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PHOTO BY PFC VINCENT LEVELEV

Paratroopers assigned to the 82nd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division conduct air assault training during a Combined Arms Live Fire Exercise at Fort Bragg, N.C., Sept. 16. The CALFEX serves to sharpen tactical readiness in live-fire situations.

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# HONORING THE FALLEN

## 20 years later, Fort Rucker remembers fallen of 9/11 attacks

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker paused to reflect on the 9/11 attacks 20 years ago and honor those who lost their lives that day during a ceremony at the Directorate of Public Safety Sept. 10.

The Fort Rucker 9/11 20th Anniversary Moving Tribute featured remarks by Lt. Col. Phillip Lenz, director of DPS, and Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general.

“This is really a chance for us to recog-

nize the significance of the 20th anniversary of the attacks on our country that took place Sept 11, 2001,” Lenz said, adding that almost 3,000 lives were lost that day, with 412 being first responders. “First responders who did what had to be done as part of their required duties, and more so as part of a mindset and a culture of brave men and women who put their lives on the line so that others may live.

“Today’s ceremony is about recognizing and memorializing those who perished that



PHOTOS BY JIM HUGHES

**The DPS honor guard prepares to lead the walk around the post.**

fateful day, and also continuing to show our

appreciation for that small group of our population we call first responders – including our firefighters, our police officers, our security officers, our emergency medical technicians and our hospital workers – who remain on the front lines in the ongoing battle with COVID. Thank you to all of those who don the uniform and put themselves in harm’s way every single day.”

Francis agreed, adding that the ceremony also paid tribute “to all our veterans who serve, and continue to serve and sacrifice for our nation. They will never be forgotten and, truly, the events of 9-11 have strengthened our resolve to remain vigilant and ready to meet any challenge.”

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the nation struggled to figure out what they meant for its future, he added.

“It’s interesting that many of you here today were very young – many of you not even born yet – when this event happened to our nation,” Francis said. “As we perceived the



**A Flatiron crew member delivers the American flag to the ceremony.**



## 9/11 cont.

events of 9-11, different folks perceived them differently. Some were very young when they occurred – they were very scared and didn't know what this meant.

"Others, who'd been through Vietnam and other national tragedies, said, 'We've been through this before, we'll get through it again – we got this.' It's that kind of grit and that kind of attitude of never losing or cowering to an enemy that has brought us to where we are today," he added. "They were very different reactions, but each one gives us a snapshot of the effect that these events have had on our nation and our culture as we move forward.

"Our Army is older than our nation, and down through time whenever freedom has been threatened there has always been a legacy of brave patriots who were willing to raise their right hand and say, 'Send me!' Just like our Soldiers in the wake of 9-11, people who are willing to put their lives on the line to ensure that our country remains safe and

free, protect our way of life and defend our Constitution continue to build on our long history of defending America through strong leadership," Francis continued. "The courage of our Soldiers and their ability to quickly adapt to changing security threats remain a fundamental tenet of our Army."

He added that when he thinks about Fort Rucker's mission to provide the best-trained aviation professionals to the nation's operational force, he's "grateful for all of the Soldiers and their families who have come through the post's gates.

"They stepped up to the plate over the last 20 years of sustained combat operations and endured the strain of an extreme operational tempo to keep us free," Francis said. "Our nation is forever grateful for their selfless service and sacrifice.

"Likewise, our first responders at Fort Rucker enable that mission to occur every day across 17 stagefields, five basefields and across the cantonment area," he added.



**A Flatiron crew member delivers the American flag to Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, USAACE and Fort Rucker commanding general, who then handed it over to Col. Robert J. Holcombe, Fort Rucker garrison commander, for the walk.**



**Holcombe and Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond P. Quitugua Jr., garrison command sergeant major, and DPS first responders, supporters and family members begin the walk.**

"From our firefighters to our police force to our security force to our EMS folks, all of them are a critical and vital part of our mission here every single day."

He also remarked that it's interesting that there is a generation coming into the Army that doesn't remember 9-11 because they were too young or not even born yet.

"It's all the more important that we have events like this one today to make sure that we never forget the lives that were lost and to honor the selfless service of our brave heroes," Francis said.

"I'd ask that you continue your thoughts and prayers to those who are actually de-

ployed around the world today, and for all of our first responders across this nation and here at Fort Rucker, who stand in the breach, ready to help us on any given day. We will never forget – Above the Best," he said.

After the general spoke, the assembled crowd observed a moment of silence for the lives lost Sept. 11, 2001, and then Flatiron flew in and a crew member delivered a flag to Francis, who turned it over to Col. Robert J. Holcombe, Fort Rucker garrison commander, to take on the group walk. The walk went from DPS to Bldg. 101, to Lyster Army Health Clinic and then to Bldg. 5700 before returning to DPS.



# NEVER FORGOTTEN

## Fort Rucker hosts POW/MIA ceremony

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker hosted its POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremony Sept. 17 at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum to a limited in-person audience that was broadcast over Facebook Live.

Brig. Gen. Stanley E. Budraitis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker deputy commanding general, spoke at the event, focusing his speech on a World War II-era former POW from Andalusia, 2nd Lt. Wesley Courson.

"In the Army, people are our greatest

strength and our most important weapons system," the general said. "It's never been more important that we recognize the service and sacrifice of our brave Soldiers who, across our nation's history, have lived out the Army Values and put their lives on the line to keep us free. They are the backbone of the joint force. Their honorable service, past and present, touches each and every one of us today."

Budraitis then moved on to Courson's story that was made public recently when a



PHOTOS BY JIM HUGHES

**Brig. Gen. Stanley E. Budraitis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker deputy commanding general, speaks at the POW/MIA Ceremony at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum Sept. 17.**

local paper published excerpts from his diary that he kept during his days as a Soldier.

"He was a member of the Greatest Generation," the general said, adding that Courson enlisted in the Army in 1941 and initially trained as an aircraft mechanic. "He went on to earn his wings as a B-17 bomber pilot and commission as an Army officer."

In 1943, Courson received orders to England and an assignment with the 306th Bomb Group, 423rd Bombing Squadron. He flew four combat missions with only minor damage to his aircraft, according to Budraitis.

"His fifth mission, which focused on a Nazi strategic asset – a submarine repair installation and depot in Hannover, Germany, would be his crew's last mission of the war," the general said. "Courson described that mission as 'involving more flak and fighter planes than all the previous runs put together.'"

While flying in formation, Courson said he felt an explosion underneath the plane lift the aircraft up and caused enough damage to make the aircraft structurally unsafe, Budraitis said, adding that the radio operator onboard was killed.

The aircraft sustained further damage shortly thereafter, and with many crewmembers injured, the wings chewed up by enemy fire, and one engine on fire and the other smoking, Courson directed the bombardier to destroy the Norden bombsight and for the rest of the crew to exit the plane.

"There was 'no way to go but down,'" according to Courson's account of the incident.

Courson was the last to exit the aircraft and suffered injuries jumping out of the bomb bay doors as the aircraft made a sharp roll.

"When the chute opened he lost consciousness, and when he came to he realized



**Attendees salute as the colors are posted at the ceremony.**

## POW/MIA cont.

he was being escorted down by two circling enemy fighter aircraft,” Budraitis continued. “On the ground, in Dutch territory, some German border guards realized he was injured, so they left him temporarily under a tree on a farm.

“He recalled a little girl, in an act of kindness, came from a nearby house and brought him a mug of cool water,” the general said. “He wrote, ‘That has to be the one most outstanding drink of water in my life.’

“In multiple prisoner of war camps, Courson endured harsh conditions and solitary confinement. At one point, he briefly escaped but was captured. He spent more than 640 days as a prisoner of war, and thankfully

was among those liberated when U.S. forces drove into Moosburg, Germany, and the city surrendered April 29, 1945,” Budraitis said. “He wrote powerful words in his journal: ‘Liberated! Liberated! We are free men again!’

“Fortunately, Courson returned home to Andalusia and lived out the rest of his life, until he passed away in 1989,” the general added. “It’s amazing that so many years later the Soldier’s family would share with the world a written, firsthand account from one prisoner of war during World War II. And there are so many more stories out there. Since the Revolutionary War, we know that more than a half-million U.S. servicemembers have, at

one point in time, been held as prisoners of war. It’s so important that we recognize their honorable service to our nation.

“And today, we continue to keep the light on for our many missing in action,” he continued. “We know that nearly 82,000 servicemembers remain unaccounted for – approximately 1,600 from the Vietnam War, nearly 8,000 from the Korean War and more than 72,000 from World War II.

“They are not forgotten,” Budraitis said. “We know that our nation dedicates significant resources, and will continue to search the Earth until each servicemember is rightfully returned back to U.S. soil. And we certainly rejoice every time we see the news

headlines that another servicemember’s remains have now been accounted for and they’re returning home where they belong.

“We will never forget the selfless service and sacrifice of our brave heroes who were taken as prisoners of war and those still unaccounted for,” he added. “We are forever grateful for them and their families. Their stories need to be told, and in so doing, hopefully we can better understand their proud legacy of service and just how precious our freedom is.

“I would ask that you please continue to keep in your thoughts and prayers our many servicemembers who are deployed around the world, and continue to wrap your hearts around their family members,” Budraitis said.



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.

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PHOTO BY LT. COL. ANDY THAGGARD

The first six Army aviation flight school students to solo in the UH-72 Lakota gather just prior to their solo flights on Sept. 11 at Fort Rucker. From left: Warrant Officer Eanone Travis, Warrant Officer Saucier Tanner, Warrant Officer Shaffer Dalton, Warrant Officer Greg Lambert, 2nd Lt. Connor Regan, and Warrant Officer Nicholas Franke.

## 1st UH-72 class solos at Rucker

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

Initial Entry Rotary Wing Class 21-21 notched their spot in Army aviation history by being the first class to solo in the UH-72 Lakota helicopter.

"We are having the first six students of Class 21-21, which is 56 students, solo today," said CW4 Bradley J. Renneke, chief of standards and senior warrant adviser at Cairns Army Airfield for the 1st Battalion, 223d Aviation Regiment, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence. "They solo three patterns each, takeoff, fly to a hover, and then pass it back to their instructor pilot."

While the first six students completed their solos on Sept. 11, the class as a whole finished on Sept. 16.

"This has not been done since October 2020 in the TH-67, and traditionally it's been in the TH-55 and UH-1," said Renneke.

With this milestone complete, the Army plans to bring back cross-country solos in the Lakota during a warfighting skills phase of training.

"Soloing the aircraft is a huge trust-building exercise for the students themselves, and for the instructors, it validates our instruction," said Renneke.

It's an accomplishment notable not only for the Army but for the individual pilots.

"I absolutely remember my first solo" at 16 flight hours, said Renneke – 2,700 hours later. "It was done at the same stage field, in a TH-67, with Mr. Humberto Dominguez, and we successfully operated three traffic patterns each."

Video of the flights can be viewed on the USAACE [YouTube channel](#).

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# EFMP & ME

## DOD offers online tool to help families with special needs

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

The Department of Defense Office of Special Needs and [Military OneSource](#) digital tool, EFMP & Me, guides military families with special needs to the specific information and resources they need.

EFMP & Me conveniently connects families anytime and anywhere with tools and information about the Exceptional Family Member Program, according to Amanda Guettler, Fort Rucker Army Community Service EFMP coordinator.

Using the tool, families can download forms, learn about support services, how to prepare for a move, respond to changes in education or medical needs, and adjust to new life situations, she said.

“You don’t have to have an account to use EFMP & Me, but having one does help if you want to save your searches and make checklists,” Guettler said, adding that the tool provides phone numbers down to the local level to help Soldiers and families get the information they need to take advantage of all that EFMP has to offer.

“The EFMP process can be a bit confusing because we’re separated – there’s the ACS

side of the house, which is me, and then the medical component of the program through Lyster Army Health Clinic,” she said. “Many people don’t realize we’re two separate entities. All enrollments and updates for enrollment, disenrollment and overseas screenings go through Lyster.

“Many people can also struggle with how to enroll in EFMP, what forms they need to fill out, if they can see a civilian doctor to get the forms done – this application through Military One Source really helps to clear up a lot of that confusion,” Guettler added. “EFMP & Me has the forms they need and provides them the local phone numbers – it kind of walks them through the steps they need to take.”

EFMP exists to help military families with special needs, whether medical or educational, she said, adding that there are two main functions of EFMP.

“One is to coordinate assignments. If a Soldier with a family member with an EFMP-documented special need gets an assignment, that special need is considered during the assignment process,” Guettler

said. “If there is a dependent who has asthma and needs certain therapies, or a child with autism – a very common diagnosis in EFMP – they make sure that the resources are available at the gaining installation before they make an assignment.

“The second is for EFMP to provide family support services. This puts the family in touch with local resources such as housing, schools, medical services, etc.” she said. “We’re here to help them navigate those channels.

“A lot of times people think EFMP is only for children or dependents with medical special needs, but we have a lot of children enrolled educational needs,” she said. “We see parents who are struggling with a school system off post to get the learning resources their children need, and through this tool on Military OneSource, they can find out what their education rights are and how to advocate for themselves.”

She added that because the medical part of the program is so widely used by the peo-

ple who need it, many times the ACS Family Support side of the program is overlooked.

“We are here to advocate for them, or if they need special equipment we can get them in touch with financial readiness or Army Emergency Relief for access to loans and grants. We also offer respite care, assistance with Individual Education Plans, activities and support groups,” Guettler said. “Our goal is to ensure military family members with special needs get the help they need to thrive in Army life.”

EFMP & Me is one part of a broad system of support for military families with special needs. That support starts with EFMP Family Support on installations and includes the Military OneSource network, which provides 24/7 support to service members and families anywhere in the world. [Click here](#) to access the EFMP & Me tool. Contact Military OneSource EFMP Resources, Options and Consultations for free, around-the-clock support, tools, assistance and more. Call 800-342-9647 or live chat with a consultant.

# EFMP & ME



GRAPHIC BY DAVID AGAN



# DOD celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month

By David Vergun  
*DOD News*

The Defense Department and the nation celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, Sept. 15 to Oct. 15.

It's a time to reflect on the contributions and sacrifices Hispanics have made to the United States, not just in the military, but in all walks of life.

A significant number of Hispanics have served in all of the nation's wars beginning with the Revolutionary War.

Sixty-one service members of Hispanic or Latino heritage have been awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest medal for valor. Two were sailors, 13 Marines and 46 soldiers.

Their stories of heroism are many. Here are two.

Marcelino Serna emigrated from Mexico to Texas in 1916. Although he was a Mexican citizen, he enlisted in the U.S. Army when World War I started April 1917. His request to enlist was granted and he was later shipped with other soldiers to the battlefields of France.

Serna's unit, Company B, 355th Infantry Regiment, 89th Division, was engaged in heavy fighting in the Meuse-Argonne region, Sept. 12, 1918.

During that day, Serna, a private, wounded a German sniper with his Enfield rifle and then advanced to an enemy trench where he threw three grenades, resulting in the death of 26 enemy and the capture of 24.

On Nov. 7, 1918, Serna was wounded in both of his legs by sniper fire. Fighting ended four days later on Nov. 11, when the armistice was declared.

During his recovery, Army Gen. John

J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, pinned a Distinguished Service Cross to his uniform. He was the first Hispanic American to receive the DSC, the second highest medal for valor.

Ferdinand Foch, the supreme commander of the allied forces, awarded Serna the French Croix de Guerre for bravery.

In 1924, Serna became a U.S. citizen and settled in El Paso, where he died in 1992 at the age of 95.

On Sept. 29, 2016, the United States designated the Customs and Border Protection Port of Entry at Tornillo, Texas, as the "Marcelino Serna Port of Entry."

Army Pvt. David B. Barkley Cantu, also served in the 89th Division in France during World War I and was Hispanic.

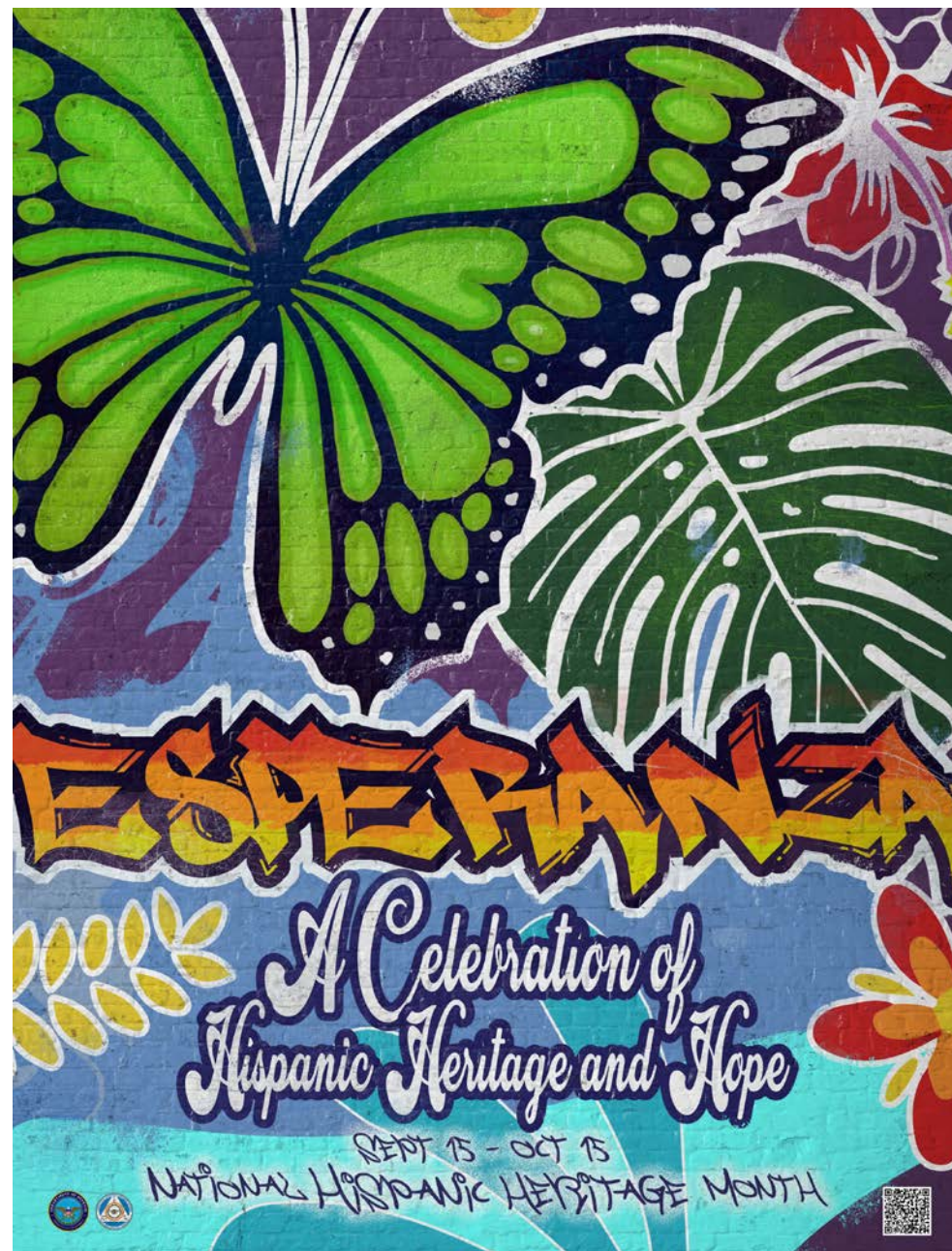
On Nov. 9, 1918, he and another soldier volunteered to swim across the Meuse River near Pouilly-sur-Meuse to get behind German lines and gather information about troop strength. On his return trip, he got cramps while swimming and drowned. The other soldier made it back to his unit and provided the commander with the intelligence the two had gathered.

For his bravery, Cantu was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Also, France awarded him the Croix de Guerre, and Italy the Croce al Merito di Guerra.

## NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Hispanic Heritage Month began as Hispanic Heritage Week in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the observance into law.

National Hispanic Heritage Month was first



DOD GRAPHIC

proclaimed by President George H. W. Bush in 1989.

Those who claim to be Latino or Hispanic

make up 17.6% of the active duty force, numbering 235,972 as of July 2021, according to the Defense Manpower Data Center.



# New SHARP policy grants additional services to Army civilians

By Thomas Brading  
*Army News Service*

WASHINGTON – The safety and well-being of all Department of the Army civilians is at the forefront of a policy unveiled Sept. 17 that allows them to receive Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention services.

“Our Army civilians deserve our support if they are victims of a sexual assault,” said James A. Helis, director of the Army Resilience Directorate that oversees the SHARP program. “We ask our Army civilians to support the prevention of sexual assault, to take sexual assault training, and to intervene when they can; the very least we can do is to be by their side if they themselves are the victim of sexual assault.”

The new policy is another example of the Army’s commitment to eliminate harmful behaviors, like sexual assault, from its workforce, Helis said.

“The Army has worked tirelessly to ensure parity for Army civilians when it comes to SHARP services,” said Jill Londagin, SHARP program director.

In the past, only DACs working overseas or in a deployed environment qualified for limited SHARP services. The only exception was if DACs were also dependents.

“When this program first started, it was believed that [non-deployed] civilians would already have access to victim services in their communities,” she said.

The latest policy opens the door for DACs to receive SHARP services, whether appropriated or non-appropriated civilians, regardless of where they are in the world. However, despite not including contractors or interns, those individuals can still see a sexual assault response coordinator to ask questions about finding resources without making a report.

The policy also lets DACs choose unrestricted reporting using multiple routes, including

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SARCs, victim advocates or victim representatives. Unrestricted reporting allows victims of sexual assault who desire to receive medical treatment, counseling, SARC and VA assistance, and an official investigation of the crime.

“Victims who make an unrestricted report of sexual assault can receive advocacy services from a SARC and a victim advocate for as long as they want instead of just while receiving emergency medical treatment while overseas,” Londagin said.

DACs can make an unrestricted report of sexual assault by using a DOD Form 2910 and SARCs are available to help assign a VA to assist them if they request one, she added.

The policy does not include restricted reporting, expedited transfers, or any additional medical entitlements or legal services DACs are not already allowed by law or policy to use, like emergency medical services, including a sexual assault forensic exam and post-exposure prophylaxis.

In regards to non-emergency services like follow-up care, DACs will not use military medical treatment facilities, if they are not eligible. Instead, SARCs, VAs and VRs will assist DACs

in finding off-post resources, like rape crisis centers and counseling services.

A special victims counsel may also be provided on a case-by-case basis for independent legal representation, dependent on the circumstances at the time of the request.

“There is no change to processes or procedures for holding individuals accountable for their actions,” Helis said. “Subjects can be investigated and prosecuted by civilian authorities if [the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command] doesn’t have jurisdiction under the [Uniform Code of Military Justice].”

“DACs who are victims of sexual assault, who chose to not receive SHARP advocacy or other support services, are highly encouraged to utilize the Employee Assistance Program,” Londagin said.

EAP services include assessments, counseling, and referrals for additional services to employees with personal or work-related concerns, she added.

SHARP services are not available to DACs for cases of sexual assault committed by an intimate partner, which is defined as a current or former spouse, a person with whom the victim

shares a child in common or a current or former intimate partner whom the victim has shared a common domicile for more than 30 days.

Relating to sexual harassment, equal employment opportunity offices will manage those complaints. SARCs, VAs and VRs can still help direct DACs to an EEO point of contact.

Although the new policy is intended to assist civilians, they will not be required to use the services.

Reporting also remains voluntary. However, victims are encouraged to report so they can receive services, offenders can be held accountable and Army leaders can see an accurate view of the depth and breadth of sexual violence within its ranks.

Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and associated retaliatory behavior have no place in the Army, Londagin said.

“Victims who receive advocacy services are more likely to receive medical treatment, engage with law enforcement and stay engaged throughout the criminal justice process,” she said. “This can have a tremendous effect not just for individual victims, but for a community in the potential to prevent additional assault.”

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

## Military health officials: Mental health care not one-size-fits-all

By Jacob Moore

*Military Health System Communications*

If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health problem or suicidal thoughts, it's important to know that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and finding the best option is key to a successful recovery.

For some people, just talking to a friend or family member can help. Others might prefer the privacy of seeking help online.

Talking to chaplains, doctors or visiting a behavioral health clinic may be the best option for someone in crisis. There is also immediate help available for the most acute and urgent problems that may involve suicidal ideations.

"It depends on the severity. If you're concerned about the immediate welfare of someone, I think the best thing to do in that case is to contact 911 or emergency services," said U.S. Public Health Service Capt. Meghan Corso, chief of Behavioral Health Clinical Operations within Defense Health Agency's Medical Affairs/Clinical Support Division at DHA headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia.

Aside from September being National Suicide Prevention Month, she noted that this is an especially important time to be aware of mental health issues given the "wide range of emotions" that service members and their family members may be experiencing surrounding the recent end to the War in Afghanistan.

"We recognize that one size might not fit all, and we want to be able to meet folks where they are in the gateway in to care," said Corso. "There's also a wide range of ideations, from mild to more severe, so again it really depends

on that level of acuity and severity. We then match the level of care and intervention to that particular individual."

The bottom line is that there are several options for getting help sooner rather than later.

A good option for many people is the integrated behavioral health consultants, typically psychologists or social workers, who are assigned across the Military Health System at any primary care clinic with an adult enrollment of more than 3,000 beneficiaries.

They are there for same-day appointments – professionals to talk to right then, right there – in the event a beneficiary needs them.

"This means that they have immediate access, and this applies to anybody who is enrolled at that military medical treatment facility," added Corso.

The military has gained momentum in recent years to reduce the stigma that was once associated with getting help, especially among service members.

"We have really worked hard to de-stigmatize help-seeking and what that does, is normalizes the experience and helps the desire to go in and get help, which is what we need people to do," Corso said. "We need them to raise their hand or intervene with a colleague or friend that they're concerned about."

An additional barrier to getting help for some, she said seeking help rarely results in an adverse impact on a person's job or potential revocation or denial of a security clearance.

According to data from the Defense



PHOTO BY KIRK FRADY

Counterintelligence and Security Agency, the agency responsible for determining security clearance eligibility, "Denials and revocations for security clearances due only to psychological issues is a .00507% chance," said Corso.

In short, it will likely not ruin your career.

"There's a really small risk to security clearances for seeking mental health services, and we've tried to get that word out," Corso said.

One of the most effective ways to support a friend or family in crisis is by simply staying connected.

"If you've heard the sentiment, 'It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem,' I think understanding and validating that people go through life events that are difficult is important. They need to know that there are people around them that really do care for them and want to help them with whatever it is that they're facing," said Corso. "I think when you pull together your family and friends – your support network – and professional medical providers, if needed, they can really help address what might feel like a helpless situation."

"We really want to drive home the fact that being connected to other people is critical to

life, let alone if you are going through a difficult time," she added.

Dr. Tim Hoyt, chief of Psychological Health Promotion and supervisor of the Combat and Operational Stress Control mission at DHA's Psychological Health Center of Excellence, agreed that talking to friends and loved ones in crisis can be hard, but it can also be extremely important.

"Listen, and let your friend do most of the talking. When they open up, express interest and don't judge them," said Hoyt.

If you are genuinely concerned that they may be thinking about hurting themselves, it's best to be direct, he said. "Ask 'How are you coping with this?' Express genuine concern and ask the straightforward question: 'I know you've been going through a lot lately. You're my friend and I care about what you're going through. I know it's common to experience depression or thoughts of suicide during times like these. Have you been thinking about killing yourself?'"

It's important to know that asking a friend about suicide won't cause that friend to attempt suicide, he said.



# DOD still seeks to find missing servicemembers from world's battlefields

By David Vergun  
DOD News

There are thousands of American service personnel missing from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War. About 75% of those are in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency estimates that almost 39,000 are recoverable, with the others being mostly deep, at-sea losses.

That agency is tasked with providing the fullest possible accounting for missing personnel from past conflicts to their families

and the nation. The DPAA continually revises its missing count as more are found, Air Force Staff Sgt. Jonathan McElderry, a DPAA forensic photographer, said.

Each year, DPAA conducts investigation-and-recovery team missions throughout the world to pinpoint last known locations of missing Americans and to attempt to excavate their remains, he said, adding that these missions are often being done simultaneously at different parts of the globe.

Recovery teams use standard field archae-



DOD PHOTOS

**Space Force Master Sgt. Hanh Le, a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recovery team linguist, prepares to catch a bucket during a DPAA recovery mission in Quang Nam province, Vietnam, June 29.**

ology methods in the excavation as directed by the on-site anthropologist. At a recovery site, the forensic anthropologist, who's also referred to as the recovery leader, directs the excavation much like a detective overseeing a crime scene, he said.

Other members of the team include a team leader, team sergeant, linguist, medic, life support technician, communications technician, forensic photographer, explosive ordnance disposal technician, and mortuary affairs specialists. Some teams include a mountaineer if the potential excavation area is on a mountainside, he said.

The number of personnel sent out to each country can vary from about 10 to more than 100. McElderry said they include service members from all branches of the military, as well as civilians.

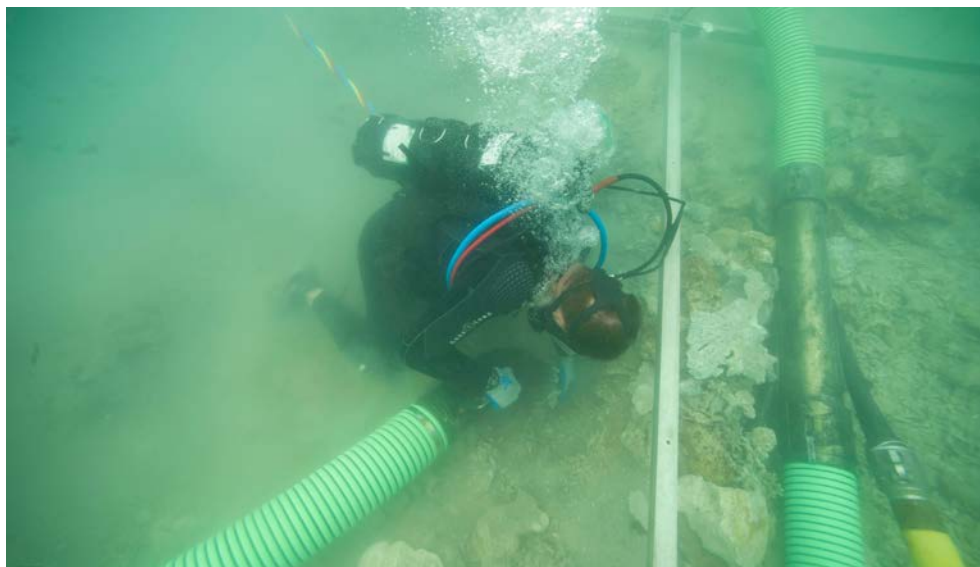
Standard recovery missions last six to eight weeks, depending on the location and recovery methods used.

Recovery sites can be as small as a few meters for individual burials to areas larger than the size of a football field for aircraft crashes, he said.

McElderry said each mission is unique, but there are certain processes each recovery has in common. The initial analysis occurs at the site, and the material is then brought back to the lab for additional examination.

At sea and in other bodies of water, divers search for remains.

So far, McElderry has been on three recovery missions, all in Vietnam, including a trip from May to July. He said recovery teams operated concurrently off the coast of Vietnam, as well as on land. His work was all



**Capt. Jacob McKorkle, assigned to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, dredges the sea floor during a March 2, 2020, underwater recovery operation aimed at searching for personnel who went missing off the coast of Ha Long Bay during the Vietnam War.**

# MISSING cont.

done on land.

McElderry said his most recent mission was different from other two due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Operations were adjusted to allow for a 21-day quarantine in Vietnam, and there were various COVID-19 mitigation procedures and personal protective equipment on site.

Besides the pandemic, another challenge was working in rugged mountains, he said. That involved hauling along safety equipment, such as ropes, harnesses, helmets and gloves. A professional mountaineer supervised the climbing and safety procedures.

Another challenge was the extreme heat and humidity and remote location, he said, mentioning that temperatures were consistently above 100 degrees.

"Despite these challenges, what kept me focused throughout the mission was just re-

membering why I was out there and how we could help the family members find a sense of closure for their loved ones who went missing. These service members gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country, so it's up to us to do our best to bring them home," he said.

Once the excavation is done, the remains undergo analysis and identification at the DPAA laboratories at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, and at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. They are the largest and most diverse skeletal identification laboratories in the world and are staffed by anthropologists, archaeologists and forensic odontologists who examine dental remains, according to the DPAA.

The lab uses mitochondrial DNA in about three-quarters of its cases. Samples taken from bones and teeth are analyzed at the Armed Forces DNA Identification



**Members of a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recovery team sift through dirt during a DPAA recovery mission in Quang Nam province, Vietnam, June 18.**

Laboratory at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, to determine the genetic sequence.

This sequence is compared with sequences from family reference samples provided by living individuals who are maternally related to the unidentified American. These family

reference samples are collected, as needed, by the casualty and mortuary offices. Generally, all persons of the same maternal line have the same mtDNA sequences.

Since these sequences are rare but not unique within the general population, they cannot stand alone as evidence for identification. In addition to the factors previously mentioned, each separate line of evidence must be examined at the lab and correlated with all historical evidence. All reports undergo a thorough peer review process that includes an external review by independent experts.

"Working here at DPAA is so rewarding. Not only is this a very humbling experience, but it also gives me a great sense of honor to serve in the military. I couldn't be more grateful to support such an impactful mission," McElderry said.

# ARMY FLIER

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