

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH

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SWEET TREAT An Army Soldier from Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assigned to Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve, gives candy to local children during a dismounted patrol through a village in Northeast Syria. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Emma Searce

Japan cancels exercise with U.S. Navy after blaze sinks minesweeper, Japanese sailor goes missing

by Hana Kusumoto and Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO (Nov. 12, 2024) - A joint U.S.-Japan naval drill has been canceled after a Japanese sailor went missing following a weekend fire aboard a minesweeper that eventually sank.

The U.S. and Japanese navies were scheduled to conduct mine-sweeping training between Nov. 9-12 until the JS Ukushima caught fire Sunday and sank the following day. The ship's crew was training en route to the joint exercise, a Maritime Self-Defense Force spokesman told *Stars and Stripes* by phone Nov. 12.

The exercise was canceled due to the effort to find Petty Officer 3rd Class Tatsunori Koga, 33, who worked in the ship's machine room, the command said in a news release. Another sailor working in the same room was injured; the remaining 43 crew members evacuated safely, the spokesman said.

It's customary in Japan for some government officials to speak to the media without naming themselves. The fire began around 9:45 a.m. Sunday in waters 1 1/2 miles north of Oshima in Fukuoka prefecture, part of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands. It was extinguished around midnight Monday, but the ship ultimately sank around 8:34 a.m., the spokesman said.

The Ukushima was built with a wooden hull, according to the spokesman. The Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Japan coast guard were still searching for Koga on Tuesday afternoon.

The fire is believed to have begun in the machine room, where the ship's diesel engines are located, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said during a Monday news conference.

"The Government of Japan will do its best to search for the missing personnel and take all possible measures to determine the cause and conduct preventative measures," he said.

The Self-Defense Force has established a committee to investigate the cause of the fire, Hayashi said. The U.S. 7th Fleet acknowledged an e-mail from *Stars and Stripes* asking whether the U.S. would assist in the search or continue the drill. The command had not responded as of close of business Tuesday.

<https://www.stripes.com/branches/navy/2024-11-12/japan-navy-minesweeper-fire-sinking-15821073.html>

MILITARY FAMILY DAY AT FLEET WEEK SAN DIEGO

by MC2 Donita Burks
Navy Region Southwest

SAN DIEGO - Liberty Military Housing, in partnership with Fleet Week San Diego, hosted Military Family Day on Broad-

way Pier here Nov. 10.

Military Family Day has been an integral part of Fleet Week San Diego for 20 years and the intent has always been the same,

to celebrate military families.

"Liberty Military Housing has partnered with Fleet Week to bring our military families to be able to participate," said Cindy Farless, community services director of Liberty Military Housing and this year's chair of Fleet Week San Diego. "It's a day to celebrate them and show them how much the community supports them."

According to Farless, FWSD is unique because it focuses on the military community that actually resides in the area. Unlike typical fleet weeks around the country, which are designed to introduce the civilian community to the military by bringing service members to the region, FWSD allows for direct interaction between the civilian

community and military families who live there year-round.

"I love to see the [civilian] community walking around and talking with the [military] families and learning more," said Farless. "I think anytime you get people together they start appreciating what these families go through a little bit more and have a little more empathy."

For Electronics Technician 3rd Class Noe Hernandez, assigned to amphibious assault ship USS Essex, Military Family Day is important because it's a way to interact with other military families and make that bond even stronger.

"Events like this allow [military] families to interact with see **Fleet Week**, page 8



Military families receive lunch during Fleet Week San Diego's Military Family Day, an event to show appreciation to military families in San Diego, Nov. 10, 2024. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Donita Burks

'Fat Leonard,' Navy scandal mastermind, sentenced to 15 years

In a *Navy Times* report Nov. 5, former military defense contractor Leonard "Fat Leonard" Francis was sentenced to 15 years in prison for masterminding a decade-long bribery scheme that swept up dozens of Navy officers, federal prosecutors said. U.S. District Judge Janis L. Sammartino also ordered Francis to pay \$20 million in restitution to the Navy and a \$150,000 fine, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office. He was also ordered to forfeit \$35 million in "ill-gotten proceeds from his crimes," the statement said.

November is Native American Heritage Month

November is Native American Heritage Month, providing Defense Department leaders with an opportunity to recognize the remarkable achievements of Indigenous peoples throughout our nation's history. Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks recently delivered a short address to champion Native contributions to national security, highlighting Medal of Honor recipients of Indigenous descent - including Jack Montgomery, Ernest Childers, Pappy Boyington and Woodrow Keeble. Continue reading this at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3961343/>.

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After 20 years, memories of Fallujah linger for veterans still coming to terms with Iraq War

by John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes
Even the dead insurgents lining the streets and alleys of Fallujah were a threat to the U.S. Marines pushing into the Iraqi city two decades ago.

Troops shot up the often boobytrapped corpses lying ahead of them as a precaution. Enemy snipers hid in the buildings. Others sprung from spider holes and fired from a high-powered Western arsenal that included .50-caliber machine guns, much of it seized from earlier fights.

The initial push on Nov. 7, 2004, marked the start of what would turn out to be the bloodiest battle of the Iraq War, confronting U.S. forces with fighting on a scale not seen since Vietnam.

Twenty years later, memories from the battle, which killed nearly 100 U.S. service members, remain raw for many who fought there. And some continue to grapple with the legacy of what it all meant.

“I kind of came to grasp that, you know, the world’s probably a worse place for what we did,” said Marine veteran Alex Nicoll. “People died, limbs were lost, and I don’t know if any outcome came of it.”

Nicoll and a group of Fallujah veterans reflected on their expe-

riences and the battle’s legacy as part of a special commemoration created by the organization Disabled American Veterans.

“It’s pretty impressive when rules of engagement are thrown out the window, the wall of lead that comes with Marines,” Nicoll said in his video testimonial. “I’m glad I got to see that. For a just reason or not? That’s debatable. But it’s irrelevant, too. We got to be a part of Marines being unleashed.”

Like the Iraq War itself, the battle has left conflicted feelings. The bravery of U.S. forces in Fallujah and the hardships they endured are now part of military lore.

The battle showcased how an unleashed Marine Corps, backed by U.S. soldiers, could lay waste to a tough adversary in brutal urban warfare conditions.

Yet the battle didn’t pave the way to a bigger turnaround in a war that had many dark days ahead. It would be more than two years before the tide started to clearly turn, with the 2006 “Anbar Awakening” and the troop surge of 2007 eventually helping to quell much of the fighting.

But even those successes proved to be short-lived. When U.S. forces pulled out in 2011, Iraq was in shambles and Iran’s

influence in the country was larger than ever. By 2014, a new group of militants that came to be known as ISIS was on the march.

Complicated retrospective
The legacy of Fallujah is muddled in ways other major operations in history aren’t, such as the great battles of World War II that are memorialized every year for the role they played in American victories in Europe and the Pacific.

In Iraq, there were none of the traditional measures of military success - no unconditional surrenders, no peace treaties - that helped make the sacrifices at Fallujah seem worth the cost.

The November battle was launched months after a precursor in Fallujah was called off amid international outcry over the scale of civilian casualties.

Hundreds of Iraqi civilians were believed to have been killed during that clash between U.S. forces and insurgents. After pulling out of the city on May 1, 2004, the U.S. turned the mission over to the Iraqi Fallujah Brigade, which quickly folded.

Many of those Iraqi troops joined up with the insurgents. After the American withdrawal, Fallujah festered throughout the summer, becoming the center of opposition to the

U.S.-led coalition.

The city also served as the main base for the militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who directed numerous high-profile kidnappings, executions and beheadings of foreigners.

By the end of the summer, American commanders and the Iraqi government had determined that an operation to clear the city of an estimated 4,000 insurgents would be needed.

Responsibility for the second Battle of Fallujah, known as Operation Phantom Fury, fell to I Marine Expeditionary Force, which commanded a contingent of more than 12,000 U.S. troops drawn from every Pentagon service and an array of coalition soldiers.

Perhaps the biggest problem facing them would be distinguishing guerrilla fighters from civilians still trapped in their homes. Civilian casualty estimates from the battle ranged between 580 and 800.

On Nov. 8, U.S. forces stormed into the city. While the Marine Corps was the main element, the U.S. Army also played a large role.

Then-Staff Sgt. David G. Bellavia, an Army squad leader, on the third day of the battle charged into a house infested

with insurgents, doing battle from room to room in close-quarter combat.

Bellavia was credited with singlehandedly saving an entire squad, and in 2019 he received the Medal of Honor, becoming the first living Iraq War veteran to receive the honor.

“Men go into battle because it is our love of nation, our way of life and our love of those we serve with side by side,” Bellavia said during a ceremony at the time. “We defend, we avenge, we sacrifice, we bleed and we are willing to die for this unique creation, the United States of America.”

Medals and memories
Scores of valor medals were awarded in the aftermath of the fighting, including at least 10 Navy Crosses for Marines.

Then-Sgt. Aubrey McDade, a machine gun squad leader, was one of the recipients of the Navy Cross, the military’s second-highest combat medal.

But McDade said he struggled for years to come to terms with the carnage he had witnessed and the screams in battle he heard from injured Marines.

“I struggled so bad,” he said during his testimonial shared with the Disabled American Veterans organization. McDade

compared his recollections to being in a trance and being “forced to watch a movie I didn’t want to watch.”

Nicoll also struggled for years after the war. He and his team did battle in what came to be known as the “House of Hell,” where bullets and grenades were flying everywhere as they fought off scores of insurgents. During the shootout, Nicoll was badly injured.

Amid the mayhem, then-Cpl. Robert Mitchell, Nicoll’s squad leader, was putting a tourniquet on Nicoll’s leg when an insurgent lunged at them. Mitchell pulled his combat knife and, in a swipe, instantly killed the fighter, according to the Marine Corps’ account.

Mitchell went on to receive the Navy Cross for his actions.

“In those situations, you just react and decide how to gain the upper hand,” Mitchell told the student media at Arizona State University in a 2012 interview. “Your training takes over and you forget about everything else because one of your guys is injured and you have to be there for him.”

The experience of Fallujah drew him closer to his fellow Marines, Mitchell said.
see Fallujah, page 8

VETERANS DAY

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Austin recounts DOD's progress, praises military leaders

By Matthew Olay
DOD News

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke recently about the progress achieved by the Defense Department during his four-year tenure as the Pentagon's top official while also praising DOD leadership.

The secretary made his remarks while addressing the media following a change of command ceremony at U.S. Southern Command in Doral, Fla.

Austin first commented on the progress made in Europe and the Middle East since the 2022 start of the war in Ukraine and the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

"We strengthened NATO. We've pulled NATO together. We've kept 50 countries focused on providing security assistance to Ukraine," Austin said, referencing the alliance of more than 50 nations comprising the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

Regarding the situation in the Middle East, Austin said that providing adequate humanitarian relief to Gaza remains a high priority, and that he had spoken earlier that day about that priority topic with Yoav Gallant, during his last days as Israel's defense minister.

"Today, when I talked to [Gallant] for the final time in his position, I emphasized again how important [the humanitarian aid issue] is and thanked him for what he did to help us move things along," Austin said, adding that more progress on the issue needs to be made.

In terms of the overall situation in both Europe and the Middle East, Austin said he's glad those conflicts have stayed relatively contained.

"I think we've done a magnificent job there in terms of



Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III addresses the audience during the U.S. Southern Command change of command ceremony in Doral, Fla., Nov. 7, 2024. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Samantha Oblander

managing things and not allowing things to blossom into a full-blown regional war," he said.

Austin also commented on

progress made in other regions.

"Despite supporting and managing security assistance to Ukraine, and also [supporting]

Minuteman III test showcases readiness of U.S. nuclear force's safe, effective deterrent

BARKSDALE AFB, La. (AFNS) - A joint team of Air Force Global Strike Command Airmen and Navy aircrew launched an unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile equipped with multiple targetable re-entry vehicles from aboard the Airborne Launch Control System earlier this month from Vandenberg Space Force Base, California.

Airmen from the 625th Strategic Operations Squadron out of Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., were aboard the Navy E-6B Mercury to demonstrate the reliability and effectiveness of the ALCS system.

This test launch is part of routine and periodic activities intended to demonstrate that the U.S. nuclear deterrent is safe, secure, reliable and effective to deter 21st century threats and reassure our allies. Such tests have occurred over 300 times before, and this test is not the result of current world events.

"These tests are demonstrative of what Striker Airmen bring to the fight if called by the president," said Gen. Thomas A. Bussiere, commander of AFGSC. "An airborne launch validates the survivability of our ICBMs, which serve as the strategic backstop of our nation's defense and defense of allies and partners."

<https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3958500/minuteman-iii-test-showcases-readiness-of-us-nuclear-forces-safe-effective-dete/>

Israel's efforts to defend its sovereign territory, we've been able to maintain a focus on the Indo-Pacific as well," he said.

"We have a great relationship with the Philippines, and we continue to work together in ways that we should be working together Our relationship with India is much expanded from what it was," he said, also adding that Japan has greatly increased its investment in defense over the past four years.

When pressed on whether he has any concerns about how the new commander in chief will use the military once the new administration takes over in 2025, Austin said that he wouldn't speculate on such a topic, but that he has full faith in the military leadership.

"I will tell you that we have an incredibly professional group of leaders in the military, and they are absolutely focused on doing the right things to maintain the competitive edge in the battlespace," Austin said.

"These senior leaders will stay focused on the task at hand: defending this country, taking care of our troops [and] succeeding through teamwork," he added.

"This is what they're made of. This is what they do. I have 100 percent confidence in them going forward."

Army

- Army charges Soldier with killing pregnant wife
- Fort Bliss Soldier drank 'a lot' before crash that killed engaged couple, Texas cops say
- Army's long-range assault aircraft fuselages to be built in Kansas

- Army recruiter killed in Seattle-area motorcycle crash

Navy

- Navy extending service lives of three cruisers
- Navy's largest base in Italy amends leases, ditches cash payment of housing security deposits
- EP-3E Aries II spy plane has flown its last operational mission

Air Force

- Air Force promotes just over 500 new chief master sergeants
- Air Force fires a commander at Montana nuclear missile base
- Cherry blossom trees are being cut down for safety reasons at airlift hub in western Tokyo
- F-15 fighters arrive in Middle East: US military
- To boost tech innovation, NATO follows path blazed by Air Force
- How things are going with the Air Force's experimental NIPRGPT chatbot
- What could the Air Force look like under a new Trump administration?

National Guard

- Texas Guardsman who fled England after major crash sentenced to prison in UK

Veterans

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- Former VA physician found guilty of sexually assaulting a patient

Military Culture & History

- Former New York Giants receivers visit Defense Department schools in Bavaria
- How tea with the Taliban inspired a veteran to bridge political divides at home



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Army EOD officers take time to honor fallen EOD heroes

by Walter T. Ham IV
ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, Va. - Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal officers from the 55th Ordnance Company recently paid tribute to fallen EOD heroes at Arlington National Cemetery.

Capt. Caroline C. Hamann, the commanding officer of the 55th EOD Company, and 1st Lt. Madison E. Faust, the 55th EOD Company operations officer,

placed flowers on the graves of fallen EOD heroes and placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

“We were assigned 30 gravesites and 30 flowers as a company, so we walked through sections 60-65 to find them and pay tribute,” said Faust. “The highlight of the visit was laying the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in unison with Gold Star father Marc Seidler.”



The Fort Belvoir, Va.-based 55th EOD Company “VIPpers” are part of the 192nd EOD Battalion, 52nd EOD Group and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives Command, the U.S. military’s premier multifunctional and deployable CBRNE formation.

From 19 bases in 16 states, Soldiers and Army civilians from the 20th CBRNE Command confront and defeat the world’s most dangerous hazards in support of joint, interagency and multinational operations.

The 55th EOD Company covers explosive response missions in most of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, half of Pennsylvania, part of Washington D.C., and part of West Virginia.

EOD companies support the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of State during Very Important Person Protection Support Activity missions to provide protection to the president, first lady, vice president and visiting foreign heads of state.

Faust said the visit gave her the opportunity to take a break from the company’s busy schedule and remember those who gave all in defense of the nation.

“Taking the time to reflect on what it is that we do and to remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice provides context, meaning and purpose,” said Faust. “We are grateful to have been provided the opportunity to participate in this event.”

Official party gathers at Arlington National Cemetery in honor of fallen EOD heroes. U.S. Army photo by Maj. Steven M. Modugno

A native of Center Valley, Penn., Faust graduated from the Military Academy at West Point with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.

Faust choose to serve as an EOD officer because of the technical competence and practice knowledge needed to be successful in the lifesaving and mission enabling profession.

“I chose to become an EOD officer because I was attracted to the mission,” said Faust. “I love that EOD units are small and tight knit, as they feel a lot like a team.”

Faust said joint service Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians share of a bond service that comes from defeating dangerous explosive devices.

“From the moment we embark on the journey at the Naval EOD School, all branches of service are united behind one mission,” said Faust. “After school, we all head in different directions to meet the demands of our assigned units. This event included EOD techs from all the services, reminding us of this unity and shared bond. EOD truly feels like a family, and I feel blessed to be a member of it.”

Refer to <https://www.army.mil/article/281232/>.

Army’s new Pacific commander has decades-deep roots in Hawaii

by Wyatt Olson, Stars and Stripes
FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii - The newest commander of U.S. Army Pacific can trace by decades his roots in Hawaii.

“If you turn back the clock, our daughter, who was born at Tripler [Army Medical Center], is 30 now,” Gen. Ronald Clark said during a news conference at Fort Shafter on Nov. 8, shortly before a ceremony in which he assumed command from Gen. Charles Flynn.

Flynn, who led the Pacific forces since 2021, is retiring after serving almost 40 years. Clark was a company commander in the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks at the time his daughter was born. He returned to Hawaii years later to lead that entire division, followed by a stint as chief of staff at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Most recently, Clark was the top military aide to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. Clark’s move to Hawaii was briefly delayed in September when Sen. Tommy Tuberville placed a hold on his nomination. The Alabama Republican had questions concerning Clark’s role in the secrecy surrounding Austin’s hospitalization in January for complications arising from prostate cancer surgery. Tuberville dropped the hold after meeting with Clark.

“Welcome back to the operational world,” Adm. Samuel Paparo, head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, told Clark during an address at the ceremony. Paparo deemed the West Point graduate “tailor made for this duty.”

“But you also know that the security environment has worsened since the last time you were here just three short years ago,” Paparo said. “Given this dangerous security environment - the increasingly connected, transactional symbiosis of our would-be adversaries, [China’s] increasingly aggressive behavior, the increasing connections between Russia and North Korea - we need the team to be ready,” he said.

Paparo told Clark he is precisely the right leader for this assignment. “And hand-picked,” he said. “We’ll value your strategic understanding of the global environment, your intimate knowledge of the Indo-Pacific.”

Gen. Randy George, chief of staff of the Army and the highest ranking official to speak at the ceremony, also warned of rougher seas ahead.

“Today, our adversaries are working together to challenge us in every theater,” he said. “Russia, China, Iran and North Korea represent an axis of upheaval that is increasingly collaborating to threaten the free world. We understand how the battlefield is changing, and we have a sense of urgency about transforming our Army to meet the needs of our nation in today’s volatile operating environment.”

George credited Flynn with bolstering U.S. Army Pacific’s formation with its roughly 106,000 personnel stationed from Alaska and the West Coast to Japan and South Korea.

“Under Gen. Charlie Flynn’s leadership, USARPAC has transformed our expectations of what a theater army is capable of,” George said. “In the past four years, they have planned, coordinated and executed more than 200 bilateral and multilateral military exercises in more than 90 countries.”

Flynn’s oversight of the reflagging of units in Alaska as the 11th Airborne Division in 2022 demonstrated “organizational agility and commitment to dominating ground combat in the harsh terrain of the Arctic,” George said.

<https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2024-11-08/clark-army-pacific-new-commander-15787611.html>

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As part of cyber workforce development, DOD lowers time-to-hire for civilians

by C. Todd Lopez
DOD News

The time it takes to bring on a new civilian employee within the Defense Department's cyber workforce has dropped below 80 days, which bodes well for the department's effort to better develop its cyber workforce.

"We have 79 days average time-to-hire in our civilian workforce," said Mark Gorak, principal director for resources and analysis within the DOD's office of the chief information officer, during a recent discussion with media. "If we include our special hiring authorities under Cyber Excepted Service, which is a Title 10 authority, that comes down to about 73 days' time-to-hire, which beats the requirements of Office of Management and Budget, and that's well below the DOD average. So, we're doing much better in our hiring, reducing that time."

The Defense Department needs a strong, educated and stable cyber workforce capable of executing its complex and varied cyber missions. In early 2023, the department published its Cyber Workforce Strategy to spell out its goals for that cyber workforce. Later in 2023, the

department released a plan for implementing its cyber workforce strategy.

Gorak, along with Chimia Carr-Nelson, branch chief for strategy implementation within the DOD's CIO, shared some of the successes the department has had this year in executing the Cyber Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan.

Reduction of the time-to-hire was just one success, Gorak said. Another has been growth of the cyber talent exchange program.

"We have exchange programs within the DOD. We have it with industry, and we have it with our federal ... partners," Gorak said. "We have expanded that program with some of our industry partners, including seven additional new industry partners."

Among those new partners are small and large technology-based organizations.

In 2024, vacancies in the DOD cyber workforce have gone down by 4.8 percent, Gorak said, demonstrating retention of cyber talent.

"The civilian vacancy rate is

now down to 16.2 percent, that is a 4.8 percent decrease from last year," Gorak said, adding that the drop was better than they had predicted. "In order to get there, believe it or not, we had to hire about 14,000 additional civilians."

Gorak also said that while the department lost some 10,000 civilian and military cyber personnel, the net gain from the new hires into the DOD cyber workforce meant the vacancy rate went down. And those personnel who left, he said, still benefit the nation by supporting other cyber efforts in industry and other places in the federal government.

In 2024, Gorak said, the department also established the Cyber Academic Engagement Office which serves as the consolidated focal point for cyber-related activities carried out between the DOD and academia stakeholders. Gorak himself runs that office.

The DOD Cyber Workforce Strategy, signed by Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, was published in March 2023. That strategy provides a roadmap for the advancement and unified management of the

cyber workforce, which includes about 225,000 highly trained civilians, military and contractor personnel.

In August 2023, the DOD followed up with the DOD Cyber Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan. At the time, Gorak said the implementation plan was designed to set the foundation for how the department would execute the 22 objectives and 38 initiatives tied to the four goals in the Cyber Workforce Strategy.

The four goals within the Cyber Workforce Strategy include:

- *Executing consistent capability assessment and analysis processes to stay ahead of force needs.

- *Establishing an enterprise-wide talent management program to better align force capabilities with current and future requirements.

- *Facilitating a cultural shift to optimize department-wide personnel management activities.

- *Fostering collaboration and partnerships to enhance capability development, operational effectiveness and career broadening experiences.

Carr-Nelson said the Cyber Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan remains an ongoing



Airmen with 175th Cyber Operations, Maryland Air National Guard, train at Exercise Southern Strike at Camp Shelby, Miss., April 21, 2023. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Renee Seruntine

effort that has already been successful in helping the department achieve its goals with its cyber workforce. "Our offices of primary responsibility are working

very diligently each fiscal year addressing the targets that they have identified with regards to the cyber workforce needs," Carr-Nelson said.

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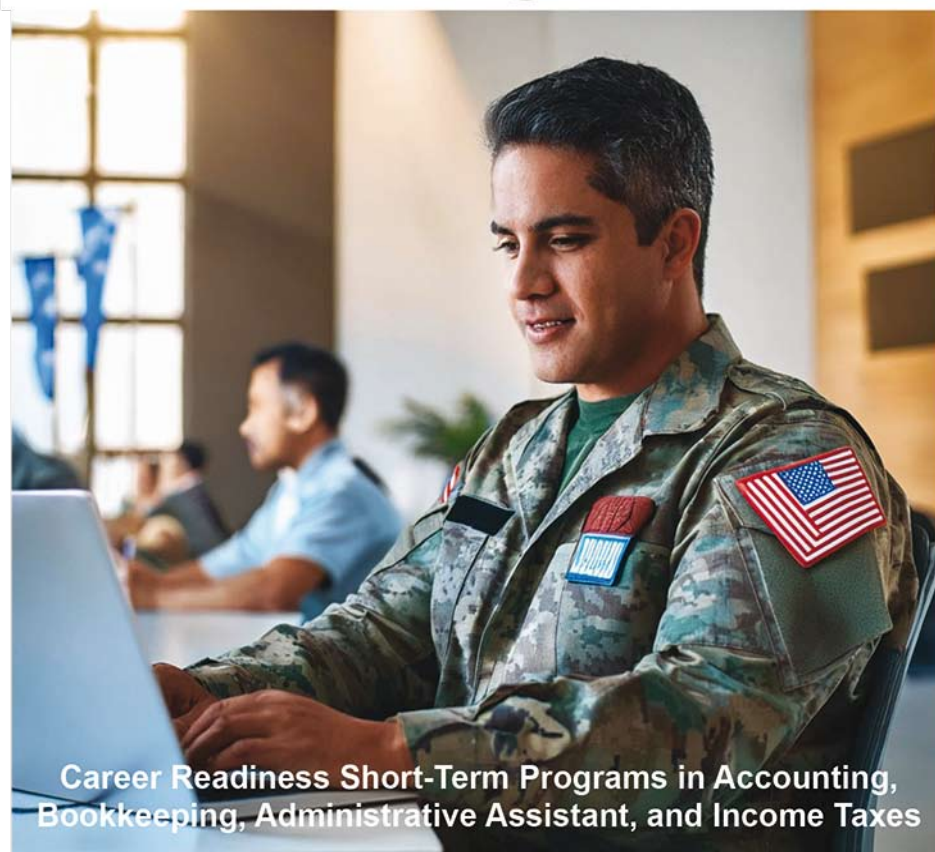


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CNRSW WARRIOR CARE EVENT HONORS WOUNDED WARRIORS, FAMILIES, SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Courtesy story

Naval Medical Center San Diego

The 2024 Commander, Navy Region Southwest (NRSW) 4th Annual Warrior Care Event was held at the Admiral Baker Clubhouse, Nov. 7. The event honored the strength and resilience of Wounded Warriors and cherished the dedicated support organizations and families who stand by them.

Organized in partnership with Navy Wounded Warrior, the Navy Gold Star Program, Fisher House, and Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSD), the event showcased the military's commitment to caring for its heroes.

Capt. Robert Bob Heely, commander of Naval Base San Diego, delivered remarks at the event, underscoring the importance of this gathering as a means of connecting and supporting the Wounded Warrior community.

"There's a lot of passion and

energy displayed here, and I really appreciate all of the organizations that support this network of veterans and wounded warriors," said Heely. "Your value to us is vitally important, and we would not be able to do what we do without you."

Heely noted the impressive growth of the program, which has expanded by 23 percent over the past four years, thanks in part to the outreach and dedication of NRSW.

"Through increased outreach and hosting events similar to this one today, Navy Region Southwest has been able to increase the growth of this program," explained Heely. "I think that's astounding and certainly there's more work to do."

The event's highlight was the announcement of the 2024 NRSW Wounded Warrior of the Year, Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class Tyler Dixon. Dixon, who lost both of his lower extremities in an off-duty accident, has con-



The staff from NRSW Navy Wounded Warrior gather for a group photo. U.S. Navy photo

tinued to demonstrate courage and resilience. He expressed his deep gratitude to the Wounded Warrior support network and others who are critical in helping him and his family navigate this journey.

In his closing remarks, Heely also took a moment to thank the families present, recognizing their critical role in the overall mission.

"Mission readiness could only

be achieved if you have the family onboard, and at Naval Base San Diego, we really take that to heart," said Heely.

Each November, the Department of Defense and military services observe Warrior Care Month, a time dedicated to honoring the strength and resilience—physical, mental, and spiritual—of our wounded, ill, and injured service members, as well as their families and caregivers.

The mission of NMCSD is to prepare service members to deploy in support of operational forces, deliver high-quality health care services, and shape the future of military medicine through education, training, and research.

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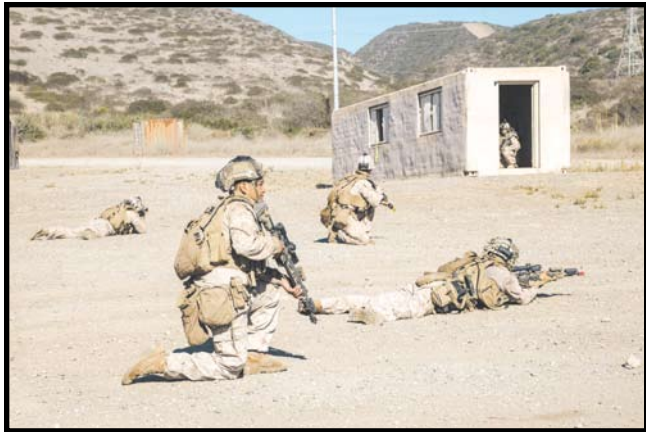
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CAMP PENDLETON (Oct. 23, 2024) Marines with 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, set security during a mechanized raid course hosted by the Amphibious Raids Branch, Expeditionary Operations Training Group, I Marine Expeditionary Force. The Amphibious Raids Branch provides relevant and realistic training to Marines and small unit leaders in mission essential tasks including amphibious raid fundamentals to prepare units for deployment. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Anita Ramos



USS GERMANTOWN (Nov. 9, 2024) Abigail Rogers, athletic training with San Diego Wave, and her son pose in firefighting boots aboard amphibious dock landing ship USS Germantown during a ship tour in support of Fleet Week San Diego 2024. Navy photo by MCC Shamira Purifoy

Armed Forces DISPATCH

Raiders run 60 miles from MCAS Miramar to Camp Pendleton

by 1st Lt. Madison Walls
3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

SAN DIEGO - Beginning at dawn's early light on Nov. 7, a group of Marines from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR) 352, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, conducted a 55-mile relay run starting at MCAS Miramar and continuing up the coast of Southern California.

The event culminated with a 5-mile hike ending at the graduation ceremony for Fox Company, Marine Combat Training, School of Infantry West.

The event was spearheaded with a purpose by Capt. Tyler Chittick, a KC-130J pilot and Marine of 16 years. Chittick has run three other ultra marathon events, all in support of a fellow Marine veteran Sgt. Milan Franklin, who lost his legs after an Improvised Explosive Device attack in Afghanistan in 2011.

Each year, Chittick brings Marines together to complete a challenging physical activity in honor of fallen and disabled veterans.

Upon completion of the hike, Chittick presented the VMGR-352 and Marine Corps flag to the Fox Company honor graduate. The presentation of the flag is a tribute to the Marines receiving it as well as the nation's values, history, and sacrifices that the flag symbolizes.

"I want to bring the young, enlisted Marines back to where they came up in the Marine Corps," Chittick said. "That's where they started their journey, and we get to embrace this experience together where it all began."

Every enlisted Marine goes through MCT; the Raider's run culminating at the graduation of some of the newest Marines in the Corps allows Marines from different backgrounds and at different stages of service to unite where they all began.

Chittick's first run was in 2012 as a sergeant; he and his team ran from Camp Pendleton to Marine Corps Air Ground

and camaraderie.

The 10-year anniversary also marked Chittick's first Marine Corps Birthday and Veteran's Day as a VMGR-352 Raider, where he motivated a new group of young Marines to participate in the event.

One of those Marines is Cpl. Armando Olivares, an aircraft communications and navigation

diff, Carlsbad and Oceanside, the Marines made their way to Camp Pendleton. Upon reaching there, they all met at the Onofre Hill trailhead where they changed into their Marine Corps Combat Utility Uniform and hiked the remainder of the 60 miles to the graduation ceremony.

"At no point in time was I worried about finishing, but it was humbling; especially running all the way to meet up with the ground Marines," Olivares said. "Our battle rhythm is a lot different, we are keeping planes in the sky and they are sending rounds down range. To be able to run the flag all the way there, show them we appreciate them, and tell them happy birthday meant a lot to me."

Marines celebrate the Marine Corps birthday in different ways all around the world: Marine Corps birthday ball pageants, cake cutting ceremonies, getting together with fellow Marines, and holding memorials to honor the service's legacy.

"As we celebrate our Corps' birthday this year, I encourage all Marines to reflect on our legacy forged in blood on battlefields since 1775, and to rededicate ourselves to carrying that legacy untarnished into the future," said the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric M. Smith.

Marines Honoring Marines

Combat Center Twenty-nine Palms where he handed a flag to Franklin in honor of his service and sacrifice.

"I'm not creating anything; this isn't a new idea. People go on long runs to honor other people all the time, so I thought let's run a flag from Camp Pendleton to Twenty-nine Palms to honor Milan," Chittick said. "When we arrived, all I could say was 'Thank you for being here. Thank you for coming home. Thank you for bringing Marines home.'"

On the ten-year anniversary, Chittick initiated the run again and has since made the tradition an annual event. Each year the event takes place on or around the Marine Corps Birthday and Veteran's Day presenting an opportunity to honor the fallen and disabled veterans while celebrating the Marine Corps' traditions

systems technicians for the KC-130J, who participated in the 160-mile run in 2022, and this year's run and hike.

"I had just checked into the fleet and heard about the event," Olivares said. "It caught my attention; I saw it as a challenge, and as Marines we take pride in challenges, so I did it."

The event was an opportunity for Marines to come together challenging themselves mentally and physically for a greater purpose and to remember why they became Marines. "We are Marines and should be ready to do anything at a moment's notice," Olivares said.

This year's iteration began at MCAS Miramar where Marines departed VMGR-352's hangar and headed north along the coast of Southern California. With check points in La Jolla, Car-

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Volunteers needed to help uncover the personal stories of America's first veterans

by Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

Mary Linville spent 36 years in nursing, but her passion has always been history.

Now retired, she's begun digging into Revolutionary War pension files, where she uncovered the story of her fourth great grandfather, a member of the Maryland militia who was wounded twice during the Battle at Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina.

"I can only imagine the hardships he overcame and sacrifices he and other soldiers made to the cause of independence," she said. "Reading this makes the heroism of these men so personal."

Digging through pages of centuries-old records isn't just for herself, Linville is transcribing the cursive text to make it easier for others to access the documents as part of a joint volunteer project of the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Park Service.

Linville is one of about 4,700 volunteers who have transcribed roughly 100,000 documents. With 2.4 million pages in the pension files, the two government agencies are calling for more volunteers to help them uncover the stories of America's first vets who fought in the Revolutionary War. The goal is to finish the work in time for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026.

Hidden among the cramped, cursive writing are the personal narratives of service members trying to prove their service and earn a pension decades after the war's end, said Suzanne Isaacs and Nancy Sullivan, the community managers who oversee the project for the National Archives, the government agency tasked with preserving government records.

"If anyone has the opportunity to really sit down and read some

200 years ago. Transcribing the text makes the documents easier to read and more accessible to the public.

"There's a lot of valuable information for different audiences," Sullivan said.

Historians and genealogists often use the records to learn more about who participated in which battles. People looking to join certain organizations, such as the Sons and Daughters of the

person perspective, and they help our interpreters in the field to connect the public with all of these stories."

At Guilford Courthouse, the park uses the pension file of Thomas Mason, a "free man of color," to provide a personal account of the battle as well as the long fight many Black veterans and their families faced to receive a pension.

He was one of about 5,000 Black men who fought in the Revolutionary War. His widow Elizabeth Mason filed for his pension in 1854 from Campbell County, Va. Then 90 years old, she included details she'd heard him share before his death 22 years earlier. The pension was denied for several reasons, with one objection on the grounds that the man processing the claim did not believe freed Black people in Virginia could marry.

Some of the records also included references to famous veterans of the war, such as George Washington and John Hancock, as well as their signatures among the few discharge papers that were issued.

With all the records available online, volunteers can transcribe records from home. For those who can't read cursive, tagging the documents to make them easier to search is just as impor-

tant, Isaacs said.

"If you read enough of these, you'll realize that there is inconsistency with spelling," she said. "So, by people tagging the correct spelling and the way we would like it tagged, then we're able to find all these records." People who volunteer through the National Park Service can receive a volunteer pass that grants free access to all parks once they contribute 250 hours.

"This partnership is about national parks being in the forever business," Barrows said. "The impacts of this project will live far beyond the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence because these stories will become part of the permanent record. Researchers will have access to this treasure trove information in perpetuity."

For Linville, who volunteers from her home in Tennessee, she said reading the documents makes her proud that her work helps others access these veterans' stories.

"What these men experienced and the sacrifices they made are the foundations of patriotism and love of country generations later," she said.

Learn how to volunteer for the project at <https://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/missions/revolutionary-war-pension-files>.



Marines prepare to patrol Fallujah, Iraq, to clear the city of insurgent activity and weapons caches during the second Battle of Fallujah, Nov. 26, 2004. The Marines are, left to right, Staff Sgt. Eric Brown, Sgt. Aubrey McDade, Cpl. Steven Archibald and Lance Cpl. Robert Coburn. Twenty years later, McDade and others say they are still coming to terms with what would be known as the bloodiest single battle of the Iraq War in the years following the 2003 invasion. U.S. Marine Corps

Fallujah

continued from page 1

"When you think you are in the worst situation possible, whether it's in training or in combat, there is always someone who knows just what to say to make light of the situation," he said.

Nicoll, who lost his leg below

his left knee in Fallujah, said it took him about 15 years to find new purpose in life.

Now he works as a motorcycle mechanic. But all these years later, he said, there's no replacing the bonds formed under fire.

"You're never going to get those buddies again," Nicoll said.

of these, you're going to get sucked in," Sullivan said. "Some of [the veterans] are really great with words and can really tell a good story."

Without formal discharge papers, most veterans tried to prove their service by describing their experiences. Many are filled with anecdotes that paint a portrait of colonial military service.

Jacob Hickman's file shows he would go home from the military every other week to tend his crops. Andrew Gillespie volunteered with a horse from his uncle and carried dispatches from his officer to the printing office.

Philip Morris detailed a battle in Rhode Island, where troops were ordered to fire a log chain from a brass cannon when they ran out of cannonballs. The more than 83,000 pension files were stored within the War Department, now the Defense Department, for decades before making it to the National Archives.

In the 1970s, the pension files were scanned onto microfilm, which was later digitized. But the original documents were handwritten and worn from being folded and mailed more than

American Revolution can use the pension files to prove their ancestor's service.

The veterans at the time also had to prove they were in financial need of a pension, so some documents include lists of their household goods and their value or the number of children they support. The National Park Service recently began pitching the project to its pool of volunteers in hopes to include some of these personal stories in celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and early battles of the Revolutionary War.

Many of those battlefields are now preserved in the national park system, such as Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, Minute Man National Historical Park, Boston National Historical Park and Fort Stanwix National Monument.

"This is really a great opportunity for us to tell a more complete and comprehensive American story as related to the American Revolution," said Frank Barrows, senior adviser for national commemorations and community engagement for the National Park Service. "They provide windows into the lives of our first veterans and their families from a first-

Fleet Week

continued from page 1

each other," said Hernandez. "You might recognize someone from the ship that you haven't interacted with before and seeing them here you might click."

Hernandez and his family were also excited to participate in the tour of amphibious dock landing ship USS *Germantown* and spend time with the community as a whole.

Farless emphasizes the significance of the community aspect of Military Family Day, noting its importance in fostering connections.

"It's an important event to be

part of as a company to bridge that opportunity and get our families out and engage in the community," said Farless.

Military Family Day originally began as a way to bring families together at a San Diego State University football game. While that tradition is still part of FWSD, the event has since evolved to include activities at the pier. Families are provided with water, snacks, cooler backpacks, and a free lunch. In addition to these refreshments, families can participate in various events on the pier and enjoy tours of the ships.



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SEMA Show, AAPEX, motorsports, pinball & more in Las Vegas

AutoMatters™ & More
by Jan Wagner



Hi everyone! I just returned from an insanely wonderful, automotive-centered, week in Las Vegas, and now I am eager to share that trip with you. As it does every year, my trip included coverage of the SEMA Show and AAPEX (automotive aftermarket trade shows). Motorsports included drifting and insane burnout demonstrations (right down to the sparking rims) outside the Las Vegas Convention Center and the Optima Ultimate Street Car road course and autocross competitions on Saturday at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway. I wrapped up my visit to Las Vegas on Sunday evening with a photo session on the Las Vegas Strip, followed by a visit to the massively enlarged Pinball Hall of Fame Museum, near the iconic Las Vegas sign.

I'll begin today with an overview. Then, in the weeks and months ahead, I'll edit more of my thousands of photos and write about them.

The SEMA Show and AAPEX focus on the huge automotive aftermarket, and together they are both filled with just about every kind of automotive product you could imagine.

The Las Vegas Convention Center — covering real estate from South hall to the new West Hall — is home to the SEMA Show. AAPEX is nearby, at The Venetian and Caesars Forum.

SEMA was founded in 1963, as the Specialty Equipment Market Association. The first official SEMA Show was held in 1967, at Dodger Stadium. The show moved to the Anaheim Convention Center in 1974, and then it moved again in 1977 to Las Vegas.

At the end of each SEMA Show, hundreds of show vehicles left



the Convention Center. This process was formalized in 2011 with the inauguration of the now-annual SEMA Cruise — a parade on Friday after the SEMA Show closed. Since this is not inside the Convention Center, it was a great opportunity for the public to see the show vehicles. This year, since the new construction outside the North and Central halls occupied the road that the SEMA Cruise used to use, a great spot to watch the relocated SEMA Cruise was from a third-floor patio on the West Hall.

In 2014, the SEMA Show added the "Battle of the Builders" competition. "SEMA Ignited" was added on Friday night, following the SEMA Cruise. Again, this provided the public with the opportunity to see some of the products that had been on display at the SEMA Show. Drifting was a very popular element of the event. "SEMA Ignited" has since morphed into "SEMA Fest" a ticketed event with live music that celebrates the car culture.

Thrilling motorsports demonstrations were performed in parking lots at the Las Vegas Convention Center, and — on the Saturday immediately following the two shows — at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. Spectators were especially entertained by the burnout demonstration for about two hours on Friday afternoon, outside West Hall. Spectators line the concrete barriers, that enclosed a space where cars did massive burnouts. Even after the tires exploded, the drivers kept the burnout going, creating sparks between the wheels and the pavement. At one point, at least one of the cars had massive flames shooting out. A group of

people brought Holdens from Australia, and ran them in the burnout demonstration too.

AAPEX stands for the Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo. It also brings together the global automotive aftermarket community. Joe's Garage is a popular feature of AAPEX. Set up to look like a large automotive garage, includes hands-on training sessions. AAPEX also featured a massive collection of automotive parts manufacturers from China, as well as other countries.

Billed as the world's largest collection of pinball machines, the 25,000 square foot Las Vegas Pinball Hall of Fame museum is filled with hundreds of pinball machines over every description. This popular Las Vegas entertainment venue is perpetually filled with people playing the machines and having a blast. I previously covered an earlier iteration of that museum in AutoMatters & More #556. Check it out at AutoMatters.net.

To get there, head south from The Strip on Las Vegas Blvd. until just before you get to the iconic "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign. The museum has a huge sign next to Las Vegas Blvd., and the building is further adorned with massive letters spelling the word "PINBALL."

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit "AutoMatters & More" at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue 'years' boxes and browse.. Copyright © 2024 by Jan Wagner — AutoMatters & More #860

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

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"Hello, Dad," I answered my phone, unaware of the bomb about to be dropped.

"I'm selling my house, getting rid of everything, and moving to Florida," my 83-year-old father barked in the cantankerous tone that had become standard for him in recent years.

"Wait, wh-what?" I stuttered. Up until that call, my father was adamant that he'd "NEVER sell the house" that he owned in a North Carolina beach community. For Dad, the three-level house in walking distance to the beach was the last vestige of his successes as a businessman — proof that, despite Dad's physical weaknesses, he'd been strong, decisive and smart with his money.

However, the house was totally impractical for someone on a walker who'd had heart, back, hip and knee surgeries. It's top floor main living area necessitated pricey installation of an elevator when Dad's knees failed. The pool and yard required extensive maintenance, which Dad now paid someone to do. And, the once airy house was now over-packed with 20 years of Dad's "priceless" stuff.

"The realtor—" he spoke in loud, angry-at-the-world blurs, "—wants this house emptied out. I'm having an estate sale. Can you come help me?"

A month later, I was on a flight to North Carolina, huddled in economy seating like a cornered rabbit, still stunned by this turn of unlikely events.

My father was changing his mind every few days. Florida became South Carolina, then Tennessee. The newest plan was to buy a local condo in North Carolina. Selling "everything"

Cantankerous to content during parent clean out

became keeping memorabilia, then some furniture, then half of the contents of the house.

My bestie since 9th grade, who knew Dad's eccentricities well, offered to help. As we left the airport in a bottom-feeder compact rental car, we strategized.

We envisioned systematically organizing items to be sold in the estate sale scheduled for the end of the week. We planned mornings walking on the beach, before spending afternoons calmly labeling and packing. We spoke of fun cocktails we planned to drink and restaurant hush puppies we planned to eat.

Entering the ground floor of Dad's house, we set off a cacophony of yaps from his three high-strung Yorkies, one of which was in heat; a second had a bum leg; and the boney, drooling third had no teeth and was half-blind. Before finding Dad in his electric recliner on the top floor, we heard him, barking orders at the dogs and us.

"Now, they're coming in an hour, so I want you to —"

"Wait, who's coming?" I interrupted.

"The estate sale crew's coming over to price everything!" my father snapped as if this new information was common knowledge.

"But we haven't had a chance to sort out what you're keeping! We thought they weren't coming until later this week!"

Before we knew it, my friend

and I were knee deep in piles of clothing not worn since the Bush administration, scores of dusty knick knacks, stacks of plastic take out containers, and loaded guns. When the estate sale crew arrived to find us amidst the unorganized hoard staring like deer in headlights, an antagonistic rapport was struck. It was us against them.

"That's worth a helluva lot of money!" my Dad bellowed repeatedly, referencing dust-blanketed decoy ducks, ornate beer steins, and spider-sack-adorned power tools. The estate crew grumbled under their breaths, visibly annoyed.

The next morning, my father was in a foul mood, the gravity of his rash decision having set in. "They're taking everything away. All my memories," he lamented angrily. Although it was smart of him to get out from under the crippling physical and financial responsibility of his house and move into a one-story condo, we felt compassion for my father taking on what many elderly parents aren't brave enough to do.

We sprang into action, arranging "keep" items in his remaining living space, where he'd see his treasures and photos of family members. That afternoon, we picked up flowers and Chinese take out. My father chortled and choked on pecan pie while watching "Marley and Me" in his recliner. The future, once again, looked right.

"That looks real nice," he said, admiring the keep items we'd carefully arranged on a nearby shelf. "You done good, girls."



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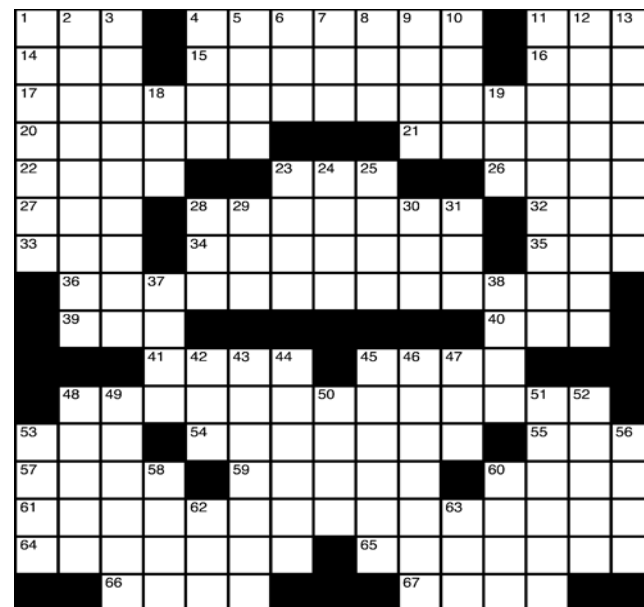
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across

1 Honshu drama
4 Words before a recap
11 Audi rival
14 Boise-to-Billings dir.
15 "Raging Bull" boxer
16 Infamous Vietnam War site, My ____
17 "Take my advice: no use crying over spilled milk ..."
20 Compact part
21 Greet warmly
22 Spumante source
23 PC core
26 Spot to get a bite on the street
27 Rockets' org.
28 Low cloud
32 Two-__: half-price opportunity
33 Pouch
34 With 36-Across, "There's no going back ..."
35 Ship letters
36 See 34-Across
39 Brewery vessel
40 Celestial feline
41 Snoots put them on
45 Other, in Oaxaca
48 "Put everything behind you ..."
53 Sigma follower
54 Shorebirds related to stilts
55 Crux
57 Cards
59 Up on the latest
60 Sax type
61 "And look ahead."
64 Force featured on "Bosch," for short
65 "So close!"
66 Oodles
67 They often take turns

Down

1 __ Own Organics
2 Where "The Man With the Hoe" carried the



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...

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<https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/movies>

<https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/theater>

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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

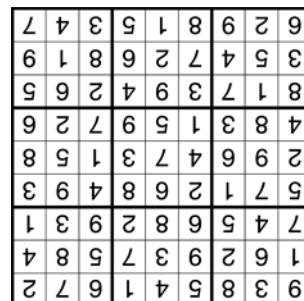
MCRD Command Museum & Historical Society. Museum focusing on Marine Corps history from the 19th century to today is also a research library. <https://www.mcrdmuseum.org/>
Free admission • The Pass and ID Center may issue day passes to visitors who wish to visit the museum and do not possess military 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: MCBCAM-PEN_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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	1						6	
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Your comprehensive TRICARE Open Season checklist

Did you know that TRICARE Open Season is underway? Open season runs from Nov. 11 to Dec. 10 this year, giving you the chance to change your health plan for coverage starting Jan. 1, 2025.

“Open season is your opportunity to make changes to your health plan for the coming year,” said Shane Pham, management and program analyst, TRICARE Health Plan Policy and Programs, at the Defense Health Agency. “Because there are new TRICARE regional contracts in the U.S. starting Jan. 1, it’s important to be proactive. Check if you need to take steps to change your coverage.”

Follow this detailed checklist to ensure you’re fully prepared.

Determine if open season applies to you

TRICARE Open Season is for beneficiaries enrolled in or eligible for:

- TRICARE Prime
- US Family Health Plan
- TRICARE Prime Remote
- TRICARE Prime Overseas
- TRICARE Prime Remote Overseas
- TRICARE Select
- TRICARE Select Overseas

Important notes:

- Open season doesn’t apply to active duty service members.
- TRICARE For Life beneficiaries don’t need to take action during open season (coverage is automatic with Medicare Part A and Part B).
- Premium-based plans (TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve, TRICARE Young Adult) are available for purchase anytime. You don’t need to take action during open season.

Even if open season doesn’t apply to you, you may still need to take certain actions this year. If you live in the new West Region, or in a state that’s moving to the West Region on Jan. 1, you may need to provide your payment information to TriWest Healthcare Alliance, the incoming West Region contractor, by Jan. 1. You must do this if you pay by bank electronic funds transfer, or debit or credit card, but not

if you pay by military pay system allotment—allotment payments will transfer automatically. You can find out more at tricare.mil/west.

Review your current plan in detail

- List your current plan’s benefits and coverage.
- Review your out-of-pocket costs for the past year.
- Identify any services or medications for which you need a referral.
- Consider upcoming health needs for you and your family members.
- Evaluate your satisfaction with current healthcare providers and facilities.

Explore your options thoroughly

- Use the TRICARE Plan Finder. Answer a few questions to see what plans you may be eligible for.
- Compare plans using the TRICARE Compare Plans Tool. Note differences in coverage, provider networks, and referral requirements.
- Review your 2024 costs carefully. (Note: 2025 costs are now available. Take note of any changes from 2024, especially in enrollment fees and copayments.)
- Check your regional contractor’s provider directory to see if your preferred providers are in-network. If you live in the East Region, you can access Humana’s provider directory. Additionally, TriWest’s provider directory is now live!

Verify your information in DEERS

- Log in to milConnect. Verify personal information for all family members:
- Names, Social Security numbers, and birthdates
- Addresses
- Phone numbers
- Email addresses
- If you have eligibility questions, contact your service’s personnel office.

Between Oct. 28 and Dec. 31, if you live in the U.S. and need to make health plan changes, you’ll need to call your regional contractor. You won’t be able to make any health plan updates online in milConnect via Beneficiary Web Enrollment. If



you live overseas, you can keep using milConnect as usual.

For enrollment changes effective now through Dec. 31, if you live:

- In the current East Region: Call Humana Military at 800-444-5445.
- In the current West Region: Call Health Net Federal Services, LLC at 844-866-9378.
- Overseas: Update your information in DEERS. You can also contact International SOS.

For enrollment changes effective Jan. 1, 2025, and beyond (including TRICARE Open Season), if you live:

- In the new East Region: Call Humana Military at 800-444-5445.
- In the new West Region (including Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wisconsin): TriWest’s call center will open Nov. 11 at 8 a.m. CT. Starting Nov. 11, you can call TriWest at 888-TRI-WEST (888-874-9378). TriWest’s secure patient portal will also go live Nov. 11.
- Overseas: Update your information in DEERS. You can also contact International SOS.

You have options

- You can choose to:
- Stay in your current plan. If you live in a state that’s staying in the East Region, you don’t need to take action to stay in your current plan. Do you live in the new West Region? You need to provide TriWest your payment information if you pay by bank electronic funds transfer or credit card.
- Enroll in a new plan. Prepare necessary information for enrollment.
- Switch to a different plan. Note

differences in coverage. Prepare for potential changes in providers.

Make changes (if needed)

- If changing plans, choose one method:
- Contact your TRICARE regional contractor, as listed above.
- Mail an enrollment form. Download the form and send it to your regional contractor.
- If you live overseas, you can log in to milConnect and click the “Manage health benefits” button. (Note: For this open season, you can only do this if you live overseas. Otherwise, you need to use method #1 or #2 above.)

If you live overseas, you can also visit an overseas TRICARE Service Center (if applicable).

Consider dental and vision coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program

- Check your Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance

Program eligibility.

- Review FEDVIP dental plan options.
- Explore FEDVIP vision plan options. (Remember: You must be enrolled in a TRICARE health plan to get vision coverage through FEDVIP.)
- Note that Federal Benefits Open Season ends Dec. 9.
- Enroll or make changes.

Mark important dates and set reminders

- Nov. 11: TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season begin. Start your plan review.
- Dec. 9: Federal Benefits Open Season ends. This is the last day for dental and vision changes.
- Dec. 10: TRICARE Open Season ends. This is the final day to make health plan changes.
- Jan. 1, 2025: New coverage starts. Prepare for any new plan requirements or changes.

Prepare for potential Qualifying Life Events

- Familiarize yourself with Qualifying Life Events (for example, marriage, birth, or retirement).
- Note that QLEs allow for plan changes outside of open season, as described in the TRICARE Qualifying Life Events Fact Sheet.

Important updates for 2025

- Check your region and regional contractor:

• **West Region:** Your regional contractor will change to TriWest on Jan. 1, 2025. If you live in Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, or Wisconsin, your state is moving to the West Region on Jan. 1.

• **East Region:** Humana Military will remain the regional contractor.

• Provide your payment information to TriWest if you live in the new West Region:

• **If you pay by bank electronic funds transfer or debit or credit card:** Provide your payment information to TriWest before Jan. 1.

• **If you pay by military pay system allotment:** You don’t need to do anything. Your payments will transfer automatically.

Stay informed:

Sign up for email alerts delivered straight to your inbox. <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USMHSTMA/subscriber/new>
Visit TRICARE Open Season for more information. <https://www.tricare.mil/open-season>

If you don’t change your TRICARE health plan during open season, you’ll need to wait until next year’s open season to make changes, unless you have a QLE.

Prepare early to ensure you have the right coverage for your needs in 2025.



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- On the right side see “Interested in volunteering?”
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