

MEDICAL NEWS

Volume 30, Number 10

www.militarymedical.com

October 2023

Mission of compassion

Surgeons restore sight and expand surgical expertise

By Staff Sgt. Kelsey Martinez
59th Medical Wing Public Affairs

Every endeavor extends beyond mere moments, offering opportunities to forge connections, sharpen skills, and enhance operational readiness. In July 2023, a team of dedicated surgeons embarked on a mission to address a diverse spectrum of chronic eye conditions, instilling resilience and adaptability for unpredictable scenarios.

At the heart of this mission was U.S. Army Lt. Col. Erin Seefeldt, a seasoned ophthalmologist assigned to the 1888th Head and Neck Surgical Detachment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. The three week long, intensive mission unfolded at Regional Hospital Dr. Luis “Chicho” Fabrega, Santiago de Veraguas, Panama. It was here that Seefeldt served as one of four subject matter experts and was responsible for mentoring junior surgeons in manual small incision cataract surgery (MSICS) and pterygium excisions.

“These missions exposes junior attendings and residents to diverse medical cases, cultural contexts, and challenging scenarios,” she explained. “Working in resource-limited settings sharpens their clinical skills while nurturing problem-solving, adaptability, and flexibility, which are crucial as the equipment, methods, and setting often differ from the usual, requiring surgeons to adapt.”

In the ever-evolving field of medicine, missions like these go beyond conventional patient care, embodying skill refinement and technique adaptation, reinforcing the idea that surgical practice is an ongoing journey of mastery.

“Surgical expertise is a skill continually honed, regardless of experience. We view it as a practice, a technique always being refined,” she said. “For the benefit of all, having a larger pool of proficient individuals performing procedures is highly advantageous.”

The team’s primary focus remained on restoring sight, tackling the challenges of cataracts, which occur when the eye’s lens clouds, causing vision impairment. Treatment involves removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with a clear one, often using

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Photo by Marcelo Calero

Rosealynn Seeley, newborn daughter to Chief Mass Communications Specialist Alexandra Seeley, Trainer, Afloat Training Group, San Diego, was born in at Naval Medical Center San Diego’s patient drop-off area as retirement ceremony kicked-off. The mission of NMCS D is to prepare service members to deploy in support of operational forces, deliver high quality health care services and shape the future of military medicine through education, training and research. NMCS D employs more than 6,000 active-duty military personnel, civilians and contractors in southern California to provide patients with world-class care anytime, anywhere.

Mom delivers baby in car as retirement ceremony begins at Naval medical center

By Petty Officer 3rd Class Raphael McCorey
Naval Medical Center San Diego

Rosealynn Seeley, newborn daughter to Chief Mass Communications Specialist Alexandra Seeley, Trainer, Afloat Training Group, San Diego, was born in the hospital’s patient drop-off area and was soon assisted by hospital staff.

“Rosealynn Ariel Seeley made her grand entrance on Aug. 31, and we are so in love,” said Seeley. “The birthing story was beyond what I could imagine.”

Upon early morning evaluation from Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS D) staff, Seeley was sent home with expectations to return once in active labor.

“The patient was evaluated at NMCS D in the early stages of contractions and was sent home with instructions to return to the hospital once she was in active labor for admission,” said Capt. Laurie Chavez,

NMCS D Nursing Services Director. “That afternoon, her labor became more intense, and they returned to the hospital.”

It became a race against time as expecting mother and close family and friends rushed back to the hospital to deliver the newborn.

“No later than I arrived at my home I hit active labor so my husband, Lt. j.g. Joseph Seeley, drove my friend and I as fast as he could back to the hospital,” said Seeley. “We did not get back in time, so Heather did her best to comfort me as I delivered my own baby in the passenger’s side of the car in the patient drop-off area of the hospital.”

Once in the parking lot Chavez rushed to Seeley’s aid providing quick and effective patient care, making

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Compassion

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phacoemulsification, a method involving ultrasound to break the lens for removal through a small corneal incision.

“While I’ve performed similar procedures in the U.S., working here presents greater challenges due to various factors,” said U.S. Army Maj. Matthew Cardinale, an ophthalmologist at the 53rd Head and Neck Team of the 147th Field Hospital, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. “The saying goes, a skilled surgeon with basic tools can outperform a less competent surgeon with the most advanced tools.”

Although phacoemulsification, small-incision cataract surgery is more commonly used to remove cataracts, in resource-limited areas, MSICS holds advantages – shorter surgery duration, reduced technology reliance, and lower costs.

“I’ve learned so much from my surgical experiences, along with others’ surgical experiences and complications during this trip that have only enhanced our skills and makes us all better surgeons,” Cardinale

reflected. “This opportunity restored sight, improved quality of life, and enhanced functionality for those suffering from blindness, and the impact we leave behind is profound.”

In these cross-cultural interactions, the languages of medicine and compassion converged, bridging the gap between medical expertise and human connection.

“The shared achievements, camaraderie, and optimism have been truly inspiring,” Cardinale emphasized. “Witnessing what a diverse group can achieve through dedication and a shared mission is astounding.”

The shift of Panamax Alpha from a U.S. Army mission to a TriService effort involving the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Air Force demonstrates unity of purpose and aligns with the Defense Health Agency’s mission to support the medical readiness of the armed forces.

“I’ve observed the evolution of these missions for over a decade, and as professionals, we recognize that we’re all performing the same surgeries and providing superior patient care for the same cause,” Seefeldt explained. “I believe the vision is that we should collaborate just as effectively stateside as we do here. Witnessing a strong TriService presence on this mission has been truly gratifying.”

This collective effort, driven by the pursuit of excellence, leaves more than restored sight; it etches a narrative of solidarity transcending borders, fostering hope for a brighter future.

U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kelsey Martinez



A group of TriService ophthalmologists, and medical technicians pose for a group photo at Regional Hospital Dr. Luis “Chicho” Fabrega in Santiago de Veraguas, Panama, July 18. The Ophthalmology Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE)- Panamax Alpha 2023, an annual TriService mission led by U.S. Southern Command, aimed to enhance the skills and operational readiness of team members by immersing them in a range of prevalent chronic eye conditions in the region.

“Participating in these missions is among the highlights of my military career, so it’s bittersweet knowing it’s my last mission,” reflected Lt. Col. Seefeldt. Her words resonated with a sense of fulfillment and purpose, knowing that her expertise was

fostering a lasting impact. “This team comprises exceptional surgeons, future educators, and subject matter experts. I’m confident in their abilities to handle future missions with the same compassion, care, and expertise demonstrated here.”

Military Medical News

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U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kelsey Martinez

U.S. Army Maj. (Dr.) Gregory Bryant Giles, Chief of Ophthalmology and Warfighter Refractive Eye Surgery Program at Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, speaks with a patient and her family member about the importance of following the instructions for patient care after receiving surgery at Regional Hospital Dr. Luis “Chicho” Fabrega. Each patient was informed of the required six-week rest period after receiving manual small incision cataract surgery to provide an adequate amount of time for the eye to heal.

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2023 MRC West Best Medic Competition

By Spc. Dominique Mendoza
Medical Readiness Command, West

FORT CARSON, Colo. – A vibrant red smoke clouded the air, swirling in a dance that shielded the surrounding area from view. The air felt thick and heavy, tinged with the acrid scent of the colored particles. Soldiers begin to rush into view from within the crimson smoke racing to reach the top of the mountain. The smell of sweat soon overwhelms the field as the competitors attempt to catch their breath. All around the sound of people cheering and clapping begin, alluding to the Soldiers' finish, the competitors still unaware that they have more grueling events to tackle before walking across the finish line.

The Medical Readiness Command, West Best Medic Competition is 72 hours of many rigorous events that blur day and night, in a true test of resilience and determination. 11 teams and only one will be announced victorious, moving on to compete in the 2024 Army Best Medic Competition.

The winners of this year's MRC West BMC are Team Four, Staff Sgt. Brooks Carroll and Staff Sgt. Eric Smith, both representing Evans Army Community Hospital, Fort Carson, Colorado.

With little sleep and relentless challenges, the competitors of the BMC completed demanding events, each one designed to test their mettle and teamwork. Day zero began with an early morning completing the Army Combat Fitness Test, zeroing weapons at the range and combat water survival; which was just the beginning.

"During this competition I was reminded that no matter what you've learned in the military about your craft, it's always important to keep it fresh," said Smith. "I would encourage anyone in army medicine to get after it and keep it in the forefront of their minds."

Day one started with a seven mile Ruck March, leading into knots and the Mabry mile, Tactical Combat Casualty Care and Wet Gap Crossing, finishing with prolonged field care.

"The Tactical Combat Casualty Care lane was the toughest," said Carroll. "We were quite taxed, we had a 90 kilogram patient, our rucksacks and full kit. It came to a point where mental fortitude came into play and we had to push through our sheer exhaustion and complete the lane."

Day two included a continuation of prolonged field care, stress shoots and medical evacuations. Finally, day three started early with the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high yield Explosives (CBRNE) event, directly into a seven mile Ruck March up agony hill and finishing with the mystery event, puzzles and tomahawk throwing.

"During this competition I realized how important it is to focus on what's in



U.S. Army photos by Spc. Dominique Mendoza

Staff Sgt. Brooks Carroll and Staff Sgt. Eric Smith, competitors representing Team Four, of the Medical Readiness Command, West Best Medic competition, are announced as winners of the 72 hour BMC on Sept. 29, in Fort Carson, Colorado. This event is a two-soldier team competition that physically and intellectually challenges our best medics in a demanding and realistic simulated operational environment.

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• **Baby delivery** (Continued from front page)

ensure the mother and newborn were healthy.

"I rushed to help the couple and assess the baby's condition," said Chavez. "The friend assisted by grabbing a dry blanket which I used to dry and stimulate the baby. The baby girl was crying and in great condition, as well as the mother who had just given birth in the car. A friend and partner were at mom's side helping with the newborn. They both helped tend to the mother and baby that were still connected by the umbilical cord."

Soon after Capt. Elizabeth Adriano, NMCSA's commander, arrived on the scene followed by the NICU staff, Labor and Delivery staff, and numerous critical care and emergency personnel to provide support and comfort.

"To greet me, was the Commanding Officer of NMCSA, a female obstetrician, who rushed to the door to inspect the newborn, along with many high-ranking Naval officers and other personnel of whom were attending a retirement ceremony a few meters from where I gave birth," said Seeley. "It felt nice to know that the baby was okay and someone was there to be sure of that. She acted quickly to assist with getting us taken care of, I'm so glad she was there to help."

NMCSA staff swiftly took control moving the new mother and child inside as applause and cheers erupted from NMCSA Sailors and Staff who happened to be attending the retirement ceremony.

"The team quickly took over and cut the baby's cord, assessed the mother and baby, and transferred the family into the hospital to continue caring for mom and baby," said Chavez. "The mother and baby were discharged home several days later."

While a surprise turn of events for Rosealynn's first day, the Seeleys and all of NMCSA welcome her with love and excitement.

"It's not every day you get a round of applause after giving birth," Seeley remarks. "This was beyond what I could have imagined, and I'm still in shock, but Rosealynn and I are healthy and happy. Welcome to Earth, Rosealynn."

The mission of NMCSA is to prepare service members to deploy in support of operational forces, deliver high quality health care services and shape the future of military medicine through education, training and research. NMCSA employs more than 6,000 active-duty military personnel, civilians and contractors in southern California to provide patients with world-class care anytime, anywhere.



Photos by Marcelo Calero

Top: Rosealynn Seeley, newborn daughter to Chief Mass Communications Specialist Alexandra Seeley, Trainer, Afloat Training Group, San Diego, was born at Naval Medical Center San Diego's patient drop-off area and was soon assisted by hospital staff. "Rosealynn Ariel Seeley made her grand entrance on Aug 31, and we are so in love," said Alexandra Seeley, Chief, Mass Communications specialist. "The birthing story was beyond what I could imagine." Above: Seeley poses in her first environmental photo with her proud parents.

USU graduate astronaut Frank Rubio returns to earth after historic space mission

By Sharon Holland
Uniformed Services University

In an incredible moment for space exploration and human endurance, U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel (Dr.) Frank Rubio has returned to Earth after spending 371 days in space – an unprecedented record for an American. Rubio, a NASA astronaut and Uniformed Services University (USU) class of 2010 alumnus, touched down near Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan at 7:17 a.m. EST, Wednesday, September 27th, marking a historic achievement for American space travel.

Rubio's mission aboard the International Space Station made him the American astronaut with the longest continuous stay in space. His mission, Expedition 67, was the third-longest spaceflight in history.

"Frank's record-breaking time in space is not just a milestone; it's a major contribution to our understanding of long-duration space missions," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson. "Our astronauts make extraordinary sacrifices away from their homes and loved ones to further discovery. NASA is immensely grateful for Frank's dedicated service to our nation and the invaluable scientific contributions he made on the International Space Station. He embodies the true pioneer spirit that will pave the way for future exploration to the Moon, Mars, and beyond."

Rubio launched into space on USU's 50th Anniversary – Sept. 21, 2022. He was slated to return to Earth in early Spring following a six-month stint on the Space Station. However, on Dec. 14, 2022, ground teams discovered a significant coolant leak in the Soyuz MS-22 spacecraft docked to one of the modules on the Space Station. Rubio and cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin traveled into space on board the Soyuz MS-22. Engineers deemed the Soyuz MS-22 not to be viable for a normal crew return, although they believed it could be used in the event of an emergency aboard the Space Station.

Instead, the spacecraft was replaced by an unmanned Soyuz MS-23 spacecraft sent up in February, 2023.

The extra time on the Space Station provided Rubio with an opportunity to conduct a wide range of experiments, including one conducted in collaboration with USU's Center for Biotechnology and Redwire, Corp., during which Rubio and his colleagues successfully printed a human knee meniscus using a 3D biofabrication facility and live human cells.

Another research highlight for Rubio was his involvement in studying the effects of space travel on the cardiovascular system, which has implications for both future space exploration and the treatment of cardiovascular diseases on Earth. His work in this area has the potential to benefit both astronauts and the general population.

In November 2022, Rubio participated in a live Q&A session from the Space Station with USU students, staff and faculty, along with fellow astronaut Marine Corps Col. Nicole Mann. One question Rubio answered addressed the physical challenges astronauts face in space.

"The reality is that this is the most challenging part of space exploration because of the effects that this environment has on our bodies," Rubio added.

NASA takes extensive measures to mitigate these effects, including exercise routines, dietary plans, and monitoring astronauts' health closely throughout their missions. After returning to Earth, astronauts undergo a period of readjustment and rehabilitation to help their bodies recover from the physiological changes experienced in space. It's possible that it could take several months before Rubio is able to bear weight, stand or walk.

Rubio's journey in space has left an indelible mark on the history of space exploration, and his legacy will continue to inspire generations to come.

"Of course it's amazing to be in space," Rubio said, "but more than anything, you feel very proud to do things that will help all humanity."



NASA photo
Army Maj. (Dr.) Frank Rubio, a 2010 graduate of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, was selected as one of 10 candidates for the NASA Astronaut Class of 2017.

Hampton Roads MSC builds future leaders at symposium

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Travis Decker
Naval Medical Forces Atlantic

The Medical Service Corps (MSC) Association of Hampton Roads hosted a symposium that focused on the state of the corps, leadership, career management, manpower, expeditionary medicine, and a professional development panel at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth (NMCP), Sept. 15.

"I'm excited [to host the symposium] because you all represent the largest and most diverse corps," said Capt. Brian Feldman, the commanding officer of Navy Medicine Readiness

and Training (NMRTC) Command. "I consider you the connective tissue of Navy Medicine and you enable comprehensive cutting-edge advancements in healthcare worldwide."

This year's theme is "Building Future Leaders," and approximately 100 medical professionals and MSC officers in the local area and from North Carolina, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Missouri, attended the symposium.

Key speaker Rear Adm. Matthew Case, the MSC director and commander, Naval Medical Forces Atlantic

(NMFL) stressed the importance of the community's professional development and medical readiness in order to support our nation's warfighter.

"I am laser-focused on expanding our capabilities and taking care of a full range of combat casualties," explained Case. "And to prepare, we need to provide the right environment for our people to be successful."

Lt. Cmdr. Diana Tran-Yu, who was in the audience and is also the president of NMRTC Bethesda's MSC Professional Association, shared her key takeaway from this year's symposium.

"Each one of us can do our part to prepare for the future in crisis and combat operations," concluded Tran-Yu. "I believe that we are prepared to provide the survivability of the force, and we must continue to amplify and reinforce great talents."

The MSC community actively supports Navy Medicine's readiness and health with more than 30 diverse subspecialties from entomology, environmental health and aerospace and

• **Best Medic** (Continued from page 3)

front of you, and I think all Soldiers can learn from that,” said Carroll. “There can be a lot of distractions, but if you can just focus on the moment, you can accomplish what’s in front of you and keep moving forward. Take one thing at a time.”

From navigating treacherous terrain to solving intricate puzzles under the

cover of darkness and in the midst of scorching heat, the competitors were pushed to their limits and beyond.

“We’re both very happy with our results,” said Carroll. “I think the effort that we put in came to fruition in the competition and now we’re able to focus on continuing to better ourselves and prepare for the Army BMC.”

“It wasn’t about winning, it was about making ourselves better,” said Smith. “I can tell you standing on the other side of the competition, I feel more trained and ready for whatever might come in our careers. We’re going to take the steam and energy we created and just keep pushing forward into the Army BMC.”

The MRC West BMC is crucible

for the Soldiers who bear the solemn responsibility of providing medical care on the battlefield. The grueling three-day event stands for a test of strength, knowledge and endurance. Beyond being a showcase of individual prowess, this annual competition serves as a powerful testament to the paramount role of medics within the army’s ranks.

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• **Symposium** (Continued from page 5)

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NMFL, headquartered in Portsmouth, Virginia, delivers operationally focused medical expertise and capabilities to meet Fleet, Marine and Joint Force requirements by providing equipment, sustainment and maintenance of medical forces during combat operations and public health crises. NMFL provides oversight for 21 NMRTCs, logis-

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Medic inspired by grandfathers' WWII service

By Spc. Aliyah Vivier

109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, Pa. — Some people join the Army for the benefits, some for the experience. For U.S. Army Cpl. John Allen, assigned to the 444th Medical Company Ground Ambulance, 424th Medical Battalion, 338th Medical Brigade, 3rd Division Deployment Support, U.S. Army Reserve, based in West Virginia, he wanted to follow in his grandfathers' footsteps.

"It's just something I was always interested in doing. Prior to that, my grandfather and great grandfather both served in World War Two. My great grandfather was actually a survivor of the USS Bunker Hill. So when it was bombed, he was luckily on deck and was able to jump off."

Allen has served with the Army Reserve as a combat medic for 12 years and is currently his unit's Army Reserve Ambassador. He has also worked his civilian job as a dialysis technician for 7 years. He spends his time volunteering in this community with the ambulance and fire department.

Allen participated in a Tactical Combat Casualty Care refresher course at the Medical Simulation

Training Center (MSTC) here, Sept. 16, 2023. He believes the instructors at the MSTC were well-prepared and used the most up-to-date information during the course of their training. He also found the hand-on component of the training to be very valuable.

"Another thing I like about this training versus other training is being able to actually stick each other with needles," said Allen. "We wouldn't be able to do what these other trainings do because they don't have the resources or the providers available. We couldn't practice our IV skills, which for obvious reasons, is a big flaw when it comes to training as a medic. So it's definitely much more hands-on training."

Allen also thought the training was a worthwhile way to practice his medical skills, seeing as they are perishable if underutilized for extended periods of time. It is also important to keep up with skills since the way that each person experiences medical conditions is different.

"Nothing is technically normal," said Allen. "If you don't practice them, you will lose them and won't get better. Just keep practicing."



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Aliyah Vivier
U.S. Soldiers, assigned to 444th Medical Company Ground Ambulance, 424th medical battalion, 338th medical brigade, 3rd division deployment support, U.S. Army Reserve based in West Virginia, conduct a Tactical Combat Casualty Care refresher course in Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, Sept. 16. The training includes mannequin simulation that performs different human functions such as change in pulses, tongue swelling, pupil movement, bleeding, yelling and screaming which shows a more realistic trauma situation.

VETERANS: be aware of Camp Lejeune misinformation

My name is Harry Blalock – a USMC Vietnam veteran and an attorney. I also trained at Camp Lejeune before my tour in Vietnam. I drank and bathed in the toxic water.

It's important for all USMC Camp Lejeune veterans and their extended families to understand key facts about the Camp Lejeune Justice Act.

USMC veterans and their loved ones who lived and worked at Camp Lejeune between 1953 and 1987 and have qualifying injuries have until August 2024 to file a claim with the Department of the Navy.

The Navy has six months to settle or reject your properly filed claim. If the Navy rejects your claim, the Act authorizes you to file a lawsuit in the Eastern District of North Carolina.

The Navy has now also announced an "Elective Option" to expedite resolution and payment of certain claims. If the Department of the Navy makes a specific written offer, a USMC veteran or their family with a qualifying injury may accept the payment or continue with litigation.

The Elective Option provides for payments according to "Tiers" related to the number of days of exposure and the proven qualifying injury. Currently, there are nine qualifying injuries the Navy will consider for expedited payouts between \$100,000 and \$550,000.

The Navy will pay these settlements *in addition to any healthcare benefits* provided by the VA.

It is important for USMC and Camp Lejeune veterans, their family members, widows, and widowers with qualifying injuries to file their claim with the Department of Navy as soon as possible.

If your claim meets the criteria of the authorizing statute, my team of military veteran attorneys will assist you with your claim.

Our website, www.blalocklegal.com, sets out the qualifying information and includes the informational forms we need to assist you with establishing a claim.

We will vigorously litigate claims for all USMC veterans and family members injured by the toxic water at Camp Lejeune.

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The information contained herein is not intended to be legal advice.

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Major General Van Ryzin awarded a purple heart on injured U.S. Marine Harry Blalock for his valor after being wounded in action during the Vietnam War.

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Insurance offerings:

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The Health Services Division is responsible for basic primary care for incarcerated adults. Emphasis is placed on early identification of health concerns, acute and chronic health problems, and preventive care. Providers offer medically necessary and quality care in accordance with the Department's Offender Health Plan.

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