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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 45
 APRIL 23, 2026



PT READY Marines with 1st Radio Battalion, I Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group, compete in a push up competition during a battalion physical training event for the I MEF Tomahawk Total Fitness Challenge at Camp Pendleton April 17, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Pfc. Maria Amaya

Caine praises Sailors, Marines enforcing Iran blockade

by David Vergun, Pentagon News

During a press conference at the Pentagon April 16, Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thanked the Sailors and Marines on board vessels in the Persian Gulf enforcing the blockade of ships that sail from Iranian ports.

While all of the Navy ships are critical to this effort, he singled out the destroyers as a prime example.

“The Arleigh Burke-class of destroyers are the backbone of the United States Navy,” he said, adding they are “the sports car” of the surface fleet.

The ships are over 500 feet long, weigh around 9,000 tons and, from the keel to the mast, stand nearly 10 stories tall. Their four gas turbine engines can drive the ship at more than 30 knots.

Caine described them as “armed to the teeth” with surface-to-air missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, antiship missiles, antisubmarine rockets, torpedoes, five-inch naval guns, multiple electronic warfare systems and embarked helicopters, extending their reach and capability. However, despite the weaponry, he said the most important weapons on board these ships are the 300 Sailors who bring them to life.

“They are the heart and soul of these warships at sea,” Caine said, noting that they are deployed for months, operating around the clock in a constant state of readiness, always delivering capability to the joint force.

It’s hot in the engine room, where the engineering team keeps the lights on and the ship powered and able to respond to the orders from the bridge. On the bridge are Sailors maintaining a constant watch, maneuvering the ship tactically and safely through always-congested waters, the general said.

“It’s like driving a sports car through a supermarket parking lot on a payday weekend with thousands of kids in that parking lot, as you attempt to maneuver through there to get to that ship that would attempt to run that blockade,” he said.

Down in the combat information center is where the decisions are made. As threats appear, Sailors make real-time decisions on how to identify and handle them.

“And they always deliver,” Caine said, noting that these ships are often run by the youngest Sailors in the surface warfare fleet.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4462499/caine-praises-sailors-marines-enforcing-iran-blockade/>

ADT TO PAY \$1.3M TO SERVICEMEMBERS FOR ILLEGAL CHARGES

U.S. Justice Dept.
 Office of Public Affairs

The Justice Department recently announced that ADT LLC doing business as ADT Security Services, the nation’s largest home security services company, will pay over \$1.3 million to resolve allegations that it violated the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) by imposing unlawful charges on at least 3,400 servicemembers who terminated their home security services contracts after receiving military relocation orders.

“Members of our Armed Forces dutifully respond to the

defense needs of our Nation, sometimes with very little notice,” said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “We’re committed to ensuring that our servicemembers’ rights are protected so that they can focus on their military mission.”



The department alleges that ADT illegally imposed a 30-day notice requirement on servicemembers who terminated their home security contracts.

The department maintains that ADT’s 30-day notice policy violated the SCRA, which allows servicemembers to terminate certain consumer contracts any time after receiving military orders to relocate to a location that does not support the contract. When a servicemember terminates a contract under the SCRA, companies can’t charge any fees beyond the current billing period.

Under the settlement, ADT will pay up to \$1,260,000 in compensation to the affected ser-

vicemembers. ADT will also be required to pay a \$79,380 civil penalty, which is the maximum penalty for a first violation of the SCRA, and make policy and training changes to avoid committing future violations.

The department’s enforcement of the SCRA is conducted by the Civil Rights Division’s Housing and Civil Enforcement Section in partnership with U.S. Attorneys’ Offices throughout the country. Since 2011, the department has obtained over \$488 million in monetary relief for 152,000 servicemembers through its enforcement of the SCRA. For more information about the department’s SCRA enforcement efforts, visit www.servicemembers.gov.

Navy destroyer USS Spruance ‘blows hole’ in Iranian ship

President Trump announced April 19 that a San Diego-based warship fired on an Iranian cargo vessel that refused to honor the U.S. blockade, reports the *Times of San Diego*. In a post on Truth Social, Trump said USS *Spruance* intercepted the Iranian-flagged container ship *Touska* in the Gulf of Oman and warned it to stop. “The Iranian crew refused to listen, so our Navy ship stopped them right in their tracks by blowing a hole in the engine room,” Trump wrote in the social media post. Trump said in his post that the Iranian ship is under U.S. Treasury sanctions because of a history of illegal activity. U.S. Central Command subsequently provided further details, saying *Spruance* disabled *Touska*’s propulsion by firing several rounds from the destroyer’s 5-inch MK 45 gun into the cargo ship’s engine room. Marines from forward-deployed 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit later boarded the vessel, which remains in U.S. custody. A statement from Iran’s military headquarters, quoted by the Al Jazeera website, vowed to “soon respond to and retaliate against this armed piracy by the U.S. military.”

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102-year-old Italian World War II veteran honored by airborne community

by Staff Sgt. Catessa Palone
VICENZA, Italy - Paola Del Din, one of Italy's most storied World War II partisans and a pioneering figure in airborne history, received the prestigious Order of Saint Michael Award during a recent ceremony at her residence.

Command Sgt. Maj. Chad B. Harness, senior enlisted advisor for U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), presented the award in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to the airborne community and her enduring legacy of courage.

"Recognizing Ms. Del Din here, traveling from the base that bears her family's name, is a privilege for all of us," Harness said. "Her service, her bravery, and her life-long dedication to the ideals we defend continue to inspire generations of paratroopers on both sides of the Atlantic."

Del Din, at 102 years old, remains a symbol of resistance, sacrifice and the shared history between Italian and American airborne forces. She became the 14th civilian to receive the Order of Saint Michael Award.

"It is an honor to receive this award," Del Din said. "I fondly remember the great kindness of the American aviators when I flew with them and I'm grateful to still be involved with the greater airborne community."

Del Din's wartime service remains singular in military history. As a young member of the Italian resistance, she volunteered for some of the most dangerous missions of the conflict, crossing lines in Florence, traveling in makeshift vehicles to transport information across the regions. In September 1944, she attended a four-day paratrooper course in San Vito dei Normanni, southern Italy, with the aim of being able to return to the north more quickly in the fight for freedom.

On April 9, 1945, she became the first woman to conduct a combat parachute jump to deliver important documents to advancing Allied units, landing in Friuli, northeast Italy, a territory still occupied by Germans, Cosacks and Fascists.

Her actions 81 years ago contributed to the liberation of northeast Italy and cemented her place among the most decorated female veterans of the era. Over the decades, she has remained an advocate for airborne heritage, democratic values and the memory of those who fought for Italy's freedom.

"My hope is that, even in some small way, others are inspired to do something positive for their country," Del Din said. "It takes regular people to stand up and fight for what they believe in. That's what my family did back then, and

that's what we need to ensure a brighter future."

The Order of Saint Michael Award, presented by the National Infantry Association, honors individuals who have made significant contributions to the Army Aviation community.

While traditionally associated with aviators and aviation supporters, the award also recognizes those whose actions have profoundly shaped airborne operations, heritage and esprit de corps. Recipients are selected for their leadership, service and lasting impact on the broader aviation and airborne profession.

"Ms. Del Din embodies the spirit of the Order of Saint Michael," Harness said. "Her courage under fire, the commitment to her fellow comrades in arms and her lifelong dedication to preserving airborne history reflect the highest ideals of our profession."

The ceremony also highlighted the longstanding partnership between U.S. and Italian forces stationed in Vicenza at Caserma Ederle and Del Din.

Caserma Del Din, the installation named in honor of her brother, Renato Del Din, an officer in the Alpine troops who was killed in action in 1944 while deployed in the mountains, stands as a daily reminder of the Del Din family's

commitment to freedom. His valor and sacrifice inspired Paola to take the nom de guerre "Renata" as she carried out more than eleven battles in support of partisan operations.

"Her story is part of our story," said Harness. "Honoring her today strengthens the bond between our nations and reinforces the values we defend together."

Following the presentation, Del Din expressed gratitude for the recognition and emphasized the importance of remembering the sacrifices made for freedom.

"It was nothing I did alone, it was my country and my brotherhood that liberated us," Del Din said. "I am free, that is the point."

SETAF-AF and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, headquartered at Caserma Del Din, routinely train alongside Italian paratroopers, continuing a legacy of cooperation that stretches back to World War II. Del Din's presence serves as a living bridge between past and present, reminding Soldiers of the human stories behind the institutions they serve.

U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF) prepares Army forces, executes crisis response, enables strategic competition and strengthens partners to achieve U.S. Army Europe and Africa and U.S. Africa Command campaign objectives.



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Chad B. Harness, senior enlisted advisor for U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), and Paola Del Din, the first Italian female parachutist to jump into combat, pose for a photo after Del Din received the Order of Saint Michael Award during a ceremony at her home in Italy, April 9. The Order of Saint Michael Award, presented on behalf of the National Infantry Association, honors individuals who have made significant contributions to the Army Aviation community and those whose actions have profoundly shaped airborne operations, heritage and esprit de corps. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Catessa Palone



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Delivering tomorrow's small caliber ammunition lethality today

by Laura Emanski and Robert Goetz

PICATINNY ARSENAL, N.J. – The U.S. Army's Capability Program Executive Ammunition and Energetics, headquartered here, is spearheading a major transformation of the nation's small-caliber ammunition industrial base, advancing one of the Army's highest modernization priorities.

Central to this effort is the delivery of next-generation 6.8mm cartridges that will equip Soldiers with increased range, accuracy, and battlefield lethality as part of the Next Generation Squad Weapons program.

The NGSW program, featuring the M7 Rifle, XM8 Carbine, and M250 Automatic Rifle, represents the Army's most significant small-arms upgrade in decades, replacing the M4 Carbine and M249 Squad Automatic Weapon. These new weapons, enabled by advanced 6.8mm cartridges, are designed to provide decisive overmatch in operating environments.

To accelerate production and strengthen readiness, Project Manager Maneuver Ammunition Systems (PM MAS), in partner-

ship with Project Lead Joint Services (PLJS), has established an interim 6.8mm manufacturing capability at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant (LCAAP) utilizing a mix of new and repurposed equipment.

As of March, operating contractor Olin Winchester is producing and delivering 6.8mm ammunition from this capability. The Army is also supplying projectiles from this interim line to SIG Sauer to support additional cartridge deliveries while LCAAP expansion continues.

CPE A&E is executing a long-term modernization strategy to ensure the Army's ammunition needs are met well into the future. A key milestone was the February 2025 groundbreaking for a new 450,000-square-foot 6.8mm production facility at LCAAP.

This state-of-the-art complex will house advanced manufacturing systems for every component of the 6.8mm cartridge and serves as a cornerstone of the Army's organic industrial base modernization. Construction remains on schedule, with production equipment installation anticipated to begin in 2028.

"CPE A&E is leading the



development, procurement, and fielding of cutting-edge ammunition and energetics ensuring the Army and its international partners maintain a significant technological advantage," said Col. Jason Bohannon, Capabil-

ity Program Executive Ammunition and Energetics. "The work being executed is foundational to advancing the Army's modernization goals and ensuring combat readiness across the force."

Buckley SFB, Malmstrom AFB selected for Advanced Nuclear Power for Installations program

from Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Department of the Air Force, in conjunction with the Defense Innovation Unit, has selected Buckley Space Force Base, Colorado, and Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana, as potential locations to site nuclear microreactors under the Advanced Nuclear Power for Installations program.

This decision is a key step in ensuring the service can execute critical missions without interruption, thereby strengthening national security.

The ANPI partnership between the service and DIU aims to deploy advanced, contractor-owned and operated nuclear microreactors on DAF installations in partnership with commercial reactor companies. It is anticipated those companies will site, license, construct, operate and decommission the microreactors.

"By advancing the use of next-generation nuclear energy, the DAF is strengthening the energy security of our power projection platforms and contributing to long-term national energy leadership," said Nancy Balkus, deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for Infrastructure, Energy and Environment. "This initiative represents a critical step in ensuring the department remains the world's premier Air Force and Space Force."

Subject matter experts from the DAF and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory performed extensive data and on-site analysis, evaluating environment, nuclear safety and energy integration. Buckley SFB and Malmstrom AFB have been selected as preferred locations to site an ANPI reactor due to their utility infrastructure, land availability and critical mission requirements.

In the coming months, the bases will be paired with an ANPI nuclear vendor technology that best fits the installation's energy needs, with an anticipated deployment date of 2030 or earlier.

This ANPI program is separate from the microreactor pilot program at Eielson AFB, Alaska, which is a stand-alone effort focused on demonstrating the feasibility and operational benefits of a microreactor at a single installation.



HONORING HEROES Army Brig. Gen. Leland D. Blanchard II, interim commanding general of the District of Columbia National Guard, coins veterans during the Blue Ridge Honor Flight ceremony at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., April 18, 2026. The ceremony recognized the service and sacrifice of World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War veterans and Gold Star families. U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Melissa Sterling



CHAIN GANG OF WATER U.S. Marines with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163 (Reinforced), 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, and local volunteers, unload water pallets from an MV-22B Osprey on the island of Saipan, April 18, 2026. The 11th MEU, embarked aboard the Boxer Amphibious Ready Group, is providing vital defense support to civil authorities, contributing to crisis response and recovery efforts in the wake of Super Typhoon Sinlaku. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Joseph Helms



SALAKNIB STRIKE A High Mobility Artillery Rocket System fires a precision-guided rocket during Exercise Salaknib 26 in the Philippines, April 16, 2026. Salaknib 26 enhances interoperability between partner nations. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jameson Harris

Former Army employee arrested and charged with leaking classified national defense information

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

The FBI arrested Courtney Williams, 40, of Wagram, N.C., earlier this month and a federal grand jury indicted her in connection with her alleged transmission of classified national defense information to individuals not authorized to receive it, including a journalist. "Clearance holders accept a solemn obligation to protect the classified information entrusted to them," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. "That they do so is critical to the security of our nation. When clearance holders violate that trust, the National Security Division will act swiftly to hold them accountable." According to court documents, from 2010 to 2016, Williams worked for a special military unit and held a top secret / sensitive compartmented information security clearance. As alleged, between 2022 and 2025, Williams repeatedly communicated with the journalist via telephone and text messages. During this period, Williams and the journalist had over 10 hours of telephone calls and exchanged more than 180 messages. In one such message, the journalist identified themselves as a journalist and stated that they sought information about the SMU in support of an upcoming article and book.

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<https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

Secretary of War general & flag officer announcements

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced April 15 that President Donald J. Trump has made the following nominations:

Marine Corps **Lt. Gen. Roger B. Turner, Jr.**, for reappointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as commander, Marine Corps Forces Pacific and commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii. Turner is currently the commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force and commander, Marine Forces Japan, Okinawa.

Army **Maj. Gen. Constantin E. Nicolet** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as director, Warfighter Support, Office of the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Nicolet is currently special assistant to the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security, Pentagon.

Air Force **Maj. Gen. Christopher J. Niemi** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy chief of staff, Strategy, Design and Requirements, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Pentagon. Niemi is currently the military deputy, Air Force Futures, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Pentagon.

Marine Corps **Maj. Gen. Keith D. Reventlow** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as director for Logistics, J-4, Joint Staff, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Reventlow is currently the commanding general, Marine Corps Logistics Command, Albany, Ga.

Army **Maj. Gen. Monte L. Rone** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as commanding general, First U.S. Army, Rock Island, Ill. Rone is currently the commanding general, 1st Infantry Division and Fort Riley, Kansas.

Marine Corps **Maj. Gen. George B. Rowell IV** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii. Rowell is currently director, J-5, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Camp H. M. Smith.

Marine Corps **Maj. Gen. James B. Wellons** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commandant for Programs and Resources, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon. Wellons is currently special projects officer to the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, Pentagon.

Marine Corps **Col. Peter D. Houtz** for appointment to brigadier general. Houtz is currently an assistant judge advocate general of the Navy, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Washington Navy Yard.

Air Force **Col. Deane E. Thomey** for appointment to brigadier general. Thomey is currently the deputy director of Air National Guard Operations, Air National Guard Readiness Center, Joint Base Andrews, Md.

Hegseth also announced that the president has made the following nominations:

Navy **Rear Adm. Douglas L. Williams**, for appointment to vice admiral, with assignment as director for Strategic Systems Programs, Washington Navy Yard. Williams is currently the director for Test, Missile Defense Agency, Fort Belvoir, Va.

As Hormuz blockade continues, search for contraband expands

In an April 16 report from *USNI News*, the U.S. reserves the right to search any Iranian vessels, sanctioned vessels and ships suspected of carrying a list of contraband items, according to a recent notice to mariners from U.S. Central Command.

Contraband items include weapons, ammunition, explosives and military equipment, the notice reads. Conditional contraband – meaning contraband for aiding Iran’s military operations – includes crude oil, nuclear material, metals and machinery. A full list is included in the blockade update.

To that end, the U.S. will pursue ships outside of the U.S. Central Command area of response, Chief of the Joint Staff

USS Frank Cable recognized for top notch safety

by Molly Burgess

The Military Sealift Command submarine tender USS *Frank Cable* was named a recipient of the fiscal year 2025 Chief of Naval Operations Afloat Safety Award.

The selectees for this award are recognized for significant contributions to Navy safety and occupational health.

The award is presented to U.S. naval ships and submarines for their outstanding safety performance, aggressive mishap-prevention posture, and comprehensive safety reporting throughout the fiscal year.

Frank Cable operates with a hybrid-crew of both Civil Service Mariners and Navy Sailors enabling the specialized repair and support of submarine missions and vessel operations in the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of responsibility.

In recognition of their fiscal year 2025 accomplishments, *Frank Cable* will be presented with a commemorative plaque and

Gen. Dan Caine told reporters April 16, according to USNI.

Traffic in the Strait of Hormuz dropped following the announcement of a U.S. blockade, Richard Meade, editor of London-based Lloyd’s List, said during a webinar. Recently, the Strait of Hormuz saw the most activity since the U.S.-Israel offensive began in Iran, although overall traffic through the Middle East waterway is far below normal.

“While sanctioned and shadow fleet ships have scrambled to test the full extent of the U.S. resolve to enforce the U.S. president’s current plan, mainstream shipping has once again been left watching the news and tuning into webinars

authorized to display the prestigious Green Safety “S.”

“These award winners are recognized for their exceptional professionalism, commitment to excellence, solid leadership, teamwork, and an in-depth risk management culture which resulted in safe and effective operations,” said Rear Adm. Daniel P. Martin, commander, Naval Safety Command, in a message announcing the award recipients. “All nominees are to be commended for the significant contribution they have made toward reducing mishaps, increasing mission readiness and preserving our most precious asset, Sailors and civilians. Congratulations to all for job well done.”

MSC directs and supports operations for approximately 140 civilian-crewed ships that replenish Navy ships at sea, conduct specialized missions, preposition combat cargo at sea around the world, perform a variety of support services, and move military equipment and supplies to deployed U.S. forces.

for signs to an end to this crisis,” Meade said.

In related news from *Stars and Stripes* on April 21, U.S. forces conducted an interdiction and boarding of a stateless, sanctioned oil tanker in the Indo-Pacific region, the Pentagon said, highlighting the global effort to pressure Iran as cease-fire negotiations continue.

Video footage shared by the Defense Department showed service members rappelling from helicopters onto the deck

of the M/T Tifani, according to the *Stars and Stripes* report. A ship by the same name was last reported in the Indian Ocean sailing under the flag of Botswana, according to ship tracker *MarineTraffic.com*.

The Pentagon said the operation occurred without incident. “As we have made clear, we will pursue global maritime enforcement efforts to disrupt illicit networks and interdict sanctioned vessels providing material support to Iran—anywhere they operate,” the Pentagon said in an X post.



Top 5

- *Air Force extends A-10 Warthog through 2030
 - *Europe plots Hormuz mission as economic, political pressure mounts
 - *Trump clears path for expanded psychedelic research to treat veterans' PTSD
 - *U.S. has turned back 27 ships since Strait of Hormuz blockade started
 - *Unregulated prediction market may endanger U.S. national security, experts and lawmakers warn
- Army**
- *Two Soldiers injured in bear encounter in Alaska
 - *Boeing lands Chinook without a pilot at the controls
 - *U.S. Army wants doctrine for landing helicopters on Arctic ice
- Navy**
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 - *U.S. Navy wants helicopter sonar that can detect subs – and mines
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- *U.S. Air Force wants better infrared jammers for its combat rescue helicopters
- Space Force**
- *Space Force's 15-year vision calls for more personnel, simulators and survivability
- Coast Guard**
- *Coast Guard searches for crew of cargo ship found overturned near Guam after typhoon
- Cyber, Space & Unmanned**
- *U.S. Army turns to Ukraine-tested drones to counter Iranian UAV threat
 - *Marine Corps prototyping AI tools for aviation supply, predictive maintenance

Places of Worship

<p>Apostolic Pentecostal Church - Faith Mountain <i>Come experience the power, the joy, the difference!</i> Sunday afternoon at 2pm Tuesday evening at 7:30pm 14069 Ridge Hill Rd. El Cajon, CA 92021 Rides: 619-938-1070 www.faithmtn.org Instagram: @FaithMtn</p>	<p>Christ Community Church <i>"Helping people love God, find community and make a difference"</i> Sunday services at 8:45am and 10:30am Children's ministry for all kids. Life groups for teens and adults. 9535 Kearny Villa Rd. Mira Mesa, 92126. Just off I-15 and Miramar Rd. More Info: www.gotoChrist.com</p>	<p>Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church San Diego <i>"Teamwork Makes the Dream Work" - Nehemiah 4:1-6</i> Join us for worship services: Sunday School 9:30am, followed by Morning Worship at 11am Rev. Dennis Ray Anderson, D. Min., Pastor 3045 Greely Ave., San Diego, CA 92113 619-233-3296 - office</p>
<p>Bayview Church <i>Attract... Assimilate... Activate</i> Terry W. Brooks, Sr. Pastor 6134 Pastor Timothy J. Winters St., San Diego 92114 • (619) 262-8384 Sunday Worship Services 7:30am, 9:15am, 11:15am Studies In Christian Living (formerly Sunday School) Tues & Thurs online only 6pm (contact Church for sign up). In person Saturday 9am & 10am www.bayviewbc.org info@bayviewbc.org</p>	<p>First Baptist Church of Coronado <i>"Reach Up, Reach Out, Reach Our World"</i> Jim W. Baize, Pastor www.fbcoronado.com Sunday Adult Bible Study 8:45am, Sunday Worship Service 10am Meeting in person and online on YouTube or Facebook FB: First Baptist Church of Coronado email: secretary@fbcoronado.com 445 C Ave., Coronado, CA 92118 (619) 435-6588</p>	<p>Southwest Baptist Church <i>"To know Christ and to make Him known"</i> Welcome All Retired Military/Chaplain as Pastors Sunday Bible Study: 9:30am Sunday Worship Service: 11am Wednesday Prayer Service: 7pm 2295 Leon Avenue, San Diego, CA 92154 Phone: (619) 423-2477 Email: pastor@swbcsd.org www.swbcsd.org</p>
<p>Bethany Lutheran Church Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod 2051 Sunset Cliffs Blvd., Ocean Beach 92107 (Parking lot off the Alley - North of the building) Worship 11am Sundays Bible Class, Wednesdays 10am (619)222-7291 Office@BethanyLutheranOB.org</p>	<p>Mesa View Baptist Church Dr. Darrow Perkins, Jr., Th.D. Pastor/Servant CW03, USMC (Ret.) <i>Seeking Sinners; Saving Souls. Strengthening Saints</i> Sunday School at 8:45am • Morning Worship at 10am Wednesday Night Bible Study 7pm 13230 Pomerado Rd., Poway • 858-485-6110 • www.mesaview.org</p>	<p>St. Luke's Lutheran Church 5150 Wilson Ave., La Mesa, CA 91942 Phone: (619) 463-6633 website: www.st-lukes-la-mesa.org Worship: 9am Pastor: Mark Menacher, PhD. <i>We thank you for your service!</i></p>

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Military leaders update Congress on force readiness, quality of life programs

by Matthew Olay

Senior leaders from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps provided an update on steps their respective branches are taking to improve the quality of life for service members during a hearing in Washington April 15 before the House Armed Services Committee's readiness subcommittee.

Acting Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Christopher C. LaNeve, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. James W. Kilby, and Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Gen. Bradford J. Gering all spoke on the topic.

"After 36 years, I've never seen a unit's readiness determined by industrial capacity alone. What I have seen repeatedly is [that] how we treat our soldiers shapes whether we retain the experienced ones, and whether the force we're building reflects the standards we claim to uphold," LaNeve said during his opening remarks.

He went on to explain that the Army is investing \$4 billion in infrastructure throughout 2026, which includes quality-of-life improvements such as upgraded nutrition initiatives, campus-style dining facilities and the scaling of holistic health and fitness across the Army's entire active, guard and reserve force.

LaNeve added that those investments have had a measurable impact, as the service's recruiting numbers are up and exceeding last year's targets.

During his remarks, Kilby explained how the Navy has been implementing quality-of-life initiatives that have led to the retention of thousands of sailors who had previously been considering leaving the service after their enlistment was up.

Chief among those initiatives, Kilby said, is the permanent, shore-based housing for junior Sailors, so they will no longer be required to live aboard their ship while in port.

"As of last month, 5,700 Sailors have transitioned from living afloat to residing ashore," Kilby said.

He added that unmet child care needs in the Navy were reduced from 2,200 spaces to 1,500, and that the Navy's fitness facilities are now open 24/7.

Additionally, Kilby noted that the Navy is expanding meal selections and adding healthy food options in its galley.

STATE OF THE MILITARY



(from left) Acting Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Christopher C. LaNeve, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. James W. Kilby and Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Gen. Bradford J. Gering. DOW screenshots

As for the Marine Corps, Gering said that senior leadership directly links quality of life to readiness.

"We ... recognize that taking care of our Marines and our families and their families is a warfighting necessity that

directly impacts readiness and retention," he said.

Similar to the Navy, Ger-

ing said the Marine Corps is focused on proper housing for service members. The branch's Barracks 2030 initiative — an \$11 billion project to modernize unaccompanied housing — aims to provide safe, high-quality living conditions for single Marines, and it is making tangible progress.

As an example, Gering said in the past fiscal year, the Marine Corps completed four new barracks, began construction on eight others, awarded renovations for an additional 27 and outfitted 159 barracks

with new furnishings.

He added that the service is "tackling child care challenges head-on" by implementing key recruiting and retention incentives for caregivers.

"These incentives include a 100 percent child care discount, increased salaries and a priority placement transfer program that allows military spouses to seamlessly move between installation child development centers when their service member executes permanent change of station orders," Gering said.

Hegseth: Flu vaccine optional

by C. Todd Lopez

Annual influenza vaccines are no longer mandatory, said Secretary of War Pete Hegseth in a video posted April 21 on social media.

"The notion that a flu vaccine must be mandatory for every service member, everywhere, in every circumstance, at all times, is just overly broad and not rational," the secretary said. "Our new policy is simple: If you, an American warrior entrusted to defend this nation, believe that the flu vaccine is in your best interest, then you are free to take it; you should. But we will not force you."

The secretary signed a memorandum that provides updated guidance that states, effective immediately, the annual influenza vaccine is voluntary for all active and reserve component service members and War Department civilian personnel.

The new mandate follows similar department efforts regarding the COVID-19 vaccine.

Between Aug. 24, 2021, and Jan. 10, 2023, the department required service members to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Over 8,000 service members were involuntarily discharged from the military for refusing the vaccine. Hegseth said that won't happen again.

"Our men and women in uniform were forced to choose between their conscience and their country, even when those decisions posed no threat to our military readiness," Hegseth said. "That era of be-



Influenza vaccines lined up on a tray at Aviano Air Base, Italy, Nov. 19, 2024. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Raya Feltner

trayal is over. Under President [Donald J.] Trump, the War Department continues to take decisive action to once again restore freedom and strength to our joint force. We're seizing this moment to discard any absurd overreaching mandates that only weaken our warfighting capabilities."

Influenza vaccines, he said, are examples of overreaching mandates. The secretary said the decision to make it optional is common sense for the War Department and the service members.

"It's the kind of common-sense approach we are undertaking in this department," he said. "Rest assured that under President Trump, the War Department will always honor our brave warriors and do everything we can to restore the American people's trust in their military for generations to come."



MILITARY STAR card now offers uniform line of credit to Sailors

On April 23, active duty and reserve Sailors who have a MILITARY STAR Card will automatically receive a \$1,000 military uniform line of credit on their account. This line of credit is determined by eligibility in Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), not a credit score.

The line of credit offers zero-percent financing for 12 months on each qualifying military uniform purchase made at a NEX, up to the \$1,000 limit. Cardholders must make 12 equal payments for each uniform purchase so that the balance is fully paid within 12 months. Missed payments may affect a Sailor's credit history if minimum payments are not made for three consecutive months.

If uniform purchases exceed the \$1,000 line of credit, Sailors may use any form of payment, including the MILITARY STAR Card, which often has zero percent interest offering.

New MILITARY STAR applicants may apply for either a military uniform-only account, a standard MILITARY STAR account or both. Applicants who apply for the standard account and meet the military uniform account eligibility will automatically receive both lines of credit.

Sailors can apply for a MILITARY STAR Card in-store or at <https://www.myecp.com/>. The website also contains the terms and conditions for the program.

Air Force announces FY26 aviation bonus

by Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

WASHINGTON - Eligible active-duty aviators have from April 1 until May 31 to apply for the fiscal year 2026 aviation bonus, Air Force officials announced April 1.

This year's AvB program builds upon previous years' offers to decisively shape and retain the rated force by providing specific eligible pilots, remotely piloted aircraft pilots, air battle managers and combat systems officers with monetary incentives in exchange for active-duty service commitments. This provides reliable personnel forecasts to continue executing the Air Force's warfighting mission.

"Our Airmen are extremely talented, with critical skills that are highly sought after," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ken Wilsbach. "The aviation bonus is an incentive that helps us retain expertise and ensures we have the right mix of experienced aviators to meet warfighting demands today and into the future."

Significant changes to the FY26 program include offering increased compensation for

shorter contract lengths, particularly in fighter, bomber, and U-2 communities. Contracts are offered for a minimum of three years and a maximum of 12 years, with rates up to \$50,000 per year, depending on the aviator's career field and experience level.

The FY26 AvB program applies to lieutenant colonels and below. These officers must be qualified for operational flying duty and entitled to, and receiving, monthly aviation incentive pay.

Airmen applying for these bonus programs should expect to see payments within three weeks after final approval of their application and processing by the Defense Finance Accounting Service.

This program is for active-duty Airmen, as well as Air Reserve Component Airmen serving in the Voluntary Limited Period of Active Duty Program.

Complete eligibility requirements and application instructions are available on the MyFSS website for CAC-enabled users.

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Pacific Fleet announces 30th RIMPAC - 'Partners: Integrated and Prepared'

from U.S. 3rd Fleet

It's fitting that the world's premier maritime exercise occurs as the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary.

For 250 years, the U.S. has built relationships with international partners based on trust, cooperation, and shared values. RIMPAC puts that trust into practice, strengthening the people-to-people relationships that are the bedrock of our collective security.

The theme of RIMPAC 2026 is "Partners: Integrated and Prepared." With teamwork at

its core, RIMPAC fosters multi-national cooperation and trust, leverages interoperability, and achieves respective national objectives to strengthen integrated and prepared partners.

Hosted by commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, RIMPAC 2026 will be led by the Commander, 3rd Fleet, who will serve as the Combined Task Force commander. Chile will fill the role of deputy commander of the CTF, and Japan will fill the role of vice commander. The Republic of Korea will command the maritime component, and Canada will command the air component.



**AIRCRAFT CARRIER CARL VINSON
28 YEARS AGO**

From July 8, 1998, USS Carl Vinson arrives in Pearl Harbor for RIMPAC 98. DoD photo by Petty Officer 1st Class James G. McCarter

RIMPAC 2026 will build on the success of RIMPAC 2024 with a larger contingent of partners demonstrating the inherent flexibility of maritime forces.

The exercise will cover a wide range of capabilities including amphibious operations, gunnery and missile proficiency, anti-submarine warfare, air defense exercises, military medicine, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, counter-piracy, mine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal, and diving and salvage operations.

Throughout the exercise, partners train and operate together to

strengthen our collective forces and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Details of RIMPAC activities and imagery are available at <http://www.cpf.navy.mil/rimpac>.

Media interested in covering the exercise should fill out the following form: <https://forms.osi.apps.mil/r/HwfYQGpQsd>.

Contact information for the RIMPAC Combined Joint Information Bureau will be made available prior to the beginning of the exercise.

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Musician 3rd Class Malaysia Billman, oboe instrumentalist, performs with the Prevailing Winds Woodwind Quintet. Navy Band Southwest's Prevailing Winds Woodwind Quintet performed at a Purple Up Day morning assembly for students at Bancroft Elementary School on April 17, 2026 in honor of Month of the Military Child. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Malaysia Billman



U.S. Marines with Battalion Landing Team 3/5, 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, conduct reloading drills with M27 infantry automatic rifles as part of weapons manipulation training aboard dock landing ship USS Comstock (LSD 45), in the Pacific Ocean, April 14, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Trent A. Henry

Former enlisted machinist's mate takes command of USS Anchorage

SAN DIEGO - Capt. Matthew Ventimiglia was relieved by Capt. Christopher Petro as commanding officer of amphibious transport dock ship USS *Anchorage* earlier this month.

As skipper, Ventimiglia led *Anchorage*, from an extended maintenance period, to various training events, and was awarded the Legion of Merit for his accomplishments. He's scheduled to become aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*'s

next skipper.

"It's been quite an adventure, and it's not just about where you go, but how you get there," Ventimiglia said. "We have come so far and will go so much further. We will do so because that's what our nation and families demand of us."

Petro enlisted in the Navy in 1993, completing basic training in Orlando, Fla., before serving as a machinist's mate. In 1999, he was selected into the Seaman

to Admiral program, graduating from the University of San Diego in 2002 with a bachelor's degree in business administration. He completed Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Fla., in 2003.

"I want to extend my appreciation to the men and women serving on USS *Anchorage*," Petro said. "I am excited for the opportunity to serve with you, and I consider myself lucky to be a part of *Anchorage*."

DOW awards contract for work on USS Sampson

Vigor Marine LLC, of Portland, Ore., was awarded a \$252,849,606 firm-fixed-price contract action for maintenance, modernization, and repair of USS *Sampson* (DDG 102) for the Fiscal 2026 modernization period.

The scope of this acquisition includes all labor, supervision, equipment, production, testing, facilities, and quality assurance necessary to prepare for and accomplish the Chief of Naval Operations availability for critical modernization, maintenance, and repair programs.

This contract includes options which, if exercised, would bring the cumulative value of this contract to \$253,195,124. Work will be performed in Seattle, Wash., and is expected to be completed by March 2028.

Last June, *Sampson* deployed to U.S. Northern Command's area of responsibility to continue the Navy's role in maritime operations that support national security priorities.

The deployment was part of the Department of Defense's support to national objectives along the U.S. southern border, following Presidential directives and ongoing interagency efforts to improve border security and homeland defense.

Sampson operated with an embarked U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET). This joint presence strengthened the ship's ability to conduct maritime interdiction operations, contribute to border security, and support counter-narcotics efforts and humanitarian missions as needed.



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Man-on-the-Street

What's been the best part of 2026 for you?

"My children, and concentrating on all the blessings I have."

Mindy Shanes
NB San Diego
Thrift Shop lead volunteer



"We had our baby this year. Her name is Ocean Edith Lopez."

Erick Lopez
NASNI Fitness Center

"I finally got a full-time position here {Navy Landing Field Imperial Beach Fitness Center}."

Sinai Garcia
OLF Imperial Beach Fitness Center

"Transferring to San Diego from Virginia."

AD1 Crys Chaney
Fleet Readiness Center Southwest



"I started my own business this year. A barber shop called Styled Studios, near Petco Park."

Jonathan Hidalgo
NASNI Fitness Center



"Going back to church, and getting more involved there."

YN1 Angelica Hernandez
NB San Diego

Commander of unmanned vessel unit concludes early command tour

by Lt.j.g. Cody Davidson, USVRON 1

PORT HUENEME - Lt. Cmdr. Chris Rodman relinquished command of Unmanned Surface Vessel Division (USVDIV) 12 after successfully completing his early command tour. LCDR Rodman served as the first commanding officer of USVDIV-12, assigned to Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron (USVRON) 1, where he played a pivotal role in introducing and developing Medium Unmanned Surface Vessels (mUSVs) for integration into the Surface Fleet.

During his tour, Rodman led his team in operating multiple unmanned platforms, including the Overlord Unmanned Surface Vessel Ranger and the Medium Displacement Unmanned Surface Vessel Sea Hunter. His team also provided mission support for sea trials and testing of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's No Manning Required Ship (NOMARS) USX-1 Defiant.

"Lt. Cmdr. Rodman built a team that embraced innovation and delivered results. His commitment to developing Sailors and advancing unmanned capabilities has left a lasting impact," said Cmdr. Timothy Boston, the commanding officer of USVRON-1.

Rodman's successful tour marks a significant milestone for the Navy's Surface Warfare Officer - Unmanned career path, which provides officers the opportunity to develop the critical skill sets required to operate and maintain robotic and autonomous systems.

The USV Division Early Command position is a post-Division Officer opportunity at the forefront of manned and unmanned fleet operations. Commanding Officers in these billets are responsible for developing new tactics, techniques, and procedures for integrating unmanned vessels, payloads, and autonomy into surface warfare missions.

Rodman will transition to his next assignment with Commander, Naval Forces Japan, based in Yokosuka, Japan. Based in Port Hueneme, aboard Naval Base Ventura County, USVRON-1 leads the introduction and deployment of Medium USVs, critical sensors, networks, and payloads to support Fleet Commanders and enhance Surface Fleet lethality.

For more news from USVRON-1, visit <https://www.surfpac.navy.mil/usvron1/>.

Hospital ship Mercy brings in new CO

by Sarah Cannon

Military Sealift Command Pacific NAS NORTH ISLAND - Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS *Mercy* Medical Treatment Facility, welcomed their new commanding officer, Capt. Damian Storz, during a ceremony here April 17.

Storz assumed command from Capt. Charles Dickerson, who served as the MTF commanding officer since 2024.

"I'll give you some advice that I try to impart to every commander I've been fortunate enough to lead," said Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson, commander, Military Sealift Command, who served as the ceremony's presiding officer. "You're in charge, so take charge! Lead boldly with intent, resolve and innovation. Be ready, and if called to action, ensure we're ready to provide our nation, our allies and our partners with the support they need to fight and win decisively."

Storz joins the *Mercy's* MTF team following a tour as officer in charge, Navy Medicine Operational Training Command Detachment, Naval Expeditionary Medicine Training Institute, Camp Pendleton.

A native of Woodland, Calif., Storz began his Navy career in 2005 following gradua-

tion from the University of Wyoming, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in General Health Science and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In 2011, he completed a Master of Nursing Science as an Adult Critical Care Clinical Nurse Specialist, from the University of San Diego.

At sea, Storz supported the humanitarian operation Pacific Partnership, on board USS *Peleliu* as staff and education and training nurse; on numerous deployments as Forward Deployed Naval Forces on board USS *George Washington*; and was part of the team that developed the first Expeditionary Resuscitative Surgical Team for Navy's 7th Fleet during Operation Guardian in the Southern Pacific Region.

"I'm committed to you," said Storz, addressing the crew. "Leading with authenticity and transparency, to strengthen the culture of trust and ready to meet the mission head on."

Storz relieves Dickerson, who served as the MTF's commanding officer through five *Mercy* Exercises. These included two joint service Steel Knight exercises with the U.S. Marine Corps, and the first advanced burn life support training ever performed onboard a Navy vessel.

Secretary of War general & flag officer announcement

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced April 15 that President Donald J. Trump has nominated Marine Corps **Maj. Gen. Thomas B. Savage** for appointment to lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commandant, Training and Education, and commanding general, Training and Education Command, Quantico, Va. Savage is currently the commanding general, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton.

Hegseth also announced that the president has nominated Navy **Vice Adm. John F. Wade** for reappointment to vice admiral, with assignment as senior military assistant to the Secretary of War, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Wade is currently commander, Third Fleet, San Diego.

Marine Corps General and Special Court-Martials

Listed below are the most recent Marine Corps General and Special Court-Martials results:



At a special court-martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Cpl. A. Hull, pursuant to the accused's plea, of assault consummated by a battery. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-1 and two months confinement.

At an article 16(c)(2)(A) court-martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. J. Frazier, pursuant to the accused's plea, of violation of a lawful general order. Consistent with the plea agreement, no additional punishment was adjudged by the military judge.

At a special court-martial at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center - Twentynine Palms, a military judge convicted Private First Class J. E. Circus, pursuant to the accused's plea, of possession of a controlled substance, distribution of a controlled substance, and introduction of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge, and reduction to E-1.

At a special court-martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. N. A. Capote, pursuant to the accused's plea, of one specification of dereliction of duty. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-3 and 90 days confinement.

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Nishka Leon
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3		7	9	6			
4			5	1			
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			6	8	5		3



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San Diego Strike Force is a professional indoor football team in the Indoor Football League (IFL) based in San Diego County. The team provides fast-paced 8-on-8 arena football, serving as San Diego's only professional football team. www.sdstrikeforce.com

2026 SCHEDULE

HOME GAMES AT FRONTWAVE ARENA

Mon., March 23, 6pm NAZ Wranglers at San Diego Strike Force*
Fri., April 17, 5pm Quad City Steamwheelers at San Diego Strike Force
Sun., April 26, 4:30pm Tucson Sugar Skulls at San Diego Strike Force*
Sat., May 23, 7pm NAZ Wranglers at San Diego Strike Force*
Fri., June 19, 7pm Vegas Knight Hawks at San Diego Strike Force*
Mon., July 6, 6pm Arizona Rattlers at San Diego Strike Force*
Sat., July 18, 8pm New Mexico Chupacabras at San Diego Strike Force*
Fri., July 24, 6pm Tucson Sugar Skulls at San Diego Strike Force*
*Conference

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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

I couldn't believe my eyes. Our 800-pound upright piano was being carried by two men down four flights of stairs from our Patch Barracks apartment to their truck. That German-Turkish moving crew displayed feats of superhuman strength like I'd never seen before.

It was 2010, and our family was PCSing to Florida after three years in Germany. We believed that hardy crew had safely packed our 18,000 pounds of worldly possessions for a successful trip back to the U.S. And they did. Every kitchen utensil, shoe, ballpoint pen, Lego block, refrigerator magnet, mattress, family photo, and Band-Aid were sealed into crates.

Well, except for one small thing. A Ziplock bag containing coins. Not the pennies on the kitchen windowsill. Not the change from pants pockets that sat on our dryer. Not the lunch money stash on the hallway table.

The coins that didn't get packed were my husband's military challenge coins. He'd wrapped them in tissue paper before placing them into the Ziplock bag, then fitted the bag snugly inside his wooden humidor box.

Months later, the crates were unsealed and every item carried into our base house at Naval Station Mayport. Unlike other moves, nothing looked broken or lost. Our piano was unscathed and still in tune, my

Never gamble with challenge coins

beloved ceramic Christmas trees hadn't suffered so much as a flea bite, and Lilly's Polly Pockets were still wearing their tiny shoes.

But when the last crate was emptied, my husband Francis searched for his humidor. He found it wrapped securely in paper, inside a sealed box marked "Office." The humidor felt strangely light.

Sure enough, it was empty. His coins, every one of them, were gone.

"I'll file a claim," I'd said, trying to comfort him. But the coins were irreplaceable. Not only would he never find those same coins again, they weren't worth enough fair market value to justify the hassle of filing a claim.

Francis had to come to terms with losing the special coins he'd collected during three years at U.S. Africa Command and a year-long deployment to Djibouti. Coins given to him from embassies and remote units in Botswana, Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Yemen. Also, he'd never see the coins he'd acquired during duty in Iraq, Poland, Norway, Italy, Alaska, and Virginia.

Most special to him was the first coin he'd ever received in 1996 while stationed at Joint Analysis Center, Molesworth, England. As a young intelligence officer, Francis was placed in charge of 30 analysts assessing the military capabilities of other nations. One afternoon in a WWII windowless Royal Air Force hanger, Francis gave a presentation about his group's mission to visiting Lieutenant General Patrick M. Hughes, the highly-decorated Director of the U.S.

Defense Intelligence Agency.

As attendees dispersed after the presentation, General Hughes reached out to shake Francis' hand. Francis's palm met the General's, and he detected a cool circle of metal.

"Nice job today. Keep up the good work," the General said.

At home that night, Francis showed me his first challenge coin, explaining that the medals were a form of recognition for a job well done. As the years passed, he collected more coins, displaying them in a rack atop his roll-top desk. He cherished them as unique "memory chips" from moments in his military career.

For a time, Francis beat himself up for not carrying his challenge coins with him during that PCS move. But then, he got on with it. Today, he has another rack atop his roll top desk, choc full of more coins collected from duty in Chili, Columbia, Peru, Honduras, Texas, Japan, Korea, and the Naval War College in Rhode Island.

Years after he retired from the Navy, Francis received an unexpected surprise. He'd forgotten that, early in his career, he sometimes had two of the same coin, so he sent the duplicates to his father. His brother found those coins while sorting out their mother's belongings after she'd passed, and sent them to Francis to restore at least some of his early collection.

We learned the hard way that while the Navy can move almost anything across the ocean, sometimes it's the smallest things that carry the most weight.

2026 Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach - thrilling racing in multiple series

The 2026 Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach was held this past weekend, continuing its tradition of great racing, in multiple series, at an iconic and historic venue. The weather was beautiful and all indications — including packed grandstands, packed walkways and the bustling Lifestyle Expo exhibit hall — point towards the attendance topping last year's 50th Anniversary event.

As always, the race weekend kicked off with "Thunder Thursday at The Pike Outlets." This is a free evening event, open to the public. It includes an NTT IndyCar Series pit stop competition on Shoreline Drive, in which four IndyCar teams compete for a \$10,000 prize. The evening's entertainment also includes a high-flying Freestyle MX motocross exhibition, a car show and live music.

With multiple race series competing, the Grand Prix has a wide variety of motorsports action and is a terrific value. Racing on the street circuit were the Porsche Carrera Cup North America, the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, the Formula Drift Super Drift Challenge invitational, the Historic Trans Am Challenge, Robby Gordon's SPEED ENERGY Super Trucks and the headline NTT IndyCar Series.

Last year's winner of the NTT IndyCar race was Kyle Kirkwood. He returned to defend his title but was defeated by Alex Palou.

The IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship included two classes of cars racing on the track at the same time: the high-speed,

high-tech Grand Touring Prototype (GTP) class, consisting of state-of-the-art prototype cars from Acura, Aston Martin, BMW, Cadillac and Porsche; and the GT Daytona (GTD) class, which included BMW, Chevrolet (Corvette), Mercedes-AMG, Lexus,



Ferrari, Lamborghini and Ford (Mustang). The potential speed differential of these two distinctly different classes of cars made for particularly exciting racing.

The Porsche Carrera Cup North America is a one-make racing series, which produces very close racing — with an international field of drivers. Seeing all those Porsche 911 racecars mixing it up with each other — for two races — is truly a memorable experience!

A fan favorite each year are the Robby Gordon SPEED Energy Stadium Super Trucks. These races are defined by the trucks launching over jumps set up on the race track, and massive suspension travels, which imparts an almost animal-like stance to the trucks as they race around the entire Long Beach track.

Of course, the Super Drift Challenge features tire-smoking action as the drivers maneuver their cars

around the track in competition, under the lights on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Added to the racing was the large Lifestyle Expo and Family Fun Zone, vendors, concerts and, of course, plenty of competition vehicles to see in between their races.

Unfortunately, earlier this year, Jim Michaelian — President & CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach, and one of the founding staff members of the Grand Prix — passed away. The official press release tells us that "Under his leadership, the Acura Grand Prix event has grown into one of the premier street races in the world, blending top-level competition with major entertainment, civic, and business impact for the City of Long Beach." More than that, Jim gave the event a special personality. I always looked forward to seeing his smiling face over the course of the weekend. Jim was 83 years old. He will be missed. Taking over as Grand Prix Association of Long Beach President & CEO is Jim Liaw.

For more information about the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, visit the individual race series' websites and: <https://gplb.com>.

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Veterans News

VA announces major improvements in benefits processing and delivery

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs announced a dramatic reduction in processing times for both Veteran disability claims and pension and survivor benefits, which shows that the Trump Administration's year-long push to make VA work better for veterans is paying off.

erans is paying off.

VA receives millions of claims from veterans each year for disability benefits and continues to process them faster than ever while maintaining high accuracy rates. This means more veterans are receiving the benefits they've

earned through their service on a timely basis. For example:

-After processing a record of more than 3 million claims in fiscal year 2025, VA is on a similar pace in FY2026 and has processed more than 1.5 million claims halfway through FY2026.

VA requests record \$488 billion for FY2027

FLEET RESERVE ASSOCIATION - The Trump administration has unveiled a record-breaking \$488 billion budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2027, representing a 7.7 percent increase over current levels.

napolis VA Medical Center and \$1.3 billion for a new facility in Manchester, N.H. The budget also allocates \$500 million for permanent homeless veteran housing at the National Center for Warrior Independence in West Los Angeles.

trim what the White House calls "divisive and wasteful diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives," redirecting those funds toward core missions like healthcare and cemetery services.

The proposal also includes a request for advanced funding for fiscal 2028 to ensure that veterans' services remain unaffected by any potential government shutdowns in the future.

The proposal includes \$205.6 billion in discretionary funding and \$282.6 billion for mandatory spending, which covers essential disability benefits, pensions, and insurance. This historic request represents a ten-fold increase in VA funding since 2001, reflecting the growing needs of aging veterans and the post-9/11 generation.

Notably, the proposal funds the restart of the VA's Electronic Health Record (EHR) modernization program, which has been on a strategic reset since 2022, with plans to go live at 13 sites throughout 2026.

Key highlights of the discretionary request include nearly \$2 billion to replace the India-

VA Secretary Doug Collins emphasized that the era of "measuring progress by how much money we spend" is over, shifting the focus toward service outcomes and efficiency. However, the budget does seek to

FRA is closely analyzing the proposed shift of \$52 billion from the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund into the discretionary budget. While the overall increase in funding is welcome, the FRA remains cautious about any moves that could jeopardize dedicated funds for toxic exposure care.



-In FY2026, VA completed 1 million disability claims faster than ever and hit this milestone on Feb. 2, 2026.

-VA's claims-processing accuracy has increased to 94.02 percent, which is the highest 12-month accuracy rate in the last two years.

-The average number of days needed to complete a claim has fallen from 141.5 days to 80.7 days since the start of the second Trump Administration, a 43 percent decrease.

VA also receives hundreds of thousands of claims for veterans pension, survivors pension, and dependency and indemnity compensation each year. DIC benefits are for the surviving spouses, the children, or the parents of a service member who died in the line of duty or through a service-related injury or illness.

During the second Trump Administration, VA has stepped

up its levels of service to ensure veterans and survivors receive the benefits they deserve:

-In February, the backlog of veterans waiting for VA benefits fell to less than 100,000 claims for the first time since 2020.

-VA has decreased the average time to complete an initial veterans pension claim from 170 days to 57 days, a 66 percent reduction. The average time to complete an initial survivors pension claim has dropped from 172 days to 73 days, a drop of more than 55 percent.

-VA has nearly eliminated initial veterans pension claims that are part of the VA disability claims backlog (older than 125 days), reducing this backlog from 3,514 claims to just 71 claims, a 98 percent reduction. The survivors pension backlog has decreased from 3,391 claims to 115 claims, a 96 percent reduction.

-The average time to complete DIC claims has dropped

from 163 days to 73 days, a decline of more than 50 percent.

-The number of DIC claims in the VA disability backlog (older than 125 days) has dropped from 13,501 claims to 2,257, an 83 percent reduction.

Additionally, VA has cut the average time to complete burial claims from 70 days to 31 days, a reduction of more than 50 percent.

VA achieved these milestones through focused leadership, hard work and targeted use of overtime. About half of VBA's claims processors are Veterans, and their firsthand understanding of military service strengthens VA's ability to deliver benefits with both precision and compassion.

"Under the leadership of President Trump, VA is focused on delivering veterans, families, caregivers and survivors all of the benefits they've earned as quickly as possible," said VA Secretary Doug Collins. "These tremendous improvements underscore that commitment."

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Art Glass Guild announces

annual Mother's Day Show/Sale

Spanish Village Art Center, Balboa Park

The Art Glass Guild will be hosting their 2026 Spring Patio Show and Sale on Saturday-Sunday, May 9-10, 10am-4pm. This show is free and open to the public and is the largest Art Glass show in Southern California and is focused on showcasing art created by local San Diego Glass Artists.

Visitors will see the patio full of juried artists exhibiting their creations as they stroll through Spanish Village Art Center in Balboa Park. Beautiful art glass exhibiting techniques such as: blown, fused, torch, stained, cast, and etched will be on display. There will be entertainment for all including, demos featuring torch-work, and an area for children and adults to create their own unique mosaic art piece to take home.

The Art Glass Guild is a non-profit art education center, focused on supporting local glass artists as well as other San Diego non-profits with art related programs benefiting the community. "This is a fun family outing to see an array of beautiful art glass, see glass demonstrations and support our local artists," says Helen Munroe, Fused Glass Artist and member of The Art Glass Guild.

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4	3	2	6	9	1	5	8	7
6	9	3	4	2	7	1	5	8
8	2	7	1	3	5	9	6	4
5	1	4	6	8	9	7	2	3

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Should I collect SS now or wait two years until age 70?

Dear Rusty: I am 67 and 9 months old, collecting a modest SS survivor benefit with plans to collect my own much larger benefit at age 70. I was confident this plan was a good one; but recent turbulent events make me nervous that cuts could come to my Social Security at any time without warning. Would it be prudent to file for my own Social Security as soon as possible so that my benefit might be "grandfathered" in before any sudden and drastic cuts occur? I do not generally panic, but these are unprecedented times. I would be quite comfortable with the benefit listed on my 2024 statement for my current age; I was just hoping to maximize the benefit by waiting.

When I go to the Social Security website to view my 2025 annual statement to see the personalized monthly retirement benefit estimates for ages 68, 69, and 70, that section no longer shows. This omission makes me uncomfortable. Can I find out what my current benefit estimate would be for ages 68, 69, and 70? Or should I just rely on the 2024 statement?

Signed: Nervous in Portland

Dear Nervous: Please do not be nervous that recent "turbulent events" pose a threat to your future Social Security benefits. Those events do not, in any way, jeopardize your future Social Security benefits, because Social Security is completely separate from all other federal political issues and finances. The primary problem with Social Security became an issue long before the current administration took office.

The Trustees of Social Security have been warning Congress for decades that Social Security's finances require Congressional attention. The fact is that Social Security revenue (as predicted decades ago) became insufficient to pay all benefit obligations in about 2021. Since that time, money from Social Security's reserved funds (Trust Funds) has been used to pay full benefits to all. In 2020, there was nearly \$3 trillion in SS reserved funds, but that has now dwindled to about \$2.5 trillion as reserves are used to supplement SS payments. And that problem continues. The Trustees of SS now predict that the reserves will be fully depleted in about 2032, at which time - lacking program reform by Congress - Social Security will be forced to pay out only what it receives in revenue. And that would mean an estimated cut of about 23% to everyone's monthly SS benefit. In the unlikely event that happens, wouldn't a 23% reduction to your larger age 70 benefit be better than a 23% cut to your lower age 68 benefit?

No one wants those cuts to happen - least of all politicians - because it would amount to political suicide (seniors are, after all, a very large voting bloc). Thus, we believe that Congress will act to reform Social Security to prevent any general benefit cuts from happening.

Here's what to keep in mind: Congress already knows how to reform Social Security to avoid any future benefit cuts - they just lack the bipartisanship to accomplish that reform. For our part, the Association of Mature American Citizens (AMAC) has offered to Congress a commonsense reform plan via its "Social Security Guarantee (SSG)."

We do not suggest changing your strategy for claiming Social Security benefits based upon fear the program will cut benefits. That's because it's unlikely that all benefits will be cut because we believe Congress will eventually enact reform. And even in the unlikely event that Congress neglects to reform the program by 2032, the percentage of reduction to a higher monthly SS benefit amount would be better than a similar reduction to a lower benefit amount. In other words, your original plan is still a prudent one.

Regarding your question about your estimated benefits, I expect your most recent SS statement didn't include future benefits because you are already collecting SS survivor benefits. You can contact SSA at 1.800.772.1213 to obtain the future SS retirement estimates you seek.

MOVIES AT THE BASES

MOVIE SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE SO PLEASE CHECK THE WEB SITE DAY-OF

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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 for children 3 & under and Active Duty military including reservists (w/valid ID). Adult \$39 (ages 13+). Youth \$26 (ages 4-12). Veterans (w/ID) \$26*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

Marine Corps Mechanized Museum Camp Pendleton. Managed under the auspices of Camp Pendleton's Museum Division Office, the collection of over 50 vehicles ranges from World War I to the first Gulf War. It includes Patton tanks, armored wheeled and tracked vehicles, trucks, jeeps and amphibious vehicles. When coming aboard Camp Pendleton, please ensure that you have a valid photo ID for every vehicle occupant along with current registration and proof of insurance. <https://www.themech.org/> 24194 Vandegrift Blvd, Oceanside, CA 92058. (760) 725-5758. Mon-Thur 8am-4pm, Fri 8am-1pm, Closed Saturday & Sunday

Armed Forces Dispatch • (619) 280-2985

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Navy Dive Medical Recovery Team provides initial care to Artemis II crew

by Navy Lt. Erin Wiley,
Explosive Ordnance
Disposal Group 1 |

The first faces the Artemis II crew saw upon their splashdown off the coast of San Diego, April 10, were Navy sailors.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jesse Wang and Navy hospital corpsmen Senior Chief Petty Officer Laddy Aldridge, Chief Petty Officer Vlad Link and Petty Officer 1st Class Steve Kapala made up the dive medical team that opened the Orion capsule upon its return to Earth.

The team conducted initial medical assessments of the Artemis II crew and assisted them out of the capsule safely and efficiently.

They provided initial one-on-one assistance to Christina Koch, Jeremy Hansen, Reid Wiseman and Victor Glover, respectively. Training was a yearslong process for the four team members, who served as first-contact medical providers inside the capsule.

Often working in expeditionary warfare communities, Navy dive medical personnel are certified divers and undergo specialized training, making them experts in decompression illnesses and other undersea medical considerations. Their mission is to care for and ensure that dive-qualified service members are safe to conduct diving operations.

Following the Orion's reentry into Earth's atmosphere and splashdown in the Pacific Ocean, the medical team entered the capsule to conduct initial exams for the crew, provided triage care as necessary and assisted the astronauts in egress onto the inflatable raft set up outside by Navy divers. The first-contact medical providers then prepared

the crew to be airlifted by Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23 back to the amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha for follow-on evaluations.

Wang, assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 1, served as the lead for the team. From Laguna Beach, California, he is a board-certified emergency medicine doctor by trade, having completed residency training at Lincoln Hospital in New York City. He joined the Navy in 2021 and was designated as an undersea medical officer in 2024.

"As a proud member of the undersea medical community, I am particularly humbled to play a part in this mission," Wang said. "It is the honor of a lifetime to stand here today, ready to provide the absolute best care to the Artemis II crew."

Aldridge, from Cushing, Oklahoma, was the first member to make contact with the crew upon their return. Assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expeditionary Support Unit 1, he opened the capsule, entered the space and began medical assessments.

"Coming from three generations of military service in my family, I'm honored to serve as the senior dive independent duty corpsman for this mission," Aldridge said. "This effort is the culmination of both our training to bring world-class care to the Artemis II crew and countless dedicated years of Navy diving and Navy medicine."

Dive independent duty corpsmen like Aldridge, Link and Kapala are specifically trained in dive medicine.

Link, assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 1, is the third member of the

team and hails from Chelsea, Massachusetts. He has 18 years of experience in dive medicine, but he shares that this mission is already a highlight of his career.

"I have been exposed to the Navy since I was a young teenager, and I'm proud to represent both my family and hometown," Link said. "Contributing our efforts to NASA and the Artemis II mission is something we take great pride in as part of that legacy."

The fourth member, Kapala, assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 11, hails from Alpena, Michigan, and has been practicing dive medicine since 2018. He notes the significance of the historical mission as a unified effort, both for himself and everyone involved.

"I grew up reading sci-fi novels and watching space movies, never thinking that I would play a part in a recovery mission like this," Kapala said. "It is surreal to play a part in safely recovering the astronauts from the capsule to get them home safe to their families; [it's] an effort that really makes you realize this team is bigger than just the four of us."

With immense levels of experience and specialized training under their belts, this team of expeditionary medical providers gave the Artemis II crew a warm welcome back to Earth following the 10-day lunar mission.

"Our fellow divers, the sailors on the ship, the helicopter squadron, our partners at NASA and everyone supporting this mission are ready to bring the Artemis II crew home," Wang said. "This team is undoubtedly making history."



From left, Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Steve Kapala, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jesse Wang, Navy Chief Petty Officer Vlad Link, and Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Laddy Aldridge, the Navy dive medical team assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 1, pose for a group photo ahead of Artemis II recovery operations while underway on the amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha in the Pacific Ocean, April 10, 2026. The Murtha is underway in the U.S. 3rd Fleet area of operations, supporting NASA's Artemis II mission, retrieving the crew and spacecraft following their return to Earth and splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 August Clawson



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HEALTH BITS

CNO says food quantity, quality meeting Navy standards aboard ship

CNO Adm. Daryl Caudle disputed reports that sailors were experiencing food shortages and substandard meals aboard several vessels stationed in the Middle East.

During a media roundtable at Sea-Air-Space 2026 in Maryland CNO said that food quantity and quality were meeting Navy standards. His comments came in response to a USA Today article, claiming meals aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and America-class amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli were unappetizing and that small portions were leaving sailors hungry.

"In no way, shape or form, has there been a time where in, at least

in this deployment, where they've not met the nutritional requirements of our menu," Adm. Caudle said. "All ships had, I'm going to say, in the strike group, at least 10 days of food, and most were over 30 days of food."

Red Cross: Keep the spring blood supply strong

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All who come to give May

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