

## Archangels make their own masks

1st Lt. Spencer E. Negrete

The Soldiers of Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 8th Field Artillery Regiment, teamed up with Soldier and Family Readiness Group members to make masks all Soldiers in the Battery.

Following plans published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the group formed an assembly line and quickly made about 100 masks in few hours. They used a few yards of cotton fabric in olive drab green and earth brown, plus some paracord, to fabricate uniform compliant masks.

SFRG members Anna Schmidt, Nicole Bradley and Audrey Donovan provided the sewing machines and know-how to get it done. Soldiers rotated through, cutting paracord to length or cutting the fabric according to the template. Once all the pieces were ready, Nicole Bradley would sew them together.

The final prod-



uct is durable and washable, and is a recommended part of slowing the spread of COVID-19.

The CDC advises the "use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus." They go on to say that the masks may help prevent the spread of the virus from those that have COVID-19 and do

not know it. Furthermore, they say to wash you mask regularly by simply adding to a regular load of laundry in a washing machine. Finally, it's best to remove your mask without touching the eyes, nose and mouth and to wash your hands immediately after removing.

More information and instructions on

how to make your own sew and no-sew masks can be found on [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

Protected by their new masks, the troops of Alpha Battery will continue to fix their trucks, maintain their M777A2 Howitzers, and serve the Fort Wainwright, Alaska, community throughout the duration of this pandemic.



## An Alaska frame of mind: The life and times of CW2 Michael Smith

1st Lt. Austen Bouska  
1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division  
Public Affairs

In his normal day-to-day work schedule, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Smith spends his time measuring out motor pools for future Winter Maintenance Facilities, conducting spill response training with different battalions or even testing new Cold Weather Equipment. As the Task Force Reserve Brigade engineer for 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, U.S. Army Alaska and as a 120A military occupation specialty (construction engineer and technician), he is the brigade's main problem solver for anything engineering related.

This can be quite a challenging task for an engineer assigned in an arctic environment like Alaska.

"Once we get into the negative digits you know, plastics, rubber and metal all become more brittle especially on military equipment that is getting used in a more rough and rigorous manner," Smith said.

Smith admits that this actually adds to his work experience in a positive way.

"I love the challenging problem set that Alaska can bring. It keeps my work interesting and exciting."

His positive attitude and motivation for his job in con-



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Smith with the moose he harvested at Creamer's Field in Fairbanks, Alaska. (Photo by 1st Lt. Austen Bouska, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

ditions that can sometimes bring others to have the opposite reaction, makes Smith a crucial member of the Task Force Reserve Team. Especially, during a year where

the Fort Wainwright area experienced one of the coldest winters since the late 1990s.

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## Bassett ACH prepares ICU rooms for COVID-19 response

Brandy Ostanik-Thornton  
Medical Department Activity – Alaska Public Affairs

In preparation for patients who may need intensive care due to COVID-19, Bassett Army Community Hospital has converted patient rooms to meet ICU standards.

We are planning for a worst-case scenario," said Lt. Col. Victo-

ria Ragan assistant deputy commander for nursing. "We are ready to support in the event all the ICU beds in Fairbanks are full and we are needed."

The rooms, located in the multi-service unit, required changes to venting, airflow, equipment and additional staffing; a project that needed

See ICU on page 2



Nurse practitioner Maj. Ashley Aiton, chief of Kamish Soldier Medical Home, and certified registered nurse anesthetist Maj. Sephra Leger, demonstrate how to set up an arterial line at a recent ICU training in preparation for COVID-19 patients. An arterial line allows ICU staff to monitor a patient's blood pressure and a way to get blood from arteries used to manage ventilator settings. (Photo by Lt. Col. Victoria Ragan, Medical Department Activity – Alaska deputy commander for nursing)



# Wellness tip of the week

Can you really get a great workout without leaving the house?

It doesn't take much money or effort to design an effective workout program at home. Even with no props or machines, you can build muscles and burn calories. If

you have a two-story home or live on the 2nd floor of an apartment, you can walk the stairs to get a great workout. An effective fitness program has five components, all of which you can do at home:

A warmup  
A cardiovascular (aerobic) workout  
Resistance (strength-building) exercises  
Flexibility moves  
A cool down

A warm-up could be an easy walk outside or on a treadmill, or a slow pace on a stationary bike. For cardiovascular, walk or pedal faster, do step aerobics with a video or jump rope.

The resistance portion can be as simple as squats, push-ups and abdominal

crunches. Or you could work with small dumbbells, a weight bar, or bands. No matter what exercise you do, be sure to start slowly and gradually increase your workout time and intensity. Don't forget to listen to your body.

# History Snapshot: Building 1555



During World War II, Ladd Field's main medical unit was housed in the north wing of Building 1555. When it was activated, the hospital had 10 officers, 10 nurses and 62 enlisted men serving as staff. The south wing contained a 250-man barracks for enlisted members of the Cold Weather Test Detachment, and the center section housed the theater and other functions. In 1953, the original Basset Army Hospital opened on post and Building 1555 became the headquarters for a variety of mission-related units. (Photo courtesy of the Dennis Collection)

# ICU: Preparing for COVID-19

Continued from page 1

the assistance of multiple departments within BACH. Staff from facilities installed high efficiency particulate air, or HEPA filters and converted the rooms to negative pressure. Negative pressure allows air to filter into the room but not escape, preventing airborne contagious diseases such as COVID-19 from contaminating other parts of the unit.

With the rooms converted to negative pressure, shifting of equipment within the hospital was necessary.

“We had the majority of the equipment on hand for emergency situations, but only in small quantities,” said Ragan. “We had to shift a lot of things around within the hospital to support the ICU beds. Some of this equipment includes ventilators, heart monitors, addi-

tional IV pumps, and extra oxygen and suction capabilities,” said Ragan.

The completion of physical changes to the ICU rooms took a week to accomplish, while training of staff to work with COVID-19 patients and in an ICU is ongoing.

Ragan, an ICU nurse herself, worked with departments to identify nurses and providers with previous

ICU experience. These staff members are continuing training to solidify procedures and implement COVID-19 specific protocols.

To assist with training and ICU patient care, BACH received ICU nurses from military hospitals outside of Alaska as well as to Air Force nurses from Eielson Air Force Base here in interior Alaska.

“I’ve been really humbled

by the amount of staff that stood up and volunteered to train for and care for COVID-19 patients,” said Ragan. “As a group we talked about the risk to our own health with exposure to high viral loads. In the end it always came down to, ‘I’m a nurse or doctor and when people need me I have to be there and try my best to help’ from those volunteering.”

# SMITH: Alaska frame of mind

Continued from page 1

Capt. Chandler Alford, operations officer for the Task Force Reserve 1/25 SBCT, who is also an engineer summed it up best in saying, “Whenever Chief Smith walks into a room, he brings a smile and joy to those around him. His professionalism as a competent and hardworking engineer in both tactical environments and working with on-post construction projects exemplifies what every senior leader should have in their formation. I can always count on Chief to bring me his best.”

During the summer months in his spare time, Smith can be found taking advantage of the 24 hours of daylight and over 6,600 miles of coastline that the Last Frontier has to offer. His wife and their two son’s ages 4 and 10 love spending this time together catching different fish.

“I love traveling to the coast. My favorite places are Kodiak, Homer and Seward.

Kodiak Island has a Coast Guard Base on it, and you can rent kayaks from their Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation program if you show them your military ID. Then in Homer I actually befriended a local charter fisherman who takes me and my family to some of the best fishing spots that a lot of people don’t know about.”

By the time he is done stocking up his freezer with salmon, rockfish and halibut, the weather begins to chill again. With the cooler temperatures, the fishing season ends and Smith sets his focus on looking forward to moose season opening in the interior.

Smith has hunted for moose and black bear during his time in Alaska.

“Over by Creamer’s Field in the Fairbanks area, I was able to get a moose last year. That has been one of my most favorite memories thus far.

Creamer’s Field is a beautiful place to go and explore any time of year.”

He also mentions that hunting and fishing are not the only activities him and his family enjoy.

“I just love taking my family out to Chena Hot Springs. I recommend going in the morning, it can be really peaceful and relaxing.”

When asked what some of the misconceptions are about being stationed in Alaska, Smith firmly stated, “The cold really isn’t that bad. You can always add more layers the colder it gets, and the military gives us the absolute best cold weather gear that money can buy.

“However, people have to realize that this place is not like the lower 48 and never will be. There is an Alaska frame of mind here and one of those is that nature is the boss. You have got to respect it and when you do respect nature you will be able to be

safe and enjoy yourself.”

Smith has enjoyed his time so much in Alaska that he plans on eventually retiring in the 49th state.

“I have another assignment that I’ll be reporting to in

the lower 48 in the coming months. Once I complete that, I plan on retiring and moving my family to Homer.”

Michael Smith’s motivation toward his job and his enthusiasm about living

in Alaska is a source for inspiration for everyone who is lucky enough to work with him. He represents the best of the best from the “Arctic Wolves” of 1/25 SBCT and is most certainly, Arctic Tough!

## ALASKA POST

The Interior Military News Connection

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# The Chaplain’s Corner

**Chaplain Paul Fritts**  
U.S. Army Garrison  
Alaska, Fort Greely

The coronavirus global pandemic has spawned a popular phrase frequently used as a social media hashtag and as a tagline for public service announcements: we’re all in this together. The sentiment is intended to offer encouragement and to promote a sense of shared suffering, along with a reminder to wash our hands and keep our distance in order to safeguard the health of our family members, friends and communities. Broadly speaking, all members of the human race are, in fact, in this together in the sense that we are biological organisms with certain vulnerabilities to this highly contagious and potentially deadly virus. However, beyond this basic assumption, I believe it is important to reflect on how we are, in truth, not as in this together as many would glibly

believe. Some will tolerate the impacts of the global pandemic better than others which means that we are not truly all in this together. In general, the trends indicate that the respiratory illness is more deadly for men than women, for the elderly than the young, for African Americans and Latinos than whites, and for the poor than the wealthy. As a middle-aged, white, affluent male, I am less at risk from contracting the virus or dying from any subsequent respiratory disease than many others. It is important to ask the question: why? Is it because I have some sort of supercharged immune system that sets me apart? Not hardly. More likely it is because I benefit from systems that favor my gender, race and socio-economic status. Conversely, others are systemically disadvantaged because they cannot afford to stay home, who feel

as though they must continue to work at lower paying jobs that put them at greater risk of exposure to the virus, and who have no guarantee of adequate health care or insurance should they become ill. I’m going to weather this pandemic just fine. But if we are genuinely all in this together, that means I have neighbors who are vulnerable. And, biblically speaking, I have obligations to those neighbors resulting from my Christian faith. In the classic social justice text of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that we should feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, host the stranger, care for the sick and visit the imprisoned. All are worthy charitable pursuits which, given the current circumstances, are out of reach for this Army Chaplain under shelter-in-place and social distancing orders. What should

I do? Many aspects of this finite, earthly experience I cannot change. For example, the social, economic and political systems that favor me over others. Most of us readily identify with Diana Young’s opinion, blogging for the Independent, when she writes: “I sympathize with those who are suffering, but please stop making me apologize for being middle class.” What I can change, however, is my attitude about my advantages in order to broaden my perspective and think more inclusively toward my neighbors. Guarding my attitude is important because I want to avoid the sort of gratitude that is only thankful for the benefits that permit me to snugly cocoon in my home with money in the bank, groceries in the pantry, and toilet tissue in the bathroom. I must not become content with gratitude focused inwardly on my own



privilege.

So, what should I do? Do unto others as I would have them do unto me. This is gratitude that pays it forward to my neighbors, not back up the hierarchy of privilege so that those who already have get even more. The Golden Rule is also a useful reminder that we will all, at some time in our lives, have a need and will benefit from the grace shown to us by someone else. Yes, we really are all in this life together in

ways deeper and more profound than even a pandemic creates. Ensuring that our future return to normal elevates all of us begins with “do unto others.” For God and Country! The Fort Greely Chapel community is a traditional, protestant Army chapel service meeting on Sundays at 10 a.m. with a weekly Communion observance. Interested? Please call 907-873-4397 or “Like” our chapel Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/FGAChapel](https://www.facebook.com/FGAChapel).

## Blackout curtain install for building 1004



Bear Creek Builders employee Forest Vent installs a blackout shade in one of 2,997 barracks windows to receive the sun-blocking window treatments as part of the U.S. Army Alaska Quality of Life improvements ongoing at Fort Wainwright. Work began April 15 in building 1001. (Photo by Grant Sattler, U.S. Army Garrison Alaska, Fort Wainwright Public Affairs)



## Fort Wainwright Families can reserve Month of the Military Child Brat Patches online with the Exchange

**Carina DeCino**  
Army and Air Force  
Exchange Service  
Public Affairs

During April, the Month of the Military Child, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service is saluting our nation’s youngest heroes.

The Exchange partnered with Vanguard to create a free, limited-edition collectible iron-on patch celebrating military children who make warfighters’ mission and focus possible.

The patch is available at the Fort Wainwright Exchange for military children age 17 and younger. For their safety and health during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fort Wainwright shoppers can reserve their patches by

completing the reservation form online at Exchange Community Hub page: [www.publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/momc](http://www.publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/momc). Once local stay-at-home orders are lifted, the Fort Wainwright Exchange will notify shoppers that their patches are ready for pickup.

The reservation form will be available through April 30, while supplies last. Up to five patches per Common Access Card-holding adult

can be reserved. “Military children sacrifice so their parents can serve our great Nation,” Fort Wainwright Exchange general manager Gloria Sylvia said. “This collectible military brat patch is a way for the Exchange to recognize the way Fort Wainwright children serve as well.” Shoppers can view full details and other virtual activities and contests at [www.publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/momc](http://www.publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/momc).



# COVID-19 rapid test debuts at Bassett Army Community Hospital

**Brandy Ostanik-Thornton**  
Bassett Army Community Hospital Public Affairs

Bassett Army Community Hospital became the first healthcare organization in interior Alaska, and one of a handful in the state, with the ability to provide rapid COVID-19 testing as of April 6.

Recently authorized for emergency use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cepheid GeneXpert diagnostic system provides automated results in an hour. According to Spc. Gabrielle Gavlick, a microbiology specialist at BACH, the rapid test can be invaluable to providers and patients in emergencies.

We had a patient going in for surgery, and the provider wanted the patient tested before hand, explained Spc. Gabrielle Gavlick. “We were able to test the patient right here and have results quickly to ensure the safety of the patient and our staff.”

In addition to the GeneXpert system, the lab team has also prepared a second analyzer, which is also capable of performing the test in-house.

The staff worked for two weeks straight preparing



Above: Spc. Haroldo Palma, a microbiology specialist at Bassett Army Community Hospital performs a quality control check on a back-up system for COVID-19 rapid testing. Bassett ACH became the first healthcare facility in interior Alaska to have the capabilities to perform COVID-19 testing. (Courtesy photo)

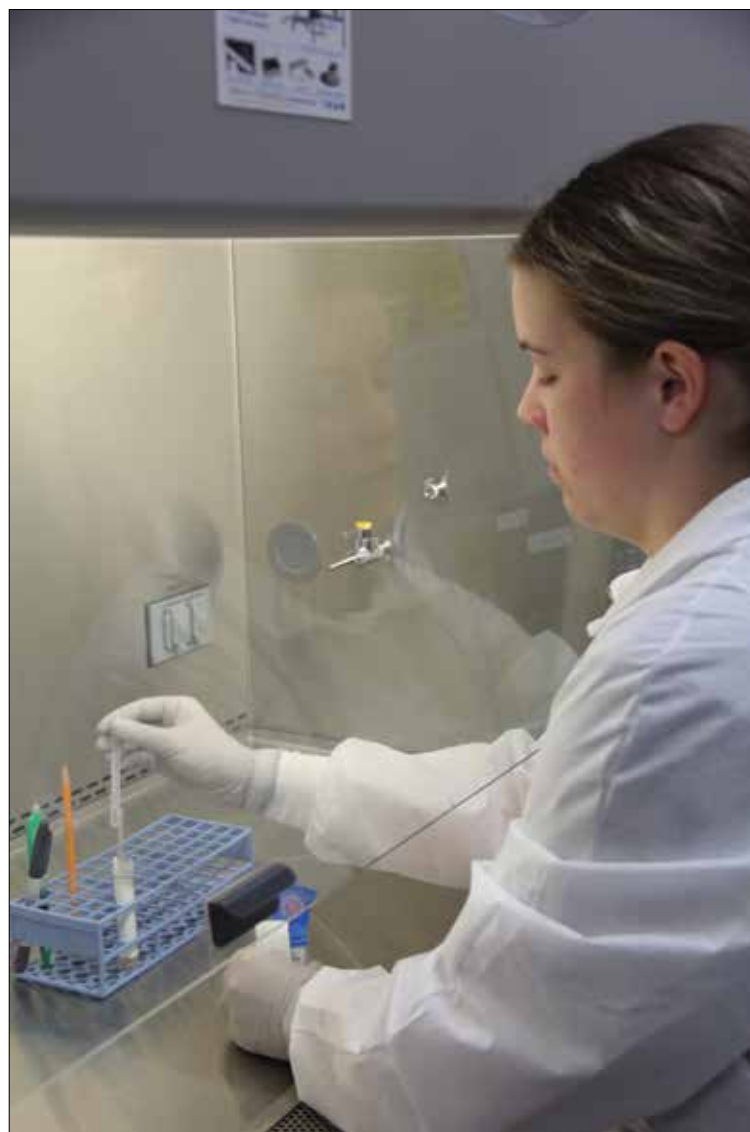
Right: Spc. Gabrielle Gavlick, a microbiology specialist at Bassett Army Community Hospital prepares a sample for COVID-19 rapid testing through a biological safety cabinet. Bassett ACH became the first healthcare facility in interior Alaska to have the capabilities to perform COVID-19 testing. (Courtesy photo)

to perform patient testing,” said Maj. Matthew Cooley, chief of pathology at BACH. “The majority of the effort was spent developing protocols and procedures as well as conducting staff training,” said Cooley.

Additionally, the lab followed federal regulations requiring test studies to ensure the system was running correctly and providing accurate results.

“Preparing has been a lot of work requiring long hours so it’s been a bit overwhelming at times,” said Gavlick, “but it’s also rewarding because I love microbiology and being a part of the solution.”

Due to large demand worldwide for COVID-19 testing, BACH must compete with other healthcare organizations for the necessary materials to



run the test. Because of the demand on supplies, BACH will continue to follow Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention and Alaska Section of Epidemiology guidelines for testing.

## Face masks now required on all commissary shoppers, employees

**Thomas Brading**  
Army News Service

Effective April 10, patrons and store employees at all commissaries are required to wear face masks, as further safety measures are increased to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

The instruction was released by the Defense Commissary Agency, or DeCA, and applies to all agency stores and other facilities worldwide where

no local directive has yet been issued, retired Rear Adm. Robert J. Bianchi, Defense Department special assistant for commissary operations, said in a statement.

However, if local commanders have already issued a directive to require face coverings in their commissaries, the new order will not supersede their guidance, Bianchi said. “Many bases have already imposed this requirement, but

at locations where there is no guidance, this is the protection of our employees and our customers.”

This policy reinforces the commissaries’ mission as being vital to military sustainment and readiness, said Army Lt. Col. Angela Parham, DeCA’s health and safety director.

“Ultimately, local commanders determine who accesses – and what activities operate on – their

installations based on public health and emergency management concerns,” Parham said. “During this pandemic, we will continue to work with senior leaders on the ground as they make decisions on social distancing and designated shopping hours.”

On April 5, the DOD released its own guidance that “all individuals on DOD property, installations, and facilities will wear cloth face coverings when they cannot maintain 6 feet of social distance in public areas or work centers.”

“The DOD’s face-covering mandate aligns with [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidance to help present asymptomatic people, who may not know they’re infected, from spreading the virus to healthy folks,” Parham said.

That said, Parham added that personal protective equipment is only one part of the preventive measures needed to help wind down the spread of COVID-19.

“Even when you wear a mask or other face covering, it is still important to practice good hand hygiene, social distancing, and refrain from touching your face,” she added.

In preparation for the guidance, DeCA officials are purchasing disposable masks and gloves for employees through commercial suppliers. Until then, store employees are wearing their own masks from materials like scarfs, bandannas, clean t-shirts or cloths to shield the nose and mouth.

The commissary is not authorized or equipped to provide face masks to customers, she said.

“Having the proper face coverings to enter a military facility is the responsibility of the service member or family member who wants to gain entrance,” Parham said. “A customer who doesn’t have the proper face coverings, just like a customer who doesn’t have the proper ID, will not be allowed to shop. The enforcement of unauthorized shoppers rests with the installation.”

### Other safety measures

In addition to face coverings on all employees and customers, Parham said, commissaries have implemented operational policies to help ensure stores remain safe in the wake of COVID-19.

Some examples include installing clear, acrylic sneeze shields in commissaries at all regular checkout lanes. Also, checkout and product display areas will continue to be disinfected routinely, along with restrooms, shopping carts, and product display cases to reduce transmission risks, she said.

At each register, hand sanitizer is accessible for and used by staff at the end of every patron transaction.

Also, multiple actions are being enforced at commissaries, including a “no visitors” policy to limit people inside the store, prohibiting reusable bags, and early-bird hours being cut back to give staff an opportunity to sanitize and restock shelves.

“We work closely with our industry partners and place product orders with them for increased deliveries to our commissaries where the need is

greatest, especially overseas, to ensure product availability, particularly on items that are in high demand,” Parham said.

“We are countering delays of shipboard supply containers by increasing air shipments of high-demand items to our overseas stores as needed,” she added. “We will continue to fully maintain this level of support throughout the duration of the crisis wherever necessary.”

Currently, DeCA has five locations on the East Coast with CLICK2GO online ordering service. Patrons can use CLICK2GO at Fort Belvoir, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Oceana Naval Air Station and Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia. The service is also available at Joint Base and McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Over the next couple years, DeCA plans to expand their number of locations from east to west as they unveil new business and store-front systems.

But slowing the spread of COVID-19 starts at home, Parham said. For example, individuals should use basic practices, like covering their faces when they sneeze to avoid spreading germs. The biggest prevention rests on individuals themselves.

“Frequent hand-washing and hand sanitizing, refraining from touching the face, practicing social distancing, and staying home when you can is the best way to protect yourself and – by staying healthy – protect your family,” she said.

Updates related to the commissaries can be found on DeCA’s Coronavirus page.



April 17, 2020

# Fort Greely chaplains provide spiritual support amid COVID-19 pandemic

**Angela J. Glass**  
U.S. Army Garrison Alaska,  
Fort Greely Public Affairs

Chaplains at U.S. Army Garrison Alaska, Fort Greely are finding ways to provide spiritual support to the installation and Delta Junction community through innovative means in response to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Fort Greely Garrison Chaplain, Lt. Col Paul Fritts, and 49th Missile Defense Battalion Chaplain, Capt. Sean Crow, are displaying their worth to the community by using creative ways to provide encouraging and heartfelt messages of hope to patrons. Both chaplains are maintaining a strong presence on social media by broadcasting Sunday services as well as publishing daily and weekly messages to the workforce. This includes publications of Chaplain Crow’s “Word of the Day” and Chaplain Fritt’s “Children’s Message.”

The religious support doesn’t stop at social media; both chaplains are also stopping at nothing to continue



Above: U.S. Army Garrison Alaska, Fort Greely Chaplain Lt. Col. Paul Fritts livestreams his first virtual service March 22 in response to the Commander-In-Chief’s social distancing guidance limiting gatherings to less than ten people. (Photo by U.S. Army Garrison Alaska, Fort Greely Public Affairs)

Right: Garrison Chaplain Lt. Col Paul Fritts and 49th Missile Defense Battalion Chaplain Capt. Sean Crow use social distancing guidelines to read a story to the children of Paul and Laci Jacques on April 8 at their home. (Photo by Laci Jacques)

socializing with the families they hold dear to their heart. Using social distancing measures outlined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, they are even making house calls to read stories to the entire family. “The Fort Greely Ministry Team has quickly adapted to our current situation by developing new capacities to livestream weekly services and messages,” said Fritts. “The current pandemic has also served as an opportunity for our team to demonstrate kindness and compas-



sion using unique methods; I’m already aware of friends and family who have been touched all over the world by our virtual community.” If you need any type of religious support from the Fort Greely Ministry Team, Chaplains Fritts and Crow can be reached by telephone at (203)-600-9874 and (208) 941-0174, respectively.

## Fort Wainwright Exchange launches curbside pickup amid COVID-19 pandemic

**Carina DeCino**  
Army and Air Force  
Exchange Service  
Public Affairs

To help Soldiers and their Families practice physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fort Wainwright Exchange is implementing curbside pickup. Beginning April 10, shoppers at the Fort Wainwright Exchange will be able to order at ShopMyExchange.com and pick up their purchases at the curb.

Curbside pickup is an extension of the Exchange’s buy online, pick up in store service. Authorized military shoppers with installation access can visit ShopMyExchange.com, find what they need and choose the pick up at store option. When the order is ready, the store will call and offer the curbside pickup option. At the store, shoppers park in a designated numbered space, call the phone number on the sign and the order is delivered to their vehicle.

As the Department of Defense’s largest retailer, the Exchange is mission essential, having served warfighters for nearly 125 years. “The Exchange is leaning forward to protect its customers and associates in these uncertain times,” said Fort Wainwright Exchange general manager Gloria Sylvia “Curbside service lets Soldiers get their essentials while maintaining physical distance. It’s a win-win.”



## Fort Wainwright Exchange shoppers get real-time update on store hours during COVID-19 pandemic

**Carina DeCino**  
Army and Air Force Exchange  
Service Public Affairs

Soldiers and their Families can stay up-to-date on Army and Air Force Exchange Service operating hours during the COVID-19 pandemic through the Exchange’s

online community Hub. Shoppers can find current hours for the Fort Wainwright Exchange and other locations worldwide by going to the Hub’s COVID-19 page at <https://publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/covid19>, scrolling down to the “Information for Your Location”

header on the right side of the screen and clicking “Store Hours by Location”. The Fort Wainwright Exchange remains open during the pandemic, but hours may be adjusted to allow for cleaning and restocking. “The operating hours on our website are being updated in near-real time,” said Fort Wainwright Exchange general manager Gloria Sylvia. “The Exchange is mission essential, so it is critical that we provide warfighters and their families with quick, easy access to up-to-date information during this time.”

The Exchange is mounting a worldwide response to protect warfighters and their Families amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information on what Exchanges are doing to protect the force, visit <https://publicaffairs-sme.com/Community/covid19>.



# The astronaut wife: choosing hope over fear

**Courtesy story**  
Commentary by Stacey Morgan, wife of astronaut U.S. Army Col. Andrew Morgan.

Imagine for a moment you are holding the hands of your children, standing in a wide open field. Now imagine that a 30-second countdown clock begins, and at the end of that countdown, that day will become either one of the highlights of your life, or the worst day of your life, and you're not 100 percent sure which way it's going to go.

This is just a taste of what it's like to be a military astronaut spouse, as you watch your best friend, the father or mother of your children, blast into outer space. It's an intensely stressful and emotionally overwhelming experience. So overwhelming in fact, that if you didn't have your children there to be brave for, I think most would be tempted to sink to the ground and let the moment overtake them.

Like so many experiences that come with being the spouse of a military astronaut, the emotions attached to a rocket launch are a complicated mix. Pride, excitement, elation, nervousness, worry, and palpable fear all swirl together into an emotional cocktail that makes it impossible to answer the dreaded question "How are you feeling?" Each rocket launch is an amazing accomplishment for the international space program, while at the same time representing the best, and worst, of the astronaut family life. That epic moment, captured on film and treasured forever by every astronaut family, is just the beginning of what will be a long, often taxing, and always relationally complex period of family separation.

Living with a spouse in space is often compared to a military deployment, and while there are many similarities, the differences are stark. Having experienced both, I can testify to the analogous pressures of single parenting, the struggle to have quality



NASA astronaut U.S. Army Col. Andrew Morgan shows photos of his wife and children attached to his space suit during an extravehicular activity spacewalk to repair the International Space Station's Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, Jan. 25, 2020. Morgan conducted the repairs with European Space Agency astronaut Luca Parmitano. This EVA marked the ninth for Expedition 61 and Morgan's seventh, setting an all-time record for U.S. astronauts for a single spaceflight. Morgan is the commander of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command's Army astronaut detachment at Johnson Space Center, Texas. (Photo courtesy NASA)

conversation and maintain meaningful connection with the absent spouse, and at the end of the mission, the awkward reunion of two people who have lived connected, but vastly different, independent lives for an extended period of time.

Where the most dramatic difference between space and combat deployment emerges is in the public nature of the astronaut persona and the exciting and mysterious nature of the space environment. Unlike in combat where the most dangerous missions are shrouded in secrecy and the world may never hear the details, the riskiest moments for an astronaut are the very ones that are live-streamed on the internet and cable television for the world to watch, with a narrator providing color commentary. Every launch, landing and spacewalk is executed so well and negative outcomes are so rare, we often forget how inherently dangerous this work is.

Undercutting the ease of watching my husband Drew (U.S. Army Col. Andrew Morgan) float in

space from the comfort of my own living room, is the notion that if something goes wrong, the world will be watching with me. Or, if I'm not watching it live, thousands of strangers across the globe may know about Drew's minor trouble or major catastrophe before I do. The idea that we as a family are sharing these phenomenal yet perilous moments with the world, literally at the same time as we experience them for ourselves, can be unsettling.

For while these brave men and women do the extraordinary in the vacuum of space, the mundane routine of life continues for the family back on earth. While we may talk on the phone with our spouse as they orbit the earth at an unfathomable 17,500 miles an hour, once we hang up, there's still math homework to help with and trash to be taken out. Astronauts may experience a sun rise and sun set every 90 minutes as the ISS circles the globe, but back on earth someone still has to make dinner, pay bills, return emails, and guide our children through the jungle

that is junior high school.

It's the exhausting parenting and head of household dance that any military spouse with an absent service member would recognize, only there's no coming home early from this deployment. On top of it all, the experience is so unique that it can be hard for other people to understand, which can make the loneliness for the families left behind feel all the more acute.

And yet, even with all the mixed emotions, family sacrifice, mental pressure, and often steep personal cost, each and every military astronaut family supports the mission. So much so, that many astronaut families will do it all again at least one more time in their future. What kept us, and keeps us serving is the sense of being a part of something bigger than ourselves, and the true belief in the benefit to all mankind of pushing further into our physical universe and widening the scope of our knowledge of the cosmos. But more than that, undergirding the benefits of the innovative science and

emerging technology that human spaceflight enables, is the deep sense of hope embedded in the spiritual heart of space exploration.

Space exploration forces humankind to continue to look forward into the future, regardless of what mess we find the world in today, or the shadows that threaten to drag our countries into the past. With the Artemis program, we will return to the moon and then take the giant leap on towards Mars, in spacecraft engineered by our generation, but they are not endeavors for our betterment. These ambitious enterprises, once fully realized, will serve the generations long after ours. It will be our children's children who look back and marvel at the scope of our imaginations, what we were able to build given our relatively limited technology, and in the case of military astronauts and their families, what we were willing to sacrifice on their behalf.

So next time your child wants to read a book about our brave astronauts or watch a video about our future colonies on Mars, sit and join them. But go one small step further - take a moment to think about the families who do their part in their own way back at home to help make those fantastic space exploration fantasies a reality. Then join us, as together we gaze upwards towards the stars, putting aside for a moment the daily grind of our present day life, and imagine the world our great-great grandchildren will live in both on, and off, this planet.

Editor's Note: Stacey's commentary is an adaptation of a guest blog originally appearing in the Houston Moms Blog, March 29, 2020. Col. Andrew Morgan, commander of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command's Army astronaut detachment, at the time of publication is serving aboard the International Space Station and is expected to return to earth April 17, after nine months in space.

# Future Army vehicles could see an improvement in structural materials

**U.S. Army CCDC Army Research Laboratory Public Affairs**

Materials used for a Soldier's personal protection gear may be tough enough for vehicles too, according to a new Army study.

Findings, released April 10 in the journal *Polymer*, show that polymers filled with carbon nanotubes could potentially improve how unmanned vehicles dissipate energy.

A team led by the U.S. Army's Combat Capabilities Development Command's Army Research Laboratory is conducting theoretical research through computer modeling.

Researchers said polyurethanes are versatile materials used in a broad variety of applications, including coatings, foams and solid elastomers. As film adhesives, for example, they are commonly used as bonding agents between layers of glass and as polymer back layers in the transparent glass or plastic composites such as vision blocks on side windows used in the tactical vehicles. In particular, high-performance segmented PUU polymers exhibit versatile physical and mechanical



Innovative computer modeling and theoretical research may result in new structural materials for unmanned vehicles systems, such as the RQ-7B Shadow. Army researchers say new materials are less susceptible to corrosion, are lightweight and have higher electrical conductivity. (Photo by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht)

properties.

In this research, the team used computer modeling to look into the nature of the materials.

Slizberg said hierarchical composites are a promising area of

research for the Army vehicles as they are less susceptible to corrosion, leading to early component death.

Slizberg said they need to have deeper understanding of the nature of molecular lev-

el interactions in these materials in order to enhance the maximum stress levels it can withstand and tailor energy dissipation mechanisms.

Chemical modification of nanofillers is nontrivial and typically

diminish their properties by changing their structure and chemistry. For example, the Young modulus could be lower, she explained.

This team's results strongly indicate the effectiveness of incorpo-

ration of aligned carbon nanotubes for microstructure optimization of hierarchical PUU polymers in the matrix as well as at the interface without any filler surface modification, Slizberg said.



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