

BEACON



514th Air Mobility Wing, Air Force Reserve, McGuire AFB, NJ

Bottoms up

Buddy system keeps wing members hydrated during Battle Axe/ORI prep

See Page 6



SeaGirt hosts water survival training and annual squadron picnic

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Wing emblem contest open to all - rules, deadlines announced

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Surviving Hurricane Katrina - AFRC aid given, cleanup begins

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BEACON

September 2005

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The deadline for submitting BEACON articles is the first day of the month for publication in next month's issue. Submit the article on disk in Microsoft Word, and include your name and phone number. Articles can also be submitted via e-mail to: 514amw.pa@mcguire.af.mil. Call (609) 754-3487 for more information.

NEWS

Command people step forward to help Hurricane Katrina survivors

ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. - From coast to coast, people assigned to and associated with Air Force Reserve Command are stepping forward to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Pararescue people, aeromedical caregivers, airlift crews, aerial porters and reservists from dozens of other specialties have logged hundreds of missions, shuttled thousands of passengers and patients, and delivered tons of supplies and equipment since the hurricane hit Aug. 29.

"I'm amazed, no, I'm more than amazed at what our people have been able to do for their fellow Americans," said Maj. Gen. David E. Tanzi, AFRC vice commander. "We knew all along our people could do this. I'm so proud of them. This is what America is all about."

Reservists from Florida, Texas, Ohio, Wisconsin, Washington and dozens of other states called their units to volunteer, and individual mobilization augmentees went to their

administrators to sign up to help.

And for every reservist participating in the relief effort, a family member, retiree or friend has donated his or her time, money or blood.

"Now is not the time to wring one's hands and wonder what to do," General Tanzi said. "People can roll up their sleeves or write a check. We should all do something to ease the suffering during this national emergency."

In addition to giving to national relief agencies such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army, people can volunteer to join efforts in Louisiana and Mississippi or stay at home to sort and package goods to be delivered to victims.

"People want to help, but they need to donate items that can be used right away," said Master Sgt. John Hunt. "Properly packaged food and bottled water are among the things that could be used by the people we saw. They also needed diapers and baby formula."

AFRC News Service



Photo by Kenn Mann

ANSWERING THE CALL - MSgt. Alex Saharig, an aeromedical evacuation technician with the 714th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron prepares medical equipment for deployment to New Orleans for relief operations of Hurricane Katrina. He is one of 23 volunteers from the 514th and 714th AES who left Sept. 3 to join other Reserve, active duty and Air National Guard medevac members at an AES staging area at Kelly AFB, Texas, set up in support of the victims of the natural disaster that recently hit the coast lines of Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. The medical staff will stage evacuations out of New Orleans to various locations. They are expecting to work 24-hour duty days caring for all types of medical emergencies including critical care patients. The medevac group departed on a Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., C-130 with 4,000 pounds of medical equipment and 3,500 pounds of water to self-sustain them during Hurricane Katrina Recovery. See page 12 for more Katrina-related stories.

BEACON

514th Air Mobility Wing, Air Force Reserve, McGuire AFB, NJ

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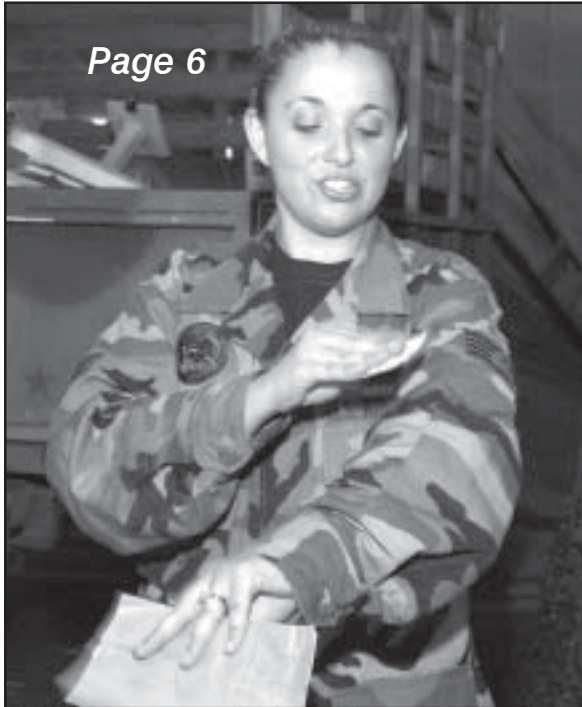


Photo by Denise Gould

DECONTAMINATION - SSgt. Nermine Prusecki an instructor with the 514th Civil Engineering Squadron demonstrates the correct way to use the M291 decontamination kit. The 514th Air Mobility Wing Readiness and Emergency Management Flight held two Battle Axe Operational Readiness Inspection spin up classes on each Sunday during the August unit training assembly weekends. The readiness section trained More than 200 wing members. See Page 6.

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Photo by Kenn Mann

OUT TO SEA - Although Capt. Vicky Lagergren of the 514th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, appears to be floundering in the open sea, she really is practicing treading water during the 732nd Airlift Squadron's 3rd annual water survival training held Aug. 20 at the SeaGirt Army National Guard, SeaGirt, N.J. See Page 8.

On the cover



Photo by Denise Gould

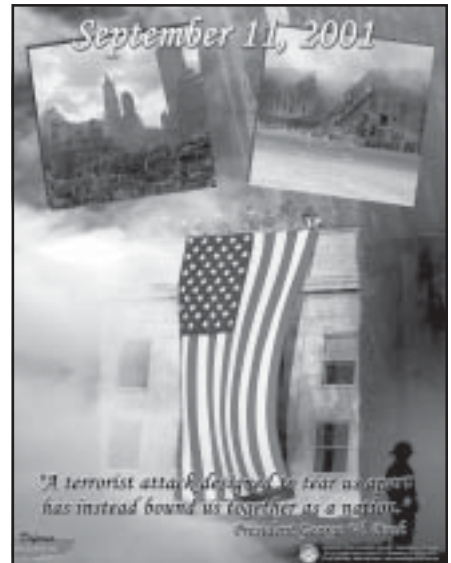
Participants of the Battle Axe training assist each other in drinking water from a canteen while in Mission Oriented Protective Posture level four. The 514

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Daylight Savings

Oct. 30

Set your clocks back one hour

VIBES:

Sept. 17 is Constitution/Citizenship Day. What do you value most about your United States citizenship?



A1C Pedro Aleman
514th CES

I was born and raised in New York City. The thing I value the most is my word (freedom of speech) and my ability to live up to my word.



SrA Deborah Green
514th ASTS

I value my freedom to speak, travel and make my own choices like my religion, the church I attend, my civil rights, who I marry and my education.



Maj. Stephen Henske
514th ALCF

I value the right to choose my own government representatives and policies. I can vote to make changes or put those in charge who can make the changes.



MSgt. Elizabeth Mitchell
514th AMW

I value the freedom and opportunities available to those of us living here.



A1C Joe Roman
514th SFS

What I value most about my citizenship is my freedom and my right to vote and to choose my political leaders.

LOCAL NEWS

Wing picks quarterly award winners

The following 514th Air Mobility Wing members were selected as the Airmen, NCO and Senior NCO of the third quarter:

SrA Erin I. Dere, 514th ASTS

TSgt. John A. DiPasquale, 732nd AS

MSgt. James L. Blizzard, 514th SFS

Fourth quarter nominations must be submitted to the 514th AMW headquarters, Building 2217 by Oct. 25. The board meets Nov. 6.



Photo by 1st. Lt. Robert Sperling

SUMMER FUN - Members of the 35th Aerial Port Squadron and their families, help themselves to barbecue and fixins' Aug. 6 during the unit's annual picnic held at the John Mann Recreation Park on Fort Dix, N.J. Several squadrons within the 514th Air Mobility Wing invite their member's families to a summer unit training assembly to show them the mission and end the day with a picnic.



Photo by Denise Gould

Louise Miller, 514th Air Mobility Wing, financial management officer, receives a certificate for her 30 years of civil service from Col. James N. Stewart, commander, 514th AMW. Mrs. Miller entered civil service July 16, 1975 and will retire Oct. 3.

Wing holds emblem drawing contest

By SSgt. Monica Dalberg.
514 AMW Public Affairs

The 514th Air Mobility Wing patch Design Contest is underway and open to both military and civilian members assigned to the 514th AMW. The contest gives wing members the chance to win \$150 and have their design concept on the unit patch!

According to Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, the current patch must be redesigned to remove the depictions of the airplane, parachute and lightning bolt.

Design submissions must emphasize simplicity and be consistent with the "Freedom Wing" motto and the wing mission.

The existing patch shape, size, wording on the bottom, color arrangement and scheme cannot be changed. Submissions packages must include a detailed explanation, clearly discussing the meaning of the symbols used and why they were selected for the design.

Submission packages must be sent through the unit's individual group com-

mander, in a dual-pocket folder that includes the full name, rank, and unit of assignment, hard copies (one each) of the design, concept explanation, along with a computer floppy disc or compact disc containing design concept and explanation by 4:30 p.m., Oct. 31.

Final selection will be determined by a senior leadership committee composed of members from all groups. The contest winner will be notified through their group commander by Nov. 18.

For more information on United States Air Force patch design, please visit <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil>. Input AFI 84-105 in the space provided for Short Title search and see Chapter 3 of the AFI.

Prospective designers may view a Power Point slide of the canvas — the blank patch they will be working with — at <http://514amw.mcguire.af.mil>. The



point of contact for this contest is Lt. Col. Raymond Douglas (609) 754-5216.



Photo by Brian Dyjak

FOREVER PLAID - "Smudge," left, played by MSgt. Eugene Brown of the 514th Air Mobility Wing Honor Guard, sings a rendition of "No Not Much" with A1C Michael Young, right, playing "Francis" and A1C Zuri Saaga, rear, playing "Sparky," both of the 305th Air Mobility Wing. The group of five performers were featured in the Stuart Ross musical "Forever Plaid" held Aug. 5 and 6 at the McGuire Officer's Club.



Photos by Denise Gould/Artwork by MSgt. Bill Dowell

Battle Ax

Training prepares wing for real world, ORI situa

By MSgt. Donna T. Jeffries
514 AMW Public Affairs

Survive to Operate was the name of the game for members who participated in the operational reading training, held Sunday during the August unit training.

Armed with the Airmen's Manual, wing members arrived at the facility dressed in field gear and carrying their chemical defense equipment.

Every two hours 11 Battle Axe instructors met the next day with students and took them through a series of classroom and hands-on lessons. Lessons were broken down into the following five sections: detection, pre-attack actions; trans-attack/post attack actions; egress, decontamination, and first aid; and self-aid buddy care.

Students experienced scenarios such as, challenge and detection, detecting contamination, that they could expect to encounter in the field. Deployments to areas of conflict and what they will be tested on were discussed. The training was scheduled to take place at the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center.

Many walked away hot, dripping in sweat and covered in mud. They were not just wearing gear, but also better prepared to survive and operate.

"The training was excellent and put us in the mindset of the ORI," said SMSgt. Claudia Bell, of the 514th Aeromedical Squadron. As well as providing a comfort level about the gear, she also helped them look at their weaknesses, SMSgt. Bell said the training allowed them to look at all the components surrounding warfare.

"I learned something at every stage," she said. "I would like to see a lot more of training every time we have an inspection."



SSgt. Javier Diaz of the 514th Civil Engineer Squadron views samples of different chemical concentrations on the M-8 Chemical Detector Paper.



Students use the buddy system to ensure each other is secured properly while undergoing a mock threat during the Aug. 21 training.

...e sharpens war skills

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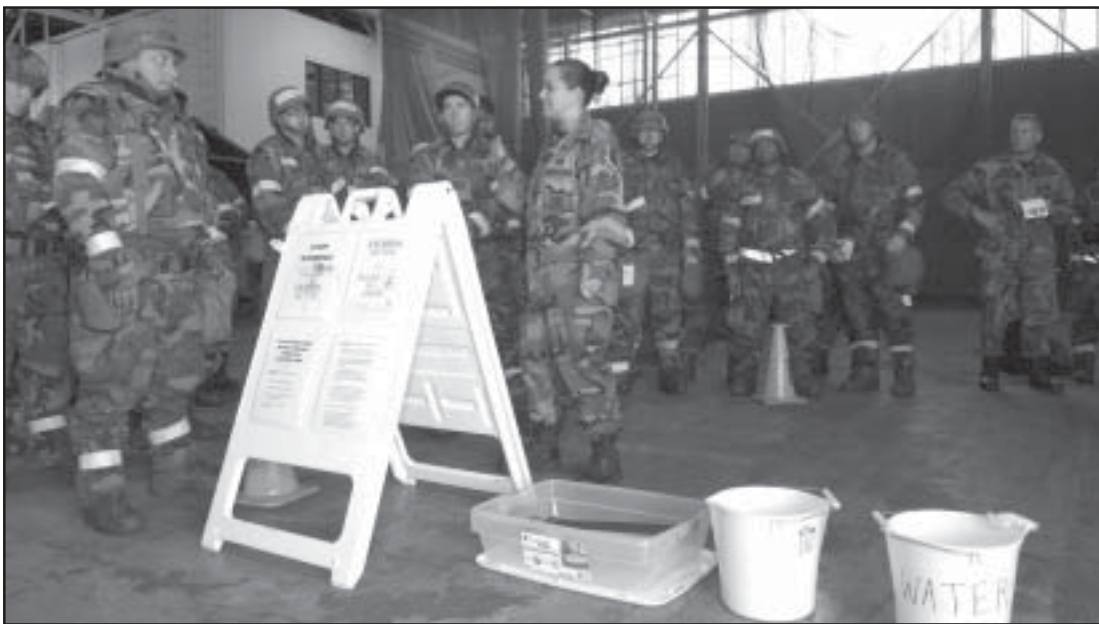
ld like to see this type



A Battle Axe participant practices donning the protective gas mask and hood within 15 seconds in preparation for October's Operation Readiness Inspection to be held at Alpena CRTC, Mich.



**er's protective mask
at elevation during**



Wing members get instruction on how to safely exit a contaminated area and enter a sterile environment. Everyone had the opportunity to practice the decontamination procedures.

514th mixes work with play

SeaGirt's wet, wild waves test unit member's water survival skills during annual

By MSgt. Donna T. Jeffries
514 AMW Public Affairs

For the third year running, 514th Air Mobility Wing members experienced the best of water and land Aug. 20 while mixing business with pleasure on the shores of SeaGirt's Army National Guard beach.

Members from five wing units spent the morning undergoing water survival training and the afternoon enjoying an old-fashioned picnic with squadron and family members.

Instructors from the 305th Life Support section specially trained in survival, evasion, rescue and escape provided training in the following areas: treading water, inflating life vests, creating human links in the water, radio



Photo



The collection of photos depicted are a combination of the water survival training and family day picnic photos taken Aug. 20

Measure

al training, family fun day

contact, staying hydrated, manipulating life raft and securing food sources.

"This training is great because it's actually taught in the ocean and not in a swimming pool," said SSgt. Bobby Pickel, 305th life support instructor. "Our students have to deal with and overcome real issues such as the ocean's current and getting sick."

Once the hard work was finished, the waterlogged members of the 732nd Airlift Squadron, 78th Air Refueling Squadron, 514th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, 514th Operational Support Squadron and 514th Airlift Control Element were able to join their families in the fun and games.

Entertainment for the day included music, clowns, magic show, an artist doing caricatures and rock wall climbing.

otos by Denise Gould and Kenn Mann



at SeaGirt Army National Guard, SeaGirt, N.J.

BRIEFS

Wing retirement ceremony set

The 514th Air Mobility Wing annual retirement ceremony is set 11 a.m., Oct. 1 at Dock 11. Everyone is invited to attend and wish the retirees and their families well.

AAFES catalog available

The Fall/Winter 2005 Catalog is available at all main stores and online at aafes.com, usmc-mccs.org, navy-nex.com or cg-exchange.com.

Prices in this all-services Catalog are valid through Jan. 17, 2006, for any authorized exchange customer. Active duty military members of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard, as well as military retirees, reservists, National Guardsmen, Department of Defense civilians stationed overseas, Exchange employees and their family members are authorized exchange privileges.

Orders can be placed by mail, fax or phone. To place orders toll-free from the United States, Puerto Rico or Guam call 1-800-527-2345. The Exchange Catalog center is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Earnings generated by purchases in the Exchange and Exchange Online Store as well as Exchange Catalogs such as 2005 Fall/Winter, are returned to the military community in the form of funding for Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) facilities and programs. In 2004, AAFES returned \$242.3 million to MWR and services programs.

ARPC Supports One-Stop Service

Air Reserve Personnel Center officials recently released the Virtual Personnel Center Guard Reserve, a Web-based personnel service portal program.

The portal has been online since April, but was recently given a new look. Within hours, changes can be made to a servicemember's records and members can have questions answered by a contact center technician working at the Air Reserve Personnel Center, Denver, Colo.

For more information, read the Air Force Print News story at <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123011196>.

AF Climate Survey here

Wing members are encouraged to participate in the Air Force Climate Survey scheduled Oct. 1 through Nov. 23. The survey is available at Website: <https://afclimatesurvey.af.mil/index.asp>.

As a compliance-based survey, the 514 Air Mobility Wing is accountable to the Air Force and Air Force Reserve Command to get as many wing members to participate as possible. For more information and to obtain the name of unit points of contact, call Lt. Col. John Eliopolo at (609) 754-2866.

SLGI coverage increases to \$400,000 Sept. 1

Four hundred thousand dollars of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance automatically went into effect for everyone in the U.S. military Sept. 1.

If people don't want the maximum SGLI coverage, they must change it in writing, even if they opted for much less or none in the past. The current maximum coverage is \$250,000.

In addition, a new law now requires the services to tell spouses if servicemembers designate a primary beneficiary other than their current lawful spouse, or they turn down SGLI coverage or reduce it after Sept. 1.

To change insurance amounts or who gets it, Airmen need to visit their unit's commander support staff or military personnel flight to fill out a SGLV Form 8286. If deployed, their personnel for contingency operation team can help. For more information contact the 514th Military Personnel Flight, customer service section at (609) 754-2129.

Commissary holds case lot sale

A case lot sale will be held Sept. 17 and 18 at the McGuire/Fort Dix Commissary.

A Defense Commissary Agency worldwide case lot sales event is held every May and September. The sales offer shoppers the chance to buy bulk quantities of products at savings of up to 50 percent above the 30 percent or more they normally save by shopping at the commissary. For more information about the sale, contact (609) 754-2013.

DOD announces one-year open enrollment for SBP

WASHINGTON (AFPN) — Department of Defense officials announced Aug. 19 that military retirees, who opted out of some or all their Survivor Benefit Plan coverage, will have another opportunity to elect coverage during a one-year open enrollment period beginning Oct. 1 and running through Sept. 30, 2006.



Upon a retiree's death, the plan provides an annuity of up to 55 percent of the military retired pay. Until recently, the annuity for a surviving spouse age 62 or older was reduced to 35 percent to reflect the availability of Social Security benefits. This reduction will phase out by April 2008, and the full 55-percent benefit will be paid regardless of the spouse's age in accordance with the fiscal 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

Current nonparticipants will be able to elect any coverage they could have elected previously upon retiring from active service or upon receiving notification of eligibility for Reserve retired pay at age 60.

If they have a reduced election, they may increase their coverage. A participant with child-only coverage may add a spouse or former spouse to their coverage, and a person may add child coverage to spouse or former spouse coverage.

But those who took coverage and later elected to terminate that coverage are not eligible to make an open enrollment election.

Open enrollment elections require a lump sum buy-in premium as well as future monthly premiums. The lump sum equates to all back premiums, plus interest, from the date of original eligibility to make an election plus any amount needed to protect the Military Retirement Fund. The latter amount applies almost exclusively to those paying fewer than seven years of back payments.

The lump sum buy-in premium can be paid over a two-year period. Monthly premiums for spouse or former spouse coverage will be 6.5 percent of the coverage elected, the same premium paid by those currently enrolled. Reserve component members under age 60 and not yet eligible for retired pay do not pay back premiums or interest, but must pay a monthly plan premium "add-on" once their retired pay starts.

Elections are effective the first day of the month after the election is received, but no earlier than Oct. 1. An election is void if the retiree dies in the two years following an election and all premiums are refunded to the designated survivor.

To make an open enrollment election, a retiree can complete and submit a DD Form 2656-9, "Survivor Benefit Plan and Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan Open Enrollment Election." The form is available electronically at www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2656-9.pdf.

For assistance with the form, people can contact the retiree activities office.

Retirees can mail the completed form to the address specified on the form. Applicants will be formally notified of their cost and have 30 days from the date of the notice to cancel the election by notifying the Defense Finance and Accounting Service or the reserve component, as applicable, in writing.

Center "supports" one-stop service worldwide

By Mike Molina and TSgt. Rob Mims
HQ ARPC Public Affairs

DENVER – The Air Reserve Personnel Center here is more than 7,000 miles from Baghdad but for an individual mobilization augmentee serving in Iraq, the center's personnel services are only seconds away.

Earlier this year ARPC officials released the Virtual Personnel Center for the Guard and Reserve, a Web-based personnel service portal for Air Force reservists and Air National Guardsmen. The new service at the center, an Air Force Reserve Command direct reporting unit, is already getting some valuable use.

"Being able to have your records updated with a simple click of a button was impressive," said MSgt. Scott Davis, an IMA attached to the 7th Security Forces Squadron, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. "I was honestly expecting the records update to take weeks, but my records were updated within a matter of hours."

The Web portal at <http://arpc.afrc.af.mil> has been online since April but was given a new look and re-released July 15.

That same day in Baghdad MSgt. Davis accessed the vPC-GR to request an update to his decorations. Within hours, the changes were made to the sergeant's records and his questions were answered.

"This system saved me valuable time trying to match my schedule here with the time change back at ARPC," he said. "It was important for me to have my records correct – just in case."

TSgt. Jennifer Bye, NCO in charge of Contact Center Branch 3, said her branch tries to handle customer requests the same day they are received.

She is responsible for managing and distributing Web requests to other contact center technicians and said she answered a lot of questions in less than 10 minutes.

"The new support site is still in its infancy, and yet the benefits to our members are already being felt worldwide," said Col. Ann Shippy, ARPC commander.

Three days after the release of the redesigned site, Hugo Padilla, chief of ARPC's personnel service systems support, helped an officer in Southwest Asia deployed from her home attachment at Scott AFB, Ill.

He helped Maj. Sharon Ross reset her password so she could access her personnel services account online.

"She was working in Southwest Asia, sitting there working real-time battlefield medical evacuations from the AOR," said Mr. Padilla. "She thanked me. I said, 'No way, thank you.'"

Major Ross said she likes the "key words" area on the "frequently asked questions" page.

"It makes it easier to hone in (on) pertinent topic questions" the major said. "I also like the site map – it's much quicker to find needed topic(s)."

When Major Ross suggested a link to MyPay, it was added to the site map two days later.

Today at work, home or on the battlefield, regardless of the time of day or night, ARPC is only a mouse click or phone call away. It has a staff willing to help, to get the job done.

"It's personnel services 24/7, no matter where you are," said Dave Aldrich, director of personnel services. "If you can get on the Web, it's available."

"It is nice to be overseas and be able to keep up with my IMA side of the business," said Major Ross. "One-stop shopping – it's the wave of the future."

AFRC News Service

Air Force changes fitness test criteria

By SSgt. C. Todd Lopez
Air Force Print News

WASHINGTON — Air Force officials are making a few changes to the physical fitness test used to assess the fitness of Airmen.

In January 2004, the Air Force underwent a major change in the way it looked at fitness. As part of the Fit to Fight program, the service adopted a more stringent physical fitness assessment that measures aerobic fitness, physical strength/endurance and body composition.

Now, 18 months into the program, senior leaders are ready to tweak the assessment to make it even better, said Lt. Gen. (Dr.) George Peach Taylor Jr., Air Force surgeon general.

“We have gotten together a group of scientists and done surveys asking folks if they like the assessment and are there issues with it,” Dr. Taylor said. “This last year we brought an update to Corona and are now in the middle of updating a few changes to the Air Force instruction that defines the fitness evaluation.”

Updates to AFI 10-248 will include a change in how body composition is measured, a new table for the running portion of the test that takes into account the runner’s elevation, and a change in the number of days an Airman must wait before retesting after having scored in the marginal category.

Under the original fitness evaluation, body composition scores were based on abdominal circumference only. The updated AFI will now direct that body composition also be measured using body mass index.

BMI is calculated by dividing weight in

pounds by height in inches squared, and multiplying the result by 703. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, those with a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 are considered to be normal. Those with a BMI of 25 or above are considered overweight.

Under the updated AFI, Airmen with a BMI of less than 25 will earn the full 30 points for body composition. For Airmen

who score a BMI 25 and above, Dr. Taylor said the results of the waist measurement would be used to calculate their test score.

“That will still be an important measure of their health,” he said. “Waist measure is

closely related to increased risk for metabolic syndrome, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Fat distribution is the critical indicator, as opposed to weight.”

For those who score marginal, between 70 and 74.9 points, the Air Force plans to correct the time to retest at 90 days; currently, retest for marginal category is 180 days. This will be consistent with the retest time for poor scores, those less than 70.

Changes to the AFI will also include adjustment for those at high-altitude installations. This applies to those at installations with an elevation of 5,000 feet or

greater, Dr. Taylor said.

“We’ll use the formula for altitude calculations recommended by the National Collegiate Athletic Association,” he said.

The Air Force continues to look at ways to improve the fitness evaluation and remains committed to the Fit to Fight program, Dr. Taylor said, because the program has proven successful.

“Participation at fitness centers is up 30

percent now,” he said. “And if you go to the field, like in Iraq or Afghanistan, you will find a continued focus on health.”

The assessment is not the focus of the fitness program, but a tool to assess the commander’s fitness training

“Now, 18 months into the program, senior leaders are ready to tweak the assessment to make it even better.”

— Lt. Gen. (Dr.) George Peach Taylor Jr.
AF Surgeon General

program.

“I want to make very clear that my focus is not on passing a fitness test once a year,” said Gen. John P. Jumper, Air Force chief of staff, in his Oct. 17, 2003, Chief’s Sight Picture. “More important, we are changing the culture of the Air Force. This is about our preparedness to deploy and fight. It’s about warriors. It is about instilling an expectation that makes fitness a daily standard — an essential part of your service.”

Dr. Taylor said he hopes the changes to the AFI will be made by early September.

Jumper set to retire

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper retired after 39 years of service at a Sept. 2 ceremony at Andrews Air Force Base, Md. His effective date of retirement will be Nov. 1. Acting Secretary of the Air Force Pete Geren presided over the ceremony, and Gen. T. Michael Moseley, previously serving as Air Force vice chief of staff, was sworn in as the 18th Air Force chief of staff. The ceremony aired live on the Pentagon Channel and through streaming video online at www.af.mil.



Gen. John P. Jumper
Retired AF Chief of Staff

Senate confirms Corley as new vice chief of staff

SAN ANTONIO (AFP) — The Senate confirmed Lt. Gen. John D. W. Corley on Aug. 1 as the next Air Force vice chief of staff. He will be promoted to the rank of general.

General Corley, who is currently the principal deputy for the assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition, will replace Gen. T. Michael Moseley. The senate confirmed General Moseley as the next Air Force chief of staff July 1.

General Corley entered the Air Force in 1973 and has commanded at the squadron, group and wing levels. He has more than 3,000 flying hours with combat experience.

As combined air operations center director supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, General Corley coordinated more than 11,000 combat missions striking more than 4,700 targets.

His awards and decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star Medal.

Katrina takes heavy toll at Keesler

By Louis A. Arana-Barradas
Air Force Print News

SAN ANTONIO — Hurricane Katrina smashed “a good 95 percent” of Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., turning it into a pile of debris and mud, said a base spokesperson.

Lt. Col. Claudia Foss, 81st Training Wing public affairs officer, said water surges from the Gulf of Mexico and the Bay of Biloxi reached depths of five to six feet at times.

“Whether it was five feet, one foot or a few inches, at one point everything was covered with bay or Gulf water,” she said.

Fortunately, there have been no reports of people killed or injured at Keesler, she said. More than 6,000 people rode out the storm in seven shelters at the base and all are accounted for. But elsewhere the storm has claimed at least 68 lives and the death toll is expected to rise.

The colonel said what the base looks like now compares “to being in Iraq” because of the destruction and debris scattered everywhere. The storm knocked trees down or stripped them of their limbs.

“Power lines are down,” she said. “We’ve got light poles that are just bent over and there’s nothing around them — so how did they bend over? Everywhere you walk, there’s either debris, trees that have fallen over or mud and muck.”

According to officials at the Air Force Climatology Center at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., the maximum winds at the base gusted to more than 90 mph. And sustained winds of 50 mph buffeted the base for most of the time.

The devastation at the base near Biloxi is widespread, as it is along the Gulf Coast and further inland. Floodwaters destroyed much of the base housing area and heavily damaged industrial areas, the colonel said. And the storm damaged a big part of the base runway.

“In many homes, there was three feet of water,” said Lt. Col. Foss, who lost her home to the flooding. “In my house, the wall facing the bay is gone.”

The colonel said one home burned down. Other homes less damaged by flooding are “not liveable,” she said.

Near the base front gate that faces the Gulf, six-foot deep water flooded the commissary and exchange stores. Many buildings have missing roofs and walls. Teams are working to clear as much debris as possible so people can return to their homes for the first time since moving into shelters late last week.

“So we’re anticipating how folks are going to react,” the colonel said.

She said many will find their homes destroyed. But at least

they can make “an initial assessment on whether or not they can salvage anything.”

To help people cope with the events of the past few days, teams of chaplains and life skills specialists are available at each shelter, Lt. Col. Foss said.

“Definitely, we’re taking care of our active duty members and their families,” she said.

There is no power at the base hospital, so patients must move elsewhere.

Medical personnel from Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB, Texas, left for Keesler Aug. 30 to help evacuate about 25 patients, medical center officials said. Three critical care teams and one obstetrics team left on a C-130 Hercules. Keesler officials will evacuate less critical patients to on-base shelters.

The base runway, while damaged, can still support C-17 Globemaster III and C-130 transport aircraft, the colonel said. The aircraft will help bring in relief supplies, Lt. Col. Foss said.

Help is starting to flow into the base, she said. Teams from the Navy base at Pensacola, Fla., are flying helicopters into the base to help. The Navy, she said, will send search and rescue teams to the base.

Airmen at other bases are ready to lend a hand as soon as possible, the colonel said. A team of Red Horse engineers is one of the first expected to arrive. They will help clear debris and help get the base back on track.

Keesler might be broken at the moment, but its people have not given up hope of starting again, Colonel Foss said. “Family support here has been phenomenal,” she said. “And we’re taking care of each other.”

Contributing to this report: MSgt. Orville Desjarlais, Air Force Print News; Lois Walsh, Eglin AFB, Fla.; and Sue Campbell, Wilford Hall Medical



U.S. Air Force graphic

Keesler and Columbus Air Force bases in Mississippi survived Hurricane Katrina. Base officials are still evaluating the damage to Columbus, but so far have reported only moderate damage to one building. Keesler, however, has suffered extensive damage to industrial and housing areas.



*Pay dates are subject to change. For information, contact your unit pay monitor.

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