

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH

San Diego Navy/Marine Corps Dispatch

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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 30

JANUARY 1, 2026



DIRECTION DUTY Navy Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 3rd Class Sofia Claire Jose directs an F-35C Lightning II, attached to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314, on aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) on Dec. 26, 2025. The Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group is underway conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. Units assigned to 7th Fleet conduct regular Indo-Pacific patrols to deter aggression, strengthen alliances and partnerships, and advance peace through strength. U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Malina Davy

KC-46 hangar project breaks ground at March Air Reserve Base

by Senior Master Sgt. Wendy Day, 452nd Air Mobility Wing

MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE - Air Force leaders, community partners and Army Corps of Engineers officials gathered at March Air Reserve Base Dec. 16 to mark the start of construction on a new KC-46 Pegasus maintenance and fuel hangar, a \$133 million military construction project that will modernize infrastructure and support long-term mission readiness for the 452nd Air Mobility Wing.

The groundbreaking ceremony was hosted by Lt. Col. Nate Chal, KC-46 Program Integration Office, who highlighted the significance of the project within the long history of tanker operations at March.

"It has been almost half a century since a new tanker mission came to March," Chal said. "This hangar represents an infrastructure investment not just for today, but for the next half century of aerial refueling operations."

Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, deputy commander of the Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, said the project reflects years of planning and coordination among Air Force Reserve Command and multiple USACE districts. The Louisville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, awarded the contract in support of AFRC, while the Los Angeles District will oversee execution.

"Today marks the official start of construction for a project of vital importance to our nation's security and military readiness," Brooks said. "This facility will ensure March Air Reserve Base continues its legacy of excellence by providing modern, world-class infrastructure for the Airmen who serve here."

The project includes construction of a state-of-the-art, two-bay hangar designed to support the KC-46A Pegasus, the Air Force's newest multi-mission aerial refueling aircraft. One bay will support aircraft maintenance, while the other will be dedicated to fuel system maintenance. The facility will also feature modern fire suppression systems, fall protection, utilities, communications infrastructure and environmental controls. In parallel, Building 1244 will be renovated to provide classrooms, briefing rooms and covered storage for a fuselage trainer. <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/555023/kc-46-hangar-project-breaks-ground-march-air-reserve-base>

FORWARD DEPLOYED MARINES, SAILORS RECEIVE CHRISTMAS CALL FROM PRESIDENT TRUMP

by Sgt. Luis Agostini

MANILA - The Marines and Sailors of Marine Rotational Force-Southeast Asia, I Marine Expeditionary Force, received

a morale call from President Donald J. Trump and first lady Melania Trump during their forward deployment in Manila, Philippines, on Dec. 25.

More than 30 MRF-SEA personnel were seated in a conference room on Christmas morning to receive encouragement and praise from their commander in chief. MRF-SEA is a deployed element of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Pendleton, who arrived in the Philippines in early October.

Due to the time difference, the call took place on Christmas Eve from Mar-a-Lago, Fla., and Christmas morning in Manila. MRF-SEA was the only Marine Corps unit on the line, joined by one unit from each of the other branches of the U.S. armed forces.

said Cpl. Lejon Robertson, an embarkation specialist assigned to MRF-SEA. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to not only listen to the president but also have him talk to you directly as a unit, especially on Christmas."

Trump thanked the Marines for their service and sacrifice while deployed during the holiday season, offering words of encouragement and appreciation.

"I know it's not easy when duty separates you from your loved ones," Trump said during the call. "You have earned the gratitude of all Americans in keeping our country safe, strong and free. Tonight and tomorrow,

"Nobody wanted to miss it,"

see POTUS, page 2



President Donald J. Trump and the First Lady make a Christmas morale call in Manila, Philippines, Dec. 25. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Luis Agostini

Statement from NEX regarding closure of layaway program

In a statement to *Armed Forces Dispatch* via e-mail on Dec. 11, Jason Rosenberg, Senior Vice President, Chief Store Operations of the Navy Exchange command, said, "The Navy Exchange will end its layaway program on January 1, 2026, due to the program's drop in patron usage in recent years. The discontinuation is in line with other national retailers who have stopped offering layaway as a purchase option in recent years. The Navy Exchange offers payment alternatives for customers, including the Navy Exchange's "Liberty Pay" program, which is a "buy now pay later" program offering zero interest options."

Air Force designates Talon prototype as YFQ-48A

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Air Force recently announced the designation of YFQ-48A as the Mission Design Series for Northrop Grumman's Project Talon, a semi-autonomous prototype aircraft. This designation marks a key step forward in the Collaborative Combat Aircraft program, underscoring the Air Force's commitment to rapidly delivering next-generation capabilities that meet the urgent and evolving needs of the warfighter. The MDS designation highlights the ongoing partnership between the Air Force and Northrop Grumman and acknowledges the continued progress of the YFQ-48A as a strong contender in the CCA program.

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ARMY OFFICER ONCE OUSTED BY VACCINE MANDATE NOW LEADS REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

by Lt. Col.
Orlandon Howard
Army Communication and Outreach Office
WASHINGTON - In early October, Army Col. Kevin Bouren was administered the oath of office by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, formally returning Bouren to active duty. The event concluded his three-year separation from the service, a period initiated by the Department of Defense's 2021 COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

Bouren, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and an officer with multiple advanced degrees, had a promising career trajectory that included an assignment to the Joint Staff. In 2021, his military service was interrupted after his request for a medical exemption from the mandate was denied.

As a result of the policy, Bouren submitted what he described as an involuntary retirement. "My departure was one of thousands across the DoD related to the unlawful mandate," he said.

The civilian interval
During his time away from the Army, Bouren made an unlikely career move. He began working in filmmaking as a co-producer and set chaplain, managing logistics and operations for films he worked on, while also mentoring the cast and crew. It allowed him to apply his leadership experience in a non-military context while integrating his faith.

"I called them my Soldiers," said Bouren. "As the set chaplain, getting to lead morning devotionals and minister to the cast and crew was wonderful."

It was a period of sustained

service. However, it was service outside the wire. Bouren maintained a stated desire to return to service, which he always felt was his professional calling. In early 2025, when the call for COVID reinstatements came, Bouren said, "God called me to military service, and there was nothing that was going to get between me and going back in the Army. I felt like I had a lot left to offer."

Reinstatement and new mandate
As Bouren pursued reinstatement, he said his process required navigating complex bureaucratic channels with a lot of uncertainty. The system was "unprepared for my specific situation," he said. As he progressed through the process, his goal expanded beyond his own return to improving the administrative process for others facing similar challenges.

After his formal return, Bouren was designated the Army's COVID Reinstatement Task Force Lead. The appointment placed Bouren in a leadership role, "directly addressing the consequences of the unlawful policies that led to his separation," he said. He oversees the reintegration of returning service members and manages personnel policy adjustments resulting from the pandemic-era mandates. He said the task force focuses on intentional and personal outreach that offers guidance rather than bureaucracy.

"We've been directed to provide red carpet treatment," Bouren said at the ceremony. "And it is my great joy to do so. Our warriors of conscience shouldn't have to navigate this alone. We're here to remove barriers and support them through

we're doing here matters."

Following the call, MRF-SEA Marines and Sailors held a traditional Christmas meal together and reflected on the unique opportunity of being contacted directly by the president of the United States. Many said the short speech and engagement with the president provided a reminder of home, the nation they serve and the importance of their mission while forward deployed.

EDITORS NOTE: MRF-SEA is a flexible task force that varies in size, capability, and composition, to accomplish different types of missions as a purpose-built unit, maintaining a forward presence and enhancing Marine Corps crisis and contingency response capabilities. MRF-SEA is uniquely organized to support security cooperation and advance mutual security objectives shared with Southeast Asian Allies and partners.

every step."

The success of the renewed process was publicly demonstrated when Bouren recently presided over the reinstatement and promotion ceremony for Capt. Mark Bashaw, an officer, Bouren said, "had also been unlawfully separated under the same policies." The event demonstrated the improvements to the administrative process that Bouren had advocated to ease the reintegrating of service members affected by the unlawful COVID policies.

"For some, wholeness means coming back into the Army," Bouren said. "For others, it means having their records corrected so they can move forward. Our job is to meet them where they are and to help right the wrongs of the past."

BACKGROUND
In a Dec. 15, a statement by Chief Pentagon spokesman, Sean Parnell was released regarding the *Restoring Honor to Service Members Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Mandate Memorandum*
The Secretary of War recently directed the military departments



Secretary of War Pete Hegseth congratulates Col. Kevin Bouren after administering the oath of office to Bouren, formally returning him to active duty on October 2, 2025 at the Pentagon. The event concluded his three-year separation from the service, a period initiated by the Department of Defense's 2021 COVID-19 vaccine mandate.U.S. Army courtesy photo

to proactively review personnel records of service members involuntarily discharged solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine and facilitate discharge upgrades as appropriate.
Under the previous administration, the Department involuntarily separated approximately 8,700 Service members for failing to comply with the Department's since-rescinded COVID-19 vaccination mandate. Of those, more than 3,000 received less than honorable

discharge characterizations. The military departments have been directed to complete their respective proactive reviews within one calendar year. Former service members won't need to do anything; the Department will look into the potential upgrades on its own.
Any service member or veteran who believes that their records reflect an error or injustice should visit the military review boards website at <https://www.milreviewbds.mil> for informa-

tion on how to apply for relief.
Additionally, the Department is eager to welcome those former service members back to service. Individuals will have until April 1, 2026, to take advantage of reinstatement. See <https://www.war.gov/Spotlights/COVID-19-Reinstatement/>. The Department is committed to ensuring that everyone who should have received a fully honorable discharge receives one and continues to right wrongs and restore confidence in, and honor to our fighting force.

Vietnam-era 'Donut Dolly' continues service with Red Cross in Poland

by Sarah Williams
Army Garrison Poland
Dorner Carmichael grew up in rural Georgia with a curiosity about the world beyond her hometown. As the Vietnam War escalated and the draft loomed over her male classmates, she graduated from college determined to see more of the world and take part in the events shaping her generation.

Carmichael learned about the Red Cross "Donut Dollies" while volunteering in college, teaching first aid with her local chapter. Drawn by a mix of adventure, curiosity and a desire to participate in history rather than watch it from a distance, she volunteered for service in Vietnam despite opposition from her mother and skepticism from friends.

The term "Donut Dolly" originated during World War II as an affectionate nickname for Red Cross women who staffed club mobiles. Those vehicles were outfitted with coffee and donut machines and phonographs to bring comfort and a sense of home to service members in Europe, North Africa, India and the Pacific.

Although the nickname carried into Vietnam, the mission evolved. Carmichael notes that during her tour, she never actually saw a donut.
Assigned forward, Carmichael lived close to combat operations. At first light, she and other Donut Dollies boarded Huey helicopters

carrying hot breakfasts to remote firebases. After serving the meals, they moved between artillery, mortar and infantry positions, running fast-paced recreation programs designed to give soldiers a break from the stresses of war.
Programs ranged from game-show-style contests focused on baseball, football and basketball to paper airplane competitions and improvised challenges meant to spark laughter and engagement. One program ended with a mechanical challenge that required a member of each team to assemble a carburetor she had checked out from the motor pool.
There was always a quiet mechanic in the back; the others called forward. One such soldier later greeted Carmichael on different bases for months, each time asking if she remembered him. She did.

By midday, Carmichael and her partner often boarded another helicopter to reach a different base or shifted to jeep runs, adjusting plans as the tactical situation changed within the area of operations.
Some of Carmichael's most vivid memories are not of combat, but of faces. She recalls arriving with another Donut Dolly, Pam, on a firebase shortly after a soldier had been killed in a firefight. The men stood in small clusters, silent and withdrawn.
Pam approached one group,

introduced herself and asked if anyone was from Georgia. When no one responded, she continued talking until a soldier quietly said he was from Kansas. Pam seized the moment, talking about cornfields and "The Wizard of Oz." Slowly, others joined in, naming their home states.
Within minutes, the men began looking up, sharing photos of dogs, homes and plans for life after the war. In that moment, Carmichael saw how simple human connections could restore a sense of normalcy.
Carmichael served as the war wound down, a period marked by declining morale, widespread drug use and increased tension after college deferments ended in 1971. Many of the soldiers she remembers were barely out of their teens.
Those experiences shaped her understanding of service, sacrifice and community, concepts she says she could not fully grasp before Vietnam.
Decades later, at a Red Cross convention, a filmmaker asked Carmichael to participate in a documentary about the 627 women who served as Donut Dollies in Vietnam. After years of limited public attention, she agreed.
Revisiting those memories on camera was difficult, forcing her to confront experiences she had long buried. She believes those stories matter precisely because they are rarely told.

Today, Carmichael continues to serve with the Red Cross in Powidz, Poland. Her work includes delivering emergency messages between service members and their families, supporting resiliency efforts and helping create spaces for rest, education and connection.
While she notes that nothing compares to life in a combat zone, the underlying mission remains the same. Showing up when people need support.
Carmichael hopes younger generations remember the Donut Dollies as part of a broader history of women's service, including both those who traveled to war zones and those who served quietly at home caring for families. She believes many of those contributions have gone unrecognized.
She encourages service members stationed in Powidz to view their tour as a fixed window of opportunity, offering experiences and perspectives they may not encounter elsewhere.
To Carmichael, service is not limited to uniforms or deployments. A meaningful life, she believes, is grounded in compassion and service to others. Even small acts of kindness matter, whether it is a conversation in a grocery store, checking in on a neighbor or offering quiet support.
"You don't have to travel far to serve," she said. "You just have to start."



Top 6

*China's military buildup makes U.S. increasingly vulnerable, DOD says

*What to know about the militants targeted by U.S. airstrikes in Nigeria

*New charges for Guard shooting suspect enable death penalty talks

*Japan's Cabinet OKs record defense budget that aims to deter China

*Latest class of guardians first to don new dress uniform at graduation

*U.S. strikes in Caribbean and Eastern Pacific (updated)

Army

*Soldier regains sense of touch through neural-enabled prosthetic limb

Navy

*Navy needs to improve fire safety enforcement on ships, watchdog warns

*Switcheroos have marked the naming of Navy submarines for decades

*Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group operating in Philippine Sea, USS Tripoli in East China Sea

Air Force

*Boeing's \$724 million radar plane lives on, despite Pentagon efforts to kill it

Veterans

*Appeals court upholds order for the VA to build 2,550 housing units in Los Angeles

Cyber, Space & Unmanned

*Perseverance continues science mission amid uncertainty about Mars Sample Return

*Synspective tapped to provide satellite imagery for Japan's new military constellation

Early Bird Brief



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We generally post the EBB by 7 a.m. ET every weekday. You can return here to read it—or you can subscribe to get it sent directly in your inbox.

DOW Invests \$32.7M to accelerate solid rocket motor component production

The Department of War announced recently Defense Production Act (DPA) Title III investments totaling \$32.7 million to expand the solid rocket motor (SRM) industrial base. Announcement of these investments was delayed due to the government shutdown.

The recipients are Systima Technologies Inc. (Systima), in Mukilteo, Was., and R.E. Darling Co., Inc. (REDAR) in Tucson, Ariz. These investments support the Department of War's objectives to expand the munitions industrial base, bolster supply chain resiliency, and increase domestic production in strategic priority areas.

"The surge in demand for propellant-based weaponry, coupled with a narrow supplier base, has created a bottleneck in SRM production," said Under Secretary of War for Acquisition and Sustainment Michael Duffey. "With these strategic investments, we are fortifying our national security by expanding critical nodes of the SRM supply chain to accelerate munitions manufacturing."

Using DPA Title III funds, the two new recipients will

strengthen SRM production capability by modernizing existing facilities and improving manufacturing processes:

DOW's \$5.0 million investment in Systima, part of Karman Space & Defense, will leverage and build upon Systima's recently executed capital investment strategy to increase SRM nozzle production capacity. Specifically, the company will create an additional dedicated SRM nozzle production line for a major production program driving out-year production, as well as an optimized production cell for specific complex nozzles.

DOW's \$27.7 million investment in REDAR will establish expanded capacity and a modernized manufacturing capability for SRM case insulation materials. Internal insulation is a critical component of SRMs designed to provide thermal protection and erosion resistance.

The investment provides an expedient route to increasing overall industry capacity of SRM internal insulation, as well as providing resiliency and increased competition across the SRM market.

This announcement brings

the total number of DPA Title III investments made to the SRM industrial base under a recent Defense Industrial Base Consortium Other Transaction Agreement (DIBC OTA) solicitation to eight, for a total of \$120.0 million.

These are two of 21 investments made by the DPA Purchases Office totaling \$939.7 million in fiscal year 2025. Recipient cost shares total \$88.0 million in FY 2025. The Manufacturing Capability Expansion and Investment Prioritization (MCEIP) directorate oversees the DPA Purchases Office.

The OASW(IBP) works with domestic and international partners to forge and sustain

a robust, secure, and resilient industrial base enabling the war fighter, now and in the future. OASW(IBP) also uses a new Defense Industrial Base Consortium Other Transaction Agreement to solicit new ideas for research or prototype project solutions for critical supply chain resiliency focus areas.

The OTA underscores the Department's ongoing dedication to safeguarding the integrity of our crucial supply chain and promptly giving our Warfighters the materials and technologies they need to accomplish their missions.

To learn more about the DIBC OTA, please visit: <https://www.dibconsortium.org>.

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Editor.....Scott Sutherland

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NATIONAL MILITARY IN PHOTOS



SEALED THE DEAL AT ALTITUDE Army Sgt. Ke-arsten Jones, a South Carolina National Guard member, reenlists aboard a UH-72 Lakota helicopter in Washington, Dec. 18, 2025. About 2,400 National Guardsmen support the D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission to help the Metropolitan Police Department ensure the safety of district residents, workers and visitors. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paris Hayes



ANCHORED IN LOVE, FUELED BY SNACKS Chief Petty Officer Isaiah King, assigned to submarine USS Annapolis, greets family upon returning to Naval Base Guam, Dec. 19, 2025, following a routine deployment in the Indo-Pacific. U.S. Navy photo by Lt. James Caliva

BLURRED MOTION

An Air Force Fighting Falcon participates in night flying operations at Joe Foss Field, S.D., Dec. 16, 2025. Training prepares aircrews to safely execute missions across a range of visibility and weather conditions. U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Luke Olson



U.S. Space Forces Japan celebrates first year of activation

by Air Force Capt.
Tisha Yates
Pacific Air Forces

U.S. Space Forces Japan celebrated its first year of activation at Yokota Air Base, Japan, last month.

As the newest independent service in the War Department and a newly activated component in the Indo-Pacific region, this small but essential team of guardians advances space expertise for Japan and joint partners.

U.S. Space Forces Japan is the second component under U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific, following the activation of U.S. Space Forces Korea in 2022. The subcomponent supports the rapidly developing Japan Ministry of Defense space organizations and capabilities, and the need for robust space expertise to support U.S. forces in Japan

"I am proud and honored to have been chosen to lead this organization," said Space Force Col. Ryan Laughton, commander of U.S. Space Forces Japan. "It's exciting to be able to come in and craft a component into something that's never been done before, but ultimately it's been a team effort."

Over the last year, the component has experienced significant growth in expertise, manpower and operational capabilities. This includes building out directorates, establishing robust processes and

developing strong relationships with counterparts at U.S. Forces Japan, other service components, U.S. partners and U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific.

The activation ensures space forces can plan, integrate, coordinate and execute efforts in Japan on behalf of U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific to best support the U.S. partnership agreements with Japan, deepen integration with Japanese space counterparts, and meet dynamic regional challenges to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"It's incredibly rewarding," said Space Force Capt. Rafael Fermin, chief of engagements at U.S. Space Forces Japan, "It comes with significant responsibility, but I'm proud to play a role in shaping [the command] and contributing to its long-term foundation and success."

The bilateral alliance with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force's Space Operations Group has strengthened exponentially over the year.

"Working with SOG, especially in my current role, has shown me how strong and steadily growing our collaboration is," Fermin said. "It's clear that we share many of the same goals and priorities, and we approach them as true partners. I'm excited to see how this relationship continues to deepen as our missions evolve."

Navy announces new small surface combatant

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Navy announced Dec. 18 its plan to introduce a new class of smaller combatant ships, the FF(X), as a critical component of the Navy's fleet of the future. The FF(X) will be a smaller, more agile surface combatant designed to complement the fleet's larger, multi-mission warships and enhance operational flexibility around the globe.

"To deliver at speed and scale, I've directed the acquisition of a new frigate class based on HII's Legend-Class National Security Cutter design: a proven, American-built ship that has been protecting U.S. interests at home and abroad," said John C. Phelan, Secretary of the Navy. "President Trump and the Secretary of War have signed off on this as part of the Golden Fleet. Our goal is clear: launch the first hull in the water in 2028. To expand capacity and production across our maritime industrial base, we will acquire these ships using a lead yard, and competitive follow-on strategy for multi-yard construction. Shipyards will be measured against one outcome: delivering combat power to the Fleet as fast as possible."

The FF(X) is a highly adaptable vessel. While its primary mission will be surface warfare, its ability to carry modular payloads and command unmanned systems enables it to execute a broad spectrum of operations, making it ready for the challenges of the modern maritime environment. Small surface combatants have always been essential to the fleet, handling a wide range of missions where a large warship isn't required. The FF(X) will continue this vital role, and will take on more routine operations, enhancing the fleets operational flexibility, adaptability, and mission readiness.

"Like the Medium Landing Ship, leveraging a complete design and production baseline approach will allow the Navy and shipbuilders to reduce costs, schedule and technical risk," said Adm. Daryl Caudle, 34th Chief of Naval Operations. "We know this Frigate design works, we know it operates with the Fleet, and most importantly, we know how to build it now."

FF(X) is engineered for rapid, cost-effective production, enabling this vital capability to the fleet faster. This is made possible by basing the new frigate on HII's proven Legend-Class National Security Cutter. This approach leverages a mature design to deliver ships to our sailors without delay.

The introduction of the FF(X) symbolizes the Navy's 250-year commitment to innovation and maritime dominance. From seabed to space, the Navy delivers power for peace – always ready to fight and win.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4364538/>



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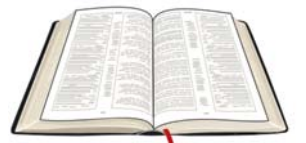
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www.bayviewbc.org info@bayviewbc.org

Bethany Lutheran Church

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FB: First Baptist Church of Coronado email: secretary@fbcoronado.com
445 C Ave., Coronado, CA 92118 (619) 435-6588

Mesa View Baptist Church

Dr. Darrow Perkins, Jr., Th.D. Pastor/Servant CW03, USMC (Ret.)
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Resources to build these life skills include family advocacy programs, family team building and resilience and wellness Specialists. Courtesy photo/MCCS

Life skills build purpose, strength

Military life is full of transitions, from permanent change of station moves to unexpected challenges. Whether on active duty, a military spouse, or preparing to transition out, five core life skills—empathy, resilience, communication, flexibility, and problem-solving—help you stay grounded, strengthen relationships, and live with purpose.

Empathy allows you to recognize when others are struggling and respond with compassion. A simple check-in with a Marine feeling withdrawn can build trust and connection.

Resilience is the ability to recover from setbacks. After a move, spouses who lose their job can adapt, explore new opportunities, and find work that suits their lifestyle.

Communication goes beyond speaking—it includes listening, setting boundaries, and resolving conflict respectfully. Effective communication supports both mission success and healthy relationships.

Flexibility helps you adjust when plans change. Service members adapting to sudden assignments while preparing for promotion boards stay ready and confident.

Problem-solving turns setbacks into paths forward. Even when money and resources are tight, working with community partners can help fill important gaps.

These skills grow through practice, reflection, and experience, supporting personal growth, effective leadership, and family well-being.

Navy tests new digital health system to modernize at-sea care

by Petty Officer 2nd Class
Sasha Ambrose
Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

MAYPORT, Fla. — Navy Medicine conducted its first pilot test of the Operational Medicine Care Delivery Platform (OpMed CDP) aboard destroyer USS *Carney* (DDG 64) to bring modern, seamless patient care to service members aboard ships in early December.

The Joint Operational Medicine Information System (JOMIS), under the Program Executive Office for Defense Healthcare Management Systems, developed OpMed CDP as part of modernized health IT software suite. This pilot program was established through a partnership with the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic Commander, Naval Medical Forces Atlantic, and JOMIS to gain fleet approval of the software’s functionality.

“The JOMIS ecosystem will transform the way our clinicians, physicians, and corpsmen provide care to warfighters in operational settings to maintain patient data flow through the continuum of care,” stated Lt. Cmdr. Erik Lawrence, Navy chief nursing informatics officer for JOMIS assigned to BUMED.

During the 12-day test, the ship’s crew received comprehensive, user-centered training on the system. The goal was to make documenting and accessing a patient’s electronic health record simple and accurate—from pharmacy and lab work to general check-ups — and to ensure connectivity with the Military Health System’s MHS GENESIS platform.

“We’re still learning how it [OpMed CDP] works, but the team has been really helpful with answering questions and listening to feedback, so I’m really excited to keep moving,” described Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Johnny Percadoni, assigned to *Carney*, during a hands-on, scenario-based session. “It’s a different day and a new system, but I think it’s going to become a lot more prevalent and useful for us.”

This phased, structured training install approach — also called fielding — is critical to implementing OpMed CDP across the Navy. The JOMIS Fielding Plan is designed to ensure a disciplined rollout that allows for agile development, continuous user feedback, and alignment with operational readiness cycles.

“We’ve been developing this agile software for the past three and a half years to provide bet-

ter decision support at the point of care for medical providers,” explained Cmdr. John de Geus, the U.S. Navy’s chief health informatics officer. “But also to provide data to operational commanders in dynamic, real-time environments.”

Based on the initial trial, CNSL has decided to move into the next phase: an extended pilot to ensure that the final product will be resilient, effective, and ready for the demands of the fleet.

“A successful fielding isn’t just about delivering software;

it’s about delivering the right capability,” concluded de Geus. “The initial pilot provided crucial insights, which is why we are moving to an extended pilot. This decision reinforces our commitment to a truly feedback-driven process, prioritizing the needs of our Sailors above all else.”

Once all phases are complete, *Carney* will be the first ship to use OpMed CDP for daily medical operations. This will modernize Navy Medicine’s readiness and ensure seamless data sharing, ultimately help to prepare warfighters for their missions at sea.

FY25 sees best recruiting numbers in 15 years

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

In fiscal year 2025, the military’s recruiting efforts returned to levels not seen in more than a decade.

“Since November 2024, our military has seen its highest recruiting percentage of mission achieved in more than 15 years,” stated Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell.

This fiscal year, all active-duty services made mission. Most reserve components also met their mission goals, with the exception of the Army Reserve, which met 75 percent of its goal.

How the active-duty components of each branch met their goals breaks down as follows:

The Army had a goal of 61,000 recruits and attained 62,050, totaling 101.72 percent had a goal of 40,600 recruits and attained 44,096, totaling 108.61 percent of its goal.

The Air Force had a goal of 30,100 recruits and attained 30,166, totaling 100.22 percent of its goal.

The Space Force had a goal of 796 recruits and attained 819, totaling 102.89 percent of its goal.

The Marine Corps had a goal of 26,600 recruits and attained 26,600, totaling 100 percent of its goal.



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JUST IN TIME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



ESCORT SERVICE USS *Lenah Sutcliffe Higbee* (DDG 123), assigned to the *Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group, returns to its homeport of Naval Base San Diego Dec. 19 following operations in the U.S. 3rd, 5th and 7th Fleets. "I could not be prouder of this crew and their performance on Higbee's Maiden mission," said Cmdr. Stephen Skahen Jr., commanding officer of *Higbee*. "As Integrated Air and Missile Defense Commander, this team rose to the challenge and set the standard. From new mission sets in new fleets, interoperability with foreign allies and partners, and representing the United States with distinguished guests; this crew answered the call with enthusiasm and precision. It's my honor to be their captain. Get Wins!" U.S. Navy photo by Gunner's Mate 2nd Class Timothy Weber

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Top hospital award goes to ... Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms

by Christopher Jones
Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms
TWENTYNINE PALMS - Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms has been recognized as a Leapfrog Top Hospital, a national designation awarded to healthcare organizations that demonstrate exceptional performance in patient safety, quality of care and transparency, hospital officials announced.

The award was formally accepted Dec. 15 by Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms Director Capt. Janiese Cleckley and Chief

Medical Officer Capt. Lisa Gibson during the Leapfrog Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner at Gaylord National Harbor in Maryland.

The Leapfrog Group, a national nonprofit organization focused on improving healthcare safety and quality through public reporting, evaluates hospitals using rigorous, evidence-based measures. These measures span medication safety, maternity care, surgical practices, patient experience, prevention of serious medical errors, and organizational culture of safety.

Hospitals earning Top Hospital status consistently meet or exceed national benchmarks and demonstrate sustained commitment to high reliability and transparency.

According to Capt. Jervia Fickens, Leapfrog Lead for NH Twentynine Palms, the recognition reflects a deliberate, year-long effort to strengthen systems designed to protect patients at every stage of care.

“Over the last year, the hospital focused on tightening the

‘safety net’ around every medication and procedure,” Fickens said. “More than 85 percent of inpatient medication orders are now entered through a Computerized Physician Order Entry system, and that system has been tested as fully meeting the national safety standard for clinical decision support, meaning it can reliably flag serious medication errors before they reach patients.”

At the bedside, medication safety is reinforced through universal use of Bar Code Medi-

cation Administration across all applicable units. Nearly nine out of 10 scannable medication administrations are completed with both patient and medication scanning, electronically verifying that the right medication is given to the right patient at the right dose and time.

“The hospital’s medication reconciliation rate signals very few unintentional discrepancies when patients transition in or out of the hospital,” Fickens said. “That directly reduces the chance of missed

or duplicated medications.”

The hospital staff also demonstrated strong performance in maternity care, with outcomes that reflect adherence to evidence-based practice. These include a zero percent episiotomy rate, 100 percent newborn jaundice screening, and high compliance with blood clot prevention for cesarean deliveries. “In maternity care, attention to evidence-based practice led to outcomes that directly affect the experience of growing families in the community,” Fickens said.

LOCAL PHOTO GALLERY



Technicians with Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit ELEVEN fast-rope into a combat search and rescue drill at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Dec. 23, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 August Clawson



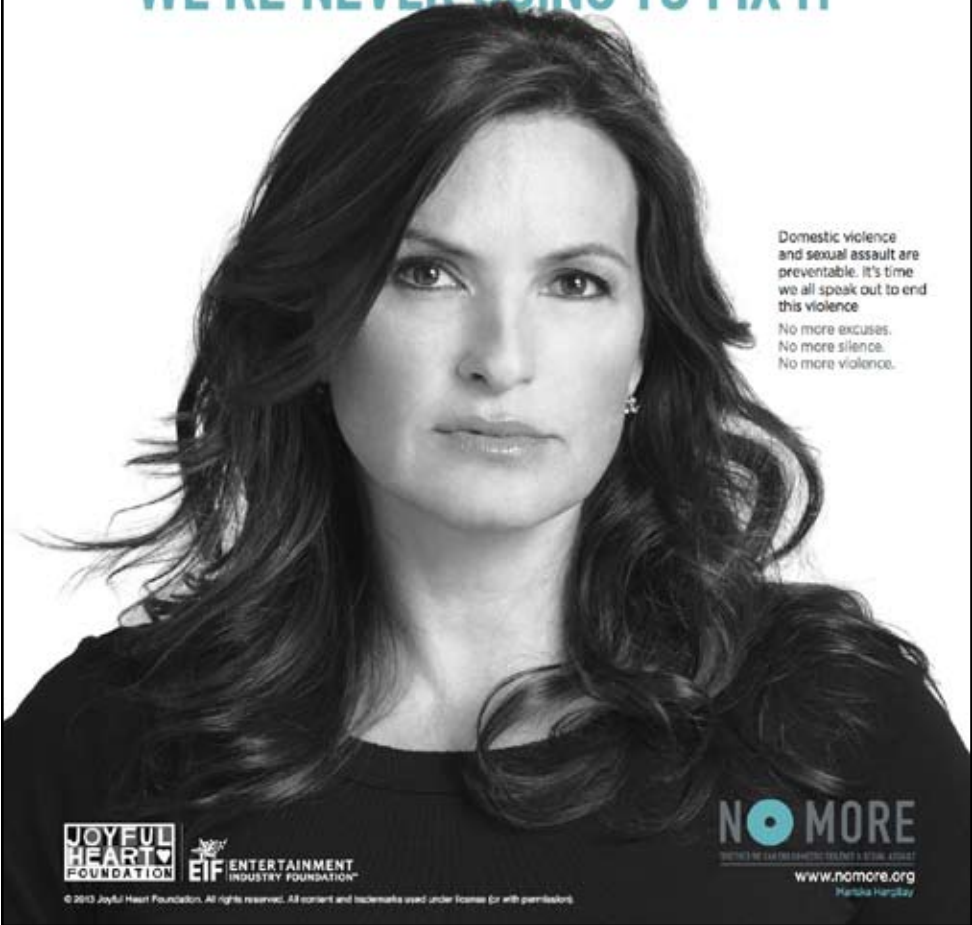
Marine Corps Sgt. Joshua Whitmill fires at a target during live fire and maneuver training at Range 800, Camp Pendleton, Dec. 18, 2025. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Brian Knowles






Navy Capt. Richard Pozniak, director for nursing services at Naval Medical Center San Diego, poses with San Diego Padres mascot the Swinging Friar and members of the Pad Squad during a holiday visit to NMCS D Dec. 18, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Jason Afbale

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TASK FORCE ASHLAND MARINES, SAILORS CONDUCT PRE-DEPLOYMENT TRAINING

Navy Sailors and Marines assigned to Combat Logistics Company, Task Force Ashland, I Marine Expeditionary Force, conduct tactical combat casualty care training at Camp Pendleton, Dec. 15, 2025. TCCC is a training program for non-medical personnel to have knowledge and skills to render life-saving medical aid in the absence of medical personnel in combat scenarios. The TCCC training allowed TF Ashland personnel to become certified in combat trauma care. TF Ashland is a flexible crisis response force, purpose-built to integrate with allies and partners in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Instagram screenshot/U.S. Marine Corps video by Cpl. Brian Knowles

Mutts with a Mission

Courtesy Story

USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71)
Morale-boosting service dogs from a non-profit veterans organization visited USS *Theodore Roosevelt* Dec. 23 to support the crew during the holiday season.



Navy Sailors meet with Deke, a 'Mutts with a Mission' dog, aboard USS *Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier, Dec. 23. U.S. Navy photo by MCSA Tyler Harstad

It was a cold fog-filled December morning until the warm furry pups from Mutts with a Mission (MWAM) boarded the mighty Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt*. These mutts come with the mission to improve morale and mental health of veterans, first responders and law enforcement all around the world.

"The program is for active-duty military and disabled veterans to bond with these dogs and be able to pick up everyone's mood," said Frank Boss Jr, certified dog trainer with 'Mutts with a Mission.'

adapt to shipboard life, including mastering ladder wells, aircraft transport, and much more.

"I think this supports the entire morale of the crew," said Damage Controlman 3rd Class Shelby Brady. "Seeing the dogs coming up to you and wagging their tails boosts everyone's happiness and work ethic."

The big stick was visited by Labradors Diego, Millie, Declan, Finn and golden retriever Deke.

MWAM, an Assistance Dogs International-accredited program, pioneered the Navy's Expeditionary Facility Dog (EFD) initiative back in 2023, training dogs like Deke and Declan to provide therapeutic support in high-stress environments such as an aircraft carrier.

Unlike therapy dogs, EFDs undergo specialized training to

This partnership with the Navy started in 2023 with Captain Sage the Labrador on aircraft carrier USS *Gerald R. Ford* during deployment to help crew morale and mental health during a hard time being away from their families.

For more news from Theodore Roosevelt, visit <https://www.air-pac.navy.mil/Organization/USS-Theodore-Roosevelt-CVN-71/>.



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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

Since PCSing from Germany to Florida, I wasn't feeling the holiday among the palm trees, heat and humidity.

I'd grown up amidst snowy Currier and Ives scenery in Pennsylvania, where mustering Christmas spirit was effortless, automatic, intrinsic. I spent holidays in a parka with a sugary slurry of cocoa and candy canes in my belly, pelting snowballs, breaking gritty icicles off gutters, and sledding until I was too numb to feel my nose running. Back then, I didn't look for it — the Spirit of Christmas found me, drew me in, and captured me.

In Florida, the only icy thing was the AC at my local Starbucks, and half-dead Christmas trees were sold in hot strip mall parking lots. So, we erected a measly artificial tree on a table in our cramped base living room, and I hid my disappointment. I owed it to eleven-year-old Lilly. Tenth-grader Hayden and eighth-grader Anna had stopped believing in Santa Clause, but our youngest was still captivated by the magic of the season.

"We have to make it special for her," I committed.

So, while the kids were asleep on December 24, Francis and I dutifully set the scene for another magical Christmas morning. Little did we know, Anna and Lilly were awake in Lilly's double bed. Watching her sister play a Santa Clause game on her Kindle, Anna saw joyful anticipation

Part 2: The year Lilly saved Christmas

in Lilly's eyes, and felt resentful.

"If only Santa hadn't been spoiled for me in Germany," Anna thought, remembering late Christmas Eve when she witnessed the shocking truth through her bedroom door's keyhole. While Lilly giggled at digital Santas, Anna thought, "How could Lilly still believe in Santa Clause? She must be faking it."

Channelling her inner evil dictator, Anna blurted with deadpan delivery, "You know he's not real, right?"

Lilly looked at her sister, confused. "Who's not real?"

"Santa — the parents made him up."

Lilly's face contorted and her eyes welled with tears, but it was too late to back out. Anna went into detail, explaining that the bites from cookies were taken by Dad. The curly script on packages was written by Mom all along.

"You're a liar!" Lilly cried, "You're stupid!"

Anna fixed her glare. Rather than acknowledging that she'd squelched Lilly's Christmas psyche, Anna did what she'd always done — she manipulated Lilly to take the blame for her mistake.

"Lilly!" Anna scolded, "You shouldn't talk to me like that!"

As if brainwashed, Lilly's anger transformed into contrition. "I'm sorry."

"I just can't understand why you treat me this way," Anna folded her arms and sulked.

Lilly begged, "Anna, I'm sorry for saying you're stupid. Please forgive me!" Anna ignored Lilly until she'd

apologized three more times, then granted her dispensation so they could sleep. But ironically, Anna depended on Lilly for comfort. To quell her own guilt, she snaked her arms around Lilly's torso, snuggled in close, and fell asleep.

The next morning while waiting for chaos to ensue, Francis and I lit the artificial tree, played Sinatra Christmas songs, and filled mugs with hot cocoa, with no inkling that Lilly had been dealt a crushing blow.

In fact, Lilly knew denying Santa would ruin Christmas for everyone, so she bounded down the stairs and exclaimed for everyone to hear, "Santa came!"

"What's this?" Lilly said after all the gifts were opened except one, "It's for me from Santa!" She tore open the poorly wrapped gift, revealing a plush cow. I assumed Francis had picked it up. Conversely, Francis assumed I'd bought it. Our work was done, so we were too content to care.

Lilly hugged the fuzzy heifer and beamed, "How did Santa know?!"

Years later, Lilly and Anna revealed what had really happened that Christmas Eve. Though devastated by Anna's revelation, Lilly admitted that after Anna had fallen asleep, she wrapped up the cow she'd recently bought for herself and hid it, hoping we'd all believe in Santa again.

Sweet, unselfish Lilly taught us that the holiday isn't about Santa, or snow, or the presents we receive — true Christmas spirit is in giving. Lilly gave us this gift by giving one to herself. And for a while, we believed.

Maybe we still do.

ELEHEAR: Beyond hearing aid review

Do you remember how well you used to hear when you were very young? I do. My hearing was so good that it even amazed me. However, my hearing deteriorated over the decades, in part due to competing in and watching loud motorsports — mostly car racing. I wear hearing protection, but that does not completely mitigate loud sounds.

I also enjoy cranking up the volume of music when I drive, only to return to my car and find that the volume level is way too high. Sound familiar?

Do you often ask people to repeat themselves because you only heard part of what they just said? Have people told you that the TV show that you are watching is too loud, and ask you to turn it down?

Recently I was visiting a family with a young child, who was playing music on their Toniebox (see my review at: <https://automatters.net/tonies-fun-facts-songs-stories-an-audio-player-for-kids/>). I could not hear the music. That convinced me that it was time for me to try the ELEHEAR Beyond hearing aid that I had been given several months ago to review.

The ELEHEAR Beyond is a light-weight, easy-to-use hearing aid, intended to be used for mild to moderate hearing loss. At \$399 MSRP per pair, it is very affordable, and you might find it sale-priced. Features include: "VOCLEAR, for "clear speech," "high sound quality" and "AI noise reduction," and that it also has a "basic music mode," "125Hz-7000Hz" range, "Bluetooth 5.3 for calls, music and TV," an "easy-to-use app," 22 tinnitus masking sounds (tinnitus is a continuous background ringing that I have learned to live with),

"up to 20 hours per charge," "11 languages available" and preset sound modes.

The ELEHEAR Beyond is very easy to use. To charge, open the hinged lid of the rugged charger and simply place the hearing aids into the recesses. The charger has a rechargeable battery too.

The light-weight hearing aids are easy to put on, including for people who wear glasses, like me. The app includes a preliminary hearing test, which is "not a replacement for a professional,

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

clinical evaluation conducted by an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist in a clinical setting." My in-app hearing test concluded that I have mild hearing loss. It recommended that I send the test results to ELEHEAR, for review by one of their audiologists at no extra charge. I did so and am awaiting their reply.

The app also has on-screen setup controls for volume and tone, for each ear. The buttons on the hearing aids are easy to reach and use. ELEHEAR recommends using the hearing aid daily, for three to four weeks.

When I watch TV without using a hearing add, what I hear is slightly muffled dialog. The highs are compromised, so I use closed

captions. My initial experiences of using the hearing aid for listening to dialog on TV is that the highs are definitely improved, but there is also continuous, high-pitched noise in the background. I assume that noise includes what are the otherwise barely audible sounds that are made when my collar rubs against my facial stubble as I move. Those background sounds, while not loud, are nevertheless annoying. I have not yet tried ELEHEAR's tinnitus masking sounds.

The ELEHEAR Beyond is a step below their top model — the ELEHEAR Beyond Pro (\$599 MSRP per pair), which features the "latest algorithm" for "ultimate sound." Its upgraded features include: "VOCLEAR 2.0, for "30% clearer speech," "real sound, no mumbles," "enhanced AI noise reduction," a "new music mode for a fully immersive experience," "125Hz-8500Hz" and an "enhanced app experience." Other features are shared by both models. While I have not tried the ELEHEAR Beyond Pro, I suspect that the improvements could help.

ELEHEAR offers a 45-day "Risk-Free Trial" and free shipping. Their hearing aids are FDA registered, and come with a 1-year warranty and lifetime support (via email, live chat or phone calls).

Of course, any hearing aid would be unnecessary if you take care of your hearing. Visit [visit https://elehear.com/](https://elehear.com/) for more details.

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Veterans News

Medal of Honor Spotlight: Army Pfc. David Nash

by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

Army Pfc. David Paul Nash had only been in the military for about eight months when he gave his life in Vietnam so his fellow soldiers could live. Nash's devotion to the mission and his comrades led him to receive a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Nash, who was known throughout his life as Paulie, was born Nov. 3, 1947, in Whitesville, Ky., to Ishmael and Stella Nash. He had six brothers and a sister, served as a Catholic altar boy and attended St. Mary's High School in his hometown.

Nash loved to fish and hunt and, as the second oldest sibling, wasn't afraid of hard work to help support his family. During his teens, he worked at a filling station and raised a tobacco crop with one of his older brothers, his mother told the Owensboro,

Kentucky, newspaper the *Messenger-Inquirer* in 2001. Two of his younger brothers said they liked to help him work on his 1957 Chevy up until the time he was drafted in May 1968.

After basic training, Nash was assigned as a grenadier to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division. By that October, he found himself in Vietnam.

According to a 1999 Messenger-Inquirer article, just days before his Medal of Honor actions, Nash took a photo of his bunker's Christmas tree, wrote a letter to his family and dropped it in the

mail. It was a letter to which they would never be able to reply.

On Dec. 29, 1968, Nash's company was on an ambush patrol in the Mekong Delta,



Navy SEALs and South Vietnamese soldiers disembark from a river patrol boat for an assault on Viet Cong positions on Tan Dinh Island during Operation Bold Dragon III in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam, March 26, 1968 U.S. Navy photo/National Archives

a swampy area with flooded fields and dikes, when they were suddenly attacked by the

Viet Cong. Nash was the first to return enemy fire. Despite being exposed, he managed to suppress the bombardment with a quick series of rounds from his grenade launcher, which enabled U.S. artillery fire to be adjusted onto the enemy.

After the combatants fled, a small element of Nash's company continued to the ambush site, where he and three fellow soldiers set up an overnight position along a narrow dike. Other squads of men set up in similar positions nearby.

Shortly after midnight, as Nash and a comrade kept watch while the two other soldiers slept, an enemy grenade went off in an adjacent position, wounding two soldiers. Seconds later, Nash saw another grenade land feet from his position.

Nash could have rolled down the other side of the dike to

escape the explosion, but he didn't. Instead, he shouted a warning to his fellow soldiers and threw himself on top of the grenade. His body absorbed the explosion, saving the lives of the three men with him.

Few were surprised by his actions. According to congressional testimony, a friend later said of Nash, "He was always quiet, but he made you feel good about yourself. He was the kind of guy you wanted next to you when you went on patrol. You trusted him. You knew he would do the right thing and cover you. When I heard what happened, I wasn't surprised. He was that kind of guy."

For making the ultimate sacrifice, Nash's family received the Medal of Honor on his behalf from President Richard M. Nixon, April 7, 1970, during a White House ceremony.

The families of 20 other fallen Vietnam soldiers received the same high honor that day.

Nash is buried at St. Mary of the Woods Cemetery in his hometown.

His memory has not been forgotten. In the 1990s, Whitesville erected a memorial in his honor in its city park. In 2004, a section of highway in Daviess County, Kentucky, was unveiled as "Pfc. David Paulie Nash Memorial Highway" to memorialize him. Several veterans who served with Nash attended the ceremony.

This article is part of a weekly series called "Medal of Honor Monday," in which highlights one of the more than 3,500 Medal of Honor recipients who have received the U.S. military's highest medal for valor.

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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. <http://www.veteranmuseum.org/>

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
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 for children 3 & under and Active Duty military including reservists (w/valid ID). Adult \$39 (ages 13+). Youth \$26 (ages 4-12). Veterans (w/ID) \$26*Must show ID at entrance. Open daily 10-5, last admission 4pm. [https://
www.midway.org/](https://www.midway.org/)

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

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



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movies](https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/movies)

[https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/
theater](https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/theater)

NAS NI Lowry Theater Policy

- Outside food and beverage are NOT permitted: Sales from the snack bar support the movie program.
- These Theaters are cashless facilities. Debit and credit cards accepted only.

Premium Offerings

- Audiovisual assistive equipment available to customers at the front counter.
- Handicap seats and child booster seats are available.



NBSD Theater is temporarily closed for renovations as we work to bring you a better movie experience. We appreciate your patience and can't wait to welcome you back in spring 2026.

In the meantime, catch the latest films at NASNI Lowry Theater! Open, and ready to serve you!

Five new animal welfare laws took effect in California Jan. 1, 2026

SAN DIEGO — Five key animal welfare bills sponsored by San Diego Humane Society will take effect Jan. 1, 2026, marking a significant step forward in protecting animals and strengthening veterinary care across California. The legislation represents a successful advocacy year in Sacramento, where San Diego Humane Society joined fellow leaders in the field — including San Francisco SPCA, Valley Humane Society, CalAnimals, ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society, Humane World for Animals and the Michelson Center — at Animal Advocacy Day 2025. Together the coalition urged lawmakers to adopt measures that increase transparency in the puppy market, prevent predatory sales practices and expand access to essential veterinary care.

Cracking Down on Puppy Mills and Predatory Pet Sales

Three laws taking effect Jan. 1, 2026, were crafted in response to the L.A. Times extensive investigation into the nation's multibillion-dollar pet industry, exposing widespread fraud, deceptive practices and inhumane conditions tied to out-of-state mass breeders. These bills close regulatory gaps that previously allowed "pet brokers" and other third-party sellers to market puppy mill dogs as locally raised pets.

Closing the Pet Broker Loophole (AB 519)

AB 519 bans pet brokers in California. Under the new law, any entity that profits from the sale of animals bred by another party is prohibited from doing business in the state. Eliminating brokers prevents third-party sellers from exploiting loopholes that have enabled inhumane breeders to continue profiting off of unsuspecting CA consumers.

Puppy Importation Transparency Act (SB 312)

SB 312 requires dog importers to electronically submit health certificates to the California Department of Food and Agriculture within 10 days of shipment. The certificates, which identify the breeder and document the dog's health, will be made publicly available. **Protecting Pets from Predatory Practices (AB 506)**

AB 506 voids deceptive contracts used by online sellers, including those requiring nonrefundable deposits or failing to disclose the animal's origin prior to purchase. It also mandates that sellers refund buyers within 30 days if a puppy becomes unavailable. **Increasing Access to Veterinary Care**

The remaining two laws address California's critical shortage of veterinary professionals. By expanding the duties of trained staff and providing more flexibility within shelter settings, these measures will help more animals receive timely, essential care.

AB 516 allows Registered Veterinary Technicians and veterinary assistants to perform any medical task not expressly prohibited by law.

Improving Shelter Veterinary Access SB 602 permits RVTs in designated animal shelters to conduct essential veterinary appointments, such as vaccinations and parasite control, without requiring a supervising veterinarian to be onsite.

SD Humane Society Community Pet Pantry offers help to pet parents in need

San Diego Humane Society is supporting families and their pets who need a little extra help. Through the Community Pet Pantry, anyone can visit our campus locations in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside and San Diego between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, to pick up a bag of dog or cat food as well as other supplies as available. No appointment is needed. Tuesday-Sunday | 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

San Diego Humane Society Campus Locations

El Cajon Campus 1373 N. Marshall Ave. El Cajon, CA 92020	Oceanside Campus 572 Airport Road Oceanside, CA 92058
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Escondido Campus 3500 Burnet Drive Escondido, CA 92027	San Diego Campus 5480 Gaines Street San Diego, CA 92110
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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Can I switch to a taxi driver job without hurting my Social Security?

Dear Rusty: I opted to draw my Social Security retirement benefit early and work part time. The company I work for has decided to pull me from field work due to my age and health. Although they are great keeping me at 20 hours per week running for parts and doing office work, I'm not sure how much longer it will last. I'm thinking of taking a taxi driving job to keep my income enough to live on. The way it would work, I would lease the cab for some amount of dollars per day, set my own hours to work and collect anywhere from \$1.40 to \$4.00 per mile, depending on what type of fare. My question is: how does Social Security look at that type of employment? Would I be held to the 15 - 45 hours a month standard? I could never come close to making the \$1,200 to \$1,300 a month I need by working so little. Any advice is greatly appreciated.
Signed: Seeking Advice

Dear Seeking: If you go ahead with your plan to lease a taxicab instead of continuing your current employment, you would, in effect, be considered "self-employed" and would submit your income tax return to the IRS accordingly. Social Security would get your earnings information as reported to the IRS, and it would be your net earnings from self-employment (after deducting all your business expenses) that is reported to SSA by IRS. There is, however, a special rule which would apply to you in your first calendar year of self-employment while collecting early Social Security benefits.

Since, in your first year, some of your earnings would be as a part-time employee paying SS FICA payroll taxes, Social Security would first look at your earnings as an employee to see if you exceeded the annual earnings limit (\$23,400 for 2025). Then, upon starting your self-employment, Social Security would look at the hours you spent performing "substantial gainful activity" (e.g., driving your taxi) each month and, if you spent more than 45 hours per month in that capacity, you would not be considered "retired," and thus, not eligible for Social Security in any month you exceeded that amount of hours. If you earned less than the annual limit in total (both as an employee and while self-employed), you would get benefits for all months of the year. But if you earn more than the annual limit, you will get no benefits for any month you exceeded 45 hours as a self-employed person. Again, this only applies during the first calendar year of self-employment - in the following year only your net earnings from self-employment would count toward the annual earnings limit.

In effect, SSA would use the hours-worked standard to see if you are truly retired or actually working. If the latter, they would withhold SS monthly benefits for any month you exceed 45 hours working while self-employed (up to and including December of your first calendar year of self-employment), and only if your total income (as an employee and while self-employed) exceeds the annual limit.

So, if your goal is to net \$1,200 - \$1,300 per month as a self-employed taxi driver, that would be well within the limits of the annual earnings test

Continued on page 11

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USNS Mercy Medical Treatment Facility participates in Mass Casualty Response Drill

From Sarah Cannon
Military Sealift Command Pacific
One hundred seventy members of the Military Sealift Command (MSC) hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) along with Marines from the Expeditionary Medical Facility, 4th Marine Medical Battalion and the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, participated in a mass casualty response drill on Naval Air Station North Island. The drill was part of the larger, multi-service exercise, Steel Knight 2025, held at Marine Base Camp Pendleton, and tested the MTF's ability to triage, treat and

transport multiple simulated patients during a crisis.
On the flight line at NASNI, the exercise simulated the transfer of patients from an accident scenario at Camp Pendleton that included an explosion. In the scenario, the patients were transferred to the field treatment facility by helicopter and offloaded by Navy and Marine Corps aircrewmembers. Once off the helicopter, members of the medical team moved patients from the flight line, through a triage station, and into various levels of treatment, the same way they would do in a real-world operation.



Above: Patient is assessed in the triage area during a mass casualty response drill on Naval Air Station North Island. Members of the Military Sealift Command (MSC) hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) along with Marines from the Expeditionary Medical Facility, 4th Marine Medical Battalion and the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab participated in the drill as part of the larger, multi-service exercise, Steel Knight 2025, held at Marine Base Camp Pendleton, and tested the MTF's ability to triage, treat and transport multiple simulated patients during a crisis. Photos by Sarah Cannon



Navy aircrewmembers deliver a patient to the triage area during a mass casualty response drill on Naval Air Station North Island.

Social Security Matters
Continued from page 10

(\$23,400 for 2025 but changes yearly). But there may, or may not, be a reduction in your Social Security benefits during your first year of self-employment, depending on when you start as self-employed. Note that SSA will ask about your work plans when you apply, and if you expect to stay under the annual limit (working part time in both capacities), you should get full SS benefits. Just be careful to stay under the annual earnings limit for those collecting early Social Security benefits. FYI, earnings from before your SS benefits started don't count toward the earning limit.
Note, too, that your monthly Social Security benefit will be actuarially reduced according to how far in advance of your full retirement age you claim SS. Whenever SS benefits are claimed prior to one's full retirement age, those benefits are permanently reduced.
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 or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.



A patient is moved into one of the two Rapid Emergency Medical (REM) Pod/Units for continued treatment.



A patient receives continued care inside one of two Rapid Emergency Medical (REM) Pod/Units during a mass casualty response drill on Naval Air Station North Island.

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