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# TRAILBLAZERS MARK AFGHANISTAN DEPLOYMENT



## Maintenance company set to deploy to Kuwait

By Staff Sgt. William Banton  
JBER Public Affairs

The 98th Maintenance Company, scheduled to deploy to Kuwait for maintenance support operations soon, honored its Soldiers in a deployment ceremony at Buckner Physical Fitness Center on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Feb. 6.

"This unit has been called by our nation to deploy, and I report they are trained and ready to answer that call," said Army Lt. Col. Kirk Boston, commander of the 532nd Engineer Battalion (Provisional), the company's parent battalion. "The past 60 days have been a blizzard of activity. This unit, on very short notice, has prepared for the mission in Kuwait."

The 98th MC has been preparing since October to deploy for nine months to a year providing maintenance in the Central Command area of operations.

"This time, it was a little different but we train [to deploy] regardless of a deployment," said Army Capt. Andrew Rainey, 98th MC commander. "Normally we would be on a cycle. In the past, with more frequent deployments, we would come in and have at least a year to prepare."

Ground support equipment platoon leader Army 1st Lt. Kristen Bell, 98th MC, said she agreed and added the short time to prepare hasn't prevented them from maintaining readiness.

"We're making sure they are ready in that aspect and prepared for what's lying ahead, that we know of," Bell said. "We've done a lot of training – counter-improvised explosive device and cultural awareness; all kinds of different training courses to make sure everyone is ready and that there are no doubts."

Bell also said the company has many younger Soldiers who are skilled at their jobs supporting U.S. Army Alaska, and leadership is setting them up to succeed in a contingency environment.

"It's kind of hectic with our family life and trying to get everyone trained up and our gear packed up," said Army Staff Sgt. Ahmad Jimmerson, electronic maintenance platoon sergeant. "This is my eighth deployment, so I'm kind of used to it, but for my younger guys this is very stressful; they don't know what to expect on short notice."

Bell said the Soldiers' families are supported by the unit's family readiness group during deployments.

"They maintain a full contact roster of everybody's spouses and next of kin, so if there was an emergency, or one of the spouses needs help around the house, we have people who can reach out and lend a hand," Bell said.

"This is my first time stationed overseas and the support system here is awesome," Jimmerson said. "In terms of family readiness, this is probably one of the best places I've ever been."



Army Col. Peter Andrysiak, 2d Engineer Brigade commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Houston, 2d Engineer Brigade command sergeant major, uncasing the unit colors during a Feb. 5 brigade redeployment ceremony at the Alaska Army National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The uncasing of the colors symbolizes the brigade's return from a seven-month deployment to Afghanistan and their reintegration with U.S. Army Alaska. (U.S. Air Force photos/David Bedard)

## Engineers among last units to leave Afghanistan

By David Bedard  
JBER Public Affairs

December 1950. The Korean War. Following the breakout of the Chosin Reservoir, Marines and Soldiers of the X Corps had avoided destruction by Chinese Communist forces and maneuvered south to the port of Hungnam. If they couldn't evacuate to United Nations lines, the battered unit would risk being encircled a second time.

It was up to the X Corps' 2d Engineer Special Brigade to run the port and supervise the loading of personnel and equipment aboard ship – an operation that would quickly be dubbed an "amphibious landing in reverse."

All told, 105,000 troops, 98,100 Korean refugees, 18,000 vehicles and 350,000 tons of bulk cargo were saved from falling into the hands of the communists, largely due to the efforts of the engineers.

Nearly 65 years later, service members of the 2d Engineer Brigade accomplished a similar feat during their seven-month deployment to Afghanistan where the brigade headquarters commanded engineer units across the country, partnered with Afghan engineer units, and undertook a massive retrograde of equipment and infrastructure to the states.

Brigade and U.S. Army Alaska leaders took the opportunity to share the accomplishments of the 2d Engineer Brigade during a Feb. 5 redeployment ceremony at the Alaska Army National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

During his remarks, Army Maj. Gen. Michael Shields, USARAK commanding general, said approximately 250 Soldiers from the 2d Engineer Brigade Headquarters, the 23rd Engineer Company and the 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion deployed to Afghanistan last spring.

Once the brigade headquarters arrived, they assumed responsibility as the Theater Brigade Engineer Headquarters, command-



Sgt. James Boker, 2d Engineer Brigade, guards the U.S. flag during the Feb. 5 brigade redeployment ceremony at the Alaska Army National Guard Armory.

ing an engineer task force of more than a thousand Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen.

Shields said the deployment was especially challenging due to the rapid drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

"The Trailblazers' mission required them to reduce the U.S. and allied footprint in Afghanistan, even as hostilities continued," the general said. "It is a very atypical challenge and not one we can routinely train for. It required flexibility and adaptive leadership. Our Arctic Trailblazers delivered just that under austere conditions."

Shields said the brigade deconstructed and retrograded 108 tension-fabric structures, synchronized the closure or transfer of 48 bases, demolished 662 wood structures, hauled away more than 120,000 cubic yards of debris from project sites, and returned more than \$51 million worth of equipment to the Army's supply inventory.

The brigade also managed the technical oversight of clearing explosives from more than 104 training ranges across the country, disposing of more than 10,000 high-explosive munitions.

"This effort was critical, as it demonstrated our commitment to reducing the military presence in a responsible manner," Shields said. "Every range the Trailblazers cleared of potentially dangerous ordnance, leaves one less concern for the people of Afghanistan as they face the future."

During his remarks, Army Col. Peter Andrysiak, 2d Engineer Brigade Commander, spoke about how the Trailblazers partnered with the Afghan National Engineer Brigade to prepare them to fully take over engineer duties.

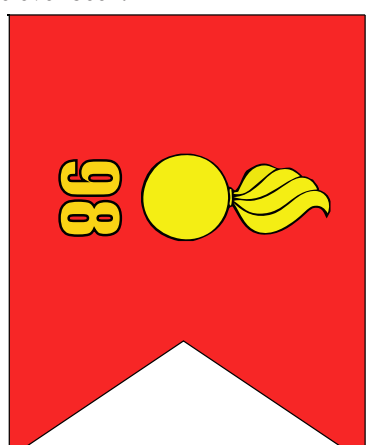
The brigade commander said the Soldiers couldn't have accomplished their mission of transitioning the country to Afghan Forces alone, relying on the home-front support of their families.

"I know too well that the sacrifices they have made, we can't give [that time] back," Andrysiak said. "There were far too many missed anniversaries, births and graduations."

Though most of the focus was justifiably placed on what the Theater Engineer Brigade accomplished, much work was required at the small-unit level to support the larger effort.

Army 1st Sgt. William Shoaf, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Engineer Brigade first sergeant and a native of North Augusta, South Carolina, said preparing headquarters Soldiers for the deployment proved to be a challenge.

"Half of our formation had never deployed before, and that was a little nerve wracking with them not knowing that they didn't understand what it's like to deploy," Shoaf explained. "But they performed extremely well. We were surprised at what we could do with so few people."



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### Inside Canadians integral to 962nd mission, A-2

- Cleaning HAZMAT in arctic conditions ..... A-2
- Guardsman to address South Africa conference ..... A-2
- Balancing service to country, family ..... B-1
- Matters of Faith: What is church? ..... B-2
- Losing weight and feeling great ..... B-4

### Call of Duty

Team Thunderdome nabs win in BOSS Black Ops tourney, Photos, B-5





# Royal Canadian, U.S. air forces create integrated top cover

JBER Public Affairs  
Staff report

During the Cold War, the Soviet threat lay not far from the west of Alaska. The state's nearest neighbor shared more than 1,500 miles of border and the mission to protect North America.

They still do. Several members of the Royal Canadian Air Force are assigned to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's 962nd Airborne Air Control Squadron, where they help maintain top cover for both countries.

The Canadian air battle managers with the 962nd AACS are certified at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma on all operational requirements before being assigned to JBER, and are not considered exchange or visiting positions.

"We fill any role we are asked to, and we [deploy] in support of the taskings the squadron receives," said RCAF Maj. Craig Derenzis, a 962nd AACS mission crew commander and aerospace controller. "There is no secondary input. There is no Canadian over-

sight that is going to tell us what to do. We are squadron members first, and that is understood by the entire structure here at the 962nd; it is a unique thing because you don't often see that.

"We've found that level of integration has become part of the squadron's culture," he said.

As a mission crew commander, Derenzis is responsible for the execution of the E-3's assigned mission as well as command of the multi-faceted mission crew who operate the aircraft's hardware.

The E-3 Sentry is an airborne warning and control system – providing awareness of friendly and hostile activity, command of an area of responsibility, all-weather surveillance, and early warning of enemy actions during operations.

"There are a lot of moving pieces, and it's the MCC's role to ensure a coordinated effort toward mission accomplishment," Derenzis said.

Unlike a fairly straightforward cargo plane, there are two overarching aspects of any E-3 flight – the flying and the surveillance.

"It's definitely a crew-composed aircraft," said Senior Airman Scott Ellis, a 962nd communication technician. "You've got your flight deck; they are driving us to where we need to be. You've got your techs, which is my job ... we make sure all the equipment is working. Then you've got your mission crew, and Derenzis is the big boss-man for that side of the house.

"Everyone has their own role on the jet, and the MCC is taking all that information in and is making bigger decisions," Ellis said.

The Canadian and U.S. air forces work so closely in air defense because of NORAD commitments, Derenzis said; U.S. Airmen are also stationed at Canadian installations.

The co-manning arrangement ensures a seamless flow in contingency operations.

"We're collectively better at defending North American airspace by integrating and working cooperatively," he said.

Derenzis said it was the op-

portunity to work with allies and be involved in international operations that attracted him to becoming an ABM, and that desire paid off when he had an opportunity to support the NATO flying mission on board an E-3 stationed out of Germany.

"There were 17 nations involved in that mission when I was there," Derenzis said. "You can imagine between those 17 nationalities, mostly European, you're going to have different expectations and a different paradigm brought to the table."

Derenzis said his exposure to U.S. Air Force operations has given him an increased appreciation for the subtle differences between actually working on a U.S. aircraft and the secondary interaction he had overseas.

"There is a fantastic opportunity to work with one another very frequently, and that doesn't [often] happen," Derenzis said. "In the NATO context, it happens to a degree, but even there you are looking at the complications from several different

cultures that are dissimilar."

The cultural similarities between Canada and its southern neighbor mean that integration is less taxing, while still providing a new outlook, Derenzis said.

"Coming here, you see a different approach to operation and a different approach to regulations," he said. "It is fantastic to have that; you can kind of take the best approaches from the different services you work with and attempt to incorporate them into your own."

The appreciation goes both ways.

"What they bring to the fight each and every day is awesome," said Chief Master Sgt. Dwayne Ward, 962nd AACS chief enlisted manager. "They bring a fresh perspective."

"I think the mission, working side-by-side, is much easier than, say, working with an Italian, a Turk, [or the Dutch]," Ward said.

"We are both from the western hemisphere [and] we have a common interest, in that we both want to protect our air sovereignty."

## Cleaning up in the cold: civil engineers train for HAZMAT response

By Air Force Capt. Anastasia Wasem  
11th Air Force Public Affairs

Members of the 611th Civil Engineer Squadron, along with five other state and federal agencies, practiced techniques to deal with oil or hazardous waste spills under cold weather conditions during an exercise on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Feb. 3 through 5.

The 611th CES acts as first responder to incidents on JBER and King Salmon Divert Airfield, as well as secondary responder to 21 remote operating locations in Alaska and around the Pacific.

It is also the only civil engineer squadron in the state that responds to oil spills, a role also unique in the Air Force.

"With this exercise, we show that it is possible to find and recover oil in Arctic conditions," said Scott Partlow, the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving assistant base manager. "I think it's a good thing that everyone gets out here and gets their hands dirty to figure out how the equipment works and why we do it."

The SUPSALV was just one of the agencies working with the 611th CES to increase joint interoperability and complete the exercise.

In addition, the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Coast Guard, Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response Inc. and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation had representatives to help plan, execute and train as part of the exercise.

"It's a unique opportunity just to have all these different agencies working together with the same focus in mind – to respond to a crisis and to be able to deploy the different techniques and be responsible for the cleanup," said Air Force Master Sgt. Petree Buford, the 611th CES operations engineering superintendent.

The response teams learned and practiced several different types of techniques to use in the event of an oil spill.

The trenching and rope-mop method consists of creating a trench in the ice, without penetrating it, and then drilling holes down to the water through the trench, said Partlow.

The oil or hazardous waste floats up through the holes, becomes trapped in the



Members of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, 611th Civil Engineer Squadron, and U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving set up the rope-mop skimmer during an Arctic oil spill response exercise Feb. 4. A trench is dug in the ice and holes are drilled to allow the oil or other hazardous material to rise into the trench to be collected. The skimmer rotates through the trench collecting the oil and carrying it to a holding tank. The units participated in the exercise to practice Arctic spill-response tactics and techniques. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. John Gordinier)

trench and is picked up by a rope skimmer, a device resembling a long, frayed rope, which absorbs oil and fuel.

The rope moves on pulleys, carrying the waste to a machine which separates the oil and water from the rope, and the oil is then sent to a holding tank.

Trainees also practiced a diversionary tactic, drilling holes in the ice to help determine the location of the spill and then simply inserting plywood to divert the spill to the location needed in order to clear it

from the water.

"We'll make a slice in the ice and then insert the plywood to act as a barrier or blockade to shoot the oil and water where we want it to go," Buford explained.

While the techniques practiced and employed by the 611th CES are effective, these are only temporary measures to prevent spreading or to clean up a small spill until larger assets can be deployed from other agencies.

The methods practiced during the exer-

cise are meant to control 60 to 70 thousand gallons of hazardous waste in a lake or river.

The 611th CES can respond to an incident on JBER in about 12 hours and in about 24 to 48 hours for an incident at King Salmon.

"This is important to the state of Alaska, because here, oil would travel to the ocean and have a much larger affected area if the spill wasn't contained," Buford said. "It could have a major impact on the residents of Alaska."

## Alaska Guardsman to speak at South Africa cyber-war conference

*Technology creates need for new strategies*

By Sgt. Maria Lindsay  
ANG Public Affairs

An Alaska Army National Guardsman is headed to South Africa next month to speak about cyberspace strategy at an international conference that will dive into cyber warfare issues.

Army National Guard 1st Lt. Christopher Brill, a communications platoon leader for the 297th Long Range Surveillance Squadron of the Alaska Army National Guard, will present his academically-published paper, "Clausewitz, Air

Power, and the Cold War: A Strategy for Cyberspace," at the 10th annual International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security, hosted in South Africa on March 23.

Brill, who wrote the paper while working toward his master's degree in Military Studies and Strategic Leadership at American Military University, was invited to present at the conference after submitting his work.

However, the conference was unable to fund his travel from Alaska.

"When I realized I wouldn't be able to fund this trip, I reached out to the Alaska National Guard Officers

Association to see if they would be willing to help," Brill said. "They said yes to my request right away ... their enthusiasm in my success has been awesome."

ANGOA has offered to pay for Brill's airfare and accom-

modations for the two-day conference, and is also keeping its members updated regarding the success of his presentation through its website.

"We sponsored First Lieutenant Brill because of his potential, his past successes and his desire to continue pursuing excellence," said Army National Guard Col. Edie Grunwald, president of ANGOA. "His paper on cyber strategy could shape future decisions and strengthen the National Guard's role within the cyber realm."

Brill's paper studies the theory of cyber warfare and the weaknesses and strengths of technology.

"Every technology has its limitations," Brill explained. "The challenge with determining outcomes and developments in cyber is that there is no cyber equivalent."

"We know how bad nuclear weapons are because we have Hiroshima. But we have no cyber Pearl Harbor," he said.

"The best we can do is theorize an outcome."

Following his presentation in South Africa, Brill, who is also a member of ANGOA, has been asked to speak at the organization's annual conference in May.

"I am incredibly grateful to the Alaska National Guard Officers Association and the Alaska Army National Guard," Brill said. "I will make sure that, while presenting my work, I do right by these organizations and represent them in the best way that I can."



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# The Iceman cometh; 962d AACS and maintenance go anyway

## New de-icing fluid keeps AWACS jets fit to fly

By Air Force 2nd Lt. Michael Trent Harrington  
JBER Public Affairs

Like a certain beloved percentage of Americans who buy their Thanksgiving turkeys three hours before dinner is supposed to begin, the pilots and maintenance crews of the 962d Airborne Air Control Squadron proved last month that sometimes one's got to go to great lengths to thaw a bird in a hurry.

The introduction of a new de-icing fluid – and 18 months of what 962d superintendent Chief Master Sgt. Dwayne Ward calls the best operations-and-maintenance relationship in the Air Force – allows the 3rd Wing's pair of E-3

Sentries to answer the alert call no matter how frigid and frozen the otherwise-friendly skies might be.

"If anybody in the E-3 community is going to be able [to] or have to do this," said Air Force Lt. Col. Eric Gonzalez, 962nd AACS commander, "it's going to be the Alaska guys. It's going to be us."

The 52 days of snowfall, 128 days of cold rain and nearly 100 days of chilly fog which Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson has averaged for the last decade (per 14th Weather Squadron statistics) all suggest he's right.

The 962d AACS bears a key burden in the Alaskan NORAD alert mission.

The E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System doesn't quite "scramble" to meet stray Cessna Skywagons from Merrill Field or Russian Bears from Moscow – such pedestrianly tactical jobs are reserved for planes named after patriotic birds of prey – but according to NORAD factsheets, it is critical in telling the afterburning jets that do the scrambling what all might be out there.

"We have a legacy aircraft,"

said Air Force Master Sgt. Fred Armand, 962d AACS flight engineer, using the officially polite term for less-than-sleek and less-than-new aircraft. "We hold an alert requirement in potentially six-plus months a year of bad weather."

"We need to be able to prove we can launch a safe flight," Armand added, "whenever higher headquarters might want it."

Before any flight below certain wind and weather thresholds, maintenance crews have to both de-ice the plane to remove ice and snow that have built up overnight, or in a few blizzardy minutes since the plane moved outside to run its engines.

Lest all that work be instantly undone, the plane must be covered with an anti-icing agent in the crucial few minutes between de-icing and take-off, said Air Force Staff Sgt. Colby Lehman, a 703d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron computer and electronic warfare technician.

The rules allow only two minutes between de-icing and anti-icing, and a limited amount of time to get off the ground from there, Lehman said.

If the crews break either of those windows, the entire process has to be started all over again, and the E-3 won't be able to keep up with the rapid timeline for responding to an alert.

Elsewhere, they can just shut it down and call it a day.

Here, the AWACS may not have that option – because with this kind of mission, even in this kind of environment, that can't happen, Gonzalez added.

Now the squadron's work will be turning the proven concept into a capability they can build upon and teach the world.

"We're the experts," Armand said. "We're the northernmost E-3 base, and this is how we prove we can get the job done."

"We're setting the tone for dealing with inclement weather, at home or deployed," he noted and,

Gonzalez added, it's likely the first time it's ever been done.

For the men and women of 962d AACS operations and maintenance, the biggest thing for now is knowing that they can do it and – in the future – do it better, said Air Force Lt. Col. Steve Eschmann, 962d AACS assistant director of operations.

The key ally to readying a 38-year old airborne early warning and control airframe is a truck with a sunroof-and-windshield-wiper combo and a boom operator suspended some 50 feet in the air.

The boom sports a set of triggers shooting air, de-icing and anti-icing fluids along the plane's 152-foot length.

Few in the squadron admit they thought saving the world could come down to unit togetherness and the sweet, juicy goodness of \$11-a-gallon de-icing fluid.

"Now, for higher headquarters [Alaskan NORAD] missions in the future," Eschmann added, no matter how foul the weather gets, "we know we've done it and we know it can be done."

The iceman cometh, and the AWACS will go anyway.



# Coast Guard conducts joint-effort navigation aid repair mission

By Lt. j.g. Keith Arnold  
Coast Guard Cutter SPAR

The Coast Guard Cutter SPAR set sail January 26 in a joint effort with Aids to Navigation Team Kodiak to rebuild the Shag Rocks day beacon, a fixed aid to navigation in Whale Pass which was knocked over by strong winds, currents and debris.

Petty Officer 1st Class Jeff Emery, a boatswain's mate, Petty Officer 3rd Class Robert Stocks, a damage controlman, and Petty Officer 3rd Class Bryan Adams, an electronics technician of ANT Kodiak sailed with the SPAR to Whale Pass in northern Kodiak to lead the rebuild. The SPAR crew supplied the transportation and additional manpower.

Shag Rocks day beacon is an essential navigational aid for vessels transiting through Whale Pass, which often is subject to currents in excess of 5 mph.

Because the beacon's base submerges during high tides, it was necessary for the planned rebuild to coincide with tides low enough to expose the reef long enough to actually conduct the work. It was also critical

that the weather remain within parameters for a 24-foot boat.

"The biggest challenge was the logistics of moving gear from the cutter to the shore aid team within a short five-hour tidal window," noted Chief Warrant Officer Travis Laster, the deck force supervisor. "The small boat had to be on station early each day to assess tidal shifts that did not match prediction in this time-critical evolution."

The first day proved challenging, but the coxswain, Petty Officer 3rd Class Patrick Joyce, learned the best place to put workers on the rocks by observing the pattern of tides and currents.

"I watched the waves flow over the rocks and found a good place to put the bow to offload the shore party," said Joyce. "From there I just had to make sure we didn't get pushed onto the rocks by the waves."

After landing two groups of personnel on the rock, the boat crew proceeded two miles back to the SPAR to load the 125-pound base onto the small boat.

The difficulty of handling the weight of the base was compounded by perpendicular seas on the small boat, proving too danger-

ous for the offload from SPAR's buoy deck as originally planned.

Several tactics were considered for the challenge, including floating the section with a cherry fender and sending a request for helicopter air support from Air Station Kodiak.

The crew settled on floating the first section with a foam buoy and towing alongside the small boat.

The tow proved to be safe and successful but too time-consuming to repeat for the remaining four sections.

As the sun set and the tide rose, the shore party made it clear over a radio call to the cutter they were rapidly losing real estate and ready to be shuttled back to the ship.

The next day, the team agreed to place rubber mats on the bow of the utility boat to carry the sections to the rock faster.

Deck force personnel manually lowered the metal sections with lines onto the bow of boat, where they were strapped for transport.

This tactic proved to be much quicker than the float-and-tow approach taken the previous day.

Once close to the rocks, lines were given to the shore party to drag the bases ashore.

This kept the boat from being in danger of running aground and kept the shore party safe from the falling metal.

To lift the heavy sections on top of one another, a special winch was bolted atop the highest section and used to lift the next section into place.

"We had to maneuver [the bases] around the uneven, 20-by-15-foot rock and hoist them on top of each other with a small pulley," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Cody Mercado, an electrician's mate aboard the SPAR who assisted with the build. "It wasn't easy, but it has been one of the highlights of my Coast Guard experience in Kodiak."

The team made great progress on Monday and Tuesday and constructed the base and bottom three sections of the tower. Unfortunately, high winds and choppy seas Wednesday forced the mission's cancellation, leaving several sections yet to be installed.

The team will resume progress when the tides are favorable again.

The difficult task of maintaining the 1,382 aids to navigation throughout Alaska is never done.

# Blood and ink: JBER pararescueman finds solace from PTSD

By Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson  
JBER Public Affairs

The aftermath of war is ugly. Buildings are razed, fields are razed, and people die. Structures are rebuilt and fields and forests are restored, but the survivors are marked indelibly.

Air Force Master Sgt. Roger Sparks sat on his couch, his two sons leaning against him as they watched “*Forrest Gump*” together.

When the firefight scene in Vietnam flickered on, Sparks’ subconscious took over.

“I was suddenly overwhelmed with grief,” he said. “I went out into the garage to get a hold of myself. That’s when I knew I had a problem.”

According to the National Center for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, between 11 and 20 percent of military members who have been a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom have experienced, or continue to experience, some form of PTSD.

Sparks, a pararescueman assigned to the Alaska Air National Guard’s 212th Rescue Squadron, became aware he had PTSD after a particularly intense combat scenario wherein he earned a Silver Star for valor.

## The cost

“I really think the cost of combat is grief,” Sparks said. “Grief is cumulative; the more we are exposed to mortal situations, the more it builds up.

“Some guys can go their whole career without meeting their threshold,” he said. “Some guys can do one deployment and get a whole bellyful.

“I’ve knowingly killed people face-to-face,” said the former Force Reconnaissance Marine. “I’ve had buddies who were with me killed, and haven’t had trouble with emotional trauma before.

“As you grow older, you change. Your sense of mortality changes.”

The feeling of youthful invincibility fades, he said; resolve and beliefs change.

“We’ve been doing [combat]



The Cheshire Cat smiles around Air Force Master Sgt. Roger Sparks’ tattoo machine. The cat has been adopted as a mascot by the pararescuemen of the 212th Rescue Squadron. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson)

for so long, we’ve just normalized it,” Sparks said. “I come back from combat where a guy died in my arms just days ago, gripping at me, clawing at me and bleeding all over me, to sit next to a lady who’s ticked off because I’m on her armrest.”

In the past, there was an extended boat voyage between home and war, but now combat is only a short plane ride away.

Sparks said this makes it difficult for service members to mentally separate the carnage of combat from the happiness of home.

He believes in World War II, the journey helped service members separate combat from normal life in their minds, but now it has become a part of “normal” life.

If you never truly leave home, then you can never really come home, he said.

“I think there’s a cost to that, and each one of these guys feels it,” Sparks said.

“With as long as we’ve been in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are young infantrymen who have made

a complete career out of warfare,” Sparks said. “We’ve given our entire adult life to combat. These are the kind of men I rub shoulders with.”

## Clinical assistance

“These service members have survived a battle with one of the greatest enemies we face,” said Air Force Capt. Chad Killpack, a clinical psychologist with the 673d Medical Operations Squadron.

Killpack said the variety of evidence-based programs available at the mental health clinic can, with early intervention, have very positive results in battling PTSD.

Sparks used one such approach, called cognitive behavioral therapy, for more than a year and was later sent to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, where he was cleared to return to operational duty after consideration of his extensive personal efforts toward recovery.

During this time, Sparks was also encouraged to get in touch with Annie Okerlin, a Tampa, Flor-

ida yoga instructor who provides a mind-body approach to alleviating PTSD through therapeutic yoga.

Okerlin began sending materials and advice to Sparks. The pararescueman said he found her program incredibly healing, and still uses the relaxation techniques.

## Art

Cleared for duty and having finished the bulk of the clinical treatment, Sparks continued to pursue a healthier mentality – and found it in an unexpected place.

On the forward operating base, just minutes after the life-changing 2010 battle which earned him a Silver Star, Sparks said three men approached him.

One was a cameraman, another a filmmaker, and the third was Scott Campbell, a well-known tattoo artist from New York City.

They were interested in making a documentary showing the effects tattooing can have on combat-exposed service members.

Sparks, exhausted and shaken from the most intense firefight of his life, nearly dismissed them.

Campbell looked at him and recognized what Sparks had just been through.

“Let’s leave, this is wrong,” Sparks recalled Campbell saying.

That’s when Sparks, looking to kill time, agreed to their proposal.

“They stayed with us for three days, tattooing us,” Sparks said. “That distracted us, because we knew we were about to go right back (into the fight).”

Sparks described the experience as profoundly healing.

Since then, he has continued tattooing as a way of expressing himself in ways he otherwise would not be able.

“I really think PTSD is the lack of desire to, or inability to express your grief to others,” Sparks said. “With tattoos, it’s like a hidden language. I can express that grief in a very tangible way.”

Sparks designed a Cheshire Cat tattoo that he and his fellow pararescuemen have adopted as a kind of mascot.

“The Cheshire Cat is elusive, appearing and disappearing at will,” Sparks said. “He always

appears in a time of need and disappears, only leaving his smile.”

Many of the men in the 212th RQS wear the tattoo as a somber mark of pride, a sobering reminder of the gravity of their job. Like the effects of war, the mark may fade – but never be erased.

## Literature

“I really enjoy reading literature; it’s been a very cathartic thing for me to read old war literature and realize all these feelings I have are just a human experience,” Sparks explained. “It’s just a human reaction to these things we are exposed to.

“Nobody is special because they’ve experienced this; we’re just human beings trying to react to the things we’ve been forced to deal with.”

Sparks explained he is particularly interested in the Hagakure, a compilation of discussions on maintaining a military mindset in peacetime, written for samurai in the 18th century.

“A big problem with PTSD is you feel isolated,” Sparks said. “You don’t think people will understand how you feel because of the things you’ve experienced.

“It’s a very healing experience to know there were people feeling the same things we experience now, in the 18th century.”

Writing free-verse poetry also provides an outlet for the emotional struggles he experiences.

“It doesn’t matter how many pushups you can do,” Sparks said. “When it comes to combat grief; you can be this physical specimen, but if you aren’t equipped to handle things emotionally, that’s where you will eventually break.”

Much has been written about dealing with the stressors of war; finding the right way is an intensely personal process, Sparks and his compatriots said.

“We’re exposed to so many different stressful situations that you develop your own way of dealing with it,” said Theodore “Ted” Sierocinski, also a pararescueman assigned to the 212th RQS.

The marks of battle may or may not fade with time, but the smile of the Cheshire Cat remains.



## Elmendorf pool closure

The swimming pool at the Elmendorf Fitness Center will be closed during February for maintenance.

## JAG law school programs

The Air Force Judge Advocate General Corps is accepting applications for the Funded Legal Education Program and Excess Leave Program until March 1.

The FLEP is a paid legal studies program for active duty Air Force commissioned officers and is an assignment action with participants receiving full pay, allowances and tuition. FLEP applicants must have between two and six years of active duty service (enlisted or commissioned).

The ELP is an unpaid legal studies program for Air Force officers, and participants do not receive pay and allowances, but remain on active duty for retirement eligibility and benefits purposes.

ELP applicants must have between two and ten years active duty service. For more information and application materials, visit [www.airforce.com/jag](http://www.airforce.com/jag), contact Capt. David Schiavone at the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson 673d ABW Legal Office at 552-3048, or contact Capt. Megan Mallone at (800) JAG-USAF.

## Exchange rewards grades

Students in first through 12th grades can bring report cards to the Exchange to receive a coupon booklet of free offers and discounts. Students can also enter the You Made the Grade sweepstakes to win \$500 to \$2000 gift cards.

For information, call 552-4222.

## JBER tax centers open

Active duty members, reservists, retirees, and their family members can receive free tax return assistance and preparation at JBER's tax centers.

Volunteers are trained to prepare 1040 EZ and 1040 tax returns, and can provide advice on military specific tax issues, such as combat zone tax benefits and the effect of the Earned Income Credit. Volunteers are also trained on how to deal with the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend.

All tax returns done through

the tax centers are forwarded electronically to the IRS, and by selecting direct deposit, taxpayers can receive their refunds in as little as one week.

The JBER-Richardson Tax Center is located on the third floor of Building 600 and will be open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Thursday from 1 to 8 p.m.

The JBER-Elmendorf Tax Center is located on the first floor of the People Center, Building 8517 and will be open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Wednesday 8 a.m. to noon. Walk-in service is available but customers having an appointment take precedence.

Taxpayers will need proof of identity (military ID); social security cards and birth dates for all dependents; last year's federal income tax return; wage and earning statements from W-2s, W-2Gs, and 1099-Rs; interest and dividend statements; bank routing and account numbers for direct deposit; amounts paid to day care providers; and day care providers' tax identification numbers.

Appointments can be made by calling the JBER-R tax center at 384-1040 or JBER-E tax center at 552-5839.

Customers can also make an appointment with a unit tax advisor, who may be able to complete tax returns at the workplace and forward it to the tax center.

## Immunization clinic move

The JBER hospital's Allergy and Immunization Clinic has moved to a new location.

The clinic is now next to the emergency room on the Moose side of the hospital. The clinic is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 12:45 until 4:15 p.m.

For more information, call the clinic at 580-2001 or 580-2002.

## Provider Drive closure

Civil Engineers are repaving Provider Drive between the Exchange and JBER Hospital through Aug. 15. Local housing will have one-lane access to Wilkins Ave.

The detour uses Westover Avenue, Grady Highway and Zeamer Avenue.

## Utilities upgrades

As part of Doyon Utilities' continuing effort to improve the utility infrastructure, the organization is engaged in a multi-year project to upgrade the JBER-Richardson electrical system to improve efficiency, reduce interruptions, and improve personnel safety.

Doyon Utilities regrets any inconvenience outages may cause, and is working to avoid unnecessary service interruptions. Work is expected to continue through 2016.

To minimize impacts, Doyon is working with installation officials to schedule work that could potentially result in an outage for completion during off-peak periods. If another outage does occur, utilities electrical crews will act quickly to restore service.

When work is completed, the installation will see an improvement in overall system reliability.

## Rental Partnership Program

The Rental Partnership Program provides active-duty military personnel with affordable off-base housing.

The Rental Partnership Program consists of two options.

The first option, RPP Plus, includes utilities and sometimes cable costs providing an easier budget with a set rental payment year round.

The other option, RPP Below Market, saves the member four to five percent off the rental fee that other tenants pay however utilities are paid for by the tenant. Both options are available with no deposits or fees with the exclusion of pet fees as it may apply.

An allotment must be executed through a Housing Management Office under either option of the RPP for the rental payments.

Visit the JBER-Elmendorf HMO, Bldg. 6346, or call 552-4328. Or visit the JBER-Richardson HMO in Bldg. 600, Room 104 or call 384-3088.

## DLA Document Services

Defense Logistics Agency Document Services duplicates and prints documents.

Document Services documents including black and white, color, large format, photographic prints, engineering drawings, sensitive materials, technical manuals and training materials.

The shop is able to handle the

design, printing and distribution of business cards, letterhead, invitations and programs.

Document Services' Equipment Management Solutions Program provides networked multifunctional devices that print, scan, copy and fax. Production facilities offer scanning and conversion services for all types of documents.

Document Services also offers Document Automation and Content Services, a service for building digital libraries of content with online access.

Hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For more information visit [www.documentservices.dla.mil](http://www.documentservices.dla.mil), visit the office at 984 Warehouse Street, or call 384-2901.

## U-Fix-It Store

The JBER U-Fix-it Stores are open to all Aurora Military Housing tenants.

Assorted items for maintaining your home may be issued from the U-Fix-It Store. The items available are subject to change and limits and some may have a cost.

There are also American flag kits and fire extinguishers available. U-Fix-It work includes all home maintenance activities.

Its purpose is to allow the occupant to make minor improvements and repairs to their home and cut down on the number of service orders. There are two stores on base.

The JBER-Elmendorf location is 6350 Arctic Warrior Drive and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. for lunch, and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. (closed for lunch noon to 1 p.m.).

The JBER-Richardson location is at 338 Hoonah Ave., open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. for lunch.

A window blind cleaning machine is currently located at the JBER-Elmendorf location.

A "reservation required to use" policy is in place with the priority going to military members PCS-ing. For more information, call 375-5540.

## JBER Bargain Shop

The JBER-Elmendorf Bargain Shop, located in building 8515 Saville off of 20th Street, is open Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and the first Saturday of the month 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Consign-

ments are accepted Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

For information, call 753-6134.

## Richardson Thrift Shop

The JBER-Richardson Thrift Shop, located in building 724, Quartermaster Drive, is open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and first and third Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Consignments are accepted Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For more information, call the Thrift Shop at 384-7000.

## Priority placement

The Priority Placement Program and Executive Order 13473 provide non-competitive appointment for spouses of active duty service members, including full-time National Guard and Reservists, who are relocating to accompany their service member during a permanent change of station.

The program allows spouses to register for Department of Defense positions and be considered for jobs offered internally. Spouses are matched with positions based on qualifications and preferences. The spouse remains eligible for a maximum of two years from the date of the PCS orders and are in the program for one year.

Military spouses who have never filled a federal position can now register for PPP.

Military spouses can register at the Civilian Personnel Office at JBER-Elmendorf or the personnel office at JBER-Richardson.

For information, contact Brenda Yaw at 552-9203.

## Furnishing Management

The Furnishings Management Office offers 90-day loaner furniture. Appliances may be issued for the duration of the service member's tour. FMO delivers as far as Peters Creek or Rabbit Creek; service members must make special arrangements beyond these areas.

When requesting furniture, service members must provide a copy of their reporting orders.

For JBER-Elmendorf, visit the Capital Asset Management Office at Building 6436, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or call 552-2740.

For JBER-Richardson, visit the Housing Management Office at Building 600, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or call 384-2576.





## Overcoming adversity, one day at a time

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Sheila deVera  
JBER Public Affairs

At the age of 18, the Lake Tahoe, California native wanted to become a police officer, but did not want to wait three years to carry a firearm legally.

He decided to join the Marine Corps, but his grandfather convinced him otherwise.

Instead, he went to an Army recruiter, but did not meet the requirement to join the Special Forces.

He then approached an Air Force recruiter, after watching a single video, he was sold.

In September 1998, he left home for the first time. The 6-foot-5-inch scrawny teenager who struggled to do 10 push-ups would support multiple deployments, earn a Bronze Star Medal, become a single father, and supervise Airmen.

Military members have to balance their personal and professional lives.

For Tech. Sgt. Jerimiah Brock, 673d Security Forces Squadron resource protection noncommissioned officer-in-charge, it's a constant struggle, but one he manages.

### Military and Deployment

"Filling out my dream sheet at basic military training [Lackland Air Force Base, Texas], I put in every base there is in California, hoping to get stationed close to home, but I was sent across the world to Okinawa, Japan and spent four years there."

On September 1, 2001, while stationed at Kadena Air Base, Japan, his first child was born.

Brock came home from Oman, his second deployment, just in time for the birth of his son. Ten days later, 9/11 happened and he knew he would once again deploy after getting a chance to see his family for a only a couple of weeks.

Things became stressful for the first-time parents as they were taking care of a premature baby and facing a pending third deployment to Spain.

When the war in Iraq kicked off, Brock was on his way to his fourth deployment.

"We were the first Air Force convoy in the country," Brock said. "It was a huge shock to me because it was my first time in a war environment and a different rule-of-engagement mindset."

It was at Tallil Air Base, Iraq that Brock saw death up close.

"I had never seen a dead body before and I watched him die in my arms," Brock said. "His eyes glazed over as if his soul had left his body, and I felt him take his last breath."

"I was covered in blood."

While there Brock and his team were shot at and mortared, found improvised explosive devices on Main Supply Route Tampa and had grenades thrown at them.

When he returned home, he was a little different. He can still remember the eyes and smell of the local national man who died, he said.

He and his wife were unhappy and requested a base of preference so she could be closer to family and friends.

While stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington, the operational tempo started to increase once again. The veteran was home only four months of the year and did two more tours in Iraq and Turkmenistan.

His fifth deployment to Iraq was when everything went bad. They were rocketed frequently and IEDs were becoming the norm.

In a one-week span, Brock and his team were shot at while on a convoy mission, handled riots at Camp Bucca, and dealt with personal issues at home.

Remembering vividly, Brock said he was just doing his usual routine at Camp Bucca, a detention facility near Basrah, when one of the detainees asked him

"Mr. Brock, Airman died today, yes?" I said 'I don't know,' and the detainee said, 'Yes, Airman died today.'"

That was before the team received word they had lost two of their members, Senior Airman Elizabeth Jacobson and Army Sgt. Steve Morin, when their convoy was hit by an IED.

He said during his time in Iraq things began a downward spiral. Brock, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, thought the Iraqi people were rude, ungrateful and did not understand what they were doing.

"I was called a baby killer, spit on while in uniform, and told we were just there for the oil," Brock said. "There was a lot of anger built up."

Back on the home front, the communication was bad. His wife invited her friends to live in his house; his money was gone, leaving bills unpaid; his house and car were being repossessed.



Tech. Sgt. Jerimiah Brock is one of many military members balancing his personal and professional life. Due to high operations tempo, service members face repeated deployments, which often can result in increased stress and anxiety leading to strained relationships at home and abroad. (U.S. Air Force photo/Air Force Staff Sgt. Sheila deVera)

"I was ready to kill myself, ready to pull the trigger," Brock said. "I was at my lowest low. As for the suicidal thoughts, I had lost everything I had built; everything I planned for the future was no longer. I figured my kids were the only thing I had left and didn't want them growing up in a broken home."

"I thought it would be better if I died in the combat zone and they would think I was killed in the war and not think of it as a divorce, he said.

"My buddy walked in and saw what I was planning. He sat me down, talked to me about the positives – though few from my perspective.

"Then he told me about the serenity prayer and said from here there was nowhere to go but up. I listened, I followed, and I lived my life," Brock said.

He filed for divorce after his deployment.

At his 10-year Air Force anniversary, while he was stationed at Fairchild, the father of five thought about getting out of the military.

"As a single parent, I had to send my children to my parents when I was away," Brock said. My children were bouncing around everywhere with no solid foundation."

However, he decided to stay in the interest of steady employment. His leadership offered him another

duty location that would not deploy him as often.

"The main struggle was service before self [and] understanding it 100 percent was not service before family," Brock said.

During his down time, the father of five is always trying to make up for the lost time.

"I would spoil my children with gifts, take them to their favorite restaurant," Brock said. "On days off, we were constantly camping, fishing, boating and riding ATVs as an escape from hardships – that was our solitude."

Taking advantage of being stationed in Germany, Brock and his children Cole and Dixie would travel to numerous countries to see the different cultures and scenery.

"We went to every kid-friendly festival we could," he said. "I was basically trying to get to know my kids again and they were trying to get to know me."

Brock did not deploy again until 2013, when he went to Afghanistan.

### Balance

The balance between personal and professional life comes with planning, organizing and leaving one or the other at the door on the way out, Brock said.

"The logistics are always the hardest," he said, "The important items on either side get prioritized,

and you do what you can to share those 24 hours between the two."

"If the Air Force takes time away, I owe my family time, and do what I can to make up for it."

After another marital setback and divorce, Brock remarried again and his children finally found a mother figure.

Hoping his children will understand his job, Brock invited his children to his office so they could see first hand what he does and talk to his Airmen.

"My kids pulled me through the toughest times of my life," Brock said. "I have been in debt to them ever since."

One of his Airmen, Staff Sgt. Madonna Henard, 673d SFS base defense operations controller, said her supervisor will remind them they work as a family, go home as a family.

"We are his family and he is ours," Henard said.

"It's a constant tug-of-war," Brock said. "My troops [Airmen] are also my family and I try to balance both."

"The military is just a chapter, every struggle is a chapter; just keep turning the pages," Brock added. "You can only control what you can control, and do your best every day."

His struggles remind him to take it a day at a time and keep moving forward.



Coast Guard Lt. Frank Wolfe, a pilot from Air Station Kodiak, answers questions posed by students of Academy Charter School in Palmer Jan. 29. A flight crew from Air Station Kodiak flew an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter to the school to share their stories with children as part of an intensive program called "Fly 'em High; Helicopters' Role in Alaska." (U.S. Coast Guard photo/Petty Officer 1st Class Shawn Eggert)

## Air Station Kodiak flight crew descends on school

By Petty Officer 1st Class Shawn Eggert  
17th CGD Public Affairs

Whether they're behind the controls of a sophisticated aircraft or soaring through the air and saving the day as a superhero, the ability to fly is a common dream for children.

On Jan. 29, students at Academy Charter School in Palmer had the opportunity to speak with the real-life superheroes of Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak when an MH-60 Jayhawk crew descended onto their soccer field for a visit.

The visit was part of a special educational intensive called "Fly 'em High: Helicopters'

Role in Alaska" arranged by Sean Reilly, a seventh-grade teacher at the school. It gave the students an up-close look at a variety of helicopters, including the Jayhawk.

"When I think of helicopters' place in Alaska, I think right away of the Coast Guard," Reilly said. "The Coast Guard is like the guardian angel over Alaska. I've been a commercial fisherman as well as a teacher, so I wanted my students to know the role of the Coast Guard here in Alaska."

The flight crew's visit began with an impressive entrance as the MH-60's rotors kicked up a flurry of snow and children lined the fences of the soccer field to watch the

helicopter land.

Lt. Frank Wolfe, a pilot at Air Station Kodiak, and his crew then guided the students through a quick hands-on tour of the aircraft before heading into the warmth of the classroom for a question-and-answer session with Reilly's students.

"The students seemed really open and interested in the stories we shared with them," said Wolfe. "The Coast Guard doesn't get to do these sorts of visits as often as we used to, but it was a great opportunity for us to come out for these students."

It's great to reach out to the communities and especially to have a chance to educate

kids about the kinds of things we do in the Coast Guard."

The students were eager to learn about the flight crew and their responsibilities and asked about everything from survival gear to favorite missions.

A few of them even had questions about how they might also someday serve as Coast Guard flight crew members.

"It's just been unbelievable that they would do this for us," Reilly said. "Sharing their stories and making it real lit a fire under my students and maybe inspired them to think about seeking a career in the Coast Guard. They're amazing."



## What is church – a building, a community or a mindset?

Commentary by Chaplain (Capt.) Brian Musselman  
JBER Protestant Staff Chaplain

Not too long ago I sat down with a few of my closest friends and asked two questions: Do we as Christians have to go to church? If so, why?

This healthy discussion was revealing. In fact, I felt challenged to relearn why I value attending church and being a part of a community.

My friends honestly shared that sometimes they don't feel like going.

Another said "sometimes I go because it is the only time during a busy week that I can quiet my mind and focus my attention on something other than myself."

Another said going to church is like "a parked car in a garage with no gas and a car that is needed to get from point A to point B, and it needs gas to travel." The church is her gas to keep going – fuel for life.

Collectively, they said perhaps people attend church on Sundays (or other days) because of the guilt they carry around the days or night prior – the church is a cleanser for them.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, and means 'assembly.'

Often, we envision church as a structure of brick and mortar, and to some extent, it is.

In fact the church is compared to structures, objects, and vegetation throughout the New Testament

(branches on a vine in John 15:5, a new temple in 1 Peter 2:5, a harvest in Matthew 13:1-3, a building in 1 Corinthians 3:9, a field of crops in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, God's house in Hebrews 3:6, and the pillar and bulwark of the truth in 1 Timothy 3:15).

As I look around Arctic Warrior chapel where I help lead services, or Midnight Sun chapel where my office is, I ask myself, 'what is the church? It can't just be a building, can it?'

Then it dawns on me – it becomes a church when people are in it.

But that just feels awkward, like asking if a tree makes a sound in the woods if no one is around.

Hundreds of people are in JBER's chapels every week.

What if there were no structures – no brick, mortar or electricity to give us a place to meet and worship, to have ceremonies, funerals, squadron parties and the like?

What would the church be then?

Recently I heard a story called "The Lonely Ember."

"A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going.

"After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly

evening.

"The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited.

"The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs.

"After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember, and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent.

The host watched all this in quiet fascination.

"As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and 'dead as a doornail.'

"Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire.

"Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

"As the pastor prepared to leave, his host finally spoke.

"Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon," the man said. "I shall be back in church next Sunday."

The church is more than a building. It is about being in community with others, sharing the same core beliefs, relying on the hands that build the walls and not the walls themselves. The church is people.

The author of the book of Hebrews included the word "meeting" in 10:25. It is the word – you guessed it – assembly. It is not the *ekklesia* previously mentioned, but nonetheless means a grouping of people.

In Deuteronomy, God says, "Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words" (4:10). The Hebrew word used is *qahal*.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the writers chose the word *ekklesiazo*. Look familiar? *Ekklesiazo* means to summon an assembly.

The author of Hebrews chose specific words to catapult our minds toward assembling – like "let us," "our hearts," "cleanse us," "our bodies," "hope we profess," "let us consider" and "spur one another on" (10:22-25).

But I'm still left challenged by the author when he writes, "let us not forsake assembling together as is the habit of some."

More than 1,000 American adults were polled by the Barna Group and asked their thoughts on going to church.

About 30 percent said attending is very important, about 40 percent were ambivalent, and 30 percent said it is not important at all.

The ambivalent gave two main reasons – 40 percent "find God elsewhere" and 35 percent find church "not personally relevant."

I can understand this response; God is omnipresent and people are imperfect. But the beauty of the church is that it is made up of different people experiencing God in all walks of life.

I can't imagine attending a church where all the people were exactly like me. I love Brian Musselman because he is wired and knitted by God's design, and God makes no mistakes, but it would drive me bonkers to be around so many Brian Musselmans.

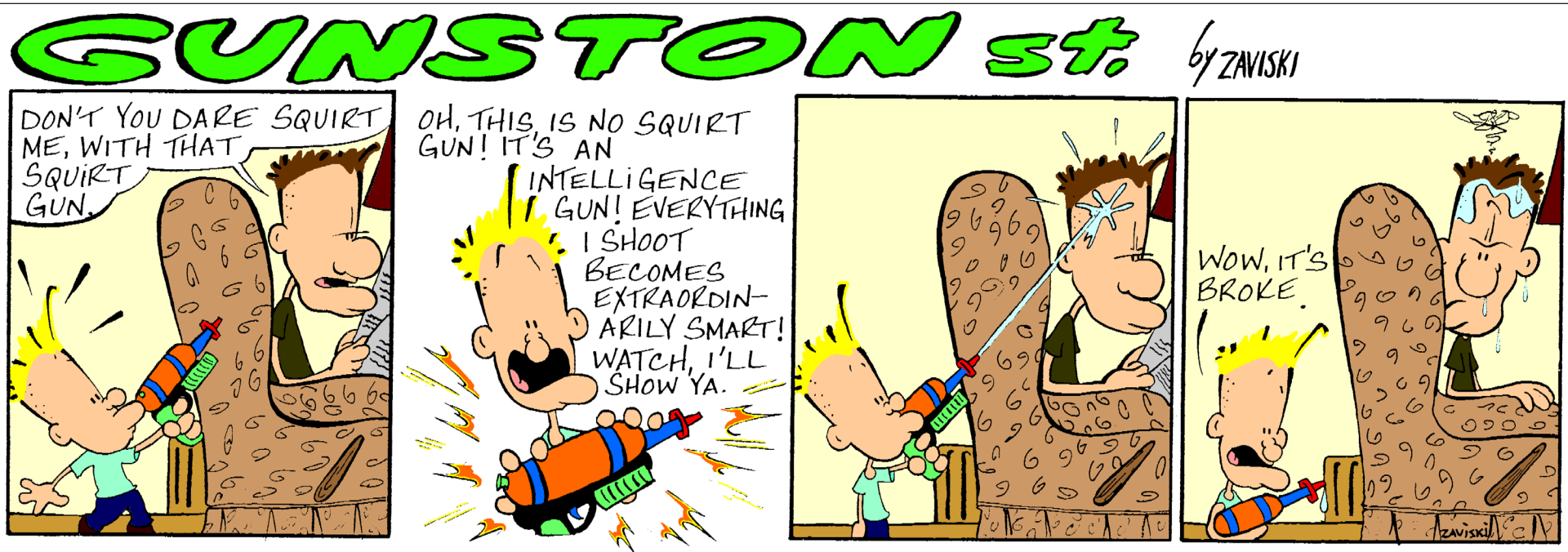
The church is people. People make each other better, like iron sharpens iron. I have room for improvement, and God makes this happen through others.

Perhaps some resist attending church because it may involve change that is, at first, uncomfortable. I can't – nor do I want to – take away this experience from anyone, because it is essential for growth.

But the church – the people – will make each other better while in community; worshipping together, studying together, caring together, and doing life together.

Do you have a community like this?

**“What is the church? It can't just be a building, can it?”**





**THROUGH FEB 28**  
**Elmendorf pool closure**  
 The Elmendorf fitness center pool is closed for maintenance throughout the month and will re-open March 1. During this period, the Buckner fitness center pool will remain open.  
 For information, call 384-1302.

**FRIDAY**  
**Cards for troops**  
 The Child Development Centers would like to show support for deployed and overseas troops by sending them cards made by children. See staff members at your child's CDC for further information.

**Papier-mâché hearts**  
 Make your own valentine hearts out of papier mâché during a fine arts and crafts session at the the Two Rivers Youth Center from 4 to 6 p.m.  
 For information, call 384-1508.

**Valentine's dance**  
 Bring your valentine and friends and get your groove on at the Kennecott Youth Center from 6:30 to 9 p.m.  
 For information, call 552-2266.

**SATURDAY**  
**Ski lesson/tubing special**  
 Head to Hillberg Ski Area for two-for-one Valentine's Day private "couples" beginner ski lessons or two-hour (adults only) snow tubing sessions.  
 For information, call 552-4838.

**Snow machine tour**  
 Head to Willow on a guided snow machine tour from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This trip is being offered at a special discounted rate as part of the RECON program which offers discounts on certain outdoor adventure program events to active duty service members and/or dependents.

Sign up at JBER-Elmendorf Outdoor Recreation Center.

Trips must meet minimum sign-up requirements and are subject to change due to weather conditions.

For more information, call 552-2023 or 552-3812.

**Valentine's date night**  
 Make your Valentine's Day special by heading to the Polar Bowl between 6 p.m. and 1 a.m. for two hours of neon bowling, shoe rental, a balloon bouquet, and

sparkling cider.  
 For information, call 753-7467.

**Scotch Doubles tourney**  
 Join us at the Polar Bowl for a Valentine's Day Scotch Doubles tournament beginning at 6:30 p.m. This cash only tourney is a system of doubles play where two bowlers on each team play alternative shots throughout the game.  
 For information, call 753-7467.

**MONDAY**  
**President's Day at Hillberg**  
 Looking for something to do on your day off? The rest of the installation may be shut down for the holiday, but Hillberg will be open from noon to 8 p.m.  
 For information, call 552-4838.

**THURSDAY**  
**Mardi Gras**  
 Head to the FirePit for a traditional Mardi Gras party from 6 to 8 p.m. with music, refreshment discounts and prizes. Winners of a limbo contest and most unique beads will each receive an FSS gift card. There will also be a Mardi Gras-themed scavenger hunt for which the winner will receive a Super Bowl champion jersey.  
 For information, call 384-7619.

**Texas Hold'em tournament**  
 The 907 Sports Bar and Grill hosts this tourney with sign ups at 5 p.m., dealing begins at 6 p.m. Free for club members; top three every week win FSS gift cards and the top weekly winner secures a spot at the final table at the close of this nine-week tournament.  
 For information, call 384-7619.

**FEB. 20**  
**Black History Month**  
 Celebrate Black History Month with featured guest speaker Vietnam veteran, retired Senior Master Sgt. Raymond Harris from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in the Talkeetna Theater. All JBER personnel are encouraged to attend.

**Raquetball tourney**  
 Sign up deadline for both men's and women's teams is Feb. 20 at the Buckner fitness center. There will be an organizational meeting March 2 at 1 p.m. The competition runs March 2 through May 1.  
 For further information, call 384-1312.

**Winter BBQ Bash**  
 Come join us on the patio outside the 907 Sports Bar and Grill

from 6 to 8 p.m. Discounts on specialty refreshments, music and indoor games.  
 For information, call 384-7619.

**Youth ice fishing**  
 Hosted by the Kennecott Youth Center from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Bring your friends, dress warmly and enjoy this unique experience.  
 For information, call 552-2266.

**Design a phone cover**  
 Make your very own phone cover during Sew-So-Sew at Two Rivers Youth Center from 4 to 6 p.m.  
 For information, call 384-1508.

**Parents Night Out**  
 Parents, need a date night? Let the professional staff at the Juneau Child Development Center care for your children from 6 to 10 p.m.  
 For more information, call Central registration at 384-7483.

**FEB. 21**  
**Blood drive**  
 The Blood Bank of Alaska will be accepting donations at the JBER Exchange from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. in their "LIFEmobile."  
 For questions about donating, call 222-5630.

**Iron Dog race start**  
 The world's longest snowmachine race starts for the first time in Anchorage and runs through Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Festivities kick off at 9:30 a.m. on Fourth Ave. with a parade, kids' events and much more.

Two viewing areas will be available on JBER: 37th Street and Talley Avenue, and Otter Lake.  
 For information, visit [iron-dograce.org](http://iron-dograce.org).

**FEB. 27 THROUGH MARCH 8**  
**Fur Rendezvous**  
 Anchorage's largest winter festival is back for its 80th year with all the zany events and activities. Run with the reindeer, race ouhouses, shop for furs or watch the sled dog teams race downtown – or bundle up for carnival rides.  
 Events, dates and times vary; visit [furrondy.net](http://furrondy.net) for information.

**FEB. 23 THROUGH 27**  
**TAP seminar**  
 The Transition Assistance Program Goals, Plans and Success seminar takes place Mon. through Fri. from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Air Force Transition Center.  
 Call 552-6619 to register.

**ONGOING**  
**Scholarship opportunities**  
 Applications are being accepted for the Richardson Spouses' Club 2014-2015 scholarship. Applicants must be military dependents, either graduating high school seniors or currently enrolled college students pursuing full-time undergraduate studies. Visit [richardsonspousesclub.com/scholarship](http://richardsonspousesclub.com/scholarship) to download full eligibility requirements along with the application.  
 Applications must be post-marked by Feb. 28.

**JSC scholarships**  
 The JBER Spouse's Club will award merit scholarships to graduating high school seniors to assist them in their first year of education at an accredited college or university. Scholarships are open to family members of all active duty or retired military members in the Anchorage Bowl. The application packet and further details are available on our website at [www.jberspousesclub.com](http://www.jberspousesclub.com) under the community tab. The deadline for the receipt of the application is Feb. 25.  
 For information, email [info@jberspousesclub.com](mailto:info@jberspousesclub.com).

**AER scholarships**  
 Army Emergency Relief is taking applications for scholarships. Scholarships are available for children, spouses and other dependents of active, retired and deceased Soldiers. Applications and instructions are available at [aerhq.org](http://aerhq.org). Submission deadline is May 1.  
 For information, call 384-7478.

**Eat and Play Weekdays**  
 What goes great with lunch? A free game of bowling. Present your receipt at the front counter totaling more than \$5 from Ten Pins or Topios (located inside the Polar Bowl) between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., Mon., Thurs., or Fri. and receive one free game.  
 For information, call 753-7467.

**Civil Air Patrol meetings**  
 The JBER squadron of the Alaska Civil Air Patrol meets the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 6 p.m. in the JBER Aero Club Hangar.  
 For information and access, 250-9548.

**Protestant Women of the Chapel meetings**  
 Women are invited to meet with the Protestant Women of the

## Chapel services

### Catholic Mass

**Sunday**  
**8:30 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**11:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Monday and Wednesday**  
**11:40 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Tuesday and Friday**  
**11:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Thursday**  
**12:00 p.m.** – Hospital Chapel

### Confession

Confessions are available anytime by appointment. Call 552-5762.

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### Protestant Sunday Services

**Liturgical Service**  
**9 a.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
**Gospel Service**  
**9:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Community Service**  
**10:30 a.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
**Collective Service**  
**11 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Contemporary Service**  
**5 p.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel

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### Jewish Services

**Erev Shabbat Service (First Friday of each month)**  
**5 p.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
 Call 384-0456 or 552-5762

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### Religious Education

For religious education schedules, please call the Religious Operations Center at 552-5762 or 384-1461.

Chapel. Bible studies are Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. at the Arctic Warrior Chapel, JBER-Richardson.

For more information, email [jber.ak.pwoc@gmail.com](mailto:jber.ak.pwoc@gmail.com) or call 384-1461.

**Wired Cafe for Airmen**  
 The Wired Cafe at has wireless internet access and programs for Airmen in the dorms. There are free meals Fridays at 6 p.m.  
 For information, call 552-4422.




**673d FORCE SUPPORT SQUADRON**

## MWR events & activities

MARKETING TIDBITS  
**MWR + Military Personnel/Manpower = FSS**


Elmendorf Fitness Center Pool, Bldg. 9510 will be closed for maintenance through February 28. Call 552-5353 for more information. To accommodate your needs, please use Buckner Fitness Center Pool, 384-1302



**Mardi Gras**  
**FEBRUARY 19 | 6 - 8 p.m.**

Come join us at the FirePit for a traditional Mardi Gras style Party! Music will be provided by a DJ, discounted specialty drinks will be offered, & there will be three prizes given away!

Menu:  
 • BBQ Ribs - \$10 • Jamaican Jerked Chicken - \$10 • Muffuletta's - \$9  
 With your choice of cole slaw or red beans & rice.  
 Call for more information 384.7619



**WINTER BBQ BASH**  
**FEBRUARY 20 | 6-8 P.M.**

Come Join us at the patio outside the 907 for our Winter BBQ Bash! Music will be provided by a DJ, discounted specialty drinks will be offered, & indoor games!

Food for Purchase:  
 • Hot Dogs - \$750 • Hamburgers - \$9  
 comes with baked beans & corn-on-cob with your choice of macaroni salad or fresh fruit.  
 Call for more information 384.7619

The 673d Force Support Squadron provides Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson personnel and family members with morale, welfare, and recreation services, in addition to force development and military personnel and manpower support. The squadron's mission is to enhance readiness by providing combat support and services for the JBER community. The motto "Mission First ~ People Always" perfectly summarizes the squadron's focus.

Vast and diverse, the 673d Force Support Squadron contains five flights: Warfighter & Family Services, Sustainment Services, Community Services, Manpower & Personnel Services, and Force Development Services. In addition to the Command Staff, led by Lt Col Christopher Busque directing operations of the 673d Force Support Squadron, the squadron also oversees NAF Resource Management, NAF Human Resource Office, and Civilian Personnel.

One key component of 673 FSS is to bring recreational opportunities to the community. These opportunities abound in Alaska, and JBER is no exception. Buckner and Elmendorf Fitness Centers, Moose Run Golf Course, Polar Bowl Bowling Center, Hillberg Ski Area, Arctic Oasis Community Center, Information Tickets & Travel, Outdoor Adventure Program, Outdoor Recreation, Skeet & Trap Range, Otter Lake, Youth Sports, Black Spruce and FAMCamp RV Parks, Aero Club, Auto Skills, and Polar Express Arts & Crafts are all an integral part of the squadron. For information on these facilities please visit: [www.elmendorf-richardson.com](http://www.elmendorf-richardson.com)

Next time you hear someone ask... "What's FSS?" You can answer them...  
 FSS = MWR + Military Personnel/Manpower!

## OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAM

Bldg. 7301, 552.2023/3812

### SNOWMACHINE GUIDED TOURS

**WILLOW:** February 14, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. \$50  
*(These two trips are RECON specific trips and are only open to active duty service member and/or family members.)*

**PETERSVILLE:** February 21, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m. \$185



**Dog Sled Rides**  
**Hillberg Lake**  
**Feb. 21 & 22**  
**Noon - 5 p.m.**

\$10 for Adults  
 \$5 for 13 years & under  
 Get tickets inside Hillberg Lodge

**Hillberg Ski Area Bldg. 23400 | 552-4838**

Stop by and see us!  
[www.facebook.com/JBER673FSS](http://www.facebook.com/JBER673FSS)



# Losing weight and feeling great

## Squadron commander motivates, encourages and inspires through fitness journey

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Wes Wright  
JBER Public Affairs

"I need to get my butt in the gym."

It's a phrase many people have probably uttered at least once in their life. For some, the battle of the bulge is a constant struggle. Fitness is a multibillion dollar industry. The Internet is awash with all the latest and greatest trends, fads and secrets – for a price.

However, according to one Airman on JBER, the secret doesn't lie in wraps, creams or pills. All that is needed is discipline and hard work.

On Jan. 5, 2014, Air Force Maj. Michael Bliss, 703d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commander, weighed 257 pounds with a low muscle-to-fat ratio. Standing at 5 feet, 10 inches, it was aesthetically not a good look, and more importantly, not healthy. Today, he weighs 213 pounds, has abdominal muscles beginning to show, runs triathlons, and can bench press 315 pounds.

"I've always been a bigger dude," Bliss said. "But I had an epiphany. I thought, 'Man, I'm a

commander and I'm sending people out of the Air Force for fitness reasons, and I'm barely holding on. I'm 46. I decided to get a handle on it to get where I truly want to be.'"

The determined major started from ground zero: seeking out the advice and support of others who had achieved success. He began researching fitness and nutrition, and started a routine that incorporated cardio and weight lifting.

"I had to educate myself," Bliss said. "I was getting stronger in my upper and lower body. I love doing squats, but I can't do them due to a bad lower back. So I started exploring fitness exercises I could substitute in, which led me to PiYo. I started in November and did it about eight times leading up to my physical fitness test in December and got a 95."

PiYo blends Pilates and yoga, strengthening the core muscles and enhancing the mind-to-muscle connection.

According to Bliss, PiYo has been just one part in the big picture of his fitness journey so far.

"You have to change your mindset. Look at it as changing your lifestyle, not just following a diet or workout routine. You have to understand it and embrace it; and it doesn't have to be freakish."

Bliss said planning is key to realizing fitness goals.

"Standing in front of the fridge when you're hungry – if you don't have a plan in place, you're going to

fail," Bliss said. "You need to have a meal plan and a workout plan. You don't want to walk into the gym and think, 'what do I feel like doing?' That doesn't work because you never really feel like doing cardio or things you may be weak at. You have to make it a personal priority."

While Bliss emphasized the importance of having a plan and strictly adhering to it, he said he also understands that sometimes life just gets in the way.

"As a husband, father and commander, there are important priorities that get in the way," Bliss said. "Having a plan in place will allow you to adjust and be flexible. I think where people get discouraged is they think, 'Oh, I can never have sweet treats or a cheat meal.' That's not true. You can make progress in your goals and still have occasional treats and splurges. We're human. We need things like that to stay sane."

"I sit down with a calendar and plan everything out: my meals, workouts and work schedule. Valentine's Day is coming up. Am I going to be that guy who doesn't take his wife out for a nice meal? Of course not, but I'm going to plan it into my diet."

Bliss said people need to make the best decision possible when forced between a rock and a hard place with their nutritional needs.

"It's about consistency and incremental change," Bliss said. "I've been doing this for a while and I've



**Air Force Maj. Michael Bliss, 703d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commander, leads a PiYo class at the JBER-Elmendorf fitness center Feb. 4. Bliss is using his personal fitness success story and knowledge to help motivate and inspire others. (U.S. Air Force photos/Staff Sgt. Wes Wright)**

probably put three perfect nutrition days back-to-back-to-back. Things come up. You think, 'Man, I haven't eaten in four hours and I left my food at home.' Well, it may not be the best solution, but perhaps I'll go get a fast food grilled chicken sandwich with no mayonnaise. You make the best decision you can."

After finding his own success, Bliss decided he wanted to give back. He created a Facebook fitness page called 'Bliss Fit Life' where he posts tips and shares motivational stories, encouraging people to not give up.

"My main motivation is to help other people," Bliss said. "I want to show people I'm a real dude with a real job and a real family. If I can do this, you can do this. I try to teach people you have to find your own motivation. If you're doing it for somebody else, you'll be able to excuse yourself out and rationalize anything."

"Whether it's wanting to be healthier so you can be more active with your kids, or if you're a supervisor and want to be a good example, whatever it is, it has to come from within."

Bliss recently became certified to teach PiYo classes and does his best to help people make progress in their goals.

Tech. Sgt. Brenda Robinson, 517th Airlift Squadron Aviation Resource Management assis-

tant noncommissioned officer in charge, attended one of his recent classes at the JBER-Elmendorf fitness center.

"This is my first class; I really enjoyed it," Robinson said. "It works every muscle group and isn't overwhelming. It was challenging but not impossible. He was very motivating and explained the exercises in an easy way."

"I had a baby and its hard getting back into it. His success is inspiring. If he did it and he's willing to take the time to lead others, it makes you want to at least give it a shot."

After the class, Bliss shared his motto for success: Plan your work and work your plan.

"If you plan, you're going to be able to overcome missteps because you've thought about it. When you put thought into your life and into your plan, you will be successful in all things."

While Bliss publicly insists there is no one secret to success, his real secret came out in the end.

"The closest thing I have to a secret is this," he said in hushed tones and with a wry smile. "At the Shoppette, they have these dark chocolates with chili in them."

"Every night, I have two squares of it, no matter what. That helps me to be disciplined through my day, because I know I get a reward at night."



**Air Force Maj. Michael Bliss leads a PiYo class at the JBER-Elmendorf fitness center Feb. 4. According to Bliss, PiYo has been just one part in the big picture of his fitness journey so far. "You have to change your mindset. Look at it as changing your lifestyle, not just following a diet or workout routine. You have to understand it and embrace it; and it doesn't have to be freakish."**



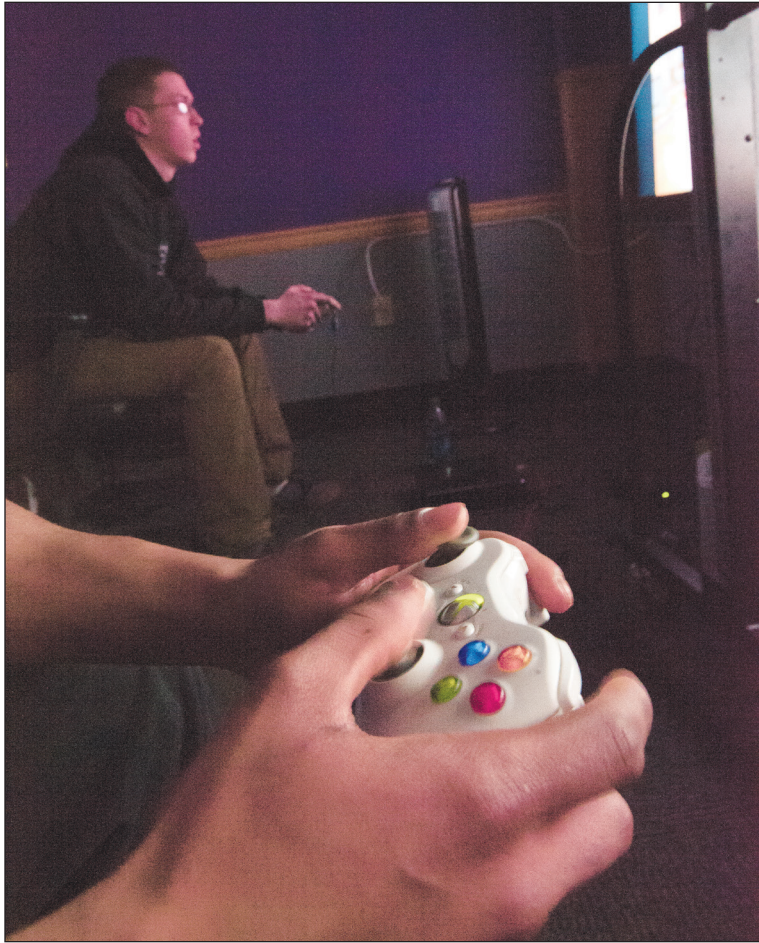


**ABOVE:** Bill Kane, a former Air Force Captain and park ranger at Kenai Fjords National Park, competes in the final leg of the Indoor Sprint Triathlon at Buckner Physical Fitness Center Monday. The triathlon is composed of three different segments; biking, running and swimming, in 15-minute increments. **UPPER RIGHT:** Alex Flores, a Buckner Physical Fitness Center lifeguard, competes in the Indoor Sprint Triathlon. Flores placed third in the final competition, but stayed behind to coach a friend and fellow participant in the second heat. Flores is a common face in the fitness center and JBER community. **LOWER RIGHT:** Swimmers prepare for the final leg of the Indoor Sprint Triathlon at Buckner Physical Fitness center on Monday. Equipment like swim goggles, help ensure a successful and safe competition. **BELOW:** Spc. Bruce Bell, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne) competes in the Indoor Sprint Triathlon at Buckner Physical Fitness Center Monday. Bell hails from Hartsville, S.C. (U.S. Air Force photos/Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson)





# Flat-screen warriors



**LEFT:** Team Thunderdome, won the 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 2' tournament held at the Warrior Zone on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Saturday. The competing teams were part of Better Opportunities for Single Service Members.

**CENTER LEFT:** Pvt. Calvin Coulter, left, and Spc. Matthew Norczyk participate in a 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 2' tournament at the Warrior Zone on JBER Feb. 7. The tournament was a part of the Better Opportunities for Single Service Members program. Coulter and Norczyk are a cavalry scouts for the 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division. Coulter is a native of Oklahoma City. Norczyk is a native of Starke, Florida.

**TOP LEFT:** Team Thunderdome won the 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 2' tournament held at the Warrior Zone on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Saturday. The competing teams were part of Better Opportunities for Single Service Members.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Pfc. Calvin Coulter chooses his weapons and other options during a 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 2' tournament at the Warrior Zone on JBER Feb. 7. The tournament was a part of the Better Opportunities for Single Service Members program. Coulter, a cavalry scout for the 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment is a native of Oklahoma City.

**ABOVE:** Soldiers participate in a 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 2' tournament at the Warrior Zone on JBER Feb 7. The tournament was a part of the Better Opportunities for Single Service Members program. Forty members of the BOSS program, divided into nine teams, competed in the event. Thunderdome won first place with 75 points; Captain Green took second place with 55 points, and 'We Don't Get Tired' nabbed third place. (U.S. Air Force photos/Tech. Sgt. Robert Barnett)