

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH



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OPERATION DEEP FREEZE The crew of U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Polar Star* enjoys ice liberty during Operation Deep Freeze in McMurdo Sound, Antarctica, Jan. 7, 2025. The operation is a joint service, interagency effort supporting the National Science Foundation, which manages the U.S. Antarctic Program. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jeremy Burgess

Secretary Hegseth's message to the Force

EDITOR'S NOTE: See page 3 for related story.

It is the privilege of a lifetime to lead the warriors of the Department of Defense, under the leadership of our Commander in Chief Donald J. Trump. We will put America First, and we will never back down.

The President gave us a clear mission: achieve Peace through Strength. We will do this in three ways — by restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence.

- o We will revive the warrior ethos and restore trust in our military. We are American warriors. We will defend our country. Our standards will be high, uncompromising, and clear. The strength of our military is our unity and our shared purpose.

- o We will rebuild our military by matching threats to capabilities. This means reviving our defense industrial base, reforming our acquisition process, passing a financial audit, and rapidly fielding emerging technologies. We will remain the strongest and most lethal force in the world.

- o We will reestablish deterrence by defending our homeland — on the ground and in the sky. We will work with allies and partners to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific by Communist China, as well as supporting the President's priority to end wars responsibly and reorient to key threats. We will stand by our allies — and our enemies are on notice.

All of this will be done with a focus on lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness.

I have committed my life to warfighters and their families. Just as my fellow soldiers had my back on the battlefield, know that I will always have your back. We serve together at a dangerous time. Our enemies will neither rest nor relent. And neither will we. We will stand shoulder to shoulder to meet the urgency of this moment.

Like each of you, I love my country and swore an oath to defend the Constitution. We will do that each and every day, as one team. Together we will accomplish the President's mission to deter war, and if necessary, defeat and destroy our enemies. Godspeed!

Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense

MILITARY POLICE, ENGINEER UNITS FROM ARMY, MARINES DEPLOY TO THE US-MEXICO BORDER

by Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas - Military police and Army engineers from seven states will join Marine Corps engineers from California

already en route for a deployment to the U.S. border with Mexico ordered Jan. 20 by President Donald Trump.

In total, 1,500 active-duty

ing at the southwest border in support of Customs and Border Protection. The forces will install physical barriers along the border and conduct detection and monitoring missions, according to U.S. Northern Command, which is leading the mission.

The first wave of active-duty troops was expected to be at locations along the border by the end of the week. NORTHCOM would not say exactly where the troops would deploy.

“U.S. Northern Command is aggressively bolstering security at the southern border,” said Air Force Gen. Gregory Guillot, NORTHCOM's commander. “In a matter of days, we will have nearly doubled the number of forces along the border,

effectively implementing the president's intent while planning and posturing for expanded efforts to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the United States.”

There is discussion among defense officials and the White House that the number of troops deployed could reach 10,000, said a senior defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The executive order that Trump signed called for whatever number of troops that defense officials deemed necessary. Despite the bulk of troops coming from military police units, the Pentagon stated Jan. 22 that none “are intended to be used for law enforcement.”

see **Border**, page 2



Marines load concertina wire onto a 7-ton truck at Camp Pendleton Jan. 22 in preparation to deploy to the U.S.-Mexico border. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Diego Berumen

More funds for Navy unit recreation

by Destiny Sibert, CNIC Public Affairs

WASHINGTON -- Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) has raised the annual unit recreation fund allocation for shore commands from \$10 to \$25 per active-duty Sailor. This marks the first increase in over 20 years. “We listened to feedback from commanders that it was time to adjust the funding to better align with inflation and current costs,” said Lisa Sexauer, director of CNIC's Fleet Readiness division, which oversees Navy Morale, Welfare & Readiness. “By raising the unit recreation funds, we're giving commanding officers more flexibility to address the immediate needs of their Sailors and enhance morale, unit culture, cohesion, and camaraderie.” The increased funding applies to Navy Regions, installations, and tenant commands assigned to Navy installations for more than 30 days. Mobile units are eligible for funding only during the periods aboard the installation. This increase does not apply to shipboard afloat commands, as their recreation funds are managed under separate policies. Unit recreation funds can be used for command-sanctioned events, recreation equipment, team-building activities, and special training. The funds may also be spent on emblematic items, recognition awards, and materials for advancement, award, and reenlistment ceremonies. All expenditures must comply with CNIC Instruction 1710.3 CH-1.

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Military families riled by lower rates paid for self-moves of their household goods

by Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

Military families are incensed over sweeping cuts to reimbursement rates for service members who choose to manage their own moves when they change duty stations, rather than opt for defense contractors.

The reimbursement rates for personally procured moves have been slashed by as much as 40 percent, Megan Harless, an advocate for reforming the process for permanent changes of station, said by phone Wednesday.

That could leave many of the thousands of families choosing to self-move each year no choice but to use HomeSafe Alliance, the sole contractor chosen to oversee all household moves for the Defense Department, she said.

Much of the moving industry involved in military relocations has its own objections to contract rates offered by HomeSafe.

The U.S. Transportation Command awarded a \$20 billion contract to Houston-based HomeSafe Alliance LLC in late 2021 to replace roughly 900 forwarding agents who have until now managed military moves.

HomeSafe is a joint venture between Tier One Relocation and KBR, formerly Kellogg



Movers at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., pack items belonging to a U.S. Soldier moving to another state, June 12, 2019. U.S. Transportation Command photo by Stephenie Wade

Brown & Root.

HomeSafe moves are being made under the Global Household Goods Contract, or GHC, which has offered rates so low that much of the moving industry has not signed on.

The legacy Defense Personal Property Program, which still fulfills more than 99 percent of moves, is operating in parallel as the Global Household Goods Contract is phased in.

Harless, whose Army husband is stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., started a petition on change.org late last year aiming to move Congress to set higher rates for do-it-yourself moves.

The petition had garnered almost 33,000 signatures as of Jan. 23.

According to the petition, HomeSafe pays subcontractors 30-50 percent less than they are paid under the Defense Personal Property Program.

The petition claims that the HomeSafe reimbursement structure de-incentivizes service members from going the self-move route.

The Transportation Command said in an email Thursday that the petition is incorrect in saying that the rate being paid to service members for personally procured moves is based on what HomeSafe pays its subcontractors for similar moves.

That rate is set “independent of HomeSafe,” the command said.

As it stands, some service

members could end up spending thousands of their own dollars to cover the cost of a self-move, Harless said.

“Some families may not have that extra money to be able to afford that cost to do the move themselves,” she said.

Many service members avail themselves of self-moves.

In 2023, 82,977 households made full arrangements to move their goods, while another 37,399 made partial arrangements and moved some items by vehicle.

Rachel Griffith and her hus-

band, an Army major stationed at Fort Knox, Ky., have used PPM for numerous moves over the past 12 years.

“Using government moving companies is consistently unpleasant, especially since the companies selected were likely the lowest bidders, and they often have questionable reputations and hire inexperienced packers,” she said in an e-mail Jan. 13.

Griffith said they began self-moving after movers packed canned goods on top of a set of family heirloom crystal glasses and decanters.

from Headquarters, 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Cavazos, Texas, to the 66th Military Police Company, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Meanwhile, two Air Force C-17 transport aircraft on Jan. 23 began to make deportation flights out of Tucson, Ariz., and Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, according to two defense officials speaking on condition of anonymity.

The military crews operating the flights were “sanitized for security reasons,” meaning the personnel removed all identifying name tags and unit patches from their uniforms. Both flights were to Guatemala. The of-

She ticked off other reasons for choosing do-it-yourself moving.

“It’s not having strangers in our homes touching our personal items and hoping those strangers don’t pocket something they want,” she said. “Countless friends have had items stolen by movers, including jewelry and electronics, plus irreplaceable pieces, like the hospital baby blanket from their first child’s birth.”

While some movers are responsible and careful, “it’s a roll of the dice on what moving crew will show up at your house,” she said.

officials declined to comment on how many migrants were on the flights, but said they will continue to occur.

“We do not have an end date,” one official said.

The State Department is coordinating with the country receiving the flights and the Department of Homeland Security is providing in-flight security, according to the Pentagon.

Border continued from page 1

Detachments made up of about 500 Marines and Sailors from the 1st and 7th Combat Engineer Battalions from the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, were already deployed in support of wildfires in the state and began transitioning Jan. 22 to the border.

They will “secure the border and protect and defend the territorial integrity of the United States,” according to a statement from the I Marine Expeditionary Force.

The remaining 1,000 troops come from various Army units -

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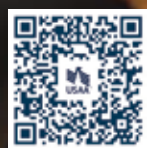
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Trump aims to cut U.S. force in Europe by 20,000, compel subsidies from allies, Italian report says

by John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump wants to withdraw 20,000 U.S. troops from Europe and demand a subsidy from allies to pay for the remaining American military presence on the Continent, Italy's leading news agency reported recently.

On Jan. 23, ANSA said Trump has been delivering his troop-cut message to European leaders since taking office Jan. 20. Trump "would like financial contributions from European countries because these soldiers are a deterrent, and the costs cannot be borne solely by American taxpayers," a European diplomat told the news service.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to questions about the report. Trump has long advocated for a smaller force in Europe, especially in Germany.

At the end of his first term, he ordered 12,000 troops out of Germany, with some to be relocated to other areas in Europe and others back to the U.S. M1A2 Tanks in formation.

The plan was never put into effect and was later canceled by former President Joe Biden.



U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment conduct a convoy during an exercise at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, in January 2023. President Donald Trump aims to re-deploy 20,000 American troops from Europe, Italy's leading news agency said Jan. 23, 2025. It's unclear what units would be targeted for cuts. U.S. Army photo by Micah Wilson

However, Trump's new Pentagon team has made clear that the U.S. needs to play a smaller military role in Europe and shift capabilities to the Pacific to counter a growing threat from China.

The U.S. has about 65,000 troops permanently stationed in Europe and thousands more there on a rotational basis. Since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the overall force level has been in the range of 100,000 troops.

It's unclear what units would be targeted for cuts, but the rotation of tank brigades to NATO's eastern flank, a linchpin of allied deterrence since the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, could be in Trump's crosshairs.

Newly installed defense officials have previously indicated that such rotations could be an area where the Pentagon could achieve savings. Other potential targets are assets that would be of value in deterring China in

the Pacific, such as warships, long-range artillery and Patriot missile defense units.

On Jan. 23, Trump told an audience of global leaders gathered at an economic forum in Davos, Switzerland, that the current NATO threshold of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense is insufficient.

Hegseth arrives at Pentagon, says warfighters are 'ready to go'

by Jim Garamone, DOD News| Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth arrived at the Pentagon Jan. 27 and said improving lethality, warfighting and readiness are the main lines of effort he will pursue while in office.

Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, greeted Hegseth as he arrived at the Pentagon. "It's an honor to serve on behalf of the president and serve on behalf of the country," Hegseth said. "In talking to the chairman and so many other folks here, we're in capable hands. The warfighters are ready to go."

President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency on the southern border. Hegseth said the "protection of the sovereign territory of the United States is the job of the Defense Department." He said he was pleased the Pentagon "snapped to" last week, providing troops to strengthen the border barrier and transportation "for the mass deportation effort."

"I'm also going to ask all NATO nations to increase defense spending to 5 percent of GDP, which is what it should have been years ago," Trump said, speaking virtually from Washington.

Trump didn't directly say the 5 percent standard would apply to the United States. Washing-

ton would have to significantly boost its own defense spending to hit the 5 percent mark.

Currently, the U.S. spends about 3.4 percent of GDP on the defense budget. Going to 5 percent would push the Pentagon budget of roughly \$842 billion to more than \$1 trillion.

"Whatever is needed at the border will be provided," Hegseth said. "Whether that is through state active duty, Title 32 or Title 10. This is a shift: This is not the way it was done in the past. The Defense Department will support the defense of the territorial integrity of the United States of America's

southern border, including reservists, National Guardsmen and active-duty [personnel] in compliance with the Constitution and the laws of our land, and the directives of the commander in chief."

<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4042099/>

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- Army and Air Force sweep out DEI-coded programs
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- Home from boot camp, Army recruit from Oregon dies of fentanyl OD

Navy

- Why the Navy wants to build a fully autonomous satellite
- Navy must meet recruiting goal for 3 years to close gaps at sea

Marine Corps

- Marine recruiter charged with felony child seduction of teen student in Indiana

Air Force

- New report: Fixes to pilot 'crisis' tied to fleet size, flying hours, reserves
- Air Force looks to upgrade Cyprus airbase as humanitarian staging post for the Middle East
- Air Force shuts down DEI programs, following President's orders
- Air Force groups that advocated for beard policies, better body armor are gutted by Trump directive

Coast Guard

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National Guard

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Your Military

- Lawmaker: Tricare West problems 'actively harming military readiness'

DOD employees charged \$500k to government at bars, casinos and online gaming stores in 2023, watchdog finds

by Rose L. Thayer, Stars and Stripes

Charges at bars during the Super Bowl, withdrawals from casino ATM machines and Roblox game purchases were among \$500,000 of worrisome spending that went unnoticed on government credit cards in 2023, according to a Pentagon watchdog report.

The Defense Department inspector general found the problematic spending during fiscal 2023, which ended Sept. 30, 2023, according to the report released Jan. 21. Much of the money went under the radar because 1/3 of program supervisors were not using available data systems to track potentially fraudulent spending.

The credit cards are issued to employees and service members to cover the cost of work-related travel and do allow for cash withdrawals, according to the report. The contracts for the cards require certain fraud prevention measures be in place, and last week's report focused on strengthening those guardrails.

While 70 percent of the \$6.4 billion charged on 2.3 million government cards that year was found to be appropriate, 12 per-

cent was inadvertently spent on the wrong things, such as alcohol or in Google's online store for games, smartphone applications and video streaming services. Inspectors also found cards used on federal holidays and during major sporting events when employees were unlikely to have work expenses.

About 2 percent of spending was considering abuse and less than 1 percent fraud, according to the report.

That's down from a decade ago, when the inspector general found about \$1 million had been charged to government cards at casinos and adult entertainment venues.

The most egregious case highlighted by the IG was an Air Force airman who withdrew more than \$10,500 from two



TUNING TIME Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Taylor Fleshman, a harpist with the U.S. Marine Band, "The President's Own," tunes a harp before a performance at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., Jan. 21, 2025. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Alexander Nottingham

Maryland casinos between April and August 2023. The airman tried the card nine more times totaling \$3,500, but those transactions were rejected because the card had reached its spending limit.

That service member received nonjudicial punishment after the Air Force program manager reached out to the commander a year after the problem began, according to the report.

The inspector general made

15 recommendations to review, update and create rules to better identify high-risk merchants and transactions, and better ensure that program supervisors are watching how much is spent using online spending data.

It specifically called for transactions be flagged for review that involve Everi, the company behind the casino ATMs used by the airman. It had recently changed its name, according to the report.

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Sailors salute the ensign during a retirement ceremony in Pensacola, Fla. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Tamon Si

Navy to issue DD-214-1 to Reservists separating Feb. 1 or later

by Lt.Cmdr. John Stevens

MILLINGTON, Tenn. – The Navy is improving how it takes care of its Reserve Force as it implements the DD Form 214-1, an official summary record of career points and service for those leaving the Reserve Component.

The Navy will start issuing the Certificate of Uniformed Service (Reserve Component Addendum) Feb. 1 for Reservists separating, retiring, or transitioning into the Individual Ready Reserve or Standby Reserve.

sooner than age 60.

“To ensure an accurate DD-214-1 and the correct entitlements, Reservists preparing to separate should continually review their retirement points, and submit accurate and timely separation or retirement requests at least 60 days before they leave the Navy,” said Satterwhite.

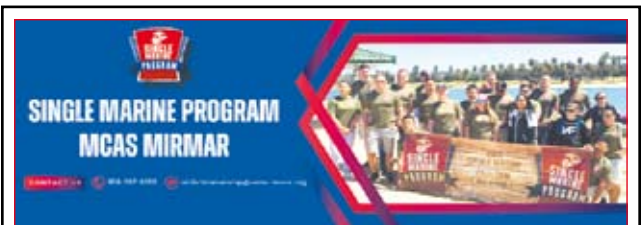
“Reservists can call MNCC any time to check on the status of their application or ask questions about the DD-214-1,” he added.

Navy Reservists will still receive the DD-214, or Certificate of Uniformed Service, for every individual active duty service period during their careers. Members will have copies of both forms in their Official Military Personnel File. Transaction Service Center Norfolk, MNCC’s Center of Excellence for separations, retirements, and Reserve HR, will process the DD-214-1 along with the DD-214.

The Navy is implementing the new form in compliance

with DOD Instruction 1336.01, which directed all branches of service to do so by February 2025.

MNCC’s mission is to deliver modern hire-to-rotate HR services through 24/7 customer service to Sailors, veterans, and their families. Through Sailor feedback, MNCC constantly strives to provide more resources and accurate resolutions. Contact MNCC at (833) 330-MNCC (6622) or Ask-MNCC@navy.mil. Find online self-service options on MyNavy Portal at my.navy.mil.



Single Marine Program

The Single Marine Program at MCAS Miramar provides an invaluable platform for single service members and geographical bachelors to connect, grow, and thrive both on and off duty. The SMP team creates memorable experiences through recreational activities, volunteer opportunities, and the means to address and improve quality of life issues. The program fosters a sense of community and provides essential advocacy, ensuring that the needs and concerns of single Marines are heard and addressed. <https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/single-marine-program>

“Taking care of our teammates means setting them up for success in the next chapter after military service,” said Rear Adm. Stu Satterwhite, Commander, MyNavy Career Center (MNCC). “Having everything on one convenient form will help ensure Reservists receive the entitlements they deserve after they leave the Navy.”

The new form will document total career points, total active and inactive service, and non-regular retirement (NRR) calculations. It will provide a detailed list of activations, noting whether each qualifies for NRR eligibility age reduction, allowing Reservists with enough active service to retire with pay

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San Diego Coast Guard announces the inaugural Coastie of the Year award

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Coast Guard in collaboration with San Diego Coast Guard City announces Petty Officer 1st Class Kirsten R. Allen, a diver with

Regional Dive Locker West, as the winner of the inaugural Coastie of the Year during an awards ceremony held at Coast Guard Sector San Diego Jan. 22.

This inaugural ceremony is aligning with the theme of remembering the past and embracing the future by being named after Petty Officer 2nd Class Mark

Mellinger, a decorated Coast Guard Vietnam War combat veteran and San Diego resident. Mellinger's service and sacrifice continue to inspire the next generation.

This new annual award honors exemplary Coast Guard members from San Diego's five local units who embody the service's

Core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty. "I am here to say thank you to all the nominees, you represent the very best of the Coast Guard and I am proud to honor you today."

From humans to canines: Twentynine Palms corpsmen cross-train with Army vets

by Christopher Jones

Naval Medical Readiness and Training Command, or NMRTC, Twentynine Palms corpsmen have been participating in cross-training sessions with Army veterinarians at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center enhancing their readiness to provide medical care to military working dogs (MWDs) in field and deployed settings.

The initiative, spearheaded by Army Capt. Andrea Lin, OIC of the MCAGCC Veterinary Section, and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Neal Petersen, provides corpsmen with hands-on experience in veterinary care.

Since September of 2024, corpsmen have been invited to attend bi-monthly training sessions to observe and practice key veterinary techniques, including IV catheter placement,

endotracheal intubation, and anesthesia monitoring. These skills are critical for providing point-of-injury care and stabilizing MWDs when veterinary specialists are unavailable.

"This cross-training is invaluable for fostering collaboration and ensuring we're prepared to care for MWDs," said Lin. "It's also a great opportunity for our team to develop leadership skills and confidence by teaching others."

The Veterinary Section at MCAGCC is responsible for the medical care of the installation's MWDs, including 24/7 emergency services and routine health maintenance. The team also ensures food safety for service members, families, and civilians by inspecting commissaries, mess halls, and other food facilities on base.

During recent training ses-

sions, corpsmen observed and assisted with various procedures, including a spay (ovariohysterectomy) on a husky, a neuter (orchietomy) on a shepherd mix, and suturing a laceration on a visiting MWD. These sessions also included detailed comparisons of medications and techniques used in human versus veterinary medicine.

MWDs are indispensable members of the armed forces, serving in roles ranging from explosive detection to patrol. However, they face unique health challenges, including musculoskeletal injuries, paw pad lacerations, and heat-related conditions. Cross-training ensures that corpsmen can provide immediate, effective care in the absence of veterinary staff.

"There aren't enough veterinary corps officers or Army veterinary care specialists to pro-

vide all MWD care in a deployment setting. We rely on the first line medics such as Army 68W and Navy Corpsmen to know and apply Canine TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care) in the field," said Lin. "Training like this bridges gaps and enhances inter-branch collaboration."



Petty Officer 1st Class Kirsten Allen, Coastie of the Year. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christopher Sappey

core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

"We are America's finest because of all of you," said San

Diego Mayor Todd Gloria. "I am here to say thank you to all the nominees, you represent the very best of the Coast Guard and I am proud to honor you today."

Allen is recognized for her exceptional on-duty performance, including completing advanced qualifications as a scuba diving supervisor and hyperbaric medical technician, earning personal recognition from Vice Adm. Andrew Tionson, and serving as a hazardous materials certifier, enhancing operational readiness.

Off duty, she volunteers at Coast Guard recruiting events and inspires future generations of Coast Guard members, notably mentoring young women in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps programs.

<https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4037143>

said Pfc. Amelia Knosp, an animal care specialist. "Personally, it has also allowed me to interact with more of my peers on base and given me opportunities to teach that I may not have gotten in other settings, especially as a lower enlisted member."

see MWDs, next page

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MWDs

continued from page 6

Corpsmen participating in the program have brought a wealth of enthusiasm and curiosity, impressing the Army veterinarians with their skills and confidence.

“The corpsmen are a lot of fun to work with,” said Angela Adkerson, an experienced civilian Animal Health Assistant. “While they may not know the ins and outs of veterinary medicine, many of them enjoy noting the differences between human medical care and animal medical care. They enjoy the new opportunities they get to try, like using our model dog as a learning tool for things such as IV placement, intubation, and CPR.”

The training has also allowed corpsmen to draw parallels between human and veterinary medicine.

“The vets were great with medical education. They allowed me to help them with procedures and observe their work. I saw how preoperative and postoperative care are similar,” said Hospitalman Jessica Sanderson from San Tan Valley, Arizona. “My takeaway from this experience is you’ll never know what kind of patient you’ll have. Being ready with proper training will help with future triaging and understanding that there can always be something new to learn.”



Veterinarian technicians practice vet techniques on military working dogs at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Veterinary Section. U.S. Navy photo by Christopher C. Jones

“The most challenging aspect of observing the surgeries was learning about the anatomical differences between canines and humans, especially while finding landmarks for intubation and with the actual spay or neuter,” explained Hospitalman Hailey Alaguena, a corpsman from San Jose, California. “It was interesting as well to learn about how certain medications used in the clinic have reversal agents that would otherwise not work if administered to humans.”

“I observed how quickly and efficiently veterinary teams must work to minimize an animal’s time under anesthesia,” said Hospitalman John Udanoh, a corpsman from Detroit, Michigan. “Working closely with a veterinary team teaches you a lot about precision, quick decision making and the unique aspect of

animal care. As a corpsman, this helps improve our adaptability and overall skills.”

The cross-training program not only enhances medical readiness but also fosters camaraderie and mutual respect among service members from different branches.

“We’re all on the same team,” said Lin. “Collaborating in this way prepares us to better support each other in a deployed setting.”

As the program continues, the participating corpsmen at NMRTC Twentynine Palms are gaining valuable skills that will enhance their ability to provide comprehensive care to animals when needed, helping ensure mission readiness across both branches of service.

North to south: USS Hampton demonstrates submarine force capability and readiness

by Lt. Cmdr. Tyler Barker

Submarine Squadron 11

From the ice-filled waters of the Beaufort Sea north of Alaska to South America the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS *Hampton* marked a unique accomplishment in 2024.

By operating in the Arctic Circle and all the way south through the Drake Passage south of Argentina and Chile, *Hampton* demonstrated the capability and readiness of the U.S. Submarine Force and their ability to operate anywhere, at any time.

“To successfully operate in diverse and challenging waterways is a testament to the incredible capability and flexibility of our submarines and the unmatched expertise of our crews,” said Cmdr. Grant Wanier, *Hampton*’s commanding officer. “This year allowed the *Hampton* crew to showcase our ability to operate anywhere, anytime, on Navy Nuclear Power while strengthening relationships with our international partners and honing our skills to execute any mission in any ocean.”

Hampton kicked off their busy 2024 schedule by sailing from San Diego to the chilly Beaufort Sea, surfacing through the ice at Ice Camp Whale in support of Operation Ice Camp. In ad-

dition to *Hampton*, fast-attack submarine USS *Indiana* joined the operation, continuing a long and proud legacy of high north operations by U.S. submarines.

“Being so far north in such cold conditions was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me,” said Fire Control Technician 1st Class Luis Velazquez-Perez, assigned to *Hampton*. “Even though we spent most of our time in the Pacific, learning how to operate up here is important for showing that we can go, and be, anywhere.”

In fall, *Hampton*’s crew began a voyage that would take them from San Diego down around South America and eventually up to Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, where they currently reside. They joined the U.S. Southern Command and Chile-hosted exercise UNITAS LXV off Chile’s coast. After wrapping up UNITAS, they continued through the Drake Passage and up South America’s east coast.

Hampton supported maritime operations for Argentina’s first ever P-3C Orion during an exercise of opportunity before stopping for a port visit in Brazil’s Itaguaí Naval Base in October. Their port call marked only the second U.S. submarine to visit

Brazil’s newest, purpose built, submarine base and celebrates the 200-year history of diplomatic relations with this critical strategic partner in the Southern Hemisphere.

“The crew of USS *Hampton* exemplify what makes the U.S. Submarine Force the preeminent warfare community in the world,” said Capt. Will Wiley, commander, Submarine Squadron 11. “As squadron commander, it is always impressive to see our crews perform so admirably no matter when or where they are called upon.”

For *Hampton*’s crew, marking so many milestones and accomplishments throughout ‘24 was a testament to the strength of the U.S. Submarine Force.

As the crew prepares to shift into the next phase of their operational life cycle, the experience gained through a busy 2024 will continue to pay dividends for the road ahead.

“I couldn’t have been prouder of the fine Sailors aboard *Hampton* as we sailed 30,767 nautical miles from San Diego to the North Pole and back, and then around South America for our homeport change to Kittery, Maine,” said Wanier.

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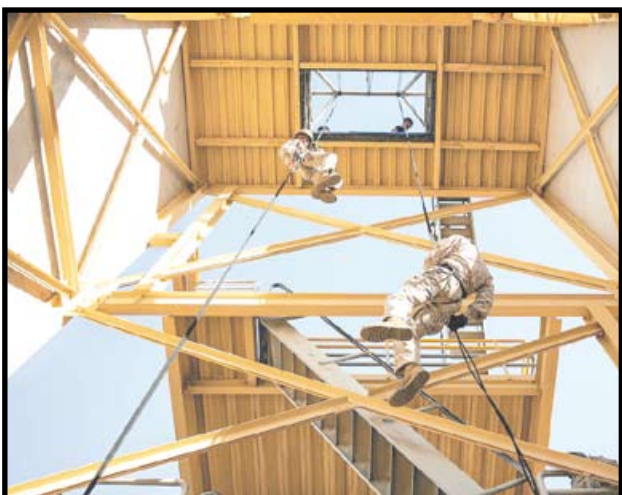
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STRUCTURAL SAVVY Navy Seamen Logan Choate, Syniah Carthen and Robert Applebee adjust metal shoring during a structural damage drill aboard USS *Preble* in the Philippine Sea, Jan. 18, 2025. *Preble* is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Ryre Arciaga



DEEP WATER Navy Lt. Cmdr. Igor Vladimirov and Petty Officer 2nd Class Cody Kramer conduct emergency scuba training at Naval Facilities Engineering and Expeditionary Warfare Center in Port Hueneme, Jan. 7, 2025. The training encompassed a range of scenarios to include unconscious, trapped and lost divers and a variety of dive-related illnesses. U.S. Navy photo by Lisa Ferdinando



TOWERING CONFIDENCE Marines assigned to Lima Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, descend from the rappel tower at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, Jan. 10, 2025. The tower provides opportunities for new Marines to gain confidence in themselves and their gear and is one of the last training events for Marines at the recruit depot. U.S. Marine Corps by Cpl. Sarah Grawcock



READY TO REFUEL Sailors aboard USS *Benfold* prepare to refuel an MH-60R helicopter in the Philippine Sea, Jan. 14, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Monica Walker



Luther Cuevas, a military police officer assigned to NCBC Gulfport Security Forces, participates in an active shooter drill during Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain 2024. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Derek Harkins

Navy Installations, Fleet commands participate in annual force protection exercise

by John Belanger

WASHINGTON - Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFFC) and Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) will conduct their annual two-part force protection exercise, Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain (CS-SC25), Feb. 3-14, at all Navy installations located in the continental United States.

"Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain reinforces our commitment to protecting our people and preserving operational readiness by testing our ability to adapt to evolving force protection, security, and mission assurance challenges," said Adm. Daryl Caudle, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command. "This exercise builds resilience and fosters coordination between fleet and shore forces, installation commands, and partner agencies, ensuring we stay prepared to counter modern day threats with precision and unity of effort."

Citadel Shield, held during the first week, is a field training exercise led by CNIC, while Solid Curtain follows in the second week as a command post exercise led by USFFC. This two-part training is designed to boost the readiness of Navy security forces and ensure seamless interoperability among commands, other services, and agency partners to protect life, equipment, and facilities. Both weeks will simulate realistic threat scenarios, including active shooters, unauthorized base access, and improvised explosive devices.

"Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain exercises are vital to ensuring the preparedness and effectiveness of our Navy security forces," said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, commander, Navy Installations Command. "These comprehensive training scenarios simulate real-world threats to enhance our readiness and interoperability with other services and agency partners. Our commitment is to safeguard life, equipment, and facilities, and these exercises are an essential part of fulfilling that mission."

For information about potential local impacts due to the exercise, visit your local Navy installation's website and social media channels.

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Recently I covered CES 2025 (the Consumer Electronics Show) in Las Vegas. The day before CES opened press conferences were held — mostly in the Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

This year, the first press conference of the day was LG, followed by Hisense, Bosch, John Deere, TCL, AMD, Siemens, Toyota, Samsung, Sony (located far away, in the Sony exhibit space at the Las Vegas Convention Center) — and one other, for Zeekr — a company that I'd never heard of, and I doubt that you have heard of them either. I had no idea what they sold, but since I was already there I decided to check it out. Was I glad that I did! It absolutely blew me away!

Zeekr is an automobile company founded in 2021, during the Covid 19 pandemic. Imagine that. How could Zeekr possibly be competitive against automobile companies that have been around for decades? How indeed, and yet more than 420,000 Zeekr production battery electric vehicles have already been delivered in over 40 global markets, including Europe, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and China.

Zeekr is part of the Geely Group, a Chinese car company that you probably HAVE heard of. As we learned at the press conference from Giovanni Lanfranchi, the CEO of Zeekr Technology Europe, and Dr. Zhu Ling, Vehicle Line Executive, Zeekr is a premium electric car company, dedicated to the pursuit of

Zeekr - the most technologically advanced car company you have probably never heard of

excellence. It has six battery electric models (BEVs) with several variations. Its goal is for its vehicles to be at the very top of their respective categories.

Zeekr has a multi-faceted explanation for how it became so good, so quickly. One reason that stands out to me is that Zeekr developed strong relationships with other, top-tier companies to learn from the best, thus greatly accelerating Zeekr's learning curve. Other reasons include parent Geely Holding's powerful brand equity and manufacturing synergies.

Zeekr has category-leading tech. It claims to have been the first BEV car company to establish an 800 Volt ecosystem: vehicle, battery and charging. Their Golden Battery Gen 2 lithium-ion phosphate battery is said to be "the fastest charging battery in mass production," charging from ten to 80% SoC in only 10-1/2 minutes.

Its AI-empowered driving is second to none, including driver-actuated autonomous parking; industry-first fully automated charging without manual intervention, via an automatic robotic arm on the charger; personalization based on behavior learning, contextual interaction, efficient journey management, comprehensive door-to-door urban intelligent driving and more.

Until now, Zeekr has had no public-facing presence in the U.S. It chose CES 2025 as a venue to test the public's reaction to several of its models, each a leader in their category.

The Zeekr Mix is a wildly popular, very cool minivan with nine seating modes, including 270-degree, rotatable front seats; and extra-wide entry thanks to its extra-long sliding rails and no B-pillars to get in the way of passengers. I asked about structural rigidity and learned that Mix actually

does have functional, albeit hidden B-pillars. When the side doors are closed, they tie securely into the body.

The Zeekr 001 FR "Hyper-Performing" battery electric Shooting Brake Supercar features a quad motor, 800 Volt system, producing peak power of 930kW; four-wheel vectoring control, coilover suspension, "Räikkönen mode" (F1 World Champion) and a pin-you-to-your-seatback zero to 100 km/h time (0-62 mph) of only 2.02 seconds! That's quicker than the Tesla Model S Plaid!

Zeekr's all-new 009 luxury flagship — a 6-seater MPV, features a dual-motor, 800 Volt system that produces 580kW of peak power and a zero to 100 km/h time of 3.9 seconds. Inside, a divider privacy wall with a video screen separates the flagship's VIP passengers from the driver's compartment.

Judging by the large crowds checking out the three Zeekr automobiles at the Las Vegas Convention Center during CES, Zeekr must have been very encouraged by the response, but stiff tariffs currently under consideration on Chinese goods could keep Zeekr and their incredible automobiles out of the U.S. market. Just like competition from the Japanese in the 1970s prompted U.S. auto manufacturers to improve their automobiles, wouldn't competition from the best Chinese manufacturers do likewise?

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit "AutoMatters & More" at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue 'years' boxes and browse. Copyright © 2025 by Jan Wagner - AutoMatters & More #868

A Raggedy Ann manifesto

I'd invite Raggedy Ann over for coffee if I could. She would get me. I think we'd be pals.

It all started in childhood, as most things do. I did the usual things little girls did back in the 70s. I rode my yellow Schwinn down Chestnut Street with the wind in my hair and the ace of hearts in my spokes, I dressed our cat in doll clothes until she hissed and scratched, I watched Fat Albert and Hong Kong Phooey cartoons, I played Barbies with the girl who lived on the corner. You know, the normal stuff.

But I also did other things. Things I've never heard other people reminisce about. Sometimes I'd lay face down in the grass and find a nice long blade to stick up my nose to make me sneeze. I'd chop earthworms into small segments on the tree stump in front of our house, believing the pieces would regenerate into multiple worms. I'd find my mom's old 45 records and play them over and over again, memorizing strange lyrics like "I bought myself an idol with a golden head" and "Bodiddie-diddy-bop I got a job."

Sounds like a serial killer in the making, but really, I was just quirky.

As an adult, my eccentricities continued to surface whether I liked it or not. I wanted to keep up with current trends, but somehow, they eluded me and I gravitated toward my own unique preferences.

There's nothing in my house from Pottery Barn or Williams Sonoma. Don't get me wrong, their stuff is fabulous, but those places don't

stock the interesting things I've found at church rummage sales, on Ebay, or washed up on the beach.

It never bothered me, until we'd have people over to our house, and then my differences seemed glaring. Our guests sometimes made comments that I chose to interpret as compliments, such as, "What an

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

interesting wine glass," "Well, isn't this cozy," or "My grandmother had one just like that." I'd tell them all about the dumpster or the garage sale, and sometimes they'd furrow their brows.

As a military spouse, I attended many socials and events with my Navy husband, which required me to show up appropriately dressed and engage in conversation with people I didn't know very well.

It was hard enough to find an acceptable outfit to wear from my trend-blind collection of old and new-to-me clothes from my eclectic closet. Then, I had to engage in the torture of mingling and chit chatting. In an effort to transform vapid small talk into something deeper and more interesting, I might pop prying questions like, "So, how's your relationship with your mother?"

One military spouse I knew during our tour in Norfolk, Virginia described me as being "intense." This was certainly a criticism, but considering that I prefer substantive friendships, I was flattered.

Over the years, I've learned that most mothers and wives don't have strong opinions about "The Godfather" movies, own thirty vintage ceramic Christmas trees, or read high school Physics textbooks for fun. Most don't have a secret wish to be a lounge singer, or insist on elaborately sorting M&Ms before eating them.

No one understands why I'm like this, and frankly neither do I. I've sometimes wished that I could be more like everyone else. Being in tune with what is popular makes it easier to fit in. A new military spouse on base will likely be successful making friends if she invites her neighbor to check out a trendy new bistro. But if she excitedly suggests, "Hey, you wanna go dumpster diving then binge watch documentaries?" she'll probably get nothing more than an awkward silence.

Regardless, we are who we are. People can't change what makes them happy. Every person is unique in some way, some more than others. When I forget to appreciate my distinctively authentic personality, I think of Raggedy Ann.

She'd like my house. We'd put on my old aprons, spread crunchy peanut butter on saltines, sing along to Ethel Merman, and watch Hitchcock movies. Maybe we'd give Holly Hobbie a ring and make it a real party.

Veterans News

Medal of Honor Spotlight: Army Maj. Audie Murphy



Army 2nd Lt. Audie L. Murphy, World War II Medal of Honor recipient. Courtesy photo

by Katie Lange, DOD News

Army Maj. Audie Leon Murphy is a World War II legend whose name is still easily recognizable today. Murphy was a movie actor, a country-western songwriter and a poet, but it was his wartime heroics and the Medal of Honor he received for them that first made him a household name.

Murphy was born June 20, 1924, on a sharecropper farm near Kingston, Texas. He was one of 12 children born to Emmett and Josie Murphy. After only five years of schooling, Murphy left school to chop cotton for \$1 a day to support his family. His mother died when he was 16, leaving

him and his siblings orphaned.

Murphy wanted to join the military, but he was denied entry into the Marine Corps because of his size — he was only 5 feet, 5 inches tall and 110 pounds, according to the Association of the U.S. Army. Eventually, he was able to enlist in the Army in 1942 after altering his birth certificate so that he appeared to be 18 — one year older than he actually was, according to Arlington National Cemetery.

After initial military training, Murphy was sent to Europe with the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division, which fought its way through North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany during the war. Along the way, Murphy earned a battlefield commission for his courage and leadership.

On Jan. 26, 1945, then-2nd Lt. Murphy was commanding Company B near Holtzwihr, France, when they were attacked by six tanks and waves of enemy infantrymen who were trying to take over a nearby wooded area.

Murphy ordered his troops to withdraw into the woods to find better positions while he stayed up front at his command post to continue directing artillery fire by telephone. As this was happening, an American tank destroyer behind Murphy took a direct hit, burning badly enough

that its crew also had to withdraw into the woods.

Murphy's resolve didn't waver. He continued to direct artillery fire, which killed several advancing enemy soldiers. When the enemy tanks moved close to his position, Murphy climbed onto the burning U.S. tank destroyer, and even though he knew it might blow up at any moment, he got behind its .50-caliber machine gun and opened fire on the enemy.

Despite being alone and exposed to German gunfire on three sides, Murphy continued to rain deadly fire onto the enemy, killing dozens of Germans in his path, which caused the infantry attack to waver. As German tanks began to lose infantry support, they also began to fall back.

Over the next hour, the Germans tried every weapon they could use to take Murphy out, but he didn't falter and instead wiped out an enemy squad that was trying to creep up on his right flank unnoticed. His Medal of Honor citation said that German troops got to within 10 yards of him, only to be mowed down by his expert fire.

Murphy suffered a leg wound at one point, but he ignored it and continued to put up a one-man fight until he ran out of ammunition. Only then did he head to the woods to find his company and get them organized for a counterattack, which finally caused the Germans to withdraw.

Nearly singlehandedly, Murphy killed or wounded 50 enemy soldiers during the battle. His refusal to give any ground to the Germans saved his company from possible annihilation and allowed them to hold their position in the woods.

According to AUSA, Murphy spent about 400 days on the front lines of the war. During his more than three years of combat, he was wounded three times, fought in nine major campaigns and was credited with killing more than 240 enemy soldiers while wounding and capturing many others.

Murphy earned 33 awards, citations and decorations, including all possible medals of valor from the U.S., as well as three French and one Belgian medal. He is still widely known to be the most-decorated U.S. soldier of all time.

Murphy received the Medal of Honor from Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch III during a ceremony on an airfield near Werfen, Austria, June 2, 1945.

That September, Murphy was discharged from the Army. Upon an invite from actor James Cagney, who had seen Murphy's photo on the cover of Life Magazine, Murphy moved to Hollywood to see if he could make it as a movie star.

He struggled at first; Army records show he slept in a gymnasium

until he got his first starring role in a 1949 film called "Bad Boy." A year later, he signed a contract with Universal Pictures, which kickstarted his career as a movie star. Murphy went on to act in 44 films, many of which were Westerns. His best-known movie was "To Hell and Back," which was adapted from a popular book of the same name about his war experience. According to the Army, that film held the record as Universal's highest-grossing picture until "Jaws" in 1975.

Murphy was also credited with writing lyrics to 16 country-western songs, the most popular of which was "Shutters and Boards."

Murphy was married twice, first to Wanda Hendrix from 1949 to 1951, then to Pamela Archer, with whom he had two boys, Terrance and James.

As Murphy built his Hollywood career, he didn't forget about his military roots. In 1950, he joined the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry Division and served with them until 1966.

The Army's biography on Murphy says he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and was plagued by insomnia and depression. After becoming addicted to doctor-prescribed sleeping pills and then kicking the habit on his own, Murphy advocated for discussions about mental health problems, something

that was taboo at the time.

According to Army Garrison Fort Gregg-Adams' website, "In an effort to draw attention to the problems of returning Korean and Vietnam War veterans, Audie Murphy spoke out candidly about his personal problems with PTSD, then known as battle fatigue.

He publicly called for the U.S. government to give more consideration and study to the emotional impact war has on veterans and to extend health care benefits to address PTSD and other mental health problems of returning war vets."

Murphy died in a private airplane crash on a mountaintop near Roanoke, Va. He and five others were headed from Atlanta to Martinsville, Va., on business when bad weather caused the aircraft to crash, May 28, 1971.

A grave marker is surrounded by small U.S. flags and a basket of flowers. Murphy's body was recovered two days later, on Memorial Day. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Murphy's Medal of Honor is on display at the Dallas Scottish Rite Library and Museum in Dallas.

Since 1999, June 20 has been officially known as Audie Murphy Day in Texas.

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FOR SALE - CONDO

VETERANS! OWN this Golden Hills Gem! Cozy 1BR/1BA w/fresh paint & 1-parking space. Onsite laundry, near restaurants/shops. 10 mins to Petco Park & SD Zoo. 100% VA financing. \$399,000. TRU Financial 619-520-8810 DRE 01769228 ^{2/1}

HELP WANTED

USS Midway Museum is recruiting volunteers for docents, air craft restoration, ship restoration and safety. www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/

Armed Forces Dispatch newspaper delivery driver for news racks, stands, countertops, etc. Coronado, Silver Strand, Imperial Beach. 2 Thursday mornings a month (approx 3 hours). Must have clean driving record, dependable car w/insurance, base access. 619-280-2985.

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CHULA VISTA – 2BR/2BA \$3200 & 3BR/2.5BA \$4200. New construction, near I-5, w/d in unit, 10 minutes to NASNI/32nd. 619-454-2545. ^{2/16}

CORONADO - 1 BR apt. lovely, quiet, classic furnished, tv & internet included, laundry on-site. Terrace view to SD & bay. 1 years lease \$3150/mo. Shorter lease negotiable all utilities included 619-435-8738. ^{2/16}

DOWNTOWN/GASLAMP – Furnished apt. Free cable TV/wifi/laundry. Full kitchen, parking available, 1 mo. min., king size bed, no smoking, no pets. \$3500/mo. Call 619-232-4045, www.mudvilleflats.com. ^{3/1}

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 It is enough to do my best.
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 I can make a difference.
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 I can get through anything.

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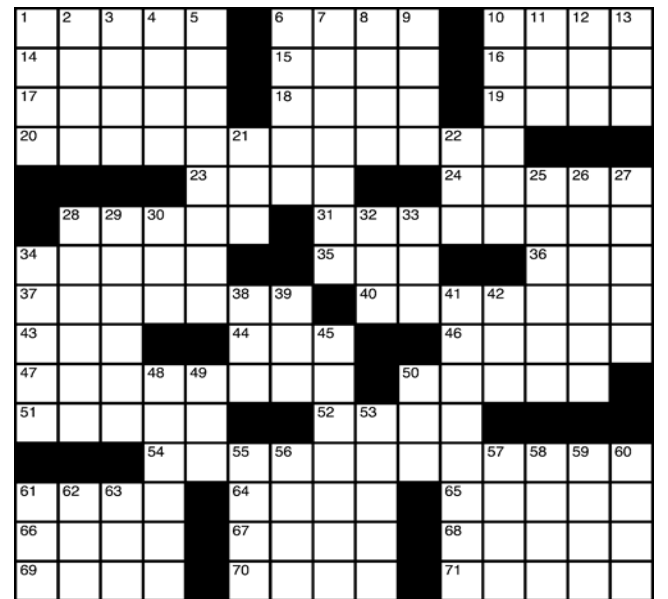
VOLUNTEERS WANTED

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- Across**
- Monastery figure
 - Move quickly, as clouds
 - Speak up?
 - Jazz singer Vaughan known as "The Divine One"
 - Despise
 - Lingerie trim
 - Speak from a lectern
 - "C'est la vie"
 - Bronze, iron, et al.
 - *Fried fare traditionally wrapped in newspaper
 - "Allow me"
 - Pal
 - Rx
 - *Missing nothing
 - Colorful South Asian garments
 - Veer off course, as a rocket ceremony
 - *Dhabi
 - *With 40-Across, defenders of the Holy Grail
 - See 37-Across
 - Golf hole meas.
 - "Bingo!"
 - Straight up
 - *Monkeys, e.g.
 - Pfizer rival
 - Lights up
 - Grocery cart unit
- Down**
- Starting from
 - Italian port on the Adriatic
 - Garments with hooks
 - Part of a swearing-in ceremony
 - Community with barn raisings
 - Suitable for hosta
 - Turn to stone
 - Four Corners state
 - Javier's "Being the Ricardos" role
 - Flat panel TV type
 - Ride (on)
 - Card worth four points in evaluating a bridge hand
 - "Bingo!"
 - Snooze
 - Cooking spray
 - 25 Slated, as some writing
 - *"Retreat!"
 - Sky blue
 - 28 Oh of "Killing Eve"
 - Urgent event
 - Fix badly?
 - Tell (on)
 - Be in debt
 - Zoom alternative
 - Tit for ___
 - *Shed
 - *Super heroes must eat oats* for the Great Lakes, e.g.
 - *Favor
 - *"Let me repeat ..."
 - Bronze, iron, et al.
 - Fire pit residue
 - Chaps
 - 53 Super Bowl LV city
 - 55 The "A" in many degrees
 - Fatty tuna, at a sushi bar
 - Personnel list
 - Spine component
 - 59 "Twilight" vampire Cullen
 - 60 Wetlands plant
 - Sack
 - 62 "It's the end of an ___"
 - 63 Label



MOVIES AT THE BASES

MOVIE SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE SO PLEASE CHECK THE WEB SITE DAY-OF TO MAKE SURE THE TITLE AND TIME ARE STILL CORRECT...

<https://sandiego.navylifews.com/> select movies at dropdown menu on left
<https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/movies>
<https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/theater>

NBSD and Lowry Theater Policy

- Outside food and beverage are NOT permitted: Sales from the snack bar support the movie program.
- These Theaters are cashless facilities. Debit and credit cards accepted only.
- Premium Offerings
 - Audiovisual assistive equipment available to customers at the front counter.
 - Handicap seats and child booster seats are available.

Movie Rating System

- G – General audiences ALL ages admitted.
- PG – Parental guidance suggested some material may not 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.



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/>

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Safety, quality care, transparency meet or exceed industry standards, top doctor says

by Janet A. Aker
MHS Communications

The Defense Health Agency's award-winning safety, high-quality care, and external transparency in all processes and improvements lead to "ready, reliable care" that meets or exceeds the nationally defined standard of care.

Continual fine-tuning and the use of both internal and external reviews mean military families and veterans will have as successful an outcome as in the best civilian hospitals and clinics, according to Dr. Paul Cordts, the DHA's chief medical officer and the DHA deputy assistant director of medical affairs. "All of our beneficiaries deserve nothing less than excellence, anytime, anywhere—always."

"We're proud of the quality of care we deliver. We work side by side as a military organization with the people we care for," said Cordts. "We have a unique mission in military medicine, and we do everything in our power to engage, educate, and equip our team with the tools they need to deliver on that mission."

Comparisons to Industry Benchmarks

Through public access to records, military beneficiaries can see how the DHA hospitals and clinics compare to civilian health care. "We post our performance for all the world to see," Cordts said.

"It's important that we compare ourselves to civilian benchmarks for a very large set of preventive and primary care measures," Cordts added. "And it's important that we compare ourselves to civilian hospitals and health care systems" directly, he added.

Military beneficiaries can make these apples-to-apples comparisons via information posted by:

- The Joint Commission Quality Check webpage, which conducts independent health care accreditation inspections of participating U.S. hospitals and clinics every three years
- The Leapfrog Group Leapfrog Group, a national watchdog organization, known as the toughest standard-setters for health care safety and quality in its Hospital Safety Grade Program
- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' Care Compare initiative

These three groups allow military beneficiaries to "make informed choices about where they receive their health care," Cordts said.

Of note, the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is a letter-grade program that focuses exclusively on a hospital's patient safety measures through more than 30 national performance indicators. Twice each year, it evaluates hospital safety measures such as errors, injuries, and infections.

On Nov. 15, 2024, Leapfrog

announced their fall 2024 ratings, and 15 military hospitals received the "A" grade. Of participating hospitals nationwide, 32% got the highest grade. Of the eligible military hospitals that took part, 75% earned the "A" grade.

"Achieving these grades is no small feat," said Dr. Cordts in the DHA's Leapfrog announcement. "The commitment of our teams to ensure the safety of every patient in our care shows that military treatment facilities are among the best in the country when it comes to protecting patients and ensuring high standards."

The Military Health System operates a Quality, Patient Safety and Access web page. This open electronic archive provides searchers with the ability to review their chosen military hospital or clinic across the Joint Commission, Leapfrog, and Care Compare with clear data showing how military facilities score on industry standard measures for patient safety, health care outcomes, quality of care, patient satisfaction, and access to care.

For example, you can specify a military hospital or clinic by name and review data on patient access to care and patient satisfaction reviews, quality of care, and patient safety information. You can also view overall ratings, which summarize up to 57 core quality measures, and download data sheets. A feature of the transparency tool is the ability to compare up to three facilities in a geographic area at once.

Cordts highlighted three other external national quality registries that rate the MHS: the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program, National Perinatal Information Center, and the Health Employer Data Information System. Delivering babies is the top line of care in the MHS. DHA medical facilities and TRICARE's private sector combined deliver approximately 100,000 babies each year, ensuring a wealth of experience in prenatal care, labor, delivery, and postpartum care—all covered fully by TRICARE.

As another measure of transparency, each year the DHA publicly releases a comprehensive report detailing how well the system is meeting the standards set for quality, safety, and patient satisfaction.

Titled "Annual Evaluation of the TRICARE Program," at over 200 pages, it provides in-depth data that reflect the current state of the MHS with in-depth reviews and analysis covering quality of care, patient trends, hospital and clinic ratings, and patient safety statistics. It also provides population statistics, TRICARE plan enrollment data, and a financial breakdown of the Department of Defense's medical programs. The report, required by law, is distributed to Congress and other stakeholders and is publicly available on the official website of the MHS.

Standardizing Care

Standardizing care across the MHS "makes the care higher quality and safer over time," Cordts said.

He pointed to two ways the MHS standardizes care: the MHS GENESIS electronic health record system and the 24 evidence-based clinical practice guidelines developed jointly between the DOD and Department of Veterans Affairs.

Cordts said the DHA will "hardwire" the clinical practice guidelines into MHS GENESIS to track adherence to best practices in areas such as limb loss and amputation, mild kidney disease, pregnancy, mild traumatic brain injury (concussion), and mental health, Cordts said. Electronic and portable medical records from MHS GENESIS follow military members and beneficiaries from cradle to grave, ensuring patient safety and quality of care across their time in the MHS.

When Things Go Wrong: Telling the Family, Telling the Public

Despite all safety measures, sometimes things go wrong in any hospital or clinic, anywhere in the world, civilian and military. Although rare, these adverse events need to be examined thoroughly from both the patient and provider sides. DHA defines an adverse event as death, permanent harm, or severe temporary harm.

Across the enterprise, the MHS Health Care Resolutions Program specialists and providers seek to talk to the patient and their family within 30 minutes of an adverse event either in person on site or virtually. The program goal is to explain the facts of the case and what happened immediately and face-to-face, if possible.

Because DHA believes in the "principles of high reliability and is a continuously learning health care system, our hospitals report patient safety events whenever there is an unanticipated outcome so that we can learn from these events and prevent them from happening in the future," Cordts emphasized.

Publicly reporting patient adverse events means the DHA has "comprehensive clinical quality improvement standards coupled with robust patient safety and accountability programs that promote a culture of safe, high-quality patient care," he said.

When an adverse event happens to a patient, DHA will "look deeply at the system that supports our clinical teams," and report errors through the patient safety reporting system, said Cordts.

Sometimes, DHA will do a "very deep analysis, called a comprehensive systemic analysis, or root-cause analysis, and in those deeper investigations [that look at causation and contributing factors]

come up with a corrective action plan that our hospitals are required to execute on," he explained. Additionally, "we then try to learn as many lessons as we can to deploy across the entire enterprise."

Health Care Risk Management and the Provider

The credentialing and privileging process for MHS hospital and clinic staff is the "foundational" review that looks at education, training, and experience to ensure staff are "qualified and competent," Cordts said. Candidates for privileging must have active, unrestricted licenses from the state or states they work in.

Once privileged, providers undergo a peer review by their professional colleagues on a regular basis to assess their quality of care and provide feedback.

Following an event that may or may not negatively affect the health and safety of a patient or active duty service member, DHA takes specific, structured steps.

The first step determines whether the incident met the standard of care, which means "was the care reasonable and appropriate or was it not," said Cordts, who's a vascular surgeon by training. Those standards are laid out in the DHA's 7-volume Procedures Manual 6025.13 on clinical quality management. The manual lays out dozens of specific procedures and processes that must be taken to ensure quality management throughout the DHA.

The aftermath of an adverse event requires some immediate actions if it's found the provider's ability to practice safe care is in question, Cordts said.

The "privileging authority"—usually the director of the hospital or clinic—can immediately suspend the provider's privileges, which pulls the provider from patient care, often the same day.

At the same time, the needs of the provider are addressed because "we are also very concerned about the well-being of the provider when there is an adverse event," Cordts noted.

Other options for action include the focused professional practice evaluation that "allows the privileging authority additional time to evaluate the provider's performance in more depth," Cordts explained. The privileging authority would consider standard of care cases in any subsequent new or re-privileging decisions being made on that individual provider, he said.

If there's a liability or malpractice claim paid out, or an active duty death benefit or an active duty disability benefit paid, those cases are transferred to DHA headquarters. Following a multi-step review process, the DHA director will make the final decision on standard

of care.

DHA has thousands of privileged providers, Cordts said. Maintaining privileges requires an individual to prove a specific set of skills and types of care learned through education, experience, and training—their credentials. Not everyone credentialed or privileged is a doctor—they could also be nurses, pharmacists, or midwives, for example.

Adverse events and adverse privileging actions may enter another headquarters review process which, in some cases, leads to further reporting. This process applies to both civilian and military providers and includes:

- The National Practitioner Data Bank National Practitioner Data Bank, which has permanent records of actions taken by authorized organizations regarding health care practitioners, entities, providers, and suppliers that do not meet professional standards and is part of the Department of Health and

Human Services

- State licensing boards, which can discipline providers for not meeting the standard of care in their state and make provider information public at their discretion

"My family and I receive care in the Military Health System, as do many of the folks who work in our defense health system worldwide," Cordts said. "When our patients come in to see us, they can be very confident that they will receive safe, high-quality care—and they will."

DHA oversees every military hospital and clinic worldwide. As of fiscal year 2023, it administered care in 45 hospitals/inpatient facilities (31 in the U.S.); 566 military ambulatory care and occupational health facilities (466 in the U.S.), 117 dental clinics (94 in the U.S.), and contingent forward-deployed sites worldwide to bring high-quality health care to 9.5 million beneficiaries worldwide.



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