



Train, Develop, and Inspire Warfighters

Keesler Air Force Base 83rd Anniversary

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Forging Our Nation's Warriors

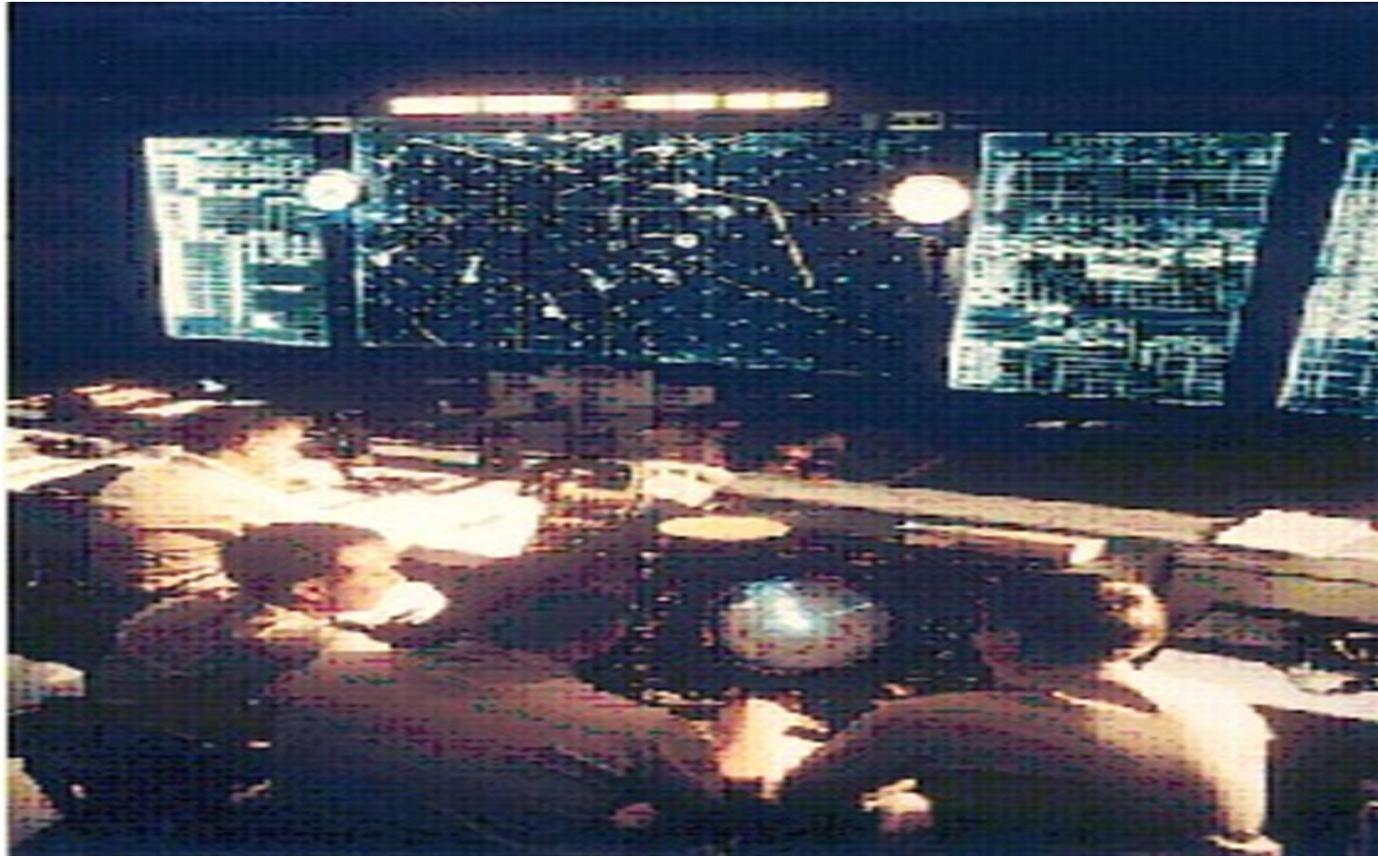


Keesler AFB History



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Advances in evolving technology rapidly led to changes in Keesler's training.



- Keesler Air Force Base (KAFB) has established itself as an exemplary installation for 83 years.
- KAFB has a proud heritage of providing technical training to American War-Fighters.
- The installation offered lucrative career opportunities to women and minorities even during Jim Crow segregation as our nation fought World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.
- Keesler still sets the high standard with outstanding cyber courses to train Airmen to “Be Focused, Driven, Warriors.”

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Second Lieutenant Samuel Reeves Keesler, Jr.

A Fine American Airman

1896 – 1918

- **Born in Greenwood, Mississippi 11 April 1896**
- **Entered the U.S. Army Air Service on 13 May 1917 during WWI**
- **Aerial Observer and Aerial Gunnery and Artillery Fire Control**
- **Assigned to the 24th Aero Squadron, Verdun sector of the Western Front in France, 26 August 1918**
- **Seriously wounded during the battle and ensuing crashlanding 8 October 1918**
- **Captured by enemy (German) soldiers the same day**
- **Succumbed to his injuries 9 October 1918 after not receiving medical care**
- **Posthumously awarded the WWI Victory Medal with Silver Star device for his gallantry.**

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Tent quarters, circa April 1941, in the former Naval Reserve Park



- Biloxi city officials asked U.S. Army Corps to build a base to support the WWII training buildup in January 1941.
- Offer included the Biloxi airport, the old Naval Reserve Park, and parts of Oak Park

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Keesler's Airplane and Engine Mechanics School taught students B-24 Maintenance until 1945



- War Department activated Army Air Corps Station No. 8, Aviation Mechanics School in Biloxi 12 June 1941
- Technical training school officers and staff arrived mid-July 1941 for Airplane and Engine Mechanics School
- First shipment of basic training recruits arrived at Keesler Field 21 August 1941
- Designated as Keesler Army Airfield 25 August 1941 in honor of Second Lieutenant Samuel Reeves Keesler, Jr.
- Focused upon training B-24 Liberator heavy bombers mechanics mid-1942

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**Women's Army
Auxiliary Corps
(WAAC) in the
Keesler mailroom
30 December 1947**



16-G ART-30DEC 47 - LOCKBOURNE A.B. - WAC ACT.

- **Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) activated 10 May 1943**
- **Women and International Students entered technical training in 1943**
- **More than 50 countries sent students to Keesler for aviation, personnel and electronics courses**

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- Keesler's first graduating class of African-American airplane mechanics, 1944
- They were Tuskegee Airmen
- More than 7,000 African-American Soldiers at Keesler by fall of 1943



- U.S. Air Force established 18 September 1947
- Radar School stood up 14 November 1947
- Keesler Field officially redesignated as an Air Force base 13 January 1948
- Airplane and Engine Mechanics School and the Radar School consolidated 1 April 1948 due to budget cuts.
- 9 Air Force women participated in first Keesler co-educational technical course in Radio Operations School 15 June 1949
- Last mechanics training courses moved to Sheppard AFB, Texas 9 November 1949

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Mayor G. B. Cousins of Biloxi signed the deed to city property of Keesler AFB over to the Air Force on 24 February 1949, as Maj Gen Charles W. Lawrence witnesses the transaction. Included was the transfer of the beach USO building from the government back to the City of Biloxi. (l to r) Jacob Guice, city attorney; Gordon Dacey, city commissioner; A. J. Creel, city commissioner; and Joseph C. Tainter, closing attorney, U. S. District Office of Army Engineers, Mobile, AL.



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- **Tactical Air Command's Air-Ground Operations School arrived from Southern Pines, North Carolina. Its T-33s were the first jets assigned to Keesler 1 January 1959.**
- **Air Training Command redesignated the 3380th Technical Training Wing as the Keesler Technical Training Center and the 3380th Technical Training Group became the 3380th Technical School, USAF. All student squadrons became school 20 May 1959.**
- **The last C-47 left Keesler. These aircraft had been used for ground approach radar training, but the adoption of less expensive simulators made their use unnecessary 1 April 1965.**
- **Hurricane Betsy lashed the Gulf Coast with winds over 100 miles per hour and storm surge as high as 15 feet above normal 9 September 1965. Downtown Biloxi suffered heavy flooding and wind damage. Keesler personnel assisted with rescue efforts, storm clean-up, and emergency repairs.**
- **The command activated the 3389th Pilot Training Squadron at Keesler 15 January 1967. This unit trained foreign pilots under the Military Assistance Program (MAP) using the T-28 aircraft. Classes began on 23 January 1967.**
- **Keesler's student load peaked at 14,000 1 July 1969 during the Vietnam War.**
- **Hurricane Camille made landfall at Waveland, Mississippi 18 August 1969, clocking wind gusts of over 200 miles per hour and pushing water surges as high as 35 feet above normal. More than 260 people were killed, and communities in five states were devastated. Keesler officials estimated on base damage at \$3.5 million. During a subsequent inspection visit, President Richard Nixon praised the base's heroic rescue and community assistance efforts.**

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Mrs. Audrey McGlothlin



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FIRST CIVILIAN WOMAN surveyor in the Air Force, Mrs. Audrey McGlothlin adjusts the balance of her surveyor's level before taking an elevation reading. Mrs. McGlothlin completed the Site Development Specialist School, Sheppard AFB, Tex., with the third highest rating in her class. She is assigned to the 3380th Civil Engineering Group here. (U. S. Air Force Photo by SSgt. George Hill)

Mrs. Audrey McGlothlin became the first woman Civilian U.S. Air Force Surveyor in October 1970 at Keesler Air Force Base. She scored the third highest rating in the Site Development Specialist School at Sheppard Air Force Base, TX. She served in the 3380th Civil Engineering Group.

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Keesler celebrated the 21st Anniversary of the Women in the Air Force, circa 12 June 1971



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Keesler AFB History

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Military Assistance Program (MAP) at Keesler Air Force Base

North American
T-28A Trojan
(Courtesy of the
National Museum
of the United
States Air Force)



- 3389th Pilot Training Squadron (PTS) activated at Keesler Air Force Base (KAFB) 15 January 1967.
- The unit taught students from South Vietnam to fly the T-28 Trojan.
- The KAFB student population peaked at over 14,000 on 1 July 1969.
- 3389th PTS instructed 743 MAP students from South Vietnam when ended its mission on 4 May 1973.

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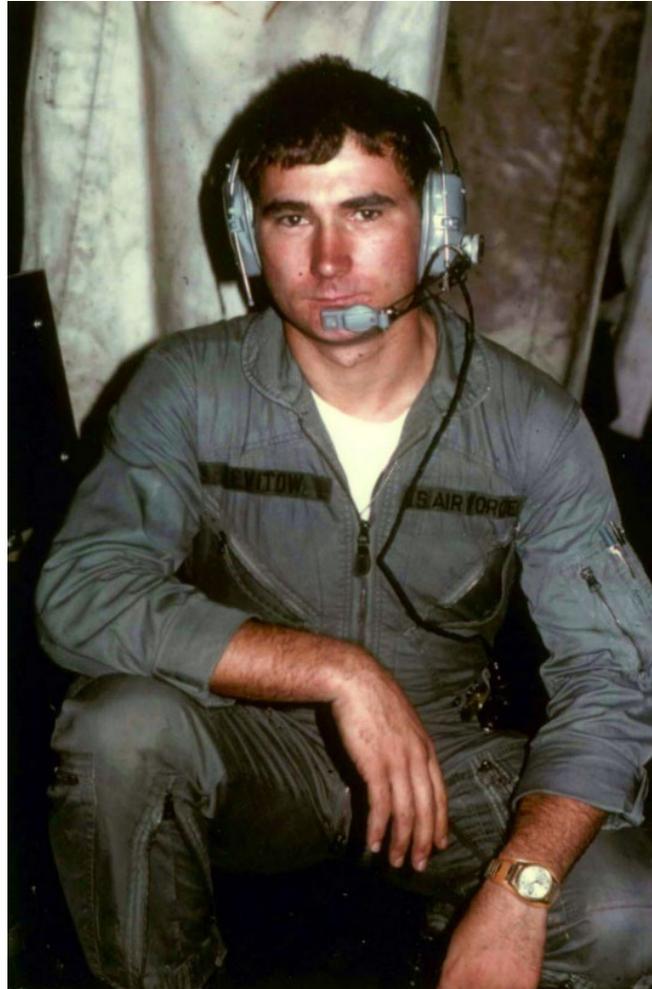


U.S. Air Force Vietnam War Hero



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**Airman First Class
(A1C) John L. Levitow
(Courtesy of National
Museum of the United
States Air Force)**



Loadmaster on AC-47 "Spooky 71" gunship night of 24 February 1969

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Spooky 71

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**Spooky 71 with
damaged right wing
(Courtesy of
National Museum
of the United States
Air Force)**



- **Enemy mortar damaged a wing of the aircraft and ignited 27-pound MK-24 flare.**
- **A1C Levitow incurred in excess of 40 wounds but dragged a crewman from open door.**
- **A1C Levitow threw the smoking flare out of Spooky 71.**

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U.S. Air Force Vietnam War Hero



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U.S. Air Force Sergeant

John L. Levitow

(Courtesy of National Museum of the United States Air Force)



A1C Levitow earned the Medal of Honor for saving a crew of seven and the aircraft.

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Levitow Training Support Facility



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**Building 7310 on KAFB is the Levitow Training Support Facility
It is a memorialization to Sergeant John L. Levitow
He passed away in the year 2000
(Air Force photo by Kemberly Groue)**

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- The Air Force Reserve activated the 920th Tactical Airlift Group at Keesler and equipped it with C-130s 25 April 1973.
- The T-28 pilot training program ended 4 May 1973 after graduating 908 foreign students. The majority of them came from South Vietnam.
- Keesler became the prime technical training center for the airborne warning and control system (AWACS) 21 December 1973.
- Biloxi city officials obtained government approval for an access bridge 1 January 1976 which would connect Keesler with Interstate 110.
- Hurricane Frederick struck 13 September 1979, causing about \$11 million in property damage on the base. In addition to base clean up, many Air Force personnel assisted with recovery efforts in several communities along the Gulf Coast.
- Base officials dedicated a new control tower 4 April 1980. It replaced a tower that had been in use since 1941.
- As a result of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization strike, the 3300th Technical Training Wing had to increase its production of air traffic controllers 1 August 1981.
- Keesler Air Force Base hosted the first Special Olympics 24 April 1982. 350 competitors participated.
- Over 260 Keesler medical personnel deployed to various locations in support of Operation Desert Storm 28 August.
- Military Airlift Command inactivated the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron 30 June 1991. The 53rd's hurricane hunter mission transferred to the 403rd Airlift Wing, Keesler's Air Force Reserve unit.

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Major General Marcelite J. Harris



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The late Major General (MG) Marcelite J. Harris became the first woman commander of a U.S. Air Force (USAF) Wing. She served as the 3300th Technical Training Wing Commander on KAFB while she was a colonel from December 1988 through September 1990. The USAF promoted Colonel Harris to Brigadier General (BG) on 1 May 1991. She became the first African-American female General Officer in the USAF. She received another promotion on 25 May 1995 to Major General becoming the first woman to achieve this rank in the USAF. MG Harris retired in 1997 holding the highest rank for a USAF woman and as the second highest ranking African-American woman in the Department of Defense. She passed away 7 September 2018.

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Major Changes at Keesler Air Force Base on 1 July 1993

- HQ USAF redesignated Air Training Command (ATC), headquartered at Randolph AFB, Texas, as Air Education and Training Command (AETC).
- HQ AETC activated Second Air Force at Keesler and made the Numbered Air Force responsible for all technical training in the command. The command inactivated Keesler Training Center and all of its subordinate organizations, with the exception of the 393rd Technical Training Group, which was redesignated as the 81st Technical Training Group.
- HQ AETC activated the 81st Training Wing and assigned it to Second Air Force. The wing assumed the old center mission. Major components of the wing included the 81st Technical Training, 81st Support, 81st Logistics, and 81st Medical Groups.
- HQ Keesler Medical Center inactivated, and HQ AETC activated the 81st Medical Group to operate the base hospital, which was still known as Keesler Medical Center.
- The First Sergeants Academy moved to Maxwell AFB, Alabama. At the same time, HQ AETC reassigned the academy to Air University.

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Brigadier General Karen S. Rankin served as the first 81st Training Wing Commander when the unit activated at Keesler Air Force Base on 1 July 1993.

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The 45th Airlift Squadron activated and assigned to the 81st Training Group 1 July 1994. Equipped with C-12C/F Huron and C-21A Learjet aircraft, it brought flying training back to Keesler for the first time since 1973.



Captain Dave Cash, 45th Airlift Squadron, gave Junior ROTC cadets from Biloxi High School a walk around tour of a C-21 aircraft 14 January 2008.

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Terrorists detonated a massive car bomb near the Khobar towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia 25 June 1995. Eleven Keesler personnel were deployed to the Air Base. They included Staff Sergeant Rondal Burns of the 333rd TRS who was seriously injured and subsequently awarded the Purple Heart. Furthermore, SrA Martie Capoeman of the Wing's Public Affairs office received an Air Force Achievement Medal with 'V' (for valor) device for her performance in providing emergency medical care.



On the night of 25 June 1996, a bomb detonated near the Khobar Tower housing complex. The blast killed 19 Airmen and injured in excess of 400 U.S. and international military members and civilians. (U.S. Air Force courtesy photo)

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The Khobar Towers Eternal Flame Monument and Memorial wall, at Eglin Air Force Base, FL, were dedicated one year after the Khobar Towers bombing on 25 June 1996. (U.S. Air Force photo /Samuel King Jr.)



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**Keesler AFB's premier
"Triangle Vision."**



- Lieutenant General John C. Griffith, AETC Vice-Commander, led an official party in breaking ground for the first construction phase of Triangle Vision 24 February 1997.
- The 403rd Wing, Keesler's Reserve tenant unit, received the first of the new C-130J trainer aircraft 17 February 1999. The "J" model aircraft replaces the 1960s era aircraft, lowering operating costs and enhancing performance and capabilities of the unit's weather reconnaissance mission.

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Major General Roosevelt Mercer



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Major General (MG) Roosevelt Mercer served as the first African-American 81st Training Wing Commander (81st TRW/CC) while a Brigadier General (BG) from September 2000 to May 2002. MG Roosevelt retired 1 January 2008 after serving as the Director of Combat and Information Operations, Global Operations Directorate, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, Nebraska.



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Aerial photograph of modern-day Keesler Air Force



- Hurricane Katrina struck KAFB and surrounding Gulf Coast Communities 29 August 2005 causing almost a billion dollars in damage to KAFB.
- KAFB promptly resumed technical training 20 October 2005 by executing Operation DRAGON COMEBACK
- The first officers graduated from the Undergraduate Cyber Training (UCT) program 7 December 2010.

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Major General Mary Kay Hertog



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Major General Mary Kay Hertog became the first woman commander of 2nd Air Force on 9 September 2009.

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Community Milestones

- **Base leaders, community partners, and Biloxi elected representatives gathered at the Biloxi Visitors Center on 3 June 2016 to celebrate Biloxi/Keesler Partnership Day. The evening event highlighted Keesler's partnership with the City of Biloxi through a city proclamation read by the city's Mayor, Andrew Gilich and a Keesler historical display featuring Keesler's 75 years on the Gulf Coast.**
- **Airmen of the 81st Medical Operations Squadron carried out the first Micra Transcatheter Pacing System for patient insertion procedure in the Air Force 13 April 2017. They implanted the smallest pacemaker in the world for patients with bradycardia at Keesler Medical Center. The device is approximately the size of a vitamin, and it weighs the same as a penny.**
- **KAFB, Biloxi, and State of Mississippi leaders announced a 37-million-dollar Division Street new main gate construction project during a ceremony at KAFB 1 June 2017. The event highlighted the Air Force Community Partnership Program that KAFB started on 3 May 2017.**
- **The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) recognized the 81st Training Wing (81st TRW) with 2017 Innovation Challenge Mission Accomplishment award 19 March 2018. Additionally, the 81st TRW earned a monetary award the unit may spend for any operations and maintenance fund purchases. The 81st TRW received this honor during the AETC Senior Leadership Conference at Vandenberg Air Force Base, CA. The event occurred 19 through 21 March 2018.**

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**Division Street Gate
Ribbon Cutting
Ceremony on 26 May
2022. (U.S. Air Force
Photo by Kemberly
Groue**



Community Milestones

Colonel William Hunter, 81st TRW/CC, and Biloxi Mayor, Andrew “FoFo” Gilich, slashed the ribbon during the Division Street Gate Ribbon Cutting Ceremony 26 May 2022. Additionally, Major General Michele Edmondson, 2nd AF/CC, took part in the ribbon cutting. Furthermore, Colonel Hunter provided remarks. Brigadier General Thomas Harrell, (AFMRA/CC), U.S. Representative Steven Palazzo, and several other distinguished visitors also attended the ceremony. The new Visitor Control Center (VCC) opened at the Division Street Gate 15 August 2022.

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COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Colonel Blackwell, 81st TRW/CC, issued a Special Commander's Alert 15 March 2020 regarding access to the Keesler Medical Center (KMC) in response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The order directed KMC staff and patients to enter the KMC only through the main entrance or the Emergency Room effective 16 March 2020. Furthermore, no individuals under the age of 18 and no individuals with a cough, fever, or cold could visit inpatients effective 16 March 2020. Moreover, only patients with appointments could visit the outpatient clinics at the KMC effective 16 March 2020.**
- **Colonel Heather Blackwell, 81st TRW/CC, heralded the availability of the COVID-19 vaccinations 17 May 2021 to all beneficiaries at the Keesler Medical Center (KMC).**
- **Colonel William Hunter, 81st TRW/CC, emphasized to the KAFB community after he took command of KAFB on 17 June 2021 that we must co-exist with the public health threat from COVID-19. He routinely directed KAFB to maintain COVID-19 mitigation protocols.**

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Thunder Over the Sound Air and Space Show 29 -30 April 2023



Spectators gather for the 2023 Thunder Over the Sound Air and Space Show at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, April 29, 2023. Thunder Over the Sound is a unique event where a military installation and its surrounding city jointly host an air show in two locations; Biloxi Beach and Keesler Air Force Base's flightline. (U.S. Air Force photo by Kemberly Groue)

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35th Special Olympics Mississippi (SOMS) 12 -13 May 2023



SOMS athletes receive medals from the 81st Training Wing Commander, Colonel Billy E. Pope, during the SOMS Summer Games at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, May 13, 2023. Over 500 athletes participated in the Summer Games. (U.S. Air Force photo by Kemberly Groue)

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