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TAKING A LOOK UNDER THE HOOD Aerospace propulsion Airmen assigned to the 6th Maintenance Squadron inspect the engine of a KC-135 Stratotanker at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., earlier this month. Aerospace propulsion specialists are responsible for the maintenance, repair and testing of aircraft engines, turbines and other propulsion systems. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Derrick Bole

DOD releases 2025 basic allowance for housing rates

by Joseph Clark, DOD News

Basic allowance for housing rates will increase by 5.4 percent, on average, in 2025, the Defense Department announced recently.

The new rates, which go into effect Jan. 1, reflect a continuation in recent rental housing market trends across the 299 military housing areas used to calculate BAH annually.

“This is pretty much in line with the same increase we saw between last year’s rates and the previous year, which was around a little over 5 percent as well,” said Summer Britford, the allowance division chief in the Office of the Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness Military Compensation Policy Directorate. “The housing market continues to trend upward consistently this year as it did last year.”

The department will pay an estimated \$29.2 billion in BAH to approximately one million service members in 2025.

The allowance, which is paid to active-duty service members stationed in the U.S. when government housing is not available, is aligned to housing costs of civilians with comparable incomes. Rates are based on median rental and average utility costs for suitable housing commensurate with service members’ pay grade and dependency status.

Britford said BAH is a significant component of service members’ overall pay and has a significant impact on the well-being of military families. She added that, in keeping with Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s commitment to taking care of those who serve, the department remains committed to ensuring the annual BAH calculations meet service members’ needs.

“Our goal is to make sure that the overall compensation package remains strong and that it remains competitive,” Britford said. “And with BAH being such a huge component of that we are focused on making sure we get it right.”

The department incorporates a variety of sources to set rates each year, including data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau as well as leading property listing services.

In calculating rates, the department excludes unsuitable housing, such as rentals in high-crime areas or in areas with average incomes less than the regular military compensation of an E1 without dependents or more than an O7 with dependents, to ensure the allowance compensates members for adequate housing in their local communities.

CENTCOM STRIKES ISIS, NEW CARRIER GROUP ENTERS REGION

by Matthew Olay, DOD News

U.S. Central Command forces recently conducted precision air strikes targeting ISIS camps and operatives in Syria, the Defense Department has announced.

“Battle damage assessments are ongoing [and there are] no indications of civilian casualties,” Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Dec. 16.

Ryder added that those initial

assessments indicate approximately one dozen ISIS fighters were killed in the strikes.

When questioned as to whether there is any concern within the Pentagon that the Dec. 8 downfall of President Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria could ostensibly lead to ISIS making attempts to free its detained fighters from prison camps in the region, Ryder said that DOD is working with the Syrian Democratic Forces to ensure the situation doesn’t deteriorate.

“[The prison camp situation] presents a significant security concern in the sense that, were ISIS able to affect some type of breakout of any detention facility, that would be a significant setback and something that would be very concerning,” Ryder said.

“[That’s] why we continue to work very closely with the SDF to ensure that those detainees can continue to be held, [and we’re also] working with the international community to attempt to repatriate many of those detainees; that is something that we’ll continue to communicate very closely with the SDF to ensure,” he added.

In other Centcom developments, Ryder announced that the *Harry S. Truman* Carrier Strike Group entered its area of responsibility on Dec. 14.

The group consists of *Truman*, cruiser *Gettysburg* and destroyers *Stout* and *Jason Dunham*.

The *Truman* CSG follows recent deployments to the same region by *Abraham Lincoln* CSG and *USS Theodore Roosevelt* CSG before it.



Soldiers depart Operation Inherent Resolve base in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle Convoy in Northeast Syria, Dec. 10, 2024. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Alexander Johnson

Pentagon official imprisoned for role in multistate dogfighting ring

STARS AND STRIPES - A former Pentagon official has been sentenced to 18 months in federal prison for taking part in a multistate dogfighting ring and for fatally electrocuting the dogs that lost. Frederick Douglass Moorefield Jr., 64, of Arnold, Md., also received six months of home detention Dec. 12 in Maryland District Court. Moorefield pleaded guilty Sept. 13 to a single count of conspiracy to engage in an animal fighting venture, as well as interstate travel in aid of a racketeering enterprise.

Service academies report first decline in sexual assault rates in a decade

The prevalence of sexual assault at the military service academies saw its first decline in 10 years, according to the preliminary findings from the Service Academy Gender Relations Survey for academic program year 2023-24, released recently. The data suggests DoD’s efforts to address these issues may be gaining traction. “This year, for the first time in 10 years, the department is seeing a decrease in sexual assault prevalence at the military service academies,” said Beth Foster, executive director for the Office of Force Resiliency, at the media roundtable. “This disrupts what had been an alarming increasing trend in sexual assault at the academies.”

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PROTECTING WARFIGHTER READINESS 1 SMILE AT A TIME

by Katie Lange
DOD News

Dentistry isn't the first thing that pops into one's mind when it comes to sailor and submariner readiness. But having to be taken via medevac off a vessel in the far-flung Pacific Ocean because of an abscessed tooth wouldn't be the best way for a sailor to get on their commander's good side.

The Navy's Dental Corps is made up of about 1,300 active-duty and reserve dentists who are experts in 15 specialties. Their work is necessary to ensure sailors can spend months at a time on deployment without having overt issues that might temporarily derail a mission.

Nowhere is that more evident than at Naval Hospital Bremerton, Wash., and its three health clinics, where personnel delivered dental care to over 12,300 active-duty beneficiaries in 2023, including soldiers and airmen from Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Wash.

"Our mission is readiness, which means we keep sailors and warfighters ready to go ... on a moment's notice," said Navy Cmdr. Doug Steffy, an oral and maxillofacial radiologist assigned to Navy Medical Readiness Training Command Bremerton. "The goal is to get them to where they will not need

any dental services for at least 12 months."

Steffy is one of only 11 oral and maxillofacial radiologists in the entire Navy — there are even fewer in the Air Force and Army — so he spends a lot of his time reading advanced digital imag-



Naval Hospital Bremerton's oral surgery team recently visited nearby Bud Hawk Elementary School to promote Children's Dental Health Month, which included teaching a classroom full of first graders the importance of brushing all surfaces of their teeth and flossing properly with visual aids and props. Photo by Douglas H. Stutz/Navy

ing for Bremerton and its clinics, as well as other commands.

"I get scans for the whole Pacific Northwest. It doesn't matter whether they're Army, Navy or Air Force," he said.

Bremerton's clinics, which Steffy commands, treat only

active-duty service members, many of whom are submariners between the ages of 18-24. All of the patients are classified into four groups:

Class 1: These patients have zero dental needs and are 100% healthy.

Class 2: There are no dental needs that will cause a problem in the next few months.

Class 3: There's a significant enough problem, such as a cavity, that could potentially cause the patient problems in the next year and interrupt their deployment.

Class 4: The patient hasn't had a dental visit in more than a year.

"Our goal is to get everyone to Class 1," Steffy said.

Within the military, Class 4 is a rarity. Unlike civilians who like to avoid the dentist, service members don't get that choice.

"We can force you to come," Steffy said. "You can't go out to sea unless we say you're ready."

That requirement to be seen has helped discover some serious issues early on, Steffy said,

such as tumors that patients couldn't feel growing.

"We've had multiple cases of patients coming in and us identifying an abnormal area of their head and neck, their bone, and then doing biopsy follow-up work and catching a truly malignant lesion, cutting it out and solving the problem," Steffy said. "If they were to wait a few more years, who knows?"

The Navy Medical Readiness Training Command clinics in the Pacific Northwest are able to do great work thanks to advanced digital technology, including computer-aided drilling and milling machines that can print dentures, implants and other dental objects. Root canal and crown procedures, for example, are completed much faster using the tech, and they save a significant amount of money.

"[For a crown], it used to take 10 to 14 days — you'd come in, get the procedure done, we would put a temporary [crown] on you and send you away. You'd come back in about two weeks, and we would cement a final product," Steffy said. "Now, they can come and be gone in two hours with the final product."

One notion Steffy would like to dispel: The care provided by active-duty Navy dentists is somehow substandard to that of civilian dentists.

"All of us are trained the exact same way every private practice dentist in the whole world is trained," said Steffy, who went to dental school at UCLA and did his residency at the University of Texas, San Antonio. "There is no military dental school. ... The difference is I'm not trying to sell you a treatment. I'm just telling you what you're going to get."

Military dentists keep up with private practice standards and meet the advancements in technology that are found in schools

and institutions.

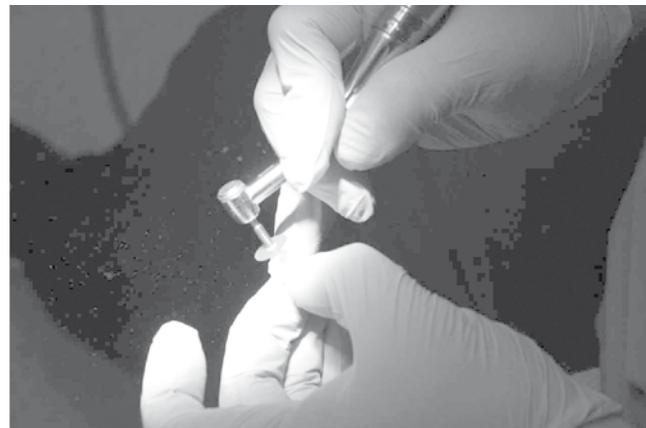
"I'm not licensed by the Navy. I'm licensed by the state of Washington, so I have to maintain the exact same standard as every dentist in the state," Steffy said. "We're also subject to the same disciplinary problems. ... Actually, we're probably held more accountable than private practice because we have peer review, which means every month, some other dentist has to evaluate five of my procedures and say, 'Yes, these are up to the standard of care.'"

Steffy, who's a married Marine Corps veteran with three

move talent up through the ranks and retain good clinicians and people to fill top leadership roles," he said. "I would encourage people to not be afraid to consider military service, as far as health care goes."

Steffy said private practice has its downsides, including feelings of isolation and having to maintain a business on one's own. In the military, however, there are plenty of peer professionals to reach out to for help, advice or to learn a new skill.

"I have direct access to a surgeon, to radiologists, to comprehensive dentists who've been



Dental Assistant August S. Cerera puts the finishing touches on a final dental product at Naval Hospital Bremerton's Branch Health Clinic Bangor Dental Clinic. Photo by Douglas H. Stutz/Navy

children, said his family loves the experiences that come with moving duty stations every few years. But he knows he's in the minority when it comes to military dentists. He said most who enlist get out after their four-year obligation, so finding capable dentists who are willing to stay in the service is always a priority.

"They're always looking to

doing this for 20 years and we're not competing with each other for patients or money," he said.

Another benefit — he's learned valuable lessons in leadership.

"Mentoring all these different people ages 18-55 and helping us all accomplish our goals together has been rewarding for me," he said.





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GOP senators urge rejection of military draft for women

by Matthew Olay
DOD News

The Missile Defense Agency, recently conducted a live intercept of a ballistic missile target from Guam, the Pentagon has announced.

Partnering with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and other Defense Department partners, MDA's Guam test represented the first ballistic missile defense test executed from that U.S. territory, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh told the media Dec. 11.

"During the test, the Aegis Guam System intercepted an air-launched medium range ballistic missile targeted off the coast of Guam," Singh said.

The test entailed the Aegis Guam System integrating with a specialized radar and vertical launching system. That integrated system fired a Standard Missile-3 Block IIA, which intercepted an air-launched medium range ballistic missile target off the coast of Guam's Andersen Air Force Base, according to an MDA press release.

"The event marked a pivotal step taken in the defense of



A Standard Missile-3 Block IIA launches from a vertical launching system at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, during Flight Experiment Mission-02, Dec. 10. Courtesy photo

Guam and provides critical support to the overall concept for the future Guam defense systems," Singh said.

The test, which MDA designated as Flight Experiment Mission-02, supported "the overall concept, requirements validation, data-gathering and model maturation for the future Guam Defense System," according to the release.

"This is a tremendous group effort and provides a glimpse of how organizations within the [department] have come together

to defend our homeland Guam now and, in the future," MDA Director, Air Force Lt. Gen. Heath Collins, is quoted in the release.

"Collectively," the quote continues, "we will use this to build upon and validate joint tracking architecture and integrated air and missile defense capabilities for Guam. Thanks to all of those

involved, especially the people and government of Guam."

"Today's flight test is a critical milestone in the defense of Guam and the region," Commander, Joint Task Force-Micronesia Navy Rear Adm. Greg Huffman, is quoted in the release.

"It confirmed our ability to detect, track and engage a target missile in flight, increasing our readiness to defend against evolving adversary threats. The event's success is a testament to the incredible work of the team both within the DOD and the government of Guam," he added.

Originally proposed by MDA in early June, the flight test underwent an extensive environmental assessment/overseas environmental assessment before being approved.

MDA's proposed action going forward is to conduct up to two flight tests or tracking exercises, per year, over the next 10 years, according to MDA's website.



Army

- New tool lets brigades 'see' their electronic warfare footprint
- She joined the Army at 45. Now she's vying to be an Army Golden Knight
- Army using existing programs to run risk reduction on new starts in light of continuing resolutions
- The defense policy bill is handing the Army a to-do list

Navy

- Flight officer with extensive Japan experience takes helm of Okinawa's Navy command
- Littoral combat ships to sail with Mk70 vertical launchers strapped to their decks

Marine Corps

- Marines reactivate East Coast squadron with Corps' newest fighter jet

Air Force

- KC-135 crews get Distinguished Flying Cross for helping fend off Iranian drones
- Spectrum warfare wing boss on the hunt for tools to reprogram F-35 and others faster
- Air Force leveraging AI flight experiments to inform future testing efforts
- Plans for new hardened aircraft shelters notably absent from new USAF base modernization strategy

Space Force

- Space Force is testing AI to automate ops — and eyeing more

Your Military

- Transgender troops, confronting shifting policies of acceptance, just want to serve

Veterans

- VA sees rise in military sexual trauma claims, thanks to outreach work
- A Minnesota-invented hearing test offered at the VA expands access to care



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USSF celebrates 5th anniversary, sets sights on future as Spacepower Conference concludes

by Staff Sgt. Adam R. Shanks
 ORLANDO, Fla. - At the recent Space Force Association Spacepower Conference in Orlando, Dec. 10-12, U.S. Space Force senior leaders outlined a comprehensive vision for the organization's future, marking significant milestones as the service approaches its fifth anniversary.

Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman outlined

six foundational "Space Force truths" that define the service's unique identity, emphasizing that space is a critical warfighting domain and how Guardians are uniquely suited to control it.

While the Space Force has grown dramatically to nearly 15,000 military and civilian personnel in just five years, its senior leaders underscored the need for advancement across

multiple focus areas, while celebrating its accomplishments.

The conference showcased the service's commitment to developing a unique organizational identity. Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force John Bentivegna described this as part of the "Guardian Experience" - an initiative designed to 'elevate the journey' of service members, cultivate a warfighting mindset and create the future.

The second annual Guardian Arena competition exemplified this, with 105 Guardians and international partners competing across academic, physical, and tactical challenges. The multi-day challenge based on the "Space Coast" at Cape Canaveral Space Station, Fla., crowned a team of Guardians from Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, cementing them as the best of the best for 2024.

Another key focus was the Space Force Personnel Management Act, which introduces unprecedented flexibility in military service.

Katharine Kelley, deputy chief of Space Operations for Human Capital, and Lt. Gen. David N. Miller Jr., commander of Space Operations Command, highlighted the act's potential to "close readiness gaps" by allowing Guardians more adapt-

able career paths. The approach will integrate active-component Guardians and Air Force Reservists, offering both full- and part-time service options. While the program is still seeing development, significant progress has been made to see it become a reality for Guardians to leverage their expertise in the space domain.

<https://www.spaceforce.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3999169/>



HOLIDAY CONCERT A conductor cues the the U.S. Army Herald Trumpets during the American Holiday Festival in Washington, D.C., Dec. 7, 2024. The Herald Trumpets are part of the Army Band "Per-shing's Own," which provides musical support for the leadership of the United States, to include all branches of government, and to a wide spectrum of national and international events in order to connect the Army to the American people. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Ramon Adelan



TRAINING TIME Air Force military working dog Iinez runs up a flight of stairs in the obedience yard at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., earlier this month. The obedience yard consists of several structures used to help train with movement through and over obstacles quickly and efficiently. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Asha Wiltshire



BREAKING GROUND Col. Jun S. Oh, 316th Wing commander, children and families, shovel dirt at the child development center groundbreaking ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, Md., Dec. 10, 2024. Construction of the CDC is scheduled to be completed in 2026. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Daniel Walderbach

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Career and Education

Future missile frigate will be named after historic female Navy officer

STARS AND STRIPES - A future constellation-class guided missile frigate (FFG 69) will be named USS Joy Bright Hancock, a tribute to one of the first female officers to serve in the Navy, according to a Navy news release.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro made the announcement Dec. 16 at the 11th Women, Peace and Security Symposium, hosted by the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

"We - men and women alike - must contribute to the meaningful participation of women in the armed forces to increase combat readiness and operational effectiveness," Del Toro said. "Captain Joy Bright Hancock was a trailblazer who paved the way for generations of women to proudly serve this great na-

tion. That is why, I am incredibly pleased to announce that a Constellation-class frigate, FFG 69, will be named the USS Joy Bright Hancock."

This will be the first Navy vessel to be named after Hancock, and the 10th of the new constellation-class frigates. The future USS Joy Bright Hancock honors her namesake's service beginning as a yeoman in World War I, and her integral role in passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948.

Hancock was one of eight women to be sworn into the regular Navy and was subsequently appointed Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women. She received commendations for her service to the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics and the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air) during



Capt. Joy Bright Hancock in her Navy uniform. Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced on Dec. 16, 2024, a future constellation-class guided missile frigate (FFG 69) will be named after Hancock for her trailblazing military service in the U.S. Navy photo Mark Faram

World War II, as well as for her assistance in expanding opportunities for women in the Navy.

The Navy now annually awards the Joy Bright Hancock Award to honor the visionary leadership of officers whose ideals foster an inclusive culture while furthering the integration of women in the Navy. The constellation-class guided-missile

frigate represents the Navy's next-generation small surface combatant.

This ship class will be an agile, multimission warship, capable of operations in both deep water and littoral environments, providing increased combat-credible forward presence that provides a military advantage at sea.

Federal joint statement on ongoing response to reported drone sightings

Dec. 17, 2024

There are more than one million drones lawfully registered with the FAA in the United States and there are thousands of commercial, hobbyist and law enforcement drones lawfully in the sky on any given day. With the technology landscape evolving, we expect that number to increase over time.

FBI has received tips of more than 5,000 reported drone sightings in the last few weeks with approximately 100 leads generated, and the federal government is supporting state and local officials in investigating these reports. Consistent with each of our unique missions and authorities, we are quickly working to prioritize and follow these leads. We have sent advanced detection technology to the region. And we have sent trained visual observers.

Having closely examined the technical data and tips from concerned citizens, we assess that the sightings to date include a combination of lawful commercial drones, hobbyist drones, and law enforcement drones, as well as manned fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and stars mistakenly reported as drones. We have not identified anything anomalous and do not assess the activity to date to present a national security or public safety risk over the civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the northeast.

That said, we recognize the concern among many communities. We continue to support state and local authorities with advanced detection technology and support of law enforcement. We urge Congress to enact

counter-UAS legislation when it reconvenes that would extend and expand existing counter-drone authorities to identify and mitigate any threat that may emerge.

Additionally, there have been

a limited number of visual sightings of drones over military facilities in New Jersey and elsewhere, including within restricted air space. Such sightings near or over DoD installations are not new. DoD takes unauthorized access over its airspace

seriously and coordinates closely with federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities, as appropriate. Local commanders are actively engaged to ensure there are appropriate detection and mitigation measures in place.

AFSFC activates squadrons to replace corrections, training dets

by Debbie Aragon, AFMISC Public Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas- The Air Force Security Forces Center recently transitioned its detachments to a squadron structure to return the units to a familiar organizational framework.

The process began earlier this year when Air Force Materiel Command published a special order to inactivate AFSFC's Detachment 2 at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, and Detachment 3 at Fort Bliss, Texas. The document also activated the 320th Correctional and Rehabilitation Squadron at Miramar and the 570th Combat Training Squadron at Fort Bliss.

"Both the 320th CRS and 570th CTS deliver very unique mission sets," said Col. Jason Harris, AFSFC commander, "so it was important to move them within a formal squadron structure - a hierarchy our Airmen have worked with before - which brings a renewed sense of excitement and purpose to those units."

Lt. Col. Scott Haselden, 570th CTS commander, echoed Harris' thoughts.

"Our members will have a more heightened sense of pride being associated to a numbered squadron ... having a designation of a squadron with a rich combat training history, resonates to the heritage of the security forces combat mindset," he said. "To identify as a combat training squadron also validates what they do every day, and I know they will wear their 570th CTS patches proudly on their sleeve."

The change delivers not only a benefit to the training and corrections mission sets but a boost to the

career development and recognition opportunities for Airmen as well.

"A key benefit of this transition is that it streamlines the process for current and future leadership to formally recognize the achievements, hard work and dedication of our Airmen with decorations signed by their squadron commander, something that wasn't possible under the previous detachment structure," said Maj. Dane Johnson, 320th CRS commander.

As a geographically separated detachment with our headquarters in San Antonio, we faced numerous administrative challenges, Haselden said.

"With 140 active-duty and civilian members assigned, as well as another 43 Active Guard

Reserve and Air Force Reserve Command members, we always had to look for ways to alleviate those challenges to streamline our processes and provide better support to our members. In addition to resolving our administrative matters, being a squadron provides justification for manpower validations to establish better organizational infrastructure to support our instructors with squadron manpower standards not associated with detachments," he added.

The change also continues to strengthen the opportunities for career development and mentorship which, along with recognition, are key to maintaining morale and fostering a positive work environment, Johnson said.

Austin extols benefits of service, mentoring

by David Vergun, DOD News

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III recently visited Camp Asaka, Japan, speaking with leaders and troops from the U.S., Japan and Australia, who are participating in Exercise Yama Sakura.

The secretary had a chance to talk to troops and leaders of the three nations.

He told them that having the right platforms and processes is important. But more importantly it is having the right kind of committed people.

"I see some very junior members and also some very senior members, which is the way it ought to be," Austin said.

The secretary challenged them to continue learning and helping others develop and share their ideas and what they learned.

Later at a press briefing, Austin said that the military takes good people and develops them into better people, providing them opportunities to expand their horizons.

"Service to the nation is important and I think it provides the individual who serves tremendous benefits," he said.

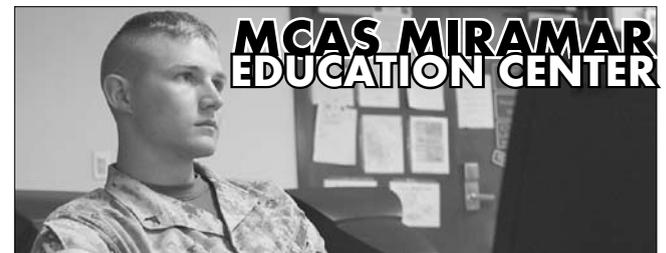
"One of my mentors used to always say that to serve is to live, and I believe that. I believe in being a part of something bigger than yourself and in giving back to this great country that's provided us so much," he said.

"And I'm absolutely proud of the young men and women that are serving in our ranks today. They are the world's finest in my view," he said.

Camp Asaka is home of the Japan Ground Self Defense Forces Ground Central Command.

"It's great to see full Australian participation in this year's exercise," said a senior defense official. The exercise started Dec. 3 and concludes Dec. 14.

Since 1982, the exercise only included Japan and the United States.



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Carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, air squadrons return from deployment



Aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*'s strike group, including nine squadrons of Carrier Air Wing (CVW-9), recently returned to their respective home bases in time for the holidays following a five-month deployment to the U.S. 7th and 5th Fleet areas of operation.

"The strength, resiliency, and dedication of American Sailors and Marines never ceases to amaze me. What we accomplished required a full-cooperative effort across the entire Carrier Strike Group and U.S. Joint Force. We enjoyed working with our allies and partners in the Pacific and Middle East, introducing the Next Generation Jammer to the fleet, flexing combat power in Yemen to degrade Iranian-backed Houthi rebel capabilities, protecting U.S. forces, and promoting free and open international shipping." - Capt. Gerald Tritz, commander, CVW-9

CVW-9 completed over 11,600 flight hours, 5,500 sorties, and over 4,400 carrier arrestments throughout the deployment, which began July 11.

Deployment highlights:

- Multi-Large Deck Event held in the Indo-Pacific by the U.S. Navy and Italian Navy's ITS Cavour Carrier Strike Group.
- Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, CVW-9's Marine F-35C Lightning II squadron, conducted multiple strikes on Houthi weapons storage facilities within Houthi-

controlled territories in Yemen.

"I couldn't be more proud of the Shogun team and all they accomplished across a dynamic deployment," said Capt. William Frank, deputy commander, CVW-9. "Our aircrew, Sailors and Marines performed admirably while conducting combat strikes and successfully defending our *Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group from Iranian-backed Houthi rebel missiles and one-way attack drones, and meeting 100 percent of our assigned missions.

BECSG also consisted of guided missile destroyer USS *Frank E. Petersen Jr.* (DDG 121), and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 21.

An F/A-18E Super Hornet, attached to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 151, conducts aerial refueling with four Italian F-35B Lightning II, attached to ITS Cavour Carrier Strike Group. Official U.S. Navy photo

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Marine squadron commander fired nine months after fatal helo crash

MARINE CORPS TIMES - The Marine Corps has fired a West Coast helicopter squadron commander nine months after a fatal CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter crash in California that remains under investigation.

Maj. Gen. James B. Welions, commander of 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, relieved Lt. Col. Nicholas J. Harvey of command of the Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, known as the "Flying Tigers," on Nov. 18 "due to a loss of trust and confidence in his ability to continue to serve in that position," according to a statement provided by the 3rd MAW to Marine Corps Times on Tuesday.

The statement didn't elaborate on why Harvey was dismissed.

On Feb. 6, a CH-53E assigned to the Miramar, California-based squadron crashed while conducting a routine training flight from Creech Air Force Base, Nevada, to the unit's home base at Marine Corps Station Miramar.

The aircraft went down in the mountains of San Diego County, and it took until the following day for civil authorities to locate the crash site, Marine Corps Times previously reported.

The crash killed all five Marines aboard the helicopter: Lance Cpl. Donovan Davis, 21, a crew chief from Olathe, Kansas; Sgt. Alec Langen, 23, a crew chief from Chandler, Arizona; Capt. Benjamin Moulton, 27, a

pilot from Emmett, Idaho; Capt. Jack Casey, 26, a pilot from Dover, New Hampshire; and Capt. Miguel Nava, 28, a pilot from Traverse City, Michigan.

A career aviator, Harvey was frocked from major to lieutenant colonel and served as the MAG-24 executive officer prior to taking command of the squadron in January 2023. He received his promotion to lieutenant colonel in March 2021.

Harvey did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lt. Col. Kyleigh Cullen took command of the squadron the day Harvey was relieved.

"The investigation into the Feb. 6, 2024, HMMH-361 CH-53E mishap is ongoing," Maj. Natalie Batcheler, 3rd MAW spokeswoman, told Marine Corps Times in a statement.

A redacted crash report will be released to the public when the investigation concludes, Batcheler said.

Primarily, the heavy helicopter squadron contains 16 CH-53E Super Stallions, which are tasked with moving personnel and gear ashore in assault operations. The unit also supports the larger air-ground task force mission of the Marine Corps.

On the day of the crash, an unseasonably intense storm slammed the region. Some family members of the fallen have criticized the service for allow-

ing the helicopter to fly in those conditions.

"Maybe this is the one instance to where they wake the f-k up and they say, 'What are we doing to our service members? We've got to stop this.'" Steven Langen, father of the late Sgt. Alec Langen, told the *New York Post* in the weeks following his son's death.

The Marine Corps has not released any details on the cause of the crash.

Harvey spoke at a Feb. 16 memorial held for the fallen Marines at Miramar, during which more than 550 Marines, family and friends gathered to pay tribute to the men.

"There are no words that can express the pain that one feels when losing a loved one — a fellow Marine, a nephew, a brother, a son, a husband, a father," Harvey said. "We can feel the presence of everyone in this hangar today, and that speaks volumes to the love, kinship, and brotherhood we share with our fallen Marines."

Harvey is currently assigned to Marine Aircraft Group-16 out of San Diego, according to Batcheler.

He received his commission in 2004. He reported to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465 in 2008, deploying with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit to Japan and Afghanistan.

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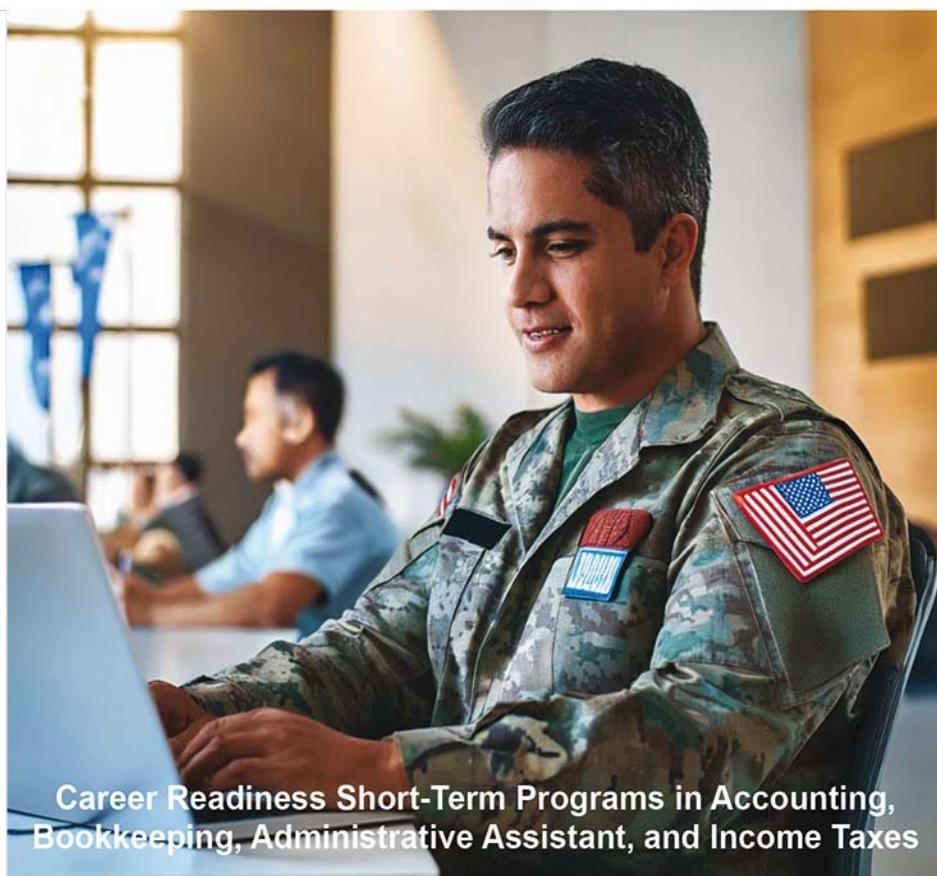
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Marine Corps lessons in orbit: A Cobra pilot's astronaut journey

by 1st Lt. James Estillore
3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

SAN DIEGO - "Our Astronaut Corps prides ourselves on our expeditionary mindset," said Lt. Col. Jasmin Moghbeli to a crowded ballroom at the Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 367 249th Marine Corps Birthday Ball. "But who does expeditionary better than the United States Marine Corps?"

Jasmin Moghbeli's path to space began in the cockpit of an AH-1W Super Cobra. In 2008, Moghbeli checked into her first operational squadron - HMLA-367, nicknamed "Scarface" - where she developed the skills, discipline, and resilience that now guide her as one of NASA's 47 active astronauts.

From Dec. 12-13 this year, Moghbeli returned to HMLA-367 here, reconnecting with Marines, flying the squadron's AH-1Z Viper, and serving as the guest of honor at their annual birthday ball - a celebration of the Marine Corps' storied history, tradition, and camaraderie.

"Your first fleet unit will always be special to you," said-

Moghbeli. "For me, HMLA-367 is that unit."

In March, Moghbeli completed her first space mission, commanding NASA's SpaceX Crew-7 aboard the International Space Station. She spent 199 days in orbit, including conducting a spacewalk, and returned with newfound perspectives that echo her experiences as a Marine.

"At just over six months, I'm pretty sure it was the shortest of my deployments," Moghbeli joked.

While some astronauts considered their quarters confining, Moghbeli offered a distinctly Marine perspective, "I never had my own personal room on any deployment, so I thought it was pretty luxurious."

Her Marine Corps roots shaped her approach to leadership. As the only active-duty Marines in NASA's Astronaut Corps, Moghbeli and Col. Nicole Mann share a distinction—both were selected as mission commanders on their rookie flights.

"I don't think it's a coincidence," Moghbeli noted. "The

Marine Corps teaches us to execute the commander's intent: you tell us what needs to get done and why, and we figure out how to make it happen."

The responsibilities she faced in orbit were extraordinary yet familiar. Over 199 days, Moghbeli's team conducted more than 250 experiments, including groundbreaking work such as 3D printing using human cells to explore organ creation and advancing fiber-optic technology.

"We were the pilots, the scientists, the maintainers, the doctors, the loadmasters, the barbers - everything," Moghbeli said. "As Marines, you know what it's like to operate without the luxury of stepping away."

Her return to HMLA-367 was also about honoring those who shaped her career. Moghbeli shared the story of Capt. David Seth "Sniper" Mitchell, a fellow Scarface pilot who volunteered for an early deployment to Afghanistan.

"There was a need to fill, and Sniper knew that if he didn't volunteer, someone else would have to go," she recounted. "So, with



Lt. Col. Jasmin Moghbeli grins after landing an AH-1Z Viper at Camp Pendleton, Dec. 12. Moghbeli flew more than 150 combat missions before joining NASA's Astronaut Corps. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Samantha Devine

the attitude of 'if not me, then who?' Sniper said, 'Send me.'"

Mitchell was killed in 2009 during combat operations in Afghanistan, a loss that remains deeply personal to Moghbeli. His sacrifice, she said, embodies the essence of being a Marine—answering the call, regardless of the risk.

"We do what we do in any climate and place, knowing the ultimate risk we face so that

others do not have to," Moghbeli said.

Reflecting on her path—from combat missions in a Cobra to commanding a mission in space—Moghbeli invoked a shared ethos of perseverance. She compared NASA's mantra, "Failure is not an option," to Maj. Gen. Oliver Smith's famous words during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, "Retreat? Hell, we're just attacking in

another direction."

As the evening concluded, Moghbeli left the Marines of Scarface with a final challenge: "Let us carry that pride—not ego, but pride—with us every day. It is our duty to define our legacy with honor."

For Scarface, Lt. Col. Jasmin Moghbeli isn't only an astronaut; she remains one of their own - a Marine whose journey to the stars began in the cockpit of a Cobra.

Veterans News

Surge in applicants strains VA jobs program for disabled veterans

by Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON - A historically underutilized veterans employment program with a track record of helping participants with disabilities land good paying jobs is experiencing a surge in applicants that is creating backlogs, draining resources and delaying benefits.

Veterans organizations with members who participate in the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program run by the Department of Veterans Affairs delivered that message at a hearing recently of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's subpanel on economic opportunity.

The hearing examined challenges at the 10-year-old program as it experiences a surge in demand for assistance with job counselors. The program is for veterans with disabilities that are severe enough to restrict or keep them from working. More than 192,000 disabled veterans applied to the program in 2024, up from 131,000 in 2023.

In 2025, officials project another 15 percent increase in applicants.

"Veterans Readiness and Employment is a transformational program that Congress must act

to protect," said Julie Howell, associate legislative director of Paralyzed Veterans of America. "Barriers to employment still exist, which is why the VR&E program is so important."

The program delivered \$2.1 billion in education, job training and other benefits in fiscal 2024. The median annual income of veterans who secure employment after completing the program is \$100,000, according to program officials.

Howell said while the program has successfully assisted millions of disabled veterans in the past decade, its popularity is hampering the staff's ability to provide guidance and individualized assistance.

Located at 350 VA sites across the nation, the program has vocational rehabilitation specialists and job counselors who work with disabled veterans seeking employment.

Disabled veterans receive help preparing for careers that they can perform with their disability. They are qualified for career counseling, job training, education assistance and other services, after an initial evaluation to assess their skills, interests and capabilities. But more than 65 percent of regional VA offices have wait times of more than a month for an initial

appointment, said Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., the subcommittee chairman.

Van Orden, a retired Navy SEAL, identified himself as "perhaps the only member of Congress to have gone through the program."

"I know this program inside and out. I believe the Veterans Readiness and Employment program is headed in the wrong direction," he said.

Van Orden said he is concerned the program's services are diminished without the VA implementing meaningful solutions to adapt to higher participation rates.

Lawmakers and veterans groups cited backlogged applications, staff shortages and failure by counselors to respond to critical communications from colleges, job training programs and student veterans.

"What should I tell my veterans who are ready to give up because they cannot get an initial appointment?" said Rep. Mike Levin, D-Calif. At the regional program office in San Diego, disabled veterans wait up to 18 months for their first appointment, he said. Counselors have begun to omit their phone numbers on emails making it difficult for college business offices

and training programs to reach them, said Keith Glindemann, president of the National Association of Veterans' Programs Administrators, which works with colleges and universities on the approval and delivery of VA benefits.

"When schools cannot obtain the necessary authorization, this delays the certification of benefits," he said. Glindemann said he has received reports from some students who say they have not heard from their counselors for months. Contributing to the problems is a turnover in program staff, he said.

"Lack of communication and constant change adds stress and delay of benefits to disabled veterans who are working toward obtaining employment," Glindemann said.

The program has become strained under the influx of veterans qualifying for services

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under the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, said Nick Pamperin, the VA's program director. The PACT Act compensates veterans for illnesses and injuries caused by toxic fumes from burn pits, radiation and contact with other hazardous substances during military service.

Staffing at the Veterans Readiness and Employment program has increased by 25 percent in two years, but job counselors continue to struggle to keep up with demand for services, Pamperin said.

"While expansion has helped with the response to program growth, there continues to be a need for significant resources," he said.

Pamperin said the program is now automating services previously done manually and moving them online. But Howell

said the VA's approach to modernizing job readiness changes with each administration.

"These piecemeal solutions will continue to be problematic until designing and implementing a single, fully integrated system is made a priority," he said. But Pamperin said the VA recently introduced a virtual assistant that processes signed documents in two days instead of the previous average of 10 days.

After some initial setbacks, the VA is now piloting an online case management system that tracks benefits and points veterans to job training and education resources, he said.

"I know that VA states they are finally on the right path with the new case management system. However, I am skeptical as this undertaking will now span the terms of four administrations," Van Orden said.

Pamperin said making improvements with a focus on people, technology and processes will help improve services and drive the wait times down. "We absolutely need to get better," he said.

Read more at: <https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2024-12-11/disabled-veterans-jobs-program-16135482.html>

Celebrating the holiday season at Knott's Berry Farm & the Disneyland Resort

AutoMatters™ & More
by Jan Wagner



Recently I visited the Disneyland Resort (consisting of Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure Park) and Knott's Berry Farm on two successive days during the winter holiday season (now through January 6, 2025).

These theme parks are very different from each other, and in many ways. Experiencing these two Southern California theme parks back-to-back invited this inevitable comparison: which theme park is better and why?

Disneyland Resort is much larger. Consequently, I did a lot of walking and was thoroughly exhausted by the end of my Disney day on Sunday.

At both parks, there are lots of rides: high-speed, themed roller coasters, fascinating "dark rides" that are much less physically challenging and kids rides. Both parks have trains. The lines for the rides at Disneyland Park are often huge — unless you pay extra. The rides at Disneyland Park tend to be newer and more spectacular (STAR WARS — Rise of the Resistance and Tiana's Bayou Adventure, for example), but those at Knott's (especially the awesome Calico Mine Ride) are great, too.

Both parks have live entertainment. Disney's is arguably more spectacular, whereas the live entertainment at Knott's is more intimate and sometimes participatory. The Disneyland Resort's live entertainment is severely impacted by its typically huge crowds. If you want to have good views of any of the popular entertainment, you'd best get there very early.

The Hyperion Theater — the one really comfortable, large entertainment venue in Disney California Adventure, has been dark most of the time for the past few years. Disney should at least put some seasonal live entertainment in there.

By way of comparison, there is an excellent ice show at Knott's (indoors, in a large theater) and a live stage show. Last night I arrived at the last minute for the live entertainment at Knott's Berry Farm, and yet was easily able to see two performances of "Stone Soul" — a wonderful "8-piece, horn-blowing, foot-stomping Classic Soul & Motown tribute band that has built a reputation

as one of the hardest-working, most entertaining Classic Soul & Motown bands you'll ever see!"

Several park visitors were literally up on their feet and dancing spontaneously!

Almost all of the merchandise that you'll find for sale at the Disneyland Resort is highly mass-produced and expensive. At Knott's, during this holi-



day celebration, independent vendors have set up numerous booths with many hand-made items. I was fascinated at I watched glass blower Myles Freedman create the unique works of art that were for sale. Elsewhere, I spoke with Rachel Walker about her beautiful drawings.

There is no comparison between the western themed area of Disneyland Park and the much more authentic and larger Ghost Town at Knott's. In the summer, during Founder's Day, dozens of costumed Knott's employees performed an ongoing story throughout the day, ending with dancing on the street to a live band.

The snowfall was artificial in both parks, but Knott's has that won hands-down. Their snowflakes were much larger, and it remained on the ground after the snow fell — enough for kids to pick up and play with.

As they were when I purchased my Knott's season pass back in the summer, the incredibly low-priced Knott's season passes are valid for the remainder of 2024 and all of

2025, and the available, modestly-priced add-ons, including General Parking, are also good for the same period of time.

I bought the meal plan add-on, valid for the choice from a wide range of entrées, twice per day — with a minimum of four hours apart.

Disneyland Resort is very expensive and annual passes

(all with blackout dates) have only been available intermittently lately. Also, you might not be able to visit when you want to because reservations are required and are often impossible to get, whereas at Knott's Berry Farm you can just show up — as I did yesterday, for a meal plan dinner and entertainment. I had the tri-tip, mixed vegetables and a corn muffin.

So, which theme park is better for you? To further help you decide, visit Knott's Berry Farm online at: <https://www.knotts.com>, and visit the Disneyland Resort online at: <https://disneyland.disney.go.com>.

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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

I've never been a fan of New Year's Eve. Perhaps my distaste for the occasion stems from unrealistic expectations. Maybe I associate it with mediocre parties, painful hangovers, or failed resolutions.

Or, maybe I'm reminded of my adolescent years and all those lousy babysitting jobs.

For teenagers, New Year's Eve is an employment opportunity. Parents everywhere are desperate to find teenaged suckers they can ply with minimal hourly wages and stale Christmas cookies to spend long hours watching their unruly children.

Worse yet, these parents, knowing they plan to be elsewhere, pitch the night to their children like this: "Hey kids, Mommie and Daddy are going out, but the babysitter is gonna let you have your own New Year's Eve Party right here at home! We've supplied you with treats that will make you intolerably hyper! And, we've provided noisemakers and messy confetti, so you can drive the babysitter to the brink of insanity! Sure, stay up past midnight, as long as you're in bed before we get home!"

In my teens, I took these substandard babysitting jobs every year, because, frankly, all my friends were babysitting on New Year's Eve, and I had nothing better to do.

I recall one December 31st when I showed up at my employer's home at the appointed hour, the house smelling of after-shave and Totino's Frozen Pizza. The two children who I'd babysat before, Ben (6) and Abby (4), were quite well-behaved. But on this night, their cousin, Ricky (7), was over for a visit, and I was expected to watch him, too. They wore metallic crowns with their footed pajamas, and ran in circles, blowing noisemakers — the kind with a long paper tube that unrolls with each blow.

While Ben and Abby took turns showing me their Christmas presents while blasting me

Babysitting on New Year's Eve

in the face with noisemakers, Ricky glanced at me sideways from a shadowy corner.

Ben and Abby's mom finally descended the staircase wearing a sparkly dress. "Don, can you do this necklace clasp for me?"

While Mr. White helped Mrs. White on with her coat, she gave final instructions, "Lisa, there's pizza in the oven and plenty of treats. They can go to bed after the ball drops. Kids, you listen to Miss Lisa, okay?" Abby dimpled with anticipation.

The closing of the front door lured Ricky out of the shadows. Suddenly, he whipped something at the wall. It was one of those gooey, gelatinous toys with arms like a spider. Abby emitted an ear-piercing scream as the slimy toy walked it's way down the wallpaper.

"Cool, Ricky," I said cautiously. He scanned my face, seemingly disappointed that I wasn't either disgusted or terrified. He skulked away to devise a new strategy.

Once the pizza was baked, a feeding frenzy ensued. The kids' faces and hands were soon plastered with tomato sauce, sticky grape soda, chocolate, and cookie crumbs. While I chased them with wet paper towels, they raged with new vigor, fueled by the fresh intravenous injection of sugar. Garbed in tinsel hats and blowing horns, they darted

around the living room as if the house was on fire, squealing like baby pigs.

"I've got five more hours of this?" I thought, mortified.

It soon became clear that Ricky's secret mission was to realize his dream of becoming the reincarnation of Caligula. He plotted and schemed, using Ben and Abby as unwitting pawns, whispering in their ears while looking side-eyed at me. For hours I wrangled these tiny humans, finally becoming so exhausted, I lied and said I had a very important phone call to make.

"Patrice, they're driving me nuts!" I cried to my best friend, who was babysitting at another house in town. We vented to each other for the next 30 minutes, until Ricky, a.k.a. Caligula II, threw the gooey spider into my very big 80s hair.

Needless to say, the mongrels were in bed before midnight.

"Thanks, Lisa," Mr. White said, dropping me at home in the wee hours of January 1st. He handed me my hard-earned wage — ten bucks. A dollar an hour, plus tip.

Times have changed since then, but a good babysitter on New Year's Eve will always be priceless.

www.themeatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

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MilSpouse Connect: Monthly events bringing military spouses together to connect and thrive.

Craft & Coffee: USO Camp Pendleton provides creative outlets for adults and children to create fun, whimsical or serious works of art through a variety of mediums. Signs up happen online and are usually advertised through the USO Camp Pendleton Facebook page.

Command Support: USO is here to support! We often help support command events across Camp Pendleton such as Family days and Morale Days. Commands can request support in a number of different ways, from outdoor games, a kids craft, or even our mobile photo booth. We also can help provide small refreshments. To request support, please email our Center Operations and Programs Manager, Crystal Gates at cgates@uso.org. All requests must be submitted within 30 days and although we try our best, not all requests can be granted.

<https://california.uso.org/>

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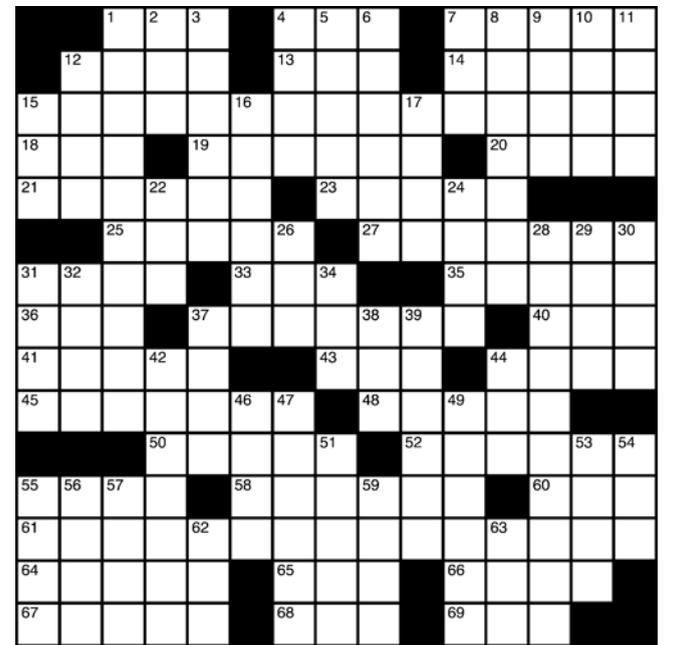
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- Across**
1 Shipwreck signal
4 Stan of Marvel Comics
7 Catch in a trap
12 Time period
13 Off-roader's purchase, for short
14 Quest for intel
15 *Instant in which emotional decisions are made
18 Middle-earth menace
19 Female surfer
20 Times to remember
21 Got a lift, in a way
23 Popular mints
25 Tea container
27 Gradually come to be
31 Wander about
33 Pasture
35 Where one may be taken to be reprimanded
36 Verb in a recipe
37 Like jobs with no future ... and what the start of each answer to a starred clue can be?
40 Tennis court divider
41 Family gathering attendee
43 Pacific Coast st.
44 Loch with a legend
45 Ties to a post
48 Rene of "Get Shorty"
50 Show flexibility
- Down**
1 *Flaky type
2 Cheerios grain
3 Came down in flakes
4 Plastering strip
5 Value system
6 Tied, as a score
7 "Seats all taken" sign
8 Archivals
9 Asian laptop brand
10 Barrett of gossip
11 Tolkien tree race
12 Macedonian neighbor
15 MLB's Astros, on scoreboards
16 "Fiddle-__!"
17 Trifling
- 22 Battering ____
24 Spot on the tube
26 Vote of support
28 *Employment field
29 Keats works
30 Vets' concerns
31 Rave's partner
32 Dog in the comics
34 Brouhaha
37 Owner's document
38 Blunder
39 Mad Magazine mascot Alfred E. ____
42 Idle talk
44 Bounced-check letters
46 Reckless
47 Racer's bathing suit
49 Naturally brewed beverage
51 Animal with a snout
53 Vitality
54 Santa helper
55 Palindromic pop group
56 Steady guy
57 Toward sunrise
59 Speedy
62 "Do or do not. There is no ____": Yoda
63 Title for Paul or Ringo



MOVIES AT THE BASES

MOVIE SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE SO PLEASE CHECK THE WEB SITE DAY-OF TO MAKE SURE THE TITLE AND TIME ARE STILL CORRECT...

https://sandiego.navylifesw.com/ select movies at dropdown menu on left
https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/movies
https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/theater

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- Premium Offerings
• Audiovisual assistive equipment available to customers at the front counter.
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Outside Temp (F)	Inside Temp (F)	
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75°	94°	109°
80°	99°	114°
85°	104°	119°



Visit our military museums

The Veterans Museum at Balboa Park. The Veterans Museum and Memorial Center is a museum located in historic Balboa Park of San Diego, California. Founded in 1989, it is dedicated to create, maintain, and operate an institution to honor and perpetuate the memories of all men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

Active duty military, Museum Member, Children under 12: Free
Veterans/Seniors: \$4 • Adults: \$5 • Student ID: \$2
2115 Park Blvd, San Diego (Balboa Park) • (619) 239-2300
http://www.veteranmuseum.org/
Hours: Call for current hours (619) 239-2300

MCRD Command Museum & Historical Society. Museum focusing on Marine Corps history from the 19th century to today is also a research library. https://www.mcrdmuseum.org/

Free admission • The Pass and ID Center may issue day passes to visitors who wish to visit the museum and do not possess military ID-call (619) 524-4200 for information on base access.
1600 Hochmuth Ave, San Diego, 92140 • (619) 524-4426
Hours: Mon 8am-3pm, Tue-Fri 8-4; Family day 8-5:45; Sat 10:30-5, • Closed Sunday

USS Midway Museum. The USS Midway Museum is a maritime museum located in downtown San Diego at Navy Pier. The museum consists of the aircraft carrier Midway. The ship houses an extensive collection of aircraft, many of which were built in So Cal.
FREE-Children 5 & under, Active Duty military including reservists (w/ valid ID). Adult \$34 (ages 13+). Youth \$24 (ages 4-12). Veterans (w/ID) \$24*Must show ID at entrance.
Open daily 10-5, last admission 4pm. https://www.midway.org/

The Ranch House Complex at Camp Pendleton. Listed as the Santa Margarita Ranch House Nat'l Historic Site and as a California State Historical Landmark. Docent-led tours are available by appointment; masks required. Please email your request to: MCBCAMPEN_history@usmc.mil or phone (760)725-5758 The Camp Pendleton Historical Society is a 501(c)3 organization in support of the base's History and Museum's programs. Go to: www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org/ for information. Hours: Open daily 10am-5pm • Last admission at 4pm

ROY'S SUDOKU

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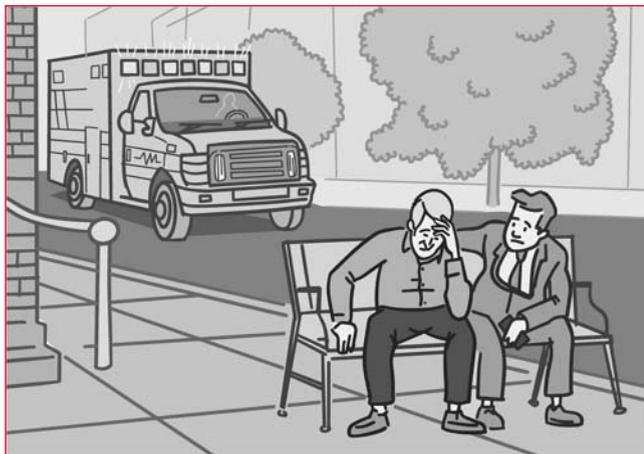
Halting heart attack and stroke: Get medical help fast

A heart attack or stroke can happen within seconds. Getting treatment fast for these medical emergencies can mean the difference between life and death or disability. But do you know the symptoms of these dangerous events? And do you know if you're at risk for having one?

More than 1.5 million people have a heart attack or stroke every year in the U.S. Heart attack happens when blood flow to the heart gets blocked, most commonly by a blood clot. Stroke happens when blood flow to the brain gets disrupted. The most common type of stroke is caused by a blood clot stuck in a blood vessel that feeds the brain. Stroke can also be caused by a blood vessel in the brain that breaks open and bleeds into nearby tissue.

"Early treatment is key to improving your chances of survival," says Dr. Gina Wei, a heart-health expert at NIH. Treatment may include either rapidly dissolving or removing the clot to open up the blocked blood vessel. For some heart attack cases, emergency surgery is used to redirect blood flow around the blockage.

Getting help immediately can save a life and reduce damage to the heart or brain. Less damage to these vital organs can also



mean less disability afterward, and a faster recovery, explains Dr. Clinton Wright, a neurologist and stroke researcher at NIH. So it's important to be on alert for symptoms of a heart attack or stroke for both yourself and the people around you. Every minute matters.

Know the Symptoms, Act Fast

The most common symptoms of a heart attack are pain, heaviness, or discomfort in the center or left side of your chest. But they're not the only symptoms. Women are more likely than men to have other symptoms, like pain or numbness in the left arm.

Some people may also feel a rapid or irregular heartbeat.

Others feel pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, shoulders, neck, jaw, or above the belly button. You may also feel short of breath or suddenly sweat a lot for no apparent reason. Rarer symptoms include feeling extremely tired for no reason, nausea and vomiting, and dizziness.

For stroke, the most common symptoms are facial drooping, arm weakness, and trouble speaking. "There can also be a sudden loss of balance or coordination, or sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes," Wright says.

If you or anyone around you has these symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately. Don't wait. Treatment can start in an ambulance

on the way to the hospital. This helps improve the odds of survival and recovery. Don't drive yourself to the ER or ask someone to drive you. It may delay treatment.

Other health conditions can mimic symptoms of a heart attack and stroke. "But it's better to be safe than sorry," Wei says. "Call an ambulance to go to the ER and get checked out."

Are You At Risk?

Most heart attacks and strokes happen in people who have certain risk factors (see the Wise Choices box). If you know your risk, you can be on the lookout for symptoms. You can also take steps to lower that risk.

One major risk factor for heart attack is high cholesterol in the blood. High cholesterol can also increase the risk for stroke. Cholesterol can build up on the walls of blood vessels, causing plaques. If a plaque breaks open, a blood clot can form. But cholesterol isn't the only contributor to this process.

Dr. Paul Ridker from Harvard University is working to understand the role of inflammation in heart disease. His research has shown that high cholesterol and inflammation work together to increase heart-attack risk. "Heart disease involves both accumula-

Are You at Risk for Heart Attack and Stroke?

Many health conditions and other factors can increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke. These include:

High blood cholesterol, or high levels of other fats in the blood (triglycerides).

- High blood pressure (hypertension).
- High blood sugar (diabetes).
- Overweight or obesity.
- Smoking.
- A lack of regular physical activity.
- Family history of heart attack or stroke.
- Previous heart attack or stroke.
- Older age.
- Preeclampsia or other pregnancy complications.

tion of cholesterol and an inflammatory fire lighting the match underneath it all," he says.

In a recent study, his team measured inflammation using a test called hsCRP as well as blood cholesterol in women in their 30s. Women with high levels of inflammation had a higher risk of heart attack or stroke later in life than those who only had high cholesterol.

"Get these things measured," Ridker advises. Knowing your numbers "can give you an opportunity to start prevention much earlier in life," he says.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is another important risk factor for stroke and heart attack. High blood pressure has no symptoms. So you may not know you have it.

You can check your blood pressure at home with automatic cuff monitors. These are available at all major pharmacies. Measuring your blood pressure at home if you have hypertension and getting your cholesterol checked by your doctor regularly can help you assess your health risk. Your doctor can advise you on how to lower your risk based on your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers.

Lower Your Risk

If you're at risk for a heart attack or stroke, lifestyle changes and medications can help you lower that risk.

"Eating more vegetables and less red meat, exercising, and quitting smoking all lower heart attack and stroke risk," Ridker says. "And it turns out they all reduce inflammation as well."

Other steps you can take to

reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke include maintaining a healthy weight, getting enough sleep, and managing stress.

"It's never too early to start making healthy changes," says Wei. "It's easy to feel overwhelmed. You can start with small steps. Like taking the stairs instead of an elevator or parking your car a little farther away when you go shopping. Or adding one fruit or vegetable to your day. Then work your way up gradually."

Sometimes, lifestyle changes alone aren't enough to reduce your risk. Medications can also help.

Drugs called statins can help lower cholesterol levels. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved the first drug to lower inflammation in adults at very high risk of a heart attack or stroke. It's called low-dose colchicine.

Drugs that lower blood pressure can also help. "As people get older, blood pressure naturally goes up," Wright says. So it's important to make sure to manage your blood pressure as you age.

A large NIH-funded study showed that using more than one medication to reduce blood pressure substantially reduced the number of strokes in people at high risk who couldn't get their blood pressure low enough with only a single drug. "And we've continued to gain more evidence that the lower your blood pressure, the better," Wright says.

"We all have the power to protect our hearts and lower our risk for heart disease and stroke," Wei explains.

Healthy eating linked to better brain health

As the U.S. population ages, more adults are developing thinking and memory problems, called mild cognitive impairment. Scientists have been looking for ways to prevent or delay this type of mental decline and more severe disorders, like dementia.

Some studies have found links between healthy eating and improved thinking and memory. An eating pattern called the MIND diet has shown promise.

It features leafy greens and other vegetables. It prefers berries over other fruit. It also encourages eating whole grains, beans, nuts, and at least one weekly serving of fish. It limits red meat, sweets, cheese, fast food, and fried foods.

To study the effects of the MIND diet, scientists analyzed data from about 14,000 people. Their average age was around 64 at the start. About 57% were

female, 70% were White, and 30% were Black. Their eating patterns were assessed. Their cognitive health was measured at the beginning and end of the study, about 10 years later.

Overall, people who were eating foods most similar to the MIND diet were less likely to have problems with thinking and memory. They also had slower rates of cognitive decline. People who most closely stuck to the

MIND diet had a 4% reduced risk of cognitive problems compared to those who ate a very different diet.

"With the number of people with dementia increasing with the aging population, it's critical to find changes that we can make to delay or slow down the development of cognitive problems," says Dr. Russell Sawyer of the University of Cincinnati, who led the study.

How aura may trigger migraine pain

Migraine headaches can last for days. Some people have what's called an aura before migraine pain sets in. Aura can include visual disturbances, such as seeing flashing lights. And it can include other sensory changes, like numbness or tingling.

Scientists have known that aura is caused by a disruption of electrical activity within the brain. But they hadn't yet figured out how the aura might trigger pain. The nerve cells that drive migraine pain are known to sit outside the brain. And communication between these nerves and the brain was thought to be blocked by a structure called the blood-

brain barrier.

To learn more, researchers looked at how spinal fluid flows out of the brains of mice. They found gaps in the blood-brain barrier around a bundle of nerve cells known to process migraine pain. Substances injected directly into the brain flowed into these nerve cells within half an hour. This time period is similar to the typical time between aura and headache.

The scientists next provoked migraine aura in the brains of mice. Then they measured changes in proteins that flowed into the nerve cells. They found changes in many pro-

teins known to be involved in migraine headache. The results point to potential new ways to relieve migraine pain.

"These findings provide us

with a host of new targets to prevent and treat migraines and strengthen existing therapies," says Dr. Maiken Nedergaard of the University of Rochester, who helped lead the study.

New Year's resolution: See doctor

Whether you're looking for a doctor or already have one, you should visit them annually. Getting an annual physical is the best way to prevent an illness before it occurs. So if you've been putting off a check-up, make an appointment for a physical in January.

Things to ask your doctor about include:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Inflammation
- Healthy food choices
- Blood tests
- A1C (blood sugar)
- Weight management
- Vitamins & supplements

Resolve to make your health a top priority in the new year!

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Rate

*Thinking about
a new
beginning
for the
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