

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH

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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 41
 MARCH 23, 2026

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NAVY ROTATES LAST CRUISER HOMEPORTED IN JAPAN TO SAN DIEGO

The Navy sent the last Ticonderoga-class cruiser homeported overseas back to the states, the sea service announced March 11.

In a March 12 report by Riley Ceder of *Navy Times*, USS *Robert Smalls* will leave Yokosuka, Japan, for San Diego, and be replaced destroyer USS *Mustin*.

“This move will be a permanent change of station for the crew and family members,” the Navy said.

The move, according to the

service, is part of a scheduled rotation of forces in the Pacific.

Smalls was most recently assigned to Carrier Strike Group Five in support of U.S. military operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

The cruiser, commissioned in 1989, was initially named USS *Chancellorsville*, a nod to the city in which Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee beat Union forces in one of the bloodiest battles during the Civil War.



A Navy Sailor looks out from the bridge wing aboard cruiser *Robert Smalls*, June 4, 2024. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Ange Olivier Clement

USS Boxer ARG deploys early for Middle East, 11th MEU embarked

Multiple national and local sources report the USS Boxer (LHD-4) amphibious ready group, with approximately 2,200 Marines from Camp Pendleton embarked, has deployed early to the Middle East as the war with Iran continues.

USS Boxer (LHD-4) left Wednesday, March 18, from San Diego, while dock landing ship USS Comstock (LSD-45) and amphibious transport dock USS Portland (LPD-27) left Thursday, March 19, according a report on usni.org.

Recently, Marines with the 11th MEU conducted pre-deployment integrated training with the three ships off the coast of California.

‘No Tax on Drill Pay Act’ introduced to support Guardsmen & Reservists

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Andy Barr (R-KN) recently introduced the No Tax on Drill Pay Act, legislation to exempt federal income taxes on Inactive Duty Training (IDT) pay earned by members of the National Guard and Reserve during their drill weekends.

Congressmen Max Miller (R-OH) and Zach Nunn (R-IA) are original cosponsors of the bill. Miller served in the Marine Corps Reserve and Nunn is currently serving in the Iowa Air National Guard.

Barr’s bill recognizes the service and sacrifice of citizen-military members by ensuring the pay they receive for monthly drill weekends and required training is not subject to federal income tax. Barr also strongly supported the Warrior Dividend of \$1,776 ahead of Christmas announced by President Trump that some National Guardsmen and Reservists received. Barr also voted to exempt federal taxes on tips, overtime, and social security last year in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

More than 800,000 Americans serve in the Guard and Reserve, and of that, over 15,000 Guardsmen and Reservists are deployed overseas each year. Guardsmen and Reservists play a critical role in U.S. national defense while also responding to emergencies at home—including natural disasters, border security missions, and domestic crises.

Under current law, National Guardsmen and Reservists must pay federal income taxes on compensation received for Inactive Duty Training, which typically includes one weekend of training per month and additional readiness activities throughout the year.

“Members of the National Guard and Reserve answer the call to serve our country while balancing civilian careers and family responsibilities,” said Barr, a past recipient of the Charles Dick Medal of Merit, the highest honor given to elected officials for advocacy of the National Guard. “Ending federal taxes on a portion of their military pay will reward these patriots for their service to our country. The No Tax on Drill Pay Act will boost recruitment and retention, strengthen military readiness, and continue our commitment to treating our military better than any in the world.”

<https://barr.house.gov/2026/3/barr-introduces-no-tax-on-drill-pay-act-to-support-national-guardsmen-and-reservists>



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Department of War identifies Air Force casualties

On March 14, the Department of War announced the death of six Air Force Airmen who were supporting Operation Epic Fury.

Maj. John A. Klinner, 33, of Auburn, Ala.; Capt. Ariana G. Savino, 31, of Covington, Wash.; and Tech. Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, 34, of Bardstown, Ky., were assigned to the 6th Air Refueling Wing, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. and Capt. Seth R. Koval, 38, of Mooresville, Ind.; Capt. Curtis J. Angst, 30, of Wilmington, Ohio; and Tech. Sgt. Tyler H. Simmons, 28, of Columbus, Ohio were assigned to the 121st Air Refueling Wing at Rickenbacker Air National

Guard Base, Columbus, Ohio.

The six Airmen died on March 12, in the crash of a KC-135 in western Iraq. The incident is under investigation.

In the first release by Central Command on March 12, the incident occurred in friendly airspace during Operation Epic Fury, and rescue efforts began immediately. CENTCOM said two aircraft were involved in the incident. One of the aircraft went down in western Iraq, and the second landed safely. This was not due to hostile fire or friendly fire.

In a previously reported story from CENTCOM on March 1,

three U.S. F-15E Strike Eagles flying in support of Operation Epic Fury went down over Kuwait due to an apparent friendly fire incident.

During active combat—that included attacks from Iranian aircraft, ballistic missiles, and drones — the U.S. Air Force fighter jets were mistakenly shot down by Kuwaiti air defenses.

All six aircrew ejected safely, have been safely recovered, and are in stable condition. Kuwait has acknowledged this incident, and CENTCOM said “we are grateful for the efforts of the Kuwaiti defense forces and their support in this ongoing operation.”



All six crew members aboard a U.S. KC-135 refueling aircraft that went down in western Iraq are now confirmed deceased. Tech. Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, 34, of Bardstown, Ky., (clockwise from top); Capt. Ariana G. Savino, 31, of Covington, Wash.; Capt. Seth R. Koval, 38, of Mooresville, Ind.; Capt. Curtis J. Angst, 30, of Wilmington, Ohio; Maj. John A. Klinner, 33, of Auburn, Ala.; Air Force Tech. Sgt. Tyler Simmons, 28, of Columbus, Ohio. U.S. Air Force, Ohio National Guard and courtesy photos

• • Some monthly observances and holidays for April • •

NAT'L PICKLEBALL MONTH
LIMB LOSS AND LIMB DIFFERENCE AWARENESS
NAT'L AFTERNOON TEA
ESOPHAGEAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH
NAT'L BRUNCH MONTH
NAT'L TAR SYNDROME AWARENESS MONTH
SARCOIDOSIS AWARENESS
NAT'L FINANCIAL LITERACY MONTH
NAT'L ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
NAT'L MONTH OF HOPE
NAT'L VOLUNTEER MONTH
DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS MONTH
WORLD LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MONTH
SCOTTISH-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
CANINE FITNESS MONTH
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
NAT'L INTERNSHIP AWARENESS MONTH
MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD

NAT'L DONATE LIFE AWARENESS MONTH
NAT'L FAIR HOUSING MONTH
NAT'L CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH
NAT'L SAFE DIGGING
NAT'L WELDING MONTH
NAT'L PECAN MONTH
NAT'L POETRY MONTH
STRAW HAT MONTH
NAT'L SOY FOODS MONTH
NAT'L SOFT PRETZEL
NAT'L JAZZ APPRECIATION
NAT'L HUMOR MONTH

Army general left classified maps on a train in Poland, watchdog finds

Military Times reported March 16 that the two-star head of the command responsible for coordinating support for Ukraine left a tube of classified maps behind on a train in Europe, losing control of the sensitive material for 24 hours, a new report from the Department of Defense Inspector General's office has found.

IN SUMMARY: Then-Army Maj. Gen. Antonio Aguto, now retired, was also found to have sustained a concussion following a night of drinking to intoxication at a social event

in Kyiv, leading to incoherence and confusion in a briefing the next day.

The report, released March 12, covers a period in April and May 2024 in which Aguto was commander of the Wiesbaden, Germany-based Security Assistance Group-Ukraine. Aguto relinquished command of the group in August 2024, having presided over its activation in 2022. He retired the same month.

The investigation, which was based on anonymous whistleblower reports and

also included allegations of a “toxic” environment at SAG-U headquarters, provided a rare inside perspective on working conditions and morale at the small logistics support element. The investigation did not find Aguto personally responsible for the unit's problems, though.

The IG's office said he relinquished his command of SAG-U on Aug. 5, 2024, and was conditionally retired as a major general effective Nov. 1, 2024, ending the outcome of the investigation.

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Hegseth says Iran's defense industrial base nearing complete destruction

by Matthew Olay
Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth told reporters March 13 that, in addition to the extensive damage the U.S. and Israeli militaries have been inflicting upon the Iranian terrorist regime's active combat forces, the country's defense industrial base is now nearing complete destruction as well.

"Soon and very soon, all of Iran's defense companies will be destroyed," Hegseth said while providing an update on Operation Epic Fury from the Pentagon's press briefing room.

"For example, as of two days ago, Iran's entire ballistic missile production capacity — every company that builds every component of those missiles — [has] been functionally defeated [and]

destroyed," Hegseth said, also noting that assessment includes buildings, complexes and factory lines all across the country.

"We're shooting down and destroying what missiles [the enemy] still have in stock; but more importantly, we're ensuring that they have no ability to make more. Their production lines, their military plants [and] their defense innovation centers [are] defeated," Hegseth said.

The secretary added that today marks the highest number of strikes the U.S. has conducted against targets in Iran and its capital city, Tehran, since U.S. Central Command and Israeli forces launched Operation Epic Fury on Feb. 28.

"As we continue to ramp up every tool [of warfare], we're employing [them], blinding,

confusing and deceiving our enemy; because we know who the good guys are here, and the American people do, too," Hegseth said.

In the 10 days since the conflict started, Hegseth said the U.S. and Israeli air forces have struck over 15,000 enemy targets.

"Looking up, the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] and Iranian regime [see] only two things on the side of aircraft: the Stars and Stripes and the Star of David — the evil regime's worst nightmare," Hegseth said.

He also noted that both Iran's missile launch volume is down 90 percent and one-way drone attacks are down 95 percent since Day 1 of the operation.

Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who joined Hegseth at today's briefing, concurred with Hegseth that this is the heaviest day of anti-regime kinetic strikes in the region.

Of note, Caine discussed the damage U.S. and Israeli forces have inflicted on Iran's navy.

"In less than two weeks, we've rendered the Iranian navy combat ineffective, and [we] continue to attack all naval vessels, including all of their Soleimani-class warships, which were armed with anti-ship missiles and anti-aircraft weapons," Caine said.

He also noted that, while significant damage has been done to Iran's navy, the regime still has the capability to harm friendly forces and commercial shipping — particularly in the Strait of Hormuz.

"The only thing preventing commercial traffic and flow through the strait right now ... is Iran. They are the belligerents

here, holding the strait closed," Caine said.

To remedy that situation, Caine said Centcom has made it a priority to target Iran's mine-laying capabilities, as well as nearby naval bases and depots.

Both Hegseth and Caine took time during the briefing to remember and pay tribute to the service members who were confirmed killed yesterday when a U.S. Air Force KC-135 refueling tanker crashed in western Iraq.

Four of the six crew members have been confirmed deceased, with rescue efforts continuing as of this morning.

"I ask that we remember our fallen and those participating in the recovery operations ... Those are very, very tough days when that [casualty-notification] knock comes on the door — for people on both sides of the door," Caine said.

"American heroes, all of them," Hegseth said of the KC-135 crew, adding that he and other members of the administration will be on hand to greet the fallen service members at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, once they are returned stateside.

"And their sacrifice will only recommit us to resolve this mission," Hegseth said.

Southern Command conducts lethal kinetic strike

On March 8, at the direction of the Commander of U.S. Southern Command, Marine Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations. Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations. Six male narco-terrorists were killed during this action. No U.S. military forces were harmed.

Joint Task Force Southern Border marks one year, bolstering southern border security through integrated operations ...

Joint Task Force Southern Border reached its one-year anniversary, March 14, underscoring a year of agile, full-scale and partner-focused missions supporting the Department of Homeland Security's southern border mission. Soldiers assigned to the 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum, New York, deployed to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, to establish the new task force, March 14, 2025, under the authority of U.S. Northern Command. The 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, assumed control of the JTF-SB mission following a transfer of authority from the 10th Mountain Division, Oct. 10, 2025. JTF-SB's mission is to safeguard U.S. territorial integrity and protect the American people. The task force achieves this by increasing situational awareness along the southern border, accelerating response capabilities and supporting federal law enforcement partners so they can focus on frontline duties. *For a detailed report by Army Master Sgt. Anthony Hewitt, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), refer to <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4435556/>.*

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Department of the Army CID update on missing drones

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. – The Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division is offering a reward up to \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for the theft of four Skydio X10D Drone Systems (SN: 1668CR40EA005D58D; 1668CR40EA00B5DDD; 1668CR40EA003S9SD; and 1668CR40EA00F29AD).

These drone systems were last seen on the morning of Nov. 21, 2025, at the 326th Division Engineer Battalion, Bldg. 6955, A Shau Valley Rd., Fort Campbell. Between Nov. 21-24, 2025, unknown persons unlawfully gained access to building 6955 and took them.

In a media advisory from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Office of Public Affairs on March 12, they confirmed that the investigation began in late November



2025 into the theft of four small quadcopter drones from a government building on Fort Campbell.

“As of March 12, we’re pleased to report that we have identified two suspects and have gathered credible evidence related to this theft and the possible whereabouts of the missing drones,” stated the release.

The active criminal investigation continues, and “we are working diligently to resolve this matter.”

There is no threat to the public. The missing quadcopters are equipped only with small cameras.

These drones were stolen from a

locked storage area within a secured government building. The individuals responsible had authorized access to the military installation and the building, and they defeated the locks on the storage cages to perpetrate this theft.

The Army PAO statement said

“this was a targeted act, not a random breach of security. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Army CID would like to thank the members of the public who came forward with information regarding the recent theft of the drones. The tips we received have proven helpful.”



Arctic action Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Sebastian GutierrezQuiroz and Sgt. Matthew Blake shoot a FIM-92E Stinger missile at a simulated hostile counter-unmanned aircraft system during Arctic Edge near Fort Greely, Alaska, March 7, 2026. The exercise was designed to improve readiness, demonstrate capabilities and enhance joint and allied force interoperability in the Arctic. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Aaron TorresLemus



On defense Army Soldiers assigned to 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, guard their positions during defensive operations as part of Freedom Shield 26 at Rodriguez Live Fire Complex, South Korea, Mar. 12, 2026. Defensive training prepares rotational forces to rapidly secure and defend key terrain alongside combined partners in support of operations on the Korean Peninsula. U.S. Army photo by KSgt. Jaeyoon Lee



Top stories

- *Old Dominion shooting suspect is ex-Army National Guard member with past terror conviction
- *U.S. bombs key Iranian island amid oil concerns
- *On board fire extinguished on aircraft carrier in Red Sea, Navy says
- *Price tag for Epic Fury tops \$11 billion in first six days, Pentagon tells Congress
- *The Navy decommissioned Middle East mine-sweepers last year. Here’s what they did.
- *U.S. Strikes in Caribbean and Eastern Pacific
- *VA announces plan to put some veterans in guardianships
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DAF announces updates to Military Leave Program

from Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va - The Department of the Air Force released an update to DAFI 36-3003, Military Leave Program, on Feb. 26. The revision incorporates changes mandated by the Department of War and streamlines leave policies to ensure Airmen and Guardians are fully aware of their entitlements.

The updated instruction aligns with DoDI 1327.06, Leave and Liberty Policy and Procedures, formally incorporates previously issued guidance, and introduces several key modifications to the military leave program.

Key policy changes

Maternity and Parental Leave: Inactive Duty Parental Leave is a new non-chargeable leave allowance for the Air Reserve Component and Space Force Active Status-Not on Sustained Duty members. IDPL authorizes the birth and non-birth parent to use 12 IDPL periods after a qualifying birth event, adoption of a minor child or placement of a minor child with them for adoption or long-term foster care.

IDPL is retroactive for members with a qualifying event between October 1, 2024, and August 7, 2025, providing a one-year window from August 7, 2025, to August 7, 2026, to utilize this benefit. This change more closely aligns with active-duty service member allowances to support both parents in uniform.

With the new IDPL allowance, Reserve Component Maternity Leave has been adjusted from 12 to 6 Inactive Duty Training

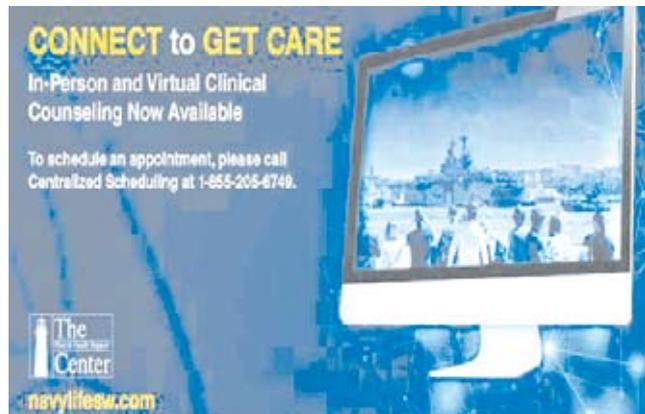
periods to align with active-duty service member allowances of convalescent leave. More information on IDPL can be found here (for CAC-enabled users).

Non-covered Assisted Reproductive Technology: To



align with DoDI 1327.06, Military Leave, Liberty, and Administrative Absence, the terminology for "Non-covered Reproductive Health Care" has been updated to "Non-covered Assisted Reproductive Technology." The full list of approved services under this leave allowance can be found in the updated DAFI.

Overseas Tour Extension



Incentive Program: The Overseas Tour Extension Incentive Program, a leave allowance for designated overseas locations, is now integrated into LeaveWeb. This streamlines the former manual process to increase trackability and efficiencies for the member, commanders, and other offices to track online.

Permanent Change of Station Moves: As previously announced through command channels, this DAFI incorporates recent changes to expand Permissive TDY usage during PCS moves.

PTDY is now authorized incrementally between gaining and losing duty stations, as well as for packing and unpacking household goods, to best suit the service member's needs. In addition, the instruction clarifies members are authorized to use at least 30 days of their existing leave en route to their new PCS to ensure service members and their families are allowed time to adjust to their new location.

Reduced Special Leave Accrual Cap: Also previously announced through command channels, Airmen and Guardians are reminded of the changes to Special Leave Accrual that are now in effect. The transition period for these changes ends on September 30, 2026.

***Reduced Cap:** As mandated by the Fiscal Year 23 National Defense Authorization Act, the SLA carryover cap is permanently reduced to 30 days. The standard annual leave carryover cap remains at 60 days.

***Use-or-Lose Deadline:** The maximum combined leave that can be carried over into the new fiscal year is 90 days (60 days annual + 30 days SLA). Any leave balance exceeding this 90-day total on Oct. 1, 2026, will be forfeited.

***SLA Sell-Back Option:** Enlisted members at risk of forfeiting leave have a one-time option to sell back up to 30 days of their SLA. This will count toward the career 60-day sell-back limit. Members should contact their local servicing Military Personnel Flight to initiate this process.

All personnel are encouraged to review their leave balances and plan accordingly to avoid forfeiture.

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<https://www.navylifesw.com/fleet-family/ffsc-careers>

USS Midway Museum docent classes to begin June 2026

The USS Midway Museum is recruiting volunteer docents (museum tour guides).

This is a great way to give back to your community and to meet interesting people. Free training classes for men and women are scheduled to begin Monday, June 1, 2026 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on board the ship in downtown San Diego.

Training is eight weeks long and includes personalized on-the-job mentoring. Applications must be submitted and screened in advance.

Prior customer service and public speaking experience preferred. No military experience is required. Women and civilians are encouraged to apply. Six month commitment required.

For application and further information

Volunteer Opportunities |

USS Midway Museum - USS Midway Museum, or call (619) 398-8289. E-mail volunteer@midway.org.

The USS Midway Museum opened in June 2004 and has become one of San Diego's most popular visitor attractions

with on million guests coming aboard each year. The ship was commissioned in September 1945 and served for 47 years including the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf. Nearly 250,000 men served their country aboard the Midway before it was retired

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

Visit this page of our website to watch fun videos about our different teams and participants:
<https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

ARENA FOOTBALL FRONTWAVE ARENA OCEANSIDE

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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*

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FIRST ON THE SCENE: MARINES RESCUE FAMILY OF FOUR FROM VEHICLE ROLLOVER

by Staff Sgt. Gabriel Tavarez
3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

CAMP PENDLETON - On the afternoon of Jan. 15, 2026, what began as a routine drive through the winding roads of here quickly turned into an unexpected rescue effort.

Two Marines, Cpl. Malakai Obed and Cpl. Caden Perez with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 169, were traveling toward the main gate of on Vandergrift Rd. when they witnessed a serious vehicle crash unfold in front of them.

clearly: "Perez was riding next to me and I heard him say, 'Oh no.' When I looked up, I saw the car go off the side of the road and into a ditch."

According to information gathered at the scene, a trailer hitch from a truck traveling ahead of the vehicle broke loose and flew backward through the air. The heavy metal hitch crashed through the windshield and struck the driver in the head. The sudden impact rendered the woman unconscious behind the wheel.

With no control of the vehicle, the car crossed both lanes of traf-

fic, narrowly missing oncoming vehicles before veering off the road and rolling down an embankment. For Obed and Perez, the response was immediate.

Without hesitation, the two Marines quickly pulled to the side of the road, jumped out of their vehicle, and rushed toward the wreckage below. As they ran toward the crash, they could see the vehicle had overturned and came to stop upside down in the ditch. When they finally reached it, they noticed several people were trapped inside.

"We could see three kids in the back and the mom was unconscious and bleeding from her head," said Obed.

The scene was chaotic. The children were frightened and screaming, and the vehicle's doors were jammed shut due to the rollover. Knowing time was critical, the Marines immediately began searching for a way to get inside.

With the doors stuck and no easy way to access the passengers, the Marines decided the quickest solution was to break a window. One of them ran back toward their truck while

the other searched the immediate area for something strong enough to shatter the glass.

"I grabbed the hitch from our truck and busted the window open," said Obed.

With the window broken and access gained, the Marines quickly worked to unlock the doors and reach the passengers. Once the doors were opened, their priority shifted to the children in the back seat. The Marines carefully pulled the three kids from the overturned vehicle one by one.

The children were visibly shaken and crying as they were removed from the wreckage and carried away from the crash site to the top of the embankment and away from the wreckage so they would not witness the ongoing rescue efforts involving their mother. Several bystanders helped calm them down as the situation continued to unfold below.

Because the mother had suffered a severe head wound and potentially neck or spinal injuries, the Marines were careful not to move her unnecessarily. Instead, they focused on getting medical help to the scene

as quickly as possible.

"We waved down some corpsmen and they ran over," said Obed. "I was just helping them out with whatever I could, grabbing a first aid kit from someone's car and running back and forth trying to help without getting in their way."

The corpsmen who happened to be driving by before the crash happened stopped and quickly assessed the woman's injuries. Working quickly and methodically, they treated her head wound and worked to stabilize her condition while waiting for additional emergency responders to arrive. At one point during their treatment, the woman briefly regained consciousness as they continued providing care and monitoring her condition.

Throughout the response, Obed and Perez remained on scene, assisting where they could and supporting the corpsmen as the situation stabilized. Their swift reaction and willingness to act in a moment of crisis helped ensure that the passengers inside the vehicle were safely removed and received medical attention as quickly as possible.

For their actions during the emergency, both Marines were awarded impact Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals in recognition of their quick thinking and selfless response.

"They have a great work ethic. It's no surprise they did what they did," said Capt. John Pietrucha, an officer in charge with HMLA-169, MAG-39, 3rd MAW.

What could have been a tragic accident instead became an account of swift action, teamwork and compassion in the face of an unexpected emergency.

For Obed and Perez, it was a moment where training, instinct and a commitment to helping others came together when it mattered most.

Their actions show the importance of Total Fitness: preparing Marines across the mental, physical, social and spiritual domains to respond to contingencies when it matters most. In moments, two Marines on an ordinary drive became first responders, demonstrating the readiness, discipline and selflessness that define the Marine Corps.



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LOCAL: Most recent Marine Corps General and Special Court-Martial dispositions

At a Special Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Cpl. S. A. Madrid, pursuant to the accused's plea, of one specification of unlawful entry. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-1 and 60 days confinement.

At a General Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. Marcjoie A. Andaya, pursuant to the accused's plea, of assault consummated by battery, two specifications of violation of a lawful general order, robbery, solicitation, and communicating threats. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge, 30 months confinement, and reduction to E-1.



At a Special Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Cpl. Alejandro Hernandez, pursuant to the accused's plea, of one specification of unlawful entry. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to

reduction to E-1 and 30 days confinement.

At a General Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Cpl. Hunter D. Way, pursuant to the accused's plea, of possession of child pornography and viewing child pornography. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to a dishonorable discharge, confinement for 40 months, and reduction to E-1.

At a Special Court-Martial on board Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Corporal Leveil Y. Parham, pursuant to the accused's pleas, of assault consummated by a battery, and drunk and disorderly. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge and 115 days of confinement, time served.

At a Special Court-Martial, on board Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Private Marriano M. Coleman, pursuant to the accused's pleas, of unauthorized absence, and violation of a lawful general order. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge, 38 days of confinement, and reduction to E-1.

MILITARY COURT MARTIAL REPORTS
STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE
 Washington, D.C.

<https://www.sja.marines.mil/Court-Martial-Reports/>

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13th MEU forms complete Marine Air-Ground Task Force

by Capt. Mark McDonough, 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit
CAMP PENDLETON – The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has officially formed as a complete Marine Air-Ground Task Force with the addition of its major subordinate elements, bringing the MEU's full capability together under one command.

The 13th MEU Command Element welcomed Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/4, which will serve as the Ground Combat Element; Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 13, which will serve as the Logistics Combat Element; and Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 166

a wide range of missions from the sea.

"Compositing the 13th MEU brings together the full capabilities of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force," said Col. Richard Alvarez, commanding officer of the 13th MEU.

tion capabilities in support of MAGTF operations.

CLB-13, the Logistics Combat Element, provides a broad range of sustainment capabilities that allow the MEU to operate and sustain itself in any environment.

"The strength of The Fighting 13th has always been its Marines and Sailors," said Sgt. Maj. Gerald Furnari, the senior enlisted advisor of the 13th MEU. "Every generation that serves in this unit adds to its legacy, and today's team stands ready to answer the nation's call."

The composite of the MEU marks the beginning of an intensive training cycle during which the command, ground, aviation, and logistics elements will train together before deploying aboard U.S. Navy amphibious ships as part of an Amphibious Ready Group.

The 13th MEU was established at Camp Pendleton on Feb. 1, 1985, as the 13th Marine Amphibious Unit, and was redesignated as the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit on Feb. 5, 1988. Known as "The Fighting 13th," the unit has deployed around the world in support of combat operations, crisis response missions, and humanitarian assistance efforts.



Camp Pendleton Marines head to amphibious vessel. 13 MEU video grab (see the full video clip at <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/560648/13th-meu-forms-complete-marine-air-ground-task-force>)

(Reinforced) and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, which together form the Aviation Combat Element. VMFA-211 will provide a full squadron of F-35B Lightning II aircraft, significantly expanding the aviation capabilities of the unit.

"That integration gives national leaders another flexible, lethal, sea-based force ready to respond when needed."

As the Ground Combat Element, BLT 2/4, provides the infantry forces of the MEU and serves as the principal ground maneuver element of the MAGTF.

The Aviation Combat Element, comprised of VMM-166 (Rein.) and VMFA-211, provides the MEU with a full spectrum of Marine Corps avia-

Together, these units form a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), enabling command and control of ground, aviation, and logistics capabilities and forming a single, rapidly deployable force capable of executing

Celebrate America's 250th birthday in Oceanside



The Oceanside Chamber of Commerce announces the Oceanside USA 250 Festival—a community celebration honoring America's 250th birthday. This event will bring together residents and visitors for a festive afternoon recognizing our nation's history while celebrating the pride and spirit of the Oceanside community. The festival will bring the community together in downtown Oceanside for live music, local food and beverage vendors, family-friendly activities, and engaging community exhibits.

Oceanside USA 250 Festival | June 27 | 12-6 p.m. | Junior Seau Pier Amphitheatre | Oceanside, CA 92054 | Free to the public

Navy MWR Fitness: Making a SPLASH in swim safety!

SPLASH
 Navy MWR Fitness Drowning Prevention Campaign

Through SPLASH, Navy MWR Fitness strives to educate parents and legal guardians on pool safety and the dangers associated with unsupervised swimming. With structured swim lessons, swim skills assessment, safe play, and active supervision, the risk of accidental drownings can be significantly reduced.

MWR FITNESS
www.navyfitness.org

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Through SPLASH, Navy MWR Fitness strives to educate parents and legal guardians on pool safety and the dangers associated with unsupervised swimming.

Six key tips in ensuring the safety of your child when using the aquatic facility:

1 - Stay within arm's reach... Adult supervision is the first line of defense in preventing accidental drownings. Drownings can occur quickly and quietly and in as little as 1 inch of water. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one in five people who die from drowning are children 14 or younger, with children from 1 to 4 having the highest drowning rates. Even more alarming, 1 in 5 drownings occur in public pools with lifeguards present. Parents must remain within arm's reach of non-swimmers at all times.

2 - Protect your non-swimmers... Water wings and other inflatable floats and devices are not

designed to save your child, nor allowed in Navy MWR Aquatic facilities. Floaties provide children and parents with a false sense of safety. All non-swimmers who do not meet the arm-pit depth and who wish to use the pool must be in are encouraged to be in a Coast Guard-approved life jacket and must remain within arm's reach of their parent at all times.

3 - Learn to Swim... Research shows a reduction in the risk of drowning by as much as 88 percent among children ages 1-4 years by participation in formal swim lessons. Navy MWR provides swim lessons for all ages with certified Water Safety Instructors. Contact your local Aquatics staff for more details.

4 - Assess swim skills... Proper skill assessment is vital in ensuring the safety of children. All children that wish to use the deep end of the pool, including slides and diving board, must be assessed prior to entering the pool. Lifeguards will be available at

times specified at the local facility to provide the official Navy Fitness Youth swim skills test.

5 - Swim safely... A day at the pool or beach is fun. However, as much as it is fun, it needs to be safe. Youth non-swimmers and swimmers must remain in their designated areas at all times. Water games are acceptable, but extended breath-holding is not authorized. Remember, even the strongest swimmers and elite athletes can die using breath-holding techniques and games. Stay safe, swim safe.

6 - Hang it up... 20 seconds, that's all it takes for a child to drown. No tweet, status update, text, or phone call is worth risking a child's drowning and/or possible death. It is up to parents to ensure the safety of their child even if lifeguards are working. Eliminate distractions and keep sight of your child at all times.

*Source: <https://www.navyfitness.org/splash>

*Reference: Brenner, R. A., Taneja, G. S., Haynie, D. L., Trumble, A. C., Qian, C., Klinger, R. M., & Klebanoff, M. A. (2009). Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: a case-control study. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 163(3), 203-210



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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

I've always dabbled in self-destructive habits. Teeth grinding, over eating, nail biting, staying up too late, procrastinating. These vices are my dysfunctional coping strategies for dealing with excess stress, emotions, anxiety and the blues.

When our three children were young and we were in that busy stage of military life that seems like a runaway train trip—deployments, teacher conferences, carpools, grocery shopping, bills, in laws, soccer practices, clogged toilets — there was no time to reflect. Things simply had to get done.

Eating straight out of a carton of ice cream, having too many glasses of wine on a Friday night, sobbing after watching a touching commercial, wearing pajamas all day, and serving Fruit Loops for dinner were effective coping strategies for dealing with heightened stress levels.

Despite the chaos, those were some of the happiest years of my life as a military spouse and mother. How could that be if I was under so much stress?

Now, my husband has retired from the Navy and has a steady corporate job. Our nest is empty. I finally have a career. We never have to move again. That runaway train dropped us off in a small New England town where life is peaceful

Happiness co-dependency

and predictable.

Then why is it that I still fall prey to teeth grinding, procrastination, and staying up until ungodly hours of the night, playing Spider Solitaire games on my phone and binge-watching true crime documentaries while eating sleeves of Thin Mint Girl Scout cookies?

The answer came to me during a trip to the hair salon this week.

“So how'r the kids?” my hairdresser asked, as always. I told her about our son, Hayden, being praised recently at his software engineering job. I told her about our middle child, Anna, getting a huge break in her fashion design career last week.

“And I have great news about Lilly,” I beamed. “She passed her final nursing school exam and is getting pinned on Friday!”

Hairdressers are experts at faking interest in their clients' chatter, but Kristy has known me since Navy orders brought us to Rhode Island thirteen years ago. She'd heard all my stories. She knew when my kids graduated high school. She knew that Lilly, our youngest, fell apart during her freshman year in college. She knew about Lilly's major depression and panic disorder diagnoses, and the months of treatment that followed.

She knew that during that time, I was a complete wreck.

Kristy learned that in the midst of Lilly's struggle, she'd decided to become a nurse. I'd told her that Lilly was a natural empath, for whom nursing was a perfect career. She'd heard the story of Lilly at age five overhearing an argument between

her parents, then climbing into her father's lap to lighten his mood. “Your breath doesn't stink today, Daddy,” she'd offered with a smile.

Kristy knew that Lilly battled and beat her depression during nursing school, and passed demanding classes while working full time in the hospital ER. She knew that Lilly had found her passion.

Kristy stopped folding foils and grinned, “That's the best news ever!” and she meant it. She told me good news about her three adult kids, too, whom I knew from our years of salon chair chit chat. Our smiles and laughter were heartfelt.

On my way to my car I felt light, buoyant, happy. It hit me. For moms like me and Kristy, happiness is dependent on our children's well-being. Twenty years ago was a happy time for me even though life was chaotic, because my kids were content, well-adjusted and thriving.

And today, with a less chaotic empty nest, my mood still hinges on my adult children's satisfaction with their lives.

Some might call my happiness dependency dysfunctional, but I believe that mothers are only as happy as their least happy child, regardless of their age. When one becomes a mother, nurturing, protectiveness, and the instinct to raise up a healthy, happy human become deeply engrained.

This week, I didn't overeat, procrastinate, bite my nails, grind my teeth, or stay up too late. My three adult children are happy, so all is right in my world.

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

Anyone who owns or rents a home needs to keep it clean, on a regular basis. One essential tool for doing that is a vacuum cleaner.

I have been using vacuum cleaners for decades. My first recollection of a home vacuum cleaner was my parents' Hoover. I think my first vacuum cleaner was a Eureka. Those were both corded, upright vacuum cleaners with a zippered bag on the back. You'd open the zipper to take out the full bag and replace it with a new one. Back in those days there was no such thing as a cordless vacuum.

Fast-forward to this century. I still had a corded vacuum but it was a Dyson. As opposed to my old Eureka, which was heavy and made of metal, the Dyson was lightweight and mostly made of plastic. That's what eventually led to my needing to replace it. Piece by piece, it slowly broke — due to user error. The last piece that broke with the main section with the dust bin. I accidentally must have pressed the release button while lifting it up from where I had stored it in my garage. It dropped on my concrete garage floor and the plastic shattered.

Off I went to Costco to look for replacement. Most of the vacuum cleaners at Costco were cordless vacuums. Some were upright, stick-type vacuum cleaners and some were the round kind that navigate rooms on their own.

Review: Shark PowerDetect Reveal Clean & Empty System

I wanted a vacuum that had a large capacity for dirt and dust, and I didn't want one of the round ones that self-navigate. I wanted to be fully in charge of it.

In part, I like the Shark PowerDetect Reveal/Clean & Empty System because it combines a reasonably large, self-contained dust bin with the ability to empty itself into a much larger dustbin back on its charging stand. A switch controls whether it empties itself every time that you return it to its base, or on-demand.

I also like the fact that this one uses a rechargeable battery. That makes it very convenient to use. No more do I need to search for an available wall outlet and avoid the cord getting in the way while I work. The downside, is that the battery doesn't last very long. It's rated for a maximum of 70 minutes, but that's not when it's using high power.

This vacuum has several modes of operation, ranging from the most power-saving mode to maximum power, plus an automatic self-detecting mode that detects hidden dirt, edges, floor types and cleaning direction to boost power and increase cleaning efficiency. You can easily hear and it changes back and forth, especially when you gle from vacuuming a hard floor to then start vacuuming carpet.

Reviewers are unanimous in their praise for this vacuum, and I understand why. It works very well, it's versatile, and it's light. Its clever brush design on its primary motorized tool cleans whether it goes forward and backwards. Emptying the dust into the large storage bin is hands-free and virtually effortless, so you don't have to endure a cloud of dust from emptying the onboard bin directly into the trash can. Shark says that the large bin provides you



with the ability to not have to empty it for up to 45 days!

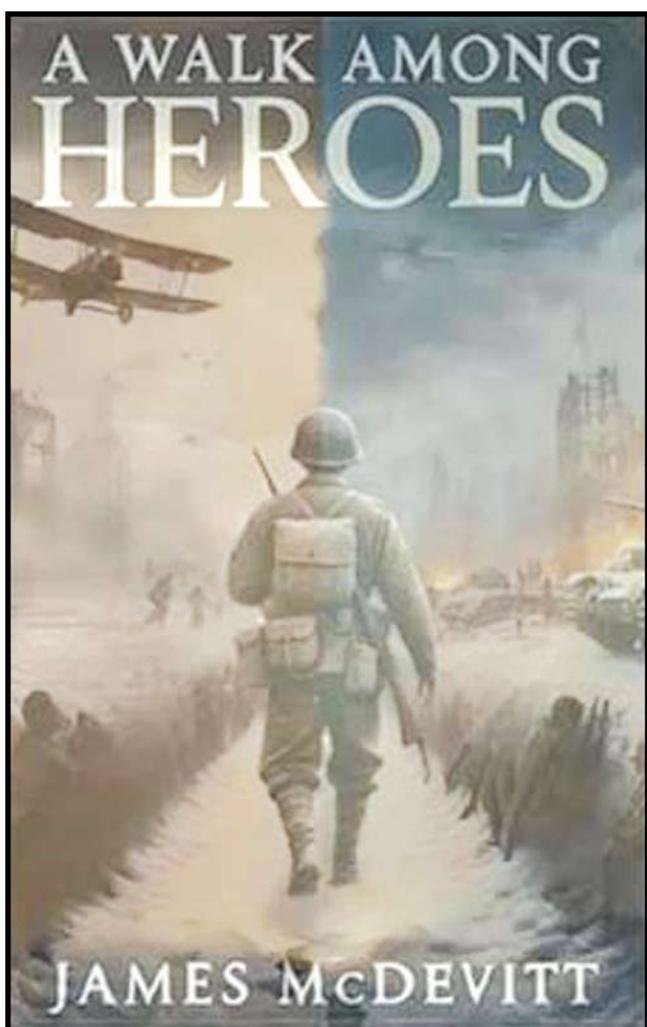
The Costco version comes with all of the attachments that you're likely to need. The only thing that it doesn't come with is something that you should purchase — a spare battery. You will want to have a fully charged battery on-hand. One battery will almost certainly not be enough to clean your home in one session.

For more information, visit: <https://www.sharkninja.com/shark-cordless-powerdetect-clean-empty-system/IP3251.html>.

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 of topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue ‘years’ boxes and browse.

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Veterans News



Rosepoint Publishing screenshot

BOOK REVIEW: A Walk Among Heroes by James McDevitt

EDITOR'S NOTE: This book review was provided by Rosepoint Publishing (<https://rosepoint-publishing.com/2025/11/16/a-walk-among-heroes-by-james-mcdevitt-bookreview-military-aviationhistory/>)

BOOK BLURB: Step into the heart of history with *A Walk Among Heroes*, a novel by James McDevitt. It's a sweeping tale of courage, sacrifice, and enduring love that transcends generations. This powerful World War II novel takes you on an unforgettable journey through the lives of ordinary men and women who became extraordinary in the face of unimaginable challenges.

Through the eyes of T.J., a young soldier returning from World War II, and Smitty, a World War I ace haunted by the ghosts of his past, the story weaves a rich tapestry of interconnected lives shaped by war, hope, and resilience.

Anchored by a love story that defies time, the novel masterfully bridges two world wars, exploring the bonds of family, the weight of duty, and the ultimate cost of heroism.

A Walk Among Heroes isn't

just a novel—it's a testament to the power of love, memory, and courage in the face of humanity's darkest hours. This beautifully crafted tale will inspire and resonate with readers long after the final page is turned.

A Walk Among Heroes visits the bonds that are formed when the people next to you may hold your future in their hands. This is particularly vital when you are moving forward with people shooting at you. Having someone to think about and love back home gives you a goal to strive for staying alive.

James McDevitt provides a very clear picture of the brotherhood of men in arms. It is a testament to someone who has served and watched someone take a bullet to save the life of a fellow soldier. The pain that their sacrifice causes lives with the survivors for the rest of their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: James McDevitt is a firefighter, an infantry officer, and author with a passion for crafting stories that capture the courage, sacrifice, and connections forged in the crucible of war. With two deployments to Iraq, and one deployment to Syria, James draws

on his firsthand experiences to create gripping, heartfelt historical fiction. His debut novel,

A Walk Among Heroes, blends authentic detail with timeless themes of love, loss, and resilience, inspired by true events and a deep respect for history. When he's not writing, James

enjoys woodworking, playing guitar, and jiu-jitsu.

He currently resides in Alabama with his wife, Lindsey, as they prepare to welcome their first child. Connect with James on social media or through his website to follow his journey and upcoming projects.

Legal guardians for vulnerable veterans

The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Justice have signed a memorandum of understanding that will help some of America's most vulnerable Veterans get the ongoing care they need.

VA cares for hundreds of veterans who are unable to make their own health care decisions and have no family or legal representation to help them. This includes some veterans who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The MOU gives DOJ the authority to appoint VA attorneys as special assistant U.S. attorneys. That appointment will give VA attorneys the legal authority to initiate and participate in state court guardianship or conservatorship proceedings in cases where a legal decision-maker is required for post-acute transitions of care for these vulnerable veterans.

The appointment of a legal guardian or conservator can be a lifeline for vets in this situation. Among other things, a legal guardian or conservator can help veterans avoid unwarranted continued hospitalization, protect their rights, and promote appropriate transitions of care from VA hospitalization to other forms of VA care or care in the community, if appropriate.

“The Department of Justice is proud to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs to support our nation's brave Veterans by ensuring that they have the best legal resources available when it comes to making medical decisions and receiving timely care,” said Attorney General Pam Bondi. “We owe our Veterans a debt we can never fully repay — but we can give them the support they deserve.”

“Our new partnership with the Justice Department reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that every Veteran receives timely, appropriate care, even in complex cases,” said VA Secretary Doug Collins.

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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Help! Social Security reduced my monthly payment

by Russell Gloor, National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the non-profit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty: My last Social Security payment decreased by about \$400, so I went to my online SS account and found a November 2025 letter explaining that my 2024 tax return showed a greatly enlarged AGI (Adjusted Gross Income). Thus, SSA decided to withdraw monies, as of Jan 2026, from my bank account because I'd owed far more monies to them! The letter itemized my greatly diminished 2026 SSA monthly payment, explaining should my next tax return show a regular AGI, then SSA would return my SS income to regular amounts (and return every prior month's deficits?). Said letter also mentioned an optional recourse, that of compiling an "Appeal" to regain my ongoing decreased income! The extra amounts now withdrawn for Medicare Parts A and D alone are outrageously high. I'm a retired senior citizen on a fixed income.

According to SSA, my having sold a piece of land in 2024 allows SSA to decrease my SS income! Has this become a common practice against USA (senior) citizens? Thank you in advance for your input!

Signed: Feeling Wronged

Dear Feeling Wronged: From what you have shared, it appears that your SS benefit amount has been affected by a provision known as "IRMAA" (Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount). IRMAA isn't really a Social Security issue, rather it is a Medicare premium thing. But when IRMAA applies, it reduces your net Social Security payment because Medicare premiums are automatically taken from your Social Security benefit, thus making your net SS payment less. If you look at your gross Social Security payment (at your online "my Social Security" account) you will see that your gross SS payment did not change, but your Medicare premium did, thus affecting your net SS payment.

IRMAA, essentially, makes Medicare a "means tested" program, where those with a higher AGI can pay a higher Medicare Part B (and Part D) premium. However, IRMAA is usually based on AGI from two years prior to the current year (because your current AGI information isn't available from the IRS when Medicare premiums are determined in October of each year). FYI, you may have received a notice in the mail in early December telling you what your 2026 Social Security and Medicare amounts would be. In a nutshell, the land you sold in 2024 apparently increased your AGI to exceed the base IRMAA thresholds (which are \$109,000 if you file your taxes as a single, or \$218,000 if you file your income tax as "married/jointly"). And the IRMAA supplements are "progressive" (higher if your AGI is more), so if your Medicare premiums went up by about \$400 (about twice the 2026 standard premium) it's likely that your 2024 AGI was over \$137,000 if you filed as a single (or over \$274,000 if you filed as "married/jointly"). FYI, you can see the 2026 IRMAA brackets/premium amounts at this link: www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare/medicare-premiums.html

A couple of additional points:

• Your Medicare premiums will, indeed, revert to the standard amounts for 2027, if your 2025 AGI amount is under the IRMAA threshold for your tax filing status.

• There is no premium for Medicare Part A (which is coverage for inpatient hospitalization care) because you are receiving Social Security benefits. However, there is a premium for Part B of Medicare (which is coverage for outpatient medical services), and you must also separately pay a premium for Part D (which is coverage for prescription drugs offered by private insurers). And these IRMAA supplements apply even if you have a Medicare Advantage plan from a private insurer.

Unfortunately, your only "recourse" is, as SSA suggested, to appeal the IRMAA supplement, but that is usually successful only if you can prove you had a "life changing event" which caused (or will cause) your AGI to be less than that used to determine your IRMAA surcharge. Your best option at this point will likely be to appeal using a "Request for Reconsideration" (Form SSA-561) asking that your 2026 Medicare premium be based on a recent year's (e.g., 2025) lower income.

Finally, IRMAA isn't really a new thing - it was enacted in 2003, effective in 2007. But it does have a profound effect on many seniors, as I explained in this article I recently published on the topic: <https://amacfoundation.org/irmaa-a-medicare-surprise/>

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-dvisory) or email us at ssadvvisor@amacfoundation.org.

About AMAC

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

Visit our military museums

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

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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.

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USU partners with Mount Sinai, HJF in landmark study to predict chronic disease through 'big data'

by Dr. Daniel Adams

March 12, 2026 -- The Uniformed Services University (USU) has launched a major research initiative alongside the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine (HJF) to redefine how chronic illness is detected and treated.



A researcher at the Uniformed Services University performs a precision liquid transfer, part of the rigorous laboratory standards that drive military medical research and innovation. USU photo.

The project, titled "ORIGIN: Omics to Characterize Preclinical Stages of Non-Infectious Diseases," aims to identify the biological "tripwires" for cancers, autoimmune disorders, neurodegenerative diseases, and heart disease long before clinical symptoms appear. By pinpointing these early immunologic changes, researchers seek to develop targeted treatments that preserve the health and operational longevity of the joint force.

Leading USU's contribution

is the Department of Pediatrics Health System's Research & Clinical Epidemiology Division, a team whose expertise is built on utilizing existing "big data" to address critical knowledge gaps in medicine. The Division has a proven track record in epidemiology, health services, and clinical

outcomes research, demonstrating an exceptional ability to reveal novel findings that can only be discovered through the analysis of massive datasets.

"Our Division's role will be to use the Military Health System Data Repository to perform

highly refined case selection for each condition of interest," said Daniel J. Adams, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and the USU Principal Investigator for ORIGIN.

The research process follows a sophisticated pipeline of data and biological analysis. Once subjects are identified, USU coordinates with the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Division to aggregate clinical data, deployment records, and banked "pre-illness" serum samples. These materials are then sent to Mount Sinai, where they undergo analysis via advanced molecular "omics" tools.

These technologies allow researchers to look back in time at samples collected years before a diagnosis. The goal is to uncover:

- Early risk factors tied to military-specific environmental exposures.
- Immunologic shifts that pre-

The Uniformed Services University leverages the Military Health System Data Repository and advanced "omics" to identify preclinical markers for over 25 chronic diseases, enhancing warfighter readiness and long-term health.

cede more than 25 different chronic diseases.

- Biological markers that could lead to immunologically targeted preventative care.

The ORIGIN project dramatically expands upon a decade-long, successful collaboration between the Naval Medical Research Command and Mount Sinai evaluating inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). "I am greatly indebted to my mentor, Dr. Cade M. Nyland, for initiating this Mount Sinai partnership with the PREDICT study on IBD," said Adams, "and I am

thrilled to take the baton and expand this work into additional chronic diseases that impact the readiness and retention of our Warfighters."

Dr. Patrick Hickey, chair of the USU Department of Pediatrics, emphasized that this cross-institutional collaboration is central to the university's core objectives. "This collaboration with Mount Sinai and partnerships with chronic disease researchers across USU will directly support our mission to promote the readiness and health of our military community," Hickey said.

Department of War's top medical leader shares vision for stronger interagency collaboration

by Robert Hammer, MHS Communications

Keith Bass, assistant secretary of war for health affairs, shared his vision of "readiness by design" as a blueprint for stronger federal health care collaboration to protect the nation's security and health at a recent meeting of federal health professionals.

The success of the Military Health System "is built, deliberately, through policy choices, strategic investments, disciplined execution, and the unmatched commitment of the federal health workforce," he emphasized.

"In the Department of War, readiness is our central obligation," he

said. "Ready to deploy. Ready to fight. Ready to return home, and ready to thrive long after the mission is complete."

Readiness includes putting an emphasis on "superior brain health, faster return-to-duty, advanced trauma and rehabilitation, resilient mental health support, forward medical care in austere and denied environments, and medical countermeasures for emerging biological threats," added Bass.

"These are not optional. They are essential."

Proactive continuum of care

Bass stressed a service member's health is a product of their entire life

journey, meaning care does not begin or end with their time in uniform. He described a critical "continuum of care" that spans three phases of their lives:

- **Before service:** "These factors shape physical health. They shape mental health. And they shape resilience, long before anyone takes an oath."

- **During service:** "That foundation is stressed—and often tested by—operational reality, deployments, combat, training at the edge of human performance, environmental and occupational exposures, separation from family, and the cumulative effect of high operational tempo."

- **After service:** "The story does not end. For many veterans, the health consequences of service emerge or intensify years later—from physical injury and chronic disease to traumatic brain injury, PTSD, and suicide risk."

He said the "impact does not stop with the individual. It touches families. It touches caregivers, and it touches the next generation," which necessitates "a health care system that is not only reactive to immediate needs but also proactive in its long-term support."

Partnerships as force multipliers

Bass described federal health care as a team effort that blends military medicine, veteran care, public health, research, and interagency partners—all with a mission that demands integration, not just coordination.

He highlighted several examples of impactful collaboration between the MHS and government agencies:

- Food and Drug Administration: "Our partnership with the FDA

has led to the authorization to use freeze-dried plasma to treat severe hemorrhage on the battlefield. A game-changer for saving warfighters' lives, especially in remote environments."

- Department of Veterans Affairs: "Through partnership with the VA, we're bridging the continuum of care for service members and veterans by sharing our facilities and caring for each other's patients," Bass said. "For providers, it improves skills. For patients, it increases access to high-quality care."

- Frontlines of Public Health: "Officers from the commissioned corps of the U.S. Public Health Service serving in scientific, public health, and clinical roles in military hospitals and clinics, are also an essential part of military medical health care," he noted.

- Health record modernization: The DOW's MHS GENESIS electronic health record and the VA's EHR Modernization are linked and in time will create a "seamless electronic health record across a lifetime of service... supporting readiness, prevention, and long-term care."

He called for more collaboration across the federal health care system, saying, "Our greatest successes happen when we function as one system, not many separate ones."

The workforce: the system's backbone

While discussing technological advancements, Bass was grounded in the human element.

"None of this matters without the people who make the system function," he said, describing "unprecedented pressures" of the workforce, including staffing shortages, complexity, operational tempo, administrative burden, and burnout.



Keith Bass, assistant secretary of war for health affairs. MHS photo.

It's the MHS' responsibility to strengthen its workforce through multiple components, Bass explained, such as:

- Modernizing training utilizing simulation, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence
- Streamlined credentialing, privileging, and professional development pathways
- Improving retention strategies and expanded mental health support for providers
- Creating new opportunities for advancement, specialization, and leadership

"Behind every readiness metric is a clinician making critical decisions under pressure," he noted. "Our federal health workforce—uniformed, civilian, and contracted—is one of the most skilled and dedicated groups in the world."

Innovation priorities for the 'future fight'

"Innovation is not a buzzword; it is a readiness requirement," Bass emphasized.

The future of federal health care "demands that we accelerate responsibly, ethically, and strategically," he said, highlighting key areas of focus:

- AI-enabled decision support
- Warfighter brain health
- Trauma and blood systems
- Regenerative medicine
- Digital and remote medicine
- Predictive analytics

"A healthier force is a more lethal force," Bass said. "A medically ready Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Guardian, or Coast Guardsman is one of our most important strategic advantages."

Integration: a readiness imperative

"A healthier future requires a single federal health team moving forward with a shared purpose," he stressed. This should include "readiness-focused modernization, workforce development and retention, interoperability and data integration, accelerated innovation, patient experience and access, prevention and resilience, and interagency unity."

"These are not aspirations. They are commitments," Bass said. "Integration is both an operational reality and a readiness imperative," he said.

Bass concluded with a call to join together for warfighter health.

"The future of federal health care will not be defined by what we manage individually, but by what we design together," he said. "Together, we'll build a stronger, more modern, more resilient system. Together, we'll protect those who serve."

"None of this happens by accident—it happens by design."

HEALTH BRIEFS

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