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Secretary of War’s ‘Arsenal of Freedom’ tour to rally nation

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth kicked off the nationwide “Arsenal of Freedom” tour Jan. 5, visiting shipbuilding yards and a recruiting station in Newport News, Va. The Secretary also administered the oath of enlistment to new recruits.

Hegseth will then continue “Arsenal of Freedom,” a call to action to revitalize America’s manufacturing might and re-energize the nation’s workforce. The tour’s message will emphasize that national security and the peace of the world move at the speed of our Defense Industrial Base (DIB) and rely on the hard work of our American workforce.

The tour will highlight the urgent need to rebuild our Defense Industrial Base (DIB) to ensure that we continue President Donald J. Trump and Hegseth’s peace through strength agenda.

American manufacturing is the bedrock of American strength. The men and women fueling this work are on the frontlines, alongside our warfighters, furthering the nation’s efforts every day they show up to work.

The tour will champion a new approach to defense acquisition, one that prioritizes and awards speed, innovation, and a “commercial-first” mindset.

This includes cutting bureaucratic red tape, empowering program leaders, and providing the stable, long-term contracts necessary for industry to invest and expand.

The goal is to create a defense ecosystem that is more agile and accountable, capable of delivering the tools our warfighters need, when they need them.

The “Arsenal of Freedom” tour is more than a series of speeches; it is a movement to restore our nation’s industrial prowess and secure our freedom for generations to come. It is a reminder that the strength of our nation is not just in our military, but in the ingenuity and spirit of the American people.

Navy adds second fitness test requirement for 2026

In a Dec. 31 *Stars and Stripes* story by Corey Dickstein, active-duty Sailors will have to complete two physical fitness assessments per year starting in 2026, the Navy announced in a return to its pre-coronavirus pandemic fitness testing schedule. All Sailors in the active component will now be tested during cycles between Jan. 1 and June 30 and July 1 and Dec. 31, according to a Naval Administrative Message governing fitness standards published Dec. 29. Reserve component Sailors must complete at least one fitness test during the year, according to the message. The increase in fitness testing aligns with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s push for increased physical standards across the U.S. military.

Army to retain military working equid programs at Fort Hood, Fort Riley

WASHINGTON -- The Army will retain military working equid (MWE) programs at Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Riley, Kansas, previously slated for discontinuation. MWE programs include horses, mules, and donkeys owned by the Department of War and housed on Army installations. The decision follows a thorough assessment of resources and support capabilities. “After careful consideration, the Army has determined that retaining these MWE programs is in the best interests of the force,” said Col. James Fuhrman, assistant deputy for Army health affairs. “These programs provide unique capabilities and benefits that are difficult to replicate, and their continuation aligns with our broader commitment to readiness and community engagement.”

JANUARY MONTHLY OBSERVANCES

Nat’l Eggnog Month	Buckwheat Month	Procrastination	Disorder Awareness
Made In America	Worldwide Food	Awareness Month	Tomato and Winter
Universal Human	Service Safety Month	Nat’l Car Donation	Squash Month
Rights Month	Tropical Fruits Month	Read A New Book	Quince and
World AIDS	Nat’l Fruit Cake	TTTS Awareness	Watermelon Month
Awareness Month	Root Vegetable Mo.	Learn A Foreign	Art and Architecture
Nat’l Pear Month	Noodle Ring Month	Language Month	Bingo’s Birthday
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Marine Corps launches new drone training program

by Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Claudia Nix, Marine Corps Training and Education Command

The Marine Corps has launched a training program to rapidly increase the number of small unmanned aircraft system operators for commercial off-the-shelf attack drones.

The program, announced in Marine Corps administrative message 624/25, addresses a critical need for standardized training as the service integrates new systems, including the Neros Archer first-person-view attack drone and prepares for this significant investment in various drone technologies.

This initiative builds on the service's success over the past few months scaling FPV attack drones across the Fleet Marine Force. It also aligns directly with War Department plans to field tens of thousands, and then hundreds of thousands, of attack drones across service components starting in March 2026 and continuing over the next several years.

The new framework, created by Training and Education Command, establishes six pilot courses and eight certifications to create a standard for drone operators across the force. These initiatives are designed to provide foundational skills

for a variety of small unmanned aircraft systems.

"We are fielding these courses as pilot programs to move quickly while maintaining our commitment to quality training and safety," said Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Benjamin T. Watson, commanding general, Training and Education Command.

"This allows us to validate all aspects of the training, from prerequisites and instructional methods to resourcing needs and certification standards, ensuring that we refine and perfect the curriculum before it becomes part of our long-term training framework."

Six approved pilot courses will certify Marines while testing instructional methods and curriculum. These courses include training for drone operators, payload specialists and instructors, with specific prerequisites such as simulator experience on Training and Education Command-approved systems. The

courses aim to ensure proper integration and supervision of new drone capabilities. The Training and Education Command has also established a process to grant certifications to Marines who have existing qualifications and experience through an exception to policy.

Seven organizations are designated as regional training hubs with the authority to immediately begin conducting the pilot courses, including schools within Training and Education Command, 1st Marine Division, 2nd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

Weapons Training Battalion at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., will serve as the interim central hub, responsible for standardizing training, certification and safety across the force. It will consolidate lessons learned and function as the Marine Corps' focal point for adapting training to emerging platforms,



Marine Corps rifleman assigned to Light Armored Reconnaissance Company, Battalion Landing Team 3/6, 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), load a simulated warhead onto a Neros Archer first-person-view drone during attack drone training at Camp Santiago, Puerto Rico, Nov. 19, 2025. The 22nd MEU(SOC) Marines are being trained and certified by the 2nd Marine Division and the Marine Corps Attack Drone Team on first-person-view drone systems to enhance combat readiness. U.S. Marine Corps photo

payloads and evolving operational requirements.

This effort to scale standardized FPV attack drone training was shaped by lessons from recent certifications, including two Marine Corps attack drone competitions, one in the National Capitol Region and the other in Okinawa, Japan. These efforts certified 19 attack drone opera-

tors, five attack drone instructors, seven payload specialists, and two payload specialist instructors.

In mid-November, the Marine Corps Attack Drone Team also supported the certification of 22nd MEU Marines, resulting in 14 attack drone operators and 11 payload specialists fully trained, equipped and ready for

contingency operations.

Over the next few months, the Marine Corps Attack Drone Team, alongside Weapons Training Battalion and regional hubs, will certify hundreds more Marines. By May 2026, all infantry, reconnaissance battalions and littoral combat teams across the Corps will be equipped to employ FPV attack drone capabilities.

Medical Genetics Center: Empowering patients one test at a time

by Air Force Senior Airman Devyn Waits

Serving 9.5 million beneficiaries, the Medical Genetics Center at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., the only genetics laboratory in the War Department, supports military medical facilities around the globe with centralized testing and consultative service.

The lab empowers patients by giving them insight into their health, enabling them to take proactive measures that support not only their own wellness but also that of their families.

"When we perform tests, we can give families a peace of

mind," said Air Force Lt. Col. Joel Hughes, 359th Diagnostics and Therapeutics Squadron clinical and laboratory geneticist.

"For example, with a noninvasive pregnancy test, we screen the developing baby's health for any potential conditions, allowing us to answer questions an expecting family may have and give them, as well as their medical team, valuable time to prepare for the birth and any medical necessities."

Hughes added that the lab can perform a wide variety of tests, including whole genome sequencing, cancer screening, carrier screening, karyotyping

and noninvasive pregnancy testing, to help service members and their families make informed decisions during critical moments of their lives.

Genetic testing services can also play a key role in supporting a service member's career, as they help determine conditions that could negatively impact performance, readiness or safety.

"One of the more common orders we get are for patients with cardiac issues," said Air Force Maj. Nicholas Singhmiller, 359th DTS clinical and laboratory geneticist.

"If an airman in a physi-



Michelle Kotos and Gracie Browning, both medical laboratory scientists assigned to the 359th Diagnostics and Therapeutics Squadron, work together to pipette blood at the Medical Genetics Center at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., Oct. 29, 2025. Kotos and Browning processed blood samples to test for spinal muscular atrophy. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Devyn Waits

cally demanding career sees a cardiologist, and that provider notices a potential heart issue, they refer them to us. Our role is to determine whether there's a genetic component to the problem, because that airman now cannot do any heavy lifting or strenuous activities due to possibly having a dangerous heart condition."

Singhmiller added that running tests helps rule out significant genetic causes, providing a twofold benefit. While medical issues may still be present, airmen can walk away with knowledge to help them choose the next steps in their careers.

"Even if a diagnosis did result

in a medical evaluation board, it gives the airman peace of mind because they've caught this condition before it causes harm," he said.

The lab's ability to efficiently support its patients and provide answers to their health is also tied to its team of geneticists.

"One of the great things about our geneticists is that they come to the lab with experience in a previous field," said Air Force Lt. Col. Felecia Washington, 359th DTS deputy commander.

"Dr. Hughes's background in internal medicine and Dr. Singhmiller's in pediatrics enhances their abilities as geneticists, because they can use that

to uniquely analyze a family's medical history, connect it to the patient's health and effectively explain what's happening to them."

While some tests are occasionally outsourced to other clinics, most tests can be ordered and completed in the lab, reducing coordination time and getting results to patients faster.

The genetics lab's commitment to maximizing efficiency and enhancing medical understanding helps service members around the globe make informed decisions for their health and their families, fostering a healthier, more resilient community across DOW.

Navy Sailors charged in fake marriages scheme

As reported in several national media outlets Jan. 5, two Navy Sailors are facing federal charges for what authorities say were sham marriages with Chinese immigrants seeking U.S. residency.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Jacinth Bailey and Petty Officer 2nd Class Morgan Chambers are charged with one count each of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, based on federal court records in Jacksonville.

Bailey and Chambers were to receive \$45,000 and \$35,000, respectively, as part of the scheme to recruit American citizens, preferably U.S. service members, prosecutors said in separate filings last month in federal court.

Bailey is an aviation boatswain's mate assigned to aircraft carrier USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower*. She enlisted in the Navy in September 2021, according to her official bio. Chambers enlisted in the service in June 2019 and is a personnel specialist assigned to the Navy Talent Acquisition Group in Jacksonville, her official bio says.

If convicted, Bailey and Chambers face up to five years in prison. Neither of them has appeared in court or entered a plea, but each waived their right to be formally indicted. Their attorneys declined comment on Monday, citing the pending case.

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Top 5

- A year of strikes: U.S. military operations surge under Trump
- Death of airman caused by multiple points of failure, report finds
- Pacifist Japan moving from exclusive self-defense to military buildup
- Xi Jinping vows to reunify China and Taiwan in New Year's Eve speech
- Taiwan's president pledges to defend island's sovereignty after Chinese military drills

Air Force

- AFSOC looks to add Starlink terminals to Ghost Rider gunships

Coast Guard

- Cat gets laughs for aloof reaction to Coast Guard boat rescue

Veterans

- WWII aviator celebrates 101st birthday in plane he flew more than 80 years ago

Cyber, Space & Unmanned

- ROTC students are helping the military defend against AI deepfakes
- China to debut reusable Long March 10-derived rocket in first half of 2026

Defense Industry

- Europe's 2025 defense winners include Saab, Rheinmetall; FCAS falters

Your Military

- When the military tried to give Soldiers personal flying platforms

Early Bird Brief



<https://www.defensenews.com/ebb>

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.

TRUMP ANNOUNCES U.S. MILITARY'S CAPTURE OF MADURO

by Matthew Olay
Pentagon News

President Donald J. Trump announced Jan. 3 the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, following a successful overnight joint U.S. military extraction in Venezuela's capital of Caracas.

"Last night {Jan. 2} and early today, at my direction, the United States armed forces conducted an extraordinary military operation in the capital of Venezuela. ... It was an operation against a heavily fortified military fortress in the heart of Caracas to bring outlaw dictator Nicolás Maduro to justice," Trump said during a midday news conference from his Mar-a-Lago residence in Palm Beach, Fla.

The president added that both Maduro and his also-captured wife, Cilia Flores de Maduro, will now face criminal court proceedings tied to a 2020 indictment from the U.S. Department of Justice on multiple federal charges, including narco-terrorism and drug trafficking.

Earlier in the day, Trump posted a photo to social media showing a blindfolded and handcuffed Nicolás Maduro in custody aboard amphibious assault ship USS *Iwo Jima*.

Labeled Operation Absolute Resolve, the joint military and law enforcement mission to capture the Maduros was the result of months of planning and rehearsal involving U.S. joint forces - including special operations forces - from multiple service branches. The military also networked extensively with multiple U.S. intelligence agencies, according to Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Our interagency work began months ago and built on decades of experience [with] integrating complex air, ground, space and maritime operations. ... We watched, we waited, we prepared, we remained patient and professional. ... This was an audacious operation that only the United States could do," Caine said during the press conference.

He added that the mission to extract the Maduros - in which there were no U.S. casualties - — was so precise that it involved more than 150 military aircraft from all across the Western Hemisphere launching in close coordination to provide cover for the ground-based extraction force in Caracas.

"Words can barely capture the bravery and the power and the

precision of this historic operation, a massive joint military and law enforcement raid flawlessly executed by the greatest Americans our country has to offer," Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, who was also in attendance at Mar-a-Lago, told the media.

"What I witnessed last night was sheer guts and grit, gallantry and glory of the American warrior. ... This is about the safety, security, freedom and prosperity of the American people. This is America first; this is peace through strength; and the United States War Department is proud to help deliver it," Hegseth said of the mission.

With Maduro now out of power, Trump said the U.S. will

oversee Venezuela until a safe transition to a legitimate replacement for the deposed strongman can be identified.

"We have a group of people running [Venezuela] until such a time it can be put back on track, make a lot of money for [Venezuelans] ... give people a great way of life, and also [reimburse the] people in our country who were forced out of Venezuela," Trump said.

The president added that, while it was his understanding that Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez was "just sworn in" [to the presidency] following Maduro's ouster, Rodríguez seemed willing to work

see **Maduro, page 4**

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NATIONAL MILITARY IN PHOTOS



LEADING THE WAY Army Capt. Megan Korpiel, commander of the Horse Cavalry Detachment, 1st Cavalry Division, leads Soldiers while waving to a crowd during the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, Calif., Jan. 1, 2026. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Steven Day



HONORING HEROES The Iowa Air National Guard Honor Guard conducts an honorable transfer of the remains of fallen Iowa National Guard soldiers, Staff Sgts. Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar and William Nathaniel Howard, at Des Moines International Airport, Iowa, Dec. 24, 2025. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Armani Wilson

ARMY STRONG

A Soldier assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment prepares to squat in the Human Performance Training



Center at Fort Benning, Ga., Dec. 30, 2025. Physical training maximizes readiness by optimizing human performance and reducing injury. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Paul Won

Human-machine teaming in battle management: A collaborative effort across borders

by Deb Henley

(Editor's note) Read this story in its entirety at <https://www.af.mil/News/>.

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. -The 2025 series of the Decision Advantage Sprint for Human-Machine Teaming marked a significant step forward in the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning into battle management operations.

Through a series of groundbreaking experiments, including the recent DASH 3 iteration, the Air Force, alongside its coalition partners, Canada and the United Kingdom, tested and refined AI's potential to enhance decision-making, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen interoperability in the face of growing global security challenges.

We understand that the next conflict can't be won alone without the help of machine teammates and supported by our allies. DASH 3 demonstrated the value of these partnerships as we worked together in a coalition-led, simulated combat scenario. The tools we tested are vital for maintaining a decision advantage, and we look forward to expanding this collaboration in future DASH events," said Royal Canadian Air Force Capt. Dennis Williams, RCAF DASH 3 participant.

Held at the unclassified location of the Shadow Operations Center-Nellis in downtown Las Vegas, DASH 3 set the stage for this collaboration, led by the Advanced Battle Management System Cross-Functional Team.

In the third iteration of the DASH series seven teams, six from industry teams and one from the ShOC-N innovation team partnered with U.S., Canadian, and U.K. operators to test a range of decision advantage tools aimed at enhancing the rapid and effective generation of battle course of actions with multiple paths. The goal of a Battle COA is to map sequences of actions that align with the commander's intent while overcoming the complexities of modern warfare, including the fog and friction of battle. Examples of Battle COAs include recommended solutions for long-range kill chains, electromagnetic battle management problems, space and cyber challenges, or agile combat employment such as re-basing aircraft.

U.S. Air Force Col. John Ohlund, ABMS Cross Functional Team lead overseeing capability development, explained the importance of flexibility in COA generation: "For example, a bomber may be able to attack from multiple avenues of approach, each presenting unique risks and requires different supporting assets such as cyber, ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance], refueling, and air defense suppression. Machines can generate multiple paths, supporting assets, compounding uncertainties, timing, and more. Machines provide a rich solution space where many COAs are explored, but only some are executed, ensuring options remain open as the situation develops."



Secretary of War Pete Hegseth speaks at a press conference in Palm Beach, Fla., Jan. 3, 2026, with President Donald J. Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to discuss Operation Absolute Resolve in Caracas, Venezuela. DOW screenshot

Maduro

continued from page 3

with the U.S. to achieve what's best for Venezuelans.

"[Secretary of State] Marco [Rubio] is working on that directly. He just had a conversation with [Rodriguez], and she's essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again," Trump said.

The capture of the Maduros represents a culmination of tensions between the U.S. and Venezuela dating as far back as 1998, with the election of President Hugo Chavez, a Venezuelan socialist who espoused anti-U.S. rhetoric and formed close ties with Cuba, Iran and Russia.

Following the death of Chavez in 2013, Nicolás Maduro took over and became increasingly politically hostile toward the U.S. as the years progressed.

Tensions between the two countries increased significantly beginning in September of 2025, when the Trump administration began conducting targeted boat strikes on vessels deemed to be conducting narco-terrorism by attempting to smuggle illegal drugs into the U.S.

In November 2025, the State Department declared Venezuela's state-embedded criminal network Cartel de los Soles — which is alleged to have been headed by Maduro — as a terror organization.

Just prior to that designation, Hegseth said such an action would provide the War Department with "more tools" to provide options to Trump in regard to how to address the narco-terror threat in the region.

"We have a lot of options; we'll make sure we have the authorities to do so, and we will protect the American people," Hegseth said at the time.

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NPS launches new Master's in Artificial Intelligence focused on warfighter needs

by **Matthew Schehl**

Naval Postgraduate School

Office of University Communications

The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) has launched a brand new Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence (MSAI) degree that will confer the advanced knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to develop, assess, and deploy AI for the U.S. Navy, joint forces and allied militaries. Graduates through the new program will be prepared to lead AI integration within their communities and across the U.S. Department of War.

The one-year MSAI residential program is designed to rapidly develop military leaders with advanced expertise in one of the most strategically vital technologies of the 21st century. The U.S. Secretary of War's recent announcement of the GenAI.mil initiative directed that, "AI should be in your battle rhythm every single day." The first cohort of NPS students will start the new MSAI degree program in July 2026, with an initial emphasis on operationalizing AI.

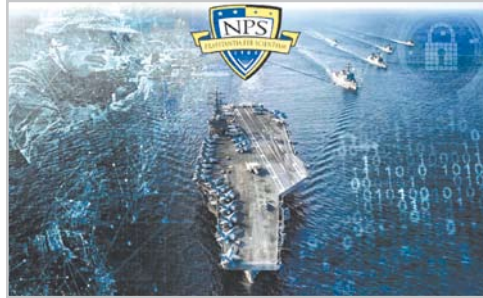
Through a combination of lectures, laboratory assignments, hands-on research projects, and team hackathons, NPS students will gain a deep understanding of AI and its warfighting appli-

cations in Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Space (C5ISR&S). "This program is going to be quite intense, but advantageous, and will instill in our students knowledge of advanced AI techniques and skills that are needed to solve some of the most complex problems that our military faces," noted Dr. Gurminder Singh, chair of the NPS Department of Computer Science.

The NPS curriculum comes at a time when AI has become central to global security competition and is transforming all aspects of modern society and military operations. According to Singh, the program serves both the U.S. Navy's urgent operational needs while capitalizing on the school's unique ability to deliver cutting-edge relevant education tied directly to military problem-solving.

"We are in the age of AI. Its impact on maritime operations, from seabed to space, and across

the seven joint warfighting functions, is and will be profound," said U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Michael Vernazza, Commander, Naval Information Forces. "We must act with urgency to inte-



U.S. Navy graphic by Andre Adams

grate this transformational technology and educate leaders who can employ it decisively and at scale across the fleet. The Naval Postgraduate School has been a cornerstone of our efforts to empower and operationalize AI, and this new AI master's degree underscores that commitment."

"We are in a race," added Singh. "And China is giving us tough competition in the use and development of AI. Our military needs to prepare quickly to deal with that challenge. This AI master's degree is designed to produce relevant expertise for applied AI in just one year."

The new MSAI program at

NPS aligns with the six Critical Technology Areas recently announced by Dr. Emil Michael, Under Secretary of War for Research and Engineering, as essential to address the country's most pressing national security challenges. In an official video posted on OUSW(R&E)'s LinkedIn, Michael said that applied AI will transform the Department of War into an "AI-First" organization, revolutionizing decision-making and operational efficiency. The effort is in response to direction from the White House.

"[Applied AI] has the potential to reshape the global

balance of power, spark entirely new industries, and revolutionize the way we live and work," states the July 2025 White House AI Action Plan. "As our global competitors race to exploit these technologies, it is a national security imperative for the United States to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global technological dominance."

Many say the AI-enabled battlespace is now upon us, with the future of warfighting advantage AI-driven. Human-machine teaming must continuously shrink the Orient-Observe-De-

cide-Act (OODA) cycle to gain and maintain decision advantage. AI is critical to technologies like intelligent autonomous systems, combat systems, and cybersecurity, but also to the business of leading and managing national defense for increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

The MSAI program at NPS will look deeply into core AI technologies that are transforming every aspect of warfare and operations.

For more information on MSAI program, visit <https://nps.edu/web/cs/curriculum-388>.

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Navy Reservists support Operation Deep Freeze 2026

by Sarah Cannon

Military Sealift Command Pacific

NAVAL BASE VENTURA COUNTY - Navy reservists from a Military Sealift Command Pacific expeditionary port unit are currently supporting cargo operations in Port Hueneme, Calif., in preparation for Operation Deep Freeze 2026, a resupply mission.

The team is overseeing the loadout of supplies and equipment onto the Military Sealift Command chartered heavy lift ship *Plantijngracht*, which will deliver the cargo to the remote Antarctica outpost of McMurdo Station.

Serving as liaisons between the ship's crew and Military Sealift Command, the reservists are overseeing the loadout of 302 pieces of cargo consisting of containers filled with construction materials, construction equipment, parts for the ongoing barge project at McMurdo Station, as well as dry goods and supplies needed for survival on Antarctica.

"This mission gives us a broader experience of what goes on [for] the logistics side of the Navy; most specifically with MSC and the way they do business," explained Navy Cmdr. Allan Phillips, expeditionary port unit commanding officer. "For us as reservists, it takes us away from the warship aspect of the Navy and focuses us on working with civilians and MSC."

In addition to cargo containers, materials for a 65-ton floating causeway system will also be loaded. The causeway will replace the ice pier at McMurdo Station.

Previously, an ice pier made up of rebar and frozen seawater was used for cargo offloads. Because of the size and weight of the cargo this year, the ice pier is unusable.

Once in Antarctica, the causeway will be assembled into sections on the ship's deck and placed into the water. The sections will be attached to one another to form the final pier.

The four-person unit began operations Dec. 21, 2025, with a brief holiday break. As the "eyes on the pier," the team is providing on-site observations for the onload of cargo, including staying engaged with the ship's crew, the pier crews and serving as a reporting team to the Military Sealift Command operation team in San Diego.

While most people would think working away from home during the holidays would be a hardship, members of the team welcomed the opportunity to be part of the unique operation made up of different military branches and government organizations working together,

something outside their normal routine.

"For the enlisted members of the team, we get to see how this type of mission plays into



Navy reservists load cargo onto the chartered heavy lift ship *Plantijngracht* at Port Hueneme Dec. 30, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Sarah Cannon

the big picture of an operation," said Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Marilyn Lazar, a hospital corpsman assigned to the expeditionary port unit.

Plantijngracht is scheduled to depart Port Hueneme Jan. 8. Following a stop in Christchurch, New Zealand, where the ship will load additional cargo, it will travel to McMurdo Station, traveling approximately 8,040 nautical miles over nearly a month.

Once in Antarctica, members of Navy Cargo Handling Battalion 1 will conduct the offload. Before departing McMurdo Station, the ship will be loaded with retrograde cargo for transportation off the continent. This includes trash and recyclable materials for disposal and equipment no longer required at the station.

Navy rescues three Filipino fishermen in South China Sea

The crew aboard Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo ship USNS *Cesar Chavez* rescued three fishermen in distress aboard a fishing vessel while transiting the South China Sea Jan. 1.

Upon spotting the distressed vessel, watch standers immediately notified the bridge, and the ship launched a rigid-hull inflatable boat to recover the fishermen. The three individu-

als, later identified as citizens of the Republic of the Philippines, were brought aboard *Cesar Chavez* and evaluated by the ship's medical staff. All three were found to be in good health. Philippine authorities were immediately notified.

The fishermen reported that their vessel's engine flooded on Dec. 28 due to heavy seas, leaving them adrift. They had departed port on Dec. 27 and

survived on rationed food and water before being located by *Cesar Chavez*.

The U.S. coordinated with Philippine government officials to return the fishermen safely to the Republic of the Philippines. Professional and vigilant watch standing procedures enabled the crew to locate and recover the distressed fishermen quickly and safely.

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Special Events Outreach



First babies of 2026



A warm congratulations to Lt. Katharine Faullin, clinical psychologist with the Naval Medical Center San Diego Department of Mental Health, and husband Joe Faullin, on the birth of their beautiful baby girl - the very first baby born at NMCS in 2026!

Della Autlee Faullin has made history as the center's first New Year's arrival. The staff is honored to have played a part in this special moment and thanks the Faullin family for placing their trust in our dedicated team of medical professionals.

Wishing the Faullin family health, happiness, and endless joy as they begin this exciting new chapter. *from NMCS Facebook*



Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton welcomes the first baby of 2026! Congratulations to Marine Corps 1st Lt. Alex and Morgan Wisthoff on the birth of their baby girl, Lucy!

Lucy arrived at 1:22 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2026, weighing 7 lb. 13 oz. and 20.5 inches long.

Wisthoff is assigned as the executive officer for Company A, Wounded Warrior Battalion (West), aboard Camp Pendleton. Joining the Wisthoffs in the photo are Lt. j.g. Marceline Lazar, a nurse with the NHCP Mother-Infant Unit, and Lt. j.g. Noelle Saria, a nurse with the NHCP labor and delivery unit. *from NHCP Facebook*

LOCAL PHOTO GALLERY



Just Add Water A Navy explosive ordnance disposal technician sets up a water tool in a vehicle during a drill at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Dec. 31, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class August Clawson



Quality Control Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class David Aroyo conducts fuel tests aboard USS *Abraham Lincoln* aircraft carrier in the South China Sea, Dec. 24, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Shepard Fosdyke-Jackson



It's a Sign A Marine assigned to Joint Task Force Southern Border puts a post for a National Defense Area sign into the ground in El Centro, Dec. 26, 2025. This marks the fifth such area established along the southern border. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Janean Carr

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JANUARY 8, 2026 www.armedforcesdispatch.com 7

New end-to-end training resources strengthen information warfare readiness

by Lt.Cmdr. Janice Leister
Program Executive Office
Command, Control, Communi-
cations, Computers, and Intel-
ligence (PEO C4I) has launched
a new Information Warfare (IW)
Systems end-to-end (E2E) op-
eration, administration, trouble-
shooting, and maintenance train-
ing, job aid, and qualification
card development and delivery
initiative.

This initiative was developed
in response to fleet feedback,
which has consistently high-
lighted the need for additional
job aids and a centralized, ac-
cessible location for Sailors
to obtain IW system material.
The new E2E training delivers
targeted resources designed to
enhance system proficiency and
support battle-ready IW Sailors
across the fleet.

The E2E training products
build upon the foundational
instructions Sailors receive at

traditional schoolhouses. Rather
than replacing formal training,
these resources are intended
to reinforce learning through
practical, deckplate-level tools
that enable increased repetition,
hands-on practice and system
familiarization.

“The greatest asset to In-
formation Warfare has always
been our Sailors,” said Jennifer
Blankenship, Lead for PEO C4I
Warfighting Readiness End to
End Training and Procedures.
“By providing clear guidance
for fault isolation, troubleshoot-
ing, and repair, these capabilities
and job aids will empower our
Sailors to become more self-suf-
ficient, capable, and empowered
to operate and maintain their IW
systems.”

Development and delivery
efforts focus on several key
products categories:

- Personal Qualification Stan-

dards (PQS) Job Aids and Quali-
fication Cards: These tools aug-
ment onboard IW system-related
PQS study by providing targeted

THE GREATEST ASSET TO
INFORMATION WARFARE
HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR
SAILORS. BY PROVID-
ING CLEAR GUIDANCE
FOR FAULT ISOLATION,
TROUBLESHOOTING, AND
REPAIR, THESE CAPABI-
LITIES AND JOB AIDS WILL
EMPOWER OUR SAILAORS
TO BECOME MORE SELF-
SUFFICIENT, CAPABLE,
AND EMPOWERED TO
OPERATE AND MAINTAIN
THEIR IW SYSTEMS.

support for 100- and 200- series
PQS line items. Qualification
cards for 300- series PQS are
also being developed to assist
qualifiers with standardized
sign-off criteria.

- Job Aid Catalogs and Guides:

These references provide quick
access to technical documenta-
tion, casualty report submission
guidance, PEO C4I processes
and procedures and other fre-
quently needed information.

- Training Differences Guides:
Designed to complement PEO
C4I-developed Naval Enlisted
Classification (NEC)-producing
courses, these guides document
changes since the last course
revision and serve as refreshers
for Sailors transitioning between
shore and ship assignments.
- Training Videos (Tech Tube
Videos): Based on fleet feedback,
these short, targeted videos offer
modern, on-demand training for
specific tasks or capabilities.
They support system navigation,
capability familiarization and
execution of common system
tasks.
- Standard Operating Proce-
dures: While system proce-

dures exist within Interactive
Electronic Technical Manuals
(ETM) and other documentation,
fleet feedback identified gaps in
end-to-end system and capabil-
ity procedures. New SOPs are
being developed and delivered
through the Information Warfare
Operating Sequencing System.
These products include proce-
dural aids, drawings and system
topologies through the Interac-
tive C4I Architecture Guide.


All materials are available on
SAILOR, the Navy’s authorita-
tive digital repository for techni-
cal manuals, training products
and job aids. As products will be
continuously updated through-
out the fiscal year, Sailors are en-
couraged to enable notifications
within SAILOR to stay informed
when new materials are posted.
Instructions for setting up notifi-
cations are available in the PEO

C4I Job Aid Catalogue.

Fleet feedback remains essen-
tial to the success of the initia-
tive. Sailors may submit input
directly through the SAILOR
interface or via Technical Man-
ual Deficiency Report process.
Instructions for both methods
are outlined in the PEO C4I Job
Aid Catalogue.

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telligence provides integrated
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mation can be found at: [https://
www.peoc4i.navy.mil/](https://www.peoc4i.navy.mil/).

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land.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2
Ikia Walker

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8 www.armedforcesdispatch.com JANUARY 8, 2026

Ask Rusty – Why didn’t my friend’s wife get all her S.S. immediately?

Dear Rusty: A friend told me about what he believes is a strange thing in the Social Security system. His wife reached her full retirement age (FRA) of 66 several years ago. She delayed filing for Social Security past her FRA and claimed on her 68th birthday in June of that year, exactly 2 years after her FRA. When she filed, she was told she would receive approximately \$300/month, which, of course, was more than she would have received at her FRA. She was told, however, that she would only receive \$300/month as of January 1 of the following year. Between June of the year she turned 68 and filed for SS until the end of that year, she would receive an amount less than \$300. This lower amount was the amount she would have received if she had filed in December, the year she turned 67. She said she was told that was how SS works. She would never receive the difference in benefits she lost from June through December of the year she filed. If the above is true, can you explain? Signed: Astounded Friend

Dear Astounded: What your friend described is, indeed, a unique methodology for how Social Security handles benefit payments for those who choose to wait beyond their full retirement age to claim SS benefits. To understand it, let me first describe how Social Security retirement benefits are calculated.

At full retirement age, a person is entitled to 100 percent of the SS benefit they have earned

from a lifetime of working. That FRA benefit amount is known as the person’s “Primary Insurance Amount” and is based upon the highest earning 35 years over the individual’s lifetime. From those past years, average lifetime monthly earnings are computed, known as the person’s “Average Indexed Monthly Earnings”.

Their AIME is subjected to

SOCIAL SECURITY REPORT

a formula which yields their Primary Insurance Amount – the benefit the person is entitled to in the month they attain their full retirement age – typically about 40 percent of the person’s average monthly lifetime earnings. However, if the person chooses to do so, they can wait beyond their FRA to claim Social Security to get a monthly benefit even higher than their PIA, by earning Delayed Retirement Credits.

DRCs are applied to the person’s PIA when they claim Social Security. For each month after FRA the person claims, they will have .667 percent added to their PIA. That means that for each full year of delay, that person will get an extra 8 percent added to their PIA. For someone (like your friend’s wife) who claimed 24 months after her FRA, she would receive a benefit 16 percent higher than her FRA amount. However, Social Security normally only applies DRCs in January of each year.

So, even though your friend’s wife claimed her SS benefits in

June, 24 months after her FRA, she would initially only get the DRCs she had accumulated through the end of the previous year – in this case, about 18 months’ worth of DRCs, or an SS payment about 12 percent higher than her PIA (her FRA amount). She would not get her remaining earned DRCs (another 4 percent) until January of the following year. So, in effect, the wife’s initial benefit didn’t reflect all her earned DRCs until her later January benefit payment. Thus, the wife essentially lost that extra benefit money for the period between June and December of the year she claimed Social Security.

In other words, she wouldn’t get the full 16 percent amount until SS applied the additional 4 percent DRCs to her benefit payment the following January. And that is why your friend’s wife initially received a payment a bit less than the \$300 Social Security said she was entitled to by waiting 2 years after her FRA to claim.

This surprises many who choose to wait beyond their full retirement age to claim Social Security. But, curiously, this process doesn’t apply to those who wait until age 70 to claim their SS benefits. For those who wait until age 70 to claim, Social Security will immediately apply all DRCs that they have accumulated and provide them with their maximum SS benefit immediately.

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

I’m overdue for a mammogram, I haven’t had my cholesterol checked, and I’ve been ignoring aches and pains for months. It’s time to finally make my health a priority.

I add this resolution to my list, which includes quitting Spider Solitaire cold turkey and going to bed earlier. Making my health a priority won’t happen easily. Online portals must be accessed. Records must be checked. Appointments will be scheduled. Authorizations will be requested. Medical professionals must be consulted.

I call my podiatrist, Dr. McCormick, who hasn’t administered a cortisone shot for my arthritic left foot since March. I’ve become accustomed to limping around like Quasimodo. Rather than deal with pains individually like I used to, I’ve accepted my status as a menopausal woman who experiences multiple pains on the daily. Back when my hormones functioned properly, natural collagen cushioned my joints. If I felt pain, I’d say to myself, “Ouch! That shouldn’t hurt! I’d better investigate.”

Nowadays, when each pain-du-jour presents itself, which often happens with an audible “snap-crackle-pop!” while getting out of bed, I simply groan and add it to the long list of menopausal inconveniences with which I am now plagued.

However, making my health a

The health risks of getting healthy in 2026

priority will require acknowledging and mitigating my various pains. First step is getting that cortisone shot.

“Your authorization expired over the summer,” Dr. McCormick’s receptionist says. My blood pressure jumps, anticipating the colossal hassle ahead. Who is my Primary Care Manager anyway? I call the Naval Health Clinic to request a new referral.

“What’s your DoD ID number?” the clinic scheduler asks. Since they started asking for DoD ID numbers a few years ago, I’m never prepared. For 25 years while I was an active duty Navy spouse, I’d rattled off my husband’s social security number, scribbling it on checks at the commissary in the early days. His SSN is burned into my brain more deeply than my own. But my DoD number is a confusing series of tiny numbers stamped among others on my military ID.

“Oh, geez, let me grab that,” I fumble, feeling my blood pressure elevate again. I read off the numbers, pausing at the blurry “65” in the middle to be sure it isn’t 56. Thankfully, the authorization is requested without the need for an appointment with my unknown PCM, and my stress dissipates.

“Just check Tricare online to make sure the Authorization comes through,” the clinic scheduler adds, and my blood surges with traumatic memories of accessing the DoD’s Self-Service Logon System (DS Logon) to get access to Tricare. A few days later, I hesitantly type my password into the system.

“Your current password has expired and should be updated,”

appears on my screen, explaining that passwords expire every 60 days. The vein in the middle of my forehead bulges. I tap a new combination of words, numbers and characters into the little box, but each one is rejected. I focus on the long list of password requirements listed on the page:

- Passwords must be at least 15 characters but no more than 128;
- At least one lowercase letter;
- At least 1 uppercase letter;
- At least 1 number;
- At least 1 special character, no spaces allowed: @ #/;~'%&=‘\$*+().{}|?><^[]-“\;
- You cannot use your birthdate, SSN, name, phone number, or ZIP code;
- When changing a password, your new password must have at least 8 characters be different;
- When changing a password, your new password must be different than the current and 5 previous passwords;
- You cannot change your password more than once every 24 hours.

On the fourth try my heart palpitates, as I think of the worst cuss words for another password, but it, too, is rejected. I type new strings of fresh swears and dirty words. By the time one of my foul epithets is finally accepted as my new password, I’m willing to undergo a gynecological exam on a crowded subway platform rather than make one more password attempt.

“Security be damned!” I seethe, my veins about to burst.

“You are confirmed for your appointment on Tuesday,” the podiatrist’s receptionist says.

“Great, but will Dr. McCormick also check my blood pressure?”

Veterans News

Medal of Honor Spotlight: Army Air Corps Brig. Gen. Kenneth Walker

by Katie Lange
Pentagon News

Army Air Corps Brig. Gen. Kenneth Newton Walker participated in dangerous bombing missions alongside his air crews during World War II because he wanted to understand how to beat the enemy. Walker never came home from his last mission. He received a posthumous Medal of Honor and is credited with helping to create the blueprint for the modern Air Force.

Walker was born July 17, 1898, in Cerrillos, N.M., to Wallace and Emma Walker. His parents separated shortly after he was born, so Walker’s mother raised him alone. At some point in his youth, the pair moved to Denver, where Walker became a Boy Scout and took an interest in several sports, including football, wrestling and boxing.

According to Air University Press author Martha Byrd, Walker’s maternal grandparents lived in Omaha, Neb, so Walker also lived there for a few years before graduating from Omaha High School of Commerce in 1915. However, by 1917, he had returned

to Denver, eventually enlisting in the Army on Dec. 15 of that year. He remained in the service for the rest of his life.

Walker became a pilot just as aerial warfare was being established. He trained at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Military Aeronautics and then at Mather Field, California, earning his commission and his wings in the Army Air Service in November 1918. He received a commission in the regular Army July 1, 1920.

Over the next few years, Walker served as a flying instructor in Texas, then in Oklahoma, where he met Marguerite Potter in 1920. The pair married in 1922 and eventually had two sons, Kenneth Jr. and Douglas.

That same year, Walker graduated from the Air Service Operations School before being sent to the Philippines to command the

Air Intelligence Section at Camp Nichols. When he returned to the U.S. in 1925, he continued his education and rose through the ranks, serving as an operations



Army Air Corps Brig. Gen. Kenneth N. Walker, shown in front of his tent-office in the field circa 1943. Photo from Library of Congress

officer, bomb squad commander and instructor at various installations.

By January 1941, then-Maj. Walker found himself serving in Washington in the high-level position of assistant chief of the Air War Plans Division. Prior to

the Pearl Harbor attacks, Walker was one of four Army Air Corps officers who created the blueprint of how to attack Japan and Germany from the air, according to a 2017 profile of Walker in the San Angelo Standard-Times. That strategy was later considered a key component of the Allied victory.

In July 1942, as the war raged, Walker was promoted to brigadier general and sent to the Pacific Theater. Shortly after his arrival, he was appointed as the commanding general of the Air Force’s 5th Bomber Command.

From September 1942 to January 1943, Walker repeatedly went on bombing missions deep into enemy-held territory with his air crews. According to the San Angelo Standard-Times, he also went on bombing missions alone — something few generals did. His desire to take part in the danger earned him great respect from his subordinates. The lessons he learned from those missions helped him develop a highly efficient technique for bombing in the face of enemy aircraft and antiaircraft fire, according to his Medal of Honor citation.

On Jan. 5, 1943, Walker joined several air crews on one of those dangerous missions. Six B-17 Flying Fortresses and six B-24 Liberators were sent on a day-time bombing mission over the Japanese-held harbor at Rabaul on the island of New Britain in Papua New Guinea. The attack was a success in that direct hits were scored on nine enemy ships. However, the bombers didn’t get away before enemy fighters and antiaircraft fire came after them.

Walker was flying as an observer on a B-17 nicknamed the San Antonio Rose, which came under heavy attack. The aircraft was last seen with one engine on fire and several fighter aircraft on its tail. Evidence collected later showed that two of the aircraft’s crew members were able to bail out; however, all 11 crew members were eventually declared dead.

On March 25, 1943, Walker’s oldest son, Kenneth Jr., received the Medal of Honor on his father’s behalf from President Franklin D. Roosevelt during a White House ceremony. Walker

was the highest-ranking Army official to be reported missing during the war.

Well before his death, Walker and a few other Air Corps Tactical School instructors were invited by a federal commission to testify in support of creating a separate military air organization that wasn’t subordinate to any other branches. Thanks to his work with this commission and the air war plan used during World War II, Walker is considered one of the forefathers of the modern Air Force.

Walker has been remembered in many ways, including on the Wall of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.

Every year, a small number of papers written by field-grade officers in the Air Force Fellows program are selected to be published online. Those papers are known as the Walker Papers. The chosen officers attend civilian universities and organizations for a year to study national security strategy and serve as military ambassadors to prestigious institutions.

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SD Home Improvement Expo: Two days only at the Del Mar Fairgrounds Jan. 31-Feb. 1

San Diego Home Improvement Expo comes to the Del Mar Fairgrounds for a two day extravaganza of hands-on demonstra-
tions, hundreds of home- improvement products and services
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ment at the premier Home Improvement Expo in sunny San
Diego. Immerse yourself in a world of possibilities as leading
experts showcase cutting-edge products and solutions to elevate
your living spaces. From state-of-the-art kitchen appliances to
eco-friendly landscaping ideas, this Home Improvement Expo is
a one-stop destination for homeowners looking to enhance their
abodes. Admission is free.

Show hours are Saturday, January 31, 10am-5pm; and Sunday,
Feb 1, 10am-4pm for more information visit: [https://sandiego-
homeimprovementexpo.com/](https://sandiego-homeimprovementexpo.com/).

Attendees are in for a weekend of inspiration, expert advice, and
Exclusive Show Deals that will transform their homes into the
home of their dreams.

MOVIES AT THE BASES

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

<https://sandiego.navylifew.com/> select movies at drop-
down menu on left

[https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/
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G – General audiences ALL
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be suitable for children.

PG-13 – Parents strongly
cautioned some material may
be inappropriate for children
under 13.

R – Restricted under 17
requires accompanying parent
or adult guardian.

NC-17 – No one 17 or under
admitted.

SD Humane Society offers a Community Veterinary Program

For pet families with limited financial resources, the San Diego Humane Society's Community Veterinary Program provides affordable, compassionate and exceptional veterinary care to help keep pets out of shelters and with the people who love them. Clinic services are available at our San Diego Campus by appointment only, Tuesday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. We also offer mobile clinic services twice a month, bringing veterinary services directly into the communities that need them most.

Please note: The Community Veterinary Program does not provide emergency or urgent care services. Eligibility requirements for our services include: Household income under \$70k/year and/or proof of enrollment in SSI, SNAP card, SSDI, WIC, pay stub, other federal/state assistance or unemployment benefits.

<https://www.sdhumane.org/programs/community-veterinary-program/>

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

Escondido Campus
3500 Burnet Drive
Escondido, CA 92027

San Diego Campus
5480 Gaines Street
San Diego, CA 92110

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Should I claim Social Security early because it's going bankrupt?

Dear Rusty: My best friend is going to be 62 and wants to begin taking her Social Security immediately. Her reasoning not to wait is the thought that it is going to run out in 10 years, so she wants as much of her money before that happens. I have paid into Social Security my entire working life (44 years and counting). What are your thoughts on taking it as soon as you are eligible?

Signed: Uncertain what to do

Dear Uncertain: Deciding when to claim Social Security is a sometimes-
confusing task, but no one should ever claim SS early because they believe
Social Security will go bankrupt in the near future. Social Security cannot and
will not go bankrupt. What your friend may be referring to is the fact that Social
Security will be facing some financial issues in 2033 unless Congress acts soon
to reform the program. And they will act, but likely not until they must.

The fact is, Social Security still has about \$2.7 trillion in reserved funds
which are now being used to pay full benefits. If that Reserves balance were
to be fully depleted, then Social Security would need to go to a "cash basis"
(essentially, paying out in benefits only what is received in SS taxes), which
would result in about a 21% cut in everyone's benefit. In other words, even
if Congress neglected to reform the program, beneficiaries would still get
about 79% of their monthly benefit starting in about 2033/2034. Hardly
anyone believes that Congress will fail to eventually reform Social Security,
and, in fact, they already know how to do that reform (they just currently lack
the bipartisanship to accomplish it). But neglecting reform would amount to
political suicide for all members of Congress, which is extremely unlikely
to happen.

Here at the AMAC Foundation, we are confident that Congress will soon
address Social Security's future financial dilemma, and we have been work-
ing on potential solutions. We have, for several years, been providing these
suggestions to various members of Congress, and those members are now
considering our proposals. Thus, we do not suggest making a Social Security
claiming decision based on fear of the program going bankrupt. That fear is
unfounded. Instead, we suggest that everyone decide when to claim based
upon their individual personal situation, considering their need for the SS
money, their life expectancy, and their marital status. And remember, claiming
early (before one's SS full retirement age (FRA)) also means Social Security's
Annual Earnings Test (AET) will apply (the AET limits how much can be
earned from working before FRA is attained).

So, our thought on the wisdom of taking Social Security as soon as you are
eligible is that it is often not a wise decision, and certainly not if that decision
is made based on fear of Social Security "not being there" soon. Instead, we
suggest making your Social Security claiming decision based upon your
unique personal circumstances, including, especially, your life expectancy,
financial need, and marital status.

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Research-backed strategies for stress, weight, memory, mood, and cellular health

USU researchers reveal science-backed strategies to optimize your daily habits—from coffee timing to cellular defense—for improved health and resilience this New Year.

As the New Year begins, many of us set goals for better health, sharper focus, and greater well-being. Science shows that everyday habits—ranging from how we manage stress to when we exercise or sip our morning coffee—can have a real impact on long-term health, cognitive function, and even the way our cells age.

At the Uniformed Services University (USU), researchers are uncovering how lifestyle choices influence not only mood, memory, and metabolism, but also the molecular mechanisms that keep our bodies resilient over time. Their work offers practical, evidence-based strategies to support happier, healthier living—both in and out of uniform—this year and beyond.

1. Coffee with Purpose: Timing for Metabolism and Weight Management

You might love your morning cup of coffee—but is that first sip at 6 a.m. really the most effective time for metabolism? Research rooted in chronopharmacology—the study of how biological rhythms influence



Chief Master-at-Arms Ryan Westfield runs on a treadmill during a Navy physical readiness test (PRT) at Naval Station Great Lakes, October 3, 2024. U.S. Navy photos by MC2 Matt Hall

the effects of substances like caffeine—suggests otherwise.

Steven Miller, a USU neuroscience graduate, reported that caffeine may be most effective when consumed after the body’s natural cortisol-driven peak in alertness, which typically occurs earlier in the morning. Drinking coffee between roughly 9:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. may help maximize caffeine’s benefits, rather than simply stacking it on top of an already-elevated cortisol surge.

2. Manage Stress at the Molecular Level with Mind-Body Practices

Stress affects far more than our

mood. Over time, chronic stress can influence gene activity linked to inflammation, accelerated aging, and cognitive decline.

Research that includes work by Dr. Meera Srivastava, Department of Anatomy, Physiology, and Genetics at USU, has shown that long-term practitioners of mind-body techniques—such as Transcendental Meditation—exhibit lower expression of stress-related and age-associated genes, along with differences in cognitive function measures and reduced chronic stress hormone levels. These findings were published in the journal *Biomolecules* in the

study “Possible Anti-Aging and Anti-Stress Effects of Long-Term Transcendental Meditation Practice: Differences in Gene Expression, EEG Correlates of Cognitive Function, and Hair Steroids.”

These biological shifts suggest that regular mind-body practices may help counteract the wear and tear that accumulates with prolonged stress exposure. Incorporating mindfulness, meditation, or other relaxation techniques into daily life may not only help people feel calmer in the moment, but also support healthier aging and greater emotional balance over time.

3. Exercise for Mood and Emotional Resilience

Exercise is widely recognized as a powerful tool for improving mood and emotional health, but the relationship is more nuanced than “exercise always makes you feel better right away.” Research co-authored in 2009 by Dr. Ali Weinstein, a 2007 USU Ph.D. graduate, USU faculty members Dr. Patricia Deuster, Dr. Charles Beadling, Dr. Jennifer Francis, and Dr. Willem Kop, helps explain why.

Their study found that acute bouts of exercise can produce immediate improvements in mood, even among individuals with depression. However, for people experiencing depression, these benefits may

be short-lived. About 30 minutes after exercise, some participants experienced increased fatigue and a temporary return of depressed mood, particularly when the exercise intensity was high and externally prescribed rather than self-selected.

Importantly, the research showed that how hard exercise feels—not just how hard it is physiologically—plays a significant role in shaping emotional responses. These findings help explain why starting and sticking with an exercise routine can feel especially challenging during periods of low mood.

At the same time, extensive evidence shows that regular, ongoing physical activity is associated with improved emotional resilience, reduced depressive symptoms, and better stress regulation over the long term. USU-affiliated research reinforces an important takeaway: the most mood-supportive exercise is often moderate, self-paced, and tailored to the individual.

In other words, movement is still medicine for the mind—but like any effective intervention, dose, timing, and personalization matter.

4. Harnessing Your Cells’ Natural Defenses for a Healthier Year Ahead

As we set our New Year goals, most of us think about diet, exercise, or mental wellness—but what if we

could also support our cells’ natural defenses against aging?

Research from Dr. Michael J. Daly at USU explores exactly that. His work uncovers how molecular mechanisms protect cells from oxidative stress, a major contributor to aging and age-related decline. Specifically, his lab has shown how manganese-dependent antioxidants safeguard proteins from damage, helping cells stay resilient under stress. While this research isn’t a clinical trial with supplements or medications, it provides a scientific blueprint for anti-aging strategies. By understanding how cells naturally defend themselves, we can better appreciate the value of lifestyle choices—such as antioxidant-rich diets, stress management, and regular physical activity—that help reduce molecular wear and tear over time.

As we step into a new year filled with opportunities, taking a science-informed approach to daily habits can make a meaningful difference, not just for how you feel today, but for how your body and mind age over time. From the timing of your coffee, to mindful stress management, to regular movement and supporting your cells’ natural defenses, research from USU shows that small, intentional choices add up to big benefits.

Here’s to a healthy, happy, and fulfilling New Year.



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