

Calendar

April 6 – Marine Corps Amphibious Vehicles Industry Day at Fredericksburg, Va., Exposition Center

April 11-13 – Navy League Sea Air and Space Exposition at Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, National Harbor, Md.

April 21 – Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity Town Hall, 9 a.m.-noon or 1-4 p.m., Gray Research Center.

April 21 – MCSC Industry Interface Council.

April 25 – Deadline for award submissions for May Awards Board.

April 27-28 – Marine South exposition at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

The Point

Corporate Communications
Public Affairs Division
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Distributed the first Tuesday of each month. Deadline for submissions is two Thursdays prior to distribution. Deadline for May is April 21.

The Point is an authorized publication for the employees and U.S. military service personnel attached to the Command. Contents are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Systems Command or Program Executive Officer Land Systems.

'The Point' submissions

Each month, *The Point* brings Marines, Civilian Marines and families the latest news in Marine Corps Systems Command and Program Executive Officer Land Systems. Topics include security, safety and features from product groups, independent program managers, deputy commanders, assistant commanders and Strategic Plan Objective Teams. There are also articles about spouses and families. To submit an article for this newsletter, send it to mcscpao@usmc.mil. Submission deadlines are the third Thursday of the month. *The Point* is distributed the first Tuesday of the month. Photographs are not published. Also, be sure to read *Spouses On Point...* [here](#)

Sea-Air-Space Exposition trip

The Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Exposition will take place April 11-13 at the Gaylord Hotel at the National Harbor in Maryland. The Navy League is providing bus transportation for Marine Corps System Command and Program Executive Officer Land Systems to the event for April 12. Attendees will be able to visit an array of exhibits and static displays. Tickets for the Sea Services luncheon are no longer available as they have all been distributed.

The Exposition was founded in 1965 as a means to bring the U.S. defense industrial base, private-sector U.S. companies and key military decision makers together for an annual innovative, educational, professional and maritime-based event located in the heart of Washington, D.C. Since 1965, Sea-Air-Space has become the largest maritime exposition in the world and has continued as an invaluable extension of the Navy League's mission of maritime policy education and sea service support.

Buses are scheduled to depart MCSC at 8 a.m. from the front of Headquarters Bldg. 2200 and return at about 4 p.m. All attendees will need to register for the exposition, free of charge, on line at www.seaairspace.org. Attire is Service C's for uniformed Marines and business attire for civilian Marines.

For more information or questions, call the Corporate Communications general line at (703) 432-3958.

MCTSSA slates road show

Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity (MCTSSA), a Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) organization at Camp Pendleton, Calif., is conducting a Town Hall April 21 for MCSC and Program Executive Officer Land Systems (PEO LS). Meet members of MCTSSA's team, find out what they offer, and learn how they support MCSC and PEO LS programs.

There are two sessions Command members can attend. Choose Session 1, 9 a.m.-noon, or Session 2, 1-4 p.m. The event takes place at the Gray Research Center. For more information, contact the MCTSSA Liaison Officer at (703) 432-3900.

***To The Point* debuts**

Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) will publish its first issue of *To the Point* on April 6. Produced by MCSC Corporate Communications, *To The Point* is intended to align understanding and communication on topical issues reflecting the MCSC Commander's communication priorities. The first issue focuses on Lighten the Marine Air-Ground Task Force. *To The Point* will be distributed as issues and communication needs arise. If you have specific questions about subjects raised in *To the Point*, call MCSC Corporate Communications at (703) 432-3958.

AE Day set for June 8

Acquisition Excellence (AE) Day, an all-day event for the entire Marine Corps acquisition community, will take place June 8 at the Hylton Events Center in Woodbridge, Va. The conference focuses on the professional development, professional and personal wellness, and morale of the acquisition workforce.... [full story](#)

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Helpful IT reminders all employees should know

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DoD to drop Social Security numbers from ID cards

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MCTSSA Captain to compete in Warrior Games

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GySgt earns leadership award

In January the Department of the Navy (DoN) presented Gunnery Sergeant Brian Bond with the John J. Lussier Electromagnetic Spectrum Leadership Award for his superior performance as the Spectrum Management Chief for Marine Corps Systems Command.... [full story](#)

Scheduler speeds DEERS service

Naval Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System offices have a new appointment scheduler that can be found at <http://appointments.cac.navy.mil/>. The system can reduce wait times to as little as three to four minutes in the middle of the day to get a government identification card renewed.

MCSC heads south to Lejeune

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Command Marine named Logistician of the Year

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Team moves SONIC toward acquisition management

The Secure Operational Networks Infrastructure and Communication (SONIC) program conducted a successful Materiel Development Decision Review (MDDR) Feb 4 with Brigadier General Frank Kelley, Commander, Marine Corps Systems Command. SONIC will transition an existing capability from dispersed, non-centralized design and sustainment into the operations and sustainment phase via an MDDR.... [full story](#)

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SPO 1.3 Team works with MCSC and its stakeholders

Marine Corps Systems Command's (MCSC) Strategic Planning Objective (SPO) 1.3 Team has been very productive in the last year, but there is still a lot of work ahead. The team needs continued support from MCSC personnel and external stakeholders.... [full story](#)

TSP information provided

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a retirement plan that allows federal employees to allocate a portion of their basic pay to their TSP before taxes are withheld. The catch-up contribution is available to participants age 50 or older or those who are turning 50 during the calendar year.... [full story](#)

Sunset Parade marches Aug. 9

On behalf of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Systems Command is hosting the Sunset Parade beginning at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 9 at the Marine Corps War Memorial near Arlington National Cemetery.... [full story](#)

Marines thrive in employing renewable energy, saving lives

Marines are strengthening their combat effectiveness, not by acquiring new weaponry or implementing different training, but by using renewable energy on the battlefield. The Expeditionary Energy Office took the lead for this initiative by developing a plan set to reduce fossil fuel consumption by 50 percent by the beginning of 2025.... [full story](#)

AE Day set for June 8

Acquisition Excellence (AE) Day, an all-day event for the entire Marine Corps acquisition community, will take place June 8 at the Hylton Events Center in Woodbridge, Va. The conference focuses on the professional development, professional and personal wellness, and morale of the acquisition workforce.

Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) and Program Executive Officer Land Systems (PEO LS) will also present more than 30 awards during three ceremonies at AE Day. Both Commands accepted 198 individual and team nominations for 17 categories making up the Commander's Honorary Awards, and 13 nominations for the Marine Corps Awards for Acquisition Innovation and Excellence. Of the three prestigious honors encompassing this list, the Andrew J. Higgins Award honors a Marine Corps officer, the Eugene M. Stoner Award goes to a Marine staff noncommissioned officer, and a Marine Corps civilian acquisition professional receives the Donald Roebling Award.

The entire workforce is invited to watch the award ceremonies, listen to motivational speakers and visit the many exhibits on display at AE day, considered a stand-down day for the Command. All government employees are expected to attend the conference, as it is officially a required duty place. Other Department of Defense civilians, military and government contractors supporting the Command may attend as guests. MCSC and PEO LS employees and guests assigned to an acquisition-designated billet must register for the event. All others are invited to register. Registration and additional event information will be posted on TIGER.

Deadline for submissions for the May Awards Board

The deadline for award submissions for the May Awards Board is April 25. Late submissions will not be accepted for this board.

Recommendations must arrive to the Awards Team at Workforce Management and Development Directorate no later than 134 days (four months, two weeks) prior to the presentation date for Legion of Merit or retirement awards, 104 days (three months, two weeks) prior to the presentation date for Meritorious Service Medals and 60 days (two months) prior to the presentation date for Navy Commendation and Navy Achievement Medals.

Make sure those who will be included in the processing of military awards (i.e., originators, reviewers, endorsers) are all registered in iAPS prior to submitting an award. The proper guidelines for submitting awards and examples can be found in the Rewards and Consequences website at: <https://www.ocio.marcorsyscom.usmc.mil/rewards/>.

An awards checklist to help you in preparing awards and the instructions for registering in iAPS can be found on TIGER at this All Hands posting.

Make sure all other awards for the board that are not submitted through iAPS are sent to the Awards inbox (mcscawards@usmc.mil) (i.e., civilian awards).

If you need assistance, contact Lisa Weaver at (703) 432-4475, Justin Williams at (703) 432-4479, Bruce Scott at (703) 432-4474 or Michael Mallinger at (703) 432-4476.

Command schedules Major League Baseball trip

Here's your chance to catch a Major League Baseball game. Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) is sponsoring a trip to the Nation's capital July 28 so employees, along with their friends and family, can watch the Washington Nationals play the Florida Marlins. The first pitch is scheduled for 12:35 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 each and can be purchased through Corporate Communications selling the tickets beginning in June. Cash and checks (made out to MCSC Social Fund) will be accepted. There is no limit to the number of tickets one can purchase. Tickets include bus transportation. Additional ticket information will be posted on TIGER.

Helpful IT reminders all employees should know

Cyber security

Get involved. Report security problems immediately! The security of our information assets is everyone's responsibility.

Passwords – Any word that can be found in the dictionary is a bad password. Use a combination of numbers, upper and lowercase letters, and special characters when creating passwords. Never share your password or Common Access Card (CAC) personal identification number (PIN) with anyone. Remember to protect it from unauthorized disclosure.

Spillages – Be aware. Know exactly what you are sending and to whom. Ensure the information is marked with the appropriate classification level and send only to those with a need to know. If you are unsure if something might be classified, err on the side of caution, and do not transmit via unsecure means without first verifying the classification of the information. In addition to putting information at risk, spillages cause significant productivity pitfalls for all affected users during the clean-up process.

Physical Security – Maintain control and accountability. Secure external hard drives, CDs, documentation, CAC cards, etc. Do not be afraid to challenge unknown personnel in restricted areas.

Data back-up – Save early and save often. All important files should be backed up on your external hard drive. If you do not have one, contact your office manager. Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) has many external hard drives in use. These can and do fail. Ensure you back up your external hard drives on a regular basis, as well as your network files.

E-mail - Be suspicious of any attachment sent from someone you don't know. Never follow a link directly from an e-mail. Forward any spam e-mails that you may receive to USMC_Anti-Spam@nmci.usmc.mil.

Phone Calls – Be wary of any phone calls from persons soliciting information. If you are suspicious, ask to call them back at a number published in the Global Address List or TIGER, or contact their office through known channels. The MCSC Service Desk and Nave-Marine Corps Intranet Help Desk will never ask you for your CAC PIN or password.

Personal use of government-owned equipment

The Marine Corps allows employees to use government information technology (IT) equipment for limited personal use in an effort to create a more supportive work environment. The limited personal use of Marine Corps-owned equipment is a privilege and not a right.

Limited personal use of government property may be considered authorized when it:

- Does not reduce productivity or interfere with the mission, or operations.
- Does not violate any standards or policies set forth by the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of the Navy (DoN), Marine Corps, MCSC or the employee's commander or manager.

Employees do not have any right or expectation of privacy while using any government-owned equipment, including Internet, phone and e-mail services.

Employees must ensure that personal use does not give the appearance of acting in an official capacity. For example, employees may not post Marine Corps, DoD, DoN, etc., information to external news groups, bulletin boards or other public forum without prior authorization.

Employees must not give the appearance the Marine Corps endorses or sanctions their personal activities.

Employees using government-owned equipment are also prohibited from engaging in any outside fund raising, product or service endorsement, expression of religious opinion or participating in lobbying or prohibited partisan political activity (e.g., expressing opinions about political candidates or distributing campaign literature).

Unauthorized or inappropriate use of government-owned equipment may result in the loss or limitation of an employee's privilege of limited personal use. Employees may also face administrative actions ranging from counseling to removal from employment, criminal penalties or financial liability depending on the severity of the misuse.

Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

PII is information that could be used to uniquely identify an individual. It is important that employees whose job requires them to handle PII are aware of how to properly protect it. Federal Regulations dictate that PII must be protected when collected, accessed, used, stored or transmitted.

Employees should use the following guidance prior to transmitting PII via e-mail.

- Must be digitally signed and encrypted using DoD-approved certificates.
- Marked FOUO (For Official Use Only) in the subject field.
- Body must contain the following warning: "For Official Use Only. Any misuse or unauthorized access may result in both civil and criminal penalties."
- Ensure the e-mail addresses are correct and the selected recipients have a need for the attached information (need to know).
- Double check an attachment to make sure it is the correct document.
- Enterprise Information Assurance Directive 018, MARADMIN 336/08 and MARADMIN 732/07 provide additional information for the proper handling of PII.

Breaches of PII must be reported by regulation. If you believe there has been a breach of PII, contact the MCSC Service Desk at (703) 432.4381.

Use of Personal IT Equipment

The use of personal IT equipment (i.e., laptops, MP3 players, iPads, iPhones, Android devices, Blackberry's, etc.) is not authorized on the Marine Corps Enterprise Network (MCEN).

The use of personally owned devices to conduct government business is also prohibited. This includes but is not limited to saving PII, FOUO or otherwise classified government proprietary information on any personal device. Auto-forwarding of NIPRNET or dot-mil e-mail to or sending official government correspondence from a commercial domain is not authorized, per MARADMIN 427/08.

Definitions:

Government-Owned Equipment: Any equipment or system purchased and/or owned by the government, including but not limited to IT equipment, Internet services, e-mail, library resources, telephones, fax/copiers, office supplies, etc.

Personal Use: Any activity conducted for purposes other than accomplishing official or otherwise authorized activity.

Employees: All military, government civilian and supporting contractor personnel with authorized access to government equipment.

Personally Identifiable Information: Information that could be used to uniquely identify an individual.

DoD to drop Social Security numbers from ID cards

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 – Beginning June 1, Social Security numbers on military identification cards will begin to disappear, said Air Force Maj. Monica M. Matoush, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

The effort is part of a larger plan to protect service members and other DoD identification card holders from identity theft, officials said.

Criminals use Social Security numbers to steal identities, allowing them to pillage resources, establish credit or to hijack credit cards, bank accounts or debit cards.

Currently, the Social Security number is printed on the back of common access cards, and on the front of cards issued to dependents and retirees. Beginning in June, when current cards expire, they will be replaced with new cards having a DoD identification number replacing the Social Security number, officials said. The DoD identification number is a unique 10-digit number that is assigned to every person with a direct relationship with the department. The new number also will be the service member's Geneva Convention identification number.

An 11-digit DoD benefits number also will appear on the cards of those people eligible for DoD benefits. The first nine digits are common to a sponsor, the official said, and the last two digits will identify a specific person within the sponsor's family.

Social Security numbers embedded in the bar codes on the back of identification cards will remain there for the time being, and will be phased out beginning in 2012.

The department will replace identification cards as they expire.

"Because cards will be replaced upon expiration, it will be approximately four years until all cards are replaced with the DoD ID number," Matoush said.

The identity protection program began in 2008, when DoD started removing Social Security numbers from family member identification cards.

MCTSSA Captain to compete in Warrior Games

At the inaugural Marine Corps Trials held at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Captain Jon Disbro again qualified to compete with the all-Marine team at the national Warrior Games to be held at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., in May.

At last year's Warrior Games, Disbro – whose right leg has been amputated below the knee – won the Gold Medal for the premier middle-distance track event, the 1,500-meter run (0.932 miles), crossing the finish line with a time of 5 minutes, 41 seconds.

In this year's Warrior Games, Captain Disbro will compete in the Warrior Pentathlon competition that includes 50-meter swim, 100-meter track, 30-kilometer cycling, shot-put and 10-meter air rifle prone events – with the winner being named all-around top athlete.

"I really like the Pentathlon competitions," said Disbro, Test Branch Head for MCTSSA's Test and Certification Group. "It's very challenging to be good at all those events in one competition."

The Captain has striven to be an all-around athlete. In addition to competing in the Pentathlon's five intense events at the trials, he also took on the 800-meter run, backstroke competition and several relay races.

“The games are a great way for injured service people to challenge themselves,” Disbro said. “I want to represent the Marine Corps and support the effort of other wounded Marines who are still recovering.”

The training and competition during the trials was fierce, with athletes vying for top placement in team and individual sports. The athletes were divided into four teams: East, West, Veteran and Allied. The Allied team had service members from the British Royal Marine Corps, Australian Defense Force and Royal Netherlands Marine Corps with the Veterans finishing first overall.

Riding the wave of the trials, Disbro and 50 other Marine athletes will train for competition at the Games.

GySgt earns leadership award

In January the Department of the Navy (DoN) presented Gunnery Sergeant Brian Bond with the John J. Lussier Electromagnetic Spectrum Leadership Award for his superior performance as the Spectrum Management Chief for Marine Corps Systems Command. He is assigned to Systems Engineering, Interoperability, Architectures and Technology.

According to his award citation, DoN honored the Gunnery Sergeant for the dedication and leadership he has demonstrated educating program managers and project officers in spectrum management techniques and procedures. His efforts have significantly improved the Marine Corps' spectrum certification process.

MCSC heads south to Lejeune

Marine Corps System Command (MCSC) will participate in the Marine South exposition at Camp Lejeune, N.C., April 27 and 28. MCSC will provide static displays representing several of the Command's programs.

Marines from Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Stations Cherry Point and New River will be among the attendees. The event focuses on the user, the Marine warfighter who benefits from the equipment, systems, services and technology that defense contractors and industry will have on display at the event.

Command Marine named Logistician of the Year

At the 7th Annual MCA Ground Logistics Awards Dinner in Arlington, Va., in February General James Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, presented Staff Sergeant Jacob Reichert, Assistant Air Delivery Project Officer for Marine Corps Systems Command, with an award naming him the 2010 Marine Corps Enlisted Logistician of the Year.

The Marine Corps Association in conjunction with Headquarters Marine Corps, Installations and Logistics Division sponsored the awards dinner honoring professional achievements of the top performing ground logisticians in the Marine Corps in 2010.

MCSC supports Japan quake, tsunami recovery

Thousands of U.S. service members plus 14 U.S. Navy ships and more than 100 aircraft are either assisting or prepared to assist the Japanese people in the aftermath of their massive earthquake and tsunami and nuclear power plant emergencies.

Marine Forces Pacific and the III Marine Expeditionary Force are the lead Marine Corps contingent for Operation Tomodachi (Japanese for “friendship”). Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) Program Offices are preparing to support the early efforts, specifically in the areas of water purification; Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Personal Protection Equipment; and support to the Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force.

Because other MCSC systems and equipment very likely will be required to support the disaster area as Operation Tomodachi develops, coordination will continue through the Command Response Cell to ensure a well-coordinated approach across the Marine Corps Logistics Command-MCSC team.

PM Ammo provides explosives safety support to Tanzania

On Feb. 16 the Gongo La Mboto military camp on the outskirts of the capital city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, was rocked by a series of explosions that decimated the base and destroyed about one-third of the country's military munitions, killing at least 25 and prompting a stampede getaway in the local civilian communities. In the mayhem of residents fleeing the blasts, more than 150 children lost track of their parents. President Jakaya Kikwete promised an investigation into the explosions, the second fatal military ammo storage area explosion in Tanzania's commercial capital in less than two years. An accident at the same military base in 2009 killed more than a dozen people. Several houses and a school were leveled during the latest blasts, which sent huge orange bursts into the night sky. Debris showered parts of the city 10 miles (15 kilometers) from the military base where the depot was located.

The President of Tanzania turned to the U.S. ambassador and requested support from the State Department to assist in the investigation. He was eager to quickly identify the root cause and possible recommendations for preventing future such mishaps. The State Department contacted the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who tasked the Department of Defense Explosives Safety Board (DDESB) to form an assessment team and quickly deploy to Tanzania in support of this effort. The DDESB sent a request to the Commander and Executive Director of Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) soliciting the services of Michael James, from Program Manager (PM) Ammo, to join the assessment team. His participation was quickly approved by the Commander and the Executive Director. James deployed in early March for two weeks as a key member of the four-man assessment team.

James is the Environmental and Explosives Safety Team Leader within PM Ammo. He has the unique mission to implement the Environmental and Explosives Safety Program for the entire Marine Corps. That responsibility is delegated to the MCSC Commander by Marine Corps Order 5100.29A (Marine Corps Safety Program) and is one of the sustaining actions within the PM Ammo strategic plan.

The hand-picked team arrived at the site March 3 to begin the assessment. The main focus of the investigative research was to determine the direct contributing factors that caused the explosion. Additionally, and of equal importance, the team was requested to provide recommendations on how to prevent future events of this nature.

The team was astonished by the widespread destruction caused by the explosions. Determining the exact cause of the explosives incident was extremely challenging due to the complete destruction of the ammunition storage compound and the lack of resources to test explosives residue. Interviews with guards and other workers at the ammunition storage compound provided the bulk of the information.

After two weeks of extensive research, the team concluded that two probable factors directly contributed to the explosives mishap. The first was the long-term storage of 30- to 40-year-old nitrocellulose-based propellants at temperatures that routinely exceeded 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 degrees Celsius) without a propellant stability surveillance program. The second probable cause was long-term damage caused by termite infestation of wooden pallets and wooden storage containers to the point of ammunition toppling over and hitting the concrete floor.

As with any accident investigation, after the cause is determined, other factors are identified that contributed to the magnitude of the incident. The contributing factors in this case that increased the severity included the compound exceeding the safe amount of explosives being stored in each building, incompatible types of explosives being stored together, ineffective ammunition inspection processes, inadequate standard operating procedures and the close proximity of the storage buildings to each other and the nearby community. The probable causes and recommendations to correct the contributing factors were provided in a detailed outbrief to the U.S. ambassador, high-ranking government officials and the senior military representatives of Tanzania.

"This highlights yet another example of MCSC's ability to leverage its technical competencies to positively influence the fraternal bond the Command shares with its sister services and allied partnering nations," said Steve Howell, Director, Plans, Operations and Safety Division, PM Ammo. "The world is a safer place, due in no small part to one of our own."

Howell added that James "is widely considered the Marine Corps' most knowledgeable subject matter expert in the area of explosives safety. He has deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan multiple times to ensure our warfighters are storing, handling, transporting and maintaining an inherently dangerous commodity in the safest possible manner."

Team moves SONIC toward acquisition management

The Secure Operational Networks Infrastructure and Communication (SONIC) program conducted a successful Materiel Development Decision Review (MDDR) Feb. 4 with Brigadier General Frank Kelley, Commander, Marine Corps Systems

Command (MCSC). On the surface, it might not seem to be such an unusual thing because MDDR are common occurrences in the Command. However, SONIC is unique since it will transition an existing capability from dispersed, non-centralized design and sustainment into the operations and sustainment phase via an MDDR.

This new program is under the Program Manager, Marine Corps Networks and Infrastructure Services (PM MCNIS) within Product Group 10, Information Systems and Infrastructure. SONIC has been established as an acquisition program to ensure that the Marine Corps garrison Secret Internet Router Protocol Network (SIPRNet) capability is refreshed and sustained. This will also ensure continued availability and security of the command and control (C2) network.

Bringing SIPRNet infrastructure under acquisition management also gives the Marine Corps Chief Information Officer, Director, Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) increased visibility into capability shortfalls on the C2 network. This provides a framework to improve operations and expand the number of available seats as mission needs arise. By centralizing design, procurement and fielding, the Marine Corps can significantly reduce the effort and funds needed to ensure network viability at all levels from the enterprise level down to the command, base, post and station.

Funding-wise, SONIC is not a large program; it has been identified as Acquisition Category IV. The PM MCNIS Team encountered several unusual challenges on the journey to the MDDR. Many challenges resulted from needing to describe an existing operational capability in a requirements framework in order to establish the acquisition program. While the SONIC Project Team worked with their C4 and Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration advocates and counterparts, they also executed more than \$10 million in procurements to upgrade and refresh critically out-of-date equipment associated with this infrastructure. In addition, in June the SONIC Team expects to complete the first phase in establishing a centralized SIPRNet service desk capability to support SIPRNet users across the Marine Corps. This service desk will be operated by the Marine Corps Network Operations and Security Command.

During the next couple of years, the SONIC Project Team plans to focus on evolving a local, equipment-based planning framework to leverage enterprise design and forward planning of equipment refresh and upgrades executed through a central program office. This will require capturing the full SIPRNet inventory and its underlying architecture to understand and articulate any capability gaps. It will also include extending the Program Office's outreach to the operational community in order to understand new requirements as they emerge and to consolidate common procurements across the enterprise.

All this must be accomplished in a dynamic operational environment that requires on-going support. As the result of a successful effort, the Marine Corps would stand to realize significant cost efficiencies associated with sustaining and modernizing the network. Meanwhile, the operators can focus their time and resources on operating and defending the network. As the Marine Corps prepares for the future, the SONIC Project Team's mission is to serve the warfighter and network operators, providing them the best, most secure communications technology solution for both the near and long term.

Marine Corps extends civilian hiring freeze indefinitely

The Marine Corps is facing significant budget challenges. Consequently, the Corps is now addressing many issues from a broader enterprise perspective in order to ensure transparency and senior leader engagement on critical funding decisions.

Since costs associated with civilian personnel drive substantial and increasing must-pay bills, Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) 154/11 has been issued to extend the Marine Corps civilian hiring freeze indefinitely. Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) is actively engaged on this issue and has also been asked to brief the Marine Corps Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) on acquisition workforce impacts and considerations.

The MARADMIN is multi-faceted, but key points affecting MCSC include:

- Personnel in career trainee or intern programs will continue to convert into permanent appointments consistent with the formal expectations of their internships.
- Scheduled promotions for personnel in career ladder positions are exempt from the freeze.
- Reimbursable billets paid by other services, agencies or working capital funds are exempt from the freeze.
- Outstanding actions for the Next-Generation Enterprise Network, Cyber, Acquisition and others (including initiatives with projected future growth) are on hold pending MROC review.
- Many requests for personnel action are not impacted by the freeze, including: management-directed reassignments, non-competitive temporary promotions, within grade increases, performance bonuses or quality step increases, corrections to pay and retirements, among others.

“All MCSC and Program Executive Officer Land System employees should rest assured that their work is highly valued and their jobs are not at risk,” said Ann Firth, Director, Workforce Management and Development. “Although we have many dynamics affecting the workforce, we are proactively addressing these issues.”

For more information, call (703) 432-4461.

Camp promotes ‘good grief’ for families

By Colonel Mike Bergerud, MCSC Chief of Staff

Last year I took part in the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Good Grief Camp over Memorial Day weekend. It helps the families of fallen service members deal with the grief in a positive way – hence the name, "Good Grief Camp."

It was my first time serving in this way, and it was immensely rewarding. I can think of no better way to spend a Memorial Day than to help the children of the fallen. We do this for the kids, not necessarily as a representative of a command or of a rank, but as service members and service civilians helping out the surviving children of "our own."

With the wars we have been fighting all these years, there are many children of fallen Marines who attend the camp, and relatively few Marine background mentors. The other military services and civilians do a good job picking up the slack. I was just a bit surprised that, beyond The Basic School students, there were not a lot of Marine mentors there.

This is not easy: You see, it is not for combat losses alone, but also for accidental losses and for suicides, which in many ways can be even more difficult for families to deal with than combat losses because there is not as robust a support structure.

To become a Good Grief Camp mentor, register by clicking this link: <http://www.taps.org/national.aspx?id=4776>, and register as a mentor at Event Registration. E-mail or call Vanessa Gabrielson (vanessa@taps.org), Heather Campagna (heather@taps.org) or Tina Saari (tina@taps.org) with any questions or concerns, or call (800) 959-TAPS (8277).

SPO 1.3 Team works with MCSC and its stakeholders

By Colonel Edward Mays, Assistant Commander, Product Support

Marine Corps Systems Command's (MCSC) Strategic Planning Objective (SPO) 1.3 Team has been very productive in the last year, but there is still a lot of work ahead. The team needs continued support from MCSC personnel and external stakeholders. Two particularly significant accomplishments include:

- A white paper that identified significant issues with the Information Technology Procurement Request Review-Approval System. Not only did his paper highlight the potential friction caused by procurement of Marine Corps information technology through multiple independent processes, it highlighted spending with funding in the process.
- A Lean Six Sigma event identified processes and resources within the Expeditionary Force Development System that could be modified to improve requirements transition and how MCSC could transition requirements from Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

Next steps include:

- Conducting a Strategic Customer Value Analysis that will identify how MCSC and its stakeholders value their relationships. This will be a multi-year effort comprising discussions between commander-level leaders, structured interviews between senior leaders and focus groups at the action officer level. The results will identify how the Command can improve each relationship and better support the operational forces.
- An Integrated Process Team might be formed to help standardize the enterprise information technology requirements process.

The SPO 1.3 Team is in the process of re-chartering. During this time, members are recommitting to our team and its objectives. This and other activities will help the team meet its objectives and ultimately help Command organizations in the process.

TSP information provided

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a retirement plan that allows federal employees to allocate a portion of their basic pay to their TSP before taxes are withheld. The catch-up contribution is available to participants age 50 or older or those who are turning 50 during the calendar year. Catch-up contributions permit employees to make extra contributions that exceed the maximum amount of their regular employee contributions. Payments can continue until you reach the limit or until the end of the calendar year.

According to the TSP website, eligibility for catch-up contributions depends on the following requirements: you must be age 50 or older, currently employed and in Pay Status, and participating in regular employee contributions to a TSP account and/or on an equivalent employer plan such as a 401k.

The TSP website, <http://www.tsp.gov/>, provides more specific information regarding this matter.

Sunset Parade marches Aug. 9

On behalf of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Systems Command is hosting the Sunset Parade beginning at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 9 at the Marine Corps War Memorial near Arlington National Cemetery.

Members of the Command are invited to attend, and bus transportation will be provided. There should be enough reserved seats at the event for all bus riders, but spectators can attend with their own transportation. Those not riding the bus will join the general public, which usually covers every inch of grass around the parade field with lawn chairs and blankets. Additional information will be posted on the Command's TIGER website.

Marching and musical units from the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., the "Oldest Post of the Corps," have been presenting the parades since 1956. These unique military ceremonies are conducted in the shadow of the Iwo Jima Memorial, a 32-foot-tall bronze sculpture of warfighters pushing up a 60-foot flag pole modeled after the raising of the stars and stripes on Iwo Jima during World War II.

The parade features "The Commandant's Own" U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps and the elite Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon. The one-hour performance includes a 21-gun salute and concludes with the playing of Taps.

Marines thrive in employing renewable energy, saving lives

By Sergeant Michael S. Cifuentes, Headquarters Marine Corps

Marines are strengthening their combat effectiveness, not by acquiring new weaponry or implementing different training, but by using renewable energy on the battlefield. The Expeditionary Energy Office took the lead for this initiative by developing a plan set to reduce fossil fuel consumption by 50 percent by the beginning of 2025.

"Our ethos demands that we increase the efficiency of our gear and the use of renewable energy, so we maintain that leadership as modern-day Spartans," said Colonel Bob Charette, Director of the Expeditionary Energy Office, or E20.

Marines deployed to the forward edge of the combat zone are reliant on the fuel, water and other expendable energy sources that are provided to them by combat support elements. That reliance comes with a cost. A study conducted by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command found that for every 50 convoys in Afghanistan one Marine is either wounded or killed. Reducing the need for logistics simply means saving lives.

"Our strategy is taking that Marine who's burning about eight gallons of fuel per day and turning him into a Marine that's burning four gallons of fuel per day," Charette said. "The foundation of the strategy is that Spartan ethos. It's that Marine building up awareness of the vulnerability of getting water and logistics."

Consequently, the Marine Corps moved to a more readily available source of energy, the sun. In the summer of 2010, Marines with Company I, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, entered their month-long predeployment training evolution

at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, Calif., with technology that absorbed the sun's rays and distributed its energy to their equipment. That power was used for more than a week, and saved an average of eight gallons of fuel per day that normally would have been used to run generators and vehicles.

Today the Marines of Company I are deployed to the Sangin valley in Afghanistan, and they're powering their patrol bases with nothing but renewable energy.

"India Company (Company I) went into the most dangerous region of Helmand Province, they battled a determined foe, and the entire time they were deploying and using small-scale renewable systems," Charette said. "They are reducing their dependence on fossil fuel, and they are reducing their dependence on batteries."

First Lieutenant Josef Patterson, Platoon Commander with Company I, said their entire forward operating base is solar-powered, and his Marines love it. When patrolling, they're using the Solar Portable Alternative Communications Energy System, or SPACES, which charges batteries, operates communications equipment and runs small electronic accessories. The system generates energy from solar panels on a tarp that can easily be rolled up and placed in a backpack when on the move.

Patterson said normally his platoon would take three to four days worth of batteries for a three-week patrol, which takes up a lot of space and weight in backpacks. But with SPACES, they're lightening the load.

"I was a little skeptical at first, but we're completely solar-powered, and I think it's a great thing," said Patterson.

Charette referred to these Marines as pioneers for using this kind of equipment in combat. By the summer of 2011, E20 will be able to deploy a battalion-level unit with renewable energy capabilities and energy efficient technology.

"The only fuels we'll see on the battlefield in the future are the fuels we'll need to move our airplanes and our vehicles," he said. "We're going to learn from that and start building on it to get to where we ultimately want to go in 2025 – go with that Marine Expeditionary Force and deploy anywhere in the world with only mobility fuels."

Commandant of the Marine Corps General James Amos said he needs all Marines to embrace this strategy and get in step, because it's important.

"You don't have to think too hard, much past the last thirty days, to see what's happening around the world," Amos said. "With all the issues, a lot of it in the oil-producing part of the world, we need to begin to wean ourselves off of fossil-based fuel. Not only that, we need to be able to lighten our load. This is about us. This is about what's best for the Marine Corps."

Integrating energy renewing technology with Marines has put the Marine Corps at the forefront of the Department of Defense with moving strategy out to the ground combat element.

"This isn't just about equipment, this is about changing that mindset and reducing dependence on liquid fuel, logistics and batteries," Charette said.



A message from the Commander's spouse to family members:

First, I hope you noticed our new "Families On Point" logo. It is fantastic! Thank you, Jennifer Gonzalez, for designing it. We are all proud to be part of our Command family, and we now have a new name and logo to show our pride. We are forging ahead with our vision to keep faith with our families by communicating, connecting and caring. New events are being planned to bring us together for support and fun. Our annual Family Fun Day and Washington Nationals baseball game are just around the corner. Information about these events was provided elsewhere in this publication, and additional information on these and other events will be forwarded soon. We're also conducting a Spouses Team Building luncheon at 11 a.m. May 10 at the Clubs at Quantico. More information follows this letter. Our new logo will be used to signify all family events so you can come join in the fun.

Be sure to check out our Family Information webpage on the Command website: www.marcorssyscom.usmc.mil. If you can't remember the web address, just Google MCSC. On the right side of MCSC's main page click on "Family Readiness and Spouse Information." We are in the process of redesigning it to make it easier to find the information you need. The family programs and resources there will help make our lives easier so we can live a balanced, healthier lifestyle. If you can't find what you need, e-mail mcscpao@usmc.mil, or call (703) 437-3958. We're ready to help.

A really special and exciting event occurred last month for one of our Command families: Candice Hall delivered twins March 14. Their names are Connor Patrick and Anna Grace. Her husband, Bryan, works in PG11. Big brother, Liam, can't wait to play with his new brother and sister. Congratulations to the entire Hall Family.

Another fun event March 2 was National Read Across America Day. This day was celebrated on the birthday of Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss was born March 2, 1904). Here's a rhyme you may recognize from one of his books:

"The more you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."
- Dr. Seuss, *I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!*

Let's celebrate our very own "Families On Point" Read Around the Command month in honor of Dr. Seuss. Pick out a new book or re-read an old favorite. When done, e-mail your name, book title, author name and book rating from the rating scale below to mcscpao@usmc.mil. We will include some of your titles in next month's newsletter. Here's my book to start our list:

Nefertiti - by Michelle Moran, Rating: 4

Book Rating Scale: 1 - Do not read, 2 - Just OK, 3 - Pretty good, 4 - Excellent, 5 - Life-changing

Lastly, let us know some of "the places you go" (I love Dr. Seuss!) over spring break with your family. We will include some family travels in the May issue of *The Point*. Who knew we would take to heart the words of Dr. Seuss! Send in any big events each month that are happening in your family such as births, graduations, promotions, awards, retirements, etc. We want to share in your happiness, too. Now, go grab a book and chair and head outside to read. It's good for the mind as well as the soul. Be sure to send in your book title with rating, spring break story and any big family news to mcscpao@usmc.mil.

I can't wait to hear from everyone.

Traci Kelley

Spouses invited to attend team building luncheon May 10

Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) and Program Executive Officer Land Systems family members are invited to a Spouses Team Building luncheon at 11 a.m. May 10 at the Clubs at Quantico. The cost is \$10.50 per adult. Hosted by Mrs. Traci Kelley, MCSC Commander's spouse, attendees will meet Sergeant Major James Dalgarn, the Command's new Sergeant Major, participate in a team-building exercise conducted by Lynda Fullem, learn about the new "Families On Point" Charter and test drive the new Command Family Information website. Those planning to attend should send their RSVP to mcscpao@usmc.mil. For more information, send an e-mail, or call (703) 432-3958.

Sign up to receive information, invitations

Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) and Program Executive Officer Land Systems (PEO LS) spouses are invited to provide their email address so they can receive this monthly newsletter *The Point*, invitations to spouse events and activities, and additional information when necessary. To sign up to receive *The Point* and additional items important to spouses, send your name, e-mail address and phone number to MCSC Corporate Communications Public Affairs at mcscpao@usmc.mil. This personal information will not be shared with businesses or Internet organizations and will only be used to provide important information to MCSC and PEO LS spouses. If you have additional questions, e-mail mcscpao@usmc.mil, or call (703) 432-3958.

Bring the kids June 28 for a Family Fun Day

Grab the kids and bring all your loved ones to work for a Family Fun Day, which is scheduled to take place on Hospital Point in front of Command's Headquarters, Building 2200, on the parade deck from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 28. An open house with static displays is also being considered beginning at 9 a.m.... [full story](#)

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Military children need and deserve the nation's utmost respect and support as they continue to weather a decade of war, the wife of the nation's top military officer said.... [full story](#)

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My 7-year-old son came home from school the other day and told me another boy had called him fat -- several times. My heart sank as I struggled for the right words to comfort my son, and promised to call the teacher on his behalf.... [full story](#)

DoD offers help with moves

Moving again? Even when a move is months away, it's natural to get a little stressed when imagining everything at home getting packed into a box and shipped off to parts unknown. There is so much to do and so much to plan. That's why we offer "Plan My Move." ... [full story](#)

Soldier shares brain injury experience

Let me take you back to the first day of my new life. The day was June 29, 2009. The mission was a mounted patrol to escort supplies and route reconnaissance from a main contingency operating base to a joint security station. The route would take about three hours. We maneuvered through one of the largest cities in Iraq during the three-hour mission.... [full story](#)

Rollout approaches for young adult TRICARE enrollment

Qualified young adults up to age 26 soon will be able purchase TRICARE military health plan coverage on a month-to-month basis.... [full story](#)

TRICARE continues Web-based counseling

[TRICARE](#) officials are extending a state-of-the-art program that's intended to ease the path to mental-health services.... [full story](#)

Military children can attend free camp

Military parents seeking a fun – and free – summer camp option for their children should check out the National Military Family Association's Operation Purple Summer Camp program.... [full story](#)

DoD celebrates Month of the Military Child

Children of U.S. service members around the world will be honored throughout the month for their contributions to their families' well-being and sacrifices on behalf of the nation, a Defense Department official said.... [full story](#)

Kids serve too

Military children continually amaze us as they rise to the challenges of military life. It's a life of frequent moves, changing schools, leaving friends and making new friends.... [full story](#)

Bring the kids June 28 for a Family Fun Day

Grab the kids and bring all your loved ones to work for a Family Fun Day, which is scheduled to take place on Hospital Point in front of Command's Headquarters, Building 2200, on the parade deck from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 28. An open house with static displays is also being considered beginning at 9 a.m.

Tickets in advance are \$7 per person, and children under age 12 are free. There is also a \$25 maximum charge for an entire immediate family. Advance ticket sales will probably begin in late May, and specifics will be posted on TIGER. Individual tickets at the event will cost \$15, and family tickets will not be available at that time.

Parents and their children are invited to participate in traditional picnic-type events and activities, which include face painting, balloon animal creations, the moon bounce and pony rides. A DJ will play tunes, and door prizes will also be given away.

Traditional drinks and eats such as hot dogs, hamburgers and chicken will be available. Kids can also enjoy cotton candy, popcorn and snow cones.

Volunteers will be needed the day of the event. To volunteer, or if you have questions, contact Mac McManus at (703) 432-3861.

Mrs. Mullen: Military children deserve respect, support

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 24, 2011 - Military children need and deserve the nation's utmost respect and support as they continue to weather a decade of war, the wife of the nation's top military officer said.

"I do not believe, and have not believed for quite some time, that there are many issues more important to the future of our armed forces -- indeed to the future of our country -- than those confronting military children today," said Deborah Mullen, wife of Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Mullen offered a snapshot of the challenges confronting military children, both in and out of the classroom, for attendees of a roundtable discussion on the education of military children, one of the culminating events of a summit called "Building a Grad Nation: Partnerships for Student Success."

Many military children have known only war, and the nation has much to learn about the long-term effects that stress will have on this generation, Mullen noted. "But we do know the effects will be significant," she added.

Last year, doctors wrote more than 300,000 prescriptions for psychological medications for military youth under age 18, Mullen said. And the issue of suicide is ongoing and of great concern, she added.

"We are seeing growing numbers of suicide attempts among family members, a trend as worrisome as the one we are seeing in the ranks," she said.

Mullen cited a Rand Corp. study that examined military children's development across a range of social, emotional and academic areas. She said researchers found that across all age groups, military children reported significantly higher levels of emotional difficulties than children in the general population. Additionally, older children had more difficulty with school and exhibited a higher level of problem behaviors, including fighting, while younger children had more symptoms of anxiety and stress, she said.

It's evident that some of the stress on military children is manifesting itself in the classroom as poor grades, inattention, aggression and even overachievement, Mullen said. To some degree, she added, all can be signs of a child under duress and in need of support.

"The classroom can be and should be a haven of learning and growth and development," she said. "I ask only that it can also be a place where military children can find the acceptance they need and the respect and understanding they so richly deserve."

To better support military children, Americans must begin to bridge the ever-growing military-civilian divide, she noted.

Mullen recalled a story she heard about an airman preparing for overseas duty. His daughter's friend asked her where her dad was heading. "Guantanamo Bay," she answered. "Oh, my goodness," her friend shrieked. "What did he do?"

"This disconnect with America ... is quite tragic for us all," Mullen said.

Mullen noted that her husband speaks frequently on the topic. "He knows the military is some 40 percent smaller than it was when the Berlin wall came down," she said. "And so he says, 'We're not coaching in Little League; we're not attending local churches; we're not living in neighborhoods. People who used to know us don't know us anymore.'"

The reality is fewer than 1 percent of the nation's population serves in the military, she said. Still, Americans must keep service members and their families at the forefront.

"When America no longer knows her troops, she can do little in all practicality to support them in the way they need it most," Mullen said. "We aren't at that point yet, of course, and I hope we don't ever get there."

If that should happen, however, Mullen said her greatest fear is that military families will be the quickest to drop out of sight.

"Ironically, it would be their toughness -- that resilience of which they are so proud -- that may hasten, if not ensure, their anonymity, so fearful they have become in asking for help," she said.

Families in need of psychological counseling aren't asking for it out of fear that doing so would negatively affect their spouse's military career, Mullen said. Yet, she added, she's heard of spouses so fraught with worry that they refuse to leave their homes, pay their bills or care for their children. And she's seen children "tough as nails on the outside, but inside they ball themselves up, shut themselves off from a world they know can crumble at a moment's notice," she added.

"It's a special kind of pride and a special kind of fear they labor under," she said, noting that more than 900,000 military children have had a parent deploy multiple times. These children don't know if their mom or dad will survive the day, Mullen said, and they face this fear over prolonged periods of time. And, unlike children of police officers or firefighters, it's a fear that isn't relieved at night when their parent walks in the door. Their parent won't walk through the door for a year at a time, she said.

"And when he does, it's a pretty safe bet he won't be quite the same guy as when he left," she said, noting that the returning parent may also have emotional and physical challenges.

For other children, their parent may never walk through the door again. "How do these kids reconcile that?" Mullen said. "How can they dare share that dreadful experience with others for whom such sacrifices are alien?"

Mullen asked the audience to imagine a life with the added worry of receiving a knock on the door with the worst news imaginable, "and no one on either side of the classroom, let alone the neighborhood, understands."

"These are the challenges I ask you consider," she told the audience. "These are the problems I ask you to solve, and the shoes I ask you to walk in, if only for a few days."

Military children need Nation's support

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 23, 2011 - Military children need the support not just of the Defense Department (DoD), but the "whole of nation" to ensure they're ready for the future, a DoD official said.

"Military children are resilient, but they need a lot of help," said Robert Gordon, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. "We're doing much more in the within the Department of Defense and federal government, but it will not be enough, because this is an American problem -- it's not just a problem of the Department of Defense."

Gordon touched on the challenges facing military children and some of the programs the Defense Department is implementing to help them during a roundtable on the education of military children, one of the culminating events of an education summit called "Building a Grad Nation."

Military families today have different challenges from those their predecessors faced, he said, most notably multiple deployments. "Again and again we are seeing service members deployed and spouses having to take care of their families back home," he said. "It's been very difficult."

Gordon said he just returned from a trip to Europe, where he met with spouses and children. Some of the spouses he met had never been out of the United States before, yet were asked to move overseas with their children and without their military spouse, who was deployed directly into the combat theater. Most of these spouses, he noted, were under 25 years old.

"That is the world in which we live today," he said.

Scattered around the world are about 2 million military children, Gordon said, 1.2 million of school age.

Of the 1.2 million, roughly 90,000 are in the military school system, and about 70,000 are in public schools on military installations across the country. The other roughly 1 million children are scattered throughout the United States in the public school system.

"One of the issues is finding them, understanding where in the world they are and what they are doing," Gordon said. Then, he added, it's "finding and engaging them."

This will take a concerted effort that extends far beyond the reach of the Defense Department, he said.

Gordon praised President Barack Obama's Presidential Study Directive 9, which directed federal agencies to determine how they can better support military families. A report titled "Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment" outlines the nearly 50 commitments federal government agencies made on behalf of military families. Many are specific to military children and their education.

"It is a whole-of-nation approach," Gordon said. "All 16 agencies of the federal government focused on military families. It's about strengthening military families."

Within the Defense Department, Gordon called for leadership involvement to help bolster military children and praised the efforts of Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his wife, Deborah Mullen, who also spoke at the roundtable.

"The chairman could ... prioritize a lot of different things - this is the DoD - but it has been our children that they have prioritized," he said. The chairman and his wife have gone across country and brought back pertinent issues and avenues of change, he noted, which "helps us craft our programs."

Additionally, DoD leaders have commissioned a 270-day education review, currently under way, to "ensure world-class educational opportunities for all 1.2 million military children," he said.

The review will look at curriculums for military children, the impact of transitions and deployments, and facilities.

Gordon also highlighted the military family life consultant program, which is designed to provide support to service members and their families. Consultants provide parent education, information on support services, and helps individuals and families develop coping mechanisms.

The program includes 40,000 consultants, he said, who assist with nonmedical counseling for a set length of time. They also can work within schools for a semester at a time. "This is a huge success story," he said.

Overall, it will take a combination of strong leadership seeking areas of improvement and the support of the entire nation to ensure military children receive the support they need and deserve, Gordon said.

After all, he noted, "military children are American children."

Caring for people aids readiness, official says

By Lisa Daniel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 17, 2011 - The Defense Department is committed to maintaining total force readiness even under tightening budgets and amid plans to transition out of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon's top personnel official assured a congressional subcommittee.

The department is committed to carrying out Defense Secretary Robert Gates' directive to prepare the force to manage risks by being agile, well-trained, and able to work within integrated personnel processes, Clifford Stanley, Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness, told the House Armed Services Committee's personnel subcommittee.

"My focus has been total force readiness, caring for our people and creating a culture of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency," Stanley said. "I view total force readiness as a mental, physical, emotional and spiritual preparedness and resilience."

This, he added, involves enabling training and equipment, supporting forces when they are deployed, and giving them and their families the support they need when they are at home.

The department also considers the role of its civilians in supporting the total force, "as well as how families and volunteers fit into the total force equation," Stanley said. And attracting and retaining the right people, he told the lawmakers, requires providing a quality of life commiserate with the quality of service.

Stanley was joined at the hearing by personnel leaders from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, who said that while all are meeting recruiting and retention goals, they must work to ensure their services' policies are the best for attracting, retaining, training and educating the right people, especially as the civilian job market improves.

Lieutenant General Thomas Bostick, the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, said that as the Army works to restore balance after a decade of a high operational tempo in dual conflicts, its personnel priorities are to recruit and retain the best people, and to make them as resilient as possible.

Those goals come at a time when recruiting and retention are becoming more of a challenge, Bostick said. Fewer than 30 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds are eligible to serve because they can't meet physical or educational requirements. One in five young people are overweight – compared to one in 20 in the 1960s – and they increasingly are not graduating from high school, he said.

"As a nation, together, we must continue to address these concerns," he said.

Lieutenant General Darrell Jones, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services, said retention among airmen is at a 16-year high, causing the service to exceed end-strength goals. Still, he said, the Air Force will continue to give bonuses to attract the right people into the right jobs.

Lieutenant General Robert Milstead, Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, said the Corps is the best he's seen in three decades and that "standards will remain" regardless of force reductions.

"Our top priority is to keep faith with Marines, Sailors and their families," he said.

Stanley and the service representatives said they are dedicated to drawing down appropriately and as conditions determine.

The Marine Corps grew by about 27,000 for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and will responsibly draw down by about 16,000 as it is able, Milstead said. "Until we're done with Afghanistan, we have no intention of reducing the Corps," he said.

All of the services are focused on increasing "dwell time" -- the amount of time at home between deployments -- the leaders said. The Army, for the first time since the wars began, expects to have two years of dwell time for all soldiers who deploy in October, Bostick said.

The Defense Department's goal for dwell time is three years at home for every one year deployed, Stanley said.

The service representatives also spoke of the risk of operating under a continuing funding resolution, since Congress hasn't yet approved a budget for fiscal 2011, which began Oct. 1. Navy Vice Admiral Mark Ferguson, Chief of Naval Personnel, said it is especially challenging in planning for permanent-change-of-station moves.

"The uncertainty of our funding streams puts that at risk," he told the panel, "delaying moves and sliding them in to the next fiscal year."

Childhood obesity hits home

By Elaine Wilson
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 14, 2011 -- My 7-year-old son came home from school the other day and told me another boy had called him fat -- several times. My heart sank as I struggled for the right words to comfort my son, and promised to call the teacher on his behalf.

While I was upset with the boy who called my son a name, I was even more upset with myself.

My son is overweight, obese by the doctor's standards, (see the blog <http://afps.dodlive.mil/2010/02/24/blogger-admits-parenting-challenge/#> I wrote last year) and I don't think I've been doing enough to help.

Months earlier, I had pledged to make over our sometimes-unhealthy family lifestyle after the pediatrician noted an upward trend on my son's weight chart.

I started with the best of intentions. For months, I worked at increasing the variety of fruits I picked up each week at the store. But recently, I've noticed my tendency to sneak a few of my family's not-so-healthy favorites -- doughnuts, ice cream and candy, to name a few -- into the cart. And down deep, I know my son is going to opt for the sweets over the healthy treats when I'm not looking.

I've encouraged my son to be more active, but that, too has waned in the winter months. The TV's siren call is hard for him to resist, and I've been growing more lax with my TV cutoff times. He's not getting enough exercise, and I'm the one who's ultimately responsible.

It's not about his appearance; it's about his health.

Studies show that about 80 percent of children ages 10 to 15 who were overweight became obese by age 25, Public Health Service Commander (Dr.) Aileen Buckler, TRICARE population health physician, told me in a recent interview. And children who are overweight before age 8 are more likely to have more severe obesity as an adult, which can lead to greater risks of cardiovascular disease, stroke, certain types of cancer, osteoarthritis and even infertility.

To make matters worse, America's childhood obesity rates have tripled in the past 30 years. Today, nearly one in three American children and about one in four military children are overweight or obese.

The topic recently has been highlighted in the news, mostly due to First Lady Michelle Obama's efforts with the "Let's Move (<http://www.letsmove.gov>)" campaign, which encourages people to adopt a healthier lifestyle through healthy eating and exercise. The Defense Department also is working to help families with this pervasive issue, which I wrote about in the American Forces Press Service article, "DoD Takes Steps to Combat Childhood Obesity (<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62753>)."

For example, officials are creating standardized menus for child development centers to ensure the centers are meeting children's nutritional needs, Barbara Thompson, of the Pentagon's office of military community and family policy, told me. They're also working with vendors who supply the centers' food to ensure they're getting the freshest vegetables, lower-fat cuts of meat and less processed food laden with fats, salt and sugar.

But the Defense Department can't do this alone, Thompson said. Adults need to be good role models. She summed up a healthy family goal with the aid of a few numbers: five-two-one-zero. People, she explained, should aim for five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, two hours or less of screen time, one hour of physical activity and zero sugary drinks.

Sounds like good advice. I need to start opting for granola bars over candy bars and frozen yogurt over ice cream. And it's time to encourage my son once again to pick up an activity that won't involve a remote control or joystick. That will, at least, be a start.

Are you struggling with a similar issue? If so, don't hesitate to write in with your lessons learned or greatest challenges.

In the meantime, for more information on a healthy lifestyle, visit a service health and wellness facility, check in with a base fitness center or visit the Let's Move campaign website, <http://www.letsmove.gov>, or Military OneSource, <http://militaryonesource.com>.

DoD offers help with moves

By Elaine Wilson
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 11, 2011 – *Robert Gordon is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. In this guest blog, Mr. Gordon spotlights an [online resource called "Plan My Move,"](#) and invites families to join discussion boards to submit questions or share lessons learned. - Elaine Wilson*

Moving? Let us help with 'Plan My Move'

Robert Gordon
Military Community and Family Policy

Moving again? Even when a move is months away, it's natural to get a little stressed when imagining everything at home getting packed into a box and shipped off to parts unknown. There is so much to do and so much to plan. That's why we offer "[Plan My Move.](#)"

Plan My Move features a calendar that you customize. When are you moving? Where are you going? Do you have family members with special needs? The site creates a calendar that walks you through the day-to-day process of moving. You can change the calendar to fit your family's needs. Tasks can be changed, moved or removed. You can add your own tasks.

Along with the calendar, Plan My Move creates travel checklists, arrival checklists, lists of documents to hand-carry and important phone numbers. You can print each of these lists and the calendar.

Plan My Move also links families to a massive amount of information about where you're going and how you'll get there. The site explains permanent and temporary housing options. It goes over the shipment and storage of your household goods. You can read about schools, employment assistance and recreation opportunities. You'll find lots of information about the local community. The site lists websites, phone numbers and e-mail addresses, so you can contact them directly.

Whether it's your first move or your fifth, there are always new challenges. How do I move my pets? How do I find the best day care and schools? What moving allowances will I get? Plan my Move has tip sheets for more than 150 different moving topics.

What moving tips do you have? [Join our discussion on Facebook](#) if you have advice to share with other families or if you have questions about a move. We've also started [discussions on Facebook on moving with special needs family members](#) and [moving with children](#). I will focus on these subjects in my next two posts. In the meantime, I hope you'll use these discussions to share experiences, advice with others who may benefit. Thank you.

Soldier shares brain injury experience

By Elaine Wilson
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 5, 2011 – *I'd like to introduce guest blogger Army Staff Sergeant Victor Medina, who sustained a moderate traumatic brain injury (TBI) during his third deployment in Iraq in 2009. Several months later, Medina started a blog titled "TBI Warrior" to help educate other survivors and caregivers affected by a brain injury through his own experiences — before and after TBI. He shared his story in a [Defense Centers of Excellence blog](#) on March 2. – Elaine Wilson*

TBI stands for: To be improved

By Army Staff Sergeant Victor Medina

Let me take you back to the first day of my new life. The day was June 29, 2009. The mission was a mounted patrol to escort supplies and route reconnaissance from a main contingency operating base to a joint security station. The route would take about three hours. We maneuvered through one of the largest cities in Iraq during the three-hour mission.

As we exited the city limits, the event occurred that changed my life forever. An explosively formed projectile impacted our vehicle.

The next 48-plus hours are a blur in my mind, still. Most of what I can remember about the event is because of the stories others have told to me. I do remember the smoke and the confusion that followed the accident, but I don't remember fainting. I remember waking up in an aid station feeling very confused and overwhelmed. I learned I had sustained a moderate TBI.

Today, after 16 months of rehabilitation, I look back and think: “It has been a long recovery.” Life is not the same; I have changed. The people who knew me pre-injury can clearly see the difference. I still cope with lingering side effects. Problems with my vision, hearing, balance, headaches, speech disfluency, including the obvious cognitive impairments, are all there. I am not the same as I was before the injury. The truth is that I’ve tried to be the old me but just haven’t been able to succeed at it.

My new philosophy in life and with the injury is: “If this is the hand life dealt me, I will play the best game possible.” Is it frustrating? Yes. I encourage others not to focus on the negative things of the past or present, but rather set eyes on a bright future. I believe survivors of mild or moderate TBI have the power to be as independent as they want to be, regardless of the symptoms. I always ask survivors to stop and ask themselves: “Are you a victim?” or “Are you a warrior?”

With or without injury we are responsible for our actions and our future. Life is about decisions, and you can choose to stand up and make the best out of your life. I decided to stand up and help others. I decided to be an example; and that’s how [TBI Warrior](#) started.

It humbles me when others feel empowered and motivated by my experiences. The Army taught me the value in “selfless service.” That is the value I choose to carry with me to help others. I always say that my mission is not about me but about all those who come behind me. TBI is not the end; it can be a new beginning. The effects may not go away, but “it will get better.”

Rollout approaches for young adult TRICARE enrollment

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2011 – Qualified young adults up to age 26 soon will be able purchase TRICARE military health plan coverage on a month-to-month basis.

TRICARE officials announced plans to roll out the new Young Adult Program -- including an option to make coverage retroactive to Jan. 1 -- in the near future.

This, officials said, will ensure military families aren’t left out as the new national health care reform law extends parents’ health insurance for their children up to age 26.

The new program will allow qualified, unmarried military children up to age 26 to buy health care coverage under their parents’ TRICARE plans through age 26. That’s up from the current maximum age of 21, or age 23 for full-time college students whose parents provide more than half of their financial support.

The fiscal 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, which President Barack Obama signed Jan. 7, gave the Department of Defense (DoD) the authority it needed to extend TRICARE coverage to young adults, TRICARE spokesman Austin Camacho said.

This ensures benefits extended are in line with those all American families receive under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which took effect in March 2010.

“We’ve been working hard to make sure we could put TRICARE Young Adult on a fast track,” Navy Rear Admiral (Dr.) Christine Hunter, Director of the TRICARE Management Activity, told American Forces Press Service. “Fortunately for our beneficiaries concerned about health care coverage for their adult children, the law signed by the president includes opportunities for military families to elect this new premium-based plan retroactive to Jan. 1.”

Qualified young adults who do not have access to employer-sponsored health care coverage will be eligible to purchase it through TRICARE on a month-to-month basis, Camacho said.

TRICARE officials expect to announce premium costs shortly, before enrollment begins. But because the 2011 defense authorization specifies that the rates must cover all program costs, Camacho said, premiums will be based on commercial insurance data about the costs of providing care.

Once premiums are determined, officials encourage eligible beneficiaries to explore all of their health care coverage options to choose a plan that makes sense for them.

Hunter estimated that the program, once in place, could extend TRICARE coverage to several hundred thousand additional beneficiaries.

“The premium allows us to provide the excellent benefit to our military families while responsibly addressing the impact of health care costs on the DoD budget,” she said.

Officials plan to roll out the new program in two phases, first offering a premium-based TRICARE Standard/Extra benefit, Camacho said. Then, later this year, they plan to introduce the TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Prime Remote plan, including overseas options, and the Uniformed Services Family Health Plan.

Once the program is in place, eligible young adults may submit an application and premium payment to the appropriate regional or overseas contractor for processing, Camacho said. Cost shares, deductibles and catastrophic caps will vary, based on the plan selected and the sponsor's status.

Young adult beneficiaries will receive an enrollment card after they buy coverage and their payment is reflected in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System, Camacho said.

The new beneficiaries may choose to pay premiums back to Jan. 1, which will entitle them to file claims for any health care costs they have accrued since that date. To do so, officials advise that they save all receipts to ease claims processing.

For adults who need health insurance coverage but no longer qualify for TRICARE coverage, officials advise exploring the Continued Health Care Benefit Program. This premium-based program offers temporary, transitional health coverage for 18 to 36 months.

Coverage must be purchased within 60 days of losing TRICARE eligibility. Information about the program is posted on the TRICARE website.

TRICARE continues Web-based counseling

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2011 – [TRICARE](#) officials are extending a state-of-the-art program that's intended to ease the path to mental-health services.

The [TRICARE Assistance Program](#) will now run through March 20, 2012, to give officials more time to measure the program's effectiveness, a [TRICARE release](#) said. Through the program, TRICARE health care beneficiaries use the Internet and a Web cam to speak “face-to-face” with mental-health counselors around the clock and from anywhere in the United States.

People can log on from home to receive short-term, nonmedical counseling for situations that may arise from life circumstances such as deployment stress, relationships, personal loss and parent-child communications.

These services are available in the United States to active-duty service members, active-duty family members who are at least 18 years old, beneficiaries using TRICARE Reserve Select and beneficiaries covered under the Transitional Assistance Management Program, the release said.

For some people, the online services aren't an appropriate level of care or video services aren't accessible. In that case, a licensed professional will refer the beneficiary to the right organization.

To find out more about this program, beneficiaries can go to [TRICARE's website](#).

If you've used the program and would like to comment on your experience with it, don't hesitate to write in.

To comment or to read more blog posts, visit the [Family Matters blog](#), or visit Family Matters on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

Military children can attend free camp

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 31, 2011 – Military parents seeking a fun – and free – summer camp option for their children should check out the National Military Family Association's [Operation Purple Summer Camp program](#).

The association developed the camps to support military children ages 7 to 17 dealing with the stressors of war, according to an association news release. Now in its eighth year, the program will host more than 3,500 children during 40 weeks of camp in 25 states, as well as one overseas location this summer.

People can [apply](#) for a camp through April 29 at midnight EDT. The camps are open to children of all services, whether active duty, National Guard or Reserve. However, priority will be given to military children with a parent deployed or deploying any time between September 2010 and December 2011 who have not attended an Operation Purple camp in the past.

For more information about the program, or camp locations and dates, visit the association's [website](#). To comment or for more blog posts, visit [Family Matters](#), or check out Family Matters on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

DoD celebrates Month of the Military Child

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 – Children of U.S. service members around the world will be honored throughout the month for their contributions to their families' well-being and sacrifices on behalf of the nation, a Defense Department official said.

Each April, Americans pause to recognize the nation's 1.8 million military children during the Month of the Military Child, which marks its 25th anniversary this year.

"It's really exciting that the Department of Defense, the White House and civic leaders recognize the sacrifices that military children make," Barbara Thompson, Director of the Pentagon's Office of Family Policy, children and youth, told American Forces Press Service. "It's particularly important during these times of conflict, when children are missing their parents and are sacrificing a lot, to say your sacrifice is recognized and we want to commend you for what you do for your family."

Throughout the month, military installations worldwide will host programs and activities for military children, including fairs, picnics, carnivals and parades, Thompson said. Communities also can get involved by sponsoring fun events to celebrate military children, she added.

Military children's sacrifices and contributions have risen to the forefront in recent years, Thompson said, as people have become increasingly aware of the impact a decade of war is having on military families. Along with the typical military-related stressors of multiple moves and schools, children also have had to deal with long-term, multiple deployments and separations from one, or both, parents over the past 10-plus years, Thompson said.

More than 900,000 military children have had a parent deploy multiple times, she added.

Military children have known only war since 9/11, Thompson noted, and recent research suggests deployments and the length of time separated have an impact on children's academic success and psychological well-being. Other research regarding children and attachment indicates that "this has to be a difficult time for military children," she said.

Just as important as caring for children is caring for their parents, Thompson added. "We know that if the parent is taken care of, the children are taken care of," she said.

Thompson praised the introduction of programs such as the Defense Department's military family life consultants, who provide coaching and nonmedical counseling to children, families and staff in schools and child development and youth programs. Sports and camps offer other opportunities for children to thrive and grow, she said. However, she said, the Defense Department can't tackle all of these issues alone.

The nation took an important step forward in January, Thompson said, when President Barack Obama unveiled a governmentwide plan to strengthen military family support. Federal agencies committed to nearly 50 new programs and cooperative efforts to improve quality of life and well-being for military families.

Thompson also called for a strong “circle of support,” in which schools, communities, health care providers and federal agencies come together to support military families. “We know that it takes a village,” she said.

“Without a doubt, when we can recognize their sacrifices, when we can tell them that we’ll reach out and help them, that we care about them and will connect them with the resources they need, then we’re doing right by them,” she said.

Kids serve too

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 – *Robert Gordon is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. In this blog, Mr. Gordon thanks military children for their contributions, and highlights a few of the Defense Department programs available to support them.*

By Robert Gordon
Military Community and Family Policy
April 1, 2011

Military children continually amaze us as they rise to the challenges of military life. It’s a life of frequent moves, changing schools, leaving friends and making new friends.

During April, the Month of the Military Child, we applaud their character and maturity, and we acknowledge that kids serve too.

Our military community includes 1.8 million American children and youth under 18 years old. The Department of Defense (DoD) offers a wide range of programs and services to support military families and their kids. Just a few of the things we’re working on include:

- Working with states to minimize school disruption for military children during transition and deployment. The [Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#) provides common guidelines for participating states to follow in handling issues including initial enrollment age, records transfer, graduation requirements and much more. So far, 35 states have adopted the compact, covering 88 percent of students.
- Increasing access to quality, affordable child care for military families. Today’s National Guard and Reserve forces mobilize and deploy at historic rates. Many military children -- of all branches and components -- live away from military installations. Even when they do live near to one, many locations are unable to meet the demand for care at military child development facilities. The [DoD Child Care Expansion Initiative](#) will help answer this growing need by ensuring their access to quality child care in the communities in which they reside.
- The Department of Defense Education Activity launched an [online preregistration application](#). Through the site, parents can preregister their children in a DoD school from anywhere in the world, and even while on the move from one installation to another.
- A new, 365-page [deployment guide](#) is now available. This guide prepares families for deployment and has chapters dedicated to preparing children for deployment, helping them to cope with separation and the adjustment when the deployed parent comes home.

Additionally, installations around the world offer a huge range of activities for military kids at child care centers, youth centers, clubs and camps.

The professionals at these programs get vital support from volunteers. I see the enormous amount of good done by the hands and hearts of volunteers. Their selfless work changes lives and strengthens our nation.

During the Month of the Military Child, I also encourage you to consider volunteering at any of the many organizations dedicated to military kids. From the [Boys and Girls Club of America](#), [4-H Youth Development](#) and the [Armed Services YMCA](#), these and many other organizations provide quality programs to military families and their children.

Have you volunteered with youth in your community? Where do you volunteer? What inspired you to get started? What experiences have you had? How would you inspire someone else to serve as a volunteer? We'd like you to share your stories on the [Facebook wall](#) of Serve.gov.

Is the organization you support listed on [Serve.gov](#)? This is a nationwide resource for finding volunteer opportunities in your community and creating your own. Listing the organization on this website allows other people to sign up and join you.

It's hard to imagine a local t-ball league without volunteers. Who would prepare the field, coach the players or call the plays? Children are first in the mind of their parents, and during Month of the Military Child, we hope they become first in the minds of their communities as well.

There are many ways to serve, and many reasons. No matter your age or background, your education or interests, your experience or abilities, Serve.gov has a volunteer opportunity that's right for you.

For more blog posts, visit [Family Matters blog](#), or check out [Family Matters on Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).