

## From Ellipticals To Tactical And the Great Outdoors



Whitehouse

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service's (AAFES) overall year-to-date fiscal 2017 Sporting Goods sales were down a few percentage points from the prior year as the fiscal year's fourth quarter was getting underway. However, Tim Whitehouse, the Exchange buyer who handles this area, noted the diversity of the assortment — encompassing everything from tactical items and camping equipment to baseball gloves, gun safes, exercise machines and bicycles — and added that some subcategories were showing strong growth heading into the holiday season.

### HOT AREAS

"We continue to see strong growth in the hydration/coolers, lighting, knives and multi-tool categories," Whitehouse noted, with the overall camping category, gun safes and fitness being Sporting Goods categories that have shown positive growth.

"Sales in camping/hydration are up 17.5 percent over the prior year, as customers have responded to the key brands like Hydro Flask and Yeti," Whitehouse said.

Some categories benefited from military-specific tie-ins, for example, the Jog-A-Lite High Visibility Jogging Belt was a top seller, partly by virtue of military regulations that require personnel using installation roadways to wear reflective gear when marching, when engaged in physical fitness, or when riding various forms of transportation

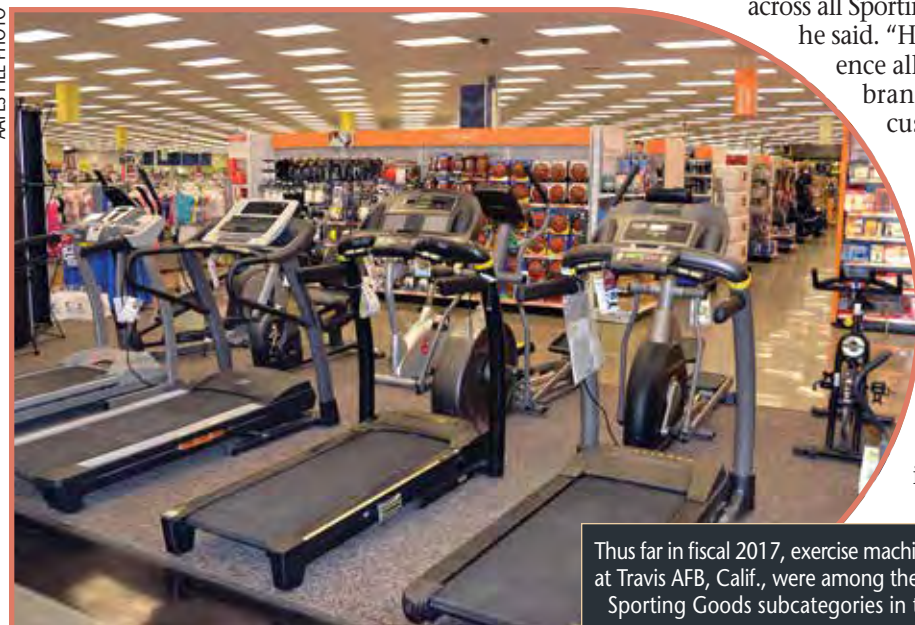
such as bicycles, and in hours of limited visibility.

Bikes accounted for several of the overarching category's top sellers. "Also, our most popular type of bikes are mountain bikes," he noted. "They are versatile enough to go on a bike ride around the neighborhood or hit the off-road trails. Bike companies are continually working to make bikes lighter and faster, and, of course, look great."

To boost the profile of bicycles in the assortment, AAFES has added Scott Bikes to a limited number of stores. "This has allowed us to introduce a premium bike brand to our CONUS locations," he said.

New brands in these categories and other Sporting Goods areas "are being evaluated on a continuous basis," Whitehouse said.

And with the Veterans online shopping benefit (VOSB) having its official debut this month, "We are continuing to increase our online selection across all Sporting Goods categories," he said. "Having an online presence allows us to offer more brands and styles to our customers."



AAFES FILE PHOTO

Thus far in fiscal 2017, exercise machines, such as those shown at Travis AFB, Calif., were among the top-selling non-apparel Sporting Goods subcategories in the AAFES assortment.

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— Tim Whitehouse, AAFES Buyer, Sporting Goods

in activity versus \$103 million at the same time in fiscal 2016.

Other than growth categories he had previously mentioned, Whitehouse said, "All the other departments in Sporting Goods are down in the low single digits to the low double digits."

Highlighting the wide-ranging nature of the assortment, topping AAFES's overall Sporting Goods category area thus far in fiscal 2017 was an air mattress, followed by two insulated coolers and two cardio machines.

### AAFES YTD FY17

#### TOP-SELLING SPORTING GOOD ITEMS\*

- 1) Intex Deluxe Air Mattress with Built-In Pillow
- 2) Yeti Tundra 45 Cooler (tan)
- 3) Yeti Tundra 65 Cooler (tan)
- 4) NordicTrack Commercial 1750 Treadmill
- 5) NordicTrack T67C Treadmill
- 6) Bowflex SelectTech 552 Dumbbells
- 7) Schwinn Elliptical 470 Cardio Machine
- 8) Jog-A-Lite High Visibility Jogging Belt
- 9) Raider Mountain Bike (29 in.)
- 10) Equator Dual Mountain Bike
- 11) Equator Aluminum Bike
- 12) Northwoods Adult Tricycle (24 in.)
- 13) Gauntlet Mountain Bike
- 14) Gerber Suspension Multi-Plier Knives

\* AAFES's best-selling non-apparel Sporting Goods items through Oct. 19, 2017.  
Source: AAFES

### CATEGORY SALES

Whitehouse told *E and C News* that Sporting Goods sales in AAFES stores through Oct. 19, 2017, were down slightly more than 3 percent to the prior year, registering \$99.5 million

Similar to other retail departments, Whitehouse said, "Promotional advertising helps drive sales in the Sporting Goods department," and this was especially true during the hunting/camping seasons and during the fall sports timeframe.

"The visibility of promotions in Sporting Goods helps keep the category relevant and provides a consistent value message to our customers," Whitehouse noted.

—E and C NEWS