

SOLDIERS URGED TO KEEP DD93, SGLI UPDATED, LOVED ONES COVERED – SEE PAGE 9

ARMY FLYER

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PHOTO BY MARINE CORPS LANCE CPL. JOSE GONZALEZ

Soldiers demonstrate a medical evacuation during a joint exercise in Zambrano, Honduras, Oct. 22.

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'FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN'

Fort Rucker salutes veterans during annual ceremony

By Kelly Morris
USAACE Public Affairs

Fort Rucker conducted its annual Veterans Day ceremony at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum Nov. 10.

The event, which was broadcast via Facebook on the USAACE and Fort Rucker Facebook page, paid tribute to all American veterans across all components in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard who stepped forward to defend the nation throughout history.

Event host Brig. Gen. Stanley E. Budraitis, deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker, welcomed attendees and spoke about the far-reaching impacts veterans have on others.

"What a great day it is to be an American and an Army aviator here at Fort Rucker, the home of Army Aviation," he said. "Thank you for joining us today as we honor our veterans who have served and continue to serve."

Each year, Veterans Day is celebrated on the anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I. On the 11th hour of the 11th day, of the 11th month, the battlefields of Europe fell silent after more than four years of fighting. In time, Armistice Day was changed to Veterans Day to honor American veterans of all wars.

"Truly our people are our greatest strength. Taking care of them, and ensuring they are ready to fight and win our nation's wars is our top priority," he said.

Soldiers live by the Army Values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service,

Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. In so doing they keep the nation free and "inspire others to reach their potential, and even to make the decision to serve in the military," Budraitis said.

"What a privilege it is to grow up in America, the greatest nation that has ever existed, and have the opportunities available to us to enjoy the freedoms we have that often are so easily taken for granted. To have a chance to live the American dream, understand what The Colors represent, to feel the spirit of patriotism, to hear and answer the call to serve—to see America from the inside looking out," Budraitis said.

He contrasted that image with the viewpoint of someone who is not an American citizen, viewing the nation "from the outside looking in," wishing to become a citizen and serve.

Kosovo native 2nd Lt. Valdeta Mehanja, a recent flight school graduate who attended the ceremony along with her sister Staff Sgt. Blerta Mehanja, achieved a dream that was instilled in her by American Soldiers years ago, when she earned her Wings a few months ago, Budraitis explained.

Fleeing Kosovo as a child, Mehanja and her siblings grew up in Germany as refugees. They returned to a ravished homeland as teenagers to try to put the pieces of their lives back together, finish school and find work. Work was hard to come by, and they were hungry. The family was happy to receive aid during that time from churches and volun-



PHOTO BY KELLY MORRIS

Brig. Gen. Stanley E. Budraitis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker deputy commanding general, CW5 Jonathan P. Koziol, chief warrant officer of the Aviation Branch, and Command Sgt. Maj. Terrence D. Reyes Jr., 1st Aviation Brigade command sergeant major, salute during the Fort Rucker Veterans Day ceremony at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum Nov. 10.

teer groups in the United States.

Having learned another language while in Germany helped her find employment. Before long she and her sister were working in Iraq and Afghanistan as contractors for the U.S. government.

At one point a convoy Mehanja was traveling with between Tikrit and Baghdad was hit by an IED. As bullets were fired, she resigned herself to her fate; but suddenly everything changed. An Apache helicopter arrived on the scene and suppressed the enemy. Army Aviators saved her life.

Looking up at that U.S. Army helicopter, she determined in her heart to find a path to citizenship, become an aviator, and return the favor to those veterans by serving in the U.S. Army.

"It would take a lot of grit and perseverance as she navigated multiple hurdles along the way, but she held to her personal conviction that God had a path for her," he said.

Mehanja was accepted at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University where she became a flight instructor. She enlisted in the Army as Black Hawk mechanic, eventually made her way to Officer Candidate School, and to flight school at Fort Rucker. She currently serves with the Alabama National Guard as a Black Hawk pilot.

"Lieutenant Mehanja had a dream, and through hard work, dedication and perseverance she did it--she became a U.S. citizen, a Soldier and an Army aviator. She did it because of brave veterans who inspired her," Budraitis said.

"Today we celebrate all of our veterans and the tremendous difference you make, not only here at home, but around the world," he said. "It's because of you that people like Lieutenant Mehanja have a hope for a better life."

From refugee to aviator: Kosovo native achieves dream to serve, 'give back'

By Kelly Morris
USAACE Public Affairs

When 2nd Lt. Valdeta Mehanja walked across the stage at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum to graduate flight school in September, she was a long way from where her journey began.

Born in Kosovo, Mehanja and her family members fled their home country when she was only seven years old. She would grow up living as a refugee in Germany.

When she was a teenager, they returned home to Kosovo to try to put the pieces of their lives back together. They stood in line to be issued identification cards by the United Nations. There was no food, no money. Jobs were hard to come by. Roads were destroyed, their home would have to be rebuilt. Mehanja still had to finish high school.

"Being a refugee in Germany was hard, but I want to say it saved us. Because we were able to learn another language. We were able to become translators, and just be more competitive when it came to getting jobs," she said.

She worked as a translator at a power plant and soon landed an IT job, at a time when the U.N. conducted apprenticeship programs teaching skills to people in Kosovo. Because she learned a new trade, she was able to eventually land a job working as a contractor in Iraq.

"I had already witnessed three wars, and I was only 22 years old. We still believed going to Iraq was safer than going to Kosovo," Mehanja said.

Mehanja reflected on the war in Kosovo as a "terrible time" of ethnic cleansing.

"There are different ways to fight wars," she said. "If you were not with the Serbs, you were against them. You would not have a job. We were literally starving. There were so many of us that would starve. My siblings and I would go to trash piles to try to find something that

was left," she said.

They were grateful for assistance from the United States.

"My older sister and mom would go to charity, Red Cross, there would be people from like Alabama that would send meals there. I support that so much because it helped us first hand. A can of beans will go a long way when you have nothing," she said.

The opportunity to work in Iraq in 2004 included setting up the Internet in areas wherever there were missions, supporting a U.S. police training program for the Iraqis.

To travel, they would link up with military convoys. At one point, she rode along with a convoy to support a mission in Tikrit. On the way back to Baghdad the convoy was hit by an IED, and bullets were fired. Mehanja did not feel confident using her weapon or fighting an enemy that was attacking them.

"I wasn't a trained Soldier, I had just done some qualification on my weapon, but that was about it," she said.

She knew from previous attacks that people were usually killed in incidents like this one. She recalled thinking, "Well, I guess this is how it happens."

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, hope arrived, from above.

"All the sudden this Apache (helicopter) came and started attacking the people that were shooting at us. We couldn't see them, they were hiding behind bushes. And we were saved! They just saved us, and the way they did it was incredible. They became my heroes," she said.

Looking up at a U.S. Army helicopter, Mehanja said to herself, "I want to do that."

When a "fancy" life is being able to have enough food and maybe buy a pair of jeans, though, the idea of ever one day serving in the



PHOTO BY KELLY MORRIS

Mehanja

United States Army seems farfetched. But she believed God had a path for her.

As she continued on as a contractor in Afghanistan, she was told her job would be setting up radio communications. What she didn't realize was the job would involve Huey helicopters.

"I was like--what? I will be able to touch a helicopter? I didn't realize what I had signed up for. I loved the job, loved the mission," she said.

For four years she worked to ensure the helicopters could communicate with each other and with base operations, supporting an international narcotics and law enforcement program for the State Department.

"I had to install antennas, run the cables, program all the frequencies, so I did frequency management as well. I loved the job, loved the

mission. We were able to help fight terrorism. It was a very fulfilling job," she said.

Being around the helicopters, and working frequently with the military, made her want to become a pilot even more.

When the contracting job came to an end, she had been able to help repair their family home, and save some money with the hope of getting an education in America. She was accepted at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and attended on a student visa, where she became a pilot in 2011. She continued to sacrifice her free time to work hard to become an instructor, and was hired by the university so she could remain in the States on a work visa.

As a fixed-wing civilian pilot, Mehanja competed in a national female cross-country air race in 2013 and 2014 that Amelia Earhart competed in years before, against approximately 50 other civilian planes. Mehanja and her copilot took home awards including first place in the collegiate category.

"I was able to see how beautiful America is. I learned a lot. It was another moment where I was like, there's no way I'm able to participate in an air race and there's not something more meant for me to do in Army Aviation. I knew then God is preparing me for something bigger. I knew it was the military," she said.

She longed to serve to "return the favor" to those servicemembers who had saved her, and become a permanent citizen, but still needed a path to get there.

"The MAVNI program opened up, where if you spoke a certain language or had a special skill you could join the U.S. Army. My sister and I joined the program right away," she said.

By 2015, she was now in her 30s, and intended to serve in the Reserve component because of her age, and pursue Army Aviation. But the recruiter told her there were no more available Reserve slots. Her option was active

Dream

duty enlistment.

"This is your opportunity," the recruiter told her.

She enlisted in the Army in 2015 to become a Black Hawk mechanic, even though it meant starting over in her 30s.

"I knew I would be one of the oldest in basic training, and it would be tough mentally and physically," she said. "But I didn't want to miss that opportunity and regret it for the rest of my life."

"I want to be there and help out, whenever there's a fire, whenever there's a war. I think that's the big fear that I always had--to pass up on an opportunity and then regret it," she said.

As an enlisted Soldier, she was eventually stationed in Germany, which completed a circle for her. Unlike her previous status as a refugee, now she could travel and see the country.

She continued to work on her packet to become an Army aviator, but faced hurdles with policy changes, and her clearance was taking longer than expected.

She deployed to Afghanistan, completing yet another circle for her.

"Now I'm back in Kandahar where I used to work as a third country national, which is the lowest status in the contracting world. It was so nice to be there in U.S. military uniform, and to be able to serve the country. It was a very fulfilling feeling," she said.

She made the transition from active duty to Army National Guard in December 2018, and in 2019 she was enrolled in Officer Candidate School. By June, she would enter the gates to Fort Rucker, the home of Army Aviation, and finally begin flight school. She would realize her dream to become a Black Hawk pilot, after all.

"Things were just put in place. It was just perfect timing. Because they only have accelerated OCS twice a year in the Guard. I was able to make it. I would like to take credit, but I re-

ally think it's a much bigger picture. I know that God has always led me," she said.

Looking back, Mehanja said growing up the way she did instilled in her a belief in the benefits of education, and taught her to think for herself, to be independent and to not be afraid to ask for help.

In an Army focused on people as its priority, Mehanja's story is one of family courage. Two of her siblings also chose to serve, in the Army and Marine Corps. Her older sister married a former Marine, so they all have connections to U.S. military service.

As she looks to a new horizon serving with the Alabama National Guard, Mehanja said she appreciates the perspective all her experience has provided her—including as enlisted and officer, as a contractor, and to be able to serve in multiple Army

components.

"I understand how enlisted works, how active duty works, now I'm going to learn how the

Guard works," she said. "I think it will give me a broader perspective of the military."

U.S. ARMY **Fort Rucker** **U.S. Army MWR** **The Landing AT FORT RUCKER**

Thanksgiving TAKE-OUT 11/25

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, have you found yourself wishing you could have a delicious Thanksgiving meal without all the work? You can! Relax while The Landing takes care of the cooking for you, so you can enjoy time with family and friends. Be sure to place your To-Go order by **Friday, November 20**. Food pick-up will be on **Wednesday, November 25** from **10 a.m. to 4 p.m.** at The Landing (heating instructions included).

Place orders by calling The Landing at **(334) 255-0769** **Monday-Friday** from **9 a.m. to 3 p.m.** or email beverley.odonnell.naf@mail.mil.

MENU

MAIN COURSES

- Oven Roasted Turkey Breast
- Sliced Honey Ham
- Herb Baked Chicken
- Includes Rolls, Cranberry Sauce, Dressing, and Gravy

SIDE DISHES

- Baked Green Beans with Smoked Bacon
- Mashed Potatoes
- Collard Greens
- Baby Carrots with Brown Sugar Glaze
- Baked Sweet Potatoes
- Traditional Macaroni and Cheese
- Rice Pilaf
- Buttered Lima Beans
- Mixed Herb Potatoes

DESSERT

- Pumpkin Pie
- Apple Pie
- Pecan Pie
- Seasonal Cake

4 Person (Pick 3 Sides & 1 Pie)	.....	\$45.00
6 Person (Pick 3 Sides & 1 Pie)	.....	\$65.00
8 Person (Pick 6 Sides & 2 Pies)	.....	\$90.00
10 Person (Pick 6 Sides & 2 Pies)	.....	\$105.00
12 Person (Pick 6 Sides & 2 Pies)	.....	\$120.00

Fort Rucker MWR

rucker.armymwr.com

Fort Rucker seeks to keep community informed through official outlets

By Jim Hughes

Fort Rucker Public Affairs

Fort Rucker is in a constant state of turn-over with Soldiers and families arriving every day, and among the top concerns these people have is getting information on their new home.

About 70% of Fort Rucker's population changes out every year, according to Col. Whitney B. Gardner, Fort Rucker garrison commander, and above and beyond the normal challenges associated with arriving at a new post to live or train, the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected every aspect of life at the post, makes it an even more challenging time.

"You may have been here a minute, but look around you, there are a lot of people who are just now showing up here. Fort Rucker is a unique place to come to even in normal times, but they're showing up in a COVID environment, which makes it even more difficult to find out what is open, what is affected, what is available to a newcomer," Gardner said. "We've been trying to find lots of different ways to get this information out."

There's certainly no shortage of information in the world, but when it comes to getting timely, accurate and specific information on Fort Rucker and the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, the post offers several outlets that serve as official communications channels.

These include the garrison digital app, USAACE and Fort Rucker Facebook page; the USAACE and Fort Rucker Twitter account; the Twitter account for Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, USAACE and Fort Rucker commanding general; the post website; and the online publication found on that website, "Army Flier."

On these outlets people will find the latest official word on what is open, what is closed, service changes, the latest general order and policy updates, and numerous and updated articles, briefs, public service announcements and links to information leadership considers

important for Soldiers, families, employees and veterans, Gardner said.

"The USAACE-Fort Rucker Facebook page and the post website are kind of the focal points for the information and updates we push out," the colonel said. "They're both good sources for the latest information. Our daily services update is on them and that's an important piece of what we've been doing – it's a great resource."

The services update was started in March when the pandemic forced leadership to start making changes in services all over post, with many closures of offices, cancellations of activities and a large portion of the workforce teleworking from home, not to mention quarantining many newcomers, the commander said, adding that it proved quite popular on Facebook for people seeking the latest news on openings, closures and changes.

People will also frequently find leadership interacting with Facebook users on the official USAACE-Fort Rucker page, answering questions, and providing information and clarifications to users of the page, Gardner added.

"Col. Chad E. Chasteen (USAACE chief of staff) and I have a team of folks who are empowered by the CG to answer questions as quickly as possible via social media," he said. "We try to be as transparent as we can be. We're not perfect, but the CG accepts the risks because we're trying to ensure that the message that is out there is accurate and timely – we don't want it to get overwhelmed by rumor or wrong information."

Sometimes, the answer is there is no answer, he added.

"The general wants to answer people's questions as quickly as possible, but sometimes it's just not possible because leadership hasn't made a decision about something or they don't have all of the information," Gardner said.

GRAPHIC BY DAVID AGAN

"We would like to have more information out more frequently, but patience is good at times – sometimes no message is good. It gives the decision makers a chance to really analyze the information and not make a hasty decision that causes turbulence for people."

Recently, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and Installation Management Command rolled out a new form of communication for people to take advantage of – the Army Digital Garrison app, available for free at the Google Play and Mac App stores.

Gardner is "a big fan," he said.

"I use it because it's quicker," he said. "If I want to know if an office is open or closed, or I'm looking for a phone number, it takes me two seconds. On Facebook or the website, I'd have to scroll or click around. The more I use it, the more comfortable I get with it. We're making improvements to it, especially how well we use it during storms to get information out quickly. I think it will be the wave of the future."

However people choose to get their information, the colonel said they need to remember that the official sources are the best place to get answers to questions, and accurate and timely information.

"There are, of course, differences between

official pages and informal pages," he said. "There are also a lot of different informal groups on social media, such as family pages or unfiltered pages – those are not official."

"I worry sometimes that people come to Fort Rucker and all they know is what is on an informal page," Gardner added. "A lot of them give good information and share advice, but I worry that someone who needs official information may not get accurate information, or may confuse advice with official information."

He said he feels USAACE and Fort Rucker have done a good job in getting out timely, accurate information during challenging times, but there is always room for improvement.

"The reason we work so hard to get information out and updates posted is for predictability," he said. "With so much uncertainty in this environment, people who are interested in Fort Rucker and what's going on here hopefully feel comfortable knowing that the information flow is generally predictable – they know where to get it and generally what it is going to look like. We're not throwing out information just to have something out there and then retracting it. A lot of people are putting in a lot of time and effort to ensure that we are providing accurate updates as often as possible."

Military and Family Life Counseling services available again in person

By Jim Hughes

Fort Rucker Public Affairs

Fort Rucker's Military and Family Life Counseling counselors are standing by to help the community's Soldiers and family members, including children, deal with life's challenges, and in-person service is once again available.

What was once a popular service for Soldiers and family members to receive non-medical, confidential counseling on a variety of life's stresses, saw its popularity decrease severely during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Kent Thompson, Fort Rucker Directorate of Family, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Army Community Service chief.

Thompson said when COVID restrictions were put into place on post and counselors were not allowed to meet with people in person, MFLC's business took a steep drop because people were reluctant to engage in "telehealth counseling."

Fort Rucker counselors had about 1,700 contacts with people on a variety of topics, ranging from relationship issues, to deployment stress issues, to employment issues and general emotional support issues, in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2019. That number dropped to 75 contacts with the in-person prohibition in place, according to Thompson.

"The evidence showed me people do not trust doing telehealth as much as they trust talking to people in person," he said. "We're trying to get the word out that the MFLCs are back, and available in person. They can do appointments just about any time, and while they cannot go to your house, they will meet you pretty much anywhere you want to meet that is safe and somewhat private. They can even meet with you on weekends in special situations."

All non-medical counselors are master's- or doctorate-level professionals with experience in a mental health-related field, and have a li-



cense or certification to practice independently, according to a fact sheet on the program available at www.MilitaryOneSource.mil. All counselors have undergone a background check, and have focused training on military culture and military life.

Non-medical counseling is confidential, short-term counseling that addresses common emotional and interpersonal concerns that may detract from military and family readiness. Counseling services are available worldwide, up to 12 sessions per person, per issue, through two Department of Defense-funded programs — Military OneSource and Military and Family Life Counseling, according to the fact sheet.

Non-medical counseling is confidential; however, counselors are required to report situations that include harm to self or others, domestic abuse, child abuse or neglect, sexual

assault against any person, and any present or future illegal activity.

According to the fact sheet, non-medical counseling is good for the following.

- Marital or relationship issues
- Child social skills
- Communication
- Effectively dealing with children
- Stress management
- Parent-child relationship issues
- Anger management
- Grief or loss
- Deployment or reintegration
- Academic problems

According to the fact sheet, situations outside the scope of non-medical counseling include the following.

- Active suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- Crisis situations

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Domestic abuse and child abuse
- Fitness-for-duty evaluations
- Depression
- Long-term counseling

Situations involving these issues should be referred to military treatment facilities, TRICARE, or other providers of mental health services. MFLC counselors can also refer people to appropriate agencies if they can't fully help them, Thompson added.

Contact information for Fort Rucker's counselors are available on the ACS website at <https://rucker.armymwr.com/programs/army-community-service>. People can also make an appointment by calling 1-800-342-9647 or start a live chat at www.MilitaryOneSource.mil.

McConville on FVL assault aircraft: 'We're flying before buying'

By Future Vertical Lift
Cross-Functional Team

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – On a wet, rainy day at the Sikorsky Development Flight Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, the Army's 40th chief of staff, Gen. James C. McConville, stood on the flight line as the Sikorsky-Boeing Joint Multi-Role Technology Demonstrator prepared for a flight demonstration.

Officials worried the weather would keep the SB-1 Defiant grounded, but, as if on cue, the rain stopped, the skies cleared and the aircraft took to flight.

A few days later on an unseasonably cold day in Arlington, Texas, McConville along with other senior leaders walked out of the hangar of the Bell Flight Research Center.

"We're flying before buying," the senior Army aviator exclaimed as the Bell V-280 Valor took to the sky for a flight demonstration of the JMR-TD aircraft's capabilities.

In 2014, the Army selected the Bell and

Sikorsky-Boeing teams to continue the Joint Multi-Role Technology Demonstrator to flight demonstration proving out transformational vertical lift capabilities while burning down risk for Future Vertical Lift efforts. The Bell V-280 Valor is a tiltrotor aircraft that made its inaugural flight in December 2017. The Valor has since reached speeds in excess of 340 mph.

The Sikorsky-Boeing tech demonstrator SB-1 Defiant first took flight in March 2019 and leverages Sikorsky's X2 technology with a rigid compound rotor and pusher prop. The Defiant has recently reached speeds of 250 miles per hour. Both Industry teams have made significant contributions to the tech demonstrator program and have provided invaluable flight data to the Army requirements developers for FVL platforms.

Coming off the heels of the Army Requirements Oversight Council approval



The SB-1 Defiant performs a flight demonstration in West Palm Beach, Fla., Oct. 22.

of the Abbreviated Capability Development Document for the Future Long Range Assault Aircraft, the Army chief of staff took the opportunity to visit each of the tech demonstrators for a firsthand assessment of their transformational vertical lift technologies.

"I'm excited to see what everyone is doing to transform Army Aviation," McConville stated.

The flight demonstrations showcased advances in vertical lift technologies not just in terms of increased speeds, but level one handling qualities as well.

"FLRAA will see significant improvements in reach," said Brig. Gen. Walter Rugen the Future Vertical Lift Cross Functional Team director. "Reach is defined as speed, range, and endurance at range and we expect to see two and three times the reach with FLRAA over our current fleet."

Flying at twice the speed and three times the range of the current UH-60 fleet, FLRAA will provide transformational advances in terms of lethality and survivability in Multi Domain Operations with significantly enhanced air assault and aero medevac capabilities. These advancements will prove critical for Army operations in a theater like the Indo-Pacific where the dominant geographical feature is water and yet land forces remain the predominant military force in the majority of nations in the region.

FLRAA's extended reach will increase the U.S. Army's ability to move forces while overcoming the tyranny of time and distance.

"It's the technology that allows you to do these type of things, and now you can do them a lot faster, a lot further," McConville said.

The Army plans to publish requirements informed by the JMR-TD activities in a request for proposals to industry for the FLRAA program by the summer of fiscal year 2021. FVL is the Army's No. 3 modernization priority with an ambitious schedule to field the first unit equipped with FLRAA by fiscal year 2030.

Brig. Gen. Robert Barrie, the Program Executive Officer for Aviation, remarked, "The government and industry investment in the JMR-TD aircraft has had a significant impact in reducing risk prior to moving into the FLRAA program of record."

Affordability is a critical element of the FLRAA program with operating and support costs estimated to be approximately 68% of the overall lifecycle costs.

"We're taking what we've learned through JMR-TD and baking those lessons into our requirements to drive down operating and support costs of the aircraft," Rugen said.

"Cost matters, performance matters and schedule matters. We say that, but it really does," the Army chief of staff said. "And ultimately, winning matters."



SIKORSKY PHOTOS

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James C. McConville checks out the SB-1 Defiant after a flight demonstration in West Palm Beach, Fla., Oct. 22.

Army efforts save lives in Central America after historic hurricane

By Thomas Brading
Army News Service

SOTO CANO AIR BASE, Honduras – As Hurricane Eta pummeled through much of Central America earlier this month, a joint disaster relief response leapt into action, saving at least 289 lives and delivering life-saving supplies to the storm-ravaged region.

Eta was the deadliest storm to hit the region in two decades. Its forceful winds and torrential rainfall left a trail of destruction in its wake, resulting in deadly floods and mud-



PHOTOS BY CAPT. RACHEL SALPIETRA

An Army HH-60 Black Hawk crew assigned to the 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, Joint Task Force-Bravo rescues victims of Hurricane Eta stranded in floodwaters in Honduras Nov. 5.

slides, especially in Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, and Guatemala.

On Nov. 3, the historic storm made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane in Nicaragua and left countries reeling, said Col. John Litchfield, commander of Joint Task Force-Bravo, or JTF-Bravo. “[We] maintain a high level of readiness to respond to crisis, particularly hurricanes and other disasters that require military support.”

JTF-Bravo began operations in Honduras on Nov. 5, followed by Panama on Nov. 7 and Guatemala on Nov. 10, as each country declared a national state of emergency and requested the U.S. government’s help.

Around 250 troops from JTF-Bravo, U.S. Army South, U.S. Special Operations Command South, and other U.S. Southern Command teams were deployed to Central America’s hardest-hit areas.

“We’ve been able to help out partners in Central America,” said 1st Lt. Paige M. Ziegler, a CH-47 Chinook pilot with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, assigned to JTF-Bravo. “We’re proud to assist in their time of need.”

For many of the people they helped, it was their first time seeing a U.S. Army helicopter, she added.

“We’re landing in these incredibly remote areas and being able to assist them,” she said last week, “and seeing how gracious they are for our help has been the most rewarding mission I have done to date.”

Capt. Max Vandervort, commander of Bravo Co., 1-228th Avn. Rgt., flew missions

around the region, including to Guatemala.

“It is the unfortunate truth that this country [Guatemala] is extremely versed in handling natural disasters,” Vandervort said. “Through all of the mudslides, high-water levels, and illnesses, the Guatemalan people have been so friendly and appreciative.

“We are all Americans, and I know that they would do the same for us if the roles were reversed,” he added.

Once the storm made landfall, Litchfield said his troops were able to get out and save lives. “The first 72 hours were almost exclusively on search and rescue,” he said. “People who were trapped, and in very dire circumstances.”

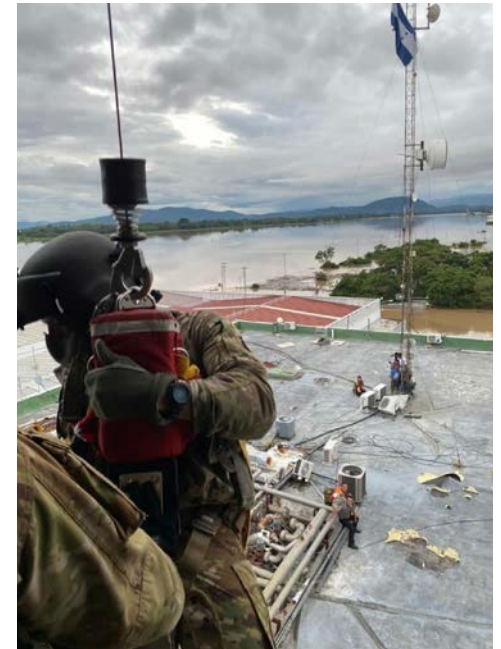
After the initial lifesaving efforts, “we started to transition to places where people were isolated and needed to be extracted or needed life-saving supplies,” he added.

JTF-Bravo then expanded its mission, which concluded over the weekend, from rescue to delivering life-saving supplies and humanitarian aid to stranded communities. The first round of humanitarian aid was delivered Nov. 9 to the Cortes Department of Honduras.

“In addition to standard [UH-60] Black Hawks, we have several that are specially configured for medevac missions,” Litchfield said last week. “We also have Chinooks, our heavy cargo helicopters, which is our most capable platform in terms of range as well.”

The Navy, Coast Guard, and the British military also supplied manpower and helicopters toward the mission, he said.

Military personnel were deployed to some of the most gravely affected communities, Litchfield said, and a daily haul of more than 378,000 pounds of life saving aid was delivered.



ered.

“I’m extremely proud of the tireless efforts the men and women of the Winged Warriors have demonstrated to save lives and bring comfort to those affected by this devastating storm,” said Lt. Col. Adam R. Bock, commander of the 1-228th Avn. Rgt. “What we do here matters, and it’s inspiring to see everyone working together towards a common goal.”

This common goal, as Bock said, is an all-hands effort that has included host nations’ governments and organizations. Litchfield estimated that for every life saved by Americans, Honduran forces have saved 10.

“There hasn’t been any challenge that we couldn’t overcome, either overcome as a task force, or more importantly, with our host nation partners,” Litchfield said.

Soldiers urged to keep their DD93, SGLI updated, loved ones covered

By Matthew Leonard
U.S. Army Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – Every day, people across America die unexpectedly, and that includes the nation's Soldiers.

When this occurs, the Army wants to be sure that each Soldier's wishes are carried out appropriately, and keeping your beneficiary documents up to date will help this to happen.

Two documents are very important in the case of a Soldier's death: the SGLV Form 8286 (Service members' Group Life Insurance Election and Certificate), and the DD Form 93 (Record of Emergency Data).

SGLI

Soldiers use the SGLV 8286 to designate their desired coverage amounts, as well as their designated primary (principle) and secondary (contingent) beneficiaries. When Soldiers joins the service, they are automatically enrolled in the SGLI program with coverage of \$400,000. At any time they may choose to decline the coverage entirely, or choose to decrease the coverage amount in increments of \$50,000.

RECORD OF EMERGENCY DATA

The DD 93 is used to designate beneficiaries for certain benefits, and provide the Soldier's command with the names and addresses of the people the Soldier desires to be notified in case of emergency or death.

One of the benefits Soldiers designate via the DD 93 is the Death Gratuity Program beneficiary. Separate from SGLI, the death gratuity provides for a special tax-free payment of \$100,000 to eligible survivors (or designated beneficiaries) of members of the armed forces who die while on active duty or while serving in certain reserve statuses. The

purpose of the death gratuity is to provide immediate cash payment to assist the service member's survivors in order to meet their financial needs during the period immediately following the member's death.

The DD 93 is also a guide for disposition of the service member's pay and allowances if captured, missing or interned.

WHEN TO UPDATE

Soldiers must update/certify their SGLI during in- and out-processing, and/or at least once a year. It is also very important that Soldiers review and update their SGLIs and DD 93s whenever a life event occurs, such as marriage, divorce, birth of a child, death of a beneficiary or change in a beneficiary's address.

"Soldiers need to pay attention to this," said Sgt. Maj. Clifton Brown, Sergeant Major of the Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operation Division, U.S. Army Human Resources Command. "For example, there have been cases where a Soldier failed to update their SGLI or DD93 after a divorce, and financial benefits legally went to the now ex-spouse."

Soldiers should also be aware that the SGLI and DD 93 benefits are different than personal assets. For example, the disposition of personal assets is often directed within a last will and testament. However, SGLI and DD 93 benefits are not personal assets, and the Soldier's beneficiary elections on these documents take precedence over what a will might attempt to direct with respect to these specific benefits.

COVER DOWN ON THIS

Soldiers may update their SGLIs at



PHOTO BY SGT. 1ST CLASS JOHN ETHERIDGE

any time. This may be accomplished online through the self-service SGLI Online Enrollment System, which is accessible via milConnect at <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect>. The SOES is the preferred method to process SGLI coverage for all Army components. It is the Soldiers' responsibility to keep their SGLIs up-to-date within SOES and any legal documents accessible.

Beneficiaries for SGLI may include any person, firm, corporation or legal entity, including charitable organizations. If a Soldier elects a trustee or person(s) under a will, those documents need to be established and must be accessible by the beneficiary at that time of the election.

Whenever a Soldier designates a person other than the spouse or children to receive all, or a portion of, the SGLI, the Defense Manpower Data Center will attempt to notify the Soldier's spouse in writing at the last known address on record within the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. The receipt or non-receipt of this letter does not change the Soldier's designation.

Issues may occur when Soldiers decrease their insurance coverage and then later decide to change their coverage back to a higher amount. Soldiers can return the coverage to a higher amount, but will need to complete

the required medical questions. If the Soldier answers "yes" to any of the questions, they are required by the Office of SGLI to return a physician statement.

Once SGLI changes are approved, the Soldier needs to verify that the correct premiums are drafted from their pay. Soldiers can do this by looking at the "Deductions" column and the "Remarks" section at the bottom of their leave and earnings statement.

To update the DD Form 93, Soldiers must visit their unit's S-1 or human resources/personnel section.

Completed SGLI and DD 93 forms reside in the Soldiers personnel file within the Interactive Personnel Records Management System. It is from iPERMS that HRC's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operation Division obtains the Soldier's most current documentation in order to begin processing benefits following a reported death.

Leaders must provide Soldiers the opportunity to update their records. Unit human resources specialists must fully understand casualty documents and be able to articulate the potential problems that some election decisions might create. They also need to be able to provide the assistance necessary so that the Soldier's intent is captured, and the ramifications of designations are understood.

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

By U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

Public Affairs

This month marks the 70th anniversary of Cpl. Mitchell Red Cloud Jr.'s fight-to-the-death valor in the Korean War.

Coincidentally, this anniversary of Red Cloud's death comes during Native American Heritage Month, which is observed annually in November.

On the night of Nov. 5, 1950, Red Cloud, a Native American of the Ho-Chunk, or Winnebago tribe, was on a ridge guarding his company command post when he was surprised by a coordinated assault of Chinese forces.

He sounded the alarm as the enemy charged from a brush-covered area less than 100 feet from him. Springing up, he delivered devastating point-blank automatic rifle fire into the advancing enemy. His accurate and intense fire slowed the assault and gained

time for the company to consolidate its defense. With utter fearlessness, he maintained his firing position until being severely wounded by enemy fire.

Refusing assistance, he pulled himself up, wrapped his arm around a tree and continued his deadly fire until he was fatally wounded. His company found him the next morning, surrounded by dead Chinese troops.

His "dauntless courage and gallant self-sacrifice" stopped the enemy from overrunning his company's position, and gained time for reorganization and evacuation of the wounded.

In April 1951, Gen. Omar Bradley, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, presented Red Cloud's posthumous Medal of Honor to his mother, Lillian "Nellie" Red Cloud.



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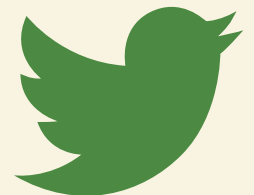
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