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PHOTO BY SPC. BRENDAN NUNEZ

U.S. and Moroccan troops fast-rope out of a CH-47 Chinook in Tifnit, Morocco, June 14 during African Lion, U.S. Africa Command's largest joint, annual exercise.

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# Fort Rucker welcomes new garrison commander

By Jim Hughes

*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker welcomed its new garrison commander during a change of command ceremony June 17 in the U.S. Army Aviation Museum.

Col. Robert J. Holcombe assumed command of the garrison from Col. Whitney B. Gardner when he accepted the unit colors from Vincent E. Grewatz, director of Installation Management Command – Training, who hosted the event.

Holcombe, an aviator, said he and his family are excited to be back at Fort Rucker, and he feels he's set up for success thanks to Gardner's efforts the past two years.

"Whitney, I can't tell you how much I appreciate the welcome you gave to us," the new commander said. "Every time I meet a new director, or go to a new office or agency, I keep thinking to myself, 'OK, here is where the problem is ... or maybe this one,' and it just doesn't ever happen. You've built a team here that is exceptional. Clearly, I have big shoes to fill."

The new commander added that he is honored by his new assignment.

"It's a sacred duty to be given the opportunity to lead our Soldiers – the sons and

daughters of our nation," Holcombe said. "I'm doubly blessed, and this garrison is doubly blessed, to be able to take care of our families, our community and our dedicated civilians. Major General Francis (Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general), thank you so much for your confidence to trust me with that duty, and I will do my best to honor that confidence. Thank you to my wife and daughter for being with me every step of the way and being so enthusiastic about this new adventure. I'm happy to be here."

The Holcombe family brings to IMCOM "a track record of excellence and a clear passion for mission, people and families," Grewatz said at the ceremony. "I can't think of a better couple to lead the garrison as we move forward. His record for excellence and leadership speaks for itself.

"Rob, hold fast to all of those tactical and operational skills that you've honed over a career of excellence – one day you'll need them again," he added. "Welcome to Installation Management Command. I'm confident that you will lead this organization with pride

“*It's a sacred duty to be given the opportunity to lead our Soldiers – the sons and daughters of our nation. I'm doubly blessed, and this garrison is doubly blessed, to be able to take care of our families, our community and our dedicated civilians.*”

– Col. Robert J. Holcombe  
*Fort Rucker garrison commander*



PHOTO BY JIM HUGHES

**Col. Robert J. Holcombe accepts the garrison colors from Vincent E. Grewatz, director of Installation Management Command - Training at Fort Eustis, Va., as he assumes command of U.S. Army Garrison Fort Rucker from Col. Whitney B. Gardner during a change of command ceremony June 17 in the U.S. Army Aviation Museum.**

and distinction, and will successfully meet all of the new challenges you will face while elevating this garrison to new levels of innovation and performance."

Grewatz also spoke about Gardner and his accomplishments while commanding the garrison, saying the colonel and his team performed admirably.

"They postured the garrison for continued success – we're fortunate that Fort Rucker is one of the best garrison teams in all of IMCOM," Grewatz said. "They advanced efficiencies, responsiveness and innovation by driving change, and posturing the installation for success for today and in the future.

"This leadership team masterfully managed garrison resources during a time of enduring and emerging requirements that optimized base operations support," he add-

ed. "Whitney postured a positive command climate consistent with mission first, people always. He was a hands-on leader – he led by example and he built a cohesive team, which is the aim of our service culture campaign at IMCOM, and made it better at Fort Rucker."

Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general, complimented Gardner on his work during the pandemic where the colonel and his team worked tirelessly to protect the Soldiers, families and employees of the post while continuing to support ongoing training operations.

"As you drive through the gates of Fort Rucker, what the security guards are going to tell you is, 'Welcome home.' When you enter this installation that's where you are – you're home," he said. "Fort Rucker is the home of

## NEW COMMANDER cont.

Army Aviation, and Colonel Gardner has led this installation, our home, with distinction for the past two years, ensuring that people remain our No. 1 priority.

“When Whitney took command two years ago, nobody could’ve imagined the challenges that he would face as the garrison commander, but Whitney and his team were absolutely up to the challenge – we didn’t miss a beat on training the world’s best aviators,” Francis added.

The general also spoke about Gardner’s success in strengthening positive relationships with surrounding Wiregrass commu-

nities and developing his workforce.

“Whitney and Melissa, thank you for your leadership to this installation, our home, and throughout this great community, and also for maintaining Fort Rucker as a great place to live, train, play and pray,” Francis said. “We’re excited for you and Melissa as you take on the challenges as USAACE chief of staff.”

Gardner thanked garrison employees, the garrison command team and USAACE leadership, along with on- and off-post partners who helped make his time as commander a success.

“They never fail our Soldiers, they never fail our families,” he said. “Our partners, our volunteers, local community leaders and sponsors give us the ability to punch above our weight and deliver services beyond what a small garrison should be expected to do.”

Gardner also mentioned that when he stood at the same podium two years ago, he said he would act on three simple basic actions: always do no harm, always do as much good as he could, and adhere to the regulations, policies, directives and senior guidance that exists to support those who call Fort Rucker home.

“I am confident that we met those initially broad expectations and, despite a lot of challenges along the way, we improved those processes,” he said. “We got stronger and more efficient as a team to better serve USAACE and our community, and we had a lot of fun.”

He also welcomed the new commander.

“I’m leaving you the best garrison, the best garrison workforce, and most definitely the best command group and team of directors,” he said. “We are grateful to have you. You will make this garrison truly Above the Best.”



The U.S. Army has partnered with the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) to create the **Digital Garrison** mobile app. **Digital Garrison** is a one-stop information source for Army communities. The app puts real-time information into Soldiers’, families’, and civilians’ hands and keeps military communities connected – a key part of readiness and resiliency.

**DOWNLOAD DIGITAL GARRISON TODAY FROM THE APPLE APP STORE OR GOOGLE PLAY!**





# 1st Aviation Brigade welcomes new commander

By Lt. Col. Andy Thaggard  
*USAACE Public Affairs*

Col. Richard P. Tucker assumed command of the 1st Aviation Brigade, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, at Fort Rucker June 18.

Tucker now leads the largest brigade in Army Aviation, according to Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, USAACE and Fort Rucker commanding general.

"The 1st Aviation Brigade is one of the most complex and unique ... in the Army. The command spans from lower Alabama to the high desert to Arizona," said Francis.

Over the last two years, the brigade "trained over 8,000 officers, warrant officers, and Soldiers across 26 distinct programs of instruction - building the foundation for the

future of our branch," said Francis.

Tucker earned a bachelor's degree from the U.S. Military Academy and a master's of art from Appalachian State University and the U.S. Army War College. He commanded the 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment in Honduras in 2016-2017, has served as a joint multinational planner (J7) for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and transitions from USAACE's director of strategic plans (G5).

"We do two things in USAACE on behalf of our Army - develop leaders and drive change. The 1st Aviation Brigade has been on the leading edge of both," said Francis. "I look forward to the next two years as you take this stellar brigade to even greater heights."



PHOTOS BY LT. COL. ANDY THAGGARD

**Col. Richard P. Tucker receives the unit colors for the first time as commander during the 1st Aviation Brigade change of command ceremony at Fort Rucker June 18.**



**The 1st Aviation Brigade colors march toward the official party during the unit change of command ceremony.**

Whether you're a new drone pilot or have years of experience, FAA rules and safety tips exist to help you fly safely in the national airspace.



Drone operators in the local area, especially those who wish to fly near any of Fort Rucker's stagefields or basefields, should call **USAACE G3 Air** to avoid interference with USAACE flight training.

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**Need a Visitor's Pass?** Don't wait until the last minute. The VCCs will close at 4 p.m. July 1. Plan ahead!

**DRIVER LICENSE**

**VISITOR'S PASS**

Unescorted visitors must obtain a visitor's pass from one of our Visitor Control Centers or be escorted on post by an authorized escort (military/DOD/retiree).

To obtain a visitor's pass, people will need a valid Government-issued picture identification, such as a driver's license, state-issued ID, or passport.

THE DALEVILLE VISITOR CONTROL CENTER IS OPEN 8 A.M. – 4 P.M., MONDAY – SUNDAY  
THE OZARK VISITOR CONTROL CENTER IS OPEN 8 A.M. – 4 P.M., MONDAY – FRIDAY

**Joining us for Freedom Fest?**  
Bring your lawn chairs and blankets but please leave the following items at home:



**NO TOTE BAGS OR BACKPACKS**  
Medical and baby care items are allowed.



**NO PETS**  
Service dogs that are properly identified and credentialed are allowed.



**NO FIREWORKS**



**NO GLASS CONTAINERS**



**NO WEAPONS**  
To include guns, knives, pepper spray and electric stun devices.



**NO BICYCLES, SCOOTERS, ROLLER BLADES, HOVER BOARDS, SKATEBOARDS OR UNICYCLES**

## LEGEND

- Ozark Gate Parking Area and Traffic Flow
- Daleville Gate Parking Area BEFORE 7:30 p.m. and Traffic Flow
- Daleville Gate Parking Area AFTER 7:30 p.m. and Traffic Flow
- Enterprise Gate Parking Area and Traffic Flow
- Freedom Fest Area
- ♿ Handicapped/VIP/Vendor Parking Area
- Fort Rucker Residents Parking Area (opens at 4 p.m. after the commissary is closed) and Traffic Flow

TO  
ENTERPRISE  
GATE

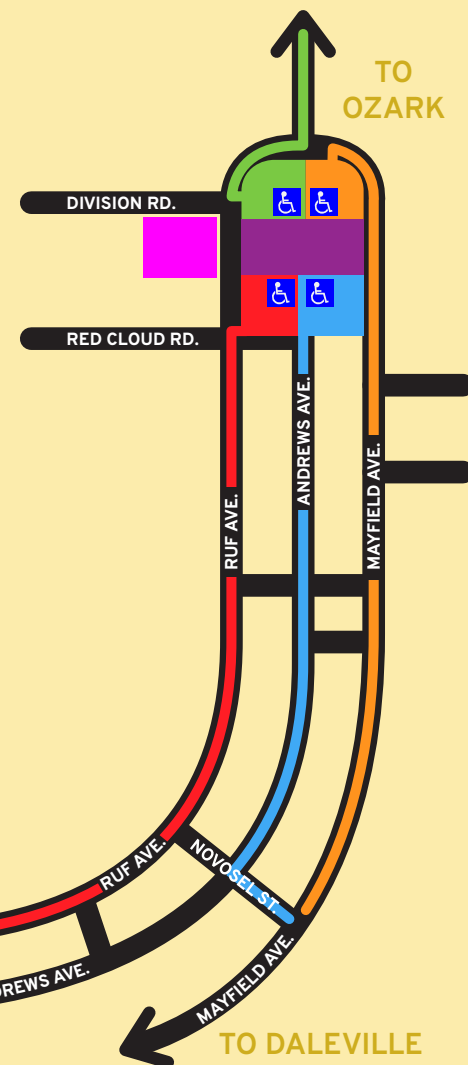
TO DALEVILLE



If you're joining us for Freedom Fest, be sure to enter post through the gate that you wish to exit later in the evening.

For example, if you want to leave from the Daleville Gate after the fireworks, you should enter post via the Daleville Gate and follow signs to park in the Daleville parking area. Exit routes will be strictly enforced.

See you there!



# Fort Rucker officials adjust gate access, visitor pass policy

Fort Rucker Public Affairs

*Staff Report*

Fort Rucker officials recently revisited the post's gate access policy in an effort to fine tune the issuance of visitor passes and to continue the momentum of last year's reduction of minor crimes that was seen as a result of the pandemic.

Officials reduced the length of visitors passes for people without a long-term reason to be on post from six months to seven days in early April – then extended that to 30 days in early June – to try to continue 2020's trend of a significant reduction in minor crimes when access to the post was severely restricted because of the pandemic.

Nothing about the process for getting a visitors pass has changed, only the length of time for passes for unsponsored people with no documentation showing a need to come on post, according to John Tkac, Fort Rucker Directorate of Public Safety chief of physical security.

For people with an established need to be on post, getting a pass for longer than 30 days is a simple process, Tkac added.

"Documentation can be as simple as showing your Silver Wings Golf Club membership card, or even a Fort Rucker hunting permit – those show the personnel at the visitor control center that you have a need and they'll issue you a six-month pass," he said.

The process for obtaining a visitors pass is explained in detail at <https://home.army.mil/rucker/index.php/visit>, and also includes an

extensive FAQ list and downloadable forms to expedite the process at the VCCs.

Basically, Tkac said, it boils down to if a visitor with no military affiliation wants to come on post to visit the museum or attend an event, then they get the 30-day pass by showing their ID, such as a drivers license, at one of the VCCs – located at Daleville or Ozark gates.

If a visitor has a reason to be on post for a longer period, they simply need to provide documentation to that effect to the VCC personnel, and they can get a six-month pass.

For people who have a requirement for a year-long pass, they need to obtain a sponsor – such as a relative who is a Soldier who lives on post, or someone at an organization they must visit regularly, etc. The visitor gets that person to agree to sponsor them, the sponsor completes the form and gets it signed through their command or director, and then the visitor provides that form at the VCC to be issued the pass.

"At the VCC, personnel will conduct a background check through the system to make sure visitors don't have anything that would disqualify them from getting a pass and coming on post unescorted," Tkac said. "Then they take their picture and issue them their pass.

"The procedures obtaining a pass are not



FILE PHOTO

**A Fort Rucker security guard verifies a person's credentials at an entry control point.**

as difficult or cumbersome as some people seem to think they are," he added. "It's really an easy process."

And the effort to reduce crime isn't an indicator that Fort Rucker isn't a safe place to live, work and play, Tkac said.

"In 2020, we had more restrictive access to the installation based on the general orders that were issued and the resulting restricted access to visitors," he said. "When we looked at the 2019 crime statistics that involved subjects who had no military affiliation and we compared them to 2020, we saw there was a

huge decline in the number of offenses."

The main offenses Tkac referenced were things like cases of driving under the influence, people bringing weapons on post, marijuana possession, and traffic citations and accidents.

"In 2020, those sorts of offenses were reduced drastically – almost down to none at all in some areas," he added.

For more information on Fort Rucker's visitor policy or the process for obtaining a pass, visit the website referenced previously or call 255-0607.



# BEST IN ARMY



PHOTOS BY JIM HUGHES

Sgt. Maj. Jesus Goytia, Fort Rucker Directorate of Public Safety sergeant major, and Lt. Col. Phillip Lenz, DPS director, receive the Sgt. Maj. Wardell B. Turner Award from Col. Whitney B. Gardner, Fort Rucker garrison commander, during a ceremony outside of Bldg. 101 June 16.

## Fort Rucker DPS receives Sgt. Maj. Wardell B. Turner trophy

**By Jim Hughes**  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker Directorate of Public Safety leadership and employees were presented the Sgt. Maj. Wardell B. Turner award during a ceremony outside the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence headquarters building June 16.

Lt. Col. Phillip Lenz, DPS director, Sgt. Maj. Jesus Goytia, DPS sergeant major, and numerous law enforcement, security, firefighting and administrative personnel received the award from then-garrison commander, Col. Whitney B. Gardner.

The Army announced Fort Rucker DPS as the winner of the new award, deeming it the best emergency services directorate in

the Army, in late January.

Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general, and Vince Grewatz, director of Installation Management Command - Training, spoke at the event to congratulate the team.

Francis said he and the USAACE command team couldn't be more proud of the DPS team for what they do for the installation.

"Fort Rucker is an incredible place to train – we train the best aviators in the world," he said. "We have a lot of hardware sitting on five airfields and a lot of folks coming here for training – we train folks from more than 47 different nations. The requirement to run our fire departments, to run our security

and all the other functions that DPS does is absolutely critical to our mission. We could not execute the mission we do here every day without the team standing behind me. I'm proud of each and every one of you.

"Because you're the first to get this award, that means that's just the way you are," Francis added. "You are leading the charge – you do it every day and your commitment to excellence is absolutely Above the Best. Congratulations!"

Grewatz said he was happy to be able to attend the ceremony, and to meet the first winners of the award in person.

"The way you take care of the community and take care of each other is laudable," he said. "This is an amazing achievement.

"The last year has been a really difficult





## BEST cont.

one, and we've required a lot more of you than we have in the past. You responded magnificently, and you've earned this award and set the standard," Grewatz added. "This is well deserved – it's absolutely phenomenal the way you pulled together. You epitomize the teamwork that installation management brings in each of your capacities because you bring a wealth of individual skills and overall organizational capability to this installation and to the community."

Lenz said the entire community can take pride in the accomplishment.

"This is not just our award – this is a community award," he said. "I've always believed it takes a village, a community, to make it happen. This is a monumental accomplishment to what we do each day. We have our security officers on the gates every day under the most austere conditions. We have incredible firefighters – on the military and civilian sides. Military policemen, Department of the Army civilian police, physical security inspectors, administrative technicians, information technology specialists – just an incredible team.

"The really special piece is we competed against 72 other installations across the whole U.S. Army," Lenz added. "We won this the first time through. We beat out (the Army's largest installations) – and let's be real, they have much bigger missions than we do and a lot more challenges than we have.

"Each one of you is dedicated to the overall mission and this award is a tribute to every one of you standing behind me. It doesn't matter if you wear a green uniform or a blue uniform, military or civilian, and it doesn't matter what you do – we made it happen and we're going to continue to do better," he added.

Lenz also recognized the installation's partners from surrounding Wiregrass communities for their help in successfully carrying out the DPS mission.

"If anything ever happens, and it has happened, our brothers and sisters in arms outside of the gates are always right there for us each and every step of the way," he added. "We can't do it without them."



# SELF-HELP PROGRAM



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# Fort Rucker raises more than \$100,000 for Army Emergency Relief

By Jim Hughes

*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker ended its annual Army Emergency Relief campaign during a ceremony June 15 in The Landing as officials recognized campaign standouts and revealed the campaign raised more than \$100,000 for the charity that helps Soldiers help Soldiers.

Campaign leaders thanked the many unit coordinators and the campaign staff who helped ensure 100% of Fort Rucker Soldiers were aware of the benefits available to them through AER, said Beth Gunter, outgoing Army Community Service AER financial counselor whose duties are being assumed by Jo Close.

"The No. 1 goal of the AER campaign is to increase Soldiers' awareness about the benefits of the AER program," she said. "Unit coordinators conducted training to ensure over 2,300 personnel and 2,100 students are aware of the benefits available to them when experiencing financial issues."

The three-person campaign team, made up of CW4 James N. Bueby, Fort Rucker AER campaign manager, and two assistant coordinators, SSgt. Ian Van Harper and SSgt. Ramone Diaz-Rondon took on the responsibility to ensure the unit coordinators were trained, and received the resources and support they needed to complete their mission, she added.

"The AER mantra, Soldiers helping Soldiers, was seen throughout this year's campaign," Gunter said, adding that despite manpower shortages and challenges with the new AER software, the team remained fully committed to the mission and to AER. "For the past 3 ½ months, their support and hard work played a vital role in the success of the AER program and helping to ensure it will be there for generations to come."

Fort Rucker officials also thanked All In Credit Union whose 30th annual golf tournament benefitting AER raised \$30,000 for the charity, about twice its normal amount.

Col. Chad Chasteen, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence chief of staff, spoke at closing ceremony about how AER has helped Soldiers through unforeseen financial emergencies, including a private suffering vehicle trouble on his way to Fort Rucker for advanced individual training last year.

"He rented a vehicle with what little savings he had in order to meet his report time while his family stayed in a hotel and the vehicle was repaired out of state," Chasteen said. "If you have ever been a private, which I was back in 1988, or if you've ever had car troubles, which I had last week, or if you have had a family, or all of the above, you can imagine his stress."

"When leadership within his unit was made aware of the situation, they immediately sent him to AER for assistance," he continued. "The Soldier was provided with the funds necessary to get his vehicle back home and to drive on training."

He also spoke about past experiences where AER helped Soldiers under his command.

"If you have been in the Army for a while, you probably have your own AER story. I have one," he said. "Eight years ago as a battalion commander, I personally witnessed AER make a powerful impact on a unit and a family. While stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, one of my Soldiers experienced a traumatic event with life-threatening consequences. In the middle of the night a few short days before Christmas while the family was sleeping, their home on post caught fire."



PHOTO BY JIM HUGHES

**Col. Whitney B. Gardner, Fort Rucker garrison commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond P. Quitugua Jr., garrison command sergeant major, present a check for the \$101,056.70 the Fort Rucker community raised for Army Emergency Relief during its campaign that ended June 15.**

The older, historic home went up quickly, and the Soldier was able to get his spouse and two children to their rally point unharmed, the colonel added.

"They stood on their lawn in their pajamas as flames burst out of windows," Chasteen said. "Then help came in waves. First, came firefighters and neighbors and unit members and the chain of command – myself included. They were followed quickly by AER, who provided immediate funds for a family in need. That family is still serving today. I am proud that AER was there to help within hours of a tragic event. The outpouring of community support combined with a rapid inject of financial resources enabled that family to recover and rebuild."

AER's secondary mission is to provide scholarships, based on financial need, for the

children, spouses, orphans and widows of active-duty and retired Soldiers, he said, adding that within the Wiregrass area, 10 spouses and 78 children benefited from more than \$370,000 in scholarship assistance during the last school year.

"As a community, Fort Rucker contributed over \$100,000 – that seems a lot, but actually it's less than last year," he said. "There are thousands of charities out there, but there is only one that is truly committed to helping the Soldiers of the U.S. Army, our Soldiers. We can do a lot if we all give a little."

For more information on AER, call 255-9641 or visit <https://www.armyemergencyrelief.org/>. Also, people can donate to AER at any time by visiting <https://www.armyemergencyrelief.org/donate/>.



# THE CHAMPS

Parker  
Elementary  
School  
celebrates  
teachers, staff  
as champions  
of 2020-21  
'season'

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Ellis D. Parker Elementary School celebrated its teachers and staff as the champions of a challenge-filled 2020-21 school year during an event at the school June 10.

That event featured championship T-shirts, championship candy rings, gold medals, music, cheering and group photos with confetti being launched over the more than 100 champion teachers and staff – all designed to give the feel of a football midfield championship celebration, according to Dr. Vicki Gilmer, school



PHOTOS BY JIM HUGHES

**Ellis D. Parker Elementary School hosted a teacher and staff appreciation breakfast June 10 to celebrate what school officials called their championship season during the 2020-21 school year.**

principal.

"The theme all year is this is a season – and it has been a season like no other," Gilmer told the assembled teachers and staff in the school amphitheater. "You are the champions of this season – from quarantining, teaching in person, going remote, coming back in person, going back remote, coming back in person – all of the things we had to accomplish this year, you all did it and did it so very well. Go Patriots!"

The genesis for the idea of holding a cham-

pionship celebration came about when Connie Ellis, an employee in the front office, brought in her son's championship rings he earned playing football with the University of Alabama, Gilmer said, adding that she'd been considering how best to recognize her outstanding teachers and staff for persevering.

"I said, 'That's it! We'll celebrate a championship season!' At the end of a challenging season, like any good team, they celebrate," she said. "They deserved a big celebration – we had

great parents who supported us and great kids who supported us, but the staff was top notch.

"We've talked a lot in past years about building a team, blending as a team, and also having perseverance and grit – they modeled that above anything I could've imagined this year. I'm so proud and so thankful for them," Gilmer added.

Fort Rucker Soldiers and organizations also threw in their support during the ceremony as garrison command attended the event,



# CHAMPS cont.

the Directorate of Public Safety flew its giant American flag above the group as they posed for the photo, Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers volunteered and cheered the teachers on, and NCO Academy students fired off the confetti cannons during the group photo.

The teachers and staff certainly earned the designation of champions and the day of recognition, said Command Sgt. Maj Raymond P. Quitugua Jr., garrison command sergeant major.

“We’ve done a lot of great things for the essential workers who’ve been supporting Fort Rucker – firefighters, police officers, security guards, medical personnel. The teachers and staff of our outstanding Parker Elementary School deserve that same type of recognition,” Quitugua said. “Not all heroes wear capes and not all heroes wear this uniform. Some of the best heroes out there are the ones that you see each and every day – that certainly applies to our teachers.

“As a parent, as a member of this community and as a leader of this installation, I am very, very grateful for the teachers, the staff

members and the administrators of Parker Elementary School,” he added. “This recognition is something they’ve certainly earned – kids in school, kids out of school, teaching kids virtually, teaching kids in a new building – our teachers were always adaptable and flexible in taking care of our loved ones, so that we could go carry out our missions that are important to the military and our nation.”

Gilmer and her fellow champions hope to continue their winning ways during the school’s summer session and a few months later during the 2021-22 school season, she said.

“We do have our summer program kicking off in a week – some kids will come in and join us for three weeks for a little bit of catching up after a difficult year,” she said, adding that she hopes next school year will bring back a little more normalcy for students, teachers, staff and parents alike.

“Fort Rucker is one community – Above the Best,” Gilmer said. “I thank all of our students, our parents and the garrison for their support – we’ll be back next season!”



**ABOVE:** The kindergarten team poses for a championship photo with the school mascot during the celebration.



**LEFT:** Teachers and staff celebrate.

**BELOW:** Soldiers help direct teachers and staff to their group tables.





# CARING FOR SOLDIERS, FAMILIES

## DOD certifies Fort Rucker ACS, team names it best seen to date

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*



The Department of Defense certified Fort Rucker Army Community Service during a recent inspection of its family support programs.

The certification means that the Soldiers and family members who call Fort Rucker home are in good hands, according to Kent Thompson, chief of ACS.

"This used to be known as accreditation, but we've recently moved into a pilot program where we've gone from having to meet Army standards to having to meet DOD standards," he said, adding that under this pilot program some old standards dropped away while others are even more stringent than before.

Fort Rucker ACS came through with flying colors, which was no surprise to its chief.

"Of the 64 major standards they review, we were identified as having strengths (highest level) in 24 of them," Thompson said. "The team said that is better than anyone else they've looked at so far."

That team was made up of Installation Management Command ACS leaders who spent more than 45 days poring over more than 400 pieces of evidence of compliance that local ACS staff had uploaded onto IMCOM's system, and interviewing about half of Fort Rucker's family support staff via phone or Microsoft Teams.

Strengths the team cited were strong

leadership, a resilient and passionate team, a well-versed staff with a high level of expertise in family readiness, a high level of communication skills, valued recognition programs, successful implementation of virtual services delivery, the Fort Rucker Rocks! Program and more, according to the team's out-brief slides.

Being named the best the team had seen came as no surprise to Thompson, who heaped praise on his staff for earning the certification and for all of the work they do to take care of Soldiers and family members.

"I've been working in ACS for over 20 years and this is a really, really good staff," he said, adding that they have achieved so much despite cuts to manning that put programs at risk.

"Initially, it seemed those cuts were really going to cause ACS to go downhill," Thompson said. "But what happened was the people who remained on staff stepped up and took over those positions that other people used to do – they took on those tasks and became experts on those topics. People went from becoming program managers of one program to becoming an ACS specialist over several programs. I couldn't ask for a better staff."

Although the ACS staff is happy about earning certification, and not having to worry about it for another four years, many are

already working to get even better, the chief said.

"Whatever little things that we did notice that we maybe could do a little better, they're already working on it," he said. "They're already changing some things that even though we passed and passed with flying colors, they're saying, 'You know, I noticed something that I think we can do better.' They're already acting on it."

All in the name of taking the best possible care of Soldiers and family members, Thompson said.

"We are here to help Soldiers and their family members accomplish their mission," he said. "We want to do everything we can to make sure Soldiers can go out and accomplish their mission without having to worry about all of the other problems that may come up in their lives."

"We have the family advocacy program to help with relationship problems, or anger or stress management; financial readiness; relocation readiness, helping people PCS in or out – borrowing Lending Hangar items – and finding out about what their next duty station is going to look and feel like; and the Exceptional Family Member Program that offers support groups for exceptional family members," Thompson added. "All of these

things are designed to help Soldiers not have to worry about the things on the home front – whether they're a single Soldier or a married Soldier, it doesn't matter.

"If I were going to say I was disappointed about anything, it would be that I don't think a lot of Soldiers come to see us when they probably should," he added. "They need to be proactive rather than reactive. If they see something starting to become a problem, they should come see ACS before they go anywhere else -- think ACS first."

There's also a bit of a use-it-or-lost-it element, he added.

"We're like any place else in the Army – if people don't use the services, a decision maker may determine that because the service isn't used very much, maybe people don't need it," Thompson said. "That would be a shame and that's what happened when we did lose some of our positions. I think people know about ACS, but they don't really know exactly what we do because they don't come to see us very often. Those who do are usually very happy – we have a 99%-positive ICE comment rate."

For more information on Fort Rucker ACS and all it offers, visit <https://rucker.armymwr.com/programs/army-community-service>.

# The possibility of flight

By Lt. Col. Andy Thaggard  
*USAACE Public Affairs*

Humanity's effort to move like and with the birds is traced to around 400 B.C. with the discovery of kites that were used for religious ceremonies, testing the weather, and fun. Kites gave way to wings of feather or lightweight woods, and even steam-powered experimentation before Leonardo da Vinci started drawing the Ornithopter flying machine in the 1480s. Today, two U.S. Army aviators are active NASA astronauts, and one might set foot on the moon or Mars.

To inform and educate Army ROTC and U.S. Military Academy cadets of their career options for defying gravity through sustained flight, the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence (USAACE) Organization and Personnel Force Development Directorate (OPFD) regularly conducts aviation branch awareness and mentorship engagements through a combination of virtual and in-person visits.

"We provide an overview of Army Aviation and a question and answer session with aviation officers to assist cadets with their branching decision and with their transition from cadet to lieutenant," said Lt. Col. Erika Salerno, OPFD deputy director.

In fiscal year 2020, OPFD conducted 50 virtual engagements, reaching approximately 1,437 potential future Army aviators, including cadets from 16 historically Black

colleges and universities. While incorporating coronavirus mitigation measures, OPFD conducted 37 virtual engagements and three in-person events during fiscal year 2021 — impacting over 1,000 cadets.

The most recent in-person events at Fort Rucker included Florida A&M University and Tuskegee University cadets visiting on different dates. Still, all 50 were able to spend time in a flight simulator, receive a guided tour of the Army Aviation Museum, a branch overview, and talk with the branch chief of Army aviation, Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, USAACE and Fort Rucker commander.

"Aviation is an incredible capability for the United States Army. And you get to get into a cockpit every day and go do what we do. And I would just tell you ... it's an absolutely phenomenal career. If I could start over again and be in your place, I would do it today," said Francis.

During Q&A sessions, cadets asked about branch diversity, how the Army was addressing the issue, and his advice. Francis acknowledged the issue, for statistics show that for over 5,500 Army aviation commissioned officers, it only averages 15% minority group representation and 11% women across all three components.

He said that the engagement sessions were one way the branch was diversifying



PHOTO BY KELLY MORRIS

**U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets from Florida A&M University receive a warm welcome from Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general, and ask questions about the Aviation branch, during their tour of Fort Rucker April 16.**

and provided some pointed advice.

Don't self-eliminate, he said. So many think they can't do it, never try, and miss out.

"We want you, and are looking for you to come be a part of the aviation branch," Francis said. "You've got great potential ... and I would encourage all of you to give aviation a shot."

Interested cadets can contact OPFD

through the Aviator Insider Instagram or Facebook pages, or via <https://home.army.mil/rucker/index.php/about/usaace/opfd>, to learn how they can fly the descendant of da Vinci's Ornithopter, the modern helicopter. And perhaps one day they will fly beyond the sky.



# Business booming for MWR's leisure travel office in new location

By Jim Hughes

*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Many in the Fort Rucker community have been bitten by the travel bug, if customer traffic at the leisure travel office is any indication.

After just over a month of operating in its new location inside the Center Library, business is booming, Charlotte Allen, senior travel clerk and manager of leisure travel, said, adding that the office averages about 15-20 customers a day and an additional 10-15 phone calls for information.

"We were shut down for so long, and now we've had a major influx of business – it doesn't seem to be slowing down as people seem to really want to travel," Allen said, adding that the office moved from its former location in Bldg. 5700 and held its grand re-opening in early May. "I'm even giving out cruise quotes, scheduling flights to Italy and things like that now."

MWR Central-Leisure Travel is a full service travel agency that provides a range of travel services to active-duty and retired military personnel, their family members, Department of Defense civilian employees and other members of the military community, according to the Fort Rucker Directorate of Family, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation website.

"We are also your one-stop shop to receive the latest and greatest information on MWR events and activities on Fort Rucker," the website reads. "You are able register for the fun runs and other various events hosted



PHOTO BY KRISTINA DELUCA

by the physical fitness center, along with other special event tickets may be purchased at your MWR Central office."

Leisure travel can also provide brochures, catalogs, flyers and information on various attractions and points of interest in the surrounding area, as well as other major travel destinations and hotels all over the world, according to the website.

"We can help them with flights and hotel reservations to wherever they're wanting to go – whether it's Disney, Sea World, Tennessee, Atlanta, Florida – we can help

book all of that and also help them find the best deals available to military members," Allen said. "We're seeing cruises opening back up, too, and have had some people come in to look at what next year's cruise prices will be, and getting quotes for flights to places like Italy and Manilla."

While Allen and the two other travel clerks in the office stand at the ready to help people get to pretty much wherever the travel bug wants to take them, the manager said the most popular destinations people want to go are Universal Studios and Walt Disney World

in Orlando.

For those in the community who've fallen victim to a bite from the travel bug now that travel restrictions are being relaxed in many places, Allen's advice is simple.

"Come in and see us -- we'll do our best to make you happy," she said.

For more on leisure travel, stop by the office in the Center Library Tuesdays-Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., visit <https://rucker.armymwr.com/programs/mwr-leisure-travel>, or call 255-2997.

# HOW TO VOTE ABSENTEE

## Installation voting assistance office, FVAP.gov stand ready to assist

By Linda Blake

*Fort Rucker Installation Voting Assistance Officer*

The Army will observe Armed Forces Voters Week June 28 to July 5.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program works to ensure program eligible citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so. The program is intended to assist a voter in registering to vote and applying for an absentee ballot.

FVAP works with state governments, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and other entities to accomplish this as easily as possible for the voter. The Federal Post Card Application, or Standard Form 76, is a dual form that allows voters to register to vote and request an absentee ballot simultaneously. Installations across services have established installation voting assistance offices that are manned by installation voting assistance officers who are available to assist. At unit levels, voters can seek aid from their unit voting assistance officers.

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act also allows program-eligible citizens to use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot, or Standard Form 186. It is essentially, a back-up ballot for federal offices. This ballot may be cast by UOCAVA

voters who have registered and requested an absentee ballot in a timely manner, but have not yet received their state or territory official ballot.

Read the following steps to assist in filling out the FPCA. State voting laws are diverse, so each voter will need to follow their state-specific guidelines when filling out the FPCA, sending in the FPCA, and observing state cut-off dates for registration and ballot request and return.

Every two years, FVAP publishes the Voting Assistance Guide for voters to reference. A copy of the guide can be found at [fvap.gov](https://fvap.gov). While at [fvap.gov](https://fvap.gov), take advantage of the FVAP online assistant and click on Request an Absentee Ballot.

The online assistant will have voters' state-specific requirements already populated as it walks visitors through filling out the FPCA fillable pdf. There is no need to look-up state information in the Voting Assistance Guide.

Follow these simple steps:

1. Fill
2. Review
3. Print
4. Sign

**Armed Forces Voters Week**  
28 June – 5 July

**APPLY FOR AN ABSENTEE BALLOT**  
*by visiting*

**FVAP.GOV**  
FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**CONTACT YOUR INSTALLATION VOTING ASSISTANCE OFFICER**

**Location:** Bldg: 5700, Rm: 220  
**Phone:** 334-255-1839  
**Hours:** M-F - 7:30 a.m. – 4:15 p.m.  
**Email:** [usarmy.rucker.usag.mbx.voting-office@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.rucker.usag.mbx.voting-office@mail.mil)

### 5. Send

You will need a printer to complete the process to print the FPCA and then sign the form. No personal information will be archived at any point.

Some states permit FPCAs to be emailed or faxed. Others, like Alabama, require the document to be mailed through the postal system. Follow the instructions for your state.

Upon conclusion, the online assistant will provide a downloadable PDF package that identifies any missing information on the FPCA, generates the unsigned FPCA, and provides additional relevant documents, contact information for local election officials and important federal election dates and deadlines. The package will provide

state instructions on how and where to send the signed FPCA. A similar process can be followed using the online tool to fill out the FWAB.

Refer to [fvap.gov](https://fvap.gov) for additional information on voting residence (within your state of legal residence), military spouses, transitioning or separating, election notifications and much more.

Voting questions can also be directed to state local election officials, post legal offices, unit voting assistance officers or the installation voting assistance office in Bldg. 5700, Rm. 220. The office is open Mondays-Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call 255-1839.





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