

In His New Role at DoD, Art Myers Leads By Example

Government Recreation & Fitness magazine caught up with Art Myers, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense and principal director, Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP), to speak with him about his new role at the Department of Defense (DoD).

As the former Air Force Services Director, Myers helped to put the “fit” back in Fit to Fight, spearheading a great boon in fitness center construction projects during his tenure. As a lifelong gym rat — he still hits the fitness center daily for 5 a.m. workouts — Myers continues to lead by example. In his new dual position in the Department of Defense he brings the same dedication to Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) and quality of life programs and facilities that he exhibited in the Air Force.

As the principal director for Military and Community

Family Policy, Myers is responsible for many of the same programs he handled in the Air Force, including MWR, family policy programs, casualty, mortuary, exchanges, Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), Armed Forces Retirement Home, DoD Education Activity, Voluntary Education and the new Military OneSource Center.

Myers points out that his previous responsibilities as Air Force Services director is helping him in his new positions in DoD.

“Having worked in the Air Force for all those years at the base level, MAJCOM and Air Staff, and working with all the services, has given me a jump-start on this job because I’m



(from left to right): Pia Rose, MC&FP intern; Lt. Col Greg Skibicki, Joint Staff J8, Requirements Coordination Division Branch Chief, Col. Eddie Adelman, Military assistant, Art Myers, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense and Principal Director for Military Community and Family Policy; and Dr. Rebecca Posante, director, Military Community and Family Policy Office of Communications, discuss support to service-members and families in the joint environment.



Instructor Renee Champagne at Ramstein AB, Germany, leads a core conditioning class for moms and their babies. Family programming will be a big focus for DoD in the coming years.

PHOTO BY EVAN BAUMHOFFER



basically still an operator from the field,” says Myers. “I know all my counterparts in the services; I know the programs; so basically all that I have done is move up a notch. Instead of overseeing programs for the Air Force, I am now overseeing programs for all services. With my working experience with all within DoD, we’re finding a great communication channel has opened up to further improve the program for all of our men and women in uniform and their families.”

Myers also brings his vast experience as a leader in MWR and quality-of-life programs.

“I think one of the things that needs to be done — as we become mid-level non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and mid-grade officers — we need to set the example,” he says. “Many people come into the military fit and then over time they lose that ... or they come in unfit and become fit. Let’s ensure all of us set the standard to be ‘Fit to fight and win!’”

Myers says he will never forget basic training when he enlisted in 1961.

“We had one of those monkey-bar setups over a lake, and I fell in that lake every time,” he recalls. “Well, in 1994 I was invited to go down there and go through the obstacle course again. When I got there they asked if I wanted to go through a modified one or the full one, and I said, ‘I want to go through the full one.’ I went over one hand at a time, hanging over that lake, and went over with no problem. And the reason is — I’m responsible for fitness; I have to set the example myself and be fit. If I’m going to go to senior leadership and ask for support to ensure our people are fit, I can’t go there and not be fit myself. Everyone in leadership roles needs to think this way — that we all should be role models — take action to get it done!”

Supporting Families

Some of the major issues that DoD is facing are in family programs.

“We have many Guard and Reserve members who deploy,” notes Myers. “When they deploy, their families are out in the community — they are community based and not installation based — so we have a lot of programs to support them in their area. Probably before 9/11, I don’t know if all the services’

departments did the job needed to support the Guard and Reserves. So 9/11 was a wake-up call, and today we have numerous programs out there to support them.”

One important family area that DoD is looking at is child-care.

“Under the stimulus bill, DoD received \$240 million for childcare spaces,” Myers points out. “Right now our shortfall is 37,000 spaces, so that will give us an additional 6,000 spaces. When I was in the military, one spouse was always home; but today, both spouses work, so when a person deploys, child care is especially important.”

Although the FY 2009 budget includes \$2 billion in direct funding for MWR programs, of which \$959 million is for child and youth development programs, Myers thinks there is still a long way to go.

“I think there is a plan in action and we have a lot of support from DoD and Congress, so I believe we are on the right track,” he notes. “However, it is going to take time before we are successful because of the number of people who need this type of support. We’re headed in the right direction but I’m not even close to declaring victory on that front and we are about to open another front trying to get our fitness requirements done.”

Myers says that it is imperative that Congress continue to grant temporary authority for minor military construction projects, such as Child Development Centers (CDCs) and fitness centers, through 2012.

“Right now the law is \$7 million and you can do projects fairly rapidly,” Myers explains. “For \$15 million you can build a bigger facility that better meets our needs. It was just for child-care before and we’ve asked to add fitness centers to that also. And this would enable us to renovate a facility where we need it quickly. There is a demand for fitness and a backlog for child care: We have 37,000 spaces needed, which will go down to 31,000 — but we really can’t even pinpoint the need, because I’m sure there are some families who don’t even bother going on the list because they think they will never get there. But greater flexibility with the authority would be beneficial. Over the past three to four years with that funding authority, com-

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The new fitness center at USAG Wiesbaden, Germany, hosts youth wrestling tournaments and provides expanded opportunities for youth and families.

combined with a robust military construction implementation plan and facility projects funded by the individual services, we've probably generated around 30,000 spaces, so it is a good mechanism when the funding is available to get these projects done."

Fit to Fight

Although DoD is putting a lot of emphasis on families, Myers says it is important to remember the military member and physical readiness.

"You know I'm a big advocate of fitness funding, and I believe we need to jump-start that program," he stressed. "We have a lot of outdated fitness centers and equipment, so we need to focus in that area."

In the fitness pipeline, armed services are doing a review of their fitness programs.

Myers points out that the Air Force, which just finished its review, had a lot of success building new fitness centers under his tenure as Air Force Services director.

"We built fitness centers not so a person could pass a physical fitness test," he notes. "We did it to change their culture as far as fitness is concerned. We saw an increase of about 30 percent in fitness center usage in the Air Force. The other services have also put additional emphasis on fitness. What I hope to do down the road is to try to get funding to assist the services in their fitness endeavors. In the Air Force, one of the things that jump-started us: We received about \$183 million from OSD in the late 1990s for quality of life (QOL), and we put that into fitness centers. And that \$183 million turned into close to \$500 million, because we started to get MILCON funding, and help from Congress."

In the area of fitness, Myers hopes to build many new and renovate and improve many existing facilities over the next six years.

Currently there are 10 fitness center military construction projects in FY 2009 and another 71 fitness center projects programmed through FY 2014. In FY09, fitness center projects include MCB Camp Pendleton, Calif., for \$12.2 million, Fort Carson, Colo., for \$28 million, NS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for \$20.6 million, Dover AFB, Del., for \$19 million, Fort Stewart, Ga., for \$22 million, NS Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, for \$45 million, NAS Meridian, Miss., for \$6.3 million, NS Newport, R.I., for \$29.9 million, Shaw AFB, S.C., for \$7.1 million, and NS Kingsville, Texas, for \$11.6 million.

He points out that the key thing is to ensure that all military personnel are fit to fight and win. "That is a big effort and I think we will get a lot of support to accomplish it."

With so much emphasis on the family, Myers points out that these new fitness centers will be more "family friendly," and include dedicated space for family fitness or programs, which has shown great promise in facilities that have added them already.

For Guard and Reserves, or any military person who is displaced from a military location, DoD has a contract with the YMCA of America.

"If you are Guard or Reserve and you are going to deploy for six months, you and your family get a free YMCA membership, which includes three months prior to deployment and then three months after you come back," explains Myers. "And while you are gone, your family members can use it. We have been getting a lot of great comments from family members. We received one recently from a woman whose husband has been deployed for six months. She said, 'He is going to have a big surprise when he comes back' because she has lost 25 pounds swimming in the 'Y.' These family fitness programs are encouraging. Fit Factor, which we started in the Air Force and the Navy is now using, rewards kids and families for being active. So it has to be a family deal — everybody stays fit."

Wounded Warrior Support

DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are making a concerted effort to improve the overall support network for wounded warriors.

"We are doing a lot to support our wounded warriors or injured servicemembers," says Myers. "One program that we started with our Military OneSource — and we started this some time ago — is the Wounded Warrior Resource Center. It's a help line. If a wounded warrior has a problem — maybe he or she doesn't believe they are receiving the right treatment or needs assistance with the VA, etc. — they can call the Military OneSource line. There are people there who will assist in correcting whatever deficiency there is. And they will stay with this individual until that problem or whatever need is taken care of. We have gotten great reviews, and we've worked with the services — the medical people — on supporting them. Every day we are addressing various wounded warrior initiatives to further assist them and their families."

DoD recently had Sesame Street at the Pentagon, and has been working with the iconic children's program and PBS to create videos for families who deal with issues that are raised when a loved one deploys. The newest video focuses on the impact on

children and the family when an injured family member comes home from a deployment. The next video is planned and focuses on helping children cope with the loss of a loved one.

“These are great videos!” notes Myers. “We are encouraging parents to watch them with their children, or watch them and then later on watch with the children. We had a packed house here, and Sesame Street is doing a great job of supporting us.”

Recreation and sports are an important part of rehabilitation and reintegration, and DoD partners with many organizations such as the Paralympics, Road 2 Recovery and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) to provide inclusive and adaptive recreation programs.

“We have contracted with Penn State University to provide recreation-training courses over three years,” Myers points out. “Each four-day course teaches 30 installation recreation people how to successfully integrate wounded warriors and families into their MWR programs. We already had some classes graduate and that is really doing well in assisting our families and wounded warriors.”

Looking Forward

“When I travel overseas ... I believe we’ve got to focus on our facilities there,” says Myers when asked about DoD’s plan moving forward. “In the AOR, the department has done a great job with QOL programs — especially in Iraq. However, I believe we need to do additional work in the quality-of-life area in Afghanistan. So that is one of the efforts we are pursuing.

“We are also working with the services to execute an Exceptional Family Member campaign. We have children with special needs, and I believe we need to provide the resources and programs to support this initiative.”

He points out that DoD is striving to be more technology savvy, and continues to work through its Military OneSource to meet the need.

In terms of funding, the goal is to balance it out.

“We have two weapons systems: We have the weapons themselves and the military personnel that employ those weapons, and we have to balance it out,” says Myers. “One of our goals is to balance it out and get the necessary funding to meet the needs of both weapons systems.”

One of the ways to meet these needs is by having great leaders in key positions.

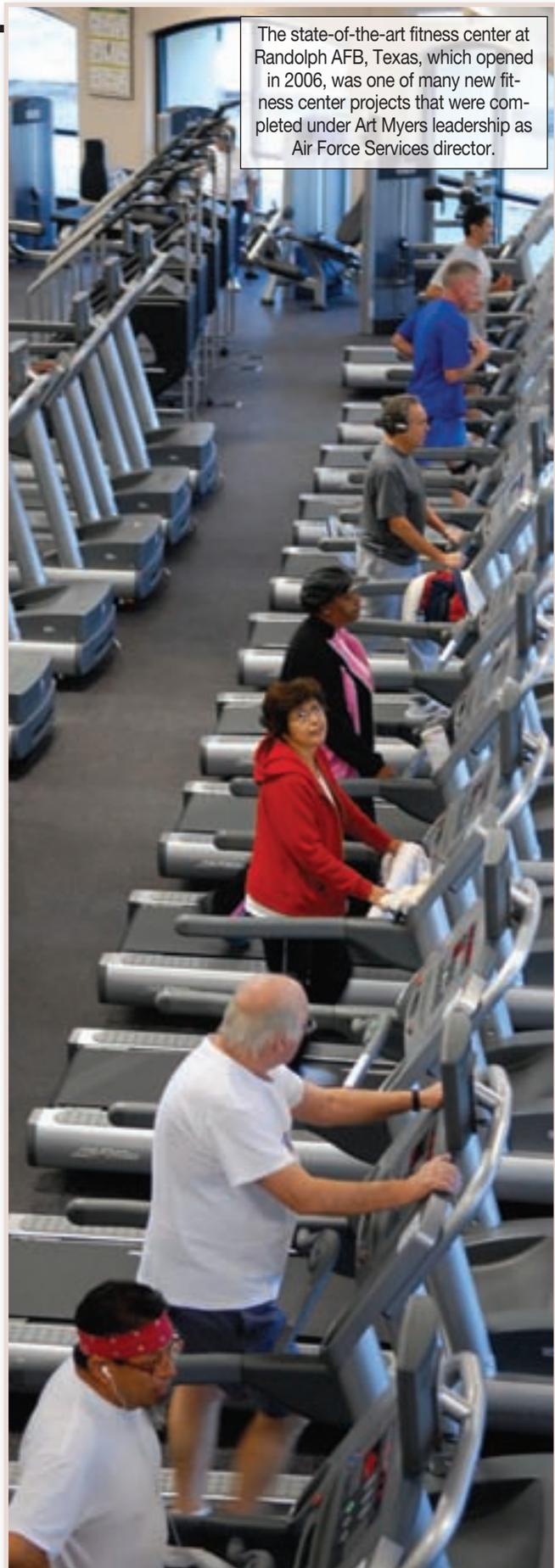
“We have a great team with the resale and MWR directors,” he says. “Communication is key. We may not always agree on everything, but there needs to be a little give and take. The key thing is to get the job done. We plan on being more active with the congressional staffers who are very interested in what we are doing. Rather than just having a hearing every year, we should visit several times a year and let them know what is on our agenda and find out what is on theirs, and tell them how we are doing. If we further improve communication, we will get things done more efficiently and effectively.”

Myers says he is pleased that President and Mrs. Obama will continue to focus on military members and their families.

“Leadership in DoD is dedicated to taking care of our military community,” he says. “We will take this trust, confidence and resources and use them as effectively and efficiently as we can.”

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The state-of-the-art fitness center at Randolph AFB, Texas, which opened in 2006, was one of many new fitness center projects that were completed under Art Myers leadership as Air Force Services director.



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