



**Commander
22d Air Refueling Wing
McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas**

22 March 2023

McConnell Families,

Our families are the backbone of our Air Force and where feasible, it is paramount we keep our collective team (Airmen, AF Civilians, Families, etc.) apprised of events which may have deeper impacts than just on our service members. Generally, details of exercises and operations are not widely disseminated to protect the integrity of missions. This case is different for a variety of reasons and worthy of making an exception. Next week, from 27-31 March, Team McConnell will conduct exercise LETHAL PRIDE. This will inevitably impact many of our families and I'm sure it has already raised some questions. In the pursuit of transparency, we would like to answer and address common questions (and maybe even concerns). In the event I missed something, please ask your squadron leadership who will provide an answer or elevate it up the chain of command. Rest assured; your question will be answered.

LETHAL PRIDE is McConnell AFB's first-ever large-scale exercise to demonstrate our ability to command and control aircraft in a deployed and degraded communications environment. Our approach is for Airmen to simulate an emerging conflict deployment against a near-peer. To do this, our deployed members will live in a tent city located on McConnell AFB for approximately five days. Living in a tent is not new to anyone, but combining that with the types of capabilities we are trying to develop is very new.

Exercise participants will have daily access to the base dining facility, a deployed field kitchen, the base gym, and shower facilities. Throughout the exercise, participants will not have access to personal electronic devices or be permitted to leave the exercise or support sites for any reason without "deployed" commander approval. This exercise is a precursor to our participation in Operation MOBILITY GUARDIAN, to be conducted by Air Mobility Command later this year.

Q: How many airmen are participating in the exercise?

A: More than 100 Airmen will be "deploying" for this exercise from McConnell AFB. Additionally, there are multiple aircraft and crews from McConnell, Fairchild, and MacDill AFBs along with a contingency response element from McGuire AFB and an aeromedical evacuation team from Scott AFB. Aircraft departing McConnell as part of the exercise may make precoordinated stops at other installations throughout the course of the event.

Q: Why are Airmen not allowed to use personal electronic devices during the exercise?

A: Airmen must be prepared to operate, work, and live without the use of personal electronic devices in a spectrum of conflict situations. Recent conflicts around the world have proven adversaries possess the technology to accurately pinpoint the location of opposing forces via personal electronic devices. Once an adversary knows the location of opposing forces, they can monitor their movements, exploit the force with things like misinformation, and potentially target them if desired. Restricting the use of electronics for this exercise therefore directly trains our forces for how we will fight in future high-tech conflicts and better prepares our team for the tactics that lie ahead.

22 ARW...WE ARE A/R!

- Q:** If I need to get in touch with an Airman during the exercise and they do not have their personal electronic device, how do I contact them?
- A:** In the case of an emergency, please contact the McConnell AFB Command Post at 316-759-3251. If you call, please be sure to give your full name, phone number, nature of the emergency, and who you need to speak with. We will ensure you get in contact with the specific Airman.
- Q:** What should an Airman do if they need to pay bills or handle important personal matters during the exercise, but do not have access to their electric devices?
- A:** Handling of foreseeable personal matters should be taken care of prior to the exercise start or arranged for others to handle (spouse/dependent/roommate) on behalf of the Airman during the exercise period (we have been briefing this to Airmen for a month). In the event a matter must be handled during the exercise and cannot be altered, this should be vocalized to leadership ahead of time and accommodations may be made. Participants should make every effort to handle matters prior to exercise start, similar to what would be done for real world deployments. We also completely understand that life isn't always full of scheduled events (i.e. things happen), which is why you can call Command Post to get in touch with them if needed.
- Q:** How were people chosen to participate in this exercise?
- A:** Airmen were chosen based on their career field and level of expertise. The goal is to have select Airmen who are seasoned and highly skilled that can direct and share their knowledge, while also having newer, less experienced Airmen who can gain tremendously from this experience. With the exercise taking place here on our installation using some permanent facilities, there is a reduced requirement for Mission Support personnel and a focus on Maintenance and Operations personnel. The primary participants are maintainers, aircrew, and cyber professionals. We've scaled down the exercise as much as possible while still being able to meet our training requirements.
- Q:** Will the Airmen depart the base to a deployed location?
- A:** Airmen will simulate a deployment location while remaining on McConnell AFB. Some Airmen will be traveling off-station to other installations as part of the flying mission. This is part of "Hub and Spoke" operations to be exercised where McConnell AFB is the main deployment "Hub" and other installations serve as the forward deployed "Spokes". Most Airmen will be housed in a tent city for the duration of the exercise with additional support facilities at their disposal. Due to the nature of the exercise, Airmen will not be permitted to leave the exercise location or have unapproved visitors at any point during the event.
- Q:** Should we expect any loud noises, bangs, or large aircraft movements? Should we expect any restrictions to base access or amenities during the exercise?
- A:** No loud noises or explosions should be expected. There is potential for large aircraft movements throughout the week but nothing which should create reason for concern. There will not be any restrictions to base access or change in installation amenities. Everything will be open and operate as normal.
- Q:** Where will Airmen eat during the exercise?
- A:** Airmen will have daily access to the base dining facility as well as a deployed field kitchen. Those that receive Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) were given the option of having the cost of meals deducted from their pay at the conclusion of the exercise, pay for their meals with cash, or provide their own meals. Airmen who chose to provide their own meals were forewarned that no resources will be provided at the exercise site to refrigerate or heat food. Airmen that are on meal cards will use their meal card to pay for meals.
- Q:** Why do Airmen have to pay for their meals during this required exercise?

- A:** Per DoD Directives and AF policies, all Airmen shall pay for any meals the government furnishes while they are also entitled to BAS. This includes during field duty while located at home station. The government cannot legally provide food without charging as all participants already received the allotted monthly food allowance. Participants had the option to have the \$45.16 automatically deducted from their pay, or to pay \$56.85 in cash for their meals over the 5-day exercise.
- Q:** Can I visit the site or drop things off to an Airman such as meals?
- A:** Unfortunately, no. Think of this as if the Airman is deployed to a remote (austere) island with no cell phone. The exercise location will be off limits to non-participants and dropping off supplies or food to Airmen would be counter to the exercise's various objectives. Although the location is on base, it is intended to simulate a deployed environment. Airmen must bring everything they need for the week on day one. Unless deemed a risk to health, no outside supplies will be available. Site access is restricted to participants, senior leadership, and select preplanned visits that help achieve objectives.
- Q:** Why do we need to do this exercise?
- A:** This exercise is an operational evaluation of our ability to respond to non-routine mission sets and to ensure we are aligned with the military guidance outlined in the 2022 National Defense Strategy. Given the spectrum of threats the DoD may be asked to respond to in the future, it's important we periodically test our team, our resources, and our tactics to assess overall effectiveness and find areas for improvement. The bottom line is that our job as leaders is to prepare Airmen for upcoming challenges they may face. This exercise directly accomplishes that.
- Q:** Is there any real value added in sleeping in tents on base versus at home?
- A:** Absolutely! While I know it's not always ideal for your Airman to be away from home, the reward in this case is the realism it infuses into the exercise. By not having daily pauses or breaks in the exercise for the team to go home, it keeps Airmen more locked in on the scenario and focused on achieving the tasks being asked of them. This also better reflects what would happen in a real-world deployment, thereby providing more authentic training. Keep in mind, we're testing a lot of new things in this exercise...living in tents isn't one of them, but it is critical to giving a realistic picture of how the other items we're testing will work in the deployed environment.
- Q:** Was any consideration taken into how this will affect jobs of spouses?
- A:** Definitely. Each LETHAL PRIDE participant was chosen by their group and squadron leadership approximately one month ago. This was done early in the process to allow time for Airmen to provide feedback to leadership about any issues or concerns associated with spouse or family schedules. This also gave time for families to work through any internal scheduling changes needed to accommodate the Airman being gone for the week.
- Q:** Will there be any changes to childcare services for families of those participating?
- A:** There could be...tell us what you need. Families requiring altered childcare schedules during the week should contact the installation's Child Development Center or express concerns through their squadron chain of command. With a parent being unavailable for the week, this inevitably causes some changes to childcare options as well as pickup and drop off times. We're here to support.
- Q:** What will happen if there is severe weather? How will I know my spouse/Airman is safe?
- A:** McConnell AFB senior leadership consistently monitors weather conditions and responds accordingly. In the event severe weather is forecasted or detected, Wing leadership will make an appropriate decision on adding precautions or executing a weather response. The utmost focus throughout the exercise is the safety of personnel. While exercise participants will be living in tents over the five days, there are hardened facilities at the site to escape from severe weather such as lightning or tornados. There are also buses available to evacuate the team back to main base if

necessary. Any significant weather response will be shared via the McConnell AFB website, Facebook page, and through the AtHoc alert system like normal.

Q: Will there be medical services for those participating?


A: Medical assistance will be available at the site should aid be needed. Participants may further be transported to the Medical Clinic if deemed necessary. While Airmen will not have personal electronic devices with them, they will have alternate means of contacting both base and local medical services if required.

Q: Will Airmen get additional time off afterwards because of their participation in this 24-hr, five-day exercise?

A: Yes! Each squadron leadership team will assess when time off for airmen in their unit makes the most sense for those who participate in LETHAL PRIDE. Ideally, all Airmen will get personal time back.

I hope these answers provide you a better outline and intent of our exercise and aid in mitigating any possible unforeseen circumstances. Most importantly, I want to say thank you for your patience and understanding in this matter, as well as for your continued support of our amazing team! While we don't normally publish letters like this for exercises, this exercise has us doing things a bit different and we felt an explanation was owed. Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'GEORGE N. VOGEL', written over a horizontal line.

GEORGE N. VOGEL, Colonel, USAF
Commander