

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH



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Serving active duty and retired military personnel, veterans and civil service employees



U.S. Air Force photo by Cynthia Griggs

DOGGY DELICACY Air Force Staff Sgt. Daniel Duarte awards military working dog Kay with a hamburger during his retirement ceremony at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, Feb. 2, 2024. Kay served eight years as a patrol narcotic detector dog and will be adopted by one of his handlers.

RESEARCHERS TO TACKLE VOTING CHALLENGES OF MILITARY MEMBERS

by Joseph Clark, DOD News
Researchers from nonprofit election technology company VotingWorks showcased an early-stage prototype of technology aimed at improving the experience of military absentee voters, Feb. 7.

The prototype was presented during the National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State

Election Directors conferences in Washington, D.C., last week. It was unveiled midway into a two-year, research project funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency to explore methods to ease burdens for service members stationed away from their home voting districts.

“We want military voters to be first-class voters and have the

same abilities as other voters,” said Ben Adida, the executive director of VotingWorks and the technical lead on the project.

In describing their specific goals for the project, the research team said military voters should have the ability to cast a privacy-protected ballot through election day, receive a paper ballot for verifiability, and confirm that their vote was counted.

The research team also wants those ballots to be counted as part of election night results, or soon thereafter, similar to the in-person ballots cast at a service member’s regular polling center.

“We want them to be a part of that because that’s an important part of being and feeling enfranchised during the voting process,” Adida said.

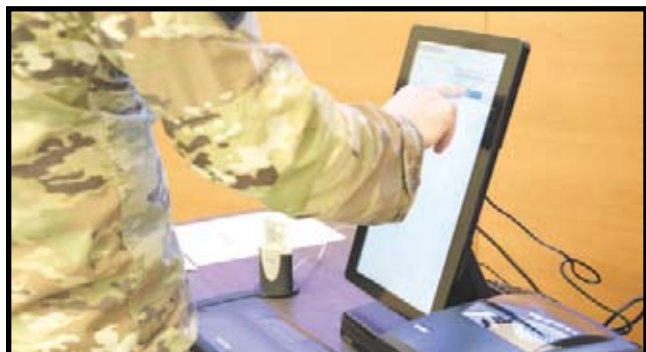
While the majority of service

members, 75 percent, are eligible to vote absentee because they are stationed away from their home voting precincts, doing so is often more complicated according to analysis conducted by the Federal Voting Assistance Program.

Service members must explicitly request absentee ballots and follow their state’s specific rules about how their ballot can be sent and received. Military absentee voters often send their ballots to be counted via an ad hoc mix of fax, email and mail that could potentially compromise the security of their ballots.

In some cases, state absentee voting measures require access to technology not readily available while deployed, and often require military voters to vote earlier than their civilian counterparts due to long mailing timelines.

see Voting, page 3



A service member tests an early-stage prototype of voting technology. DARPA photo

8 fun facts about Presidents Day

Happy PRESIDENTS DAY

As a tribute to our fearless leaders, as we celebrate this year on Monday, February 19, here are some neat facts about Presidents Day that honor their life and legacy. Did you know that ...

- ✓ Presidents Day is celebrated on the third Monday in February, thanks to the 1968 Uniform Monday Holiday Act
- ✓ It was established in 1885 in honor of President George Washington’s birthday
- ✓ Washington’s birthday was actually on February 22, 1732 (this would be his 282nd birthday!)
- ✓ Washington’s birthplace is a national monument and is located in Colonial Beach, Virginia
- ✓ It is still officially called Washington’s Birthday by the federal government
- ✓ The government debated renaming the holiday to Presidents Day to include President Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, but the proposal failed in committees
- ✓ Lincoln’s birthday was actually on February 12, 1809 (this would be his 205th birthday!)
- ✓ Lincoln’s birthplace is a national historical park and is located in Hodgenville, Kentucky

Navy’s naming of its newest destroyer honors Black World War II hero

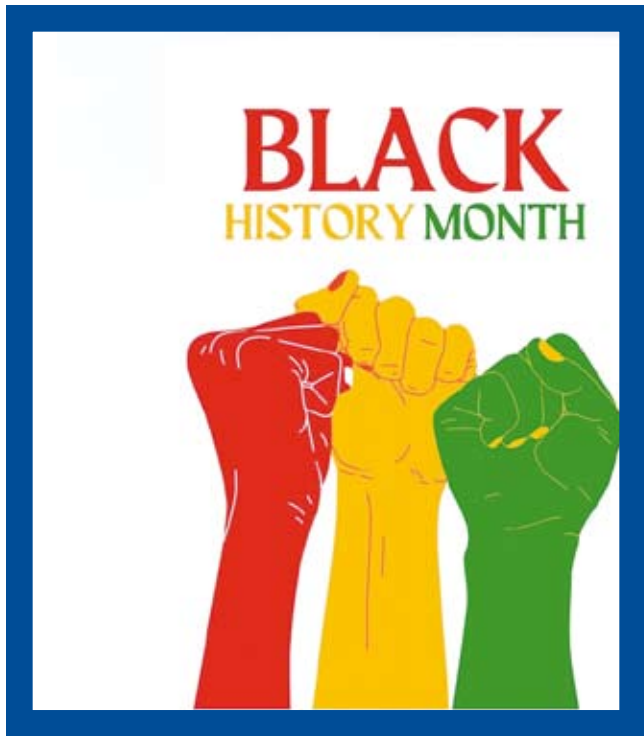
The Navy will name its newest Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer for World War II hero Charles Jackson French, who saved 15 of his fellow sailors from certain death by exposure or execution. In a daring feat of strength and endurance following an enemy attack that sank USS Gregory on Sept. 5, 1942, French swam his shipmates out of danger by towing their life raft with a line tied around his waist. The feat earned him the nickname “The Human Tugboat” and “Hero of the Solomons.”

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A JOURNEY OF PURPOSE: FINDING MEANING IN SERVICE

by Lance Cpl.
Alexandra Earl
MCRD, San Diego

On a quest for purpose of life, individuals embark on diverse paths, seeking answers amid the transitions of youth or the trials of adulthood. The quest knows no bounds of age, and the answers remain elusive, subjective to each unique journey.

For Recruit Benedict Stur, an 18-year-old from Denver Colo., his quest for purpose in life began by joining the ranks of the United States Marine Corps. Upon graduating from Chesterton Academy of Our Lady of Victory, Benedict decided to follow in his brother's footsteps in serving his country.

While being appointed in a leadership position as the guide for Platoon 1074, Delta Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, Calif., Stur knows both sacrifices and triumphs

will arise.

Stur said, "As the guide it's like having 40 mindsets to keep strong all at once."

The hardest part to overcome in bootcamp is taking care of the recruits in his platoon day and night as well as keeping his body and mind strong.

While reflecting on his journey, Benedict drew inspiration from "Unbreakable" by Thomas Shea, a highly decorated U.S. Navy SEAL. In his book, he shares his experiences from years of combat while in Afghanistan. Stur embraces the concept of "interior dialogue," which is harnessing the power of positive self-talk to persevere through adversity.

Stur said, faith serves as a steadfast beacon, guiding his heart to keep pushing forward. Clinging to the words in John 15:13 "Greater love has no one



Marine Corps Recruit Benedict Stur, with Delta Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, poses for a photo after completing the 8-kilometer hike on Camp Pendleton Jan. 30, 2024.

than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

As Stur nears the Crucible, the ultimate test of endurance, his dream to earn the title of United States Marine, will become a reality.

He is scheduled to graduate, March 8, 2024.

The purpose of the hike is to condition recruits to the rigorous terrain on Camp Pendleton and prepare them for the 13-kilometer hike and culminating event - the Crucible. Stur was recruited out of RSS Denver Metro South. USMC photo by Lance Cpl. Alexandra M. Earl



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Austin thanks Blue Star Families for their support during global uncertainty

by David Vergun
DOD News

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III thanked members of Blue Star Families for their service and sacrifice and that of their men and women in uniform.

“Global uncertainty is the theme of this gathering. Yet, in times of challenge, the world looks to America,” he said speaking recently at a virtual town hall event.

The nonprofit group aims to support the immediate family of active-duty service members.

The U.S. military is the “most powerful and innovative fighting force in the world,” he said. “It’s not just because of our brave troops around the world. It’s also because of our outstanding military families. You serve right alongside your loved ones.

“And you bear all the stress and strain of the homefront, especially in challenging times. So we are forever grateful,” Austin said.

Taking care of its people is a top priority for the Defense Department, Austin said. He noted that service members received a 4.6 percent pay raise this year—the largest in two decades. The department is also working to make child care more affordable and moves easier and help military spouses pursue their own careers.

“I’m proud of what we’ve done, but we’re going to keep pushing to do more because we are determined to do right by our troops—and by all of you,” Austin said.

Following the secretary’s remarks, senior defense and national security officials took questions from the family members.

“American security and prosperity at home oftentimes begins

overseas,” said Laura Cooper, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia, Ukraine, Eurasia.

A large part of that is providing aid to Ukraine to help them

this threat in a much more direct and much more costly way,” she added.

Daniel Shapiro, deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, said the goal



The U.S. military is the “most powerful and innovative fighting force in the world. It’s not just because of our brave troops around the world. It’s also because of our outstanding military families. You serve right alongside your loved ones.”
--Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III

defend against Russian aggression, she said.

U.S. forces stationed on NATO’s eastern flank are there to support allies should they face Russian aggression in the future, Cooper said.

“If we don’t enable the Ukrainians to stop Russia and defend against aggression, we will face

of the Defense Department is to try to build a more peaceful, prosperous and more integrated Middle East in order to help the lives of those who live there and, thereby, to make the U.S. homeland more secure.

The principles of partnership, deterrence, diplomacy and promoting our values in the Middle East are vitally important, he

Voting

continued from page 1

Those challenges, in part, translate to lower turnout by military members when compared with civilian voters, according to FVAP figures.

The FVAP found that, in 2020 military voter turnout was 27 percentage points lower than civilian voters with similar characteristics.

That year, turnout among civilian voters with similar demographics to military voters was 74 percent, the highest since 1900. Military turnout in 2020 was 47 percent, comparable to 46 percent in 2016, the FVAP found.

The early-stage solution presented by the research team this week is a deployable terminal that would allow military voters to transmit a signed, encrypted digital ballot to their home precinct on election day using their common access card.

Common access cards, which are issued to every member of the military, include strong authentication capabilities and digital signatures key to ensuring the authenticity of the digitally transmitted ballots.

The terminal would also print paper ballot along with a mailing label to be sent to the service member’s home state for audits – which usually occur up to four

weeks after Election Day.

John Kirby, National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications, spoke of the challenges in the Middle East, Ukraine and China and the importance of U.S. allies and partners.

Addressing troop deployments around the globe, Kirby said, “With all the turbulence overseas, you can’t address it if you’re not over there, if there’s not a presence, if you’re not willing to have skin in the game,” he said.

A large part of U.S. readiness is ensuring troops and their families have what they need, he added.

Jason Israel, director for defense policy at the National Security Council, said these are dangerous times, but it’s paramount that everything must be done to defend U.S. troops and allies.

The best thing that Congress can do now for national security is to provide appropriation and the supplemental funding package, he said.

“We are really pushing every day to try to work with Congress to find a solution to the impasse,” he said.

Essentially, by capitalizing on the extra time, service members would no longer have to mail in a paper ballot – used for both the initial vote count and in the audit – in advance.

Adida said that separation between when the digital vote is counted and when the audit of paper ballots is performed is the key observation underlying the solution.

“Our work is about figuring out what we can do with that extra time,” he said. “Because the audit that requires a paper ballot, doesn’t need to happen for a bunch of days after the election results.”

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EARLY BIRD BRIEF

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- **Big changes in store as Air Force, Space Force arrive at AFA Warfare Symposium**

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- **Military Culture & History**
- **World War I exhibit explores war’s impact on children**

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Army watercraft company that saw action at Normandy and Vietnam reactivates in Japan

by Seth Robson, Stars and Stripes

YOKOHAMA NORTH DOCK, Japan - A U.S. Army unit that will operate landing craft throughout the Indo-Pacific began work Feb. 8 at this waterfront base south of Tokyo.

A bell rang out from the deck of USAV Calabozza, a landing craft utility vessel, while about 40 Soldiers stood in formation on shore, signaling the activation of the 5th Transportation Company, which had been inactive since 1997.

The unit "will strengthen maritime maneuver capabilities in contingencies, including disasters in the Indo-Pacific Region," U.S. Army Japan said in a statement provided at the ceremony.

The company traces its lineage to Mechanical Repair Shop Unit 306, constituted in 1917 at Newport News, Va. It saw service in World War II, including at Normandy, and on the Saigon and Mekong rivers during the Vietnam War, according to the ceremony program.

The unit, led by Capt. Miata Schenaker, is evidence that "the Army can fight on land, air and sea," Army Japan commander Maj. Gen. David Womack told dignitaries gathered at the dock.

A crew of 13 noncommissioned officers can deliver equipment and supplies to beaches using vessels like the Calabozza, he said.

The Calabozza and another vessel like it, the USAV Fort McHenry, which is deployed to Cairns, Australia, are the only watercraft operated by the newly activated company so far. Col. Ned Holt, commander of the Okinawa-based 10th support Group, said after the ceremony.

LCUs move personnel, gear and supplies to shore. They are small but boast the same payload capacity as seven C-17 Globemaster III aircraft. One LCU can carry up to five M1 Abrams tanks, 24 double-stacked shipping containers or 400 combat-equipped troops.

"These boats are older than most of these Soldiers," Womack said of the 1970s- and '80s-era landing craft.

Soldiers on the Calabozza sleep four to a room, although Warrant Officer 2 Jason McElrath, the vessel master, gets his own cabin, he said during a post-ceremony tour of the landing craft.

It is equipped with a pair of .50-caliber machine guns, a bow engine that enables it to maneuver in tight spaces, and an aft anchor that can winch the watercraft away from a beach, he said.

McElrath took charge of the Calabozza in June. He said the vessel had been on temporary assignment in the region and moved cargo, vehicles and troops to Sasebo, Okinawa and the Philippines last year.

<https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2024-02-08/army-watercraft-company-reactivates-japan-12936800.html>



U.S. can respond decisively to cyber threat posed by China

by C. Todd Lopez, DOD News

The cyber challenge posed by China is unlike any challenge ever faced by the U.S. and its allies, said the commander of United States Cyber Command.

Speaking earlier this month before the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Army Gen. Paul M. Nakasone told lawmakers that cyber actors in China have used malware to hold at risk critical U.S. infrastructure such as systems that provide water, electricity and fuel to U.S. citizens. He said those efforts are meant to provide options for the Chinese in crisis or conflict.

"When we have discovered them in these critical infrastructures, the first thing that we need to do is to make sure that we get them out," Nakasone said. "The second thing is that we need to have a vigilance that continues onward. This is not an episodic threat that we're going to face. This is persistent ... we have to operate every day; we have to have a vigilance. We have to have offensive and defensive capabilities."

Despite those threats, Nakasone said U.S. cyber warriors are more than adequate defenders of the nation's infrastructure.

"The men and women of U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency continue to maintain our strategic advantage by contesting the threats posed by [China] in cyberspace by using the full scope of our authorities and the full spectrum of our capabilities to impose costs, deny benefits, and encourage restraint on the part of our adversary."

Nakasone also said the U.S. has its own offensive, cyber capability and making that capability well known serves as a deterrent against Chinese cyber aggression.

"We do have the capability, and we're very, very good—the best," Nakasone said. "And in terms of the way that we communicate it, we communicate it in many different ways—from our policymakers who have these discussions to the exercises that we conduct to the real-world examples that, that we do with a series of different partners."

While Nakasone told lawmakers he believed China is a "near-peer adversary," he also reassured those lawmakers that he believes the U.S. will maintain its supremacy in cyberspace.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3663799/>

Air Force Pacific feels like 'home' for new commander of Pacific Air Forces

by Wyatt Olson, Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii - An Air Force fighter pilot who has spent a third of his 36-year career in the Indo-Pacific took command of Pacific Air Forces during a ceremony Friday in a hangar here.

Gen. Kevin "Gumby" Schneider, who received his fourth star the same day, took the reins from Gen. Ken Wilsbach, who now heads to Langley Air Force Base, Va., to head Air Combat Command.

Gen. David Allvin, Air Force Chief of Staff, told the audience he was confident Schneider, with his deep experience in the region, would transition well into the new job.

"He understands the value of partnerships that need to be sustained and enhanced," Allvin said. "He understands airpower in the Pacific."

Schneider also understands the "challenges and sometimes the frustrations" of dealing with the Pentagon, Allvin said. "But he also understands that there's a way that one can work with the Pentagon to ensure that we continue the momentum to find what this theater needs."

Schneider was most recently director of staff at Headquarters Air Force in the Pentagon.

As 31st PACAF commander, Schneider oversees almost 46,000 military and civilian personnel, with major installations in Hawaii, Alaska, Japan, South Korea and Guam. About 350 aircraft are assigned to the command.

"Having spent a third of my career and over a third of my life in the Indo-Pacific, this feels like coming home — because it is," Schneider told the audience. "PACAF is where I learned to be a mission ready fighter pilot, developing the warfighting skills and deep appreciation for tactical teamwork that carried me throughout my career."

From 2019 to 2021, he commanded U.S. Forces Japan out of Yokota Air Base, Japan.

Schneider's previous Indo-Pacific assignments include chief of staff at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and chief of staff at PACAF.

Schneider recollected his first operational assignment in 1990 as an F-16 instructor pilot with the 36th Fighter Squadron at Osan Air Base, South Korea.

"And since that first tour in 1990, I have served in the Indo-Pacific many times, and over the decades, I have watched the security situation in the region change," he said. "It has become more interconnected. It has become more challenging. It has become more severe. And it now carries a far higher potential for volatility."

<https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3672895/>

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Editor.....Scott Sutherland

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The USS Midway Museum is currently recruiting for docents, air craft restoration, ship restoration and safety volunteers. These assignments are a regular commitment of at least 6 months.

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Retired officers, enlisted members can rejoin active duty to offset personnel shortfalls

Secretary of the Air Force
Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Secretary of the Air Force has reimplemented the Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty Program in an effort to leverage the talents of our highly trained and experienced officer and enlisted military retirees to help minimize the service's critical manning shortages. Application window opened Feb. 8.

Applications must be submitted by Jan. 31, 2026, and the program allows up to 1,000 retired officer or enlisted personnel to active duty at any given time. Additionally, under this VRRAD program, the period of active duty service is limited to no more than 48 months. Personnel will only fill vacant active duty authorizations. Retired applicants selected for Extended Active Duty can expect to return to active duty anywhere from 4 to 6 months from their date of application.

"The VRRAD program is a strategic enabler to embrace experienced talent, tapping into a valuable resource of retired members to fill critical roles to close the gap against our peer competitors," said



Lt. Gen. Caroline Miller, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services.

Retired officer applicants are limited to Line of the Air Force commissioned officers retired in the grade of captain through lieutenant colonel. Officers who volunteer to return to active duty under the VRRAD program will primarily fill vacant rated staff, active flying staff, Officer Training School, Squadron Officer School, and Jeanne M. Holm Center academic staff. While all members that meet eligibility may apply, we are targeting the following Air Force special duty codes:

- 11X – Pilot
- 12X – Combat Systems
- 13B – Air Battle Manager
- 13H – Aerospace Physiologist

- 13M – Airfield Operations
- 13N – Nuclear and Missile Operations
- 14X – Information Operations/Intelligence
- 15X – Operations Analysis and Weather
- 16X – Operations Support
- 17X – Cyber Operations
- 18X – Remotely Piloted Aircraft
- 19Z – Special Warfare
- 21X – Logistics
- 31P – Security Forces
- 32E – Civil Engineering
- 35P – Public Affairs
- 38F – Force Support Officer
- 61X – Scientific/Research
- 62X – Developmental Engineering
- 63X – Acquisition
- 64P – Contracting
- 65X – Finance

71S – Special Investigation
Retired enlisted applicants are limited to members retired in the grade of staff sergeant through senior master sergeant. While all members that meet eligibility may apply, the following AFSCs are being targeted:

- 1C171 – Air Traffic Control
- 2G071 – Logistics Plans
- 2T377 – Fleet Management & Analysis
- 3F071 – Personnel
- 3P071 – Security Forces
- 4A271 – Biomedical Equipment
- 4E071 – Public Health
- 4N071 – Aerospace Medical Service
- 4R071 – Diagnostic Imaging
- 7S071 – Special Investigations
- 8R000/8R200 – Recruiter(s)

Information about the Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty Program, to include detailed official program guidance, eligibility criteria and application requirements, can be found via <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3668722/>.



The Navy continues to incentivize service members to remain affiliated even after their Active Duty separation. Navy Recruiting has rolled out a \$20,000 sign on bonus for prior service veterans to keep them in the fight. The Reserves is a part-time option for military service with the opportunity to continue reaping the benefits of Tri-care, SGLI, TSP and more even after active duty.



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Philippines, U.S. partner in Maritime Cooperative Activity in South China Sea

by Lt.j.g. Rebecca Moore
Commander, Destroyer
Squadron 7 Public Affairs

SOUTH CHINA SEA - The Navy and the Philippine Navy (PN) conducted the third iteration of the Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA) in the South China Sea, reaffirming both nations' commitment to bolstering regional security and stability, Feb. 9.

Participating ships included littoral combat ship USS *Gabrielle Giffords*, homeported in San Diego, embarked with a MH-60S Sea Hawk from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 23 from the U.S.; and the Philippine Navy's BRP Gregorio Del Pilar (PS-15) and AW109 Helicopter (NH434).

The MCA displays the enduring partnership between the two militaries and advances combined capabilities in the evolving maritime domain through routine goodwill activities at sea.

During the activity, the allied forces sailed together and participated in advanced planning and maritime communication operations to enhance interoperability.

"We welcome any opportunity

to conduct maritime activities with our allies. Sailing and operating together demonstrates our commitment to improving our interoperability and continued coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines," said Capt. Sean Lewis, Destroyer Squadron 7 commodore.

The U.S. Navy regularly conducts events to strengthen ties among allied and partner nations. MCA enhances combined readiness and capabilities in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Gabrielle Giffords is on a

rotational deployment to the Indo-Pacific, conducting operations, exercises and port visits throughout the region and working hull-to-hull with allied and partner navies to provide maritime security and stability, key pillars of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

DESRON 7 serves as the primary tactical and operational commander of littoral combat ships rotationally deployed to Singapore, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7's Sea Combat Commander and builds partnerships through training exercises

and military-to-military engagements.

7th Fleet is the Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.



MCRD SAN DIEGO (Feb. 8, 2024) Marine Corps drill instructors with Mike Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, inspect a recruit during a senior drill instructor inspection here. The SDI Inspection is the first of several inspections recruits will undergo throughout the duration of their training at MCRD San Diego and aims to ensure the recruits are upholding the uniform orders given to them. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Yvonna Guyette

Fired CO of USS *Howard* got in hot water after 'unprofessional' remarks

The Navy relieved the commanding officer of the Japan-based destroyer *Howard* after the skipper made "unprofessional" remarks, according to a U.S. defense official.

The service announced Feb. 7 that it removed Cmdr. Cameron Dennis, who became the commanding officer of the warship in September, due to a "loss of confidence in his ability to perform his duties."

But a defense official granted anonymity to discuss personnel matters said Dennis' ouster came after a command investigation substantiated allegations that he made "unprofessional comments" in the workplace.

The official declined to provide further information, but another official has confirmed to *Navy Times* that the firing was not connected to Dennis' professional performance.

Dennis is being reassigned to the 7th Fleet staff, while the deputy commodore of Destroyer Squadron 15, Capt Dave Huljack, will serve as commanding officer until a permanent relief is found.

Dennis' dismissal comes less than six months after the Navy removed the previous skipper of the warship, Cmdr. Kenji Igawa, due to a loss of confidence. Days prior to Igawa's removal, the ship encountered a "soft grounding" as it pulled into Bali for a scheduled port visit.

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FORCE PROTECTION | **NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO (Feb. 2, 2024) Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Juan Bautista, assigned to amphibious assault ship Boxer, responds during an anti-terrorism force protection drill here. U.S. photo by MCSN Tyler Miles**



SUNLIT SEA | **Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler Yukon prepares to pull alongside aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt for a replenishment during routine operations in the Philippine Sea, Feb. 2, 2024. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class John A. Mille**



TOP MARINE **Staff Sgt. Shelbie Allen, an air traffic controller at MCAS Camp Pendleton, poses for her recognition Jan. 30, 2024, as the 2024 Marine Corps Installations Command Enlisted Marine of the Year. Allen was recruited out of St. Louis. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Erin A. VandeHoef**

'Confronted with a tragedy:' 3 pilots and 2 crew chiefs killed in Marines helicopter crash outside San Diego

by **Matthew Adams**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON - Three pilots and two crew chiefs were aboard the helicopter that crashed during a training exercise in the mountains outside San Diego, the service said Feb. 9. All five Marines were killed.

Capt. Benjamin Moulton, Capt. Jack Casey, Capt. Miguel Nava, Lance Cpl. Donovan Davis and Sgt. Alec Langen were the Marines aboard the CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter that was traveling Feb. 7 from Creech Air Force Base in Nevada to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, the service said. They were assigned to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16 of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

"We have been confronted with a tragedy that is every service family's worst fear," said Lt. Col. Nicholas Harvey, commanding officer of squadron 361. "Our top priority now is supporting the families of our fallen heroes, and we ask for your respect and understanding as they grieve."

Moulton, 27, was a CH-53E helicopter pilot from Emmett, Idaho. He was commissioned in March 2019 and promoted to captain last August, according to the Marines.

Casey, 26, was a CH-53E helicopter pilot from Dover, N.H. He was commissioned in May 2019 and promoted to captain last September, according to the service.

Nava, 28, was a CH-53E helicopter pilot from Traverse City, Mich. He was the longest tenured of the five fallen Marines. He was

Meyer nominated

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced Feb. 8 that the president has nominated Marine Corps Col. Samuel L. Meyer for appointment to the grade of brigadier general.

Meyer is currently serving as chief of staff, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton.



Top row from left, Capt. Jack Casey, Capt. Benjamin Moulton, Capt. Miguel Nava. Bottom row from left, Sgt. Alec Langen, Lance Cpl. Donovan Davis. U.S. Marine Corps photo

commissioned in May 2017 and promoted to captain in November 2021.

Davis, 21, was a CH-53E helicopter crew chief from Olathe, Kan. He enlisted in the Marines in September 2019 and was promoted to lance corporal last month, the service said.

Langen, 23, was a CH-53E helicopter crew chief from Chandler, Ariz. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in September 2017 and was promoted to sergeant October 2022, the service said.

The helicopter was found Feb. 7 at about 9 a.m. local time in Pine Valley, Calif., according to the 3rd MAW. The service announced Thursday morning that all five Marines were confirmed dead.

Marine Corps leaders, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Presi-

dent Joe Biden expressed their condolences.

"My prayers are with these brave Marines and their families, loved ones and teammates," Austin said. "As the Marine Corps investigates this deadly crash, it is yet another reminder that across our nation and the world our selfless service members put their lives on the line every day to keep our country safe."

Citing hazardous terrain and

weather at the crash site, Col. James C. Ford, operations officer with 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, said the ground recovery efforts will take place over coming weeks as an investigation into the crash is conducted.

The 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, which is headquartered at the Miramar base, has been coordinating search and rescue efforts with federal, state and local agencies such as the San Diego County Sheriff's Department and the Civil Air Patrol. An investigation into the crash is underway.

The last known contact with the helicopter was at about 11:30 p.m. Tuesday, when waves of downpours and snow were hitting the region, Mike Cornette of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection told CBS 8 news.

The area is in the Cuyamaca Mountains at an elevation of about 3,700 feet and saw as much 8 inches of accumulating snow within hours Tuesday night and early Wednesday. More snow fell Wednesday night, forecasters said.



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Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve announces Sea, Shore, Selected Reserve Sailors of the Year

by Chief Petty Officer
Chelsea Milburn
Commander, NARF

SAN DIEGO - Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve (CNAFR) announced its 2023 Sailors of the Year at an awards ceremony at the Coronado Brigantine, Feb. 8, 2024.

The 2023 Sailor of the Year winners are as follows:

CNAFR Sea Sailor of the Year

Aviation Structural Mechanic 1st Class Aaron Doane
Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 60

CNAFR Shore Sailor of the Year:

Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class William Posey
Fighter Squadron Composite 12

CNAFR Selected Reserve Sailor of the Year

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Paul Laughlin
Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 59

During their two days in San Diego ahead of the ceremony,

the 14 finalists visited several Department of Defense and aviation historical sites within the area, had time to network with and receive mentorship from senior enlisted leadership from across the CNAFR enterprise, and conducted their final competition.

The historical sites included the San Diego Air and Space Museum, USS Midway Museum, and the Mount Soledad National Veterans Memorial.

In addition to Doan, Posey, and Laughlin, finalists included:

Naval Aircrewman Mechanical 1st Class Brian Collins
Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve

Logistics Specialist 1st Class Sara Covert
Naval Air Facility Washington D.C.

Yeoman 1st Class Gerda Dessalines
Fleet Readiness Center Reserve Mid-West

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class William Kuechler

Naval Air Facility Washington D.C.

Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Christopher McCoy
Commander, Fleet Logistics Support Wing

Naval Aircrewman Mechanical 1st Class Nathan Pouch
Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 62

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Lorena Ruiz

Electronic Attack Squadron 209

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Scott Stanford
Commander, Maritime Support Wing

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Brandon Stewart
Navy Air Logistics Office

Yeoman 1st Class Madison Tress

Patrol Squadron 62

Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 1st Class Jain Zheng
Airborne Command and Control and Logistics Wing Squadron Augment Unit

Posey and Laughlin will go on to compete for Commander, Navy Reserve Force (CNRF) Sailor of the Year in their respective categories. Doan will go on to compete for

Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNAP) Sea Sailor of the Year.

Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve (CNAFR) mans, trains and equips the Naval Air Force Reserve in order to provide enduring operational support and strategic depth to Navy forces that win in combat.



Mercy returns to San Diego, concluding Pacific Partnership



SAN DIEGO (Feb. 12, 2023) Hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) returns to homeport at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego after completing a deployment in support of Pacific Partnership, the largest multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the Indo-Pacific.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Megan Alexander

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Busch Light CLASH at The Coliseum

In an historic change of plans for NASCAR — and with only about four hours of advance notice given — the feature races of the 2024 “Busch Light CLASH at The Coliseum” (non-Championship pre-season race) and the “King Taco La Batalla en El Coliseo” (the NASCAR Mexico Series race) were rescheduled from Sunday, February 4 to Saturday due to unprecedented, life-threatening, heavy rain predicted for Sunday in Los Angeles. The event’s live music, heat races and more were cancelled.

Fans who had bought tickets to attend the races on Sunday were suddenly confronted with no racing that day, and there were hardly any spectators in the grandstands on Saturday. No doubt NASCAR, FOX TV and the vendors, who had bought merchandise to sell on Sunday, suffered big losses.

Considering the circumstances, by advancing the day of the races NASCAR had made the best out of what was certainly going to be impossible conditions for racing on Sunday. The only thing that NASCAR could have done better would have been to have made this decision earlier, since the weather forecasts had consistently been predicting very bad weather in the LA area for several days in advance.

In the past two years I’d walked all over the LA Memorial Coliseum venue, checking out not only the immediate area of the racetrack,

Unprecedented deluge of rain in L.A. upends NASCAR CLASH

but also the pits (a few blocks away — since the Coliseum is not nearly large enough to include them), the large vendor areas and more. This year, however, I no longer had enough time to do that.

The racing was good with plenty of surprises, ‘bumping and banging,’ and not-so-gentle moving of competitors out of the way. Despite the tight confines of such a short track, drivers were still able to move up from the back to the front. Denny Hamlin won the CLASH.

This year there was also a NASCAR Mexico Series race. Thankfully the rain held off on Saturday night, with just a very light sprinkling of rain during the final laps. NASCAR Cup Series’ Daniel Suarez, who used to race in that series, won.

For results of the 2024 NASCAR Busch Light CLASH at The Coliseum visit [nascar.com](https://www.nascar.com), and for the King Taco La Batalla en El Coliseo visit <https://www.race-monitor.com/Results/Session/8014631>.

While I was taking photos from the upper levels of the Coliseum, where I had a bird’s eye view of the racetrack down below, I spotted something unexpected in the distance. To the right of the tall buildings of downtown Los Angeles, at the California Science Center, I noticed what looked like a full-scale mockup of a NASA space shuttle.

I have been covering San Diego’s Fleet Science Center for over 20 years but I had never been to the California Science Center, so I walked over to check it out more closely. I learned that what I’d seen was the actual

Space Shuttle Endeavor, which had just been moved from its temporary home inside the museum. Earlier in the week a crane had lifted it up and set it down upright amongst two solid rocket boosters and an external fuel tank. A photographer told me that over the next two years an incredible exhibit will be built there. Supposedly J.J. Abrams will be helping to create an exhibit which will begin with visitors watching a movie of the Endeavor lifting off. The movie screen will then be raised to reveal the actual space shuttle, complete with flames and smoke emerging from its rocket’s engines.

Admission to the galleries is FREE. Since Sunday’s racing had been cancelled, I spent the day at the California Science Center. I look forward to sharing some of the photos that I took there in a future column. In the meantime, visit the California Science Center at <https://californiasciencecenter.org/>.

News reports that began on Sunday showed the devastation caused by the heavy rains. There was flooding, as well as landslides. People died. On my drive home south from Los Angeles on Sunday evening in heavy rain, I could barely see the lane markings on the freeways. The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reported a three-day total of 8.51 inches of rain for “LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN USC, CA.”

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit “AutoMatters & More” at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue ‘years’ boxes and browse. Copyright © 2024 by Jan Wagner — AutoMatters & More #826

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

Our family’s third Labrador Retriever, a goofy guy named Gilligan, turned one last week. Suddenly, everyone’s a dog expert, hell-bent on enriching me with their wealth of canine knowledge. People must see me struggling with rambunctious Gilly, and want to assert dominance, nipping, bossing, and taking control.

Thankfully, no one has humped my leg yet.

Just last week, Gilly and I joined a new walking group outside the local recreation center. The congregating women noticed Gilly sniffing the bushes and raised their voices to an excited pitch. Gilly strained at his harness, wanting to flop his big paws onto the women’s expensive coats, deposit yellow hairs all over their Lululemon pants, and lick them right in the mouth.

“Gilly! Back!” I repeatedly tried to make him sit.

“Isn’t he sweet!” they squealed, while Gilly wriggled to break free.

“He’s turning one, and he’s a handful,” I said, apologetically.

“Oh, but he’s a puppy! You just need to be consistent,” they advised.

I smiled and nodded my head with brows raised as if to say, “You’re so wise,” when my inner voice retorted, “Thanks for the expert advice, Captain Obvious.”

“He’ll go to Island Canine Academy for behavior training in a couple months,” I said. “Gilly’s off to college!” I joked. “We’ve promised him a tiny lava lamp and a ‘Lassie’ poster for his crate at the Academy, isn’t that right buddy?”

No one laughed. A short lady with a red hat that made her look like a gnome told me about her Westie named Charlie. “I trained him using treats. You should try that,” Gnome said. My inner voice dripped sarcasm, “Eureka, Einstein! Treats to train dogs? Who knew! Thank you from the bottom of my ignominious heart!”

Our walking group leader arrived, and we began the planned four-mile trek. The gaggle of women naturally settled into packs of two or three, while Gilly tugged, stopped, sniffed, and yanked along with me.

I was between two packs when I heard, “Hey!” A thin woman wearing a hat with a humongous, mauve pom-pom trotted to catch up with me, blurring breathlessly, “Get a gentle leader. It’s the only thing that works for pulling dogs.” I’ve been told by countless people that this or that collar/leash/harness is the only one that works. Prong, electric, slip, martingale, harness — everyone and their brother’s cousin’s mother-in-law, seemed to have an opinion for me. I tried to tell Pom-pom about my experiences with gentle leaders, but she just kept yammering.

POM-POM: “The gentle leader goes around the dog’s—”

ME: “Yes, I know how it—”

POM-POM: “—snout, and it keeps them from—”

ME: “—works, because I used gentle leaders for our first—”

POM-POM: “—pulling. You

Pet peeve

need to get one, seriously.”

ME: “—dog to stop his pulling.”

Mercifully, Gilly dragged me toward a fat squirrel ahead, leaving Pom-pom behind. Another woman in an ice-blue beanie saw Gilly tugging me and chirped, “My sister has Goldens, and she swears, ‘If you can teach dogs to retrieve balls, you can teach them anything.’” My inner voice couldn’t stay silent any longer. “You’re sister says that teaching a RETRIEVER to RETRIEVE is the key to dog training? She’s a real genius that one,” I sassed Beanie.

Gilly stopped to sniff grass, and I heard Gnome call out, “Do you brush Gilligan’s teeth?”

“Well, yes, but he’s afraid of the —” I began, but like Pom-pom, Gnome’s questions were merely rhetorical.

GNOME: “We brush Charlie’s teeth every night, before he—”

ME: “—brush, but he likes the Peanut Butter dog toothpaste, so I—”

GNOME: “—goes to bed and says his prayers, and—”

ME: “—have to use a cloth next time.”

GNOME: “—the vet says Charlie’s teeth are perfect.”

My inner voice quipped, “Who died and made you Cesar Milan?”

As we approached the rec center at the end of our trek, Gilly stopped abruptly, circled three times, then crouched to make “a deposit” on the grass in front of the bank. The women walked on, without noticing that I’d fallen behind the pack.

“Forget behavior school, I’ll train you myself,” I announced to Gilly while he concentrated. “Don’t worry,” I assured him, “we’ll still get you that lava lamp.”

Veterans News/ Fleet Reserve Association

Accusations at VA regarding sexual misconduct

The House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) is investigating allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct within the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion. ORMDI is the office charged with preventing sexual harassment and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within VA.

Earlier, the HVAC voted on a bipartisan basis (22-1) to subpoena numerous documents from the VA following their failure to address allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct properly and adequately. To date, the VA has failed to fully comply with the congressional subpoena. The Committee received a copy of the VA’s internal investigation conducted by the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. The report was damning and substantiated many of the serious allegations the Committee uncovered; however, it fails to fully capture the scope of material the Committee requested.

The HVAC Chairman, Mike Bost, issued a statement that due to VA’s failure to hold its leaders

accountable, the Committee will continue to conduct its investigation to ensure all VA leaders are held fully accountable and to determine if legislative action must be taken to ensure employees at VA are safe from harassment.

Navy allowing those without high school diploma or GED to enlist

The Navy’s Chief of Naval Personnel, Adm. Rick Cheeseman, announced that the Navy will allow those without a high school diploma to enlist if they score 50 or higher on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, which all potential recruits must take. This move aims to boost recruitment amid an historic recruiting crisis across the services. Federal law permits the military to recruit such applicants, and the Navy last allowed those without a diploma to enlist in 2000.

Currently, the Navy is the only military branch seeking to recruit those without a high school diploma or GED, aiming to expand the number of eligible candidates to join the service amid a historically difficult recruiting environment. The Navy insists the policy change does not mean the service is lowering its standards and emphasizes that these prospective Sailors must

still qualify for specific ratings based on their Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) line scores.

The Navy recently announced it recruited 30,236 new active-duty Sailors in fiscal 2023, falling more than 7,400 short of the 37,700 target for the year. The service also recruited 1,948 Reserve enlisted personnel, down from its 3,000 goal.

The Navy also failed to meet its officer goals, recruiting only 2,080 new active-duty officers rather than the 2,532 target, and 1,167 Reserve officers rather than the 1,940 target.

CFPB protecting veterans from predatory loans

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recently sent \$6 million in financial relief to consumers harmed by illegal lending practices targeting veterans. Five people and their companies misled veterans and other consumers into selling their pension and disability payments, which is illegal under federal and relevant state law. These transactions were instead illegal high-interest loans.

The lawsuits involved the following individuals and entities: - Mark Corbett

- Andrew Gamber, Voyager Financial Group, LLC; BAIC, Inc., and SoBell Corp

- Katharine Snyder, Performance Arbitrage Company, Inc. and Life Funding Options, Inc.

- Candy Kern-Fuller and Howard Sutter III, attorneys at Upstate Law Group LLC

The payments total \$5,126,262 from the CFPB’s victims relief fund and \$721,990 from money paid by the defendants. Most veterans will automatically receive a refund check.

In 2019, the CFPB and the

state of Arkansas reached an agreement with Andrew Gamber and his companies, who brokered high-interest loans to veterans and other consumers. In partnership with the state of South Carolina, CFPB also filed a lawsuit against Katharine Snyder, Candy Kern-Fuller, and Howard Sutter III and their companies for similar actions. Mark Corbett, who worked with Gamber and Snyder, violated the Consumer Financial Protection

Act by misleading consumers about interest rates and contract validity, as well as payment timing.

The FRA wants to ensure that the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act is enforced by regulatory agencies, including the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Office of Military Affairs, and wants to ensure that active-duty personnel are protected from predatory lenders.



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Friday, February 9
 6:00 PM The Book of Clarence pg13

Saturday - February 10
 1:00 Aquaman (LAST SHOWING) pg13

6pm Land of Bad (ADVANCE SCREENING) r

Sunday, February 11
 1:00 PM Migration (LAST SHOWING) pg

3:00 PM Mean Girls pg13

Friday - February 16
 6pm (EXCLUSIVE NEW RELEASE) Madame Web

Saturday - February 17
 12:50 PM The Boys in the Boat (LAST SHOWING) pg13

3:30 PM American Fiction r

6:00 PM Madame Web pg13

Sunday - February 18
 1:00 PM Mean Girls (2024) pg13

3:30 PM The Iron Claw r

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Thursday - February 8
 6:00 PM Night Swim pg13

8:00 PM The Iron Claw r

Friday - February 9
 5:50 PM Migration pg

8:00 PM Mean Girls (2024) pg13

Saturday - February 10
 3:00 PM The Book of Clarence pg13

5:50 PM Aquaman/Lost Kingdom pg13

Sunday - February 11
 1:00 PM Migration pg

3:10 PM Mean Girls (2024) pg13

Thursday - February 15
 5:50 PM Mean Girls (2024) pg13

8:20 PM The Book of Clarence pg13

Friday - February 16
 6:00 PM American Fiction r

Saturday - March 9
 6:00 PM Arthur the King (ADVANCE SCREENING) pg13

Pendleton Theater and Training Center
 Bldg 1330 Mainside (Across from Mainside Center)

Saturday, February 10
 1:30pm Aquaman/Lost Kingdom (PG13)

4:30pm The Boys in the Boat (PG13)

Saturday, February 17
 1:30pm Night Swim (PG13)

4:30pm The Iron Claw (R)

Bob Hope Theater 577-4143
 MCAS Miramar Bldg 2242

Friday, February 9
 6:00 PM The Book of Clarence (PG-13)

Saturday, February 10
 3pm Aquaman/Lost Kingdom (PG-13)

6:30 PM Mean Girls - 2024 (PG-13)

Sunday, February 11
 12:00 PM Mean Girls - 2024 (PG-13)

3:00 PM The Iron Claw (R)

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Will withdrawing from 401(k) affect my Social Security?

Dear Rusty: My full retirement age (FRA) is 66 and 8 months, which I'll reach in September 2024. I'm still working 3 days a week. I want to cash in my 401K and want to know if I have to wait until my FRA for IRS purposes or can cash it in anytime in 2024. I don't want to affect my Social Security or end up paying taxes on my benefits.

Signed: Seeking to Avoid Taxes

Dear Seeking: We're not experts on IRS matters here at the AMAC Foundation so I can't address 401(k) questions, but we can provide information on your Social Security circumstances and how 401(k) withdrawals may affect your SS. I assume from your question that you are now receiving early Social Security and wish to avoid any tax consequences thereto by cashing in your 401(k), as well as from working. Here's what you need to know:

- Since you will reach your full retirement age (FRA) in 2024, your 2024 work earnings limit will be \$59,520 up to the month you reach FRA. If you were born in January 1958, you'll attain FRA in September 2024. After you have reached your FRA there is no longer a Social Security limit to how much you can earn from working, so your work earnings thereafter will not affect your monthly Social Security benefit regardless of how much you earn. If your part time work between January and August 2024 won't put you over the \$59,520 limit, your work earnings will not negatively affect your gross monthly Social Security benefit.

- Assuming you are on Medicare, the premium for which is deducted from your Social Security payment, withdrawals from your 401(k) might affect your net monthly Social Security payment in two years hence. Medicare premiums are based upon your combined income from all sources, including 50% of the SS benefits you received during the tax year. If your 401(k) withdrawal(s) put you over an income threshold for your tax filing status, you may be required to pay an "IRMAA" (Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount) on top of the standard Medicare premium. That IRMAA supplement would be deducted from your Social Security, which would affect the net amount of your Social Security payment. Your Medicare premium for each coming year is determined by your combined income from two years prior, so if you "cash in" your 401(K) in 2024, it would affect your net Social Security payments in 2026.

- Whether you will pay income tax on your Social Security benefits is determined by your combined income from everywhere, which the IRS calls your "Modified Adjusted Gross Income" or "MAGI." MAGI is your income from all sources (except ROTH IRA withdrawals) and includes half of the SS benefits you received during the tax year. If you file your taxes as a single, and your MAGI is over \$25,000 – or if you file your taxes as "married-jointly" and your MAGI is over \$32,000 – then 50% of the Social Security benefits received during the tax year becomes part of your overall income taxed by the IRS (at your normal IRS tax rate). But if your MAGI as a single filer is more than \$34,000 – or as a married/jointly filer over \$44,000 – then up to 85% of the SS benefits received during the tax year becomes part of your overall income taxed by the IRS.

So, to recap:

1. Your part time work earnings in 2024 won't affect your monthly Social Security benefit, unless your 2024 work earnings prior to September 2024 exceed \$59,520.

2. Depending on the amount of your 401(k) withdrawals, your 2026 net Social Security payments may be impacted by Medicare's IRMAA provision. But your 401(k) withdrawals will not affect your gross Social Security payments.

3. Depending on the amount of your 401(k) withdrawals, some of the Social Security benefits received during the 2024 tax year will likely be subject to income tax. That is, if your annual total income, including your 401(k) withdrawals, exceeds the MAGI thresholds described above.

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Join the 28th Annual ShamROCK St. Paddy's Day shenanigans March 16

Lace up your dancing shoes and grab a pint – the 28th Annual ShamROCK Music + Beer Festival proudly announces a lineup of toe-tapping live music and entertainment for this year's event. On Saturday, March 16, from 2-11 pm, experience the lively atmosphere of the city's longest-running St. Paddy's Day celebration in the Emerald-hued streets of the Gaslamp Quarter. For nearly 3 decades, ShamROCK has been an annual beacon of Irish culture, blending the artistry of a good brew with the energetic pulse of live Celtic music. It has become an unmissable event for beer and whiskey connoisseurs, music enthusiasts, Irish brethren, and anyone seeking an epic Gaelic San Diego day.

Spanning four emerald-carpeted blocks in the Historic Gaslamp Quarter, ShamROCK boasts three stages for a musical event like none other. Presented by The Field Irish Pub, the Pint Stage will evoke the lively atmosphere of Ireland with performances by the region's top Irish and Celtic acts, with Irish dance performances by Na Scealaithe Irish Dancers between sets.

Get ready for a euphoric journey of musical nostalgia at the Rainbow Stage! While the Pint Stage brings you the authentic pulse of Ireland with its top Irish and Celtic acts, the Rainbow Stage is set to come alive with melodies of the region's top tribute and cover bands playing renditions of familiar favorites.

The ShamROCK Shenanigans Stage is the heart of jovial competitions and lighthearted fun, featuring FREE Shenanigan Showdowns all day. Flaunt your best Irish jig, test your luck in Leprechaun Tug-of-War, or compete in Blamey Stone Balancing. Games like Gaelic Jenga and Shillelagh Cornhole await, alongside unique contests like Unicorn Races and Rainbow Streamer Relays. The mischievous ShamROCK leprechaun emcee will be orchestrating these showdowns, offering prizes sure to make your friends green with envy.

For more information, tickets, and more, visit www.SanDiegoShamROCK.com

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NavHosp Camp Pendleton celebrates 10th Anniversary of new hospital

by Curtis Hill

Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton celebrated 10 years of operation in their newest facility and location on Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2024, with the Pacific Ocean as the backdrop.

Providing congratulatory comments at the ceremony were Rear Adm. Guido Valdes, director of Defense Health Network Pacific Rim; Navy Capt. Jenny Burkett, director of Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton; and retired Master Chief Petty Officer Kevin Burg, former Command Master Chief of Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton.

Valdes' comments were mainly directed at the Sailors and staff who work at Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton.

"I want to specifically recognize the men and women who work tirelessly every single day at this hospital to support and provide outstanding care to our Sailors, Marines and families," Valdes said while addressing the Sailors in formation. "Be proud of what you do every day."

Dozens of plank owners of the facility were in attendance and recognized during the ceremony.

Plank owners are designated as those service members and civilian staff who were assigned to or employed by Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton at the time the new facility was dedicated.

Burkett recognized one of the plank owners individually with a command coin.

"Jason Obregon was one of the first people to set foot inside the building before the staff and the patients arrived and he continues to support us working here today," she said.

The facility being celebrated is the third hospital to serve the population of Camp Pendleton.

The first hospital was placed in commission in September 1943 and was called Naval Hospital Santa Margarita Ranch. The second began operation in December 1974 and it remained in service until completion of the new facility. Both previous facilities were in the Lake O'Neill area of the base.

On March 19, 2009, construction of the new facility was approved in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The groundbreaking ceremony

was conducted on Dec. 2, 2010, and construction was completed on Oct. 17, 2013.

According to a press release from Clark Construction from Oct. 24, 2013, the project was delivered six months ahead of schedule and more than \$100 million under budget and was a joint venture between the design-build team of Clark Construction Group, LLC, and McCarthy Building Companies, Inc.

The grand opening, dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Jan. 31, 2014.

Although Burg retired just a few short months before the grand opening, he was here through most of the construction phase. He addressed the staff about the importance of each member of the hospital team.

"As nice as this facility is and with the many memories many of us have of the old facility, it's important to understand that this would just be a nice-looking building if it weren't for all of you," Burg said while addressing the hospital staff. "I know it sounds cliché, but it is the truth.



Navy Capt. Jenny Burkett, director of Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton, and retired Master Chief Petty Officer Kevin Burg, former Command Master Chief of Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton, cut a ceremonial cake on Jan. 30, 2024, in celebration of the 10-Year Anniversary of the grand opening of the current hospital held aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. Photo By PO2 Caitriona Estrada

You make this building a beacon of hope to everyone who drives by ... knowing they will receive the best care as long as you work here," he added.

Burkett's comments included two key numbers: there have been more than 7.5 million patient encounters and more than 11,500

babies delivered in the hospital since it opened 10 years ago. She also spoke of history of Navy Medicine aboard Camp Pendleton and then looked to the future of continuing the mission.

"One thing that will not change is Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton has been and will continue to be a

facility that focuses on providing ready, reliable care to our patients and beneficiaries and provides a ready medical force of trained, experienced medical professionals through our graduate medical and dental education programs and our day-to-day treatment of patients," she said as she wrapped up her comments.

National Wear Red Day, raising awareness from NMCS D



SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Feb. 1, 2024). With cardiovascular disease being the number one killer for women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Naval Medical Center San Diego's (NMCS D) Cardiology Department is wearing red in observance of National Wear Red Day. 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 5,000 active-duty military personnel, civilians and contractors in southern California to provide patients with world-class care anytime, anywhere. Photo by Marcelo Calero

With cardiovascular disease being the number one killer for women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Naval Medical Center San Diego's (NMCS D) Cardiology Department is wearing red in observance of National Wear Red Day.

"With cardiovascular disease being the number one cause for morbidity and mortality in the U.S., it is important for NMCS D to take advantage of every opportunity to raise awareness," said Cmdr. Cicely Dye, NMCS D Cardiology department head and staff electrophysiologist. "This is

not only a professional crusade for me, but a personal one as well as I want nothing more than to get this message out."

Dye, a Chicago, Ill., native, is also a U.S. Naval Academy graduate who conducted her full spectrum of medical training at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

"I was touched by the medical care that was being given at Walter Reed and wanted to devote my military service to serving the medical needs of active military members as well as their families and retirees," expresses Dye. "I

decided to do cardiology because I wanted to do a procedural specialty but still have a long-standing close relationship with my patients. I sub-specialized to electrophysiology because while working as cardiology staff at [Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune], I realized that arrhythmias were very impactful to our active-duty population. Treating arrhythmias and ensuring that our military is ready to fight is most fulfilling to me."

Dye is not alone at NMCS D. Cmdr. Luke Oakley, NMCS D interventional cardiologist shares a similar conviction when it comes

to cardiovascular disease.

"I was driven to pursue a career in medicine – and in the military – out of a passion to understand how things work and a desire to help others," said Oakley. "Success in this field requires a unique combination of knowledge, skill, and empathy. My earliest influences in medicine were my mother who was a nurse and my grandfather who was a physician in the Army during WWII."

A native of Omaha, Neb., Oakley graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor's of Engineering degree from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn. He obtained a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C.

"In college I studied Biomedical Engineering out of a desire to understand how things work, but quickly realized I missed the humanism of medicine," stated Oakley. "Interventional Cardiology is a rapidly evolving field that leverages technological innovation to help patients live their best lives. It's a field that balances all the things I love in medicine; compassion in helping patients along their journey to health, and advanced procedures which can save or improve their quality of life."

To this end, NMCS D's Cardiology Department offers rapid cardiac evaluation and treatment to improve the lives of our active-duty service members, beneficiaries, and family members.

"Patients who come here for

their cardiovascular care have access to top trained cardiovascular specialists and subspecialists," said Oakley. "Our only goal is to help our patients – the nation's best – live full, healthy, and happy lives. So it is occasions like Wear Red Day that we use to get the message out. The other component of the message is to let everyone know just how proud and fortunate we are to serve at NMCS D."

NMCS D continuously seeks professional civilian talent, not just limited to health care providers and administrative support.

For anyone seeking a federal job, visit USAJobs at usajobs.gov - the Federal Government's official employment site.

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.



SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Feb. 2, 2024) Cmdr. Cicely Dye, NMCS D Cardiology department head and staff electrophysiologist and Cmdr. Luke Oakley, NMCS D interventional cardiologist shares a similar conviction when it comes to cardiovascular disease. "With cardiovascular disease being the number one cause for morbidity and mortality in the U.S., it is important for NMCS D to take advantage of every opportunity to raise awareness," said Cmdr. Cicely Dye. Photo by Marcelo Calero.

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