

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH



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 Serving active duty and retired military personnel, veterans and civil service employees

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GIVING THE GREEN LIGHT A Marine Corps AH-1Z Viper assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163 (Reinforced), 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, takes off during flight operation's aboard amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4) in the Pacific Ocean, April 7, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Nicole Stuart

U.S. blockades ships entering or exiting Iranian ports, U.S. Central Command says

TAMPA, Fla. - U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) forces implemented a blockade of all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports on April 13, in accordance with President Trump's proclamation.

"Effective immediately, the United States Navy, the finest in the world, will begin the process of blockading any and all ships trying to enter, or leave, the Strait of Hormuz," said Trump on April 12. "No one who pays an illegal toll will have safe passage on the high seas."

The blockade is enforced impartially against vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas, including all Iranian ports on the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. CENTCOM forces will not impede freedom of navigation for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz to and from non-Iranian ports.

Additional information will be provided to commercial mariners through a formal notice prior to the start of the blockade. All mariners are advised to monitor Notice to Mariners broadcasts and contact U.S. naval forces on bridge-to-bridge channel 16 when operating in the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz approaches.

Stars and Stripes newspaper reported that with the blockade, Trump is applying severe economic pressure on Iran, which has largely restricted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz since the war began in late February. The closure of the strait, which usually carries about a fifth of the world's oil, has rattled global markets and sent fuel prices soaring.

The U.S. restrictions appear broad in scope, *Stars and Stripes* reported. A U.K. Maritime Trade Operations advisory said the blockade encompasses the entirety of Iran's coastline, including ports and energy infrastructure, and that neutral vessels currently within Iranian ports have been granted a limited grace period to depart. In a post on Truth Social, Trump warned that any vessels approaching the blockade would be "immediately ELIMINATED," adding that the U.S. would use "the same system of kill that we use against the drug dealers on boats at Sea."

FAITH, NAVY SEALS, AND A DESIRE TO HELP

by Scott Sutherland
 Staff writer

"When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

Dr. Wayne Dyer

Sometimes all it takes is one

moment to change a thought process, and sometimes a life.

It was after Kameryn Rein Schwarz saw the film 'Act of Valor' in 2012 that she became inspired by the courage and sacrifice of U.S. Navy SEALs de-

picted in the movie. The movie starred active-duty SEALs in a fictionalized story about a team on a global manhunt to stop a terrorist plot.

One would think that as a former Chicago police officer, Schwarz has seen it all, on and off the streets there. But a pivotal training visit with Naval Special Warfare in Chicago set a new direction for her life, ultimately leading her to establish the faith-based charity Operation Christian Fellowship alongside recently retired SEAL Christian Mullan.

"Our mission is clear and urgent," according to her bio on OCF's website, "to ensure that no warrior loses his faith or his marriage while serving our country."

Nearing the end of the week

with her time with the special warfare team, Schwarz felt a bold prompting to pray with the team - a completely unconventional request. Before that moment, she admits she had a "full-on argument with God."

"I thought, 'There's no way. If I pray this prayer, I'm never getting invited back tomorrow.'"

As stated in her bio, what followed was one of the boldest prayers of her life. "The Holy Spirit was so present during and after that prayer," she remembers. "I literally thought, 'I can't believe I'm saying these words in front of these men right now.'"

A single prayer can change everything.

Schwarz said her work with
 see OCF, page 7



(from left) Kameryn Rein Schwarz, Christian Mullan, and Tricia Kirchmeyer of Operation Christian Fellowship. Photo courtesy of Kameryn Rein Schwarz

April is the Month of the Military Child celebrating military connected children, youth and teens

The symbol for the Month of the Military Child is the dandelion. Dandelions can take root and flourish practically anywhere the wind blows them. Like them, military children are uprooted and replanted across the world, and can thrive wherever they land.

The Department of War celebrates military children during the month of April. There are more than 1.6 million military children who face many challenges and unique experiences as a result of their parents' service.

While military members serve around the world, we often forget the challenges faced by their children. Military families move on average every two to three years, impacting military children through changing schools and support networks.

Each year, the DOW joins national, state and local government, schools, military serving organizations, companies and private citizens in celebrating military children and the sacrifices they make.



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Former Army employee and top secret clearance holder arrested and charged with leaking classified national defense information

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

The FBI arrested Courtney Williams, 40, of Wagram, N.C., recently and a federal grand jury indicted her in connection with her alleged transmission of classified national defense information to individuals not authorized to receive it, including a journalist.

“Clearance holders accept a solemn obligation to protect the classified information entrusted to them,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. “That they do so is critical to the security of our Nation. When clearance holders violate that trust, the National Security Division will act swiftly to hold them accountable.”

“The tradecraft, tactics, and techniques used by the U.S. military unit in this case are classified and should be shared only with those with proper clearances and a need to know in order to protect American lives and safeguard classified National Defense information,” said Reid Davis, the FBI Special Agent in Charge in North Carolina. “

These are serious accusations. Anyone divulging information they vowed to protect to a reporter for publication is reckless, self-serving and damages our nation’s security.”

According to court documents, from 2010 to 2016, Williams worked for a special military unit and held a top secret / sensitive compartmented information security clearance. As a clearance holder, Williams received training as to the proper handling, safeguarding, and storage of classified information.

Williams also signed a classified non-disclosure agreement which, in relevant part, confirmed her understanding that the unauthorized disclosure of classified information could constitute a criminal offense. In her role at the SMU, Williams had daily access to a broad range of clas-

sified information.

As alleged, between 2022 and 2025, Williams repeatedly communicated with the journalist via



telephone and text messages. During this period, Williams and the journalist had over 10 hours of telephone calls and exchanged more than 180 messages. In one such message, the journalist identified themselves as a journalist and stated that they sought information about the SMU in

support of an upcoming article and book.

After these communications with Williams, the journalist published a book and article that named Williams as a source and attributed specific statements to her. Some of these statements contained classified national defense information. In addition to her disclosures to the journalist, Williams also made unauthorized disclosures of national defense information via her social media accounts.

On the day the article and book were published, Williams exchanged several messages with the journalist. In one such message, Williams stated that she was “concerned about the amount of classified information being disclosed.” In a separate message to a third party, Williams added that, “I might actually get arrested . . . for disclosing classified information.” In a subsequent message, Williams cited a statutory provision of the Espionage Act.

When asked how she knew that she may face legal consequences for her disclosures to the journalist, Williams responded, “I have known my entire career,” adding that “they tell you everyday . . . 100 times a day.” Finally, in a message to a different third party, Williams stated that she was “probably going to jail for life.”



Destroyers USS Frank E. Peterson, right, and USS Michael Murphy transit Strait of Hormuz. U.S. Navy photo

U.S. forces start mine clearance mission in Strait of Hormuz

USCENTCOM

TAMPA, Fla. – U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) forces began setting conditions for clearing mines in the Strait of Hormuz, April 11, as two Navy guided-missile destroyers conducted operations.

USS Frank E. Peterson (DDG 121) and USS Michael Murphy (DDG 112) transited the Strait of Hormuz and operated in the Arabian Gulf as part of a broader mission to ensure the strait is fully clear of sea mines previously laid by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

“Today, we began the process of establishing a new passage and we will share this safe pathway with the maritime industry soon to encourage the free flow of commerce,” said Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of CENTCOM.

The Strait of Hormuz is an international sea passage and an essential trade corridor that supports regional and global economic prosperity. Additional U.S. forces, including underwater drones, will join the clearance effort in the coming days.

The *New York Times* reported April 10 that Iran has been unable to open the Strait of Hormuz to more shipping traffic because it can’t locate all of the mines it laid in the waterway and lacks the capability to remove them, according to U.S. officials.

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Hegseth, Indonesian counterpart announce defense partnership

by Matthew Olay
Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth welcomed his Indonesian counterpart — Defense Minister Sjafrudin Prawiranegara — to the Pentagon April 13, where the two men announced the establishment of the Major Defense Cooperation Partnership between the two countries.

The partnership will serve as a framework to advance bilateral defense cooperation between the U.S. and Indonesia in order to maintain peace and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

“Your visit demonstrates the importance that the War Department places on our growing security relationship — and it is active and growing — with Indonesia,” Hegseth told Sjafrudin, just before noting that the two countries complete more than 170 military exercises together each year.

“This [partnership] signifies the strength and potential of our security relationship ... bolsters regional deterrence, and advances our shared commitment to peace through strength,” Hegseth added.

During his brief remarks, Sjafrudin affirmed Hegseth’s sentiment regarding the strength of the U.S.-Indonesia relationship.

“Today, we are here as Indonesian delegates ... with very great enthusiasm to continue to develop our defense relationship, [which] should be enduring for our next generation in Indonesia and the United States of America,” Sjafrudin said. “We’re working on behalf of mutual respect and mutual benefit to enhance [the] value of our national interests.”

The new cooperation agreement features three “foundational pillars” that are based on each country’s national sovereignty and mutual respect: military organization and capacity building; training and professional military education; and exercises and operational cooperation.

Under the framework of the agreement, both countries will work on exploring cutting-edge initiatives, “including codeveloping sophisticated asymmetric capabilities, pioneering next-generation defense technologies in the maritime, subsurface and autonomous systems domains, and cooperating on maintenance, repair and overhaul support to improve operational readiness,” according to a joint statement on the new partnership.

The statement goes on to explain that both the U.S. and Indonesia have agreed to enhance joint special forces training, and that such engagements will make the bond between both countries’ militaries stronger.

Additionally, Hegseth noted that Indonesia has been helpful to the U.S. with the recovery of fallen service members.

“I appreciate your continued support in helping the United States find, return and protect the remains of our soldiers who fought alongside Indonesians during World War II,” Hegseth told Sjafrudin.

He added that the signing of the partnership memorandum will enable the War Department’s Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to recover those aforementioned service members’ remains in Indonesia.

Both Hegseth and Sjafrudin described the defense cooperation as a “line of departure” — a military term for setting off on a new mission — for their respective countries.

“So, here’s to the next chapter and our new mission together for our great countries,” Hegseth told Sjafrudin.

The U.S. and Indonesia have maintained formal diplomatic relations for more than 75 years, and established ties in 1949, just after Indonesia’s war for independence from the Netherlands.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4457873/>

USS *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* commissions

by Ensign Dylan Barron

Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

NORFOLK, Va. — The Navy welcomed a new Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer to the fleet April 11 during the commissioning of USS *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* (DDG 124) here.

Approximately 1,800 guests were on hand to celebrate the ship’s entry into service. During the ceremony, Secretary of the Navy John C. Phelan wished the crew of *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* fair winds and following seas as they brought the ship to life and began her commissioned service.

“This is the first vessel to bear the name of a Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipient, and Col Barnum’s actions in the Que Son Valley during Operation Harvest Moon defines what leadership looks like when everything is on the line,” said Phelan. “This ship is not symbolic, it is combat power, and today she joins something bigger. The ship and her crew join the President’s Golden Fleet, the Fleet of the future— rebuilding American maritime dominance by putting more capable ships in the water, strengthening our industrial base, and ensuring we can fight tonight and win tomorrow. To be a superpower, one must be a seapower, and USS *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* represents exactly what that future looks like.”

Adm. James W. Kilby emphasized the role of Arleigh Burke-class destroyers in delivering combat power and sustaining the Navy’s global warfighting advantage. “The need to build great warships like *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* is as clear today as it ever has been. Sailors on ships like *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* are standing the watch, defending the homeland, and deterring aggression.”

Gen. Eric M. Smith highlighted the legacy of the ship’s namesake and the standard it sets for the crew.

“Col. Barnum represents the very best of our naval service, courage under fire, selfless sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to mission and to others,” said Smith. “The crew of USS *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* carries forward that legacy, and with it, the warrior ethos required to deter aggression and win when it matters most.”

The ceremony featured traditional naval honors, including music from “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band, as Sailors manned the rails and the ship was officially placed into active service. Upon the order from the ship’s sponsor, Martha Hill, to “man our ship and bring her to life,” the crew rushed aboard, bringing the warship to life amid applause and ceremonial cannon fire.

Martha Hill, the ship’s sponsor and wife of Harvey C. Barnum Jr., reflected on the crew’s role in bringing the warship to life. “This moment marks the transformation of this ship from steel into something living — a reflection of the spirit, dedication, and strength of the Sailors who will carry her forward,” she said. “You are now part of her story, and wherever she sails, you will represent the very best of our nation.”

Barnum reflected on the responsibility carried by the crew and the trust that defines the naval service.

“Our strength is not built on technology alone, but on trust, trust that we will stand by one another and that no one will ever be left behind,” said Barnum. “That belief shapes how Sailors and Marines fight, how they lead, and how they act when it matters most. The crew of USS *Harvey C. Barnum Jr.* now carries that responsibility forward.”

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/>

FEEL THE BEAT



Marine Corps Cpl. Jesse Powers, a percussion instrumentalist with Marine Band San Diego, performs for students at Sheboygan Falls High School in Sheboygan Falls, Wis., April 8, 2026. The band toured multiple schools in the Milwaukee area to improve community relations, increase morale and spread awareness of Marine Corps opportunities. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Janell B. Valerio Alvarez

Hegseth authorizes off-duty service members to carry private firearms on installations

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed a memorandum directing military installation commanders to allow War Department personnel — namely, uniformed service members — to request to carry privately owned firearms while in their nonofficial duty capacity on DOW property within the United States.

“Before today, it was virtually impossible ... for War Department personnel to get permission to carry and store their own personal weapons aligned with the state laws where we operate our installations. ... Well, that’s no longer,” Hegseth said during a social media video released April 2.

“The memo I’m signing today directs installation commanders to allow requests for personal protection — to carry a privately owned firearm — with the presumption that it is necessary for personal protection,” he said.

At the video’s outset, Hegseth said the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment applies to all Americans, including those in uniform.

“The War Department’s uniformed service members are trained at the highest and unwavering standards. These warfighters — entrusted with the safety of our nation — are no less entitled to exercise their God-given right to keep and bear arms than any other American,” Hegseth said.

He then cited several active-shooter incidents on U.S. military installations in recent years as examples of when personnel having the ability to return fire on the threat could potentially have reduced the human damage inflicted.

Specifically, Hegseth mentioned the Dec. 9, 2019, terrorist attack at Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, which killed three men and injured eight others; the Aug. 6, 2025, shooting and wounding of five soldiers by one of their fellow soldiers at Fort Stewart, Georgia; and the shooting of two individuals — one whom died — at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, as recently as March 17.

“Recent events ... have made clear that some threats are closer to home than we would like,” he said.

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Feature Page: Medevac team transports wounded warriors to world-class care

by Christopher Smith
Walter Reed National
Military Medical Center

When injured active-duty service members need to get from the battlefield to critical medical care back home in the U.S., the medical evacuation department for Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Maryland, plays a vital role.

“Walter Reed’s medevac team is responsible for supporting patient movement across the globe while ensuring patients receive presidential care during transport throughout the aeromedical evacuation system,” said Navy Lt. Abena Nimako, officer in charge of the medevac team. “In addition to inbound and outbound military personnel from all branches requiring transport, the medevac team also supports the movement of reservists, veterans, beneficiaries and dependents for care.”

The medevac team supports the Defense Health Network National Capital Region’s patient movement requirements as directed by the War Department. The team coordinates and synchronizes various movement plans with the U.S. Transportation Command’s Global Patient Movement Requirements Center, the U.S. European Command’s Theater Patient Movement Requirements Center, the Deployed Warrior Medical Management Center at Landstuhl, Germany,

and Air Force aeromedical staging facilities to ensure a seamless transition of patients transferring to and from the national capital region.

The medevac team is composed of dedicated officers and enlisted personnel from the Navy, Army and Air Force, including registered nurses, paramedics, medics and hospital corpsmen. The primary team consists of 14 active-duty personnel, which includes one nurse who serves as the mission nurse and the officer in charge of the department, currently filled by Nimako; one patient care coordinator; one noncommissioned officer in charge and 11 hospital corpsmen.

There is also a rotational team comprised of nine active-duty enlisted personnel and two registered nurses that operate on a two-month period to provide relief for the primary team.

The service members use a variety of vehicles to transport patients and team members to

and from the pickup/drop-off locations, including ambulances, patient evacuation vehicles that function as intensive care units on wheels, an ambulance bus, a separate luggage truck and a nine-seater van.

The team is equipped with critical lifesaving equipment, including defibrillator units, IV kits, a blood infusion system, oxygen tanks, wound vacuums and other vital patient care supplies. In addition to the medical

pieces of equipment necessary to safely transport patients.

A typical mission begins far from the hospital, with the initial stabilization and transport of wounded or critically ill service members from a combat zone conducted by air medevac units.

“Once stabilized at an overseas hub, the patient is then flown back to the United States to various destination airfields in the national capital region,” Nimako said.

Walter Reed serves as a critical receiving and continuing care facility for service members — and sometimes their families or allies — who have already been medically evacuated from an operational theater.

The medevac team meets the incoming patients at their destination airfield, transitioning them into patient care vehicles to ensure uninterrupted quality of care. An average mission involves transporting between eight to 10 patients, but the team has the capability to carry as many as 26 patients on litters or upward of 42 ambulatory patients.

Once the patients are secured

in the vehicles, the team continuously monitors their condition, administering any needed care during the trip to Walter Reed. At each stage of the process, the team remains in contact with operations for Walter Reed, base security forces, service-specific liaisons and hospital staff, depending on the nature of the patient’s medical situation. Hospital staff will also inform patients’ families of their imminent arrival so they can be present to support their loved ones.

At Walter Reed, patients are transferred into the care of the specialized unit depending on their needs — intensive care, orthopedic, gastrointestinal or other treatment type. Each handover involves a detailed report of the patient’s condition.

“Thank you’ is not what I am looking for,” Nimako said. “The real validation is when the mission is secured and the patient is at Walter Reed. I tell myself that I made a difference that day. I did something good.”



Members of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center medevac team gather beside a specialized patient evacuation vehicle in preparation for a medevac mission at the medical center in Bethesda, Md., March 6, 2026. DOW photo by Ricardo J. Reyes

staff, the team also includes three professional drivers who operate the large vehicles required to carry the medical staff and sizable

Former Air Force NCO pleads guilty to multi-year bid rigging

A former active-duty U.S. Air Force master sergeant pleaded guilty earlier this month to fraudulently inflating the cost of information technology contracts for the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, according to information provided by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The defendant, Alan Hayward James, 51, of Texas, inflated costs by at least \$37 million - and using the excess funds to enrich himself, enrich co-conspirators, and channel bribes to a federal public official in PACAF whom the conspirators nicknamed “Godfather.”

James pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, bribery, and conspiracy to rig bids. James also agreed to pay over \$1.4 million in restitution to the Department of War.

“Over 37 million dollars — that’s how much the U.S. Air Force overpaid because of the scheme that the defendant admitted to, under oath and in open court,” said Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Daniel Glad of the Justice Department’s Antitrust Division.



Top 5

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Applying total systemic friction on the cartels

Strike kills 2 people engaged in narco-trafficking ops, says U.S. Southern Command

On April 13, at the direction of the commander of U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations.

Intelligence confirmed the

vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.

Two male narco-terrorists were killed during this action. No U.S. military forces were harmed.



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WANTED: Volunteers for NASA study

by Zachary Wilson

Naval Medical Research Unit Dayton

Navy researchers at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, are seeking volunteers to assist in a study that directly supports one of the United States' biggest space exploration goals: returning American astronauts to the moon.

Researchers assigned to the Naval Medical Research Unit Dayton, the Air Force Research Laboratory's 711th Human Performance Wing, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and NASA's Human Research Program are conducting a collaborative study examining motion sickness and how the human body adapts to acceleration and changing gravity environments.

Volunteers will help scientists better understand how the brain and inner ear respond to motion and to space motion sickness mitigation techniques, which could improve both military aviation safety and astronaut performance in space.

The study, StableEyes with Active Neurophysiology Monitoring, or SWAN, has been underway for several years and requires volunteers who have both a current aviation medical clearance and TRICARE health insurance coverage, due to the challenging nature of the motion profile.

"The participants' physical readiness for the unique aspects of the centrifuge exposure, coupled with the need to have reasonable astronaut analog subjects, is key," said Rich Folga, SWAN project manager assigned to Naval Medical Research Unit Dayton. "Having an aeromedical

clearance notice from a competent flight medicine examiner ensures candidates have 'the right stuff.'"

He said that additional subject screening is done to ensure the candidate is a good match for the target study population, based on self-reported sensitivity to provocative motion stimulus.

First, participants experience controlled acceleration profiles in a centrifuge, simulating space-

This research is part of a broader effort to develop countermeasures that will help astronauts remain safe and effective during future lunar missions under NASA's Artemis program.

flight deconditioning effects on key balance and coordination systems.

After the centrifuge run and during the temporary deconditioning effect, volunteers perform a series of tasks while wearing goggles that track head-and-eye movements, capturing motion sickness-related measurements. The entire group will complete additional tasks testing balance after the deconditioning events.

This research is part of a broader effort to develop countermeasures that will help astronauts remain safe and effective during future lunar missions under NASA's Artemis program.

"Dayton has been at the center of aerospace medicine for decades and aerospace in general since the invention of the aircraft," said Richard Arnold, director of Dayton's Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory.

"Naval medical researchers at the lab contributed to astronaut training and physiological

research during the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs. This collaboration continues that legacy by bringing together Navy, Air Force and NASA scientists to solve challenges that will help enable future missions to the moon and beyond."

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is home to the nation's premier aerospace medicine research center, where scientists from the Navy and Air Force collaborate in support of joint

missions and broader national priorities, including the ongoing collaboration with NASA and related research that affects both military aviation and future human space exploration.

The Air Force's centrifuge has recently supported astronaut training and research tied to the Artemis lunar exploration program, which aims to land astronauts on the moon and establish a sustained human presence there later this decade.

NASA's Artemis campaign is designed to return U.S. astronauts to the lunar surface for the first time since 1972. The program's first mission, Artemis I, successfully completed an uncrewed test flight around the moon in 2022. The crewed Artemis II mission launched April 1 and saw the crew travel farther from Earth than any humans in history as they orbited the moon while spending 10 days in space.

For astronauts traveling to the moon, the body must transition between Earth gravity,

microgravity during transit and the moon's partial gravity, conditions that can create sensory conflicts in the vestibular system — the inner ear structures responsible for balance and spatial orientation.

Studies like the one underway in Dayton help scientists develop techniques and technologies that allow astronauts to adapt more quickly to these conditions.

Participants will complete up to eight hours of testing across two days, including exposure to three times the force of Earth's gravity acceleration profile inside the centrifuge, and a series of balance and vision assessments.

Active-duty service members and federal employees must be on leave or in an off-duty status to be eligible for monetary compensation. Experimental stress-hazardous-duty incentive pay will be available to on-duty military participants.

Qualified participants must:

- ✓ Be active-duty military or a TRICARE beneficiary;
- ✓ Be between the ages of 18 and 55;
- ✓ Be between 5 feet and 6 feet, 4 inches in height;
- ✓ Weigh between 88 and 245 pounds;
- ✓ Have a current medical clearance (DD2992, FAA 8700-2 or FAA 8500-9) prior to the second study session;
- ✓ Not have been exposed to centrifuge training in the past 72 hours;
- ✓ Not be susceptible to moderate-to-severe motion sickness;
- ✓ Meet additional study criteria.

If you are interested and meet the eligibility criteria, contact the research team to learn more or volunteer by e-mailing NAMRU.DRD.Scheduling@us.af.mil.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4455366/navy-researchers-look-for-nasa-study/>



Personnel assist NASA astronaut Jack Hathaway as he exits the Air Force Research Laboratory's 711th Human Performance Wing's centrifuge, June 20, 2025. Centrifuge training simulates the gravitational forces experienced during launch and reentry. Photo by Richard A. Eldridge/Air Force Research Laboratory

DOW's annual recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

The Department of War recognizes April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month as part of its ongoing efforts to counter sexual assault in the Total Force.

"Sexual assault is unacceptable, period, and has no place in our military. It is contrary to our institutional values, the warrior ethos, and our overall readiness," said Anthony J. Tata, under secretary of war for personnel and readiness, adding that, "Awareness, prevention, and support are a shared responsibility. We expect every member of the Department of War community to help root out harmful behaviors, maintain standards, and continue to drive necessary change throughout the force."

Eliminating sexual assault in the military requires unwavering, year-round commitment. The ongoing DoW sexual assault awareness and prevention campaign, "STEP FORWARD: Prevent. Report. Advocate," calls on the Total Force to confront

and counter harmful behaviors, provide victim assistance, and strengthen command climates.

"The warrior ethos demands integrity, honor, and courage — on and off the battlefield. Sexual assault violates every one of those values," said Dr. Nate Galbreath, director of the Department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. "To Step Forward is to live up to those expectations. It means having the integrity to intervene, the courage to seek help, and the honor to create a climate of dignity and respect. Those standards build a lethal force where every warfighter is safe, respected, and ready for the fight."

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, please reach out to the Safe Helpline at (877) 995-5247 or [SafeHelpline.org/live-chat](https://www.sapr.mil/saapm) for anonymous, 24/7, one-on-one support.

More information can be found on the SAPRO website at <https://www.sapr.mil/saapm>.

Marine Corps interim guidance to determine voluntary versus involuntary absence

In an April 10 Marine Corps administrative message, INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR COMMAND RESPONSE TO SERVICE MEMBERS ABSENT FROM DUTY AND DETERMINATION OF VOLUNTARY VERSUS INVOLUNTARY ABSENCE, provisional guidance is provided for a standardized framework for commanders exercising statutory command authority when responding to service members who are absent from duty with unknown whereabouts.

The guidance establishes response timeframes, requires safety and mental health risk consideration, and provides a framework for determining whether an absence is voluntary or involuntary. This guidance is an interim compensating control until permanent service policy is established.

•Commanders will presume that a service member whose whereabouts are unknown may be in potential danger until facts indicate otherwise.

•Response actions will consider safety risk, mental health risk, self-harm risk, and personal circumstance factors. An immediate and thorough inquiry is essential.

•An incorrect determination can delay law enforcement investigations in a missing persons case or cause undue hardship on dependents.

A voluntary absence is one in which a service member knowingly and intentionally fails to report for duty or remains absent without authority.

An involuntary absence is one in which a service member

is absent due to circumstances beyond their control, including but not limited to foul play, accident, medical emergency, or other calamity. Involuntary absences may be processed through casualty reporting.

Specifically, commanders must report a missing Marine to law enforcement within three hours and notify the local chaplain of the service member's absence, according to the directive authorized by Lt. Gen. William Bowers, deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs.

The process is divided into three phases: initial response, preliminary inquiry and risk assessment, and status determination. "Initial response should occur within 3 hours of discovery of absence, the directive states.

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Navy's oldest active aircraft carrier *Nimitz* trains with Ecuador Navy

by Carrier Strike Group 11

PACIFIC OCEAN – The Ecuadorian and U.S. Navies recently conducted a bilateral maritime engagement as part of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet's Southern Seas 2026 deployment.

The engagement focused on increasing interoperability between the two navies, included participation by the Ecuadorian Esmeraldas-class missile corvettes BAE Manabi (CM 12) and BAE Loja (CM 16), Ecuadorian A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, aircraft carrier USS

Nimitz (CVN 68), destroyer USS *Gridley* (DDG 101), and F-18 Super Hornets and MH-60 Sea Hawks assigned to Carrier Air Wing 17.

"Engaging with partners like Ecuador ensures that when the need arises, we can work together as a proficient warfighting team, built with trust and experience," said Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11. "Training on the high seas with Ecuadorian naval forces gave us the chance to hone our critical skills while also continuing to build a relationship that is already strong and enduring."

Training conducted included subject matter expert exchanges, simulated maritime interdiction operations scenarios, a live-fire gunnery exercise, maneuvering in formation and an air defense exercise.

Nimitz also hosted a visit of senior Ecuadorian government and military leaders including Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriela Sommerfeld, Minister of Defense Giancarlo Loffredo, and Chief of Defense Gen. Henry Delgado.

The delegation was accompanied by U.S. Charge d'Affaires a.i. in Ecuador Lawrence Petroni.

The visit was one of many planned opportunities for distinguished visitors to observe aircraft carrier operations during Southern Seas 2026.

While aboard, the Ecuadorian delegation met with Norman and Capt. Joseph Furco, commanding officer of *Nimitz*. The leaders discussed the Southern Seas 2026 mission and the strong security partnership between Ecuador and the U.S.

Visitors also observed flight operations and an air power demonstration from *Nimitz*' flight deck.

The visit and bilateral training demonstrated the Southern Seas 2026 mission to strengthen existing regional partnerships and encourage the establishment of new relationships through the exchange of maritime mission-focused knowledge and expertise.

Southern Seas 2026 marks the 11th iteration of the exercise to the region since 2007. Like the previous deployments, Southern Seas 2026 is designed to foster goodwill, strengthen maritime partnerships to counter threats,

and build the U.S. Navy's team alongside partner nation maritime services.

During the deployment, *Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group (NIMCSG) is scheduled to conduct passing exercises and operations at sea with partner nation maritime forces as the ships circumnavigate the continent of South America.

NIMCSG consists of *Nimitz*, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17, Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 9, and *Gridley*.



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Navy awards USS *Augusta* repair contract to BAE Systems for \$33.5 million

BAE Systems reports that it was awarded a \$33.5 million Navy contract to perform maintenance, repairs, and modernization work on littoral combat ship USS *Augusta*, keeping the vessel on active duty for future fleet operations.

The award, issued to BAE Systems' Maritime Solutions in San Diego, covers the ship's FY '26 scheduled shipyard period during which the vessel will undergo work, which will take place in San Diego and is expected to run through August 2027, giving the Navy and the contractor plenty of time to complete the overhaul. The contract is valued at \$33,513,369, with options that could raise the total to \$35,705,364.

The Navy said the package includes all labor, supervision, equipment, production support, testing, facilities, and quality assurance needed to complete the availability period. In practical terms, this means shipyard crews will handle everything from structural and mechanical repairs to modernization work and post-repair testing before the ship returns to service.

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Former enlisted machinist's mate takes command of USS Anchorage

by Petty Officer 3rd Class
Zachary Costan
USS Anchorage

SAN DIEGO - Capt. Matthew Ventimiglia was relieved by Capt. Christopher Petro as commanding officer of amphibious transport dock ship USS *Anchorage* (LPD 23) April 3 here.

"I often told my crews, including *Anchorage's* commissioning crew, that if we end up being the best crew ever, we will have failed," said Capt. (Ret.) Brian J. Quin, an *Anchorage* plank owner and ceremony guest. "We should always strive to be the best crew until now. We must set up our

reliefs to be better equipped for success."

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



Capt. Christopher Petro

scheduled to become aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln's* next skipper.

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

Petro, a native of Fort Worth, enlisted in the Navy in 1993, completing basic training in Orlando, Fla., before serving as a machinist's mate. In 1999, he was selected into the Seaman to Admiral program, graduating from the University of San Diego in 2002 with a bachelor's

degree in business administration. He completed Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Fla., in 2003.

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

Naval Surface Force/U.S. Pacific Fleet's mission is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore.

OCF

continued from page 1

OCF began out of necessity. "While there are more than 40 nonprofits that support Navy SEALs in various ways, none are faith-based. OCF exists to meet that specific spiritual need."

OCF provides spiritual resources and support to active-duty Navy SEALs worldwide, helping them navigate deployments, separation from loved ones, and the spiritual challenges that accompany this demanding profession, while also strengthening their families through Scripture-based prayer groups, community, and ongoing spiritual support.

"Central to our work is ensuring that every active-duty SEAL who requests one receives a

custom embossed Trident Bible, personalized with his name and class number, free of charge, reflecting both their elite training and their faith in Christ," she said. "These Bibles are carried into training, deployments, and real-world operations as a tangible source of strength and identity."

Since their initial launch in August 2025, OCF has distributed nearly 200 custom-embossed Trident Bibles to active-duty SEALs.

Operation Christian Fellowship is currently investing time and energy into their \$150,000 fundraising campaign, seeking 150 individuals to give \$1,000. These funds are dedicated exclusively to sourcing, embossing, shipping, and distributing Trident Bibles so that every

active-duty SEAL who requests one can receive one, regardless of location. All donations to OCF are tax-deductible, said Schwarz.

Besides Schwarz and Mullan, Tricia Kirchmeyer is director of prayer programs for the organization.

"I think it's important that you don't have to believe or have a certain type of faith to receive our resources," said Kameryn Rein Schwarz. "We will help whoever requests it. OCF is a non-denominational, apolitical Christian ministry. Our focus is solely on sharing the hope of Jesus Christ and supporting warriors and their families, not promoting any political or denominational agenda. While we believe church community is important, we're more about a nurturing relationship with our creator than we are about religion."

Find out more at operationchristianfellowship.org.





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WATERS OFF SAN DIEGO (April 10, 2026) Navy divers approach NASA's Artemis II module to recover the crew after returning from a lunar mission. USS John P. Murtha supported the Artemis mission following its splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. U.S. Navy by Petty Officer 2nd Class David Rowe



NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO, Ca. (April 10, 2026) Destroyer USS Stockdale returns from seven-month underway to the 4th Fleet area of operations. Stockdale carried out sustained operations at sea, maintained peace through strength and sustained credible deterrence alongside allies and partners. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Sara Eshleman

FAA, DOW sign landmark safety agreement to protect southern border

DOW News
WASHINGTON - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Department of War (DOW) completed a thorough safety assessment of a high-energy laser counter-drone system. This assessment validated that proper safety controls are in place and that while these systems are at the cutting edge of counter drone technology, they do not pose undue risk to passenger aircraft.

FAA and DOW completed the safety assessment after observing demonstrations of the system last month. This Administration upholds the highest standard for safeguarding Americans and will build-in this methodology from the start for systems employed

in the U.S. Homeland.

"The FAA's top priority is protecting the safety of the American flying public, and we value the collaboration with the Department of War in that effort," said FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford.

"Following a thorough, data-informed Safety Risk Assessment, we determined that these systems do not present an increased risk to the flying public. We will continue working with our interagency partners to ensure the National Airspace System remains safe while addressing emerging drone threats."

"This successful test show-

cases the significant advancements we're making in counter-drone technology to ensure that our warfighters have the most advanced tools to defend the homeland," said Army Brigadier Gen. Matt Ross, director of JIATF-401.

"By working hand-in-hand with the FAA and our interagency partners, the Department

of War is proving that these cutting-edge capabilities are safe, effective, and ready to protect all air travelers from illicit drone use in the national airspace."

The DOW will continue to coordinate with the FAA to employ this system and ensure civilian aircraft, pilots, navigation equipment, or air traffic services aren't impacted.

Marine Corps General and Special Court-Martials

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



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

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

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

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

San Diego Navy Community Recreation goes to Safari Park

WILD THINGS

Com Rec Goes to Safari Park!
 Wednesday, April 29 | Check-in 0700-0830

Visit your favorite animals and enjoy early access to Safari Park. Active Duty and infants 3 & under do not need to register. REGISTER: navylifesw.com/NBSDCR

Wed., April 29 ♦ Check-in 7 a.m-8:30 a.m.
 Visit your favorite animals and enjoy early access to Safari Park. Active duty and infants 3 & under do not need to register.
 Register here. <https://sandiego.navylifesw.com/>

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Sports

2026 NAVY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

American Conference announces 2026 Navy football schedule

ANNAPOLIS, Md.-- The Navy football team will play five games at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, two games at a neutral site and five road games, according to the 2026 Navy football schedule. Navy returns 12 starters and 46 letter winners off a team that won a school-record tying 11 games against just two losses, defeated Army and Air Force to win the Commander-In-Chief's Trophy in back-to-back years, won the Lambert Trophy for just the second time since 1963 as the best team in the East and beat Cincinnati in the AutoZone Liberty Bowl.

2026 Navy Football Schedule

- Saturday, Sept. 5 vs. Towson**
- Saturday, Sept. 12 at Florida Atlantic
- Friday, Sept. 25 at UAB
- Saturday, Oct. 3 at Air Force
- Saturday, Oct. 10 vs. Tulsa**
- Saturday, Oct. 17 at UTSA
- Saturday, Oct. 24 vs. North Texas (Homecoming)**
- Saturday, Oct. 31 vs. Notre Dame (Foxborough, Mass.)
- Saturday, Nov. 7 vs. Temple**
- Saturday, Nov. 21 vs. Memphis**
- Saturday, Nov. 28 at Charlotte
- Saturday, Dec. 5 American Conference Championship Game (at the #1 seed)
- Saturday, Dec. 12 vs. Army (East Rutherford, N.J.)

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

2026 SCHEDULE

HOME GAMES AT FRONTWAVE ARENA

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

*Conference

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James Stevens' 2026 Winternationals crash highlights NHRA safety

Thankfully, in my many decades of covering and participating in motorsports, I have personally seen very few serious accidents, but on Saturday, April 11th I witnessed and photographed a truly horrific drag racing crash during the 2026 NHRA Lucas Oil Winternationals, at the IN-N-OUT BURGER Pomona Dragstrip.

Early in the day I had been trackside to shoot closeups of the drag racing starts, very near to the left-side protective wall and in front of grandstands packed full of fans. The starts were violent, ground-shaking and painfully loud. I shot some photos there and then left to walk over to the much-quieter areas on the backside of the grandstands to shoot crews working on the cars in the pits, the vendor areas and more, for much of the day.

Towards the end of the day, I decided to shoot some photos of the racing from a different perspective. I climbed up to the top row of the grandstands, about midway down the track. With my long telephoto lens, I was able to zoom way in and shoot the competitors as they lined up behind the "Christmas Tree," and then follow them as they raced past me, on their way to the finish line. They accelerated so fast that their races began and were over in barely more than an instant.

I was lightly dressed for the heat of the day, but after the sun set it got cold. The flags stood straight out in the stiff wind. It was not surprising, therefore, that many of the spectators had already left the exposed grandstands. Nevertheless, I stayed and kept shooting.

It was Round 1 of eliminations, and James Stevens, of Gothenburg, Nebraska, had staged his Performance Truck & Trailer Top Alcohol dragster behind the "Christmas Tree," ready

to race. He was in the right-hand lane, next to Garrett Bateman in the other lane. The lights turned green and the race was on.

As my photos of his shocking, horrific accident show, in an instant Stevens' dragster turned sideways, crossed the center line, veered back towards the protective wall along the right side of the track and crashed violently into it. That impact and his trajectory launched his dragster up into the air, erupting in

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

a fireball, breaking into pieces and getting badly tangled in the catch fencing. Emergency vehicles — including an ambulance, and members of the NHRA Safety Safari rushed to his rescue.

It seemed like an eternity before the "Jaws of life" helped extricate Stevens from the wreckage. He was placed onto a stretcher and lifted into an ambulance. The track announcer said that James was conscious and speaking with first responders.

From my vantage point, it was impossible to differentiate between the mangled mess of his car and the catch fencing. Eventually, one piece at a time, a forklift raised and moved what appeared to be an engine, a rear-end assembly and a frame onto a waiting flatbed truck.

According to published reports on

April 12th by Susan Wade at <https://www.autoweek.com/racing/nhra/a70996611/violent-crash-nhra-at-pomona/> and <https://competitionplus.com/nhra-top-alcohol-dragster-driver-james-stevens-crashes-hard-at-pomona/>, later that night James Stevens' daughter Jess Hampton had posted this message on Facebook:

"My dad James is pretty banged up. Sounds like he's got a broken forearm, broken left wrist, broke his C-7 [vertebra], bruised lung, rib fractures, and possible broken back (again). If you didn't know, he wrecked at this very same track in 2019. He is in a lot of pain, so please pray for healing and comfort. He will have surgery tomorrow."

Motorsports sanctioning bodies and manufacturers continually work to improve safety measures, to better protect competitors, spectators, track personnel and others every time racers strap on their helmets, buckle their safety belts, take to the track and compete. Safety is, and will continue to be, their number one priority.

It is truly a testament to the ongoing, ever-evolving safety efforts of the NHRA and other sanctioning bodies that the vast majority of people continue to survive even the most horrific of motorsports accidents, like the one that I witnessed on this cold, windy evening in Pomona.

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

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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by Lisa Smith Molinari

"In 1878, Charles Freeman was committed to Danvers Lunatic Hospital for the murder of his youngest child," the sound system in my husband's car blared as we drove away from our house to run errands.

"Murder again?" I said to Francis, who had been listening to audio books about heinous crimes a lot lately. It seemed that every time I rode as a passenger in his car, I was welcomed not with music or news or podcasts, but with detailed descriptions of disturbing real-life murders.

This wasn't exactly the pick-me-up I needed on a frigid April morning.

"I've been listening to a biography on President McKinley," my husband defended himself, "but I needed a break, so I found another audiobook about famous murderers."

I accepted my husband's eccentric habits — the poor guy does have long commutes to and from work across the border in Connecticut every week — and settled in for the ride, hoping that looking out at the half-bloomed daffodils and the nesting Canada geese would lighten my mood.

"Hmm," a delayed thought suddenly occurred to me. "Danvers Lunatic Hospital ... I wonder what the origins of the word 'lunatic' are?" I said half to myself while

Love and lunacy

staring out the window.

"Moon," Francis immediately responded, with a tone that implied that the answer to my question was an obvious one. "Luna means moon," he added, sniffing with intellectual superiority.

"Well, of course, I know that luna means moon." I was now on the defense. "I was asking why the word for moon was ever associated with people with mental illness. Like, was it once believed that mentally ill people howled at the moon or something?" I clarified, intending to finally, once and for all, prove to my husband of 33 years that I am not, in fact, an idiot.

"I'm sure the word comes from the belief that different phases of the moon made people go crazy," Francis said confidently, as if he was educating his simpleton wife on sociology, human history, and etymology.

I stared over at Francis where he sat in the driver's seat. His eyebrows were arched upward, demonstrating his satisfaction with his place in the world. His chin was in the air, showing pride in the vast knowledge he'd gained from 28 years of active duty military service, extensive world travel, and a post-military-retirement career in corporate security. His hand was draped leisurely over the steering wheel of his imported car, clearly indicating Francis' belief that, in his quest for success in life, he had most definitely arrived.

Our marriage flashed before my eyes. All the years that I neglected my law career to follow my Navy husband and raise our three children. Every promotion I attended, truly proud of Francis' earned ac-

colades. That time when our kids were teenagers, and I found out they didn't know I ever had a law career, or a brain for that matter. And Francis' retirement ceremony, when the pomp and circumstance was worthy of someone who'd reached celebrity status.

"It must be so nice," I said, breaking the silence with a bit of playful banter, "to be so completely certain that you are smarter than your wife."

"You know I don't think I'm smarter than you," Francis said, tsking at my silliness.

"But you believed that I didn't know that luna means moon?" I said, incredulous.

"Well, I, I ..." Francis stutted.

A half hour later, we were in the midst of buying a new washing machine at Home Depot. Francis stood by with our credit card poised for the purchase, while I sorted out all the details with the Home Depot agent. Unlike most traditional marriages, I had always been the handyman of the family. I used the tools, installed the light fixtures, assembled the cribs, and fixed the broken stuff. So, I was in charge of picking the appliances.

Researching online to answer a question I had about an LG washer-dryer combo unit, the agent poked at her keyboard and reported, "Here it is. The LG website says yes — you can wash and dry clothes simultaneously."

"Honey," Francis whispered, tapping me on the shoulder with a mischievous grin, "simultaneously ... that means at the same time." www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.com

Veterans News

VA requests record \$488 billion for FY2027

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

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

Key highlights of the discretionary request include nearly \$2 billion to replace the Indianapolis VA Medical Center and \$1.3 billion for a new facility in Manchester, N.H. The budget also allocates \$500 million for permanent homeless veteran housing at the National Center for Warrior Independence in West Los Angeles.

Notably, the proposal funds the restart of the VA's Electronic Health Record (EHR) modern-

ization program, which has been on a strategic reset since 2022, with plans to go live at 13 sites throughout 2026.

VA Secretary Doug Collins emphasized that the era of "measuring progress by how much money we spend" is over, shifting the focus toward service outcomes and efficiency. However, the budget does seek to trim what the White House calls "divisive and wasteful diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives," redirecting those funds toward core missions like healthcare and cemetery services.

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

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

VA 100,000 new enrollees in 2026

The VA announced April 6 that more than 100,000 new veterans have enrolled in VA healthcare so far in 2026. This milestone was reached on March 31, significantly faster than in six of the last seven years. VA Secretary Doug Collins attributed this surge to the department's transformation into a "service organization" where veterans come first, noting that historic improvements in facility access and benefit processing are driving the increased engagement. Significant improvements since January 2025 have contributed to this growth, including the opening of 34 new healthcare facilities and the reduction of the benefits backlog by 67 percent. The VA has also offered over 2.2 million appointments outside of normal operating hours, providing more timely and convenient options for those with civilian work schedules. *SOURCE: Fleet Reserve Association*

Veteran's organizations to receive \$7M for rural transportation services

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced the availability of \$7 million in grants for organizations that provide transportation services to rural veterans.

Grant funding is available to veteran service organizations and state veterans service agencies that provide veterans transportation services to and from VA or VA-authorized health care appointments.

The funds are made available through the Highly Rural Transportation Grants Program, which provides transportation programs in counties with fewer than seven people per square mile. There is no cost to participate in the program for Veterans who live in an area where this program is available.

Since HRTG's launch in 2014, VA has awarded \$35 million to organizations across 15 states, U.S. territories, and tribal lands.

"Improving health care access



for rural veterans is vital," said VA Secretary Doug Collins. "These grants will help break down the geographic barriers to health care some rural veterans face."

For more details about eligibility, priorities, and application requirements visit VA.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp/grant_applicants. Interested parties can apply on grants.gov. The closing date for application is May 5.

The grant is just one of many ways the second Trump Administration is making VA work better for veterans. For example, VA has:

** Enrolled more than 100,000 new veterans in VA health care in 2026.

** Opened 34 new VA health

care facilities since Jan. 20, 2025, Opening 34 new VA health care facilities expanding health care access for vets around the country.

** Reduced the backlog of veterans waiting for VA benefits by 67 percent, after it increased 24 percent during the Biden Administration.

** Completed 82,083,918 direct care appointments in FY2025, up 4.1 percent from FY2024.

** Offered veterans more than 2.3 million appointments outside of normal operating hours, giving veterans more timely and convenient options for care.

** Permanently housed 51,936 homeless veterans across the country in FY2025, the highest total in seven years.

NMRTC Camp Pendleton graduates 19 from Division Officer Leadership Course

by Curtis Hill

Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Camp Pendleton graduated 19 junior officers from the Division Officer Leadership Course held at Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton from March 23-27, 2026.

According to the Navy Medicine website, "DIVOLC is a service school requirement for O-1 through O-3 medical department officers who graduated from Officer Development School after January 2018."

The weeklong course was led by Cmdr. Catalina Coronado, the previous NMRTC Camp Pendleton staff education and training department head, and Lt. Cmdr. Roberta Orozco, the current NMRTC Camp Pendleton staff education and training



Graduates from the Division Officer Leadership Course hosted by Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Camp Pendleton pose with the course leaders, Cmdr. Catalina Coronado, the previous department head for NMRTC Camp Pendleton staff education and training, and Lt. Cmdr. Roberta Orozco, the current department head for NMRTC Camp Pendleton staff education and training, outside the west entrance to Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton on March 27, 2026. According to the Navy Medicine website, "DIVOLC is a service school requirement for O-1 through O-3 medical department officers who graduated from Officer Development School after January 2018." Photo by Curtis Hill

ing department head.

The course is offered in three locations across Navy Medicine, with San Diego being one of the three.

Participants in the course included junior officers from the Medical Service Corps, Medical Corps, Nurse Corps, and Dental Corps across Southern California to include members from the following commands: NMRTC Camp Pendleton; Expeditionary Medical Facility 150 Alpha; Expeditionary Medical Unit 7; NHCP, Naval Medical Center San Diego; EMF 150 Bravo; 1st Dental Battalion; and 1st Medical Battalion.

The course was a valuable experience for those participating.

"This course was expertly run and closed gaps in questions from my enlisted to officer career, such as record management," said Lt. j.g. Kaysha Honeycutt, the division officer for operations management at NMRTC Camp Pendleton. "There were engaging group discussions

that helped prepare the students for future situations they may be met with as a division officer in the Navy."

One aspect mentioned by multiple participants as significantly beneficial was the group discussions.

"Great discussions were had, especially amongst those in the course, giving us yet more perspectives of various leadership styles," said Lt. Anthony Westerman, command chaplain for EMF 150 Alpha.

Graduating were Lt. Dustin Bartell, Lt. Parker Beatty, Lt. Taylor Chen, Lt. Patrick Conejo, Lt. Janice Darko, Lt. Aaron Lyon, Lt. Benjamin Makus, Lt. Anne Neuweiler, Lt. Gildas Noumen, Lt. Bwabwa Tchombela, Lt. Anthony Westerman, Lt. Robert Williamson, Lt. j.g. Eunice Appiah, Lt. j.g. Kaysha Honeycutt, Lt. j.g. Candice Jepma, Lt. j.g. Adam Rives, Lt. j.g. David Rojas, Lt. j.g. Janeane Rosario, and Ens. Kianna Montemayor.

How divorce affects your family's TRICARE benefits

by TRICARE Communications

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – During a divorce or an annulment, you may be concerned about what will happen to your family's TRICARE coverage.

In general, here's what will happen to your TRICARE eligibility when your divorce or annulment is final.

Sponsors and their children: Sponsors, their biological children, and their adopted children stay eligible for TRICARE (unless they lose eligibility for other reasons).

Stepchildren: Stepchildren who haven't been adopted by a sponsor will lose TRICARE eligibility. Their coverage will end on the final date of divorce or annulment.

Spouses: Former spouses must meet certain criteria to stay eligible for TRICARE. If you don't meet these criteria, your last day of TRICARE coverage is the day your divorce decree or annulment is final.

If you're in the process of getting a divorce or you're recently divorced, here are some important things to keep in mind.

Sponsors and their children

Are you a sponsor? You must update your marital status in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System when your divorce or annulment is final.

To update DEERS, you'll need to go to a local ID card office. Be sure to bring a certified copy of your divorce or annulment decree.

Are you eligible for a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan option? In some cases, divorce or annulment is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event. As described in the TRICARE Qualifying Life Events Fact Sheet, a TRICARE QLE opens a 90-day window for you and your eligible children to change your TRICARE health plan.

"This 90-day window starts on the date of your divorce or annulment," noted Shane Pham, management and program analyst, TRICARE Health

Plan Policy and Programs Branch, at the Defense Health Agency. "If you're thinking about changing your plan, it's a good idea to update DEERS as soon as possible."

Do you have a child custody agreement? Consider your custody agreement and where your children will live when choosing a TRICARE plan for your children. (Your children don't all need to be enrolled in the same plan.) Learn more about child custody scenarios. You can use the Plan Finder to see which plans your children may be eligible for.

Former spouses

Are you separated or living apart from your sponsor? If you aren't yet divorced, you can keep your TRICARE benefits.

After a divorce, you may be eligible for TRICARE coverage if you meet the criteria for one of the following scenarios. You'll have the same health benefits, plan options, and costs as retiree family members.

Scenario 1 — The 20/20/20 rule. You keep TRICARE health care benefits for as long as you remain eligible if:

- Your sponsor has at least 20 years of creditable service toward determining retirement pay,
- You were married to your sponsor for at least 20 years, and
- The period of service and your marriage overlapped for at least 20 years.

Scenario 2 — The 20/20/15 rule. You keep TRICARE health care benefits for up to one year if:

- Your sponsor has at least 20 years of creditable service toward determining retirement pay,
- You were married to your sponsor for at least 20 years, and
- The period of service and your marriage overlapped for at least 15 years.

In either scenario, you'll need to establish your eligibility as an unremarried former spouse. You'll

need to update your DEERS record in person at your local ID card office. Bring these documents:

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree
- DD Form 214 or Statement of Service from the sponsor's service personnel component

Remember: You can lose your TRICARE eligibility under either scenario if you:

- Remarry (unless you gain eligibility under your new spouse), or
- Buy and gain coverage through an employer-sponsored health plan

Learn more about benefits for former spouses. <https://tricare.mil/formerspouse>

What are my health coverage options if I lose eligibility for TRICARE?

Former spouses and stepchildren may have other options for health care coverage when they lose TRICARE eligibility. These may include:

- **Buying Continued Health Care Benefit Program coverage.** If you qualify for CHCBP, you must buy coverage within 60 days of loss of TRICARE coverage. Certain former spouses who haven't remarried before age 55 may qualify for an unlimited duration of coverage.
- Searching the Health Insurance Marketplace to find civilian health plans. You can also check for Medicaid eligibility in your state.
- Getting coverage through your employer
- Continuing to use Medicare, if you're entitled to it

Looking for more information?

Do you have questions about your eligibility for TRICARE? You can call the DMDC/DEERS Support Office at 800-538-9552.

Getting a divorce or annulment is just one type of TRICARE QLE. Examples of other QLEs include:

- Moving
- Losing or gaining other health insurance

- Children becoming adults
- Getting married
- Giving birth or adopting
- Retiring

Go to Qualifying Life Events (<https://tricare.mil/lifeevents>) to learn about other QLEs and your options following a QLE.

EVERY U.S. MILITARY INSTALLATION IS A NO-DRONE ZONE!

Remember the acronym DRONE:

- Direct Attention
- Report the Incident
- Observe
- Notice Details

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Volunteers are our greatest asset and the backbone of the USO. Whether helping a soldier with a connecting flight, distributing a Care Package, serving snacks with a smile, providing local information, or "welcoming home" troops from deployment, volunteers are vital to the success of the USO's mission. While the duties of a volunteer may vary, the goal is always the same – to improve the quality of life of service members, boost their morale, and serve as the link between service members and the American people.

Ready to apply to be a USO San Diego volunteer?

Visit <https://volunteers.uso.org/>

Once you navigate to the web page, scroll down to and look at the right side of the page to find information about volunteering.

Camp Pendleton USO Programs Include:

USO Transitions: <https://www.uso.org/programs/uso-pathfinder-transition-program>

Want to be better prepared for future success before transitioning from the military? Are you a military spouse looking for new opportunities? The USO Pathfinder® Transition Program extends the USO experience to active duty, Reserve, National Guard and military spouses by offering professional development services throughout the duration of military service as well as in preparation for life post-military.

MilSpouse Connect: Monthly events bringing military spouses together to connect and thrive.

Craft & Coffee: USO Camp Pendleton provides creative outlets for adults and children to create fun, whimsical or serious works of art through a variety of mediums. Signs up happen online and are usually advertised through the USO Camp Pendleton Facebook page.

Command Support: USO is here to support! We often help support command events across Camp Pendleton such as Family days and Morale Days. Commands can request support in a number of different ways, from outdoor games, a kids craft, or even our mobile photo booth. We also can help provide small refreshments. To request support, please email our Center Operations and Programs Manager, Crystal Gates at cgates@uso.org. All requests must be submitted within 30 days and although we try our best, not all requests can be granted.

<https://california.uso.org/>

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