

# ARMY FLIER

SERVING THE U.S. ARMY AVIATION CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AND THE FORT RUCKER COMMUNITY SINCE 1956

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AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. ALEXANDER COOK

Soldiers fly in an MH-6 helicopter during a special operations forces capabilities demonstration over Tampa Bay, Fla., in May.

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# Fort Rucker welcomes new garrison command sergeant major

By Jim Hughes  
*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*

Fort Rucker welcomed its new garrison command sergeant major to the home of Army Aviation during a change of responsibility ceremony May 25 at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum.

Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher T. Doss, Fort Rucker garrison command sergeant major, assumed responsibility from Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond P. Quitugua Jr. as the garrison colors changed hands from Quitugua to Col. Robert J. Holcombe, garrison commander, to Doss.

Holcombe said Doss is a great fit to take on the duties of the garrison's command sergeant major.

"It's bittersweet to say goodbye to a phenomenal leader like Command Sergeant Major Quitugua, but we are excited to welcome command sergeant major and Danielle Doss to the Wiregrass and garrison family," the colonel said. "Command Sergeant Major Doss has a great reputation in Army Aviation and he is well qualified to assume his post as our CSM.

"Through our many conversations, it's clear that he knows the task ahead and is ready to take on the challenge," Holcombe added. "I'm excited to work with you, command sergeant major. I can't think of a better person to maintain the momentum that the garrison has worked so hard to achieve."

Doss said he was humbled to stand before the crowd at the ceremony and ready to serve.

"I use the word serve because it describes both our task and purpose to our nation, higher headquarters and each other," he said. "We as leaders are blessed with the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the Soldiers, civilians and families that live and work on Fort

Rucker and in the Wiregrass communities."

Doss added that he's eager to begin working with the Installation Management Command-Training, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, garrison and brigade team at the home of Army Aviation, and thanked Quitugua for a seamless transition.

"Colonel Holcombe, you lead an outstanding organization. I look forward to what we can accomplish together," he added. "I am lucky to be a member of this team."

Doss thanked the officers and NCOS who mentored him over the years, and also thanked his parents, and his wife and children.

Holcombe also spoke about Quitugua, reminding the attendees he arrived at Fort Rucker in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Under Command Sergeant Major Quitugua's leadership, they (garrison staff) transformed into an organization capable of providing hands-on service, even when social distancing," he said. "The garrison team set new standards throughout the pandemic, finding ways of safely conducting multiple live events, like Freedom Fest and the first Winterfest, Aviation Industry Days, community engagements and many more, ensuring that the strong bonds that hold us together as a community weren't frayed by isolation and fear.

"They operated under conditions that garrisons were never designed to tackle," Holcombe added. "Throughout the past 18 months, the garrison team stayed in the fight in the classrooms, in the hangars, in the barracks, and, yes, in the Coffee Zones, to make sure no element of USAACE or any other unit on Fort Rucker was lacking for support.

Through it all, Quitugua was there, the col-



PHOTO BY JIM HUGHES

**Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher T. Doss, Fort Rucker garrison command sergeant major, accepts the garrison colors from Col. Robert J. Holcombe, garrison commander, during the change of responsibility ceremony where he assumed the duties from Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond P. Quitugua Jr. May 25 at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum.**

onel said.

"His steady hand and ready ear somehow kept it all up and running," he added. "He was there for all of us, watching our backs and was equally comfortable briefing junior Soldiers or four-star generals. His love for this garrison and his teammates is absolute. He is a leader who knows his team so well that he can tell when someone is hurting and needs that extra attention. His competence and demeanor make him a sounding board not only for leadership throughout the installation, but also across this community and even other garrisons.

"The Army has recognized his potential for service in positions of greater responsibility and they are entrusting the entire Chemical Branch to his care and sending him to Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri)," Holcombe said. "He will certainly take them to great heights and will continue his amazing record of service to the Army and our nation."

Quitugua spent most of his time at the podium speaking about the accomplishments of his garrison teammates, and how great it was

working with the surrounding communities and leadership across USAACE and the rest of Fort Rucker.

"Senior leaders always ask what kind of a leader a subordinate aspires to be. My answer has always been the same: I want to be an inspirational leader who enacts transformational change," the outgoing command sergeant major said. "Well, I will tell you this: this assignment has actually inspired me."

He then thanked the garrison team, his former garrison commander, and USAACE, other unit and community leaders for making his time at Fort Rucker so rewarding. He also thanked his wife and children for all of their support.

"Well Fort Rucker, the Quituguas' time here has come to a close," he added. "I know it feels just as brief to you as it has to us; however, do not forget for a second how much we accomplished together. Fort Rucker has been really good to us, and we will forever hold this place and its people very close to our hearts."

# Daughter of Fort Rucker Soldier earns Miss Ozark title

By Jim Hughes

*Fort Rucker Public Affairs*



GiGi with her father, Whitney, and mother, Melissa.

COURTESY PHOTOS

The daughter of the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence chief of staff earned the honor of representing a nearby community when she became Miss Ozark at the city's pageant April 30.

Greta "GiGi" Gardner, daughter of Col. Whitney B. and Melissa Gardner, said she is thrilled and proud to represent the city in which she's lived for the past year.

"This is really special for me," GiGi, who will be a senior at Carroll High School in Ozark next year, said. "I'm a military child and while I may not have grown up here, I love Ozark so much. I think that is one of the main things that they saw with me, and one of the main things that I spoke about – there's nothing that I would be more proud of than to represent the city and Fort Rucker."

She will represent the city at numerous events throughout the summer, and also at the Miss National Peanut Festival pageant this fall that will feature contestants from Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

Even though she will face off against many more competitors and the stakes will be even higher at the National Peanut Festival pageant, GiGi remains confident – a recurring theme with the teen.

"I'm confident and nervous – nervous mainly because I know all of the girls I met through these events and they are all amazing," she said, adding that while she would be happy for any of her competitors to win the pageant, her main goal is to earn the title of Miss National Peanut Festival herself. "I believe I have a great shot at it."

And that's the way she approaches most things in her life, she said when asked about her philosophy for success.

"Confidence, for sure, but I also feel that

if you don't have your mind on something, you won't achieve it," she said. "When I put my mind to something, I am more likely to achieve it, but if it's not exactly there, then I won't be at my strongest."

When pressed for an Oscars-like acceptance speech for winning Miss Ozark, GiGi thanked all of the people who helped her achieve her goal.

"It was definitely not a one-person show, even if it was just me up on the stage," she said. "A lot of people put a lot of work into it. I really want to thank my parents for believing in me and letting me sign up for the event that they knew was going to take up a lot of my time. They are my biggest supporters."

Her biggest supporters are justifiably proud of GiGi and her accomplishments, according to her father.

"I've been most impressed with how willing she has been to put herself out there," Whitney said. "She has had extremely minimal experience doing pageants. Most girls who enjoy doing pageants are drawn to them at an early age. It can be difficult for a military kid to connect quickly or deeply with a school or with a community, but she loves Carroll High School and the city of Ozark. She'll be a great representative of the city."

"She never quits," he added. "She is always trying new things. Melissa and I are so impressed with how brave she is, how willing she is to compete, to put herself out there and represent herself well and learn – she always wants to learn."

GiGi is proud of her military and Fort Rucker affiliations, her father added.

"She's a good example for Fort Rucker kids," Whitney added. "She's a good person who wants to do well – she's proud to repre-

## MISS OZARK cont.



GiGi was also named most photogenic.

sent the city and the military. I think she is an all-around great representative of Ozark and Fort Rucker. I think she has a really strong chance of earning the Miss National Peanut Festival title. It would be such a huge thing for her, for Ozark and also for Fort Rucker.”

GiGi said being a military kid has played a major role in making her who she is today.

“Even though I have some military kid friends who would say it isn’t always the best, I believe it’s become a part of who I am,” she said, adding that she can’t imagine who she’d be if she lived in one place all of her life. “Living in all of the places I’ve lived and knowing all of the people I’ve known – I’ve had to say goodbye to great friends and peo-

ple I really cared about from moving – has really opened my eyes to a lot of things that I realize not very many people get to see. It’s made me stronger.”

When she’s not winning pageants or excelling at school, GiGi said she enjoys cheer-leading.

“That has always been my favorite thing to do – I love the team, I love to cheer, I love stunting, I love supporting our teams,” she added. “I also learned how to play soccer and softball, and I am in student government, which is another thing I’m very passionate about. I love being a part of that and doing things for the school and for the students.

“I can’t say that I have a lot of free time,

but when I do, I normally just sit and hang out with my parents,” she said. “That might sound kind of boring, but I really do like to just hang and talk with them. I also love being with my friends.”

After high school, GiGi plans to use her varied experiences and scholarships from the pageants to go to college.

“I am keeping my options open on schools – I would like to visit them and learn more about them,” she said. “But so far, I like Troy, Auburn University, Mississippi State, and the College of Charleston. I plan to major in entomology, and become a conservation and environmental biologist.”

## Fort Rucker hosts Memorial Day Ceremony

Maj. Gen. David J. Francis, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general, CW5 Michael L. Lewis Jr., chief warrant officer of the Aviation Branch, and Command Sgt. Maj. James D. Wilson, Aviation Branch command sergeant major, salute during the Memorial Day Ceremony held at Fort Rucker’s Veterans Park May 27.



PHOTO BY JIM HUGHES

# Honoring the brave Soldiers who took part in Operation Overlord

By Cpl. Jordan Pearson  
*Army News Service*

NORMANDY, France — Every year, service members from across the globe travel to the small, historical village of Sainte-Mere-Eglise in Normandy, France, to honor the brave men and women who took part in Operation Overlord in June of 1944.

Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, along with the French and German armies, participated in a ceremony that commemorates and honors the men of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Regiment, 101st Airborne Division who lost their lives when their C-47 aircraft was hit by enemy fire.

Col. Mark Denton, commander of Task Force 78 and the 207th Military Intelligence Brigade - Theater, spoke at the ceremony. During Denton's speech, he talked on the selflessness and impeccable bravery of the men of the famed Easy Company.

"When I imagine the hours leading up to the D-Day landings in June 1944, I think about the brave service members and what must have been going through their mind as they prepared to execute what is still known as the largest ever multinational amphibious landing and military airdrop in history,"



Col. Mark Denton, commander, 207th Military Intelligence Brigade – Theater, meets with soldiers from the German Army during a ceremony that commemorates and honors the men of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Regiment, 101st Airborne Division who lost their lives when their C-47 aircraft was hit by enemy fire in June of 1944, Sainte Mere Eglise, Normandy, France, June 2.



PHOTOS BY CPL. JORDAN PETERSON

Cliff Stump, a U.S. Army veteran who served with the 82nd Airborne Division, delivers a thumbs up.

Denton said.

Almost 78 years to the day, French Soldiers, civilians and government officials still welcome U.S. Soldiers with open arms to their land.

"I feel immense gratitude to the people of France," Denton said at the close of the ceremony. "The people of France welcomed our Soldiers into their towns and communities today, just like they did over 70 years ago."

In recognition of the anniversary of D-Day, Task Force 78 welcomed 30 veterans of World War II back to Normandy. While in France, the veterans will participate in commemoration events. For some veterans,

this is the first time they have returned to Normandy since World War II.

The 207th Military Intelligence Brigade - Theater conducts intelligence analysis, collection, and exploitation in support of Southern European Task Force-Africa (SETAF) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) in order to set the intelligence architecture for the theater, disrupt transnational and transregional threats and promote regional stability in Africa while building and maintaining intelligence readiness. Task Force 78 is responsible for housing, feeding and transporting roughly 600 Soldiers from around the globe to nearly 60 ceremonies across Normandy.

**FREEDOM FEST**

**FRANK FOSTER**

**RUMBLE OVER RUCKER**

**JUNE 30TH, 2022**  
**FORT RUCKER, AL**

**HUNTER CLARK**

**MCOE BAND**

**THE ROCK MOB**

**ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED BY BAMA SLAM**

**U.S. ARMY MWR**  
SOLDIER. FAMILIES. COMMUNITY.

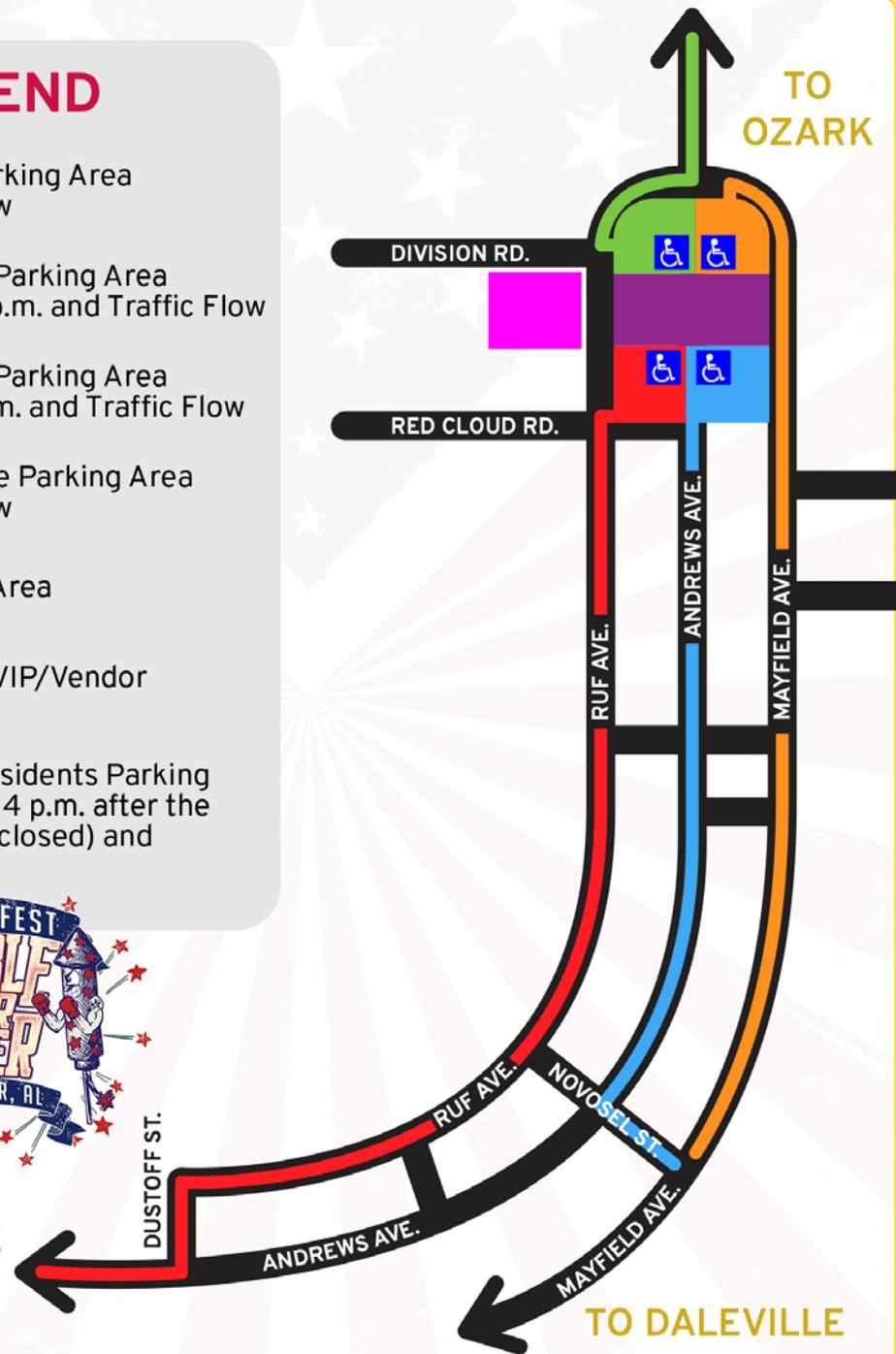
The poster features a patriotic theme with a background of red and white stripes and a blue field with white stars. At the top, a banner reads 'FREEDOM FEST'. Below it, the event title 'RUMBLE OVER RUCKER' is written in large, bold, red and white letters. The date and location, 'JUNE 30TH, 2022' and 'FORT RUCKER, AL', are displayed in a blue banner. The names of the performing artists are listed in white text on red and blue banners: 'FRANK FOSTER' (top right), 'HUNTER CLARK' (bottom left), 'MCOE BAND' (bottom center), and 'THE ROCK MOB' (bottom right). A large black and white photo of Frank Foster performing on stage is in the upper right. Other photos include Hunter Clark playing guitar, the Mcoe Band performing on a stage, and silhouettes of The Rock Mob. The U.S. Army MWR logo is in the bottom left corner.

# 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  
OZARK

DIVISION RD.

RED CLOUD RD.

RUF AVE.

ANDREWS AVE.

MAYFIELD AVE.

RUF AVE.

NOVOSEL ST.

ANDREWS AVE.

MAYFIELD AVE.

TO DALEVILLE

DUSTOFF ST.

**Coming to Freedom Fest?** If you need a visitor's pass, don't wait until the last minute. **Plan ahead!**



**DALEVILLE VCC IS OPEN**  
8 A.M. – 4 P.M.  
MONDAY – SUNDAY

**OZARK VCC IS OPEN**  
8 A.M. – 4 P.M.  
MONDAY – FRIDAY

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.



# Experienced environmental team helps bolster diverse wildlife at Fort Rucker

By Thomas Milligan

*U.S. Army Environmental Command*

A dedicated, skilled environmental team, with diverse backgrounds and experiences, is credited with helping Fort Rucker make real strides in supporting wildlife and habitat, while maintaining the focus on providing critical training space.

“Our team brings a set of diverse and experienced backgrounds, and all of our team members have worked in many different environmental programs over the years and can successfully support one another and the

comprehensive nature of our work together,” said Marty Daniel, Fort Rucker Natural Resources Branch chief. “We exchange ideas, perspectives and lessons learned, and work well together to achieve our goals.”

One example of this approach in action is the work the team did with Auburn University and State of Alabama wildlife and fisheries staff to study the white-tailed deer population on the installation. Research projects in 2011 and 2014 identified coyote



**A gopher tortoise is next to its burrow on Fort Rucker. Fort Rucker has the largest private gopher tortoise population in the southeast. Based on a survey conducted in 2019 there is estimated to be 2,872 gopher tortoises on the installation.**



ARMY PHOTOS

**Feral pigs in a corral trap on Fort Rucker. In FY 2020-2021, 1,249 feral pigs were removed from the installation. Fort Rucker's feral pig trapping program has helped the deer herd become healthier, as well.**

predation and habitat competition from feral hogs as a driver in a drop in overall deer population and herd health.

Armed with this knowledge, the Fort Rucker environmental team helped establish guidelines for deer hunting designed to bolster the health of the herd, and launched feral pig and coyote trapping programs. At their peak, the programs trapped more than 90 coyotes a year and more than 1,400 feral hogs a year, which in turn bolstered the overall health of the deer herd.

The Fort Rucker team also partnered with Auburn University and the University of Georgia researchers to address a concerning decline in the eastern wild turkey population in the region and on the installation. The teams collected ambient sound in turkey habitat areas and are developing methods to determine turkey activity. The research is designed to understand “gobbling” activity and how location and land ownership (private vs. public), habitat variables and predator management programs all affect the turkey population. That work is ongoing.

Fort Rucker also has the largest non-private gopher tortoise population in Alabama. A survey in 2019 estimated there are 2,872 gopher tortoises on the installation. To protect this species, Fort Rucker environmental staff established a program to remove the tortoises from any areas where they could be harmed by installation activities or Army training. The team created a 1 1/2-acre enclosure for these tortoises to provide a safe, suitable environment for them for six months, after which they are relocated to a suitable environment elsewhere on the installation.

As part of this work, Fort Rucker has become a member of the Alabama Tortoise Alliance and works with other organizations, groups and communities to help conserve the species and communicate and collaborate on conservation planning and efforts. The goal is to boost the gopher tortoise population so that it no longer warrants state or federal protection.

Fort Rucker's primary mission is to support aviation training programs on the installation's 57,772 acres.

# Army Inspector General starts New Soldier Experience inspection

By Thomas Ruyle

*Department of the Army Inspector General*

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Army Inspector General has started an unprecedented inspection of all systems, processes and experiences of the nation's newest Soldiers.

The New Soldier Experience inspection will examine every aspect of entering Army service, including shipping from the military entrance processing station to Initial Entry Training; Advanced Individual Training, and the first units of assignment. It will examine reception, quality of life initiatives, the training experience, and why some are motivated to leave the Army before the completion of their first enlistment.

The New Soldier Experience inspection, which could take up to a year to complete, began in mid-March when inspectors and subject matter experts from both the operating and generating force arrived at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for a pre-inspection.

Lt. Gen. Donna W. Martin, the 67th Inspector General of the Army, emphasized the significance of the New Soldier Experience inspection.

“This inspection ties directly to the priorities of the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army,” she said. “It is imperative that we build cohesive teams and create a positive command climate from the moment a new Soldier enlists into the Army. The young men and women joining our Army today want a challenge, and they desire to be a part of something greater than themselves. We really have to get their initial experience in our Army right.”

## WHAT IS THE NEW SOLDIER EXPERIENCE INSPECTION?

The New Soldier Experience inspection will include interviews with leaders, trainers, cadre and Soldiers, and review processes and programs at 38 Army locations across all components from March 2022 through the end of the year. Inspectors will also interview command teams, drill sergeants, medical providers, reception center personnel, Soldiers in training and Soldiers who are exiting the Army before completing their initial enlistments, along with many other groups who affect the experience on these installations.

“The New Soldier Experience inspection differs from any other inspection conducted because it is a comprehensive look at all the systems that support the civilian to military transition and our first-term Soldiers,” Martin said. “It will look at the experience our newest Soldiers are having in the training base and at their first units of assignment.”

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE NEW SOLDIER EXPERIENCE INSPECTION

\* Assessing the Army's ability to transform civilian volunteers into professional Soldiers with common core values, ethical reasoning, motivation and discipline.

\* Examining the new Soldiers' experience from Initial Entry Training through their arrival at their initial duty assignments.

\* The New Soldier Experience inspection will identify best practices and centers of excellence that the Army can replicate to ensure new Soldiers prosper and contribute to the



PHOTO BY THOMAS RUYLE

**Sgt. Maj. Larry Orvis, center, the Department of the Army Inspector General sergeant major, speaks with inspectors general assigned to Fort Sill, Okla., March 15 as part of the New Soldier Experience pre-inspection visit there. The New Soldier Experience inspection is designed to assess the Army's ability to train, integrate and retain first-term Soldiers.**

Army's readiness.

## WHY NEW SOLDIER EXPERIENCE INSPECTION, AND WHY NOW?

In September 2021, Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth approved Martin's recommendation to begin an all-encompassing, special inspection of the Army's process to integrate new Soldiers into the ranks. The Inspector General acts as the eyes, ears, voice and conscience of the Army.

The New Soldier Experience inspection will specifically address three of Secretary Wormuth's six priorities.

\* Build positive command climates at scale across all Army formations.

\* Reduce harmful behaviors in our Army.

\* Strategically adapt the way we recruit and retain talent into the Army in order to sustain the all-volunteer force.

“The effort being put forth by the entire IG system in support of New Soldier Experience inspection is commendable,” Wormuth said in a video address to the Worldwide Inspector General Conference in April.

The inspection will continue into late 2022, with a full report to Army senior leaders to follow in the months after that.

Secretary Wormuth will review the final inspection report to find ways to improve how the Army trains, mentors, and integrates new Soldiers into effective and cohesive teams.



# ADJUSTING ON THE FLY

## KFOR MedEvac team crosses borders to save lives

By Sgt. 1st Class Warren W. Wright Jr.  
138th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo – When the term MedEvac is mentioned, the thought of injured Soldiers being carried by stretcher and loaded onto Black Hawk helicopters is often the first thought to come to mind. However, a much different story recently played for one Kosovo Force aircrew who was called out to the rugged landscape of Albania's northern mountain range.

It began as a typical, quiet Saturday morning at Camp Bondsteel for the on-call MedEvac crew of Detachment 2, C Company, 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, Virginia National Guard. That is until a call came in notifying them of a potential MedEvac request from an unlikely source.

"At about 12 o'clock, I got a call from our battalion commander, and he just kind of gave me a heads up and said, 'hey, you know, be prepared, there might be a MedEvac (request) coming through,'" explained Capt. Christopher Jackson, operations officer with 2nd Bn., 224th Avn. Reg. "I went ahead and called our MedEvac, let them know a MedEvac (request might) come through, that way they can get their crews pulled up and get them ready."

The initiating incident occurred earlier that morning May 28 when two Albanian State Police officers were injured when their vehicle rolled down a cliff.

Due to the remote location of the incident and the specialized equipment necessary to extract the injured officers, Albanian officials

sent a request for aid to KFOR, who in turn tasked Regional Command East with the vital life-saving mission.

RC-East passed the mission down to the aviation team of Task Force Pegasus, where coordination for the MedEvac began.

Initial information received by Jackson stated the incident in Albania included "two Albanian police officers; where one was critically injured and unconscious, (and) another one was noncritical, but also injured," he said. "They were doing some sort of operation, got in a vehicle accident, rolled down the cliff and were injured. They needed a hoist and a ventilator, which hoist (operations) is something our MedEvac trains with all the time, but never actually done as a real mission."

Upon receiving notification the request would be coming through, the on-call MedEvac team with 1st Bn., 169 Avn. Reg., call sign Samaritan 17, began loading the necessary equipment, developing an action plan, and started spinning up their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

"You always prepare for what's going to happen; you play through that in your mind," said CW4 Brady Lemmon, the team's pilot in command. "It's happened before, but this was my first time I've ever done that and to be able to execute it at the level that we did, I'm very proud of that."

When asked what he thought about conducting a MedEvac in Albania, Lemmon said "that it didn't matter. We had a grid coordi-



PHOTO BY SGT. 1ST CLASS WARREN W. WRIGHT JR.

**CW2 William Von Hemert, CW4 Brady Lemmon, Sgt. Christopher Buchanan, Sgt. Ashley Camper and Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Moore, all MedEvac crewmembers with Detachment 2, C Company, 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, Virginia National Guard, stand in front of their UH-60 Black Hawk MedEvac helicopter at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, June 2.**

nate; we had people to help. It could have been anywhere."

In addition to Lemmon, Samaritan 17 included CW2 William Von Hemert, pilot; Sgt. Christopher Buchanan, crew chief; Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Moore, medic; and Sgt. Ashley Camper, medic.

Before departing Camp Bondsteel, the Samaritan 17 crew had a good understanding of what they were flying into, thanks to the information they received from the 9-line MedEvac request. A 9-line is a military system used to relay information about the location, severity of injuries, specialized equipment

needed, and more, so MedEvac crews are as prepared as possible when responding to an incident.

However, the information they had on hand couldn't prepare them for everything they would encounter when they arrived on the scene.

"We heard (they were) in a gorge, but we didn't realize that there was going to be 800-meter cliff bases all around us and have to be in such a tight area," Von Hemert said. "And that's kind of the nature of MedEvac. We train that when we get on scene, we assess everything from winds, terrain, ingress and



# Army re-activates historic airborne unit, reaffirms commitment to Arctic Strategy

By Joe Lacdan  
*Army News Service*

FORT WAINWRIGHT, Alaska – Several hundred Soldiers gathered in formation within the Alaskan Interior on a bright June morning Monday to take part in the activation of the 11th Airborne Division, posturing U.S. forces for strategic advantage in the harsh Arctic terrain.

The 11th Airborne Division unites about 12,000 Soldiers in Alaska under one flag, marking the first time that the Army has activated an airborne division in 70 years. During flag ceremonies Monday at Fort Wainwright and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, the Army also re-designated the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team and the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, formerly of the 25th Infantry Division, into the 1st and 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Teams of the 11th Airborne, respectively.

The activation reaffirms the Army's commitment to its recently announced Arctic Strategy, which outlines the service's plan to equip, organize and train with partner units to establish military dominance in the region. The division will be headquartered at JBER and members will wear the unit's distinctive blue patch with a red and white emblem with angel wings to symbolize the unit's call sign, "Angels."

"Wherever you go, you will be the most highly trained, disciplined and fit Arctic warfighting unit in the world; ready to fight and win," Army Chief of Staff, Gen. James C. McConville said to Soldiers at Fort

Wainwright. "That is what you will do. That is you who are. We are counting on you."

The activation also serves another purpose. By uniting the Army units as one airborne unit, Army leaders hope the activation can ignite a greater sense of camaraderie and enthusiasm for Soldiers serving in one of the U.S. military's most remote and desolate locations.

In recent months, the Army's senior leaders have met with commanders at Alaskan installations to address quality of life concerns of Soldiers. Assessments revealed that the previous unit designations did not support unit cohesion.

"Experience has told us that units that have a common unit identity is a source of pride," McConville said to reporters. "It's extremely important. And the history of a unit and the patch matter."

McConville said the Soldiers of the 11th Airborne Division will be equipped with cold weather gear within the next 1-2 years. He added that the unit will serve as the Army's leading experts for Arctic military operations.

McConville said that the Stryker Brigade Combat Team based at Fort Wainwright will transition to become a more mobile, infantry-based brigade combat team bolstered with a stronger air assault capability and the skills to maneuver effectively in extreme cold weather environments.

McConville added that the Army plans



PHOTO BY SENIOR AIRMAN PATRICK SULLIVAN

**Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 11th Airborne Division, stand at Pershing Parade Field during the reflagging ceremony of the 11th Airborne Division on June 6 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.**

to move the armored Strykers out of Alaska by the end of the summer as it continues the acquisition process of Cold Weather, All-Terrain Vehicles or CATVs.

The 11th Airborne Division originally played a critical role during World War II and the Vietnam War. The Army credits the unit with the amphibious assault landing at Luzon, Philippines, and eventually helped secure the liberation of Manila from Japanese forces.

"The 11th Airborne Division has a storied history of valor during World War II in the Pacific and also has a proud history of innovation," McConville said. "So we expect them to live up to the legacy .... We expect them to be masters of their craft in Arctic warfighting and extreme cold weather and high altitude and terrain. We expect them to develop innovative ways of operating in this

environment."

The Army now has a strategically located unit that can quickly deploy to any region, especially those in cold weather climates such as Nepal and India.

"Their focus will be on dismounted and Arctic mobility and capabilities of sustained operation in the Arctic [and] extreme cold weather," said 11th Airborne Division Commander Maj. Gen. Brian Eifler. "In addition, they will be providing those capabilities in other cold weather environments."

Eifler added that U.S. Army Pacific Commander Gen. Charles A. Flynn traveled to Nepal to meet with Nepalese leaders on coordinating more training opportunities with U.S. Army infantry brigade combat teams. Eifler said that includes the possibility of taking part in a joint expedition on Mount Everest.

## 1-11th Avn. Regt. welcomes new commander

Lt. Col. April Kearney assumes command of the 1st Battalion, 11th Aviation Regiment from Lt. Col. Bryan Whittier during a change of command ceremony June 3 at Howze Field.



PHOTO BY 2ND LT. MICHAEL NEEDHAM

# ARMY FLIER

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