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TAKING IN THE VIEW Air Force Gen. Adrian L. Spain, left, commander of Air Combat Command, and Staff Sgt. Tory Steen, a loadmaster assigned to the 418th Test and Evaluation Squadron, observe the landscape in the Western region while seated on the ramp of an HC-130J Combat King II, at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Jan. 10, 2026. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Heather Amador Paulino

NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO EARNS 2025 TOP SHORE AWARD

by Lt. Drew Verbis

Naval Base San Diego

Naval Base San Diego, the largest naval installation in the Pacific, has been awarded the 2025 Shore Battle “E” Award in the Fleet Concentration/Extra Large category, recognizing sustained excellence in operational readiness, installation management, and unwavering support to the Fleet, warfighters, and Navy families.

“This recognition belongs to the Sailors, civilians, and partners who deliver ready, reliable shore support every day,” said Capt. Brian Bungay, base commander. “Our mission is simple and demanding, support the Fleet and warfighter while taking care of our people and their families. This award reflects a team that meets that charge—on routine days and during the most challenging moments.”

The Shore Battle “E” Award, presented by Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC), honors installations that demonstrate superior performance across mission execution, readiness, safety, and quality of life. NBSD earned the distinction for its world-class operational support to 58 afloat tenants and 251 ashore commands, serving as the primary West Coast homeport for the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

“The outstanding performance of this year’s winners is a direct reflection of the dedication and professionalism of our Sailors and civilians,” said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, CNIC. “They are the backbone of our shore enterprise, and their relentless work ensures our installations are true force multipliers, enabling fleet readiness and power projection around the globe. I’m incredibly proud to recognize their achievements and their unwavering commitment to the Fleet, the Fighter, and the Family.”

Throughout 2025, the installation managed more than 1,300 ship movements and welcomed over 13 million personnel, ensuring safe, efficient access to the waterfront while sustaining the operational tempo required for forward-deployed forces. In parallel, the base advanced significant quality-of-life and sustainability initiatives, adding 680 electric vehicle charging stations and increasing shuttle ridership by more than 200 percent, improving mobility, reducing congestion, and supporting environmental stewardship for the workforce and families who rely on the installation every day.

“Our goal at Naval Base San Diego is to exemplify what it means to enable Fleet readiness,” Bungay said.

Operational excellence was further demonstrated during pivotal events in 2025, including a seamless change of command that

see **Award**, page 5



An aerial photo of Naval Base San Diego. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Austin Haist

\$1,776 ‘Warrior Dividend’ tax-free, IRS confirms

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

On Jan. 16, the Internal Revenue Service confirmed that the \$1,776 “Warrior Dividend” more than 1.5 million service members received last year, at the direction of President Donald J. Trump, would be tax-free.

In a press release posted Jan. 16,, the IRS confirmed the tax-free status of the dividend.

“The Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service today confirmed that supplemental basic allowance for housing payments made to members of the uniformed services in December 2025 are not to be included in income by those who received the payments; they are not taxable,” the statement reads.

According to the IRS, U.S. tax law excludes from gross income a “qualified military benefit.” The Warrior Dividend is just such a benefit and is therefore not taxable. Service members will keep all of the dividend to use as they see fit.

“The tax-free Warrior Dividend places \$1,776 directly in the hands of our warfighters and their families,” Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said. “The department is proud to recognize their sacrifice.”

On Dec. 17, 2025, the president announced that nearly 1.5 million service members would receive a \$1,776 bonus to both thank them for their military service and to commemorate the 250 years the U.S. military has been defending the nation.

“Nobody deserves it more than our military,” he said. “I say, ‘congratulations’ to everybody.”

In a related statement, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said the dividend illustrates the nation’s commitment to military service members.

“This Warrior Dividend serves as yet another example of how the War Department is working to improve the quality of life for our military personnel and their families,” Hegseth said. “All elements of what we’re doing are to rebuild our military.”

Coast Guard interdicts 15 aliens near San Clemente Island

SAN DIEGO—Coast Guard members interdicted 15 suspected aliens approximately 24 miles southwest of San Clemente Island, Jan. 13. At 9:43 p.m., Jan. 12, watchstanders at Coast Guard Sector San Diego Joint Harbor Operations Center received a report of an unidentified vessel transiting towards U.S. waters and dispatched Coast Guard Cutter *David Duren* crew members. The asset that originally reported the vessel later noted that it appeared to have lost propulsion for an unknown reason. *Duren*’s boarding team was launched and interdicted the panga, with no use of force being necessary. All 15 aliens claimed Mexican nationality and were transported by the Coast Guard to another Department of Homeland Security agency at Ballast Point.

Military now requires doctors to offer chaperone for sensitive medical exams

Staff at military medical facilities must now ask patients if they would like a chaperone in the room before a doctor performs a sensitive exam, according to a report in *Stars and Stripes*. Leadership made the change after an Army doctor was charged with illegally recording videos of patients during appointments. “Having chaperones available is a crucial part of patient-centered care,” said Dr. Paul Cordts, deputy assistant director for medical affairs and chief medical officer at the Defense Health Agency. “Chaperones can help protect both patients and health care staff.”

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Coast Guard Adm. Kevin E. Lunday is sworn in as the 28th Coast Guard Commandant by Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 15. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Gabriel Wisdom

Kevin E. Lunday is sworn in as the 28th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard held a swearing-in and assumption of command ceremony Jan. 15 for Adm. Kevin Lunday as the 28th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard during an event at Coast Guard Headquarters.

Secretary Kristi Noem joined senior Coast Guard leadership, members of the Joint Force and distinguished guests in recognizing the transition of command and Adm. Lunday’s commitment to leading the Service.

“President Trump’s plan was simple when he became President of the United States. He wanted to revitalize the Coast Guard, equip it with the best technology, ships, and aircraft available, and then recruit the

men and women that were necessary to run it all. It’s a tall order, and it takes a special kind of leader to lead this team and make that a reality,” said Noem.

“With almost 40 years in the Coast Guard, and with command experience that has ranged from the Indo-Pacific to the Persian Gulf to cyberspace, Kevin Lunday was the man for the job. Congratulations, Admiral Lunday!”

Lunday formally assumed the responsibilities of commandant and reaffirmed the Coast Guard’s enduring role as a vital instrument of national power responsible for controlling, securing, and defending the U.S. border and maritime approaches.

Former U.S. Navy SEAL convicted of transporting explosives to throw at law enforcement at California protests

by U.S. Attorney’s Office,
District of New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE – After a five-day jury trial and approximately three hours of deliberation, a federal jury recently convicted Gregory Vandenberg, a former U.S. Navy SEAL, of intending to use explosives against law enforcement officers at the June 14, 2025, “No Kings Day” protests in California.

According to court records and evidence presented at trial, on June 12, 2025, Vandenberg, 49, was traveling from El Paso, Texas, to San Diego to attend the “No Kings Day” protests, which were scheduled for June 14. While in New Mexico, Vandenberg visited a travel center off Interstate 10 near Lordsburg and purchased six large mortar fireworks, which are designed to shoot high into the air and explode, and 72 M-150 firecrackers, which are designed to sound like gunfire.

During this visit, he told the store clerk that he intended to throw fireworks at police officers at the upcoming protests. He asked detailed questions about the amount of gunpowder in the fireworks, their explosive impact, and their ability to harm others. He also discussed taping multiple fireworks together to increase their explosive impact. Vandenberg emphasized that he was not interested in the color or display of the fireworks—only in their ability to cause explosions and harm law enforcement.

Vandenberg, who has no stable employment and lives primarily out of his car, also made several statements demonstrating his knowledge of explosives and past special forces experience. He encouraged the clerk to join him at the protests and repeatedly expressed a desire to throw fireworks at law enforcement officials at the protests in California. He also discussed handing out fireworks to others at the event and noted that he would not get hurt because he knew what he was doing.

When purchasing the fire-

works, he falsely told the cashier that he was not from this country when she asked for his I.D., and he asked if the store was going to track him. Employees, alarmed by his comments, recorded his license plate and contacted law enforcement.

Federal agents tracked Vandenberg to Tucson, Arizona, and arrested him the following morning while he was sleeping in his car at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. Vandenberg initially claimed to be traveling for work and later falsely stated he was visiting friends in Phoenix that weekend, though he was unemployed at the time.

A search of his vehicle revealed the purchased fireworks, along with clothing displaying antisemitic, anti-Israel, and extremist symbols—including a t-shirt with an image of the Al-Qaeda flag and a t-shirt calling for the destruction of Judea. FBI agents also discovered that the home screen on Vandenberg’s phone consisted of an image of the Taliban flag.

It was further discovered that Vandenberg wore a t-shirt into the store that stated “AMALEK” in large letters on the front—a t-shirt that Vandenberg had specially made and that he stated meant the “destroyer of Jews.”

A review of his phone showed violent and extremist content, including antisemitic, anti-Israel and anti-U.S. materials, as well as messages discussing the upcoming protests. A review of

his phone also showed messages suggesting Vandenberg was upset with the U.S. government, including President Trump, because he viewed the U.S. government as being controlled by Israel and the Jews.

“People in this country are free to hold their own beliefs and to express them peacefully,” said

verdict sends the message that attempts to substitute violence for expressing one’s opinion has no place in our communities and will be met with federal consequences.”

Vandenberg was convicted of transportation of explosives with intent to kill, injure or intimidate and attempted transportation of prohibited fireworks into California.

Following the verdict, the Court ordered that Vandenberg remain in custody pending sentencing, which has not been scheduled. At sentencing, Vandenberg faces 10 years in prison.

Acting U.S. Attorney Ryan Ellison and Justin A. Garriss, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Albuquerque Field Office, made the announcement in early January.

The Las Cruces Resident Agency of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Albuquerque Field Office investigated this case with assistance from the Tucson Resident Agency of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Phoenix Field Office, Tucson Police Department, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) El Paso. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Grant Gardner, Richard Williams, and Joni Stahl are prosecuting the case.



Gregory Vandenberg wearing a t-shirt bearing the word ‘AMALEK,’ a term meaning ‘destroyer of Jews’ at the travel center on June 12, 2025. Courtesy photo

Acting U.S. Attorney Ryan Ellison. “What they are not free to do is use explosives to threaten or terrorize others. Vandenberg intended to turn explosives into a tool of intimidation, and this



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

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<https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

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U.S., regional partners establish new air defense operations cell in Qatar

by U.S. Central Command
Public Affairs

U.S. Central Command and regional partners opened a new coordination cell at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar last week to enhance integrated air and missile defense.

The new Middle Eastern Air Defense — Combined Defense Operations Cell is located in the Combined Air Operations Center on base and comprised of personnel from the U.S. and regional partners.

The Qatar-based operations center, established more than 20 years ago, currently includes representatives from 17 nations who coordinate the employment of military air assets across the Middle East. The new operations cell is designed to enhance coordination and integration for air and missile defense efforts among regional partners.

“This is a significant step forward in strengthening regional defense cooperation,” said Adm. Brad Cooper, Centcom commander. “This cell will improve how regional forces coordinate and share air and missile defense responsibilities across the Middle East.”



U.S. Army Central and the Saudi Arabian armed forces conducted the fourth iteration of the Red Sands Integrated Experimentation Center at the Shamal 2 Range near the King Khalid Military Center in northern Saudi Arabia, Sept. 8, 2025. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David Gordon

U.S. Air Force Central service members will work alongside regional counterparts at the operations cell in planning multinational exercises, conducting drills and responding to contingencies. The cell will also be responsible for sharing information and threat warnings.

“The [cell] creates a consistent venue to share expertise and collectively create new solutions together with our regional partners,” said Air Force Lt. Gen. Derek France, U.S. Air Force Central commander. “This strengthens our integrated air and missile defense throughout the region.”

The formation of the cell follows the opening of two bilateral combined command posts last year for air and missile defense. The new facilities, opened by U.S. Army Central in partnership with Qatar and Bahrain, will serve as hubs for integrated air defense planning, coordination and operations.

Joint Interagency Task Force-Counter Cartel (JIATF-CC) established

TUCSON, Ariz — The Department of War established Joint Interagency Task Force-Counter Cartel (JIATF-CC) under U.S. Northern Command.

Brig. Gen. Maurizio Calabrese is the JIATF-CC director. This is the next step in the whole-of-government approach to identify, disrupt, and dismantle cartel operations posing a threat to the United States along the U.S.-Mexico border.

JIATF-CC will work with the Homeland Security Task Force National Coordination Center to ensure sharing of all intelligence between our DOW of War, law enforcement, and Intelligence Community partners to ensure our operations across the whole-of-government are synchronized and coordinated to have the greatest effect possible on eliminating these narcoterrorist networks.

Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, commander, Northern Command, presiding over the ceremony,



Officials at the ribbon-cutting ceremony in Tucson Jan. 15. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jhade Herrera

said, “We are One Team — operating across multiple domains and via traditional and non-traditional means to deliver accurate, timely, and relevant intelligence to execution elements.”

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Editor.....Scott Sutherland

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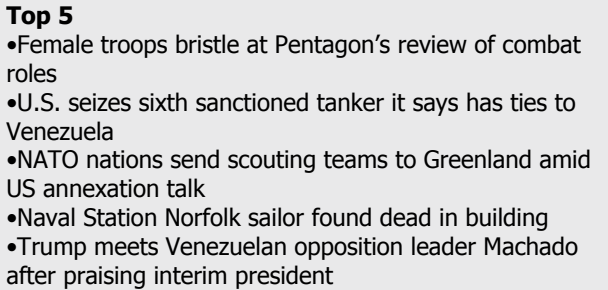
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- Top enlisted Soldier says he got 'over my skis' on new Army PT uniform
- Army competition tests medics' ability to keep wounded Soldiers alive beyond 'golden hour'

- Navy civilian ship repairman accused of smuggling psychedelic drugs into Japan
- U.S. Navy to deploy unmanned systems with surface forces this year
- Pentagon moving carrier strike group toward Middle East amid tensions with Iran

- MH-139 logs first convoy flight providing security to US Air Force nuclear missiles

- Lunday becomes U.S. Coast Guard's 28th commandant

Veterans

Cyber, Space & Unmanned

- Saildrone, Lockheed to place missile launchers on naval drones

- Macron puts local defense firms on notice France may buy European
- Lockheed delivered record 191 F-35s as it cleared out TR-3 backlog
- Latvia eyes indirect-fires boost with new Archer howitzer acquisition
- Czechoslovak Group plans stock-market listing amid Europe defense boom

- Remains of Cuban officers killed during Venezuela strike repatriated

- The U.S. is pressing Mexico to allow U.S. forces to fight cartels

•As tensions rise in the Pacific, U.S. partners say they are in for the long haul

•U.S. warns Cuba's leadership: 'Don't play games' with Trump

- Pentagon says it will 'refocus' Stars & Stripes content
- Gunner killed off Guadalcanal accounted for after 82 years

The Defense Health Network Pacific Rim Chief Medical Officer, Dr. John Rotruck, reinforced the network's commitment to high reliability, operational readiness, and trusted partnerships across the Indo-Pacific during a recent visit to Japan. His trip included participation in the 2025 Indo-Pacific Military Health Exchange (IPMHE) and visits to several military treatment facilities (MTF).

Drawing on decades of leadership, Rotruck, a retired Navy captain and anesthesiologist who served as commanding officer of USNS *Mercy's* MTF and force surgeon for both III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, contributed an operational perspective during a panel on multinational licensing and credentialing. The discussion focused on the practical importance of ensuring allied medical teams are able to work together seamlessly to provide life-saving care during combat and contingency operations.

Panel members shared lessons learned from past missions, emphasizing that repeated interaction and joint training are essential to building cohesive medical teams capable of performing effectively together in complex environments.

“When medical teams understand each other, their systems and capabilities, before a crisis, they are far better prepared to deliver safe, effective, life-saving care when it matters most,” said Rotruck.

rum like IPMHE play an important role in strengthening relationships beyond formal agreements and improving coordination during multinational operations.

“There is no substitute for repeated engagement and building trust between allies and partners,” he said.

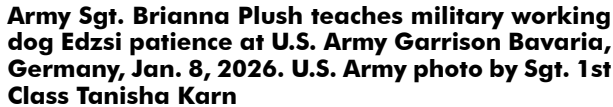
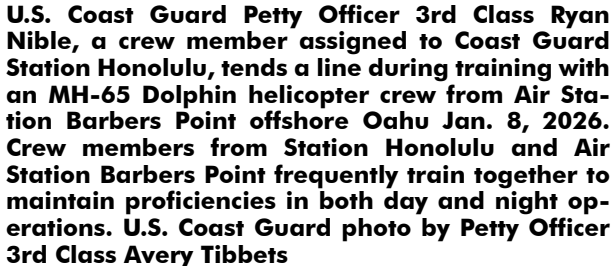
Following the exchange, Rotruck visited U.S. military hospitals and clinics across the Tokyo metropolitan area to better understand their capabilities and identify opportunities for collaboration. The region is home to facilities from three separate Defense Health Networks, making coordination and partnership at the local level especially important.

During his visit, Rotruck toured the 374th Medical Group at Yokota Air Base and the BG Crawford F. Sams Army Health Clinic at Camp Zama. He also visited Branch Health Clinic Atsugi and U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, which fall under Defense Health Network Pacific Rim.

According to Rotruck, staffing challenges have not deterred military medical teams who continue to deliver safe, high-quality care through professionalism, adaptability, and commitment to the mission.

“What stood out to me was the professionalism and commitment of the staff and the strong, collegial relationships that exist across services and networks,” he said.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/556410/dhn-pacific-rim-cmo-advances-readiness-partnerships-during-japan-visit>



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Army recruiter recognized for blending social media strategy, personal advocacy

by Twana Atkinson

Army Recruiting Battalion, Raleigh

An Army recruiter is earning national recognition for combining modern social media strategy with a deeply personal approach to mentoring future Soldiers.

Army Staff Sgt. Victoria Ortiz's method emphasizes authentic online engagement and direct advocacy for her applicants, a formula that builds trust with both recruits and their families. For her successful efforts, Ortiz will receive recognition as one of the top recruiters in fiscal year 2025 at a ceremony in the Pentagon, Jan. 21.

"My focus has never been recognition, but the well-being of future generations," Ortiz said. "When people feel valued from the start, they carry that same commitment forward and lead with care in return."

Ortiz's commitment is evident in the experience of Kaitlin Waterman, a recent recruit who sought to join the Army as part of her journey of personal growth. The decisive moment of trust in her recruiting process occurred at the Military Entrance Processing Station.

Waterman was told her mother could not be present for the contract signing because of a policy issue. Ortiz advocated for the family, reaching out to a MEPS guidance counselor to ensure the mother could be present.

For Waterman, the action was significant, remarking that "the experience highlighted the importance of having a trustworthy recruiter."

Five service members, each wearing their service's military dress uniform, stand in a front-facing line while holding wreaths in a cemetery. There are people standing in the background watching the ceremony.

The parents of other recruits share this sentiment.

"Staff Sgt. Ortiz was a bless-



Army Staff Sgt. Victoria Ortiz attends the 250th Marine Corps JROTC Ball at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C. Courtesy photo

ing in disguise," said Jason Smith Sr., the father of another soldier recruited by Ortiz. "You hear a lot of horror stories about recruiters, but she really wanted to make sure that she was doing right by him. She needs to be cloned."

Beyond one-on-one advocacy, Ortiz leverages social media to build connections. She said Facebook and Instagram have been her most effective platforms because they allow direct engagement with her target audience. Her content strategy is guided by the feedback and concerns she monitors from current applicants.

"Social media has allowed me to connect with prospects I may never have reached through traditional recruiting methods," Ortiz said.

Pentagon to start measuring troops' body fat by waist-to-height ratio

In a Jan. 13 report in the *Military Times*, the Pentagon issued a memo directing the U.S. military to evaluate the body fat of troops using a waist-to-height ratio, replacing traditional height-and-weight tables as the primary measure of physical standards. "The upper limit for allowable [waist-to-height-ratio] for Military Service body composition policies shall be less than 0.55," the memo declared. The new body fat expectations range from 18 percent to 26 percent for men and 26 percent to 36 percent for women, according to the memo. Personnel who surpass these thresholds will be enrolled in the military's remedial program, it stated, adding that failure to meet the standards "may result in the withholding of favorable personnel actions, including promotions." Continued violations, meanwhile, could lead to administrative measures, such as separation from the military, the document stated. Under the new rules, all service members will be evaluated twice a year. The memo framed body composition as a "vital component for the warrior ethos and foundational to lethality and readiness."

To streamline her process, she collaborates with a digital media specialist, Army Staff Sgt. Samantha Estrella, who helps produce content based on her concepts.

Ortiz advises other recruiters who are hesitant to use social media to remember the intimidation an applicant can feel.

"Start simple, be yourself and let authenticity guide your presence online," she said.

Ortiz believes her success comes down to a core principle.

"The key takeaway is to lead with authenticity," she said. "Consistent, honest communication builds trust, drives engagement and ultimately strengthens recruiting outcomes."

SAT prep tips for college-bound students

(StatePoint) While every college admissions department evaluates applicants a bit differently, standardized test scores are a big piece of the equation at most schools. This means you'll want to be as prepared as possible for your upcoming SAT. Here's how to get ready for this crucial exam:

Get equipped: A user-friendly calculator can save you precious time when every second counts, so gear up with a calculator like the fx-9750GIII from Casio. Its Natural Textbook Display and intuitive icon menu make it easy to use. The perfect companion for both the classroom and test day, it features graph plotting, probability distribution, vector arithmetic and spreadsheets, and has programming capabilities.

It is also approved for the SAT, PSAT, ACT and AP tests, and includes an exam mode setting to lock specific functionality for testing purposes.

Practice: Familiarizing yourself with the types of test questions you'll encounter on the SAT is essential. When it



The SAT can cause a lot of stress and anxiety, but it doesn't have to. With the right tools and preparation strategies, you can walk into the SAT with confidence and achieve your best score possible. Courtesy photo

comes to the Math section of the exam, you can lean on free online resources, like the sample exams found on casioeducation.com, to get prepared. The added bonus is that working through these sample questions will help you get comfortable with the calculator you'll be using on test day.

SAT prep courses are also a great option. Once out of reach for many families, today, a number of educational organizations offer them for free, leveling the playing field for all students. Be sure to leverage this resource to maximize your test readiness.

Read, a lot: From novels to biographies to the newspaper, read everything you can get

your hands on. It's one of the best ways to build your vocabulary and hone your reading comprehension. Building these skills can improve your chances of acing the Reading and Writing section of the SAT. Though there are many SAT vocabulary word lists out there, encountering these words in real contexts can be a more effective way to absorb definitions and usages than trying to memorize them.

The SAT can cause a lot of stress and anxiety, but it doesn't have to. With the right tools and preparation strategies, you can walk into the SAT with confidence and achieve your best score possible.

Award

continued from page 1

ensured continuity of mission execution, and the coordinated response to the Murphy Canyon plane crash. During these moments, base leadership and emergency partners acted swiftly to protect lives, support affected families and maintained mission continuity—underscoring the installation's readiness to lead under pressure while keeping people at the center of every decision.

Established in 1922, NBSD is the largest West coast naval installation and principal home-port of the Pacific Fleet, supporting more than 60 combatant and auxiliary surface ships and more than 250 shore commands.



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Tripoli Expeditionary Strike Group operates in 7th Fleet

Courtesy Story

U.S. 7th FLEET AREA OF OPERATIONS - The *Tripoli* Expeditionary Strike Group, composed of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), America-class amphibious assault ship USS *Tripoli* (LHA 7), Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS *Robert Smalls* (CG 62) and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS *Rafael Peralta* (DDG 115), is conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, Dec. 11.

This marks *Tripoli*'s initial forward-deployed assignment as the flagship for the Tripoli Expeditionary Strike Group. The group's presence promotes regional stability and maritime security in U.S. 7th Fleet.

"The *Tripoli* Expeditionary Strike Group is maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific while assuring access to the seas for all nations," said Rear Adm. Tom Shultz, commander of the *Tripoli* Expeditionary Strike Group.

"As the only permanently forward-deployed expeditionary strike group, our Navy and Marine Corps team's ability to operate in the air, on land, and

sea, combined with anti-air warfare, anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface warfare capabilities allows us to support any contingency in the region."

The 31st MEU brings the ability to conduct a variety of joint, maritime and amphibious multi-domain operations and activities. They are permanently positioned to provide a flexible and combat-capable force to contribute to deterrence, security, crisis response and multi-domain military operations in the Indo-Pacific.

"The 31st MEU is flexible and responsive. We're forward deployed and have longstanding, habitual relationships with Amphibious Squadron 11, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade and Special Operations Command Pacific," said Col. Chris Niedziocha, commanding officer of the 31st MEU.

"Those relationships, coupled with the unit's high operational tempo ensure the MEU is always ready to respond to crises and campaign with our allies or fight tonight."

Embarked aboard *Tripoli* is a detachment of F-35B Lightning II aircraft from Marine Fighter



An F-35B Lightning II, attached to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242 takes off from the flight deck of America-class amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LHA 7) during flight operations in the South China Sea, Dec. 11, 2025. Marine Fighter Squadron 242, part of the Tripoli Expeditionary Strike Group, is conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN

Attack Squadron (VMFA) 242, which provides the Tripoli Expeditionary Strike Group more stealth and flexibility than any other aircraft.

The *Tripoli* Expeditionary Strike Group is capable of conducting expeditionary warfare operations with Navy and Marine Corps capabilities to support

theater contingencies that range from crisis response to full combat operations.

U.S. 7th Fleet, the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

FRCSW opens V-22 repair facility

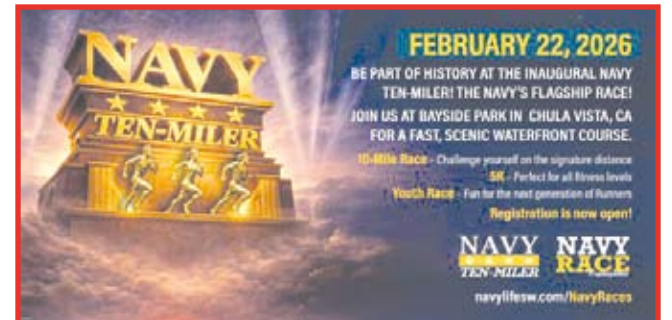
by Michael A Furlano, Fleet Readiness Center Southwest

Fleet Readiness Center Southwest (FRCSW) is poised to transform V-22 sustainment for generations to come with the opening of a brand-new, purpose-built V-22 repair facility on Naval Air Station North Island. The facility, building 418, is a 65,000-square-foot modern hangar complex designed to enhance capacity, reduce turnaround time, increase safety, and ensure that Navy aircrews receive the mission-ready aircraft they rely on.

The facility represents one of the most significant infrastructure investments in FRCSW's history, an investment expected to support naval aviation for the next 75-100 years.

"This facility positions FRCSW as the premier V-22 repair depot on the West Coast, exactly what the Navy needs as these aircraft are increasingly vital to operations. Our artisans helped design this building, and it shows. Everything in here is about efficiency, safety, and readiness," said John Goolsby, FRCSW V-22 Program Manager.

At 65,000 square feet, 40,000 dedicated to the main hangar and 25,000 square feet of shops, storage, and administrative spaces, the hangar was designed from the ground up for V-22 maintenance, modifications, and in-service repairs. The facility accommodates four V-22 aircraft at once, a 25 percent increase in bay capacity. This increase enables FRCSW to maintain its program of four Planned Maintenance Interval events per year while adding capacity for critical modifications, special inspections, and unplanned repairs.



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Honolulu Defense Forum drives multi-domain dialogue for Indo-Pacific region

from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
HONOLULU - Adm. Samuel J. Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and senior command staff participated in the Honolulu Defense Forum in Honolulu in early January.

HDF 2026 brought together over 400 U.S. and allied senior government and industry leaders to accelerate the shift from planning to execution, strengthen bilateral partnerships and advance regional security frameworks. This year's forum theme focused on "Operationalizing Indo-Pacific Readiness and Deterrence."

Paparo delivered the keynote address where he acknowledged commitments from foreign and domestic military, government, civilian, and industrial sectors in advancing strategic objectives throughout the Indo-Pacific. He encouraged the continuation of dialogue to reflect on the past, analyze the current strategic environment and chart the course for future endeavors.

"Alliances and partnerships are our strategic center of gravity," said Paparo. "When we operate with allies and partners, we multiply capability. We raise the threshold for aggression."

President of the Republic of Palau Surrangel Whipps Jr. and Japanese Minister of Defense Shinjiro Koizumi provided remarks, and former USINDOPACOM commanders retired Adm. John Aquilino, retired Adm. Thomas Fargo, and retired Adm. Harry Harris participated in HDF as well. Leaders discussed expansionism, hybrid threats including space and cyber, and increasing predictability for the defense industrial base.

Building on the momentum from previous iterations, HDF 2026 centered around themes including 'widening and improving credible deterrence and 'operational advantage through information, AI and data.' Attendees heard from leading experts on modern, consequential concepts including artificial intelligence, multinational space and integrated air missile defense, and multi-domain deterrence capabilities.

Paparo, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. and Japanese Chief of Staff, Joint Staff Gen. Hiroaki Uchikura, provided insights during a panel discussion titled, "Challenges & Opportunities in the Indo-Pacific." The panel was led by



Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Suzanne Vares Lum, director of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. The HDF is an annual conference hosted by Pacific Forum International, a non-profit, non-partisan foreign policy institute based in Honolulu.

Military component representatives participate in the "Accelerating Multi-Domain Deterrence Needs for the Indo-Pacific" panel in Honolulu, Jan. 12. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Christopher Sybert



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USS Fitzgerald returns to San Diego

Destroyer USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) recently returned to Naval Base San Diego following a lengthy underway period. While underway, *Fitzgerald* conducted a wide range of operations, including routine presence patrols and maritime security operations. The ship participated in several multinational exercises, enhancing interoperability and strengthening partnerships with key allies, including the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Republic of Korea Navy. *Fitzgerald* executed six transits of the Strait of Hormuz, ensuring freedom of navigation in the Arabian Gulf.

Former U.S. Navy Sailor sentenced to 200 months for spying for China

The Justice Department said that Jinchao Wei, a former U.S. Navy Sailor who was convicted of espionage by a federal jury in August 2025, was sentenced in federal court to 200 months in prison. Wei, 25, also known as Patrick Wei, was arrested in August 2023 on espionage charges as he arrived for work on amphibious assault ship U.S.S. *Essex* at Naval Base San Diego. He was indicted by a federal grand jury, accused of selling national defense information to an intelligence officer working for the People's Republic of China for \$12,000.

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Anticipating the future fight: Project Overmatch prioritizes training and self-sufficiency

by Lily Chen
NAVWAR

When Project Overmatch was first established in Oct. 2020 with a letter from then-Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday, the goal was to leverage technology to let commanders make rapid decisions and make communications more resilient in any contested environment.

Now, more than five years later, the Project Overmatch team is providing mission critical capabilities that enable Fleet operations around the globe. Currently, more than 80 ships are deploying with Overmatch-provided capabilities. This Navy initiative is revolutionizing how capability is delivered to the Fleet to bring next-generation technology right to Sailors' fingertips. Its team members span coast-to-coast, with an office at the Naval Information Warfare Systems Command (NAVWAR) headquarters in San Diego and headed by Vice Adm. Seiko Okano, direct reporting program manager of Project Overmatch, in Washington, D.C.

Even as Project Overmatch fields more capabilities to the fleet, the program's unique and novel approach can create a steeper learning curve than what Sailors might be used to. Where traditional acquisition timelines can take four to six years to deliver a capability or

system—too slow in the current environment—they also come with comprehensive, methodical training and sustainment plans. In contrast, Project Overmatch systems are developed and deployed much faster to meet emergent needs, with updates continuously pushed out to users — like the way applications are updated on modern smartphones.

"It's important for the end user to understand that Project Overmatch is not another material solution to provide to the fleet," said Cmdr. Rebecca Adams, fielding lead for Project Overmatch. "Project Overmatch is a process by which critical technologies are rapidly produced and provided to the fleet to avoid the delays of the typical lengthy acquisition cycle." Project Overmatch was conceptualized to provide systems, capabilities and initial training that enables crews to communicate, command, control and operate in communications-degraded environments on a timeline that puts us ahead of the expected fight, instead of behind it.

But that doesn't mean that Overmatch fields a capability and just walks away. Training and maintenance procedures for Overmatch systems adapt as the capabilities themselves adapt to changing needs. The fielding team provides hands-on

and virtual training options, and self-paced training modules are available online via the Catalog of Navy Training Courses (CANTRAC).

"Because the products fielded by Project Overmatch are going to ships ahead of the typical acquisition cycle, certain risks are introduced. One of these risks is the lack of robust training, which forces NAVWAR and the fleet to operate in different ways," said Adams. "As a Navy, we need to accept that getting technology-forward solutions to the Fleet will require accepting more risk than has been typical for new systems. We need Sailors to become used to our capabilities now, so they can utilize them in a future fight with little issue. We know that Sailors in the Fleet are able to meet that challenge and we're here to support them."

Adams and her team have trained 590 Sailors on five different Overmatch systems and developed eight instruction courses in 2025 alone, with more planned. They have worked with 20 ships this year to install and train crews on capabilities that enable resilient communications, increased battlespace awareness and AI-supported warfighting. With a variety of training options like online modules or large-scale exercise events or distance support, the Overmatch training team is focused on developing

Sailor self-sufficiency.

"We have absolute faith in the flexibility and creativity of the Sailors in the Fleet to take the tools we're providing, master them and apply them during operations today. The future fight will require adaptation at speeds that the legacy acquisition and fielding system can't keep up with," said Adams. "In a conflict, ships will need to update their systems in stride or put themselves at risk. We need to transition to that mindset now to be ready to fight tonight."

To get into contact with the training team for more information or scheduling opportunities, please email them at <mailto:OvermatchTraining@us.navy.mil> or call them at (619) 524-2116.

About Project Overmatch:

Project Overmatch enables kinetic and non-kinetic fires and effects in contested environments by operationalizing cutting edge capabilities through a digital ecosystem delivered through resilient command, control, and communications systems to an integrated, all-domain Fleet and asymmetric hedge forces. As the Navy's contribution to Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control, Overmatch is teaming with the Joint Force and allied and coalition partners to provide resilient communications and decision advantage.



Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Nibardo Serrano, right, the battalion sergeant major of 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, passes the colors to Lt. Col. Steven Bancroft, the outgoing commanding officer of 7th ESB, during a change of command ceremony on Camp Pendleton Jan. 15, 2026. Bancroft relinquished his role as commanding officer to Lt. Col. Andrew Nelson, the incoming commanding officer of 7th ESB. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Maryn Torres



Sailors conduct line handling on the flight deck of aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* during a replenishment with the fleet replenishment oiler *USNS Yukon* in the South China Sea, Jan. 12, 2026. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Malina Davy



Marine Corps recruits participate in a pugil sticks training event at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Jan. 13, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Janell B. ValerioAlvarez

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by Jan Wagner

Some of the major manufacturers in the consumer electronics space that I expected to see represented in the exhibit halls of CES 2026 (the Consumer Electronics Show) with the latest tech in flat-screen televisions, home appliances and more, were uncharacteristically absent in these categories this year.

In past years, we could count on marveling at massive displays of flat-screen televisions welcoming us to the latest in consumer technology from Samsung, Sony and Panasonic. Visitors would stand in awe as their senses were overwhelmed by colorful images and animations displayed in coordinated displays over multiple, large, flat-screen TVs. However, this year was different.

The Sony exhibit was occupied not by consumer tech, but rather by two electric Afeela automobiles. Afeela automobiles are premium-priced electric vehicles that are a collaboration between Honda and Sony. One of the two vehicles shown is being marketed now. The other was a prototype for a larger, more SUV-like future model. FYI, Ford, Mercedes, Audi, Toyota and other major auto companies seemed to be absent.

Unlike in past years where Panasonic shared a large amount of floor space with Samsung, Sony, LG, Hisense, TCL and other major players presenting devices in the consumer electronics space, “Panasonic — Explore The Future We Make” featured tech to evolve retail operations and tested volunteers with “Brain Healthcare Quotient Device” which concluded that I might have the brain health of an 80-year old — ouch!

CES 2026 - What was there & what was not from Samsung, Sony & Panasonic

Year after year Samsung had an increasingly greater, ever-more commanding presence at CES. It has evolved into a major player in the consumer electronics space, including televisions, home appliances and more, but this year, rather than dedicate massive CES exhibit hall space to displaying products from those categories, they chose to move that tech off-site, away from the CES exhibit halls. Instead, they chose to exhibit their state-of-the-art industrial robotic tech from Boston Dynamics: perhaps the world’s leading and most widely recognized robotics company.

Boston Dynamics is especially well known by consumers for its YouTube videos of dancing and otherwise gymnastically proficient robots, including the dog-like Spot and the more human-like robot Atlas.

According to the Boston Dynamics website (<https://bostondynamics.com/about/>), Boston Dynamics was originally spun off in 1992 by Marc Ralbert from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Leg Lab, where he was soon joined by Robert Playter.

Their first dog-like (quadruped) robot was BigDog, introduced in 2004. It was their first such robot to leave its controlled lab environment and venture out onto the real world terrain. Today’s dog-like Boston Dynamics robot, named Spot, became commercially available in 2020.

Their first-generation human-like robot, named Atlas, made its debut in 2013. It demonstrated “full body balance and agility.” I remember early Boston Dynamics robots springing leaks of hydraulic fluid. This problem was addressed by the introduction of the first all-electric Atlas robot in 2024.

Stretch was introduced in 2021 as Boston Dynamics’ “first-purpose built robot, tackling a specific set of

warehousing challenges.”

In that same year, an 80 percent stake in Boston Dynamics was acquired by Hyundai Motor Group, in a deal valued at \$1.1 billion dollars (US) (<https://bostondynamics.com/news/hyundai-motor-group-completes-acquisition-of-boston-dynamics-from-softbank/>). Stated goals of the deal were “to accelerate the development of cutting-edge robotics featuring advanced mobility, manipulation and vision capabilities” and “create a robotics value chain, from robot component manufacturing to smart logistics solutions.”

“Today, hundreds of customers rely on (Boston Dynamics) solutions to transform the way they work and extend their reach.”

At CES, Boston Dynamics robots were featured on their Tech Stage and in their Tech Lab. Showing the tech in action were Spot and Atlas, as well as Stretch, MobED — a four-wheel, four-wheel-steering mobile robot platform; Hyundai WIA’s Parking Solution — cutting-edge automated automobile parking platforms that lift, rotate and re-position parked automobiles; an Automatic Charging Robot and more. They demonstrated smooth mobility as they performed tasks in simulated industrial and commercial environments. On-stage at the Samsung press conference, a few Spots danced for us.

It is important to note that unlike Rosie the Robot from the forward-looking TV cartoon show “The Jetsons,” Boston Dynamics robots are expensive machines intended for use in industry, not the home environment. They are pioneering technology that will likely, someday, be produced in larger scale, for use in homes.

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— AutoMatters & More #913

I have no Ikea how to decorate

Good, bad. Bitter, sweet. Pleasure, pain. Love, hate.

These classic dichotomies most accurately describe my relationship with Ikea — the Scandinavian home furniture store known for ready-to-assemble designs and sleek modern style.

On one hand, I totally dig Ikea’s hip Euro-vibe and self-serve convenience. But on the other hand, for a person like me, whose home decorating style can best be described as Hand-Me-Down-Chic, walking into an Ikea is like crossing the Threshold of Hell.

The other day, I drove an hour north to meet a friend at the nearest Ikea. We became acquainted years ago when our military families were both stationed in Stuttgart, Germany. After we both moved to New England, we thought we’d meet for an afternoon of shopping and catching up.

As long as I’ve known her, my friend has been artistic, popular, stylish, opinionated and interesting. In other words, we don’t have much in common. But somehow, our mutual appreciation for tasteless humor created a common bond between us, and we’ve been friends ever since.

After a quick reunion in Parking Sector B, we followed signs to the Main Entrance. Despite the conspicuous lack of pitchforks and flesh-singing heat — we were at the veritable Threshold of Hell, after all — we found the lobby to begin our shopping escapade.

The staircase led us to an unplanned lunch of Swedish meatballs and ligonberry soda in the ergonomically ingenious but coldly Scandinavian cafeteria. Then, we set out on the compulsory one-way path that would take us on a mandatory tour of every product in the vast store.

All I needed was a couple of area rugs and a lamp shade, but I grabbed two of those annoying side-winding European carts, knowing full well that I would fall prey to Ikea’s marketing ploys and throw numerous sundry gadgets and accessories into my carts.

My friend, conversely, was a trained interior designer with years of experience and a keen eye for home decorating style.

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

She knew exactly what she wanted — two EXPIDIT shelving units in high gloss pink, a pack of FANTASTISK paper napkins in green, a pair of LILLERÖD curtain panels in turquoise, and a pack of BEVARA potato chip clips (her husband’s only request.)

Despite her specific mission, she stopped at virtually every showroom, tempted by the irresistibly chic displays and reasonable prices.

“So whaddya think,” she asked me in the kitchen showroom, momentarily forgetting that I have no home decorating skills, “could I make this work as a kitchen island?”

“Sure, looks pretty good to me,” I responded truthfully.

And a few minutes later, amongst a dizzying array of textile patterns, she inquired, “Ooo — wouldn’t this pop against my

new wall color?”

“Sure, looks pretty good to me,” I repeated.

And then, deep in the heart of the rug showroom, she queried, “Isn’t that a cool pattern on that flatwoven piece?”

“Sure, looks pretty good to me,” I redundantly offered, knowing full well that my friend just needed a sounding board, no matter how frumpy and unrefined.

Near the maze’s end, I wandered into a Clearance area strewn with damaged furniture, overstocks, and other tchotchkes at discounted prices. The reject in me loves a good “scratch & dent” sale, but I resisted the urge.

By the time my friend and I met up at the long check out lines, where the Ikea marketers strategically bathe shoppers in the aroma of fresh baked cinnamon rolls to lure them to buy snacks for the ride home, we both had carts overflowing with products with Swedish names we found impossible to pronounce.

My friend’s cartful of items was carefully selected to add functional fashion to her elegant and hip home furnishings. While my cart was piled high with impulse buys and sale items, which may or may not compliment my collection of hand-me-down furniture and thrift store finds.

Munching a cinnamon bun on drive home, I felt surprisingly content with my utter lack of home decorating prowess, and glad that my friend did not judge me for my ignorance. Despite our dissimilarities, we both understood that, when picking a rug, a couch, a coffee table, or a friend; the best advice to follow is, “Vive le difference.”

www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.com

Veterans News

Medal of Honor Spotlight: Army Sgt. Gordon Yntema

by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

Army Sgt. Gordon Douglas Yntema, a Green Beret, fought until his last breath to make sure the Vietnamese troops with whom he served could withdraw in the face of a firefight they couldn’t win. His selflessness and dedication to the cause earned him a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Yntema was born June 26, 1945, in Bethesda, Md., to Dwight and Cynthia Yntema. He had a brother named David.

When he was a little more than a year old, the family moved to Holland, Mich., so his father could work as a professor of business administration at Hope College, according to *The Grand Rapids Press*.

After first going to public school, Yntema attended two preparatory schools, Culver Military Academy in Indiana and Fountain Valley School in Colorado. His military education must have

stuck with him because in July 1963, shortly after he turned 18, he enlisted in the Army.

Around the same time, Yntema married Peggy Brown, also from Holland. They had two daughters, Elizabeth and Jane.

After graduating from airborne school, Yntema was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, where he learned helicopter mechanics. After deploying for four months to the Dominican Republic in the summer of 1965, Yntema decided he wanted more of a challenge. He then went to U.S. Army Ranger School, qualifying in 1966, before joining Special Forces in January 1967, earning his green beret.

By this time, the U.S. military presence in Vietnam was building, so Yntema was sent to the country in October 1967 with a detachment assigned to Company D of the 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces.

That same month, he received a Purple Heart for wounds he suffered while stationed in a Special Forces camp west of Saigon.

By mid-January 1968, Yntema was serving as an advisor to a Vietnamese reconnaissance platoon at Camp Cai Cai, along the Cambodia border. On Jan. 16, 1968, his team and another platoon were sent to block enemy movements near the village of Thong Binh when a firefight broke out with the Viet Cong.

The group’s friendly South Vietnamese commander was seriously wounded, so Yntema assumed control of the platoons and moved them forward to within 50 meters of the enemy’s bunkers. After 30 fierce minutes of fighting, they were forced to pull back to a trench for better protection so they could still carry out their blocking mission.

The situation went from bad to worse. A company of enemy



Army Sgt. Gordon D. Yntema, a Green Beret, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during a firefight that took his life Jan. 16, 1968. U.S. Army photo

soldiers moved into a position that pinned the platoons down on three sides before unleashing a mortar barrage that inflicted heavy casualties on exposed soldiers. Yntema’s remaining platoonmates were low on ammunition, so many of them chose to flee.

Yntema was seriously wounded and also ordered to withdraw, but he refused to leave his fallen comrades. As enemy fire continued, the sergeant carried the wounded Vietnamese commander and another mortally wounded U.S. Special Forces advisor to a small gully about 50 meters away to try and give them some form of protection.

He then continued to push back the attackers, who were trying to overrun the position, until he ran out of ammunition and was surrounded. The enemy gave him the opportunity to surrender, Yntema’s Medal of Honor citation stated, but he refused. Instead, he used his rifle as a club to fend off about 15 Viet Cong. His resistance was so fierce that the enemy was forced to shoot him.

Despite insurmountable odds, Yntema refused to give up, instead giving his life to make sure his surviving platoonmates could escape.

For that supreme sacrifice, Yntema received a posthumous Medal of Honor from Vice President Spiro Agnew Nov. 18, 1969, during a White House ceremony. His wife, Peggy, accepted it on his behalf.

Yntema’s body was eventually returned home and buried in the Pilgrim Home Cemetery in Holland.

His sacrifice has not been forgotten. A dining facility at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., is named in Yntema’s honor.

In 2011, a section of highway near his hometown was designated the “Medal of Honor Recipients Highway” in his honor and that of three other Michigan recipients: Army Sgt. Paul Chambers, Army Lt. Col. Matt Urban and Army Cpl. John Essebagger Jr.

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Family vacations to San Diego cost 19.1% more now than in 2019

from Luxury Link

A new study on behalf of Luxury Link has identified the U.S. cities where family vacation costs have risen the most.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic upended the travel industry, prices have rebounded—often at a pace that has outstripped general inflation. While travel demand surged back in the years following the pandemic, so too did the cost of family vacations across the United States. From airfare and hotel stays to meals and rental cars, nearly every component of travel has grown more expensive, placing new financial pressure on American families planning time away.

Key Findings, With Data for San Diego

- Overall vacation prices are up 14.5% nationwide. Across the 100 cities analyzed, the average cost of a four-night trip for a family of four grew by 14.5% since 2019, reaching \$4,668 in 2025.

- Overall vacation cost change: The cost of a four-night family trip to San Diego has increased by 19.1%, outpacing the national increase.

- Primary cost driver: The largest contributor to rising costs in San Diego was lodging, which increased by 23.4%, reflecting broader inflationary pressure in that category.

Despite these challenges, families still have options to make their vacations more affordable. Traveling during the shoulder season or booking flights and accommodations on off-peak days can significantly lower costs. Many are also rethinking their destinations—trading expensive coastal hubs and theme parks destinations for less-crowded cities or hidden gems that offer more value.

To help families understand where and how vacation costs have changed, researchers at Luxury Link—an online booking platform specializing in luxury travel—analyzed what it costs to take a four-night domestic trip for a family of four in cities all across the country. The analysis examined four major expenses—airfare, lodging, meals, and rental cars—comparing 2019 prices to the most recent available data for 2025. The findings highlight which types of travel expenses have seen the steepest increases and which U.S. cities have experienced the sharpest rise in overall vacation costs.

Among the four major categories of vacation spending, the cost of dining out has seen the sharpest increase since the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2025, average daily meal expenses rose by 28.2%—more than double the rate of inflation for lodging (+12.9%), airfare (+9.1%), or rental cars (+8.7%). For a typical family of four eating three meals a day, this jump translates to hundreds of additional dollars over the course of a single trip.

These meal cost increases reflect broader trends in the food service industry, where labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, and higher ingredient costs have pushed restaurant prices upward nationwide. And because dining out typically makes up a large share of discretionary spending on vacation, the impact on family budgets can be especially pronounced.

While vacation prices have increased nationwide since 2019, the sharpest spikes have not occurred in the country's most expensive cities. Instead, the steepest growth in costs has taken place across the Mountain West, where demand has surged in midsize cities that once offered affordable alternatives to pricier coastal destinations. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, the total cost of a four-night trip for a family of four has risen by 27.7%—the largest increase among the 100 cities analyzed. Other destinations in the area, including Spokane, Washington (+24.8%), Las Vegas, Nevada (+24.8%), Salt Lake City, Utah (+23.8%), and Phoenix, Arizona (+23.8%), also rank near the top.

These cities, many of which became increasingly popular for domestic travel after the pandemic, have experienced outsized jumps in lodging and meal costs. For example, lodging prices in Albuquerque grew by more than 50%, while meals rose over 45%. In Salt Lake City, rental car prices jumped more than 26%. Though overall vacation costs in these destinations still trail high-cost cities like New York or Boston, the rate of increase has outpaced the national average by a significant margin.

Outside the Mountain West, notable increases were also observed in parts of the South. Nashville, Tennessee (+22.6%), Savannah, Georgia (+21.3%), and Atlanta, Georgia (+20.7%) each saw family vacation costs climb more than 20% since 2019. In total, 20 cities experienced increases of 19% or more—well above the 14.5% national average. These patterns suggest that vacation inflation has been most intense in smaller or mid-tier cities that have grown in popularity but may lack the infrastructure to absorb higher visitor volumes without significant price pressures.

Here is a summary of the data for San Diego, CA:

Change in cost of 4-night stay for a family of 4 (2019–2025): +19.1%

Total cost of a 4-night stay for a family of 4 (2025): \$5,180

Change in round-trip flight cost (2019–2025): +15.1%

Change in lodging cost (2019–2025): +23.4%

Change in meal cost (2019–2025): +21.1%

Change in rental car cost (2019–2025): +11.9%

For reference, here are the statistics for the entire United States:

Change in cost of 4-night stay for a family of 4 (2019–2025): +14.5%

Total cost of a 4-night stay for a family of 4 (2025): \$4,668

Change in round-trip flight cost (2019–2025): +9.1%

Change in lodging cost (2019–2025): +12.9%

Change in meal cost (2019–2025): +28.2%

Change in rental car cost (2019–2025): +8.7%

Link to the full report: <https://www.luxurylink.com/blog/family-vacation-costs-risen-most/>

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

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



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Air National Guard captain delivers baby in hospital parking lot

by TSgt. Melissa Sterling

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- An Air National Guard medical officer supporting operations in the nation's capital delivered a baby in the front seat of a car just outside a hospital emergency room days before Christmas, turning a routine evening into an unexpected life-saving moment and underscoring how service members support the community in ways that often extend beyond their assigned mission.

Capt. April McClung, a nurse assigned to the 130th Airlift Wing, West Virginia Air National Guard, delivered the baby Dec. 23, 2025, outside Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. McClung is assigned to the Joint Task Force-District of Columbia, supporting the D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission.

The D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission focuses on supporting civil authorities, enhancing public safety and strengthening community confidence through visible, disciplined service. While much of that work includes presence patrols, coordination with partners and assistance at



U.S. Air National Guard Capt. April McClung, a nurse assigned to the 130th Medical Group's chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosives enhanced response force package (CERFP), poses for a photo outside the National Building Museum, Jan. 9, 2026. McClung is serving with Joint Task Force-District of Columbia in support of the D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission, which provides public safety support and coordination alongside local and federal partners throughout the nation's capital. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Melissa Sterling

key locations across the District, McClung's experience reflects how Guard members remain prepared to help wherever the need arises.

McClung was inside the hospital when a man rushed to the registration desk seeking help, explaining his wife was in labor in their car. Minutes later, he returned with greater urgency, saying the baby was coming immediately. Drawing on decades of medical experience, McClung stepped forward.

"I've been a nurse for 28 years, specifically as an obstetrics nurse, and I've also worked in emergency care," McClung said. "I knew that if the mother had just a little help, she would deliver her baby safely, and that keeping the baby warm would be critical."

After informing hospital staff of her background, McClung went outside to help. At the curb, she found the mother kneeling in the front passenger seat, the baby already crowning, while the family's toddler sat crying in a car seat. While the father

was searching for a blanket, McClung calmly coached the mother to control her breathing and allow the delivery to progress naturally to reduce the risk of injury.

An emergency room physician and additional staff arrived shortly afterward. McClung relayed the need for essential medical equipment, including a cord clamp, bulb syringe, warm blankets and a stretcher. She continued to support the mother as the doctor and the baby's father completed the delivery.

When the umbilical cord was found wrapped around the baby's neck, McClung advised the physician on how to safely reduce it. Moments later, the baby cried, signaling a successful delivery. The newborn was placed in warm blankets and transported for further care, while the mother was safely transferred to the emergency room for evaluation.

McClung said her professional experience and military training prepared her to act decisively.

"I knew I could do the delivery myself if I needed to," she said. "Emergency delivery is part of my required military training, and over the years I've delivered many babies before doctors could arrive."

Her response, she said, reflects the same principles that guide the D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission: readiness, disciplined initiative and a commitment to serve the public.

"The military teaches you to step up when called, make sound decisions and work through chaotic situations with the resources you have to complete the mission," McClung said. "That mindset guided everything I did that night."

The incident highlights how National Guard service members support communities in a wide range of ways - from planned operations that enhance safety and stability to unforeseen moments that require immediate action. Whether assisting with public safety missions, supporting community events or providing emergency medical care, Guard members are trained to respond when needed.

Reflecting on the experience, McClung described the moment as deeply meaningful.

"I knew this was a special and sacred moment for the mother and father, and I was honored to help," she said. "Being so close to Christmas made it even more special."

McClung said she hopes the experience helps the community better understand the purpose behind missions like D.C. Safe and Beautiful.

"We're here to serve our country and our communities," she said. "Sometimes that means supporting large operations, and sometimes it means helping one family in a moment they'll never forget. We genuinely care about the people who live here."

Nellis medics take the reins, host first 'Medic Rodeo'

by Robyn Stulgaitis

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. — Cannon blasts echoed across the desert and a helicopter hovered overhead as the cries of casualties cut through the air. This scenario was no ordinary training day; it was the inaugural Medic Rodeo at Nellis Air Force Base, a grueling race against the clock that would test the skills of the installation's medics.

While a first for Nellis, the Medic Rodeo draws on a long-standing Air Force tradition, using realistic, high-stress combat scenarios to test battlefield medical skills in a competitive setting.

SSgt Abey Lewis and TSgt Daniel Schmidt spearheaded the effort to bring the event to Nellis, drawing on their own experiences competing at Cannon AFB's medic rodeo.

"We want to prepare our medics before they are thrown into the fire," said Lewis. "We want to be the best fighting air force and also be able to bring our people home when they need to come home."

The competition featured four teams of five, each composed of two clinical medics, two non-clinical medics, and a dedicated coach.

"The teams are made up of people that normally don't work together directly," explained Schmidt. "In these scenarios we get them working shoulder-to-



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Rafael Diaz, left, an aerospace medical technician and Staff Sgt. Danielle Dan, right, a health services management craftsman, both assigned to the 99th Medical Group, reassess patient care during the 2025 Diamondback Medic Rodeo at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Lauren Clevenger.

shoulder. Everyone has something to bring to the table."

The teams navigated the medical response following a simulated drone strike, progressing through three distinct phases: care under fire, tactical field care, and tactical evacuation care. Adding a powerful layer of realism to the exercise, real patient volunteers acted as casualties during the four-hour scenario. Teams met the challenges of treating battlefield injuries including inhalation burns, broken pelvises, lacerations, symptoms of shock and hemorrhagic shock, necessitating expert blood product resuscitation. Striving for the highest level of realism, the event was a base-wide effort,

using assets from across the installation.

"The Fire Squadron provided access to the burn pit training area, Security Forces provided training weapons, and EOD simulated cannon blasts," said Lewis. "We wanted to promote as much realism as possible."

Medic Rodeo events use Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) guidelines to challenge technical skills, leadership, and teamwork, preparing medics for austere environments. Lewis, a certified TCCC Instructor, emphasized the importance of TCCC principles.

"TCCC has a special place

in my heart," said Lewis. "It's all about trauma medicine. Our stateside job is clinical and keeping warfighters ready, but when downrange the focus is trauma medicine."

For medic rodeo competitor Col Cody Hess, Administrator, Mike O'Callaghan Military Medical Center, the event reflected a broader commitment to readiness.

"This was an incredibly value-added experience," said Hess. "The urgency our team felt in that simulated environment is the same urgency we need to bring every day and continue to train with purpose. This drives muscle memory, strengthens teamwork, and develops the confidence to act decisively in a crisis."

Emerging victorious in Nellis' first medic rodeo, TSgt Brianna Gonzalez, SrA Christian Macgregor, SSgt Danielle Dan, SrA Jonathan Fuentes, and A1C Rafael Diaz will be recommended to represent Air Combat Command and compete in the 2026 Medic Rodeo.

Severe blood shortage: Give blood with Red Cross now

The American Red Cross is facing a severe blood shortage, and individuals are urged to give now so patients don't face delays in lifesaving care. Winter typically puts pressure on the blood supply, and volunteer blood donors are the key to helping save lives.

There's no time to wait — we're asking eligible donors to make an appointment to give blood as soon as possible. As a thank-you, those who come to give through Jan. 25, 2026, will be automatically entered for a chance to win a trip for two to Super Bowl LX in Santa Clara, California. See RedCrossBlood.org/SuperBowl for full details.

All who come to give Jan. 26-Feb. 28, 2026, will receive a \$20 e-gift card to a merchant of choice. See RedCrossBlood.org/Heart for details.

Make an appointment today to give blood by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting red-cross-blood-dot-org or calling 1-800-RED CROSS to schedule your donation. Take action and help save lives!

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June 15: Los Tigres Del Norte
June 15: Sure Fire Soul Ensemble
June 18: Jordan Davis
June 18: That Arena Rock Show
June 19: Xscape
June 19: No Duh

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June 8: Boney James
June 12: The California Honeydrops
June 13: The California Honeydrops
June 19: Mary Chapin Carpenter and Brandy Clark
June 24: Elvis Costello & Charlie Sexton
Aug 18: Tennis and Alice Phoebe Lou
Aug 24: Pink Martini
Aug 26: Burton Cummings
Sept 1: Hiatus Kaiyote
Sept 9: MJ Lenderman & The Wind and Nap Eyes
Sept 27: Stereophonics
Nov 2: Little River Band
Nov 5: Aly & AJ

Magnolia
May 21: David Bisbal
June 27: Prince Again: A Tribute to Prince
July 12: Bruno & the Hooligans
Aug 7: Caloncho and Daniel Me Estás Matando
Aug 15: Macy Gray
Aug 23: Buena Vista Orchestra
Aug 24: Béla Fleck & the Flecktones
Aug 29: Will Wood
Aug 30: Alicia Villarreal
Sept 11: Steven Wilson
Sept 29: Sparks
Oct 16: John 5 and Richie Kotzen
Oct 19: Choir! Choir! Choir!
Oct 24: Black Jacket Symphony: AC/DC Back in Black

Moonlight Amphitheatre in Brengle Terrace Park
May 22: Tusk: Fleetwood Mac Tribute
May 23: The Sixties Show
May 24: Michael W. Smith
July 31: Mick Adams & the Stones
Aug 1: Uptown Motown Celebration
Aug 2: Leann Rimes
Oct 2: Anything for Salinas: A Tribute to Selena
Oct 3: 24k Magic: Bruno Mars Tribute
Oct 4: Pop 2000 Tour

North Island Credit Union Amphitheatre
May 22: Hardy and Koe Wetzel
May 24: Simple Minds, Soft Cell, Modern English
June 19: Dierks Bentley
June 21: Jorge Medina & Josi Cuén
July 19: Incubus and Manchester Orchestra
Aug 6: Creed and Mammoth WVH
Aug 24: Big Time Rush
Aug 27: Nelly and Ja Rule
Sept 5: Little Big Town
Sept 6: \$uicideboy\$
Sept 23: Billy Idol and Joan Jett & the Blackhearts
Oct 4: Luis R. Conriquez

Oct 18: Alice Cooper and Judas Priest

Old Poway Park
June 7: Sam Hinton Folk Heritage Festival

Open Air Theatre
May 30: James Arthur
June 4: The Black Keys
June 20: Barenaked Ladies and Guster
June 22: 90s Pop Tour
July 12: Brit Floyd and Alan Parsons
July 23: Father John Misty
July 24: Dispatch and John Butler
Aug 2: Primus and MonoNeon
Aug 10: Alabama Shakes
Aug 16: Michael Franti and Allen Stone
Aug 17: The Australian Pink Floyd Show
Aug 20: Japanese Breakfast
Aug 21: Lost 80s Live
Sept 3: The Flaming Lips and Modest Mouse
Sept 9: Lucy Dacus
Sept 13: Gregory Alan Isakov
Sept 18: Kidz Bop
Sept 23: Chevelle and Asking Alexandria
Sept 24: Air
Sept 26: Eladio Carrión
Oct 4: UB40
Nov 7: Miguel Bosé
Nov 10: Avatar: The Last Airbender In Concert
Nov 15: José María Napoleón

Pechanga Arena San Diego
June 14: Ivan Cornejo
June 21: Wu-Tang Clan
Aug 1: Phil Wickham & Brandon Lake
Aug 13: Heart and Todd Rundgren
Aug 24: Kali Uchis and Thee Sacred Souls
Sept 27: Benson Boone

Pechanga Resort & Casino
July 13: Oak Ridge Boys
Aug 22: Burton Cummings
Oct 30: Daryl Hall and Glenn Tilbrook

Petco Park
May 29: Hippie Sabotage and Two Feet
June 5: Brand New
June 7: Brad Paisley and Walker Hayes
June 13: Peach Pit and Briston Maroney
June 27: Purple Disco Machine
July 2: Summer of Loud Tour
July 16: The Driver Era: Obsession Tour
July 19: Billy Currington and Kip Moore
July 20: Iration and Inner Circle
July 31: Teddy Swims
Aug 6: Kevin Kaarl
Aug 7: Counting Crows
Aug 16: Blues Traveler and Gin Blossoms
Aug 27: Pixies
Aug 30: Holo Holo Music Festival
Aug 31: Holo Holo Music Festival
Sept 3: Ken Carson
Sept 4: Bomba Estéreo & Rawayana: Astropical
Sept 15: Coheed & Cambria and Taking Back Sunday
Sept 17: Chris Brown
Sept 19: Kolohe Kai
Sept 20: Kolohe Kai
Sept 29: The Head and the Heart
Oct 17: Rilo Kiley and Waxahatchee
Nov 8: Diplo’s Run Club

The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park
May 29: Hauser
June 5: Ludacris
June 7: Trombone Shorty
June 10: Tash Sultana
June 14: Mariachi USA
July 6: Earth, Wind & Fire
July 12: Alison Krauss & Union Station
July 18: MAOLI
July 29: Beck & San Diego Symphony
Aug 1: Shaggy
Aug 9: The Beach Boys
Aug 10: The Gipsy Kings featuring Nicolas Reyes,
Aug 11: King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard
Aug 17: Cynthia Erivo & San Diego Symphony
Aug 24: Boyz II Men
Aug 26: Mt. Joy
Aug 29: Weird Al Yankovic
Sept 10: Chicago
Sept 13: Tribal Seeds and The Movement
Sept 19: Jon Batiste
Sept 28: Big Thief
Oct 2: Above & Beyond
Oct 10: HAIM

Nov 23: John Legend

Snapdragon Stadium
June 26: Shakira

Sycuan Casino Resort
July 18: Queensrÿche
Aug 23: Cash After Dark

Viejas Arena
May 25: Chelo and Lorenzo de Monteclaro
July 5: TLC
Aug 10: Ghost
Sept 21: Alejandro Fernández
Sept 27: Ice Cube
Nov 16: Bryan Adams and Pat Benatar & Neil Giraldo
Viejas Casino
May 24: Cheap Trick

Waterfront Park
Aug 2: Chris Lake
June 20: 2 Chainz and Lil John
June 20: Jake Shimabukuro
June 21: Sammy Johnson
June 21: Matthew Phillips
June 22: Banda MS
June 22: The Evolution Of Pop
June 25: Chelsea Cutler and Quinn XCII
June 25: The Long Run
June 26: Yeah Yeah Yeahs
June 26: Jared Rogerson
June 27: Jon Pardi
June 27: The Expendables
June 28: Jessie Murph
June 28: Forever Ray
June 29: Banda El Recodo
June 29: Dead Man’s Party
July 2: Third Eye Blind
July 2: Michael Minelli
July 3: The Como La Flor Band
July 5: Ziggy Marley
July 5: Long Beach Dub Allstars
July 6: Los Tucanes De Tijuana
July 6: Devotional

Del Mar Fairgrounds
June 11: Live and Collective Soul
June 11: Ozomatli
June 12: Foreigner
June 12: Strait Country
June 13: Maxwell
June 13: Jesse Royal
June 14: Zedd
June 14: 24K Magic
June 15: Los Tigres Del Norte
June 15: Sure Fire Soul Ensemble
June 18: Jordan Davis
June 18: That Arena Rock Show
June 19: Xscape
June 19: No Duh
June 20: 2 Chainz and Lil John
June 20: Jake Shimabukuro
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Your Local USO Wants You!

Volunteers are our greatest asset and the backbone of the USO. Whether helping a Sailor or Marine with a connecting flight, distributing a Care Package, serving snacks with a smile, providing local information, or “welcoming home” ships and 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/>

- On the right side see “Interested in volunteering?”
- Click red “Register Here” button
- Navigate to your area
- Finally, select the USO San Diego center nearest to you!

Positions may be available around San Diego county at:

Neil Ash Airport Center
Camp Pendleton USO Center
San Diego MEPS Center
Special Events



San Diego Outreach
Neil Ash Airport
Center
San Diego
MEPS Center
Camp Pendleton



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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/>

Come Pitch With Us!

Southern California Horseshoe Pitchers Association (SCHPA), a charter of the National Horseshoe Pitchers Association (NHPA), has clubs all over the southern half of California. These clubs all have first class horseshoe courts built to official specifications.

- Organized tournaments most weekends year around
- All skill levels and ages welcome. When you enter a tournament, you will be seeded with other players with similar skill levels for fair, enjoyable and friendly competition.
- Local clubs located at Balboa Park, Carlsbad, Encinitas, Ramona
- For info visit <https://socalhorseshoes.weebly.com/>
- Join today and we'll see you at the pits!



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