller said. "Don't play the game of execute and ask forgiveness. We'll help you get there, but ask first. Then we can determine right away the legal way to do it. You may have to jump through a couple of extra hoops, we might ask for an extra piece of paper, but we'll help you get there legally."

The command is unusual because it deals with five "colors" of money — Army Operations and Maintenance funds (known as OMA), medical funds, reimbursable funds, procurement funds, and research, development, testing and evaluation funds.

"We're one of the few organizations that have an OMA mission and a medical mission," Zeller said. "Usually you have one or the other. If you're a division, your mission is to go out and destroy the enemy. If you're medical, you treat the casualties and provide medical care. In our mission, we perform both functions."

Reimbursable funds come from the Selective Service, because it uses the command's computers and pays for the time it uses. The Marine Corps pays the command for costs associated with converting Marine military billets to civilians under Program Budget Decision 712. The RDT&E funds are related to developing the Virtual Interactive Processing System.

The USMEPCOM machine motors down the road fueled by five sources of "fuel." The Resource Management directorate makes sure they are mixed in the proper ratio for the best performance and that each part of the "engine" is in tune with the others. Everybody, after all, wants to get the best "gas mileage" possible.

Acquisition and Logistics:

— buying, tracking what's needed to stay on the road

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

If someone wants to buy an “accessory” or a “replacement part” for the USMEPCOM vehicle they go to J-8’s Acquisition and Logistics Division.

“If the command buys it, it goes through acquisitions, who turns it over to logistics,” Jeff Zeller, Resource Management director, said. “They are the ones who have the whole logistics function. The reason they’re called acquisition vs. logistics is because they also have a contracting branch, whether it’s a purchase card or reviewing statements of work for contracts to go out. A lot of times that’s a stand-alone function, but it’s together here.”

Starts with acquisition

“You’ve got to buy it before you can put it on a property book,” Zeller said. “You’ve got to lease it before you put it in the vehicle fleet. You have to buy the supplies before you put them in the printers, copiers, whatever.”

The branch reviews package preparation and acquisition progress for contracted work, Bob Blanchard, chief of the acquisition and logistics division said.

USMEPCOM doesn’t have warrant authority, which means it relies on other contracting offices to award its contract. A warranted contract officer can enter legally binding contracts which bind the federal government to an agreement which transfers money from the government to a civilian business.

Although USMEPCOM’s contracting office is not warranted, four members of the staff have been warranted at some point during their careers.

“If somebody wants help and to talk to a warranted contract officer, we have experienced people who have been warranted,” Blanchard said. “They are ready to help dealing with contracting officers.

“It’s not something they grant to everybody,” Blanchard said. “In the Army system, you need a two star general or equivalent as the head of contracting and you need at least an O-6 or equivalent as the (principal assistant responsible for contracting).

“We have a number of places that legitimately constitute a contracting office for the Army, Department of Defense and the federal government,” he said. “Our most likely one would be the contracting office for the southeast region at Fort Knox, Ky. We use the (Defense Information Systems Agency) out of the (Defense Information Technology Contracting Office) and we use different functions out of the (General Services Administration).

Better lodging, transportation, meals

“We’re here to serve the MEPS,” he said. “Most of their contracting is far more streamlined now. The major contract at every MEPS is the lodging contract. We run that program here at the headquarters and the contracts are awarded by Fort Knox. The

contracts are normally for five years, so we try to do 10-13 MEPS a year.”

The military services pay for the rooms and transportation to and from the hotel and to the airport. The services provide credit card account numbers to pay for the rooms and transportation, Blanchard said.

Over a five year period, the command has revamped the lodging contracts.

“We used to pay for rooms we didn’t use,” Blanchard said. “We now have an automatic eight o’clock cutoff. Any rooms that aren’t taken by eight o’clock are turned back to the hotel.”

Blanchard said it is still possible to have no shows, but only if a service orders a room after eight p.m. The command does track walk-ins to the hotel, for which some hotels charge a higher rate.

USMEPCOM pays for other local travel and contracts for it separately.



Robert Blanchard, Chief,
 Acquisition and Logistics
 Division

needed local destinations and the airport.

“We have to see quotes from three DoT-approved carriers before we can sign the agreement,” Blanchard said. “It is much the same process we would use if we were getting ready to ship our household goods and we went over to the transportation office. They would call the approved carriers who service the Department of Defense, get quotes and select one to handle your needs.”

Blanchard stressed that everything has changed since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and that security requirements are much more stringent.

“We’ve been standardizing,” Blanchard said. “The Department of Transportation has given us the authority to sign transportation contracts for the command. We’ve been systematically going through the MEPS and redoing those contracts.”

Applicant transportation from the MEPS to the hotel and back is in the meals and lodging contract. The command does have separate contracts to transport applicants to medical consults, other

Acquisition & Logistics Division

“From time to time, people get lax and don’t want to use approved carriers,” he said. “We try to do our small part on this end to make sure we are using approved carriers. That is a big push.”

And more contracts ...

The contracting branch oversees the command’s other contracts. The medical directorate administers the contract for fee-basis practitioners. Blanchard was deeply involved in getting the contract written and Donna Lahti approves payments to the contractor. It also has payment authority for all information technology contracts.

“We advise on contract administration for whoever is actually getting the service, Blanchard said. “The money routes through whoever wanted the contract.

“The (contracting officer’s representative) is there to verify receipt of services,” he said. “We get them to verify the invoices before the payment is made.

“The branch also functions as business advisors when CORs have issues with contracts let by external contracting offices, Blanchard said. “They ask for our advice to make sure they understand what’s going on. If they need us to interact or intervene with other contracting professionals at those offices, we will do that as well.”

Blanchard also gives out more autographs than Leonard Nimoy at a Star Trek convention — his signature appears on the checks applicants use to buy meals as they travel to their basic training sites.

“That program does not actually belong to USMEPCOM,” Blanchard said. “Under U.S. Statute, only the Department of the Treasury can issue government checks, so the program is under their auspices. It’s run from USMEPCOM by the Army Comptroller.

“I allow my signature block to be used by the Department of the Treasury to make the checks legal. Any decision on any other program they might use has to be addressed to the people who control and fund the program.”

The checks are good for up to \$18. The restaurant fills in the amount and the check clears the bank.

“(The program) was developed to control the number of checks that were handed out so that only an applicant who was traveling got a check,”

Blanchard said. “The vouchers we were using before were also part of MIRS [MEPCOM Integrated Resource System], but that system didn’t work well. Now every check has a name on it when it is printed out. The system won’t print more than one check per person. Then there is an indelible record of the check.”

Government Purchase Cards

The division also runs the command’s government purchase card program.

“There are about 130 credit card holders out there in the MEPS and three in the headquarters,” Jackie L. Morris Jr., contracting branch chief, said. Lahti is the agency purchase coordinator. She oversees the whole credit card program.

The cards can be used to make purchases up to \$3,000 or services up to \$2,500. Larger amounts require a contract.

The branch uses several means to monitor the credit card program and make sure purchases are legal.

“When the IG goes out to do their inspections, they check on the credit card program,” Morris said. “Donna has a monthly (program) where she has a percentage of the MEPS send in their documentation to verify they are documenting all their procurements. She checks to see if there’s anything from an oversight perspective that we need to question. Then we contact the MEPS and get resolution that something was done properly.”

Blanchard pointed out that the MEPS have checks and balances for the program.

“You have credit card holders at the MEPS,” he said. The commander is their reviewing official. That’s the first line to make sure it’s done correctly.”

Proper planning the key

No matter how a product or service is paid for, people need to plan, Blanchard said.

“In layman’s terms, (acquisition) means that when you are requesting funds in your budget, you should be putting together your procurement package and developing an acquisition strategy to know how you’re going to spend the money before the budget comes down,” he said.

“Probably the biggest single failing in the federal government is that people plan for the money, but they don’t plan how they’re going to execute it once they get it.

“When I say plan, that means if they’re asking for money to write a contract, they should have a rough idea of the statement of work, of what contracting office they are going to use and what their time of performance or time of delivery is going to be,” Blanchard said. “And they should probably be planning to have their acquisition package, depending on the dollar value and complexity, to their contracting office somewhere between six and nine months out.”

New system eases burden

Wide Area Work Flow, a new DoD system to pay contractors, is reducing the time it takes to make payments while reducing paperwork and saving man-hours. It has been in effect for about a



Jackie L. Morris Jr.

Acquisition & Logistics Division

year, and has reduced Defense Finance and Accounting System's paperwork burden.

"WAWF is the latest payment processing system," Morris said. "It's paperless in real time and gives us the ability to process payments through an automated system. It also saves the government manpower resources.

"It's working very well," he said. "The Army set a standard that 75 percent of procurements will be processed through that system. The contracts are written by external organizations, but we are heavily involved to make sure the payments are being made through WAWF."

USMEPCOM exceeded that standard last year, processing nearly 86 percent of its acquisition actions with WAWF. Blanchard said the program will reduce manual payments for the MEPS.

"The MEPS were having to put miscellaneous payments into the system, which were manual payments," he said. "They use that system to pay for a lot of their consult visits. We're starting a program to put that payment system into WAWF.

"We will have to put the form into the system once, then we will shoot it around (electronically)," Blanchard said. "It is in real time. It goes to the next person's box, they click on it and send it on. The advantage of real time hits when it leaves us and goes to DFAS. It processes through there on a real-time basis rather than having slips of paper go from desk to desk."

Amusement Vending Machine Fund

The contracting branch also oversees the contracts that provide machines for the Amusement Vending Machine Fund.

"The only vending machines we get to run most of the time are the amusement machines like pool tables and games," Blanchard said. "The pop machines are run by the appropriate local authority. If the MEPS is on a (military base) the money goes to the base. In a stand-alone MEPS, GSA owns the vending machines.

"AVMF has a unique contracting vehicle called a concessionaire contract," he said. "Our warrants are processed through

(Installation Management Command). Lori McBride holds the right to write concessionaire contracts."

Under a concessionaire contract the government awards the right for a business to provide a service on government property.

Logistics

After people in the organization buy or lease something with the help of the acquisition branch, the logistic branch tracks it. The branch has reorganized in the last year, combining supply and logistics and merging the medical logistics and logistics branches.

Long-time USMEPCOM employee Frank Musgrave was chief of the logistics branch until his recent retirement. Bob Dondelinger was the acting branch chief until William Pugh arrived from Fort Bragg, N.C., and assumed the duties permanently.

"Right now, the logistics branch is structured much the same way it was before the first merger," Dondelinger said. "Our policy people look at different service and DoD requirements and determine the policy under which the MEPS property books operate, plus the one in headquarters.

"The policy side of the house establishes policy based on the regulations," Dondelinger said. "They apply to all property book operations and the entire logistics operation in USMEPCOM."

The property books are listings of accountable items in an organization's possession. Items are distributed throughout the unit and accounted for by hand receipt. Even though the command has 68 property books at 66 locations across the country, there are a number of methods to track equipment.

The system is automated, so the headquarters can "see" the assets electronically. The Inspector General looks at equipment accounts during inspections. The sectors also have programs to do on-site inventories. The Command Logistics Evaluation Assistance Program sends someone to visit the MEPS. Every property book is inventoried annually.

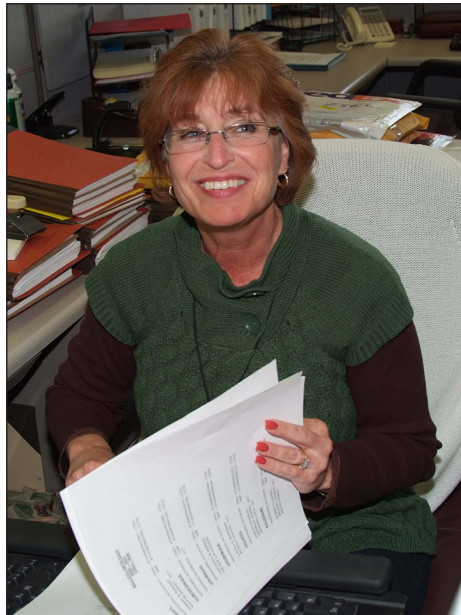
"(CLEAPs) go out and spend a full week at each MEPS," Dondelinger said, "sitting right next to the supply tech, going through what they've got and training them. We do about 30 CLEAPs a year. All three programs are coordinated to make sure the property book is checked once a year. At least once a year, they're going to see some smiling face associated with a logistician from this headquarters."

Blanchard said the biggest challenge is distance.

"The Army's model is built to imagine we all live together on one installation and we have 65 diverse sites," he said. "That's what makes the visit programs through the sectors, the IG and us so important. We don't have the ability to just go out and look at them any time."

GSA vehicle fleet

Logistics also manages the command's fleet of GSA vehicles. Army policy determines how many and what type vehicles a MEPS may have. GSA leases the vehicles and releases them to USMEPCOM.



Donna Lahti

Acquisition & Logistics Division

“GSA does that much the same way you would a rental car,” Blanchard said. “We manage the program here. It’s broken down so the supply tech manages it at each MEPS.”

Interservice support agreements, memorandums of understanding and memorandums of agreement are documents that define the relationship between two government organizations. An ISA can be used to transfer funds between agencies, MOUs and MOAs usually cannot.

“MOU, MOA and ISA are terms that get confused a lot,” Blanchard said. “Although there is some difference in the technical language, in actuality they’re similar.”

An ISA outlines what services one organization is willing to provide and what services the other organization needs. The unit providing the service or services can be reimbursed for its expenses, but can’t make a profit.

Furniture replacement

The biggest factor in determining when to replace furniture is often funding. If a MEPS is relocated it will probably get new furniture if the command has the funds.

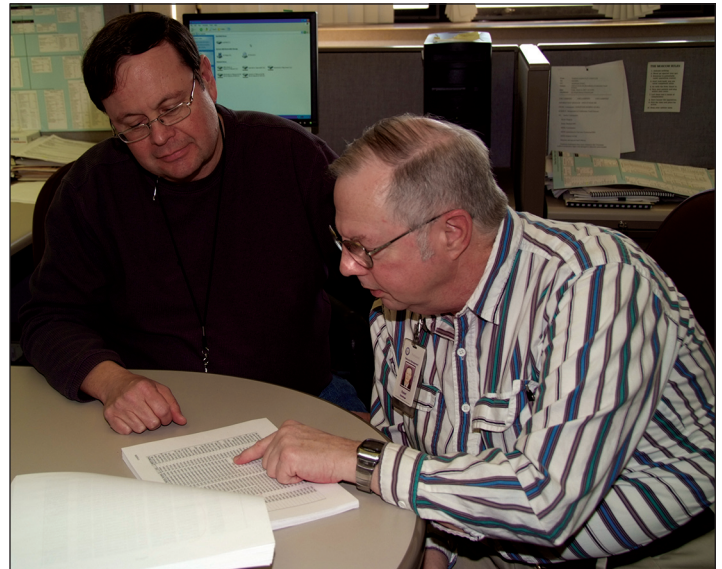
“There are all kinds of programs to determine the life cycle of furniture and when to replace it, but funding is the driver,” Blanchard said. “Most of the time, funding for furniture comes late in the year when all other needs have been met. We run the program to keep track if a MEPS needs to replace furniture, but until we’re funded, we don’t get to do anything on it.

“Most people see us as the bad guy who stands in the way of them getting their furniture,” Blanchard said. “In fact, it’s how much money I can get my hands on and what priorities the commander sets. We run the program, we collect the data, we turn it in and the commander prioritizes what will be done.”

Medical supplies, equipment

“We are the definitive source for medical stuff,” Dondelinger said. “We work with (J-7) to see what is required for the MEPS to perform physicals. We manage the life cycle of each piece of medical equipment.

“We also have a pool of equipment at the medical maintenance depot repair facility at Tobyhanna, (Pa.)” he said. “Let’s say the audiometer is broken. They can call Tobyhanna and they’ll FedEx one out the next day. It will be the same model the MEPS had before. The MEPS uses the same packing material to send the broken equipment back for repair.”



Will Larie (left) and Bob Dondelinger

Noncritical items such as examination tables or things that can’t be shipped, like an audio booth, are repaired on site by technicians from an Army hospital or clinic.

“They come out to the MEPS on a scheduled basis, usually once or twice a year,” Dondelinger said. “They will also come out on an as-needed basis. It’s all done on a non-reimbursable basis because we’re considered an Army organization and so are they.

“Nobody should be calling any local vendor and using their government purchase card to fix medical equipment,” he said.

The MEPS order medical supplies monthly, based on authorizations for expendable and non-expendable items on the Medical Material Allowance List.

“We want them to have what they need, not what they want,” Dondelinger said. “If they think they want something (not on the list), they can ask for an exception to policy which we must approve because we publish the authorization document that medical approved.

“The MMAL tells them what quantities they can have,” he said. “They’re authorized alcohol prep pads because they draw blood, but they’re not authorized surgical equipment because they don’t do that kind of work.”

Most MEPS purchase medical supplies locally, using the government purchase card. Those on military installations order through the local military medical facility.

J8: Resource Management

Acquisition & Logistics Division

- Contracting Branch
- Logistics Branch

Budget Division

- Command Team
- HQ Support Branch
- Field Support Branch

Manpower & Management Division

- Manpower Branch
- Management Branch

Programs, Policy & Systems Division

- Programs & Formulation Branch
- Financial Systems & Travel Branch

Budget: Command's banker makes sure the checks clear

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

While it might be accurate to describe the J-8 Budget Division as the system that fuels USMEPCOM, there's a simpler way to put it.

"We're the command's banker," Dee Varga, the division chief, said. "Distributing funds is like your pay check going into your account so you can pay your bills."

The division is mainly concerned with how current fiscal year funds are spent and that the budget stays in line, but also coordinates with the Programs, Policy and Systems Division for future funding through the Program Objective Memorandum process. It also oversees the Program Budget Advisory Committee, which helps the commander set priorities for unfinanced requirements.

"They worry mostly about the current year execution and the UFRs," Jeff Zeller, Resource Management director said. "They monitor the inflow of money and coordinate with the POM side of the house to see how much we requested, how much was validated and how much we actually received. They break that down into the individual directorates and individual expenditures."

The whole thing begins with coordinating with the Programs and Formulation Branch, Varga said.

"Programs, Policy and Systems formulates the budget," she said. "We have a handoff in the summer prior to the beginning of the fiscal year." The division will have a projected budget for fiscal 2010 this summer.

Command team

The command team fits between the headquarters and field areas and interfaces with Army Accessions Command (USMEPCOM's executive agent) and the Defense Finance and Accounting Office. The team also develops the financial reports that are sent to AAC.

"They receive and distribute funding down to the headquarters and support branch," Varga said. "Central contracts are also handled by the command team and they are responsible for centrally funded programs. For instance, (Office of Personnel Management) testing and communications are done at the headquarters level.

The command team also identifies and reports UFRs.

"This is the element that identifies and reports unfinanced requirements," Varga said. "They update the unfinanced requirements that were first identified by programs, policy and systems in the previous fiscal year."

Although MEPS may sometimes have UFRs, they come to the command team through the headquarters proponent or sector headquarters. Varga offered some advice to MEPS that might have a UFR.



Dee Varga, Chief, Budget Division

"The MEPS needs to coordinate closely with the sectors and the headquarters proponent to ensure that funding is potentially available," she said. "Then it will be rolled together with several MEPS that might have that requirement and then it becomes a UFR."

"It is very important for them to monitor the e-mail traffic and to go through their sectors so they get that information out," Varga said. "They do come to us and we try to direct them to the right proponent. It's not like we're trying to push them off, but part of the problem is that, if they're having a problem, it is probably happening at more than one MEPS and the project manager needs visibility on those problems."

Headquarters support branch

The headquarters support branch oversees the command budget execution, funds headquarters activities, gives guidance to the directors and special staff, chairs the PBAC, and reviews audit and accounting transactions.

"Command budget execution is really just documenting everything we spend," Varga said. "It's basically that monthly statement you get from your bank. We process all the documents similar to how a bank would process checks."

"We receive funding by quarter," she said. "In order to give (the executive agent) an idea of how much we need per quarter, we ask the staff elements what they're going to be spending each quarter."

Budget Division

Guidance is provided to make sure everything is on the up-and-up and that no one gets in trouble.

“Not every great idea is really something within our constraints,” Varga said. “One of the most common things we hear is, ‘We want to buy food for an event.’ There are limitations on what you can buy.

“Another one we get quite often is, ‘We want to buy a presentation item for a person who’s retiring,’” she said. “We can’t buy presentation items. You have to take up a collection.

“We really ask that if you have questions or there has never been a precedent in your (area), give us a call. It’s easier to answer a question than to try to fix a problem.”

Monitoring obligations and disbursements is the key to getting the most out of the money allocated to the command.

“When there is a contract, we actually fund it,” Varga said. “We monitor those so we can (use) the money if there is any left over. We monitor those very closely, because that’s money we’ve lost if we don’t monitor it.

“We review and audit accounting transactions to make sure we’re on track and haven’t charged something to the wrong account.”

The branch’s final area of responsibility is chairing the PBAC. The committee allows leaders and directors to meet and review the overall budget. “Banding” helps set priorities and helps the directors determine what they absolutely must have to do their jobs.

“It helps the commander prioritize and gives him the chance to meet with his commanders and directors and helps determine the priorities for the command’s resources,” Zeller said.

“When there are cuts, we document it and go through it with the commander to identify where that funding gets split up,” Varga said. “During the PBAC and as we’re developing the spend plan, the commander validates how funds are distributed among the staff elements.



Jamie Theys

“The commander sets the funding and the directorates set the priorities by how they spread the funding,” she said. “The command can always adjust priorities. That is the PBAC process.”

Field support branch

The field support branch provides direct support to the MEPS and their budget technicians. Debbie Nicolazzi leads the branch that has two teams, one supporting each sector.

“There are five people on each team,” Nicolazzi said. “There is a team leader who handles OMA funding, reviews guidance and helps with policy and procedure. There is another analyst who handles the medical funding. Then there is an analyst and two technicians who are the direct (points of contact) for the MEPS.

“Each MEPS is assigned a specific person in field support for all their questions,” she said. “Everything will go through that POC. If, for example, Debbie Pattie is gone and her phone rings, somebody picks it up. She leaves not only a voice mail message but also makes sure she puts her out of office message on (e-mail).

Each MEPS submits a spending plan for the year and the teams review those requirements.

“What we’re basically looking for is if you had a requirement for applicant transportation last year, do you still have it this year?” Nicolazzi said. “We review to ensure the MEPS are capturing all their requirements.

“Once we get the requirements put together, we brief the sector commanders,” she said. “They are shown a spread sheet that shows MEPS by MEPS what the requirements are. If we see anything different or that we haven’t seen before, we make a note of that and ask the sectors. If the sector (commander) tells us, ‘They’re not doing that,’ we take it off.”

Sometimes changes in procedures cause a change in funding needs for the MEPS.

“When we originally went to MIRS, paper costs increased dramatically at the MEPS because contracts had been done on carbon forms MEPCOM didn’t pay for,” Nicolazzi said. “When MIRS came on line, all of the sudden you’re printing all those contracts and you’re using all this paper. Every time a MEPS was brought up on MIRS, you would see that their supply costs increased.

Nicolazzi is hopeful that System to Standard and the Virtual Interactive Processing System will eventually cut costs by lowering the amount of printing, saving paper, toner cartridges and other related expenses, but noted that funding will stay pretty much the same until a trend is seen.

The branch provides accounting, budget and midyear guidance to the field.

“There are specific times of year that we go out to the MEPS and task them,” Varga said, “preparing their budgets, midyear reviews, monthly obligation plans and end-of-year closing procedures. The guidance changes very little from year to year, but we always have new budget techs out there, so we always make sure we republish and don’t make the assumption they will look for last year’s guidance.”

Budget Division



Kim Schumacher

Sometimes a specific issue leads the branch to put out guidance.

“If an issue comes up at one MEPS, it is probably happening at others,” Nicolazzi said. “We might put out an info message.”

She gave an example of one issue that arose at several MEPS in a short period of time.

“We seem to have had a lot of problems lately with individuals at a MEPS making a purchase and then coming to the budget tech and saying ‘I want my money and you need to reimburse me.’ We can’t pay an individual. We’ve had four instances of that (recently).

“I put together an e-mail and reminded the budget techs that you have to have the proper paperwork done first,” Nicolazzi said. “Individuals can’t go out and make purchases and then come and tell you, ‘Oh, by the way.’”

Varga said the MEPS budget tech is the “commander’s best friend” and Nicolazzi pointed out that the budget tech “can keep the commander out of jail.”

“Without the money, nothing happens,” Nicolazzi said. “Every time you turn on a light, it takes money. Every time somebody gets in a GSA vehicle and drives off to a school or wherever, that takes money. (The budget techs) make sure the bills are paid to get the applicants to and from hotels and airports. They make sure the applicants lunches are paid for. All of that is the budget tech.”

Varga pointed out that when a MEPS budget technician position is vacant, it falls to the field support branch to maintain the books until a replacement is hired and trained.

“When we have vacancies at the MEPS, Debbie and her staff pick up the ledgers,” she said. “Not physically, because the ledgers are online. They become integral to that MEPS turning on the lights and processing applicants. On average, we have six to 10 ledgers up here while those MEPS commanders are hiring the new budget techs.”

On a typical day, Varga said, each of the people in field support will be handling what amounts to an extra full-time job as a MEPS budget tech. “There are not a lot of idle hands.”

Nicolazzi pointed out the ebb and flow of the ledgers to and from the headquarters is pretty constant.

“We’re going to be turning back Harrisburg and Pittsburgh,” she said. “Those positions have been filled. In March we are getting Seattle and New York because those are going to be vacant. We’ll turn a couple back and get a couple more.”

Once a new budget technician is hired and he or she has access to all the systems needed to do the job, a field support team member goes to the MEPS to train the new employee.

“We always go out and do the initial training as soon as they have access to the systems they need,” Nicolazzi said. “There’s nothing worse than to go out and train someone on a system they don’t have access to and can’t use. We generally go out for a week.”

While the budget techs are the people the branch deals with often, it also interacts with other people in the MEPS.

“We deal with the commanders, the senior enlisted advisors, a lot of operations officers,” Nicolazzi said. “If MEPS commanders have questions or they’re not real comfortable with the guidance that’s come out, something they’ve seen in e-mail traffic or heard at a conference, we get the phone call. ‘How are we going to pay for this? Have you heard anything on this? Is this funded?’”

End-of-year closeout

The “favorite” time of year in the budget division is the closeout at the end of the fiscal year. A successful closeout, which means spending 99.9 percent of the command’s \$265 million budget, doesn’t just happen by accident. It calls for planning.

“End of year is an interesting ride,” Varga said. “It’s never boring. End of year can best be facilitated if we have good, solid requirements and the paperwork is completed.

“If a MEPS really wants an improvement project for their location, they need to get it in early so the staff element — whether it’s the logistics branch, facilities or information technology — has time to do the paperwork. The time to think about end of year is actually at midyear.”

Nicolazzi said at the end of the year, MEPS have to “be ready to go or get run over.” She provided examples of how to get things done as closeout looms.

“Maybe Atlanta needs a new television set,” she said, “and we haven’t been able to fund it throughout the year. It is still a requirement for them. When it comes down to the end of the year, the best thing the MEPS can do is have that paperwork ready to go so when (we) notify them we have the money, they can go out and get their purchase made.

“In September, we don’t have the time for them to tell us it’s going to take two or three days. We’re going to go on to the next MEPS requirement,” Nicolazzi said. “The sectors are provided with the requirements we have not been able to fund that can be executed at the MEPS level. Those lists are prioritized by the sectors.”

Nicolazzi explained how she prepared for end of year when she was the budget tech at the Milwaukee MEPS.

“In July or August I had my supply tech get all the paperwork ready to go,” she said. “I set up files in my office. When I got the phone call from headquarters approving furniture for the Army liaison, I was told to have it done in eight hours. By the end of

Budget Division

the day, all the paperwork was ready to go, the estimate was there and all I had to do was get signatures. If you have the paperwork ready, you have more of a chance of getting what you need.”

Varga said an experienced team helped the command be the first activity reporting to Accessions Command to close for two years in a row.

“The team knows how to work the end-of-year closeout and it really is a team effort,” she said. “It’s not just internal to our organization, because that’s the point in time where it’s not headquarters money or field support money, it’s the command’s money.

“All the people in resource management have to come together to execute,” Varga said. “It has to be working with our acquisition division compatriots to make sure it all comes together so we get the documents processed. It’s also coming together with the different staff elements because they are the ones submitting the paperwork. We really understand the meaning of teamwork at that time of year.”

Maybe the budget division is as much fueler as banker after all. It makes sure there’s money in the “tank” all year and then runs it bone dry at the very last moment as the command reaches its destination at the end of another year.

Phil Weiman and
Shari Reilson



J-8 Alphabet — A thru M

AAC	Army Accessions Command (10)
ATAAPS	Automated Time and Attendance Production System (19)
AVMF	Amusement Vending Machine Fund (7)
CBA	Centrally Billed Accounts (19)
CLEAP	Command Logistics Evaluation Assistance Program (7)
COR	Contracting Officer’s Representative (6)
CTO	Central Travel Office (19)
DbCAS	Database Commitment Accounting System (18)
DFAS	Defense Finance and Accounting Service (7)
DISA	Defense Information Systems Agency (5)
DoT	Department of Transportation (5)
DTS	Defense Travel System (18)
EDS	Electronic Documentation System(18)
GFEBs	General Fund Enterprise Business System (18)
GSA	General Services Administration (5)
IBA	Individually Billed Accounts (19)
IMCOM	Installation Management Command (7)
ISA	Interservice Support Agreement (8)
JFTR	Joint Financial Travel Regulation (19)
JPS	Joint Personnel System (16)
JTR	Joint Travel Regulation (19)
MMAL	Medical Material Allowance List (8)
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement (8)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding (8)

Number in parenthesis is the page number on which the acronym is first used in the magazine.

Manpower and Management:

— ensuring the 'drivers' are up to the task

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

The Manpower and Management Division makes sure there are people to drive the car, that they have the skills to handle it, that no one is asked to drive more miles than he or she can safely handle and that they get paid the right amount for their time behind the wheel.

The Manpower and Force Development Branch concerns itself with making sure the command has the right billets in the right grades in the right places for the command to function. The short way of explaining it is J-8 handles the “spaces” and the human resources professionals in J-1 handle the “faces.”

“J-1 puts together the position description, which decides the grade,” Jeff Zeller, director of Resource Management, said. “Once we’ve got that, we have an issue as to do we have enough money for that? That’s where we get involved.

“In a tactical unit, it works very well with the J-1 owning the spaces and the faces, because the spaces don’t change much and there isn’t as much of an impact on the budget, because the military people are all centrally funded,” he said. “What you’re really trying to do is get the appropriate grade and skill to fill that space.

“In a garrison or non-tactical command, money is the driving factor, because you have to pay for those spaces. It

makes sense for spaces and funding to be in the same directorate. You can say, ‘I’ve got 10 spaces. How much money do I need to fill those?’” Zeller said.

Sharon Collins, acting division chief, said the division looks at what the unit does and determines how many people it will take to get it done.

“In the MEPS, you have a lot of processes,” she said. “You have medical processing, operations processing and the testing section. We have developed a staffing formula as to how many people it takes to process the number of applicants who go through a MEPS.

“The manpower requirements are documented every year,” she said. “The Army does the manning document for the Army military personnel and civilians. Every year, during the (management of change) window, we tell them where the spaces go, what should be moved, what should be upgraded and what should be increased or decreased.

“That, in turn, ties in with the program out years which budget puts together to say ‘In the next five years, this is how many people we anticipate we will need,’” Collins said. “For example, we’re seeing a lot of money spent on the fee-basis practitioner contract. One proposal is to bring back the (assistant chief medical officer). So we would tell (programs, policy and systems) ‘We’re in the process of trying to bring this many positions back in house,’ and have them budget in the out years.”

The number of people a MEPS is authorized is based on workload, which is determined using data captured by QUIC-R.

“Every day, every time a MEPS processes an applicant, they capture it in MIRS,” Collins said. “Every time you show up at the control desk, they click your file. That information is downloaded every night. (J-5) converts it to QUIC-R and consolidates the data for all 65 MEPS and you get a snapshot of what’s going on.

“We count accessions and inspects,” she said. “Those are two of the workloads. In medical, it’s physicals and inspects. In testing it’s student testing and enlistment testing. Those are the broad categories by which we determine how many people you process daily, which determines how many people you get.”

Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr., USMEPCOM commander, initiated a bottom-up review of all MEPS positions shortly after he arrived, the first time the command had conducted such a review. Manpower looked to see if job descriptions were accurate. J-1 requested input from the MEPS and had commanders write what their people actually do.

“We have a work center description of what the MEPS do, the steps they take,” Collins said. “By validating the processes, you see how many people you need. Where are the slow points? Is there a faster way to do this?”

“For example,” she said, “one of the things we saw when we went out to the MEPS was that the transportation assistant is a one-person job, according to the staffing structure. We saw that in most MEPS there were two or three human resources assistants helping the transportation assistant. We created a job called a processing technician who would assist the transportation assistant with orders and doing briefings. When they were done with that for the day, they would go back and do the HRA job.”

The review has led to some positions being upgraded because some of the tasks performed had never been documented. Collins cited the fact the HRAs are the first line of defense against fraudulent enlistment and they need to be computer literate to operate MIRS.

“You come in at night to take the ASVAB and you sign a block on the form,” she said. “The next day when you come in to process, you sign a different line and the HRA on the desk compares the two signatures. It’s the HRA’s responsibility to catch it if the signatures don’t match. We were at MEPS when they actually saw the signatures didn’t match. That was not being captured.



Sharon Collins

Manpower & Management Division

“We noticed that the job description for an HRA says if you can turn on a computer and do Outlook, you can be an HRA,” Collins said. “We discovered that’s not true. The MIRS system has like six pages of coding. It’s a stand-alone system, so you have to learn to navigate through it. It’s not that difficult to get the hang of, but if you’re not computer literate to begin with, you’re going to panic and say, ‘Oh my gosh! What do I click first?’”

There were side benefits in going to the MEPS to observe the operations firsthand, Collins said.

“We’re going out to the MEPS, to listen to their problems and see if we can help them,” she said. “We tell them, for example, that if they know someone is leaving, they can put in an anticipated (request for personnel action) for the vacancy. We can show them how to help themselves in the system.

“We’ve found the commanders have been really appreciative of the staff and we’ve been getting a lot more calls from commanders and first sergeants,” Collins said. “They’ve found out we’re not the bad guys from headquarters. Now if we tell them they can’t do something, but this is the way you could do it, they

realize we understand what they do.”

Team member Patricia Scott concurred.

“They all want more authorizations,” she said. “When we can go out to the MEPS, sit with them, explain the formulas we use, show them they can monitor their workload in the MEPS, they can follow along and see what we see. If they see a

discrepancy, they can

contact us or we tell them to contact J-5 so they have a better understanding.”

Based on the bottom-up review, the command applied for upgrades for several positions in the MEPS.

“Indirectly, we helped contribute to some of the upgrades, because of the things we found out,” Collins said, “but a lot of it was hard work on the parts of commanders and individuals in the MEPS.”

Manpower plans, policies, procedures

The branch works closely with the Human Resources Directorate (J-1) on plans, policies and procedures. If a MEPS wants a position upgraded, to temporarily promote an employee or to hire a temporary employee for a gapped billet, it is a shared issue.



Richard Harris

“It would be up to us to set the procedure on what the MEPS has to do in order for us to grant the billet,” Collins said. “Whether or not somebody gets a temporary promotion would be a J-1 issue, because it would depend on the person having the skills and qualifications to be temporarily promoted.”

In some cases, a temporary hire won’t be approved, because the billet was eliminated. That was the case with the unit clerk position that was taken away when Program Budget Decision 712 went into effect.

“Every MEPS that had 20 or more military personnel was entitled to a unit clerk,” Collins said. “Rather than limiting them to just military duties, some commanders had them process requests for personnel actions, do time cards, etc. In that case, you wouldn’t get a temporary hire because that whole billet went away.

“But let’s say the position is someone who works in processing and the Army sends that person to school for a year,” she said. “It is a key billet and we need the person there to get the mission done. The MEPS would make a request through sector and we would go to Colonel Campos, explain the situation and see if he wants to use money that was not budgeted for to help the MEPS so they can continue processing.”

Documentation

The command maintains manning documents for each branch of service. Manpower works with the service’s headquarters to make sure the command gets the billets it is authorized and J-1 requisitions the “face.”

“We make sure the space stays intact,” Collins said. “If there are any changes to the grade, title or (specialty), manpower does the documents to change it.”

Determining requirements

The branch reviews workload quarterly and determines MEPS manpower needs, Patricia Scott, said.

“If we have someone who is working over what they’re authorized for four consecutive quarters, we can recommend an increase in the requirements. If they’re under for four consecutive quarters, we can recommend a decrease. We probably wouldn’t just take a billet, but when someone leaves they wouldn’t be able to fill (the position.)”

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Organization structure changes

Manpower oversees changes to the headquarters' manning. If a directorate wants to reorganize, wants to change grades or needs to add people, the commander has the final word. He relies on manpower's expertise to determine if the positions are available.

"Right now, whatever we do is a zero sum game," Collins said. "We're not going to get any more positions right now. We have to live within our structure. In order to add a billet, we have to take it away from somebody."

Joint Personnel System

The branch uses the Joint Personnel System to track billets and vacancies. The system tracks both military and civilian personnel.

"The J-8 responsibility to JPS is to establish the spaces," Collins said. "Any space documented in JPS is there because manpower validated a requirement for it."

"The civilian portion is equipped to track when you had your last performance appraisal, who your supervisor is, where you live," Collins said. "I don't think the MEPS or the headquarters have utilized the program properly. It's kind of under used, but there are a lot of capabilities."



Mike Welch

Workload studies

Workload studies are used to make sure the command's operations are as effective and efficient as possible.

The cost of the fee-basis practitioner contract has soared more than 300 percent, which led to the study to possibly "insource" the duties by establishing an assistant chief medical officer at most MEPS.

"A lot of commanders are saying they want a second ESS because we can't meet the goals of how many schools we get into," Collins said. According to Zeller, the requirement has been identified in the POM, but not validated by the Army.

Special studies

Special studies are usually directed from the command groups or directors, Mike Welch, management branch chief, said.

"A couple of years ago, we studied whether we wanted to adopt the joint staff organization," he said. "Once the ball got rolling there was no stopping it."



Jessica Clark and Chris Jalkin

'Insourcing'

"We're getting into insourcing, bringing the contracted work back into the government," Collins said.

The assistant CMO position is one example of insourcing.

"We have a couple of different options," Collins said. "We could go to Medical Command and ask if we can take the contract money and transfer it to civilian pay, or we can see if we can take the contract pay and convert it (to civilian payroll). We could leave it the way it is."

"Some MEPS might not need an ACMO, but would need a fee-basis practitioner when the CMO is away. The biggest thing we're talking about right now is what constitutes an ACMO," she said. "A fee-basis practitioner is a standard based on a projection, but projection isn't the actual workload. A lot of MEPS have a no-show rate of 10 to 15 percent. They make up some of it with walk-ons. We just have to get everybody to look at this realistically."

Internal Review

The internal review function used to be an independent office, then it was placed in the IG shop. The function transferred to J-8 about a year ago.

"We've started a few evaluations," Welch said. "Some local transportation policies and procedures have come up and we're looking at how they can be fixed. We don't have a full shop of auditors. You can call them an internal review or a management evaluation. We're looking at policy and procedure."

Management controls

Management controls, a federal requirement, calls for the commander to send an annual statement of assurance to the next level up the chain of command. It eventually ends up going to Congress. The sectors and headquarters staff provide feeder statements to the commander.

"The idea is to take a look at the risk in your operations as a whole on an ongoing basis," Jeff Arthur, who manages the program, said. "Once a year you certify to Congress that everything is going well, everything is fine, whatever should be happening is happening. Or everything is going well except we've discovered a material weakness that needs to be called to somebody's attention."

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USMEPCOM has only reported one discrepancy in its history; a discrepancy in civilian pay calculations about seven years ago.

“The commander reported to the next higher level that we needed better management controls,” Welch said. “There wasn’t any money missing, but it wasn’t being budgeted correctly. We got some help on policy and procedures and followed up a couple years later. Everything was (fine.)”

Welch explained that there are two parts to management control. The Army has a formal framework with checklists and regulations. The review and analysis program, Command Logistics Evaluation Assistance Program, staff assistance visits, technical assistance visits and inspections also play a role.

“Those are all management controls that make sure everything is operating properly,” Welch said.

When it is time to submit the annual report, the MEPS commanders review their IG reports and rely on their personal knowledge of their operations to provide a “reasonable assurance” that they are operating properly. Those reports are forwarded to sector, which in turn forwards them to headquarters.

Army Suggestion Program

One of Michelle Chambers’ responsibilities is overseeing the command’s part of the Army Suggestion Program, which allows people to submit ideas that will help the command operate better. If the suggestion is adopted throughout the Army, there can be a cash award, based on the savings. Suggestions adopted for use at lower levels earn prizes like caps, mugs or gym bags.

“Each person who wants to submit a suggestion must have an (Army Knowledge Online) account,” Chambers said. “Go to AKO, and then to the Army Suggestion Program. Click on submit suggestion and each screen tells you what to do.”

The command averages three or four suggestions a month, Chambers said.

“Most of the suggestions we receive here are actually ‘Good Ideas,’ so they transfer down to the Good Idea Program,” she said. A person submitting a good idea that is adopted earns a command coin.

The Department of the Army monitors the program and makes sure suggestions keep moving through the system.

“DA looks to see who is holding what suggestion at their location,” Chambers said. “If there are suggestions that have been assigned to someone here and no action taken, DA sends a message to me and the person I assigned it to see what the holdup is.”

Suggestions that concern USMEPCOM’s operations are automatically routed to Chambers. She tries to assign it to a subject matter expert within 48 hours and the SME has 30-45 days to look at it.

“The person who submitted the suggestion can follow it from the time they submit it until it goes through DA,” Chambers said. “Each suggestion is assigned a number. They type in the number and it gives them the status.”

It’s a good thing the Manpower and Management Division ensure the command has enough skilled drivers. They cover a lot of miles.



Michele Chambers

J-8 Alphabet — O thru W

OMA	Operations and Maintenance Army (funds) (4)
PBAC	Program Budget Advisory Committee (10)
PBD 712	Program Budget Decision 712 (4)
PBR	Program Budget Review (18)
PEG	Program Element Group (analyst) (18)
POM	Program Objective Memorandum (10)
R&A	Review and Analysis (19)
RDT&E	Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation (funds) (4)
STANFINS	Standard Army Financial Information System (20)
TDY	Temporary Duty (4)
UFR	Unfinanced requirement (10)
WAWF	Wide Area Work Flow (7)

Number in parenthesis is the page number on which the acronym is first used in the magazine.

Programs, Policy & Systems: — writing the 'owners manual' to keep the command on track

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

When all else fails, read the owner's manual. The Programs and Policy Division wrote the book and revises it when the new model vehicles come out.

The division has three branches – programs and formulation, financial policy and control, and financial systems. The division is in the processing of reorganizing. In the future, it will be known as the Programs, Policy and Systems Division and will have two branches, programs and formulation, and financial systems and travel.

Each branch has special functions, according to Beverly Poole, division chief.

Programs and formulation works mainly with the Program Objective Memorandum, securing funds and planning for as much as eight years in advance. Financial policy and control manages centrally and individually billed accounts, payroll, time and attendance, and the Amusement Vending Machine Fund. Financial systems works with policy implementation, the Defense Travel System, the Database Commitment Accounting System, financial reporting, automated time and attendance, and the Electronic Documentation System. It will also work with the General Fund Enterprise Business System when it comes online.

"It's not necessarily the functions, but the different pots of money we deal with, because we work with all branches of service," Poole said. "We have different types of money than a normal Army installation. We have to manage that. Even though we're not responsible for, say for instance, when we do recruit travel, those funds are paid by different agencies."

Program Objective Memorandum

"Most people are worrying about today," Clarice Wallace, programs and formulation branch chief, said. "But my team and I, our hair is turning gray for the future."

"The POM team does two things," she said. "We're looking at money in the out years. The last POM we built was for (fiscal years) 10-15. Where you're spending money this year in FY09, we built a POM in FY08 to tell our (program element group) analysts how much money we were going to need to run MEPCOM."

"A very good example of this is payroll," she said. "Everybody wants to be paid, but we have to look at how many people we have and tell our PEG analyst how many people we have to pay and justify getting that funding. We do that with all the programs here at MEPCOM."

"Everybody is familiar with unfinanced requirements," Wallace said. "The people in budget are looking at those in the current years. We're looking for those in the out years. If we can justify those UFRs, then the money comes in and you'll have enough to do your program. We can tell you how much money MEPCOM is going to get to do business from FY10 all the way out to FY15."



Beverly Poole, Chief, Programs, Policy and Systems Division (left), and Latoya Hardy

Sometimes the branch identifies UFRs in future years, because they know the amounts needed to fund some programs that have gone up and will stay steady after adjustments for inflation. That was the case with the fee-basis practitioner contract.

"We've been working with the office of the surgeon general," Wallace said. "When we realized there was going to be a UFR in the current year, we know it's going to affect the out years. We're looking at a program budget review and looking to 11-15. Hopefully by (fiscal 2011) we'll have those funds in our budget and we won't have to identify UFRs any more."

Budget development

As the next budget year approaches, the branch receives the command's funding amounts. It should have the figures for fiscal 2010 in April and will begin developing a budget for that year.

"We work closely with the directorates to get a good scrub of those budgets," Wallace said, "because although they may ask for \$20 million to operate they may only really need \$15 million and of course, we've probably only got \$10 million."

"We identify the UFRs for the current budget year so we can make them visible to our executive agent so they can work to get additional money to keep us running."

Wallace said the most important thing right now is justifying programs and said most people don't realize how vital those efforts are.

"It's going to determine whether or not we get funding for facilities, for the medical program," she said.

Although they are dealing with long-term funding plans, the pace gets hectic at times.

"We can have a day where it's quiet and we're reading all the e-mails that come in," Wallace said. "All of the sudden the phone rings and it's from a PEG analyst and they have a question that has to be answered in an hour or two. We're scrambling around

Programs, Policy and Systems Division

to get information because they have to meet a deadline and get it up to someone else who is going to determine whether or not we get our funding.”

Poole said the looming end of funds dedicated to fighting the war on terror in tandem with a weak economy could spell trouble. For example, much of the money for additional Saturday openings came from that funding stream.

“It’s going to hurt when the war on terror funds go away, because so many people here at MEPCOM are depending on that money,” she said. “If that money goes away, even if the mission goes away, we have gotten so used to having that money.

“We are going to have to tighten our belt,” Poole said. “We have a new administration. Things are bad all over. We’re going to have to do a better job of scrubbing our budgets.

“As we come up to FY10, I would ask the directors, the special staff, the people who do the budgets for the MEPS to do a really good job scrubbing their budgets,” she said. “If there is something they can do without, don’t ask for the money. It’s only going to get worse. We’re getting more questions about ‘What would you do if we cut this much money.’ I don’t want it to be a surprise if we come back down and ask how you can cut your budget.”

Financial policy and control

Overseeing the command’s centrally and individually billed credit card accounts along with civilian pay programs make up a large part of the branch’s workload.

Individually billed accounts are credit cards used for government travel. Centrally billed accounts are for applicant travel.

Kevin Steverson is the agency program coordinator for both types of accounts.

One of the major issues is reconciling the accounts when the bills come in every month.

“The central travel office (processes transactions) and the MEPS gets the monthly statement. The MEPS has to make sure they are billed correctly,” Steverson said. DFAS pays the bill

once it is reconciled. The trigger is the travel specialist or the budget tech telling the services how much to authorize DFAS to pay.

“When the bills come in, they should get another package from the commercial travel office that has all the invoices from that month and who shipped for what service,” Steverson said. “After that, they match up the names with invoices.”

Sometimes the CTO, which deals with seven or eight MEPS, will bill an applicant to the wrong MEPS because it used the wrong credit card. In that case, the MEPS reconcile the accounts among themselves.

The card is cut off when it becomes 61 days past due. At 180 days, the card is permanently revoked.

“It’s a very hot topic,” Steverson said. “It throws up a red flag when these cards get shut off. That’s when everyone starts panicking. ‘How are we going to get these shippers out of here?’”

Poole said problems with delinquent accounts has eased since the issue was elevated and became an item covered in (Review and Analysis).

The Army’s standard for IBA delinquency is 2 percent and the command has consistently stayed below that mark.

“We’ve been less for 13 weeks straight,” Steverson said. “We were less than 1 percent on the last report.”

Steverson also keeps a sharp eye out for fraud or misuse of the cards, randomly scanning reports about twice a month. He usually looks for things like gas station purchases and cash advances when the person is not in TDY status.

“Suspected abuse of government cards is reported to supervisors and then moves up through the chain of command,” he said.

“Any time you’ve got credit cards, somebody is going to try it,” Steverson said, noting that Christmas and Valentine’s Day seem to see the highest incidence of misuse.

Civilian pay, entitlements

The branch also handles civilian payroll execution, time and attendance, civilian entitlements, and pay banding for the National Security Personnel System.

Lynn Simmet maintains the payroll budget for the current year, and issues overtime and wage award targets.

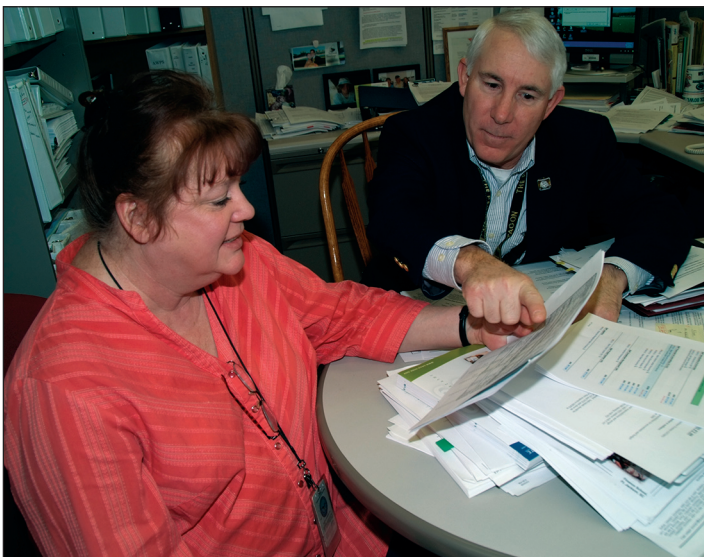
She pointed out that all overtime must be approved in advance, even if it’s verbal, and that forms must be filled out to support the time sheet.

“I also process (permanent change of station) orders for anybody coming on board from overseas,” she said. “The orders are issued by personnel and I put the fund cite on them to make sure we have the money for a civilian employees.

“We only have certain entitlements we will pay for certain employees,” Simmet said. The Joint Travel Regulation, Joint Financial Travel Regulation and the financial management regulations all state what you can pay.”

Simmet also processes recruitment and relocation bonuses. “They should be getting down to nil, because they’ve increased the grades out in the field. That’s why we were doing bonuses.

A new system called the Automated Time and Attendance Production System is being tested at the headquarters, with a plan to field it to the MEPS in late May. The pilot program at the headquarters has gone well so far.



Charles Petron and Lynn Simmet

Programs, Policy and Systems Division

“It is an automated time system where every employee is going to be putting their time in,” Gloria Walker said. “Before ATAAPS came around, everybody gave their administrative assistant their time sheets to put in the system. This should be much easier.”

MEPS still process time sheets manually. Dorethia Callahan and Gloria Walker are customer service reps for civilian payroll at headquarters. In the absence of the MEPS primary and alternate timekeepers, Callahan and Walker process time sheets for the MEPS. When MEPS timekeepers input their time and attendance into the payroll system, the two also review missing time reports to ensure no employee is missing time. Also, they process financial documentation to begin pay for new hires.

Under NSPS, the branch does a pay determination when a new employees start work. It also sets the percentages for how much payout is for awards and which category, and sets the total dollars for salary and awards. The pay pool computes the amount per share, based on the ratings employees earn.

Another vital area the branch handles is financial policy development. For instance, when people went TDY, some left from work and others left from home. There was no clear guidance about which location to use. Now people are paid as if they left from home, no matter what, Poole said.

“A new regulation came out that said pay from home,” Poole said. “Now we have to update our internal policy to match what the update says.”

In other areas, Poole said, “Different scenarios pop up and we have to make sure we pull the regs and find out what is applicable. Then we fine tune it for MEPCOM.”

The branch may also publish excerpts of regulations so people can understand the policy without reading the entire regulation.

AVMF

The MEPS deposit Amusement Vending Machine Fund money into a central bank in the Washington, D.C., area. Stevenson maintains a spreadsheet that distributes the money, which is done quarterly. The amount of money each MEPS receives is based on the size of its staff.

Financial Systems Branch

“This branch is new,” Charles Petron, former chief of the Financial Systems Branch who recently assumed duties as the General Fund Enterprise Business System program manager, said. “It’s new to MEPCOM and it’s new to many corporations. We’re going from lots of manual methods to systems methods. We prepare monthly and ad hoc reports that support the entire command. We provide checks and balances.”

The branch uses internal and external financial systems. Examples are the Standard Army Financial Information System and resource management tools.

“They are ledgers for all the budget tech and headquarters budget analysts,” Petron said. “They input transactions every day as they execute funds. We check for system integrity to make sure they’re putting good financial data into the system.”

“We do this every day with the Database Commitment Accounting System.

DbCAS, which is used to manage Defense Health Program funds, is more than 20 years old. STANFINS, which is nearly 40 years old, handles operations and maintenance and research, development test and evaluation funds.

STANFINS will soon be replaced by GFEBS. It has nine modules broken into two groups.

The first five are cost management financial reporting, funds management, reimbursables and accounts receivable, and the spending chain (similar to procurement). The final four, which apply to plant property equipment, are assets, plant management, project systems and real property.

“We are going to shift starting in April 2010 from what is known as budgetary accounting to proprietary accounting,” Petron said. “We’re going to operate just like a corporation. Everyone will have specific roles and responsibilities for which they will have to receive training before they are allowed into the system.”

“There will be trial balance sheets at the end of each month,” he said. “People will have to become a little more astute at general ledger accounting as set up by the Treasury Department.”

“I think it is going to make it easier,” Petron said. “There will be more visibility, because the funds will be put up at the top and they’ll come down to Army Accessions Command, and then to MEPCOM.”

The system, which will have nearly 80,000 users, Army-wide, will affect everyone in USMEPCOM, because everyone will have to be in a cost center.

“We haven’t established those yet,” Petron said. “It’s on our plate to do it. Each major director, and division and branch chief may or may not have a cost center. There are supposed to be four people in my branch, six or eight in financial policy and four in formulation. That might be one cost center.”

Petron pointed out that Poole, as the division chief, would know what her division spends on labor and salaries, leave, TDY and training.

Poole said there is a module in ATAAPS that will allow some cost centers or costs objects to feed directly into GFEBS.

“The commander is looking at identifying everybody’s functions,” she said. “You’re going to be able to put in there how much time you spend on each function of your job, rather than just putting in an eight hour day.”

Sometimes it’s best to read the owner’s manual first. It can save a lot of missteps and could keep you from accidentally causing damage.



Jennifer Gettelman

Reflections from Boise budget tech

Last November, Ungkana (Mui) Stowe marked her 22nd year at Boise MEPS.

“Mrs. Stowe excels as our budget technician,” said Maj. Connie May, Boise MEPS commander.

“I have no worries about our MEPS’ financial matters because of her knowledge and attention to detail,” May said “It is because of this, all the new budget technicians and even travel specialists could benefit from some advice from her.”

Before her arrival at Boise MEPS, she worked as an accounting technician in the Accounting and Finance Office at Mountain Home Air Force Base for three years. Also, she was a travel accountant for the Air Force in Thailand during the Vietnam War.

What is Stowe’s advice for budget techs? Consistently pay attention to detail in all facets of the position, from the budget plan to funds certifying, and from MEPS defense travel administration for the Defense Travel System, Meals and Lodging Program to vendor payment processing. “It will shorten the time it takes for you to do the job and will reduce your stress,” Stowe said.

To plan for the next fiscal year budget plan, Stowe uses the midyear budget. Then she subtracts or adds to the next year’s best-known activities to get an idea of what that budget will look like.

Although deviation reports are no longer required, Stowe continues to generate this report at least quarterly, because she thinks it’s a great tool to analyze budget executions and prepare inputs for MEPS Review and Analysis financial slides.

To obtain the data for the R&A travel and transportation portion, Stowe adds all travel funded by MEPS and headquarters and

verifies it against what was actually taken.

The bottom line of the slide is to see the cost per accession; therefore, any related mission costs must be captured.

“Even though, per regulation, you do not need the file copy for any travel orders and settlements, I prefer to have them in my file,” Stowe said. “When needed, there they are.”

She would like to see MEPS budget techs receive travel information memorandums sent by headquarters, because it’s the budget technicians who certify the orders.

Stowe truly likes DTS because payments are made within a few days. There are no more phone calls to Defense Finance and Accounting Service Travel Pay, asking for the status of settlements. Stowe ensures the lodging allowed in the per diem tab and the actuals on invoices are matched, since she’s found this to be a common place for a mistake.

Data queries MS04 NSFOP is her most frequently used query. When the disbursement column amount does not match the



Mui Stowe

In seven years, Mike Sigloh earned “excellent” ratings for the Boise MEPS supply section during Inspector General visits in 2003, 2005 and 2007. With those ratings, he can offer sage advice.

Before joining the MEPS in 2001, Sigloh worked in Army recruiting for eight years, and was both an Army guidance counselor and human resources clerk.

In addition to the ratings he earned after taking over the supply section in March 2002, the MEPS received no findings during USMEPCOM Command Logistics Evaluation Assistance Program – CLEAP — in 2002, 2004 and 2008.

Sigloh offers these recommendations to supply techs.

As Property Book Officer

- Remember, you are responsible for the MEPS achieving the daily mission.
- It is your job to ensure that the commander and the first sergeant do not fail.
- The worst scenario you could encounter: not having enough items needed for the day, causing a halt in processing. Failing to properly account for equipment.
- Use the tools that are available to you to manage your inventories (i.e. MAPBS, the Automated Requisition Program for medical supplies, etc.).
- Also, take initiative to keep current with your regulations. (You don’t need to memorize the regs, just know how to find the answers.)
- Your commander depends on you as the logistics expert

to answer any questions that may arise.

- Remember that you are the one responsible for all the non-expendable and expendable property at the MEPS.
- Some commanders are not aware of what you do, but if you fail, they are responsible for your actions.
- If you keep your standards high and do not deviate from the basics, you will be successful.

As purchasing officer:

- You are responsible for spending the taxpayers dollars – don’t take this lightly.
- Research items you plan to purchase and don’t always go with the first price.
- If you believe you’re correct, don’t be afraid to dispute purchases and practices with the higher headquarters.
- Present and explain your objections to purchases in a professional manner in order to get the most value from your budget.



Mike Sigloh

and supply tech

obligation and accrual, she knows there's something wrong and further research is needed.

The MS02, Prior Month Transaction is her accounting "security blanket" report; because it captures all transactions for each month that she might need for an error correction. She does not have much use for the MS03, Cumulative Obligation, except at the end of the month to check the matching total obligations to the DCAS and RMT obligations. She attaches them to end-of-month status of funds report, as required by USMEPCOM Regulation 37-1.

"When budget and supply technicians work as a team, it becomes a simple matter and a good way of doing business, less stress, a healthier and happier work place," May said.

The supply technician/cardholder needs to provide the budget tech with a GPC transactions report on the following day of the GPC Statement closing date to check for accuracy of the accounting inputs and to make adjustments to the estimate amounts in DCAS and RMT.

Before month-end reports, Stowe verifies the GPC purchases that have not come thru in ACCESS with supply technician and makes any necessary adjustments.

"Mrs. Stowe is always asking questions and looking for ways to improve business practices," May said.

Editor's note: Mui Stowe and her husband own Indian Creek Vineyard and Winery outside of Kuna, Idaho. The business has earned numerous awards, including "Idaho Winery of the Year" for 2008.

- Always keep your commander informed of your purchases.
- Ensure the proper IMPAC procedures are followed (funds available through budget, signed by commander, then make purchase).
- If the purchasing officers in the command practice budget management and develop a good working relationship with their budget personnel, this command can save the taxpayer's money.
- Don't get into the mindset of, "that's just the way it is."

Sigloh offers these recommendations for establishing a successful logistics program.

- Manage your time well.
- Keep informed on updates to regulations, etc., (don't depend on someone doing it for you).
- Don't be afraid to challenge the system. Do it professionally and make sure you have your facts straight.
- Never put your commander or first sergeant in a situation that makes them look foolish.
- Give 110 percent.
- Always seek self-improvement (when you become complacent; you can make mistakes).

Fort Jackson supply is always ready

By Sgt. Erica Knight
Fort Jackson MEPS

"Accountability," said Randy Horton, administrative services technician at Fort Jackson MEPS. "That's what it comes down to."

According to Horton, organization is key to accountability. "You've got to know what you have."

Because of his organization skills, the supply room is kept in perfect order. "If someone came in here and took something, I would know just by looking around," Horton said.

Horton is ready for inspection all year. He uses a file system in which each regulation has a folder tagged with a red tab. Within those folders, each document is tagged and labeled for quick access. Every time a regulation is changed, the file gets pulled and updated.

Horton spent 22 years in the Army working in supply. While in that service, Horton worked in the supply office for the Syracuse MEPS from 1989 to 1992. He has worked at the Fort Jackson MEPS as a civilian since 2004.

Originally from Mount Airy, N.C., Horton lives with his wife, Noemi, in Elgin, S.C. They have two daughters, a son, and three grandchildren. When he's not working, he enjoys carp fishing — regularly.



Randy Horton

One budget tech's best advice

By Matthew Marion
Buffalo MEPS Budget Technician

What is my advice to other budget technicians? Ensure your assistant budget technician is trained in your duties.

The assistant budget tech's position description emphasizes administrative duties, rather than formal training in Department of Defense "budgeting." However, at Buffalo MEPS, we emphasize the importance of an assistant budget tech being trained in budget.

Why? Because a budget-trained assistant budget tech allows for continuity in the absence of the budget tech. And, having a fully trained staff increases mission readiness and fosters growth.

After all, my primary leadership core value is to mentor and coach the assistant budget tech to replace me one day ... it's simply natural progression.

Indianapolis recognizes its employees are its currency

By Don Ross

A MEPS could count its “resources” as its building, phones, computers, pencils or lighting, but in Indianapolis, they realize their greatest currency is their staff.

Each section is a different type of currency, yet with a cross-training program, everyone is converted into gold.

Indianapolis is proud of its civilian staff that has more than 242 years of experience. The MEPS staff includes 26 civilians and seven military personnel. The “more experienced” encourage and share their knowledge with the new in order to become a winning team.

Seven employees account for 63 percent of the years of experience here in Indianapolis. This type of longevity is proof of dedication, job satisfaction and commitment.

One of those long-time employees, Michael Gustin, lead health technician, has worked at the MEPS for 24 years. Gustin said he “enjoys working with the applicants and believes in our mission that we accomplish on a daily basis.” He encourages newer employees to, “treat applicants as if they were your own family.”

Karen Wright, lead human resource assistant, has 24 years of service as well. She remembers her first job title as, “data transcriber for Systems 80.” Her reasons for staying with the MEPS are “Loyalty to the employer,” and the fact that there is “always something and never nothing” to do. Wright imparts to new employees, “Go with the flow — the work is rote, but customers are constantly changing.”

An example of a new employee is Robin Varnado, human resources assistant. Varnado said she joined the team because, “I



(Left to right) Indianapolis MEPS Commander, Lt. Cmdr. Sheila Noles, Michael Gustin, Karen Wright, and Robin Varnado. Gustin and Wright are MEPS’ long-time staff – each having worked at the MEPS 24 years. Robin Varnado represents the “new,” arriving this year, to stay near the military in which she served.

used to be in the Army and thought this would be something new, yet still within the military family.” Varnado has recently volunteered to cross-train as the commander’s secretary, citing reasons as “liking to learn new things and the opportunity to help new employees with the check-in process.”

Indianapolis MEPS commander, Lt. Cmdr. Sheila Noles offers her staff the opportunity to raise their value both individually and collectively by promoting from within. Eight people have transferred within the MEPS to a new position, providing upward mobility and staff members who are cross-trained. The MEPS leads encourage cross-training within their sections as well.

Indianapolis MEPS is a great example of the fact that a MEPS’ greatest resources are much more than its computers and chairs!

San Antonio practices fiscal responsibility

By Capt. Timothy Doll
San Antonio MEPS Assistant
Operations Officer

“Don’t tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money and I’ll tell you what they are.”

— James W. Frick



Eloise McGee

Should Mr. Frick visit the San Antonio MEPS, he would clearly see where its priorities lay — shipping and qualifying applicants for service in the U.S. Armed Forces.

As a public, tax-funded organization; fiscal responsibility is at the forefront of the San Antonio MEPS’ daily business.

The bulk of this task falls on the shoulders of two people: Susie Wright and Eloise McGee. Wright, who hails from San Antonio, has served as the budget technician for the past two years.

McGee, originally from Spring Hill, La., has been in the civil service for 20 years, 15 of those at the San Antonio MEPS. She’s been a budget technician for the past two years.

Each plays a vital role in the day-to-day functioning of the MEPS.

In addition to monitoring internal MEPS budget matters, the budget section is responsible for tracking the meals and lodging charges incurred by the recruiting services.

McGee takes great care in scrubbing rosters and coordinating with the service counselors to justify each charge.

One of the most important aspects of the job is reconciling the MEPS-controlled centrally billed accounts.

With the transfer to Citibank, it is even more pressing to keep all accounts current.

In this era of heightened operational tempo, and its associated increase in defense spending, it is more important than ever for each MEPS to be fiscally responsible.

With dedicated civil service employees like Wright and McGee, San Antonio MEPS has its priorities in the right place.



(Left) A member of a Chinese People's Liberation Army delegation takes a vision test during a visit to Honolulu MEPS. (Below) During the same visit, 1st Sgt. Anthony Lockett explains the oath of enlistment to members of the delegation in the MEPS ceremony room.



Chinese delegation visits Honolulu to learn about processing

The staff of Honolulu MEPS was able to offer a view of how the United States processes military members during a visit from a Chinese People's Liberation Army delegation.

Established in 1927, the PLA is the unified military organization of all land, sea and air forces of the People's Republic of China. While in Hawaii, the delegation from China observed several military units, including the Honolulu MEPS. Maj. Gen. Zhong Zhiming led the delegation of 10 officers and three noncommissioned officers.

Chief Master Sgt. James A. Roy, U.S. Pacific Command senior enlisted leader, hosted the delegation. This was the first time enlisted members of the PLA took part in an official delegation to another

nation. Senior enlisted military members from Honolulu MEPS planned and executed their part of the visit.

At the MEPS, Petty Officer 1st Class David Thrush, assistant zone supervisor for Navy recruiting in the Pacific region, and 1st Sgt. Anthony Lockett gave briefings to the delegation.

Following this, Lockett gave the delegation a tour of the MEPS facility. During the tour, members of the delegation had the opportunity to experience applicant processing firsthand.

In medical, the Medical NCOIC, Sgt. 1st Class John Acevedo demonstrated how to use the breathalyzer and how to conduct a vision test. Later he conducted the test for a member of the delegation.

In processing, Sgt. 1st Class Derrick Townsend, processing NCOIC, conducted a pre-enlistment interview with one of the delegates and answered questions.

The tour was completed in the ceremony room where the delegation viewed a mock oath of enlistment ceremony and received USMEPCOM coins.

The purpose of the PLA delegation's visit was to allow the PLA NCOs to observe the role enlisted leaders play in the U.S. military.

The delegation's visit to the MEPS not only gave the delegation a chance to better understand the structure and role of the NCO corps in the U.S. military, it also



Sgt. 1st Class John Acevedo demonstrates the use of a breathalyzer to a member of the Chinese delegation.



(Top) Maj. Gen. Zhong Zhiming (second from left) and other members of the delegation listen to a briefing at the MEPS. (Above) Sgt. 1st Class Derrick Townsend explains the pre-enlistment interview.

gave the PLA NCOs an opportunity to observe enlisted leaders from the MEPS and recruiting commands conduct their daily business of manning the U.S. military's all volunteer force.

Memphis hosts Center of Influence Event

— Awards banquet celebrates successful military and educator partnership

By Capt. Jeromy Spellings
Memphis MEPS Operations Officer

The Memphis MEPS and Interservice Recruitment Committee continued to strengthen their bonds with local and regional educators when they co-sponsored the joint venture awards banquet with the West Tennessee Counseling Association.

As in years before, J.B. Smiley, Memphis MEPS education services specialist, and Evon Calhoun, president of the counseling association, co-narrated the event that has become a tradition.

The guest speaker was former Eastern Sector Command Sgt. Maj. Darlene Hagood. She spoke with compassion, telling educators that they inspire students to learn and choose careers. She made it emphatically clear that if it were not for educators, there would be no professionals.

A total of 174 counselors, principals and other guest attended the banquet to celebrate the accomplishment of educators and the military in promoting education, counseling and career opportunities for young people. Educators enjoyed dinner and entertainment by the Navy Band Mid-South, Fairley High Junior ROTC students, recording artist Julie Carter and the Huddleston Jazz Trio.

During the awards portion of the banquet, Memphis MEPS commander, Lt. Col. Gregory James, and Hagood were assisted by Ray Johnson, test coordinator, and Gloria Miller, budget technician, in presenting certificates of appreciation to counselors who provided exemplary support for the ASVAB Career Exploration Program and recruiting.



Awards banquet guest included counselors, principals, superintendents, school board members, lawyers, college professors, Interservice Recruitment Committee commanders and USMEPCOM personnel, including John Barker, Pam Jackson, Barry Adams, Command Sgt. Maj. Darlene Hagood, Sue Jeffers, Evon Calhoun, Mary London, Mary Alexander, Mary Brignole, Kathy Internado, Thelma Wright, Virginia Stackens Crump, Sonja Sanes, Cecilia Kirkwood, Julia Howard, Vickie Smith, Margaret Schingle, Rosie Jones Carlock, J. B. Smiley, Maj. Gregory James, Lt. Col. Lee Erickson, Lt. Col. Eric Goslowsky, Capt. Marcellino Neville, Maj. David Banning, 2nd Lt. Matthew Cocita, Kathy Knight, Samuel Perkins, Roger Givens, Vanchenzia McKinney, Anna Shelsky, Gloria Miller, Julie Carter, Geraldine Wright, Candace Armstrong, James Sanders, Ray Johnson and Kim Jessee.

They made special mention of two outstanding ASVAB supporters, who for many years have used the ASVAB to help students make informed career decisions. Barry Adams of Hickman County High, Hickman, Ky., and Sue Jeffers of Blytheville High, received USMEPCOM plaques displaying a Counselors Award of Merit. West Tennessee Counseling Association presented special awards including secondary and elementary counselor of the year and counselor-educator of the year.

As the event came to closure, guest mingled. Educators and military personnel exemplified a spirit of cooperation. Memphis MEPS personnel look forward to a continued cooperative relationship with educators.

Springfield first sergeant's spouse serves in Kuwait, Baghdad

By Jeanette DeForge

Some mail packages or wave flags to support the troops, but Elisa A. Robles volunteered to go to Kuwait and Iraq to help directly.

An assistant manager for the military store at Westover Air Reserve Base, Robles volunteered to help run similar stores set up for military personnel overseas.

In October, the Chicopee mother of three arrived in Kuwait. In February she traveled to Baghdad to work at Camp Prosperity.

"I've wanted to go up there and see what they are going through," she said. "I wanted to support the troops."

The first five months went well, despite the 12-hour work shifts scheduled six days a week.

"I like to talk to the troops and see what they need," she said. "I tell them, I'll try to get you anything you need."

The most-requested items are electronics such as iPods and video games which help pass the time. The store is open 24 hours and is set up as one-stop shopping selling toiletries, snacks, electrical adapters, and it rents DVDs.

For 12 years Robles has worked for the Army & Air Force Exchange Service, which operates stores and restaurants on military bases across the country. She has worked in many locations, moving when her husband, a 22-year Army veteran who now works at Springfield MEPS, has been transferred to different bases.

The exchange is run by the military but most of its employees are civilians. It must rely on volunteers like Robles when it opens stores in other countries, said Capt. David K. Tomiyama, a spokesman for the exchange based in Texas.

There are 470 civilian workers now who volunteered to work overseas in Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.



Elisa A. Robles

100-plus take oath at Jaguars' game

Representing all services, 106 applicants raised their right hands and took the oath of enlistment during halftime of the Jacksonville Jaguars-Tennessee Titans game Nov. 16.

This is the second year the Jaguars invited the Jacksonville MEPS to participate in their military appreciation day.

More than two dozen soldiers from Fort Stewart, Ga., joined the enlistees in taking the oath. These re-enlisting soldiers recently returned home from deployment.

Major Gen. Tony Cucolo, 3rd Infantry Division commander, Fort Stewart, addressed the applicants and administered the oath.

Standing alongside 3rd Infantry Division Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Andrews, Cucolo praised the applicants' courage and patriotism and underlined the importance of taking the oath, especially at this time in our nation's history.

As the applicants and soldiers raised their hands, two massive American flags were stretched out over the entire field; held tight



Applicants take the oath of enlistment at a Jacksonville Jaguars game. *Photos by Dan Van Slyke*

by Air National Guardsmen who had also recently returned from deployment.

At the end of the oath, the crowd of more than 65,000 erupted in a standing ovation.

The energy was palpable, and the pride on each new service member's face was obvious.

As the formation marched off the field, the Titans were returning to the sidelines from the locker rooms, but yielded for the group to pass; even stopping to shake hands and personally thank the nation's newest patriots.

As the formation was led off the field through the sideline tunnel, the crowd noise continued to elevate as they begun chanting in unison "U - S - A."

The applicants stayed for the rest of the game and received meal vouchers, courtesy of the Jaguars organization. Throughout the rest of the evening, they were frequently stopped and congratulated by members of the community.

After the game, the group boarded a chartered bus to return to Jacksonville MEPS, still energized and feeling like heroes.

It was an unforgettable night that highlighted the remarkable first step these 106 individuals made toward serving the country and the deep gratitude and pride of the Jacksonville community.



(Left to right) Major Gen. Tony Cucolo, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Andrews, both from 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.. Cucolo praised the applicants' courage and patriotism in his remarks and administered the oath of enlistment.

Robles is the first Westover employee to volunteer, he said. "She is physically taking a bit of a risk, hats off to her," Tomiyama said.

Robles assignment in Camp Buehring, Kuwait, is essentially a transfer station where troops come while waiting to head to long-term assignments in locations such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We are in a safe zone. It is the desert, I see a lot of camels, it is pretty amazing," she said.

One of highlight Robles said she is seeing a lot of people who met her husband through his job. Many New England residents entering all branches of the military go through Springfield MEPS, Robles said.

"It is amazing, it makes me feel so good when I see their faces, they are always so glad to see me," she said.

Robles did not request a specific location. While in Kuwait, she mentioned she was interested in going to Iraq and recently was asked to fill a vacancy in Baghdad.

"I will be close to the fighting, I try not to think about it. I don't know what I am going to be experiencing but I am going with a positive mind," she said.

Robles said she spent a week training before leaving in October and was issued the same protective gear troops receive.

While Robles is not too nervous, her husband, 1st Sgt. Peter Robles admits he was a little shocked when his wife told him she was transferring to Iraq.

"I did get that gulp in my throat, she is my wife and I pray for her safety," he said, adding he is relieved the fighting has calmed.

The couple married 10 days before Robles entered the Army. In their 22-year marriage, Robles said his wife has followed him and supported him, so this is his turn.

"It is about the progression of her career, I knew it would be a good advantage for her," he said.

Being "Mr. Mom" has been a good learning experience. Robles said he has grown closer to his two daughters Stefani M., 18, who is entering Springfield Technical Community College, and Deidre A. 20, who works at Westover. Their youngest, P. Anthony Robles is 12.

"With my son, I just try to keep him busy, I coach youth basketball and he plays," he said.

The family keeps in touch through phone calls and e-mails but they miss each other.

Robles said he is proud of his wife and is impressed she never complains, although she is working 12-hour days and sleeping on a cot.

"I call her a great American," he said.

School welcomes military guest speakers on Veterans Day

On Veterans Day, Chicago MEPS' Petty Officer 2nd Class Laura Harris and three soldiers from the Army National Guard were special guests and speakers at Lincoln Elementary School.

Selected students who had written letters to military members had breakfast with Harris and the soldiers. School faculty members were so impressed with the children's letters that they planned this extra privilege.

"It was more my honor than theirs to participate in this event," Harris said.

After the breakfast everyone attended an assembly that focused on the history of Veterans Day.

"We said the Pledge of Allegiance, stood tall for the national anthem, and then the students sang us the service songs and 'America the Beautiful,'" Harris said.

"After the assembly, we went to the classrooms to speak to the children about our services, what they do and why it's important.

Harris spoke to a class of kindergartners and first graders. She spoke about the Coast Guard's many missions (search and rescue, law enforcement, environmental, and boating safety), lineage and history.

"They had some really intriguing and sometimes quite chal-



Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Laura Harris poses for a photo with the classroom of kindergartners and first graders she visited on Veterans Day.

lenging questions."

The Coast Guard recruiting office provided keepsakes for the children to have as a remembrance the day's events, the Veterans Day Holiday and what it represents.

Son changes course to follow in dad's footsteps

By Capt. Shawn P. Broussard
New Orleans MEPS Executive Officer

Initially 1st Sgt. David Martin was shocked when his son told him he was going to join the Army, but then the father realized it wasn't all that surprising.

"I never believed Nicolas would ever join the military because he was such a scholarly kid focused on college," Martin said.

"However, now that I look back I can remember he'd imitate my military mannerisms, stance, tone, knew each piece of equipment and its use."

At New Orleans MEPS recently, Nicolas Martin enlisted in the Army as a psychological operations specialist with an airborne option.

His father, 1st Sgt. David Martin, a soldier for more than 26 years, assigned to the 769th Engineer Battalion, witnessed the ceremony.

First Sgt. Martin recently returned after completing a third deployment to the Middle East, conducting engineer operations near Baghdad.

Nicolas Martin said he's extremely excited his father returned home safely and that he joined the military for purely patriotic reasons.

"It's amazing how he's evolved and time has passed," 1st Sgt. Martin said.

Nicolas smiled and nodded his head. His father added, "I believe Nicolas' goal is to be better than me."

Again, Nicolas nodded his head.



1st. Sgt. David Martin and his son, Nicolas.

"He has already surpassed my entry line scores but after all these years, he still has a ways to go," 1st Sgt. Martin said.

Nicolas nods again, but this time it's with a grin, and a look of determination.

Upcoming Diversity Celebrations

April 21: Holocaust Remembrance Day
April 19-26: Days of Remembrance
"Never Again": What You Do Matters

May: Asian Pacific American
Heritage Month
"Leadership to Meet the Challenges of a
Changing World"

Aug. 26: Women's Equality Day
"Celebrating Women's Right to Vote"
Sept. 15 - Oct. 15:
Hispanic Heritage Month



Baltimore sustains its presence in the community

In July 2006, Baltimore MEPS Commander, then Lt. Col. Robert Larsen (now colonel) explained the concept of “Christmas in July” to Petty Officer 1st Class Felecia Wilson, then MEPS Readiness Support Group coordinator.

Larsen made the point that many people donate to community organizations during the holidays, because of the season’s tradition of giving.

During that month, the MEPS donated toys, clothes, food and other items to a shelter, Sarah’s House, located only a mile from the MEPS. Some of the “other items” included more than 10 backpacks filled with school supplies.

The shelter provides emergency housing to as many as 66 people and transitional housing for 22 families

That August, a MEPS employee dressed as Santa Claus and delivered a pickup truck load of goodies to Sarah’s House.

The tradition continues. Last fall the MEPS launched Operation Backpack, an effort to provide backpacks and school supplies to the shelter.

Last summer, Baltimore MEPS operations NCOIC, Sgt. 1st Class Karen Thomas organized the drive. She said she wanted to make a “positive difference” in the lives of children.

The MEPS asked the Fort Meade community for backpacks, spiral notebooks, loose-leaf paper, rulers, pencils, calculators, pens, markers, crayons, erasers or cash donations. They established a drop-off box inside the MEPS.

“The turnout was amazing!” Thomas said. She is the current MEPS RSG leader.

“With the assistance from the community, our goal of collecting for 50 to 60 children was nearly tripled. We initially collected for Sarah’s House, but were able to assist two other shelters and an elementary school,” Thomas said.

The mission of Sarah’s House is to provide a safe shelter, daily meals, and personal as well as professional casework support for those in need. Staff and volunteers understand the importance of maintaining a caring and nurturing environment for all guests, especially the children. In the spirit of the biblical figure Sarah, they welcome with hospitality those who go to them, and try to offer a sense of hope in the face of homelessness.

The shelter’s goal is to effect positive change in the families they serve by providing parenting classes and workshops, employment programs, licensed child care, counseling and transportation.

The programs are all aimed at helping guests achieve independence and strengthen their families.



“With the way that the economy is today, it feels good to be able to help others in a time of need. I feel the school supply drive promotes understanding, teamwork, harmony, pride, and esprit among all groups, not just within the specific group that we are collecting for, but the MEPS employees and the community involvement as well,” Thomas said.



Sgt. Francis Green (left) and Sgt. 1st Class Karen Thomas stand with donated items outside Sarah’s House.

Commander elected to serve as vice chairman of Oklahoma Federal Executive Board

Federal Executive Boards

In 1961, President Kennedy expressed his belief that government agencies need to coordinate their activities, in particular, outside the Washington, D.C., area. This is an excerpt from his memorandum on this subject.

“As an integral part of present steps to increase the effectiveness and economy of Federal agencies, I want coordination of government activities outside of Washington significantly strengthened. That is to include improvement of the management and direction of Federal offices throughout the country by the chief departmental officials in Washington, and provision for an interagency working group for closer coordination across department and agency lines in important centers of Federal activity outside of the National Capital area.”

Since 1961, federal executive boards have been a forum for communication and collaboration among federal agencies outside Washington, D.C. Since about 88 percent of all federal employees work outside the national capital region, good communication between these agencies is necessary.

Additionally, federal representatives are the principal contacts with the federal government for the citizens of the United States. The national network of 28 federal executive boards serves as the cornerstone for strategic partnering in government.

Almost 50 years after the establishment of federal executive boards, at least one MEPS commander is contributing to President Kennedy’s plan of better coordination between government agencies.

Oklahoma City MEPS commander, Lt. Cmdr. David Nikodym is the vice chairman of the Oklahoma Federal Executive Board.

Today there are 28 federal executive boards and numerous federal executive agencies throughout America coordinating federal, state and local government activities for the good of each agency.

The nation’s 28 FEBs are in major metropolitan locations. The Oklahoma FEB is one of three state FEBs, the other two are in Oregon and south Florida.

In Oklahoma, the board is made up of 309 agency heads. Last year they elected Nikodym to serve on the board’s executive policy council, consisting of 10 agency heads. The agency heads, along with the executive director and staff, coordinate the efforts of the 309 member agencies in Oklahoma.

Agency heads elect the chairman and the vice chairman.

Recently, as vice chairman, Nikodym signed a memorandum of agreement between the Oklahoma City/County Health Department and the Oklahoma FEB. “This MOA covers the nearly 25,000 federal employees in central Oklahoma in addition to their families,” Nikodym said.

“Homeland Security Presidential Directive 21 stresses the importance of public health readiness and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified the need for communities to provide prophylaxis and medications to one hundred percent of their populations within 48 hours of an incident or emergent requirement.

“With this agreement we not only cover the federal employees, but also their family members, and that totals about 100,000 people,” Nikodym said.

“Basically, we receive the medications from the Oklahoma City/County Health folks and distribute them.”

Nikodym explains this would eliminate the need for 100,000 people associated with the federal government to get their

required medicines from regular county distribution points.

“Many of the MEPS are located in areas covered by FEBs and, although there is a mission statement for the FEB,” Nikodym said, “it really boils down to one thing — we are an inter-agency working group and the Oklahoma FEB is getting a lot of good done for its agencies, employees and families”



Oklahoma City MEPS commander, Lt. Cmdr. David Nikodym signs a memorandum of agreement between the Oklahoma City/County Health Department and the Oklahoma Federal Executive Board.



Update: Jamaica



In Jamaica, children (at left) line up and (at right) gather outside the distribution area for Miami MEPS' second school supply program.

Miami MEPS is continuing a tradition that began almost two years ago — gathering and delivering school supplies for Jamaican youngsters.

The program began through the efforts of Miami MEPS medical noncommissioned officer, Master Sgt. Steven Jeffrey and then-operations NCOIC, Sgt. 1st Class Stanley Marion.

Jeffrey was born in Jamaica and lived there until he moved to Brooklyn at the age of 10.

He still travels to his childhood home to visit family members who live there.

In a 2008 *Messenger* article, Jeffrey said, "Every time I go down there, I wonder what I can do to help. You have kids who can't afford a pen or pencil to go back to school. That bothers me. I have to help these kids."

In 2007, Jeffrey's co-workers, liaisons, recruiters and other tenants in the MEPS building donated nearly 500 pounds of books and school supplies. Jeffrey said they donated thousands of books in just two weeks.

That year, Jeffrey paid for his own plane ticket to Jamaica to accompany the supplies and get them to the kids.

Miami MEPS commander, Lt. Cmdr. Richard Pokropski wrote a letter to the airline, asking them not to charge for the extra weight, because it was a charitable donation. The airline accommodated his request.

When Jeffrey arrived in Jamaica, he put up a few fliers to advertise the event and set up a distribution point. He was surprised by the response.

He thought he would help only one school, but ended up helping many. In all, about 300 to 350 children received supplies that year.

Again, Jeffrey spearheaded the collection and delivery effort last fall. He traveled to Jamaica, this time with Eyda Machado. At the time she was the MEPS budget technician. She retired in December.

The two made their trip the same

week that hurricanes Fay and Gustav passed over Jamaica. Despite the storms, Jeffrey and Machado persevered.

"They both 'broke their backs' transporting the hundreds of pounds of school supplies from the airport to the remote location," Pokropski said.

"They worked all weekend with volunteers to put individual supply bags together."

This year's drive provided supplies to about 1,000 children; more than a three-fold increase from 2007.

"The large oceans and vast distances that separate countries once meant something, but through human ingenuity, we have bridged those oceans and dwarfed those distances," Pokropski said.

"As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. professed, 'Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what

I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality,'" Pokropski said.

Jeffrey left the Miami MEPS in September, en route to Fort Dix, N.Y., but he plans to be part of the school supplies donation program in the future.



Children walk through the Jamaican countryside.



Eyda Machado packages school supplies in Jamaica.

Chicago MEPS holds food drive for needy children

When three members of the Chicago MEPS donated 80 cans of food to the Maryville City of Youth, Des Plaines campus, it was a win for all.

“We are really thankful to all the service liaisons, recruiters and MEPS staff members who made this canned food drive such a success, Lt.j.g. John York, Chicago MEPS operations officer, said. “We are already talking about other volunteer opportunities within the Maryville City of Youth community and hope to make this an ongoing partnership.”

Employees of Chicago MEPS, service liaison offices and Marine Corps Recruiting Battalion Chicago donated the food.

Mary Krieger, the volunteer services coordinator, accepted the donation on behalf of the organization which provides assisted living and schooling for developmentally disabled boys between the ages of 9 and 18.



(Left to right) Mary Krieger, Windy Robinson, Jeff Engel and Lt.j.g. John York. Robinson is Chicago MEPS' Readiness Support Group president.

Raleigh staff reaps the rewards of reaching out to their community

“One of our proudest moments,” Maj. Angela Hunter, Raleigh MEPS commander, said, “has been to give part of ourselves to the community we serve.”

The MEPS staff adopted a family of 10 during the holidays, through a partnership with Choices for Children, a program that is part of the Family Resource Center of Raleigh.

The resource center assists families with career development, education, housing, youth, employment and other general family crises. The Choices for Children program provides a community approach to recruiting, supporting

and preserving families in the downtown Raleigh area.

“The entire Raleigh MEPS family teamed up and took on the responsibility of providing for each child,” Kimberly Franks said. “You would have thought each section were in a competition with a reward of a million dollars.

“Each section was eager, enthused, and willing to go the extra mile in providing for the family,” Franks said. “The dedication, commitment and care each employee gave was priceless.”

“We are honored to give back to our community, because we know the impact it has on their lives,” Staff Sgt. Anthony Moody said.

The MEPS staff invited the family to the station for lunch and to pick up their gifts.

“Seeing the smiles on the children faces when they received their toys was priceless” Hunter said.

“The family is a foundation for all children regardless of where they are from or live,” Franks said. “We want to help reach these families directly and provide them with items that can help make their life a little easier.”

The Raleigh MEPS staff stands firm in recognizing the “F” in Eastern Sector’s F.L.A.G [Family, Leadership, Ambassadorship, Growth] — families taking care of one another.

Dallas staff ride in Veterans Day Parade

The parade began at Reunion Arena and ended in front of City Hall. Last year’s theme was honoring Blue/Gold Star families and Korean War veterans. Dallas MEPS had a military vehicle in the parade. Seating in the vehicle was limited to 20 people. All riders wore their uniforms or patriotic clothing. This parade is the fifth largest in the nation.



Command wins 2008 Gold Award for Excellence in Business Process Management and Work Flow

USMEPCOM received the 2008 Gold Award for North America — Global Awards for Excellence in Business Process Management, in an online awards ceremony March 2.

The award is co-sponsored by the Workflow Management Coalition, BPMFocus.org, and BPM.com. According to the BPMF website, the award “recognize(s) user organizations that have demonstrably excelled in implementing innovative business process solutions to meet strategic business objectives.”

USMEPCOM was selected from a field of seven competitors in the North American regional category. The award is based on a case study, submitted by Oracle Corporation, describing USMEPCOM’s multi-year effort to modernize its information technology architecture. The IT modernization allowed the command to re-engineer its business processes and workflow to more efficiently process applicants for enlistment and transfer qualification data to the armed services.

In fiscal 2008, USMEPCOM administered 587,000 Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery tests to applicants for

enlistment, another 641,000 ASVAB tests to high school students across the nation as part of the DoD Career Exploration Program, 386,000 medical examinations and initiated 333,000 background screening processes. USMEPCOM efforts resulted in 274,000 armed service accessions during that period.

The Global Awards for Excellence in Business Process Management have been presented for the past 15 years. Each of five global regions, Europe, Middle-East Africa, North America, Pacific Rim and South and Central America, receives one gold and one silver award, in addition to one global winner.

USMEPCOM competed against six other finalists in the North America category. The other nominees were: City of Edmonton, Canada; Dickinson Financial Corporation, U.S.; Farmers Group, U.S.; Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics; Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico; and U.S. Xpress, U.S.

Buffalo’s former Marine reverses the clock

Retired Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Russell Moffitt is reversing the clock — in more ways than one.



(Above) Russell Moffitt cools his feet after a run. Moffitt (at right), a retired Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant, improved his time on the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., by about 42 minutes between 2007 and 2008.

In 2007, he ran the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., in 04:26:47. In 2008, he ran the same marathon in 03:44:17.

Moffitt is a human resources assistant at the Buffalo MEPS.

“He actually seems to be getting better with age,” Air Force Capt. Michael Endres, Buffalo MEPS executive officer, said.

“He dramatically improved his time from the previous year. Who said an old dog can’t learn new tricks? Normal people, when they get older, they get slower. Not Marines,” Eric Clayborne of the Buffalo MEPS, said.



Capt. Richard S. Laca

Company Grade Officer of the Year



Captain Richard S. Laca is the USMEPCOM Company Grade Officer of the Year. He is the operations officer and deputy commander at the Atlanta MEPS.

Laca directed the operations section which processed nearly 8,000 accessions, more than 15,000 applicants, 36,000 tests and 11,500 medical actions. He developed a command inspection program and led it for all sections. His leadership on the MEPS “mega test day” led to testing 29 high schools and nearly 3,500 students. He developed daily and monthly accountability spreadsheets to track applicant processing and combined the operations and medical standard operating procedures into one detailed, user friendly, understandable document. Laca led the medical team’s briefing on how to conduct proper body fat measurement procedures to more than 100 Army recruiters. As transportation

processing officer, he led the transportation of more than 7,400 applicants and oversaw more than \$500,000 in transportation costs with no discrepancies or funds lost. He mentored the Indianapolis and Tampa MEPS operations officers during their crosswalks.

He developed and improved the quality review checklist, so the operations section has better accountability and control of the review process and monitored the travel contractor’s performance by submitting quarterly reports and ensuring compliance with the contract. Laca created an overtime budget spreadsheet, which allows leadership to track overtime in different sections. He developed a database for monthly exception to policy and unprojected walk-ons so the MEPS can track trends by services. By establishing a new processing flow in the medical section, he decreased processing

Sgt. 1st Class Karen N. Thomas

Senior Enlisted Military Member of the Year



Sgt. 1st Class Karen N. Thomas is the USMEPCOM Senior Enlisted Military Member of the Year. She is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the processing section at the Baltimore MEPS.

She was a key contributor in Baltimore MEPS becoming the first station to initiate e-Security procedures which will serve as the model for all other MEPS. Thomas oversaw the conversion to the system’s digital photo and biometric fingerprint processes and shaped the blueprint to eradicate fraudulent enlistments and ease the paperwork burden. She assembled a team to develop an e-Security flow chart, which enabled a precise view of how the program was integrated into existing operational procedures. Thomas’ ability to build a team was instrumental in launching e-Security and deploying a team to do the same at the San Juan MEPS. She also took part in

an administrative review of e-Security at USMEPCOM.

She overhauled the process to build shipper packages which guaranteed a quality product for applicants. Thomas incorporated projection data sheets into operations, which gave the control desk a snapshot of floor activity to manage manpower and increase productivity by 40 percent. She instituted methods to cut applicant processing time by one hour and improved the morning check-in rate by 25 percent.

Thomas is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in management from Westwood College and enrolled in one particular class so she could help the MEPS set priorities for key projects. She unified NCOs, civilians and service liaisons to plan and execute organization day, which was attended by 190 family members and guests. She hosted

time by an hour, which allows the service to process more applicants.

Laca earned a master of science degree in criminology from Indiana State University and completed Squadron Officer School. He has also attended various military and civilian courses and workshops that allowed him to broaden his scope of responsibilities. In the community, Laca is an active member of his church where he serves as a eucharistic minister. He orchestrated a fund-raiser for the Susan G. Komen Foundation in his home that raised more than \$1,000. Laca helped keep teenagers off the streets by helping with setting up, chaperoning and cleanup for a local youth organization's dances.

"If you look closely enough, you will see leadership is his hallmark and excellence is his norm," Maj. Adrian L. Hughley, Atlanta MEPS commander, said. "He is an outstanding mentor and motivator. His contributions to the Atlanta MEPS are invaluable."

a chili cook-off and led a drive to provide backpacks to more than 100 children. She volunteered for a local elementary school's career day and participated in a one-mile run with students, encouraging them to finish the course. Thomas organized a 12-person team to support an American Cancer Society walk and raised more than \$2,000 for breast cancer awareness. She led 100 volunteers in collecting four tons of food for families in Fort Meade's biggest food drive.

"Sergeant 1st Class Thomas is definitely an example of the profound character and leadership we expect in today's senior enlisted members," Col. Robert S. Larsen, Baltimore MEPS commander, said. "She is inspirational and has a courageous attitude. Her tireless enthusiasm has contributed greatly to the organization and the USMEPCOM mission."

Tech. Sgt. Michelle C. Gafford Enlisted Military Member of the Year



Tech. Sgt. Michelle C. Gafford is the USMEPCOM Enlisted Military Member of the Year. She is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the processing section at the Jacksonville MEPS.

Gafford displayed her leadership and dedication by supervising two military members and nine civilian employees to process more than 13,000 applicants. She revamped the training and quality review programs which led directly to an area previously rated marginal being rated excellent during an inspector general review. She bridged a critical gap when the travel specialist was out sick for one month,

servicing in that capacity, in addition to her regular duties, and ensured transportation for more than 1,000 shippers. She identified a bottleneck in morning shipper flow and revamped procedures and realigned manning to increase efficiency tenfold. After a two-day closure due to Hurricane Fay, anticipating heavy volume, she cancelled a temporary duty trip to ensure success. She worked closely with service liaisons the day before the hurricane arrived to ensure all shipper preparations were met. As a result, nearly 200 applicants shipped successfully, immediately after the storm.

Gafford led by example, scoring a 93 on her physical readiness test and was recognized by the unit first sergeant, earned the Army physical fitness excellence patch and received a coin of excellence from the Eastern Sector commander. Additionally, she implemented a program for those who received minimum or near minimum scores on their practice fitness tests upon assignment to the MEPS, which contributed to substantial improvement during their record PT tests.

She is pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in early childhood education and completed A+ and network essentials training courses offered through the Air Force portal to keep abreast of her career field.

Gafford served as Amusement Vending Machine Fund president, and chaired and organized the holiday party. She raised more than \$1,500 by spearheading events such as silent auctions, bake sales, lunches and chili cook-offs. She volunteered to assist with Special Olympics and the special education program at a local elementary school, and worked with the local Marine Recruiting District on its Toys for Tots drive.

"Technical Sergeant Gafford embodies what a professional military member should be," Capt. Kennethra Edwards, Jacksonville MEPS executive officer, said. "She exhibits superb confidence and an infectious attitude in every task without regard to stress or difficulty and encourages her team to exceed standards."

Dr. Phillip W. Catron

Civilian of the Year – GS-10 and Above



Dr. Phillip W. Catron is the USMEPCOM Civilian of the Year, GS-10 and Above. Catron is the chief medical officer at the San Diego MEPS.

Catron developed a standard operating procedure to minimize the need for recruiters to submit medical documents on uncomplicated medical cases, which decreased the workload for recruiters while maintaining accurate applicant processing. He expanded the dial-a-medic program and took more than 1,600 calls, a full 40 percent of dial-a-medic calls to all Western Sector MEPS. He was directly responsible for a visit by the Navy Recruiting Command operations officer, who wanted to see firsthand why the San Diego MEPS consistently has the lowest attrition rate for all Navy recruiting districts.

He developed a standard form library for commonly needed medical tests and consultations, which improved the efficiency of medical processing. Catron revised a number of the MEPS' medical protocols which decreased costs, while improving the quality of medical processing. He recruited three new physicians, one of whom is able to work at the Los Angeles MEPS as well as in San Diego, and trained four fee-basis practitioners to work as the assistant chief medical officer.

Catron strengthened the MEPS physician peer review program by reviewing outcomes with fee-basis practitioners. The program reviewed more than 2,000 applicant records for medical processing accuracy. He also maintained continuing medical education for MEPS physicians. He regularly hosts

David Rogers

Civilian of the Year – GS-7 to GS-9



David Rogers is the USMEPCOM Civilian of the Year, GS-7 to GS-9. Rogers is the test control officer at the Baltimore MEPS.

Under Rogers leadership, the testing section completed 65.5 percent more ASVAB tests than the average MEPS. He supervised more than 14,000 enlistment tests in nearly 900 sessions, an average of 15.9 people per session. Rogers worked with the education services specialist to test more than 12,000 students during 399 sessions. He contacted schools that were not testing and encouraged them to do so, and also increased the amount of time he and the ESS spent on market penetration. His efforts led to 39 new schools joining the program for the 2009 school year. Rogers optimized the use of military entrance test sites by reorganizing the schedule to avoid more than 400 potential conflicts. His flexibility with special tests allowed the MEPS to conduct nearly 3,000 special

tests. He was personally commended during the inspector general review for leading all areas to excellent ratings and simultaneously fielded e-Security to three MET sites during the inspection.

In addition to his regular duties, Rogers is the anti-terror officer, security manager, emergency management assistance program manager, recruiter orientation instructor and voting assistance officer. He volunteered to serve in all these positions to provide consistency for more than 14,000 applicants and 110 permanently assigned personnel. He coordinated with officials from Fort Meade, the Military District of Washington and USMEPCOM to get outside funding to install blast retention film and saved the command more than \$32,000.

Rogers attended eight classes during the year on subjects ranging from the National Security Personnel System to Voting Assistance Officer Certification Training. He also designed an 80-hour cross-training

social events for fee-basis practitioners and their families to show his appreciation for their dedication and ensure all the doctors are recognized.

Catron was a member of the work group that determined the medical requirements for the Virtual Interactive Processing System, one of only two CMOs chosen to do so. In the community, he is a volunteer physician and teaches neurology at the Naval Medical Center, San Diego.

“Dr. Catron’s seven years as a MEPS chief medical officers is one of the best investments the command has ever made,” Lt. Cmdr. Cheryl R. Stolze, San Diego MEPS commander, said. “He approaches each task with the intention of improving the process and customer service to applicants, recruiting services, reception centers and, ultimately, the armed forces.”

program to ensure proficiency in critical testing section tasks while maintaining the security and accountability for a \$450,000 inventory.

He set up a job shadow program that is now an annual event. Working with counselors from a local high school, he coordinated four events involving 120 students. Additionally, he and his staff are directly involved in eight local community and MEPS events, he raised more than \$1,400 for homeless families and supported a back to school backpack campaign that benefitted 140 children with backpacks and school supplies.

“He has increased morale through his behind the scenes influence on junior NCOs and civilian co-workers to ensure their success,” Col. Robert S. Larsen, Baltimore MEPS commander, said. “His efforts assisted in the ultimate success of our MEPS. Dave Rogers has clearly demonstrated that ‘above and beyond’ is achievable.”

Mary Gayle Roberson

Civilian of the Year – GS-6 and Below



Mary Gayle Roberson is the USMEPCOM Civilian of the Year, GS-6 and Below. Roberson is the lead health technician at the Amarillo MEPS.

During a year when both the chief medical officer and medical NCOIC positions were vacant, Roberson stepped in and led the medical section. Before the Choctaw fee-basis practitioner contract was implemented, she ensured doctor coverage was provided by contacting and scheduling travelling fee-basis practitioners. She later implemented the Choctaw contract and sustained medical operations for nine months. Roberson’s experience and

commitment were critical to maintaining service for the 12 months there was a different doctor working in the MEPS every week.

She assumed additional duties as the medical NCOIC and led the short-staffed section through a staff assistance visit and inspector general inspection. Roberson continuously inspected the medical section and immediately corrected deficiencies and conducted training to maintain standards. She secured on-site CPR training for the medical staff, saving the MEPS \$2,000. She personally travelled out of the local area to conduct training on medical procedures for recruiters, which contributed to a decrease in pre-screening errors.

Roberson attended Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability training to ensure the MEPS was complying with government regulations. She also completed an array of courses to help her become a more effective leader and provide supervision for the medical section and several other courses to improve her professional competence.

Roberson volunteered as purchasing agent for the Amusement Vending Machine Fund and is active in the Readiness Support Group. In the wider community, she volunteers for Family Support Services and the Downtown Women’s Center shelter, which provide services to help people get back on their feet. She worked as a hostess waiting on corporate tables to raise funds for the Children’s Advocacy Program and leads the collection of toys, hygiene items and blankets for the Faith City Mission Drive.

“Mrs. Roberson’s professionalism, technical competence and willingness to accept responsibility make her an asset not only to the Amarillo MEPS, but all of USMEPCOM,” Lt. Cmdr. Tawanna Hopson, Amarillo MEPS commander, said. “She is one of the finest civilians I have had the pleasure to serve with in my military career.”



Des Moines MEPS
Maj. Andrew P. Reed

Hometown: Born in Little Rock, Ark. “Being an Air Force brat and rolling right into the Marine Corps after that, I don’t really have a hometown. Anywhere I live is my hometown.”

Growing up Air Force: “It was great. We travelled a lot and lived in 11 different places. I have friends all over the country. It was a great experience. I wouldn’t trade it for living in one spot in my formative years. Getting a wide range of experience has helped me as a Marine Corps officer. My parents did a good job of telling us what was going to happen. It was never a secret.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid?

“Probably a bat and glove. I loved playing baseball. There were five of us. We’d have a home run derby, play a pick-up game, or have some infield practice. There was never a better way to kill time than playing some baseball.”

Education: Cornell College, Iowa; bachelor of special studies in secondary education and physical education.

Why Marine Corps: “Each of the services have their own niches. I was just drawn to the Marine Corps by the reputation. I knew I wanted to join an officer program and do some time, but I didn’t know I would make it a career. I grew to trust the Marine recruiters and it felt

right. I’ve had a great career and loved every minute of it.”

Previous assignment:

Assistant logistics officer for 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Favorite assignment: 22nd MEU. “For our two deployments, before we knew we were going to Iraq and Afghanistan, we had a lot of operational exercises. I was the lead logistics planner, so we went out to a lot of different countries and I was always there a couple of weeks early. In Afghanistan, I did a lot of civil affairs programs and had a lot of autonomy. It was probably the best job I will have unless I get to command a Marine unit. Tactical and combat operations as a Marine logistician — it doesn’t get any better than that job.”

Future military career plans:

“I’m awaiting orders, but I’m definitely going back to Fleet Marine Force, back to a logistics unit, hopefully as an executive officer. My long-term plan is to command a logistics battalion.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I want to be an astronaut, but I studied PE, so I can’t. I’ve got a wide range of interests and skills, but we haven’t really focused on the next career. If I had my druthers, I’ll probably go back to teaching. I enjoyed that.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “Spend family time together. We take a lot of trips. There are no major league sports here, but the Iowa Cubs are here, and hockey, and arena football. We do a lot of sports. We’re taking a trip to Mexico. We take a lot of trips. We’re taking advantage of the non-deployable time.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Give them autonomy to make decisions on their own. I like to give my lead human resources assistant and health tech autonomy to interact. They all understand what

we’re doing. I like giving them the authority to make decisions on processing. It gives them confidence and shows that you trust them.”

What do you like best about your job?

“The enlistment ceremony. We get these kids signing up to join the military. We’ve been at war since most of them were in junior high. It’s a privilege to enlist them. I take each of those seriously and love doing them all.”

What do you order when you eat out? “We go to so many different places. There’s a ton of variety here in Des Moines. If there’s one we go to most often it’s Italian. There’s a local butcher shop that makes Italian meats and some pastas that you can’t get any place else.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “A trip to Cancun for my 21st birthday from my then girlfriend, who is now my wife. We had a great time.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? “M&Ms. I’ve always got them around. The peanut butter ones are the best.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? “I don’t do reality TV that much. It’s gone overboard, so I don’t watch those.”

What would people be surprised to know about you?

“I’m a closet Star Wars freak. I don’t have any of the models or action figures or that kind of stuff, but I know all the movies, so I could win a trivia contest.”

One thing always on his desk: “A picture of my son.” (He just turned 6.)

Three things on his desk right now: “A jar of M&Ms and two books, my Command and Staff book and Papillion.”

Last book he read: The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson. “It was excellent.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Someplace warm and someplace on the water. It doesn’t matter where or when. As long as those two criteria are met, it’s a perfect vacation.”



Jackson MEPS
Maj. Jennifer Hicks-McGowan

Hometown: Victoria, Texas. “Victoria’s not very big, but very friendly.”

Fond childhood memories:

“Some of my fondest memories are spending time with my identical twin sister, Vanessa. We were in every class together until we hit the sixth grade. We were best friends. We did everything together, and I mean everything. We didn’t have much money, so we made things up to do. We would do cartwheels in the front yard and then spin around in circles until we got dizzy and fell down. Then we would lay there and stare up at the sky. That was fun for us.”

Hey, Twin: “When we were in high school, our nickname was ‘Hey, Twin.’ That’s what our friends said when they saw one of us. Our senior year of high school, we switched classes all day long. We knew many people wouldn’t be able to tell the difference. Her friends referred to me as, ‘Hey, Twin,’ and my friends did the same to her. Nobody knew who Jennifer was and who Vanessa was. It kind of bothered me that nobody knew who I was when we switched. That’s when I realized I needed to establish my own identity.”

What was your favorite toy: “We loved paper dolls. We would cut out pictures of

models from newspapers and magazines. Those were our paper dolls. We would play school and take turns playing the teacher. The paper dolls were our students.”

Education: Bachelor of fine arts degree in communications from Sam Houston State University; master’s degree in public policy and administration with a concentration in human resources from Jackson State University. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in public policy and administration from Jackson State

Why Army? “I started out interested in the Marines. My sister and I went to the Marine recruiting office because we loved the uniforms. He told us he couldn’t keep us together because the Corps was small. So we went to the Army, because we knew it was bigger. They were not only able to guarantee to keep us together, but put us in the same (military occupational specialty) and gave us the same first duty station. I knew that I wanted to serve in some way.”

A better chance to serve: “I loved the Army because the Army gave me opportunities I wouldn’t have otherwise had. I felt I would be more of an advocate as an officer than an enlisted soldier. I felt I would be able to help soldiers more with their issues on the officer side, and that has turned out to be true.”

Previous assignment: Fort Leavenworth, Kan., as an Intermediate Level Education student. “My twin sister and I were there together. Before that we had been separated for at least 10 years. When we were commissioned, my sister went to Germany and I stayed stateside. At Fort Leavenworth, we lived across the street from each other in base housing, so our families got to reconnect with each other. That was the best year of my life.”

Favorite assignment: “Hands down, Fort Leavenworth.”

Future military plans: I’m sort of mixed on that. Now that I’ve served in USMEPCOM, I love being in a joint assignment and would like another joint assignment. Because I’m working on my doctorate, I would like to be a professor of military science at a university.”

What do you want to be when you grow up?

“Probably a person who teaches and mentors. I want to help motivate young people to make a difference in their lives and do something better for themselves. Help people change directions into a positive realm.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “I’m a mom and a wife. When I’m not a commander, that’s my priority.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? Remind them of their purpose to defend the nation and remind them that they are part of the finest fighting force on the face of the earth. When you remind them of that, they realize it’s true and they step up.”

What do you like best about your job? “I love everything about being a commander. I love being able to manage talent and to inspire people to go further than they thought they could.”

What do you order when you eat out? “I love Mexican food. Chicken fajitas are one of my favorite meals.”

What’s the best present you ever got? My husband, Van, gave me a pair of diamond earrings on our 10th anniversary.

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Chocolate. Chocolate chip cookies, chocolate ice cream chocolate bars, chocolate milk. I love chocolate.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV?

“Boxing. It’s one of the most brutal sports ever known to mankind.”

What would people be surprised to know about you?

“I’m a certified personal fitness trainer. I work at the YMCA in Jackson and help people reach their fitness goals.” She teaches group exercise classes, including kick boxing (no contact, of course), aerobics and step aerobics.

One thing always on her desk: “A picture of my family. It keeps me grounded.”

Two things on her desk right now: Military coin collection, and a cup from the Truman Presidential Library that says “Leadership is the ability to get someone to do what they don’t want to do and like it.”

What’s the last book you read? “‘Better Than Good’ by Zig Zigler. It has a lot of religious connotations, where he talks about not being content where you are, but to strive every day to be better than good and the importance of doing your best every day.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “A cruise around the world. It takes almost a year. It won’t happen until I retire from my second job. My husband and I are going to do it someday.”



**Shreveport MEPS
Maj. Steven Downey**

Hometown: Sanford, N.C. “Small military, industrial town. It’s close to Fort Bragg.”

Fond memories: “Being it’s a military town, it gave me the inspiration and the ability for what I could see myself doing.”

It was all sports related for me, but if all else would fail, the military was something I wouldn’t mind doing.”

Favorite toy: “My Tonka truck. They were real popular and I was one of the few kids in the neighborhood who had one, and everybody wanted to play with it, so I was kind of like the centerpiece of the kids in the neighborhood.”

Education: North Carolina Central University. Commissioned from Duke ROTC. Bachelor of science in public administration. Master of arts in human resources management from Webster University.

Previous assignment: Brigade human resources officer, 3rd Brigade, 75th Division, Fort Riley, Kan.

Favorite assignment: Tank platoon leader in Schweinfurt, Germany. “It was a thrill being on the tanks and a real world mission with all that firepower. It was an amazing experience.”

Future military plans: Headed to Intermediate Leadership Education at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. “I dread it, but I’ve got to do it.” After that he expects to deploy again.

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I haven’t given that too much thought. I would like to open some type of franchise or continue with real estate. I have several properties.”

Where’s my rent? “It’s good when you have good tenants. It’s bad when you don’t. When you’re not collocated with the properties, it’s challenging to say the least.” He once had to fly back from Korea to evict somebody. “It wasn’t fun at all.” He owns seven properties in North and South Carolina and Kansas.

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “I like to work out, read or dabble with something on the computer.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Lead by example. Be fair. The best way to inspire people is to show

you genuinely care about what they do and just be fair with everybody.”

What do you like best about your job? “The mission. To be involved in these young men and women’s lives and see the first impression of the military. To be a part of that is an honor. Being able to swear them in and see them go out the door is truly an honor.”

What do you order when you eat out? “Subway. Spicy Italian.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “The BMW I bought myself in Germany.” (It’s a 528i.)

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Eating sweets. Snickers bars. I love them, but I know they’re not good for me.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? “Any kind of soap opera. I hate soap operas.”

What would people be surprised to know about you? “I used to sing in a church choir when I was younger.”

One thing always on his desk: A bottle of Gatorade.

Three things on his desk right now: Rating schemes, his education services specialist’s travel calendar, and GI Jobs magazine. “It talks about life after the military. It’s a monthly publication we get through distribution.”

Last book he read: “Walking on Water” by Randall Kendall. “It’s a biographical perspective on his journey though life. It’s kind of a rags to riches story.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Australia. I haven’t been there yet. I came close, but I want to go down under. I’ve heard a lot about it. It seems like it would be a fascinating place to visit.”



Columbus MEPS
Senior Chief Petty Officer
Crystal A. McGee

Hometown: Dayton, Ohio. “It’s a big small city. It was big to me. There was a lot to do growing up in Dayton. I used to go skating, shopping, a lot of outdoor activities.”

When I was a kid! “When we went to school, it took blizzards to close the schools. It would be a bad day and you got an hour delay. Today, they get a drop of snow and they close the schools.” (Editor’s note: The day the *Messenger* spoke with McGee, many Columbus area schools were closed after about two inches of snow.)

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “I used to have this doll, it was a Dawn doll — Fashion Show Dawn. You’d buy clothes and put her on the runway and she would model.”

Education: “I have an associate degree in fashion merchandising from before I came in the Navy.” She is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in human resource management from Kaplan University.

Why Navy? “We had Navy ROTC in my high school, so I did get a glimpse of Navy life, but that didn’t really have anything to do with it. I was taking the bus to school one day when I was in college and a friend of mine who was in the Navy was telling me about the travel, so I joined the Navy. I wanted to travel and I was

tired of doing what I was doing.”

Previous assignment: USS Lassen (DDG-82) out of Yokosuka, Japan.

Favorite assignment: “The Lassen, just because of all the places I was able to visit, the port visits. You get to see the world on a ship. A DDG is a small boy. When you’re trying to get advanced to E-7 or E-8, they tell you a small boy will make you or break you. It was a challenge, but I was able to do it.”

Future military career plans: “This will be my last tour. I have one shot at picking up E-9. If I don’t make it, I’ll retire out of here. That will be 26 years.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I want to work with people. I love talking and I love helping people. A lot of people tell me I’m a good listener and that I should be a marriage counselor or youth counselor. I would love to do something like that.”

What do you do when you’re not a senior enlisted advisor? “I have lots of family members in the area that I spend time with, especially my nieces and nephews. I’ve always got somebody’s child at my house. I like being the favorite aunt. I love being around children, especially when I can send them home.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Walk in their shoes. I won’t ask them to do anything I won’t. After they do something, I thank them for it. Sometimes they don’t live up to our standards, but they do try, so we have to show them our appreciation.”

What do you like best about your job? “I love being able to talk to the applicants before they ship out. I tell them about my experiences in the military, in the joint environment, and what they can expect in boot camp. I can reassure the parents that their child will do well. Some of them are apprehensive, because their

child is leaving home. I reassure them that their child will do well. I tell them they’re removing the boundaries for their child, letting them spread their wings and fly.”

What do you order when you eat out? “Some kind of pasta with Alfredo sauce. I love Alfredo sauce.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “My husband has been wearing my diamond earrings for so long, he thought they were his. This past Christmas he finally bought me a new pair of diamond earrings.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Candy. Not chocolate. I like kiddy candy, like Smarties or Sugar Daddies. Bubble gum. I love bubble gum.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? “I hate reality shows, like the court shows, Jerry Springer, things like that. The Flavor Flav show.”

What would people be surprised to know about you? “That I stood outside for about 2 and a half hours to audition for ‘Deal or No Deal.’ They built us all up, told us we had to be enthusiastic and all that. It took about 10 seconds for them to tell me no. I said, ‘What, you don’t like me? Everybody likes me.’ Needless to say I don’t watch ‘Deal or No Deal’ any more.”

One thing always on her desk: A calendar.

Three things on her desk right now: “My lunch, a bottle of water and my pad of sticky notes.”

What she’s reading: Reading for Results. “It’s to help give you tools to understand your reading. It gives you clues about paragraphs and helps you figure out what the author is talking about.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Probably going to the Virgin Islands. I had a friend from the Virgin Islands, and she told me about the cruises and all that. Never been there, but I would love to go.”



Sacramento MEPS
Chief Master Sgt.
Alonzo J. Baker

Hometown:

Bennettsville, S.C. “It’s a small town of about 10,000 people. It’s a friendly southern-type town.”

Fond childhood memories: “I used to love going to my grandmother’s. Grandmothers spoil you and do things your parents don’t want to do. She used to make cakes for me, I went to church her. I just enjoyed being with my grandmother. I got spoiled pretty much.”

Favorite toy: “The Tonka truck. I loved those things and still do. You could never break them. You could throw them against the wall, jump on them, whatever. They still survived.”

Education: Associate of arts degree in information resource management from the Community College of the Air Force; bachelor of science degree in computer information systems from Bellevue University, Omaha, Neb.

Why Air Force? “I thought about going in the Marine Corps; they gave me a good offer and I liked their reputation. I like traveling. That’s the biggest reason I joined the Air Force. I like to think for myself. I like to be creative. There’s nothing wrong with ‘yes sir, yes ma’am,’ but you want to be able to think for yourself.”

Previous assignment: U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., in the intelligence directorate and the strike warfare directorate.

Favorite assignment: Ramstein Air Base, Germany. “My first supervisor was a great individual. I liked the traveling and met a great bunch of people. People overseas seem to be much tighter, there’s more camaraderie.”

Future military career plans: “I’m negotiating my next assignment with the chiefs group. I’m keeping my fingers crossed. I don’t want to say until it happens. I’m looking at the Midwest or East Coast, somewhere in there.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “A teacher. I love history and English and I’m pretty good at writing. If you know where you came from, you know where you’re going. Then you won’t be so naïve as to why things are as they are and you won’t try to impose your views on another country.”

What do you do when you’re not a senior enlisted advisor? “I love listening to music. I love sports. My wife and I do gardening, I love gardening and landscaping and all that. We plant flowers, things like that. One with nature, you know?”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Be yourself. Get to know them. If you can’t be yourself, they can see right through that, point blank. Don’t forget where you came from, because if they can see where you came from, they will get some inspiration from it. Bring them up slowly, raise them up. And having fun, that’s my best thing.”

What do you like best about your job? “I like talking to people, getting to know different people from different backgrounds. The best thing is getting people with different ideas to pool together to work as a team.”

What do you order when you eat out? “I love so many different foods. Let’s go with steak and baked potato, a nice T-bone. And some ice cream. I have a weakness for ice cream.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “It was from my last commander Lt. Col. (Donald) Farnsworth. He bought this nice big picture of the Buffalo soldiers in a frame. I thought it was something he got for himself. He left a note that said open it after the ceremony. It took my breath away.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Ice cream. I don’t smoke or drink, so I gotta have some kind of vice.” He describes his choice of flavors as “eclectic” and says he doesn’t have a favorite.

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? “Reality shows. Sometimes I try to see if I’ve missed something about them. I just can’t do it. It gets too silly. Except for ‘The Amazing Race’ and ‘Survivor.’ I like those.”

What would people be surprised to know about you? “People see me as being real quiet, but I’m a practical joker. When I first came in, you could play with people, but now you have to wait until you get to know them.”

What’s the last book you read? “‘The Persian Puzzle’ by Kenneth Pollack. It talks about the Persian people, the country, it covers the Persian Empire up to today. Most people don’t realize that Iran was once called Persia.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Going to Paris. I’ve been there three times, but things change. It’s a very romantic place to take the wife. We go down the Seine on a boat, go to the Moulin Rouge, things like that.”

One thing always on his desk: “Gatorade. I always have Gatorade on my desk.”



Springfield MEPS
1st Sgt. Peter Robles

Hometown: “I was born in El Paso, Texas, and raised in Los Angeles and El Paso. Every time I got in trouble in California, they sent me back to Texas.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “Probably a ball or something like that. We didn’t have too many electronic toys when I was a kid.”

Education: Bachelor of science degree in management from the University of Maryland. “I was in D.C., so I could take my last eight classes on campus. It was kind of nice.”

Why Army? “At the beginning, I went into the Air Force office and I guess because some of the issues I had as a kid they pointed me down the hall to the Army. I took the ASVAB, and the recruiter came to me and said, based on my location and ethnicity, they thought I cheated so I had to take it again. I scored five points better than the first time I took it. If that Air Force recruiter had pushed me to the Marine office, I probably would have gone into the Marines.”

Previous assignment: Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. “I was there as part of the cadre. I ran their human resources shop. That was an adventure having the ex-sergeants major there as

instructors and the future sergeant majors there as students. Some of them were very demanding.”

Favorite assignment:

“Working at the Army Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Va. I had worked force development, so I thought I had a good understanding of the POM, but I learned about programs and promotions, training requirements. I also liked talking with the soldiers in the field. You have so much power, that you really have to give them an ear. A lot of people don’t take the human factor of the soldiers of the field into account. It was the whole total Army, not just one battalion or brigade. And being able to write some of the military personnel messages that affect the whole Army.”

Future military career plans:

“Finish up my tour here and see what Human Resources Command has in store for me. I will PCS from here, but my wife is in Iraq right now. We’ll go to our next duty station. She works for (the Army and Air Force Exchange Service) as a manager.”

Mr. Mom: His wife deployed in mid-October (see article, page 24). “I’ve really learned a lot about myself, interacting

with my kids and grocery shopping, things I’m not accustomed to.” They have three children, 19, 18 and 12. Robles says he gets “mandatory” help from the teens.

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I’ll probably engage in the federal system in human resources or even a state job. Things are tough right now. I’m very flexible as far as the job market.”

What do you do when you’re not a senior enlisted advisor?

“I like to mess around with my DJ equipment. I do picture framing. I coach in the community. Enjoy my family.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Listening and offering feedback. You give a junior soldier or even an officer an ear and you remember what they said the next time you talk to them. You can see their faces light up and they think, Wow the first sergeant really cares about me.”

What do you like best about your job? “The challenge of learning the business rules of the services. One of my goals when I came here was to not color everything Army, to respect the traditions of each service. Getting smart on their

service, their promotion systems, the military education system. I also like engaging with the applicants and finding out why they’re joining. I get a feel for what’s going on in the civilian sector.”

What do you order when you eat out: “I’m a steak person, so probably sirloin steak, medium rare.”

What’s the best present you ever got? “When I first got promoted to sergeant we went on a 45-day field problem in Germany. My sergeant first class had gotten sick and couldn’t go, so I had to take over. When we got back my soldiers got a plaque for me. It meant so much that they knew I really busted my butt. I’m sure it didn’t cost much, but it meant a lot. It set the tone for me in my career as an NCO.” He still has the plaque hanging in his office.

What’s your guilty pleasure?

“I’d have to say two things. Food wise, French fries with chili and cheese. When I DJ for parties, it’s enjoyment for me, but I get paid, so I feel a little guilty about it.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? “Golf or tennis. But I have to admit that ever since my son got his Wii, we’ve been playing golf and tennis. I haven’t started

watching the pros yet, but it’s starting to get interesting.”

What would people be surprised to know about you? “I’m a handyman. I try to fix things on the spot here at the MEPS rather than put in a work order. It might be a chair or something, but I fix it myself if I can. When I first got here, I did 3D military type theme pictures that we’ve got hanging in the MEPS.”

One thing always on his desk: “Mandatory — a picture of my family.”

Three things on his desk right now: “A plaque of an eagle I got from HRC, my notebook and some of my coins.”

What’s the last book you read? “The one Colonel Price made me read, ‘Good to Great’ by Jim Collins. I kind of liked it. It told about a couple of companies that almost folded and the strategies they used to come back. When you’re up in the hierarchy, you don’t know some of the ideas at the worker level. Sometimes a big idea takes about a hundred little ideas to make it happen.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “I’ve never taken a cruise, so taking a cruise in the Caribbean with my family and friends.”

San Diego loses a cherished friend

By John Stine

The San Diego MEPS staff lost a cherished friend upon the death of Dr. Paul Ernest Thomas, a fee-basis practitioner there.

San Diego MEPS colleagues attended a memorial worship service that honored Thomas as a loving husband, devoted father and cherished friend. At the time of his death, he was 74.

Thomas was a staff anesthesiologist at San Diego Scripps Memorial La Jolla for from 1963 to 1993. After retiring from Scripps, he began working at the MEPS. All who knew him will remember his compassionate manner and expert medical contributions.

Detroit CMO dies at 80

Dr. Wayne L. Tucker, Detroit MEPS chief medical officer, died Feb. 21. He was 80.

Dr. Tucker, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, joined the MEPS staff as CMO in 1985.

“Doctor Tucker was a kind and thoughtful man,” Maj. Richard W. Whitmer, Detroit MEPS commander, said. “He brought a positive attitude to the work place and an encouraging word for anyone he talked with. No matter how busy, he had time for everyone. His professionalism and knowledge set the standard for the medical community. His mentorship of several members of the Detroit MEPS staff has had a long-lasting, positive influence on their lives. He was respected and beloved by every member of this command and will be dearly missed.”

Dr. Tucker is survived by his wife, Doris, two sons, two daughters and three grandchildren.

Portland staff shows their support

It all started last fall, when Nancy Wilson, a human resources assistant at the Portland, Maine, MEPS came to work with an announcement. She had been diagnosed with cancer.

Wilson has worked at the Portland, Maine MEPS for seven years. After being in remission for 12 years, the cancer had returned. The news was a devastating blow to her co-workers.

The staff immediately wanted to be a part of her recovery plan. Her co-workers visited her at the hospital, donated leave, and acted as a line of support and hope.

Since one of the side effects of chemotherapy is hair loss, the MEPS processing section came up with an idea. They would shave their heads and recruit the other men at the MEPS to do the same.

Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Kenneth Stevens sheared off Nancy's brown hair, and then the men lined up to shave their heads in a show of solidarity.



Nancy Wilson (center) poses for a photo with her co-workers who shaved their heads in a show of support, including (left to right) Gary Griffith, Jay Lamontagne, Paul Witten, Andrew Rogers, Kenneth Russell, Danny Chouinard. Four others shaved their heads too. They are MEPS commander, Lt. Col. Eric Warner, Sgt. Kenneth Stevens, Michael Watson and Ryan Cote.

"Miss Wilson is a good and caring friend, who is a magnificent baker and always takes the initiative to bake delicious birthday cakes for her co-workers," Ana Lebrun said.

"We are praying for Miss Wilson and sending positive thoughts her way," Lebrun added.

NEW FACES

CHICAGO MEPS

Lt. Vernessa Morris, Migdalia Quiroz, Rodgerick Cobb, Piotr Porebski, Dan Aasland, Michael Gamez, Sgt. John Pfundstein, Sgt. 1st Class John Hopson

FORT LEE MEPS

Robert Fraker

Chief Medical Officer
Years of military service: 22
Last assignment: Fort Lee MEPS fee-basis practitioner for 11 years
Civilian education: BS, MD, MSHA
Diversions: Reading, walking
First impression: Large organization and big responsibility.

Sha'Reen Fuller

Human Resources Assistant
Years of government service: 1
Years of military service: 8
Last assignment: Fort Bragg, N.C.
First impression: Really nice people and nice-looking building.

Sharon Johnson

Human Resources Assistant
Years of government service: 3
Last assignment: Gissen, Germany
Diversions: Reading, walking, spending time with family
First impression: Friendly and pleasant environment.

RALEIGH MEPS

Andy W. Renfrow

Test Administrator
Years of service: 3.5

Last assignment: 1132nd Military Police Company Rocky Mount, N.C.

Diversions: Playing drums, coaching little league, giving financial advice
First impression: Very professional, friendly atmosphere.

Vedica M. Lawson

Test Administrator
Years of service: 2
Last assignment: HHC 690th Base Support Battalion, Kinston, N.C.
Diversions: Reading books and enjoying family
First impression: Very friendly and professional MEPS.

Tamika Richardson

Medical Technician
Years of service: 15 years
Last assignment: Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune

FOND FAREWELLS

CHICAGO MEPS

Mary Walker

OMAHA MEPS

JoAnn Pechar
Information Technology Specialist
Years of service: 28
Departing for: retirement
Plans: "Enjoy my 16 grandchildren and life after the MEPS. This job has been great, met lots of nice people. My co-workers at Omaha MEPS have been the greatest people in the world.

APPLAUSE

EASTERN SECTOR Headquarters

Master Sgt. Spencer Parker, selected for promotion to senior master sergeant

CHICAGO MEPS

Nelson Gonzalez, promotion to test score technician; **Keith Sargent**, promotion to testing coordinator

FORT JACKSON MEPS

John Bonner, education services specialist, and **Dennis Holman**, test coordinator, received a Civilian Army Achievement Award for exceeding their goal four months early; **Spec. Keyyana Somerset**, promoted; **Johnny Baker**, 20 years of service

JACKSONVILLE MEPS

Master Sgt. Karen Figueroa, selected for promotion to senior master sergeant

PORTLAND, ORE. MEPS

Mike Williams, Dean's List at Liberty University, Fall 2008

BIRTHS

USMEPCOM Headquarters

Maj. Nicole Curtis and her husband **Roger** welcomed a son, **Jacob Franklin Curtis** (6 pounds, 8 ounces, 20 inches) on Jan. 27.

CHICAGO MEPS

Jon and Andrea Woods welcome a daughter, **Lia**. **Glenys and Jorge Rivas** welcome a daughter, **Samantha**.

Fort Dix offers ASVAB at Army Experience Center

By Rebecca O'Donnell
Fort Dix MEPS

Talk about putting technology to use! Here's something exciting. The Fort Dix MEPS organized the administration of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery exam to potential enlistees for the first time at the new Army Experience Center, in Franklin, Pa., Feb. 5.

The center is equipped with high tech simulators and advanced technology regarding career opportunities and is part of the Army's efforts to move into the new millennium of recruiting.

The Fort Dix MEPS staff had the opportunity to visit for a training day and get some hands-on experience last year when the facility had recently opened. During this visit, the testing staff thought how great it would be to bring the electronic version of the ASVAB to the experience center.



Office of Personnel Management test administrator, James O'Brien administers the ASVAB at the Army Experience Center.

Potential enlistees could literally take the test electronically, which is currently done with paper and pencil at the test sites and lessen the test time by almost an hour. Scoring would be available more quickly and the center's technology would provide the enlistees with



Young women prepare to take the ASVAB at the Army Experience Center in Franklin, Pa.

career field choices available with direct correlation to their test results. This adds another location for testing in the Fort Dix region and adds convenience, too.

The outcome of the development may be the future innovative test site for the ASVAB, according to MEPS testing personnel.

"It's a win, win for everyone. It's a win for the Army to provide the opportunity. It's a win for the applicants to take the test in such an environment and it's a win for USMEPCOM and the other services, as it projects them into future of recruiting," Maj. Jerry M. Brooks, Fort Dix MEPS commander, said.

RECOGNITIONS

Indy's education services specialist retires after 23 years

By Donald L. Ross
Indianapolis MEPS

“Being successful is not measured by what we receive but instead by what we give.”

Many turned out to honor Margaret “Peg” Leavitt at a retirement ceremony on Nov. 7, for 23 years of service as an education services specialist at Indianapolis MEPS.

Peg's legacy is measured by her commitment that has been an inspiration for thousands of high school students over the years through her teaching, coaching and mentoring. She served as a role model ESS for hundreds of USMEPCOM

employees through crosswalks, seminars, and conferences.

Employees, students and colleagues who were lucky enough to have made her acquaintance know she gave 23 years of unselfish government service.

The USMEPCOM Eastern Sector commander, Col. Barrye Price joined MEPS staff, liaisons and recruiters at the ceremony. The retirement celebration brought several previous employees back to the MEPS who had not visited for a number of years since their own retirements. Leavitt's husband, Tom, and daughter, Laura, attended as well.

Leavitt received the Army Meritorious Civilian Service Award and a Department of the Army retirement certificate.



Upon receiving her retirement certificate, Peg Leavitt poses for a photo with Eastern Sector commander, Col. Barrye Price.

Ask the Chief

The *Messenger* will begin a new column titled, “Ask the Chief,” similar to the “Ask the Editor” type.

David O’Brien is the USMEPCOM deputy commander/chief of staff and he would like this column to be an exchange between you and him.

Your letters and questions will be directed to O’Brien and he will respond to them in the magazine.

O’Brien has been the command’s deputy commander/chief of staff since March 2004. Before putting on civilian attire, he retired as a Navy captain, after a distinguished 29-year career. His last assignment was as chief of staff for the admiral at Naval Training Center Great Lakes, Ill.

He’d like the process for asking questions to be simple and easy. If you have a question for O’Brien, e-mail it to messenger@mepcom.army.mil. If you choose to do so — include your name, position and

MEPS. If you’re in the military, include your branch of service and rank.

If you’d like to ask a question anonymously, you can do so in one of two ways. First, you can e-mail your question to the messenger address, with the words, “From Anonymous.” The *Messenger* staff will forward only the question to O’Brien and the staff will not publish your name.

Second, you can fax your letter or question with the words, “From Anonymous” to (847) 688-2664 (a public affairs office fax machine).

A *Messenger* staff member will forward the letters/questions to O’Brien. For anonymous letters/questions, PAO will e-mail only the letter or question to him.

Questions should be related to the command and its mission of military processing. Questions must be appropriate.

The goal of this exchange is improved communication between people who work in MEPS, sectors and headquarters. O’Brien wants to provide succinct, straightforward, honest answers. So, just ask!



David O’Brien
USMEPCOM Deputy Commander/
Chief of Staff

MEPS of Excellence

The MEPS of Excellence Program acknowledges Military Entrance Processing Stations that obtain a level of excellence based on criteria related to USMEPCOM core processes (medical, testing, applicant processing) and general military readiness.

The two requirements to become a MEPS of Excellence are:

- To be one of the top three MEPS in each category.
- To meet the overall threshold.

The 65 MEPS are divided into three categories, based on historical data. MEPS remain in the designated category the entire fiscal year.

The MOE points system measures up to 10 criteria per quarter, based on a points system. The criteria are:

- Timeliness of military evaluations and awards
- Total students tested goal
- Drug and HIV specimen processing
- Clinical Laboratory Improvement Program

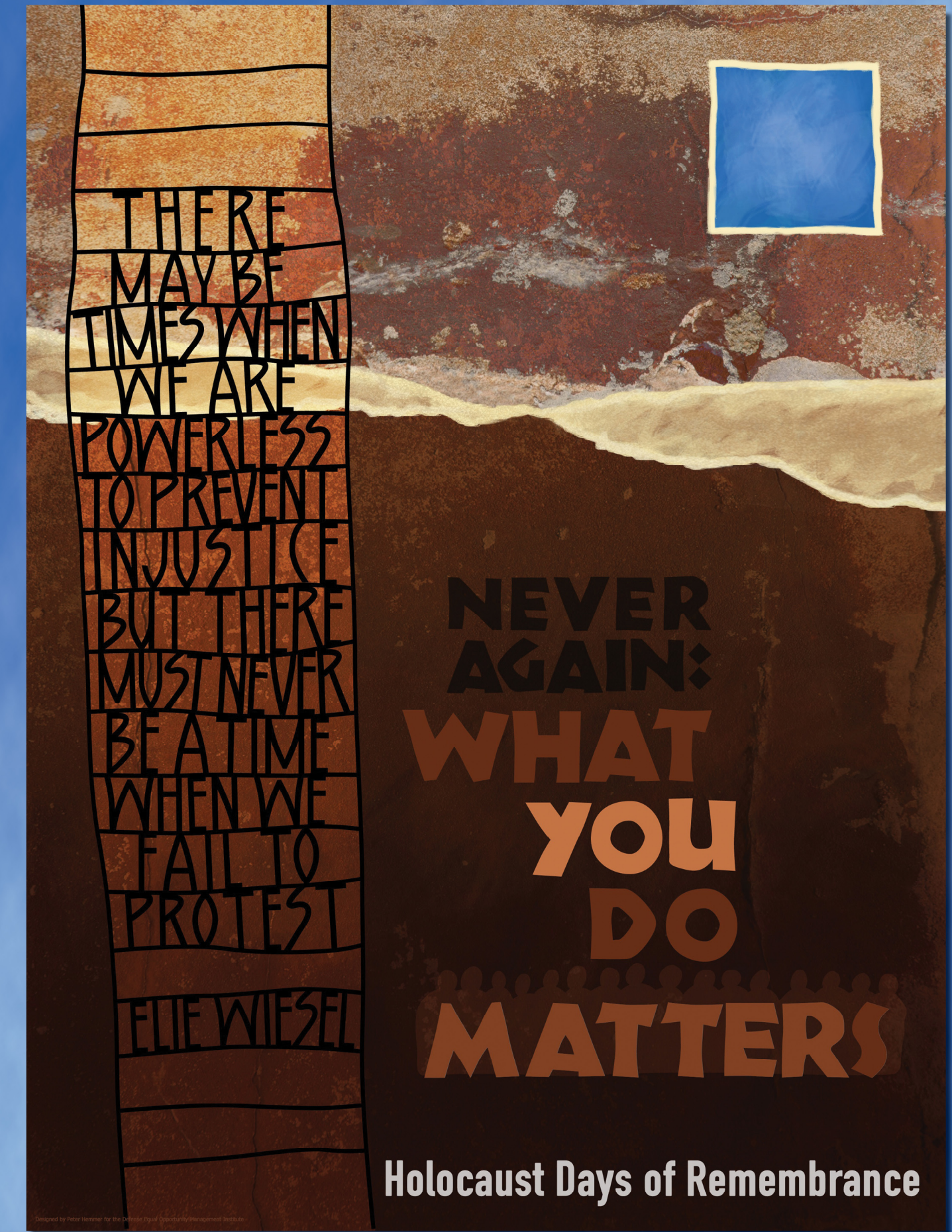
- Physical fitness readiness
- Height and weight standards
- Electronic fingerprint capture station (unclassifiable fingerprints)
- Incidents of serious misconduct by military or civilian employees
- Test loss compromise
- Citibank travel card delinquency rates

1st Quarter, Fiscal 2009 MEPS of Excellence

Category 1
St. Louis MEPS
Tampa MEPS
Columbus MEPS

Category 2
Oklahoma City MEPS
Detroit MEPS
Nashville MEPS

Category 3
Knoxville MEPS
Beckley MEPS
Portland, Maine, MEPS



THERE
MAY BE
TIMES WHEN
WE ARE
POWERLESS
TO PREVENT
INJUSTICE
BUT THERE
MUST NEVER
BE A TIME
WHEN WE
FAIL TO
PROTEST

ELIE WIESEL

**NEVER
AGAIN:
WHAT
YOU
DO
MATTERS**

Holocaust Days of Remembrance