

# ARCTIC WARRIOR

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON'S SOURCE FOR NEWS

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# Odd man out: 611th CES owns it

By **AIRMAN 1ST CLASS ADRIANA BARRIENTOS**  
*JBER Public Affairs*

Usually the odd man out is something no one wants to be, but the 611th Civil Engineer Squadron owns their exclusivity. With a mission that goes beyond their host installation, they are like no other CES within the Air Force.

Civil engineer squadrons are crucial for mission readiness at any location, but especially so for Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's arctic warriors. They are responsible for coming up with solutions to complex problems that keep our facilities and utilities running effectively, even through ice and snow.

The fine distinction between the 611th CES—assigned to the Pacific Air Forces Regional Support Center—and its counterparts lies within their realm of responsibilities. This squadron of only 87 members is responsible for the upkeep of 43 austere radar sites throughout Alaska and the Pacific region. This means sustaining Arctic surveillance weapon systems and infrastructure, as well as maintaining the strategic Pacific air bridge and divert airfield at Wake Island atoll, and three radar sites in Hawaii that support the Hawaii Regional Air Operations Center.

"It's an important mission," said Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Nathan McNeely, 611th CES senior enlisted manager. "We fall under PACAF and we sup-



**Tech. Sgt. James Lawyer, 611th Civil Engineer Squadron airfield planning noncommissioned officer in charge, and Airman 1st Class Shane Leapheart, 673d CES engineer, set up a temporary base station at Cape Newnam in August 2017. This procedure locates benchmarks on the site to establish vertical and horizontal coordinates for future projects and property surveying. (Courtesy photo)**

port Hawaii and Wake Island. If you think about the radar sites, they're actually the first lines of defense if we were to have an adversarial aircraft cross into our air space. Those radars make sure that we get early detection, and get those bombers or fighters out of here to intercept."

Their posture at JBER is a matter of efficiency, as 17 of the 21 active sites are in Alaska; they include 15 long-range radar sites scattered across the state, King Salmon Air Station which serves as a divert airfield, and Eareckson Air Station in the Aleutian Island's which hosts a ballistic missile defense mission, and serves as an aircraft re-

fueling point.

"We're always protecting the Lower 48, which is a Northern American Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command mission," McNeely said. "I would say about 80 percent of what we do is for the homeland defense mission although we belong to PACAF."

The job description is only the start of what the 611th Airmen are tasked to handle. Being in remote locations, hours away from any support agencies, accuracy and precision critical.

"Going on a temporary duty assignment to these sites can be challenging," said U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt.

Austin Henrichsen, 611th CES maintenance contracts manager. "The planning and methods of our squadron has to be top-notch. When you plan a job here at JBER, you have to plan for options A, B, C, and D because when you're out there, hardware stores don't exist, there's no room for error when planning a job."

Along with the colorful scenery Alaska offers, come frosty, subzero conditions in the tundra. Due to the limited construction seasons at most of the sites, coordination of materials and logistics has to be done well in advance.

"From engineering flight to operations flight, we'll

designate someone to be a project lead and they'll start coordinating," said Tech. Sgt. Patrick Brooks, 611th CES non-commissioned officer in charge of maintenance contracts.

Once this is done, the construction team will start planning, scrubbing down every list, coordinating with through our CE logistics folks, and that's how we get everything on a military aircraft, or a barge movement."

The 611th CES dispatches engineers 365 days a year. Even where there isn't ongoing construction, they're tasked with quality assurance evaluations, and more often

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# JBER to host reception for Tyndall arrivals

By **AIRMAN 1ST CLASS  
CRYSTAL JENKINS**  
*JBER Public Affairs*

In an effort to welcome and provide resources and support to more than 200 Tyndall Air Force Base Airmen and families being relocated to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, a reception is scheduled to kick off April 8, at 9 a.m.

“Right now we are focused on taking care of our Airmen and their families,” said Chief Master Sgt. Brian Stafford, who serves as the 3rd Wing command chief. “After making direct contact with many of the Airmen arriving, we know many of these families have lost a home, vehicle, clothing or other personal items. This is a venue beyond the normal newcomer’s orientation.”

The JBER Support to Tyndall Airmen and Families Reception is set up to be a



**An F-22 Raptor from Tyndall Air Force Base taxis at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Many families are arriving at JBER after moving from Tyndall, and JBER is making an extra effort to ease the transition. (U.S. Air Force photo/Sheila deVera)**

one-stop information fair to connect them with the appropriate agencies to address their immediate and specific needs and learn more about services they offer.

Military chaplains, the


United Services Organization, and the Armed Services YMCA of Alaska as well as Air Force resources will be available.

“We are looking forward to receiving Tyndall person-

nel and families into our 3rd Wing family,” said U.S. Air Force Col. Robert D. Davis, 3rd Wing commander. “We have been anticipating their arrival and will do everything possible to facilitate a smooth

transition to JBER.”

The reception will be located at the Arctic Warrior Events Center in the Susitna room.

For more, visit [ww.jber.jb.mil/Info/Newcomers](http://ww.jber.jb.mil/Info/Newcomers). 

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than not, unforeseen circumstances require them to go on a temporary duty assignment at a moment's notice.

"Once, we had a massive wind-storm that blew the roof off of a power plant, water started penetrating the facility, and we lost power," Brooks said. "So we actually dispatched a quick reaction force CE team from JBER to go out there with raw materials to repair the roof and bring it back online."

Although logistical hurdles, weather and wildlife can end up sending a priority job into temporary chaos, the unique mission, planning and partnerships assure the mission stays on track.

The 611th CES partners with sister squadrons within the 673d Civil Engineer Group to collaborate on programs, balancing and cross utilizing manpower.

Similarly, 773d Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle maintainers dispatch with the 611th CES construction crews to ensure vehicles remain operational throughout the

project locations.

However, when there is a project on an island across the Pacific, it takes more than JBER's teams to maintain the radar sites.

"We leverage support from multiple agencies in Hawaii due to the location," said Tech. Sgt. Steven Klauck, 611th CES commander's executive. "We have points of contact at 18th Force Support Squadron at Bellows Air Force Base. We work with them, we use the Navy, we use support agreements with the Directorate of Public Works out of Hawaii, Army garrison, the Coast Guard. Really, they are the force multipliers."

Building and maintaining partnerships is a priority for an installation like JBER, and even more so for the mission at the 611th CES.

"Partnerships are key in our organizations just because of the logistical nightmares; the partnerships that we have at these various sites is paramount to make sure Alaska radar sites are up and running," Klauck said. "The partnerships we develop and continue to develop are fundamental to our unit's mission due to how small




**Air Force staff sergeants Travis Stout, 611th Civil Engineer Squadron structural craftsman, and Elliot Westerman, 23d CES structural craftsman assigned to Moody Air Force Base, repair a steam heat line at King Salmon in 2017. Heat is critical in winter. (Courtesy photo)**

we are."

While the unit functions as a small team, they all agree that their mission is massive, and there's no telling what'll happen next.

"There isn't a better job," said McNeely. "I'm immensely proud of what we're doing, and the impact

we're having with so few people. We trust our Airmen, and ask them to give it all they got. When you see some cool things we've accomplished, it's pretty empowering."

Day in and day out, 611th CES sees the mission through— all in JBER's backyard. 

# Therapy dog breaks the ice

By **DAVID BEDARD**

176th Wing Public Affairs

When Bolt, a honey-colored golden retriever, saunters into a 176th Wing office suite, he's greeted like a star quarterback or a local celebrity. Because wing Airmen vie for his attention during these periodic visits, they often stock their offices with chew toys and dog treats in an effort to give them an edge.

One such contestant for Bolt's affections is Alaska Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Amanda Plazio, noncommissioned officer in charge of Separations and Retirements, 176th Force Support Flight. When the gregarious canine enters Plazio's work area, he knows she will have a chew toy waiting for him.

The retriever noses around in the NCO's office until he finds his coveted prize. In return, the sergeant gets to enjoy some valuable face time with the helpful hound.

Bolt is a highly trained, nationally certified therapy dog who works closely with 176th Wing Director of Psychological Health, Diann Richardson, licensed clinical social worker.

"A therapy dog like Bolt, is a very well-trained dog that knows basic commands, is friendly, patient, confident, gentle, and comfortable in many different situations," Richardson said. "Additionally he provides comfort and love to others, can interact with a variety of people, is not aggressive, and listens."

She said Bolt arrived in Alaska fully trained with 20 critical voice commands and four hand signals. His training is comprehensive and is a crucial component of his value to the wing.

Professionals at Southeastern Guide Dogs in Palmetto, Florida, raised Bolt from a newborn pup to 10 weeks, giving him the socialization and training he needed before having him live and continue to train with a volunteer "puppy raiser" family for a year.

He then continued his training as a guide dog for the vision impaired before trainers realized he was too social, a problem if he constantly wants to stop to ham it up with people and other dogs.

"Bolt is extremely social," Richardson said. "He likes people. He likes other animals. He likes children.



Alaska Air National Guard Col. Scott Coniglio, 176th Wing vice commander, greets therapy dog, Bolt, Dec. 20, 2018, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Bolt works closely with 176th Wing Director of Psychological Health Diann Richardson, as part of the licensed clinical social worker's outreach to the wing. (U.S. Air National Guard photo/David Bedard)

He likes to be in the mix of things."

Disqualifying for vision-impaired work as his outgoing nature was, his canine charm was tailor-made for therapy work. Consequently, trainers worked with Bolt for 16 months before delivering him to Richardson.

Southeastern Guide Dogs sent a trainer to Alaska who worked with Richardson and her family for a week to ensure she had all the knowledge she needed to care for and effectively employ the well-schooled retriever in her workplace.

The organization visits and reviews Bolt's effectiveness and training annually.

"Bolt is my coworker," she explained. "Bolt is an asset in my job as 70 percent of what I do is prevention, which means going into the squadron, getting to know people, and being a relatable and reliable entity."

Richardson said her acceptance into the units soared when people knew she is nearly always accompanied by the affable canine. Still, wing Airmen often skip past her and focus on the friendly dog.

"For every 10 'Hey Bolts,' I get about two 'Oh hi Dianns,'" she said. "Which is fine because his job is to add levity, decrease stress, and be a nice diversion from work."

Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Matthew Harper, 210th Rescue

Squadron commander, said he personally benefits from Bolt's visits, even if he has to occasionally play defense on his trash bin.

"He makes me happy ... when he's not rooting through my garbage," Harper said. "He takes your mind off whatever struggles you're dealing with."

Richardson explained the therapeutic effect Bolt has on Airmen from a clinical standpoint.

"What I know from science is dogs are natural stress reducers," she said. "They reduce cortisol in the body when you pet them, and they increase oxytocin levels, which is the feel-good hormone. Dogs can play a positive role in the psychological health of humans by reducing levels of depression, stress, anxiety, and loneliness."

She said beyond daily stress, most people will suffer at least three traumatic events during their lifetimes.

"We are all walking wounded," Richardson said.

To that end, she works to fight the tendency to resist help necessary to overcome adversity.

"Let's face it, there continues to be a stigma with mental health," Richardson said. "Even just walking around, some folks may be concerned I might impact their career in a negative way by just talking to me, which

is not the case."


Bolt helps break down barriers so Richardson can have frank conversations with Airmen. If they need help, Richardson can refer them to several agencies on or off base.

"My role at the wing is to offer an external perspective for mental health challenges and, if needed, link service members or their family members to effective resources," she said.

Trained to help different people in different places, Richardson said Bolt enjoys the advantage of getting to know the Airmen he works with every day.

"What's nice about a military-facility therapy dog is that the people at the 176th Wing are his main mission," she said. "This is us. He's not going to schools or hospitals. He's working with Guard folks and their families.

"By now he is familiar with most work centers, recognizes a significant amount of people, walks around greeting folks at wing meetings, knows which service members give great scratches, and has comforted Airmen discussing difficult issues in my office," Richardson continued.

And if he gets to gobble down a dog treat or chase a favorite toy, Bolt's visit with the Airmen he serves is all the better for it. 

**Friday**

**Member appreciation**

Head to the PermaFrost Pub for member appreciation day from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Food service begins at 4 p.m. For information, call 552-3669.

**April 12**

**Lunch with a vendor**

Get specials on cruises and Kenai Fjords tours with vendors at Information, Tickets and Travel. Vendors are available from 11 a.m. to noon; deals are available all day. For information, call 552-0297.

**April 13**

**Ping Pong tournament**

Show off your skills and crush the competition at the Warrior Zone starting at 2 p.m. with this tournament with prizes for the top three finishers. For information, call 384-9006.

**April 13 and 14**

**Alyeska Slush Cup**

Even Alyeska's season must come to an end. Check out the spring carnival with long lift operations, great conditions, and the slush cup – skimming a 90-foot pond in a zany costume. For information, visit [alyeskaresort.com](http://alyeskaresort.com).

**April 15**

**Clothing and book swap**

Bring a bag to the JBER Library from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. to swap freshly laundered clothing with no rips or stains. The library will be giving away books as well. For information, call 384-1640.

**April 17**

**Ladies' night at the range**

Women of all skill levels can head to the Skeet and

Trap range for this introduction to shotguns, safety and shooting from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. For information, call 384-1480.

**April 19**

**Teens' Easter egg hunt**

The JBER youth centers invite teens to search in the dark for prize-filled eggs starting at 9:30 p.m. Bring a flashlight and a basket. For information, call 384-1508 or 552-2266.

**April 20**

**Easter Bunny ice cream**

Tickets go on sale April 1 for this event featuring ice cream, crafts, and much more with the Easter Bunny from 11 a.m. to noon. For information, call 552-8529.

**Paws to Read**

The JBER Library invites children in kindergarten through 5th grade to read to a service dog from 10 a.m. to noon. For information, call 384-1640.

**Ongoing**

**Open swim**

The first Friday of each month is free open swimming at the Polar Paradise pool in the Buckner Physical Fitness Center from 4 to 9 p.m. For more information, call 384-1369.

**Glide Fit**

Try a new way to get in shape with this class at the Buckner Physical Fitness Center pool Saturdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. or Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Test your balance while working out on a stand-up paddleboard. Open to ages 13 and older. For more information, call 384-1301.

**Night at the Fights**

The Egan Center hosts Thursday night boxing and mixed martial arts fights at 7:30 p.m. For more, visit [thursdaynightfights.com](http://thursdaynightfights.com).

**Evening hikes**

Alaska Outdoors hosts weekly hikes Monday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday hikes are easy, 3.5 to 4.5 miles and perfect for beginners or families with kids.

Thursday hikes are moderate difficulty.

For information, visit [alaska-outdoors.org](http://alaska-outdoors.org).

**Civil Air Patrol**

Adult members of the Civil Air Patrol meet at the Aero Club Hangar the first and third Tuesdays of each month; cadets meet Saturdays. For more information or to join, call 350-7951.

**Thursday science club**

Youth are invited to the

JBER Library to experiment and think about science from 6:30 to 7 p.m.

For information, call 384-1640.

**Library story times**

The JBER Library hosts preschool story times Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 to 11 a.m.; Toddler Tales Wednesdays from 10 to 10:30 a.m., and all-ages story time Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7 p.m. For more information, call 384-1640.

**Model railroading**

The Military Society of Model Railroad Engineers meets at 7 p.m. Tuesdays and 1 p.m. Saturdays in the basement of Matanuska Hall; everyone is welcome. They also host an open house every third Saturday through the end of this month.

For more information, call 552-5234, e-mail [msmrre@gmail.com](mailto:msmrre@gmail.com) or visit [facebook.com/msmrre](http://facebook.com/msmrre).

**Chapel services**

Catholic Mass

**Sunday**  
 9 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Monday and Wednesday**  
 11:40 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Tuesday**  
 Noon – JBER Hospital Chapel  
**Friday**  
 Noon – JBER Hospital Chapel

Confession

Confessions are available anytime by appointment or after any mass. Call 552-5762.

Protestant Sunday worship services

**Gospel**  
 9:30 a.m. – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Contemporary**  
 11 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Traditional**  
 11 a.m. – Heritage Chapel

Religious Education

For schedules, call the Religious Operations Center at 552-5762.

**Self-aid and buddy care**



Airman 1st Class Sierra Howard, 673d Contracting Squadron contract specialist, performs self-aid and buddy care techniques in a simulated hazardous environment during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson April 2. Polar Force is a two-week exercise designed to test JBER's mission readiness. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jonathan Valdes Montijo)

# Friendships like a cold drink on a hot day

By **ARMY CHAPLAIN (LT. COL.) GREG THOGMARTIN**  
*JBER Deputy Chaplain*

Lately I have been thinking a lot about friendship.

Circumstances conspire to make me ponder often about what it means to be a friend and what a great and precious gift it is to have a friend.

In mid-March I traveled to Waco, Texas for the funeral of a friend. It was a sad occasion that brought me to be with his family.

It was, however, also a profound honor to be asked to speak at this funeral and to be given an opportunity to honor a fellow Soldier and friend.

My relationship to my friend had changed considerably over the years. When we first met and served together, he was more of a mentor than a friend. I admired him for his knowledge and skills.

David was three years my junior.

However, he had a lot more experience at being a Soldier and serving in the military. He had three different military occupational skills, to include being an infantryman for

eight years.

I drew upon his experience, his knowledge of the Army, and his incredible insights into human beings.

He was then a mentor helping enable our Unit Ministry Teams to succeed in our mission to care for military personnel and families.

I don't know that I can explain how the movement is made from being a mentor to becoming a friend. I only know that it happens now and then, and I am grateful that it does.

Mentors enable our growth professionally and potentially our success. Friends enhance our resiliency and spur our growth as persons.

Gary Fenton writes this from a pastor's perspective about our need for friendship:

"Not only is having friends good for pastors but admitting the need

for them is often as therapeutic as the relationships themselves...

The need for close friendships was driven home to me when

a church acquaintance, about four years older than me, came to visit. I asked him how things were going.

'I am lonely,' he said. 'Basically, if I died now, I don't know who would be my pallbearers. I have business associates and family members, but...'

That was painful to hear. I thought about my friends: the truth is, if I

have no one to carry my body when I die, it probably means no one is carrying me while I am alive." (Fenton, *Your Ministry's Next Chapter*, p.120)

What makes for a friend or a good friendship? Is there a tidy formula? Probably not.

I suspect it has a lot to do with a willingness to know and to be known. Simon Sinek says, "The strong bond of friendship is not always a balanced


equation; friendship is not always about giving and taking in equal shares. Instead, friendship is grounded in a feeling that you know exactly who will be there for you when you need something, no matter what or when."

Friendship carries a strong element of wanting the best for the other person. It also embodies a commitment to be there for them not only wanting the best for them, but also wanting to see the best in them or to want them to become their best self.

If life is a journey, then friendship means that I don't make my journey alone.

It affords the hope that when the going is hard that there will an encouraging presence. Gary Preston in *Character Forged in Conflict* writes, "Close friends care for our souls when they are bruised."

I am grateful for the memories of my friend David. They are a source of strength.

I pray you likewise have a friendship that is like a drink of cold water on a hot day – refreshing. Encouraging. Life giving. Life sustaining. 



**Hospital Family Day hours**

The 673d Medical Group is open on Pacific Air Forces family days to ensure patients have access to acute care and several other services. Specialty care, surgical services, the laboratory, pharmacy and radiology will be open on a limited basis. For information, call 580-2778.

**Firewood permits**

Firewood is \$35 per cord or \$17.50 per half-cord. To receive a permit, an iSportsman permit is required. For information, visit <https://jber.isportsman.net>.

**Main Pharmacy hours**

The main JBER pharmacy, on the first floor of the JBER hospital, is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The pharmacy at the Exchange is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays for civilian prescriptions and refills, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. for refills only.

**iSportsman enrollment**

Anyone choosing to rec-

reate in JBER training areas must obtain an iSportsman permit and sign in and out using the iSportsman system prior to recreating. A pass costs \$10; \$5 for those 60 and older and disabled persons. Passholders may also need an installation access pass. For information, visit [isportsman.jber.net](https://isportsman.jber.net) or call 552-8609 or 384-6224.

**Reserve ‘Scroll’**

Officers wanting to transition to the Air Force Reserve must have their commission transferred to a list called “the Scroll” and approved by the Secretary of Defense.

The process averages 120 days, but can take longer, and must be approved before participating in the Reserve, which may mean a break in service. Even if you’re unsure about transitioning to the Air Force Reserve, the process can be initiated. For information, call 552-3595.

**Pothole repair**

The 773d Civil Engineer Squadron encourages all

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson personnel to report potholes. For holes in housing areas, contact Aurora Housing at 753-1051. Other requests are tracked by 773d CES. Note the location, including cross-streets or building numbers. Then email [773ces.ceoh.potholerepair@us.af.mil](mailto:773ces.ceoh.potholerepair@us.af.mil) or call 552-2994 or 552-2995. Include contact information for crews.

**U-Fix-It Store**

The U-Fix-It stores, open to all Aurora Military Housing tenants, issue home maintenance items. Availability is subject to change and limits; some items may have a cost. The JBER-E location, at 6350 Arctic Warrior Drive, 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.

The JBER-R office 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. A blind-cleaning machine is

available at the JBER-E location; priority goes to those PCSing. For information, call 375-5540.

**DLA Document Services**

Defense Logistics Agency Document Services duplicates and prints documents, including color, large-format photos, engineering drawings, sensitive materials, manuals and training materials. They design, print and distribute business cards, letterhead, invitations and programs, and provide devices to print, scan, copy and fax, and provides maintenance and ink cartridges. They offer document automation and content services for building digital libraries. To register, go to <https://www.dso.documentservices.dla.mil>. For information, visit [documentservices.dla.mil](https://documentservices.dla.mil) or call (808) 473-1699 or (315) 473-1699.

**OTC pharmacy counter**

The pharmacy at the JBER hospital has over-the-counter medication for DoD beneficiaries from 7:30 to

10:30 a.m., Monday through Friday. Flyers and those on personnel reliability program status, pregnant, or under the age of 2 are not eligible.

The clinic offers pain relievers; cough, cold and allergy medications; ointments; constipation and diarrhea medications, and others.

For information, visit JBERPharmacy on Facebook.

**ASYMCA Bargain shop**

The ASYMCA Bargain Shop, 8515 Saville Ave. on JBER-E, is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and the first Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For information, call 753-6134.

**Richardson Thrift Shop**

The JBER-Richardson Thrift Shop, Building 724 Quartermaster Drive, is open Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m., and first and third Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. For information, call 384-7000.



# 176th AMS readies for aerial gunnery



Alaska Air National Guard Staff Sgt. David Dunning, an aircraft armament systems specialist assigned to the 210th Rescue Squadron out of Eielson Air Force Base, installs a GAU-2 7.62 mm minigun on a HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 19. Alaska Air National Guardsmen armed two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters each with two GAU-2 7.62 mm miniguns in preparation for aerial live-fire gunnery training. (U.S. Air Force photos/Alejandro Peña)



Alaska Air National Guard aircraft armament systems specialists Master Sgt. Brandon Sipes, left, and Staff Sgt. David Dunning perform an operations check for a recently installed GAU-2 7.62 mm minigun at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 19. Sipes and Dunning are assigned to the 176th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, and the 210th Rescue Squadron out of Eielson Air Force Base, respectively.

**ON THE COVER:** Sipes installs a GAU-2 7.62 mm minigun on a HH-60G Pave Hawk.



# JBER hospital performs corneal transplant

By **AIRMAN 1ST CLASS  
CRYSTAL JENKINS**  
JBER Public Affairs

Patients with a common eye disease now have alternatives as the 673d Surgical Squadron and Ophthalmology team advanced their skills and performed their first corneal transplant February 27 at the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Hospital.

The hereditary eye disease known as Fuchs' Corneal Dystrophy displays symptoms which for most can often become noticeable after the age of 50 and can ultimately cause a significant loss in vision.

This loss of sight can be treated with two different methods of cornea transplant known as Descemet's Stripping Endothelial Keratoplasty (DSEK) and Descemet's Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK).

The JBER patient who received the first corneal transplant, John Anderson, is a retired military member and pilot who had multiple symptoms which include,

blurred vision.

"It takes a little bit of time to recover, but this surgery will help keep my vision from deteriorating in the near future," Anderson said. "I'm grateful there was a doctor here able to perform this kind of surgery. After doing a lot of research myself, I'm glad this was able to be done before it became too severe."

Long before a decision is made, a patient with Fuchs' must first understand how the cornea works, since the disease initially only affects a single layer of the cornea.

The cornea, which is the clear window on the front of the eye, is comprised of three main layers – the epithelium, stroma and endothelium.

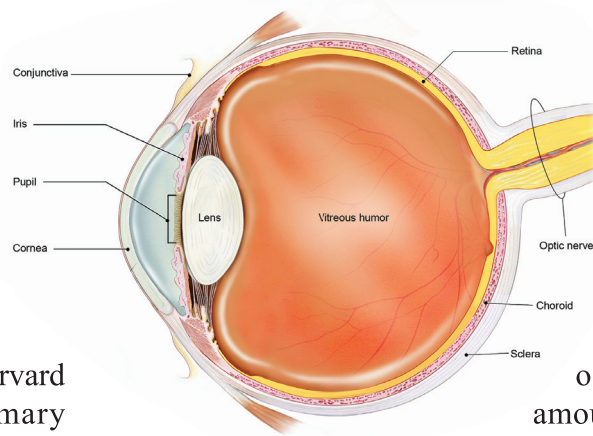
The epithelium is a barrier which protects the cornea from dust, debris and bacteria.

The stroma is the middle layer and makes up 90 percent of cornea thickness, mostly of collagen and other structural materials. It gives the cornea its strength and

dome-like shape.

The endothelium, one layer of cells on the Descemet membrane, provides the appropriate balance of fluid in the cornea, keeping it thin and clear.

"While attending Harvard ophthalmology's primary teaching hospital, Massachusetts Eye and Ear, I was introduced to both types of treatment and was able to see firsthand their varying success rates," said Air Force Lt. Col. J. Richard Townley, 673d Surgical Squadron chief of ophthalmology and refractive surgery consultant to the surgeon general. "It became very important to me to become proficient in performing the DMEK method. By being able to perform this surgery, my patients are now 15 times less likely to experience infection, [they] have a faster rate of recovery, needing only a localized immune suppressant, and may not require the continued use of steroids for the rest of




corneas have significantly scarred gives you the best chance of having good vision after the procedure."

To understand the varying options, one must do a fair amount of research and have an ophthalmologist experienced in current best practices.

In 2013, Townley was the first Department of Defense ophthalmologist to perform DMEK surgery at Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

Now, after performing more than 30 DMEK procedures and seeing the success rate, he has continued taking this knowledge forward in his career and helping more surgical teams become familiar with the procedure.

For more information or to schedule an optometry appointment, call the JBER Hospital Optometry Flight at 580-0276. 

their life."

Recognizing the symptoms and seeking specialized care during the early stages of Fuchs' helps ensure patients receive appropriate treatment before the corneas have become permanently damaged from more advanced stages of the disease, such as scarring from longstanding corneal swelling.

"Corneal scarring is the one factor that imparts a degree of urgency to deciding when to have a corneal transplant," Townley said. "In general, corneal scarring limits vision, but it can improve after surgery. Undergoing DMEK surgery before your

**March 2**

A daughter, Julia Inge Newton, was born 21.75 inches long and weighing 9 pounds, 12 ounces at 7:32 a.m. to Rebecca Susan Newton and Army Maj. Boyce Jearl Newton of the 17th Combat Support Sustainment Battalion.

**March 4**

A son, Harrison Marc Ober, was born 19 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 9 ounces at 9:58 a.m. to Rebekah Ober and Sgt. Samuel Ober of the 6th Brigade Engineer Battalion (Airborne).

**March 5**

A son, Dean Rhyan Berman Eberlin was born 20 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 4 ounces at 5:28 p.m. to Sofia Lynn Eberlin and Spc. Travis Hunter Berman Eberlin of C Company, 307th Expeditionary Signal Company.

**March 7**

A daughter, Harper Grace Bowen was born 19.5 inches long and weighing 9 pounds, 1 ounce at 8:26 a.m. to Ashley L. Bowen and Sgt. Kevin D. Bowen of the 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne).

A son, Billy Waylon Binns, was born 20 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 2 ounces at 11:08 a.m. to Sierra Nicole Binns and Spc. Tyler Gage Binns of the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment.

**March 8**

A son, Luke Anderson Kearney, was born 21 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 10 ounces at 8:33 p.m. to Katherine Elaine Kearney and Air Force Staff Sgt. Sam Kearney of the 773d Civil Engineer Squadron.

**March 9**

A son, Charles Luke Nesbit, was born 21 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 14 ounces at 3:35 p.m.

to Lauren Bailey Nesbit and Cpl. Charles Jordan Nesbit of the 109th Transportation Company.

A son, Reagan James O'Donnell, was born 22 inches long and weighing 9 pounds, 1 ounce at 12:26 p.m. to Lauren Elizabeth Fleming and Kelly James O'Donnell.

A son, Ashton John Sazama, was born 20 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 2 ounces at 9:16 a.m. to Katelyn D. Sazama and Tech. Sgt. Michael J. Sazama of the 3rd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

**March 11**

A daughter, Olivia Ali Meeks, was born 20 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces at 9:43 a.m. to Brittany Michelle Meeks and Air Force staff Sgt. Letefa Oliver Meeks of the 673d Medical Group.

A son, Etzio Atlas Vaughan, was born 19.5 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces at 2:24 p.m. to Sasha Deann Vaughan and Spc. Michael Shane Vaughan of the 6th Brigade Engineer Battalion (Airborne).

**March 12**

A son, Asher Jackson Fairbank, was born 19.57 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 15 ounces at 6:28 a.m. to Meyanna Coral Fairbank and Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Jonathan Robert Fairbank of the Ruitoff Anchorage.

A son, Mateo Wilton Moreno-Zavalsa, was born 22 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces at 5:39 p.m. to Sgt. Chassity Monique Moreno-Zavalsa of the 3rd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment and Hector Moreno-Zavalsa.

**March 14**

A son, Xander Andre Cdebaca, was born 19.5 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 7 ounces at 12:17 p.m. to Kayla K. Cdebaca and Air Force Staff Sgt. Paul J. Cdebaca of the 3rd

Air Support Operations Squadron.

**March 17**

A son, Koda Ryan Kurtz, was born 21.5 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 2 ounces at 5:25 p.m. to Sarah M. Grim and Jesse Ryan Kurtz.

**March 21**

A son, Kai William Graham, was born 20 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 14 ounces at 10:57 a.m. to Tabitha Hope Graham and Army Staff Sgt. Matthew Calvert Graham of the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment.

**March 22**

A daughter, Victoria A. Hernandez-Fontanez, was born 19.75 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 1 ounce at 2:09 a.m. to Keishla M. Fontanez and Sgt. Ney O. Hernandez of the 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne).

A son, Murphy Leon Ruch, was born 19.5 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 10 ounces at 6:12 p.m. to Jessica Corder Ruch and Senior Airman Brett Anthony Ruch of the 90th Aircraft Maintenance Unit.

A son, Dominic Roan Savage, was born 20 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 1 ounce at 5:35 a.m. to Jasmine Chontu Alfred and Army Capt. Dontae Reeves Savage of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment (Airborne).

A daughter, Landon Johannes VanTonder, was born 21 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 8 ounces at 10:04 a.m. to Alexandra Dian VanTonder and Army Staff Sgt. Jacob Johannes VanTonder of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne),

25th Infantry Division.

**March 23**

A daughter, Mi'la Sadira Thomas, was born 19 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces at 9:37 a.m. to Shaantezz-Marie Ann Thomas and Senior Airman Lauaris Eurell Thomas of the 381st Intelligence Squadron.

**March 24**

A son, Hunter Stuart Berner, was born 21 inches long and weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces at 10:13 a.m. to Senior Airman Carla Joyce Berner of the 673d Aerospace Medical Squadron and Tech. Sgt. Lance Stuart Berner of the 773d Logistics Readiness Squadron.

**March 25**

A son, Oliver Reid Bull, was born 21 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 15 ounces at 4:38 p.m. to Kayla Renn Bull and Air Force Staff Sgt. Benjamin Patrick Bull of the 525th Aircraft Maintenance Unit.

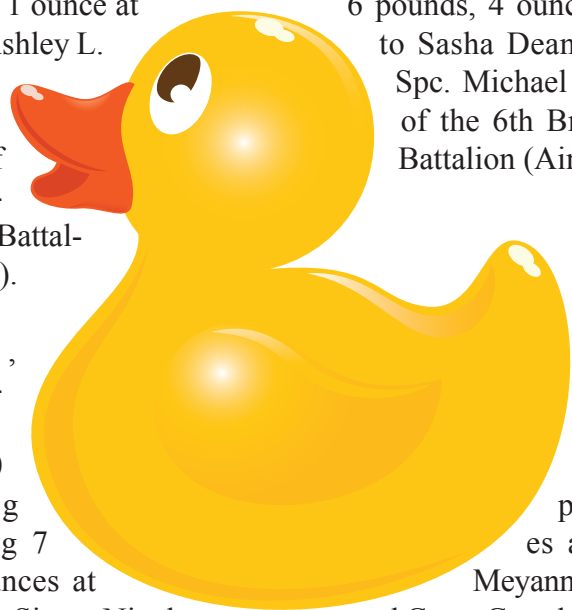
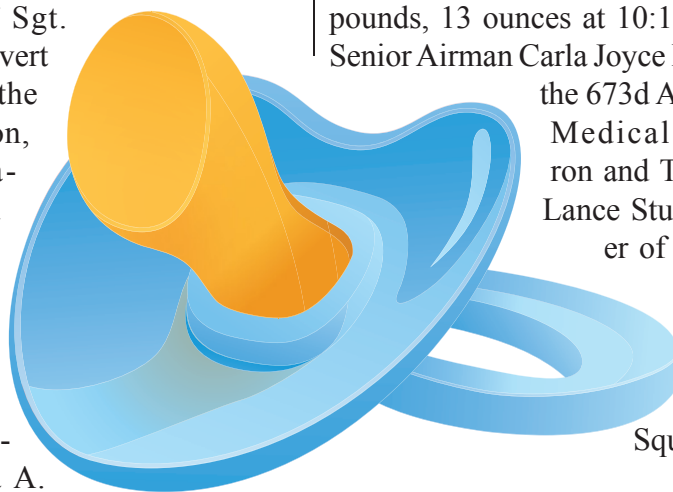
**March 26**

A daughter, Violet Joan Murray, was born 19 inches long and weighing 6 pounds at 12:33 a.m. to Victoria Helen Murray and Sgt. Joshua Leon Murray of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment (Airborne).

A son, Wyatt Joseph Nowaskey, was born 21 inches long and weighing 8 pounds, 5 ounces at 3:03 a.m. to Rebecca L. Nowaskey and Army Staff Sgt. Shane Joseph Nowaskey of the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment.

**March 29**

A son, Jacob Lee Goddard, was born 20 inches long and weighing 6 pounds, 10 ounces at 10:04 p.m. to Jenna E. Goddard and Senior Airman George M. Goddard of the 90th Aircraft Maintenance Unit.



# 176th Wing participates in Polar Force

By AIR FORCE MAJ.  
JOHN CALLAHAN  
JBER Public Affairs

The 176th Wing, one of the nation's largest and busiest Air National Guard wings, kicked off its participation in Polar Force 19 April 2, a base-wide exercise designed to test Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's mission readiness.

"Deploying a military force is a complex operation – many moving parts have to come together seamlessly at the same time," said Brig. Gen. Darrin Slaten, the 176th Wing's commander. "That's why these types of exercises are so valuable: They help ensure that the Alaska Air National Guard can deploy, on very short notice, a powerful force capable of delivering overwhelming combat power in support of U.S. interests anywhere in the Pacific theater."



**Alaska Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Micheal Long, 176th Logistics Readiness Squadron, evaluates 176th Wing Air Guardsmen during an April 3 response to simulated unexploded ordnance at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The evaluation was part of the Polar Force 2019 exercise. (U.S. Air National Guard photo/Maj. John Callahan)**

The wing implemented Polar Force in two phases.

During Phase 1, the wing practiced preparing and deploying its members to a simulated hostile environment.

The "deployers" assembled their gear and ran through a series of checks and briefings to prepare them for their upcoming assignments. Their equipment

was bundled on pallets and loaded on planes, providing practice for loadmasters and aircrew.

In Phase 2, the wing tested its ability to operate and exe-

cute missions within a hostile deployed environment.

Wearing helmets, chemical-protection suits and other combat gear, the wing's men and women evaluated their own ability to successfully execute missions while under attack.

The wing's participation in Polar Force 19 ended April 5.

"Once the exercise has concluded," Slaten said, "We will take everything we've learned, figure out where our strengths and weaknesses are, and use that information to build an even stronger force."

The citizen-Airmen of the Alaska Air National Guard are Alaskans – we live here," Slaten added. "It's inspiring to see these highly trained, highly motivated men and women come together as a team to ensure that we are ready to respond when our nation calls." 