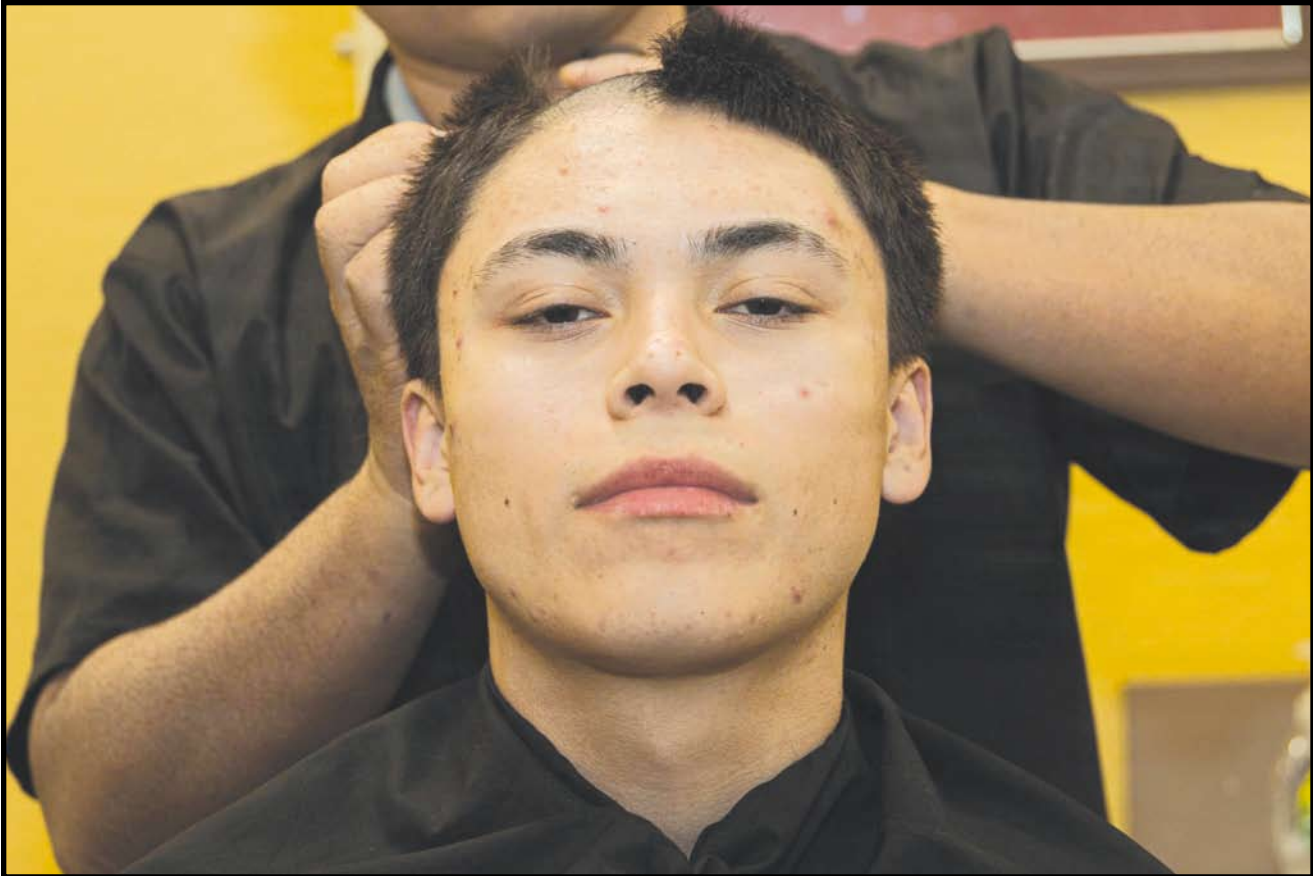


ARMED FORCES DISPATCH



San Diego Navy/Marine Corps Dispatch www.armedforcesdispatch.com 619.280.2985 SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 35
Serving active duty and retired military personnel, veterans and civil service employees FEBRUARY 8, 2026



WELCOME TO THE CLUB U.S. Marine Corps Recruit Kyle Campos with Hotel Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion receives a haircut during a receiving event at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Jan. 26, 2026. During the receiving process, recruits are taken to the USO for accountability, bussed to the depot, checked for contraband, given haircuts, make scripted phone calls home, and issued gear required for training. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Angie Palomino

Hegseth touts deterrent effect of Venezuela raid during first 2026 cabinet meeting

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

Last month, U.S. military forces captured Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores de Maduro, as part of Operation Absolute Resolve. Both are facing criminal court proceedings in the United States related to multiple federal charges, including narco-terrorism and drug trafficking.

During President Donald J. Trump’s first cabinet meeting of 2026 at the White House Jan. 29, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said Operation Absolute Resolve, which occurred Jan. 3, was spectacularly executed, demonstrated the skills of the U.S. military and also served to reestablish the deterrent effect of the U.S. armed forces.

“No other military in the world ... could have executed the most sophisticated, powerful raid, not just in American history, I would say in world history,” Hegseth said. “What those men did, going downtown, in another country ... in the most secure base in the middle of the night without anybody knowing until those simultaneous bombs dropped three minutes before the helicopters dropped — no other country could coordinate that, no other president would have been willing to empower those warriors that way.”

Last year, Trump said Iran would not have a nuclear weapon. And Operation Midnight Hammer, executed in June 2025, backed up the president’s words with effective military action, Hegseth said.

“When President [Donald J.] Trump said ... Iran, you won’t have a nuclear bomb, he meant it,” Hegseth said. “We sent those B-2s halfway around the world and they never noticed.”

The War Department is also helping secure the border and put a stop to drug trafficking in the Western Hemisphere — both are things the president has said he would do.

When the War Department effectively delivers on what the president has said the United States would do, it reestablishes the effectiveness of U.S. military deterrence, Hegseth said.

“That sends a message to every capital around the world that when President [Donald J.] Trump speaks, he means business,” he said.

CAMP PENDLETON HONORED WITH DOW MAINTENANCE AWARD

The Department of War recently announced the winners of the 2025 Secretary of War Maintenance Awards last week at the department’s annual Maintenance Awards Banquet, Jan. 22. The awards are pre-

sented annually to recognize outstanding achievements in weapon systems and military equipment maintenance.

Winners from the medium category included **1st Main-**

tenance Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton.

The Rear Adm. Grace M. Hopper Award for Software Maintenance Excellence recognizes the top organic software activity that, through its mission accomplishments, provided extraordinary capability for operational units supported.

The award is named after Hopper, a pioneer of computer programming who popularized the idea of machine-independent programming languages. This year’s winner is the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Armaments Center.

Six field-level award winners

were selected in three categories: small, medium, and large. The small category winners are the Navy’s Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron SEVEN; and the 860th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Travis AFB. Besides Camp Pendleton, winners from the medium category included Forward Deployed Regional Maintenance Center, U.S. 5th and 6th Fleets, Naples, Italy.

Large category winners were the 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment stationed at Kadena Air Base, Japan; and the 4th Maintenance Group, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C.

To learn more about the Secretary of War Maintenance Awards and the DoW Maintenance Symposium, you can visit www.sae.org/dow.

Russian embassy seeks information on two women it says were detained at Camp Pendleton

In a *Stars and Stripes* report Jan. 29 by Gary Warner, the Embassy of Russia in Washington, D.C., said that two Russian women detained in late January at Camp Pendleton should receive the “full respect for their rights.” The Russians said in an unsigned statement that they have filed a diplomatic note with the U.S. State Department over the incident. In the report, “according to information from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) dated Jan. 26, two Russian citizens (female) were turned over to them following their ‘unauthorized entry’ onto the grounds of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton,” the Russian embassy said. “They are currently being held at a local detention center pending repatriation.”

Refer to <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2026-01-29/2-russians-detained-camp-pendleton-20557593.html>.

Space Force launches GPS III space vehicle

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. and COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. - Space Systems Command and Combat Forces Command marked a critical step in enhancing global positioning capabilities with the launch of GPS III-9 Space Vehicle 09 on Jan. 27 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Fla., using a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. This significant mission also underscored the proven agility and responsiveness of the National Security Space Launch program. Once operational, the Lockheed Martin-built SV09 adds another highly capable M-Code satellite to the constellation.



In this Jan. 12, 2024 photo, Camp Pendleton Maintenance Marines hang up their award banner during a ceremony celebrating the winning of the 2023 Secretary of Defense Maintenance Award. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Gunnery Sgt. Joshua Jackson

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1976 bicentennial celebration featured military participation across the nation

by David Vergun
Pentagon News

Once every 50 years, the United States holds milestone Independence Day celebrations. This year marks the nation's 250th birthday and fifth semicentennial celebration.

The bicentennial was celebrated nationwide, July 4, 1976. It was celebrated only a year after the last U.S. troops left South Vietnam during the fall of Saigon, April 30, 1975.

President Gerald R. Ford's administration stressed the themes of healing and rebirth, as well as nostalgia for the nation's founding. Ford was a World War II Navy officer, serving in the Pacific aboard the aircraft carrier USS Monterey.

New York City celebrated the bicentennial with a parade of ships that included dozens of historic and current ships. Operation Sail, as it was called, began in New York Harbor and moved up the Hudson River.

One of the ships, the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal, carried Ford, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and State Secretary Henry Kissinger.

The event was also attended by 70 foreign ambassadors and chiefs of naval operations from 35 countries.

During the celebration in the city, bands and ceremonial units from all of the military services marched down Constitution Avenue.

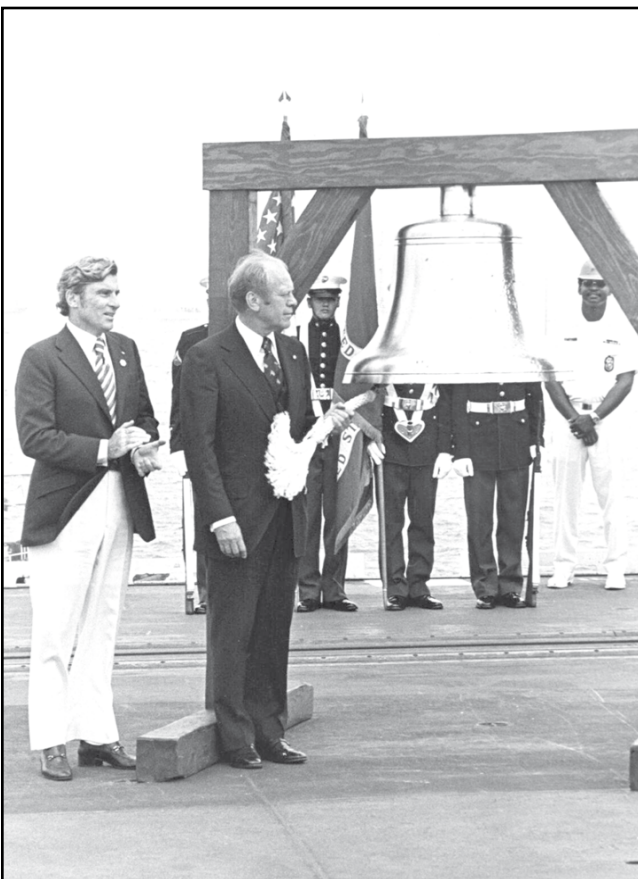
In 1976, Donald Rumsfeld was the defense secretary; Martin Richard Hoffmann was the Army secretary; Gen. Frederick C. Weyand was the Army chief of staff, followed by Gen. Bernard W. Rogers in October of that year; J. William Middendorf II was the Navy secretary; Adm. James L. Holloway III was the chief of naval operations; Thomas C. Reed was the Air Force secretary; David C. Jones was the Air Force chief of staff; and, Gen. Louis Wilson was the Marine Corps commandant.

The military wasn't involved in any conflicts in 1976, the last being the Mayaguez incident in May 1975, in Kampuchea, now called Cambodia.

The U.S. was involved in the Cold War, which lasted from 1947 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

During this timeframe, the U.S. military maintained a large presence in West Germany, Japan and South Korea.

At Panmunjom, South Korea, Aug. 18, 1976, two U.S. soldiers were killed by North Korean soldiers while trying to chop down part of a tree in the



President Gerald R. Ford rings the ceremonial bell aboard aircraft carrier USS Forrestal during the international naval review and the nation's bicentennial activities in New York City, July 4, 1976. Department of Navy photo

Korean Demilitarized Zone, which had obscured their view of North Korea. Three days later, Operation Paul Bunyan took place with a show of force made up of dozens of U.S. and South Korean troops, who completed cutting down the rest of the tree. On Nov. 2, 1976, Jimmy Carter, a former naval officer like Ford, was elected president.

art gallery



MAKING CONNECTIONS U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Rachel Cajucum, 386th Expeditionary Communications Squadron radio frequency technician, tests an antenna's connection status during a readiness and dispersal exercise within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Jan. 26, 2026. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Wingate



ON THE ATTACK Army Pfc. Victoria Rose, a military working dog handler assigned to the Combined Military Working Dog Detachment-Europe, 18th Military Police Brigade, conducts aggression training with her dog, Kimbo, on the obedience course at Ammunition Depot Europe-Miesau, Germany, Jan. 26, 2026. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Tanisha Karn

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published by Western States Weeklies, Inc.
2604 B-280 El Camino Real, Carlsbad, CA 92008
619-280-2985 • E-mail: editor@navydispatch.com
Editor.....Scott Sutherland

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CHINOOK ARRIVAL

Marines prepare as an Army CH-47F Chinook, assigned to the California Army National Guard, approaches during helicopter support team operations at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, Calif., Jan. 24, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Isabella Ramos



Marines prepare as an Army CH-47F Chinook, assigned to the California Army National Guard, approaches during helicopter support team operations at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, Calif., Jan. 24, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Isabella Ramos

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Inaugural Marine Corps AI fellowship advances workforce, applications

by Petty Officer 3rd Class
Abreen Padeken
Naval Postgraduate School

As the Department of the Navy continues to operationalize artificial intelligence across the Navy and Marine Corps, high-profile systems such as unmanned platforms or large-scale information tools grab most of the headlines. But the power of AI extends well beyond these examples, supporting data analysis for complex problem-solving, process automation and decision-support tools at every level.

The Marine Corps is advancing an implementation strategy to leverage AI across the force. A key component of this effort is the AI fellowship at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The new program enables Marines to apply AI capabilities directly to operational challenges, translating emerging technologies into practical, data-driven solutions for the fleet.

“When the fellowship oppor-

tunity presented itself, I realized that this is where AI could be appropriately inserted. Not to do our jobs for us, but to streamline our existing process and free our operators to work on more complex problems,” said Marine Corps Capt. Stephen Steckler, a member of the inaugural cohort of AI fellows and an NPS graduate in computer science.

Developed in alignment with existing AI strategy and the 39th Commandant’s Planning Guidance, the fellowship program accelerates applied AI research while simultaneously developing the service’s AI workforce.

Launched in August 2025, program participants spent five months dividing their time between applied research and field experimentation on a use case each fellow has identified. The fellows received targeted AI instruction and mentorship from NPS faculty and industry experts to assist with hands-on research.

Fast forward to early 2026, and the inaugural cohort of AI

fellows returned to campus to present their findings to Marine Corps leaders and a cross-section of NPS professors, faculty, students and advisors.

Christopher Paul, Marine Corps chairman for information at NPS, is program lead for this pilot of the AI fellowship, which he modeled after the Air Force Phantom Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The program is structured to integrate operational insight with technical expertise, Paul said, leveraging Marines who are familiar with contemporary fleet challenges and understand the potential of AI.

The use cases represented in this inaugural cohort demonstrate the far-reaching potential of AI, Paul said, and how it can be applied across the force to empower people and drive innovation.

“One of our fellows, [Marine Corps] Cpl. Joe Sadler, down at Camp Pendleton, [California,] is in a battalion maintenance

facility. He’s looking to build a tool that’s large language model-based that has an agentic shell that helps with the paperwork surrounding maintenance activities,” Paul explained.

With considerable time and effort spent outside of the actual maintenance, Sadler’s idea has the potential to save significant time and effort, he said.

Steckler’s project is another example of using AI to help Marines do their jobs better and faster, Paul said.

“He’s at the Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity where they get all kinds of new gear and prototype gear, and they have to perform different red teaming and penetration testing of the circuits and the onboard computer apparatus in that gear,” Paul said.

Steckler’s project explored the use of edge-deployed large language models to automate and streamline Marine Corps cybersecurity operational testing.

see AI, page 4



Top 5

- Iran puts ‘fingers on trigger’ as U.S. armada arrives in Middle East
 - Military commissaries are planning ahead for possible government shutdown
 - Army redesignates unit for jungle warfare training in Panama
 - DOD shutdown appears imminent, if short-lived, after failed Senate vote
 - Utilities billing resumes for some military housing residents
- Army**
- 101st Airborne Soldiers hitch rides aboard Marine Ospreys in exercise
 - \$5,000 reward offered for an explosive stolen from Fort Leonard Wood
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- Newest Ford-class carrier USS John F. Kennedy heads to sea for testing
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Air Force advances standoff cruise missile program with live-fire test

from Eglin Air Force Base Public Affairs

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. - The Air Force demonstrated a new benchmark, conducting a live-warhead test of a standoff cruise missile, known as Extended Range Attack Munition, on the Eglin Test and Training Range late last month, less than 16 months from the program’s initial contract award.

The event, which met all primary objectives including a full warhead detonation, gathered critical data to mature a new, cost-effective, long-range strike capability. This accelerated timeline is a proof point for the War Department’s focus on delivering

capability to the warfighter at the speed of relevance.

ERAM is a next-generation, air-launched cruise missile designed to provide affordable mass to the fight. It delivers a precision-guided, stand-off capability against high-value fixed targets, meeting a critical operational need by providing a long-range, cost-effective strike capability that can be rapidly producible in large numbers to bolster U.S. deterrence.

“Moving from a contract to a live-fire demonstration in under two years proves we can deliver lethal, cost-effective capability at

the speed of relevance,” said Brig. Gen. Robert Lyons III, portfolio acquisition executive for Weapons. “This is how we rebuild our military — by empowering our teams and industry partners to cut through bureaucracy and deliver the tools our warfighters need to prevail.”

The test was a collaborative effort between the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center’s Armament Directorate, the 96th Test Wing, and industry partners. Engineers and test conductors from Eglin Air Force Base’s Central Control Facility planned the mission and analyzed the data, leveraging the range’s unique capabilities to execute the complex event.

“The future fight demands we create an asymmetric advantage by developing cost-effective, attritable systems like ERAM that give commanders the ability to generate mass,” said Brig. Gen. Mark Massaro, 96th TW commander.

“This test is a critical milestone on that path. The expert teams who executed this complex mission provided the high-fidelity data we need to validate this system, ensuring that when it reaches the warfighter, it is a proven and ready tool for the right target. This is the cornerstone of building a more lethal and effective Joint Force.”

AI continued from page 3

Developed for his command, the system is designed to operate in classified, air-gapped environments while integrating existing commercial security tools into a single, natural-language interface, reducing both analyst workload and training demands.

With an overall accuracy rate of 93.3 percent, the project shows strong potential to reduce personnel requirements and testing timelines, with clear pathways for further development and operational adoption.

In this testing, too much time is spent on applying known vulnerabilities and exploits, Paul said.

While the issues the fellows set out to address were complex, the fellowship’s goal is just as much about developing the Marine Corps’ AI workforce as it is about the final product. And in just five short months, Steckler said, there were a handful of critical lessons learned that he is eager to share with the next cohort of fellows, who were also on hand for the program review on campus.

“Scope your problem appropriately and pursue your rate-limiting factor aggressively,” he said. “Whatever it is that you do not have up front and will take time to get, pursue immediately. With the professors and connections that NPS has, they can move mountains to get you what you need.”

“The vision is to build an AI tool that can automate a bunch of that process,” he noted, leaving more time to “think of creative ways to attack or possibly penetrate that gear, so that those vulnerabilities can be patched, closed or avoided before the gear is ever fielded.”

“The vision is to build an AI tool that can automate a bunch of that process,” he noted, leaving more time to “think of creative ways to attack or possibly penetrate that gear, so that those vulnerabilities can be patched, closed or avoided before the gear is ever fielded.”

While fellows conducted the initial research sprint, programs like the Marine Corps Software Factory provide a parallel pathway to operationalize this work beyond the academic environment. With fellows focused on research-driven prototyping rooted in operational challenges, the software factory works to

translate these concepts into production-ready digital tools, reinforcing a broader ecosystem that enables Marines to move AI solutions from the classroom to command.

Together, these efforts create a continuum that links education, experimentation and deployment, ensuring innovation does not stall at the prototype stage. Guiding these efforts is Marine Corps Col. Pedro Ortiz, software factory liaison officer for AI and emerging technology, who was on hand to hear the fellows’ presentations.

Ortiz is a graduate of the Marine Corps doctorate technical program at NPS that is designed to build a cadre of highly technical Marine Corps officers to identify technological breakthroughs for warfighting applications and support senior leaders in strategy and long-range concept and capability development.

“The projects presented today are a small and important sample of how Marines can implement AI solutions at their level,” Ortiz said. “I can envision in the future that this program could produce prototypes that the Marine Corps Software Factory could then transform into production-level

software for use across the Marine Corps.”

Central to the plan is the principle that AI must augment, not replace, Marines. As AI adoption escalates, balancing speed and risk emerges as a recurring theme. Marine Corps leaders acknowledge the rapid pace of AI development and the corresponding need for agility, while emphasizing that governance structures must remain robust.

“I am very proud of the breadth this program has become. We have such a dynamic range of participants — from government service employees to officers and even a corporal,” Paul said. “This program has the workings of great minds at every level of leadership.”

As the second cohort of fellows gets underway, the Marine Corps is looking ahead, exploring the establishment of a center for digital transformation to serve as a hub for AI knowledge products, prototyping and collaboration with academia and industry. Partnerships with institutions like NPS, and federally funded research and development centers are expected to play a central role in this effort.

Week of Jan. 25-31 in DOW: National Guard storm relief, narco-terrorists taken out, deterrence lauded

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

Over 5,500 National Guard members mobilized across 16 states and Washington to deliver critical aid and restore safety to people stricken by Winter Storm Fern that dropped snow and ice from the Midwest to the mid-Atlantic to the South, Jan. 24-25.

Across the country, guard members have been rescuing hundreds of stranded motorists on icy roads, supporting local authorities with patrols and logistics and escorting essential health care workers to hospitals, Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said during the department’s Weekly Sitrep video.

She also pointed out the exceptional work of the National Guardsmen in the nation’s capital, where Soldiers and Airmen already mobilized on federal crime prevention duty as part of the D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission pivoted to storm response.

“As the storm’s peak subsides, guardsmen remain on high alert against lingering threats, embodying the unyielding spirit of service that safeguards our nation,” Wilson said.

On Jan. 29, Undersecretary of War for Research and Engineering Emil Michael formed the new Science and Technology Innovation Board. Resulting from a merger of the Defense Innovation Board and the Defense Science Board, the newly formed STIB will replace “the previous ‘alphabet soup’ boards that bogged down our processes and slowed ingenuity,” Wilson said.

She added that the STIB will be composed of a uniform board of scientists and private-sector experts who will work to cultivate a faster decision-making process, allowing the Pentagon to deliver the latest technologies to warfighters.

“These efforts help to ensure that the services always have an advantage over our adversaries and that they never enter a fair fight,” Wilson said.


Lastly, at Hegseth’s direction, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by designated terrorist organizations.

“Intelligence confirmed that the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations,” Wilson said, adding that two narco-terrorists were killed in the operation.


Navy divers reinforce maritime force protection at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Greece

SOUDA BAY, Greece - U.S. Navy Seabee Divers, assigned to Underwater Construction Team (UCT) 1, Construction Dive Detachment Bravo (CDD/B), recently completed month-long inspections and maintenance on the port security barrier system and tested new methods for underwater concrete repairs on the Marathi NATO Pier Complex. The inspection revealed underwater damage that, if left unaddressed, could reduce the effectiveness of a critical floating security barrier used to protect ships during maintenance and resupply, underscoring the need for regular inspections by specialized Navy divers to keep the system fully operational. “For the pier repair project, we added reinforcement to holes and damage in the existing structural concrete,” said Construction Mechanic 2nd Class Zack Risinger, UCT 1, CDD/B project supervisor. “Working with the Hellenic Navy, we identified the priority repair site, and now, we’re going down and installing composite formwork with anchor bolts so that we can backfill the void with high-strength concrete.” Naval Support Activity Souda Bay’s port facility, also known as the NATO Marathi Pier Complex, is an active host nation military base under the operation of the Hellenic Navy. The NATO Marathi Pier Complex is one of the largest natural ports in the Mediterranean and provides berthing, refueling, ammunition handling, general supply handling, and minor maintenance and ship repair to NATO and U.S. 6th Fleet ships during normal and contingency operations.

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Unmanned Surface Vessel Divisions 31, 32, and 33 stand at attention during the assumption of command ceremony for the three divisions. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Claire M. Alfaro

Commanders of Unmanned Surface Vessel Divisions 31, 32, 33 assume command

by Petty Officer 1st Class
Claire Alfaro

Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet
CORONADO - Commanders of Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) Divisions 31, 32 and 33 assumed their respective commands during a ceremony at NAS North Island Jan. 22.

Lt. Konstantine Glaros assumed command of USV Division 31, Lt. Sarah Weinstein assumed command of USV Division 32, and Lt. Joseph Gruber assumed command of USV Division 33.

Vice Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Force, Pacific Fleet, presided over the ceremony.

"USVs extend our operational reach, reduce risk to personnel, give us attack options, and enable persistent surveillance in high-threat areas—all while offering cost-effective alternatives to traditional manned platforms," said McLane.

"As their capabilities mature, USVs are proving to be essential tools for distributed operations—providing warfighters with flexible, scalable options rooted in the inherent strengths of unmanned technology." Unmanned Surface Vessel Divisions 31, 32 and 33 fall under the command of Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron 3 in San Diego, commanded by Cmdr. Sophia

Haberman.

McLane presented division pennants to each division commander, which were then raised by the respective divisions' senior enlisted leaders.

"As you take command, remember it's all about your people," McLane said to the commanders. "How you lead—through your decisions, your presence, and your standards—will directly shape the professionalism, readiness, and wellbeing of your Sailors and their families. Be visible, be consistent, and be accountable."

Glaros, Weinstein, and Gruber reported to Haberman upon assumption of command of their divisions, marking their establishment.

"Platforms alone do not create advantage," said McLane. "Advantage comes from Sailors who can integrate manned and unmanned systems into a single, coherent force. The human element underpins everything we do . . . USVRON 3, and these three new Unmanned Surface Divisions, represent the future of naval power—and you three will lead that future."

The mission of USVRON 3 is to deliver the most formidable unmanned platforms in the maritime domain. USVRON 3's motto is "Victory Through Ferocity."

CAMP PENDLETON EMPLOYEES AWARDED FOR 545 YEARS OF COMBINED FEDERAL SERVICE

by Sgt. Dillon Buck, Camp Pendleton

CAMP PENDLETON - Marine Corps Installations West hosted its bi-annual MCIWEST-Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton Employee of the Quarter & Year and Civilian Federal Length of Service Awards Ceremony on Jan. 29, 2026, recognizing civilian employees for their dedication to federal service.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Nick I. Brown, the commanding general of MCIWEST, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, presented the awards to the recipients, and gave remarks about the vital role that civilians play in supporting the Marine Corps mission and thanked recipients for their continued service.

The ceremony awarded **Nina Kanoa**, a purchasing agent and team lead for the Regional Contracting Office, Employee of the Quarter for the 3rd quarter, and awarded **Yvette L. Zambrano**, a civilian payroll financial technician, assistant chief of staff, G-8, Employee of the Quarter for the 4th quarter of fiscal year 2025. **Julio Carrillo**, an agency program coordinator for the Regional Contracting Office was also recognized as the civilian Employee of the Year for outstanding performance during FY 2025.

Additionally, 15 employees were recognized for the length of their service, ranging from 30 to 55 years, totaling a combined 545 years of federal service. Among those recognized was **Domingo Jimenez, Jr.**, a supervisory security assistant, awarded for his achievement of 55 years of federal service.

"A lot of times in our work, we get the feeling that an individu-

al's chain of command doesn't care," said Jimenez, Jr., as he held up the pin awarded to him. "That's not true. It shows"

The event followed a recent furlough of federal workers due to a temporary government shutdown in October 2025, which led some employees to question their work and purpose. The ceremony helped revitalize and motivate the recipients by showing appreciation for all that they do.

"This past year's 'roller coaster' for civilian employees has made me question our efforts and purpose," said **David Smith**, a visual information specialist with Communication Strategy and Operations, who was one of six employees recognized for 30 years of federal service. "This ceremony today has proven to me that civilian employees are in the fight and what we do is important. This award has invigorated me to continue the fight in serving our warfighters."

The ceremony highlighted the commitment to recognizing civilian contributions during a challenging period for federal employees. The bi-annual event will continue to honor civilians across various departments at Camp Pendleton who demonstrate exceptional dedication to supporting Marines and their families.

U.S. military shoots down Iranian drone approaching USS Abraham Lincoln in Arabian Sea, official says

In reports from major news outlets Feb. 3, the U.S. military shot down an unmanned Iranian drone after it "aggressively approached a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier with unclear intent," a U.S. Central Command spokesman told Fox News. "USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) was transiting the Arabian Sea approximately 500 miles from Iran's southern coast when an Iranian Shahed-139 drone unnecessarily maneuvered toward the ship," said Capt. Tim Hawkins. "The Iranian drone continued to fly toward the ship despite de-escalatory measures taken by U.S. forces operating in international waters," CENTCOM also said. "An F-35C fighter jet from *Abraham Lincoln* shot down the Iranian drone in self-defense and to protect the aircraft carrier and personnel on board." Hawkins said no U.S. service members were injured and no U.S. equipment was damaged during the incident.

Camp Pendleton opens new vet clinic

CAMP PENDLETON - Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, in coordination with the U.S. Army, hosted the grand opening of the Camp Pendleton Army Veterinary Services and Veterinary Treatment Facility on Jan. 22.

The newly constructed Camp Pendleton Army Veterinary Services and Treatment Facility marks a significant investment in the health and welfare of military working animals, privately owned animals, and our military community. This new state-of-the-art facility is triple the size of the previous clinic and provides enhanced care for Military Working Dogs (MWD) ensuring their health and operational readiness.

This larger facility allows the Veterinary Care Team to deliver more efficient, high-quality care for the privately owned pets of service members and retirees. The Veterinary Care Team also provides facility support to the MWD Kennel, Domestic Animal Control, and Stepp Stables. The new Veterinary Treatment Facility continues to offer a wide range of services including preventive care, diagnostic testing, health certificates for travel, and select surgical procedures.

Beyond animal care, the new Veterinary Services Facility houses a dedicated space for the Veterinary Food Protection Team. This team plays a critical role in food safety and defense, ensuring the quality and safety of more than \$250 million worth of food annually across 150 support facilities on two installations.

"This state-of-the-art facility represents our unwavering dedication to the health and well-being of not only our military working dogs and the beloved pets of our service members and their families, but also our commitment to providing food safety and defense to ensure safe food is available for our military community locally and while deployed," said Army Capt. Amy Compton, Camp Pendleton branch chief, Veterinary Readiness Activity.

Navy relieves First NCR commodore

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. - The commodore of First Naval Construction Regiment (1 NCR) was relieved Jan. 23. Douglas Whimpey, a Navy reservist, was relieved by Capt. Angel Santiago, commander of Naval Construction Group (NCG) 1, which is headquartered in Port Hueneme, California.

Navy leaders are expected to uphold the highest standards of responsibility, reliability, and leadership personally and professionally, and the Navy holds them accountable when they fall short of those standards.

Naval Construction Regiments provide command and control of Naval Construction Force units while operating in a specific geographic area or supporting a specific military operation. There has been no impact to operations.

Capt. Steven Sherman, incoming commodore for 1 NCR, has assumed the duties as 1 NCR's commodore.

Whimpey assumed command of 1 NCR in February 2023 and has been temporarily reassigned to the staff at NCG-1.

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Ready, exercise: MCB Camp Pendleton conducts CPX II, a hazardous materials training exercise

by Cpl. Jacqueline Akamelu
Camp Pendleton

CAMP PENDLETON - Semper Durus is an annual interagency training exercise designed to strengthen regional defense, test anti-terrorism measures, and ensure personnel safety against evolving threats across the Marine Corps base here.

Before, during, and after Semper Durus, agencies aboard the installation maintain readiness and response effectiveness through targeted training exercises focused on specific areas.

With the focus on response effectiveness, partnering agencies across the installation participated in Command Post Exercise II at MCB Camp Pendleton Jan. 28. CPX II combines the efforts of various agencies across Marine Corps Installations West to exercise staff actions in response to a simulated contamination of the installation's food supply.

This included verifying the safety and security of food sources and their delivery, identifying the impact of food delivery interruptions, determining required response actions to re-establish safe food distribution, and exercising the Camp Pendleton Fire Department's hazardous materials response procedures.

"The goal of today's training is to highlight the capabilities of this HAZMAT team," stated Tom Kircher, the mission assurance director and CBRNE protection officer with the mission assurance branch on MCB Camp Pendleton.

"They are the only [Department of War] HAZMAT team in the state of California that is certified as a California state Type I team."

The exercise highlighted the hazardous materials team's capabilities and overall proficiency, while also including overall interagency cooperation with agencies aboard the installation, such as MCIWEST Mission Assurance, Marine Corps Community Services, the Defense Commissary Agency, U.S. Foods, Assistant Chief of Staff (AC/S) G-4, the Army Food Defense Team, MCB Camp Pendleton Fire Department, NCIS and the Criminal Investigation Division.

"CID notified us about the incident that is taking place, and because it is a higher-level incident, we, as the federal agency on base, are responding accordingly. We take interviews and figure out what is going on and then, if needed, make contact with outside law enforcement partners to try and best tackle the

situation," said Jordan Ruth, a special agent with NCIS.

"[CPX II] gives us a new perspective on base-wide involvement with significant incidents. It gives us a better training outlet to be prepared for incidents when they happen."

Initiating through a standard food delivery and inspection, the participating agencies were tasked with identifying contaminated product, contacting the respective HAZMAT support, and conducting and resolving a formal investigation surrounding the identified hazardous material.

"Our role as the fire department is to assess, isolate, and deny entry, and then mitigate the hazard," said Robert Washburn, a division chief with the Camp Pendleton Fire Department. "We'll arrive, conduct an initial assessment, gather information, and based on that, we'll develop a plan within our protocols and procedures."

Following dispatch, members of the Camp Pendleton Fire Department arrived on the scene. They followed hazardous materials response procedures proficiently, focusing on rapid isolation, scene control, and specialized mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological, and

nuclear (CBRN) threats. Using MX908 devices, the responders quickly and safely identified and removed the hazardous substance.

"As a technical rescue firefighter, I make recommendations for PPE, identify the sample, the properties of the sample, decontamination recommendations, and just make sure we know what the hazard is and everything that is involved with that product," stated John Negrete, a GS7 EMT and firefighter with MCB Camp Pendleton Fire Department.

By fostering a controlled training environment and exposure through exercises such as CPX II, all participating agencies can refine vital skills and knowledge, enhance members' confidence and capabilities, and strengthen interagency collaboration.

"We're here to make sure that if anyone goes down, we provide life safety measures and provide support for them to mitigate any risks," shared Cory Lofgren, a firefighter and paramedic with the MCB Camp Pendleton Fire Department.

CPX II is one of many training exercises conducted across the installation to ensure continuous precision and efficiency, upholding mission success to the highest standard against all threats on and off the installation.

Fleet and Family Support Centers are available to provide support via phone, telehealth, in person appointments, e-mail, social media, webinar and command GMTs.

If you would like to schedule an appointment with one of their providers, call Centralized Scheduling at 1-866-923-6478.

Services include relocation assistance, new parent support, deployment services, clinical counseling services, financial management counseling, family employment services, family advocacy and the transition assistance programs.



Members of the Camp Pendleton Fire Department prepare for the hazmat training exercise at Camp Pendleton Jan. 28. CPX II combined the efforts of various agencies across MCIWEST to exercise staff actions in response to a simulated food supply contamination, including assessing the impact of food delivery interruptions, and exercising procedures for hazmat incidents. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Jacqueline Akamelu

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USS GREENEVILLE RETURNS HOME FOLLOWING DEPLOYMENT



A Sailor assigned to submarine USS Greenville is welcomed home after returning to Point Loma Jan. 30. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Rashan Johnson

NAVAL BASE POINT LOMA - Fast-attack submarine USS *Greenville* (SSN 772) returned to its homeport of Naval Base Point Loma, following a regularly scheduled deployment to the Indo-Pacific region in support of U.S. national security objectives, Jan. 30.

During the deployment, *Greenville* steamed over 49,000 nautical miles while conducting

the full spectrum of SSN operations alongside U.S. and Allied forces.

"The return of USS *Greenville* marks the successful completion of yet another vital mission for Submarine Squadron 11," said Capt. Phillip Sylvia Jr., commodore, Submarine Squadron 11. "I am incredibly proud of the *Greenville* crew. They operated professionally in

challenging environments, proving once again that our undersea forces are the apex predators of the maritime environment and their forward-deployed presence reinforced our commitment to peace through strength."

The crew of *Greenville* relentlessly pursued excellence and operated in a professional manner in support of maritime operations in the Indo-Pacific

region, reaffirming the U.S.' dedication to deterrence, stability, and prosperity.

"The American public and our Allies and partners should rest easy at night knowing that the *Greenville* team, along with our brothers and sisters throughout the Submarine Force and the Navy have the watch," said Capt. Chad Tella, commander of *Greenville*. "Time and time again, the *Greenville* team fearlessly met all challenges head on, not only getting the job done, but exceeding all expectations. The team routinely united in the face of adversity to ensure mission accomplishment, no matter the situation."

Additionally, while on deployment, *Greenville* Sailors completed 695 overall qualifications, and nine officers and 38 enlisted Sailors earned their submarine warfare qualifications.

"*Greenville* Sailors performed second to none," said Senior Chief Logistics Specialist (Submarines) Daniel Dumitrache, *Greenville's* chief of boat.



PACIFIC TAKEOFF A Sailor assigned to amphibious assault ship USS *Boxer* launches a Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 122, 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, from the flight deck in the Pacific Ocean, Jan. 26, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Joseph Helms



TAKING AIM Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jaheel Allen, assigned to the Light Armored Reconnaissance Company, Battalion Landing Team 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, aims an M240B machine gun on the flight deck of USS *Boxer* during a simulated strait transit in the Pacific Ocean, Jan. 27, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Joseph Helms



SAN DIEGO (Jan. 21, 2026) Navy Capt. Sarah Self-Kyler, commander of Navy Public Affairs Command, pins the command ashore pin onto Cmdr. Jaqueline Pau, commanding officer of Fleet Public Affairs Center San Diego, during an establishment of command ceremony here. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Charles J. Scudella III

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Ready to apply to be a USO San Diego volunteer?

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

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

Camp Pendleton USO Programs Include:

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

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

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

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

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

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COVID killed snow days

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

As a teen, I huddled under my Kliban Cat comforter until my clock radio sounded its obnoxious beep-beep-beep alarm. Without opening my eyes, I reached a hand out to silence the noise, then tuned in to 1450 AM WDAD to listen for news about my small Pennsylvania hometown.

“Please be closed, please be closed,” I muttered, still half asleep and lisping through my retainer.

After a commercial for Bruno’s Restaurant, the DJ finally came on air. “Well folks, due to the snow storm, we have some school delays and closures to announce,” he said.

“YES!” I popped my bed head out of its warm nest of covers, listening more closely as he rattled off the announcements, one by one.

“Apollo Ridge, Armstrong and Derry school districts will be operating on a two-hour delay. No morning kindergarten. Homer City, Marion Center, and Punxsutawney School Districts are closed today. Purchase Line Schools are”

“C’mon, c’mon,” I plead, my hands clasped tightly in prayer to the school closure gods, waiting for word about the only school that

mattered — my school, Indiana Area Junior High School. My whole being yearned for the happiest news a kid could get — A SNOW DAY. One day off school wasn’t exactly life changing. But to kids who woke up early on dark winter mornings day after boring day, snow days were a rare and cherished gift.

Especially for kids like me, who walked a half mile on an icy unpaved road to my bus stop, where I waited every morning, my teeth chattering. Our neighborhood was the last stop, so by the time we got on, the bus’ windows were steamed up with the condensed hot breath of fifty pimpled adolescents. Our bus had an 8-track tape player, but only one tape. Every word from AC/DCs Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap album was burned into my brain.

Needless to say, my school mornings were sheer hell.

I beseeched the powers of the Universe as if my teenaged survival depended on it, to please for the love of God, grant us, the bedraggled students of Indiana Area Junior High School, a well-deserved break, and I’ll promise to return to school all the better for it.

My mind swirled with the possibilities. First and foremost, I might enjoy at least another hour of sleep. Not just any sleep, but deep teenaged sleep, when my mouth fell open allowing a steady stream of drool to escape. Then, I’d meet up with neighbors to sled down our hill until my lips were too frozen to form intelligible consonants. Afterward, I’d have hot cocoa, gallons of it, and maybe tomato soup with grilled cheese for dipping while watching daytime

sitcom reruns like “Gilligan’s Island” and “Beverly Hillbillies.”

Oh, the sheer joy of it all!

I was recently saddened to learned that many children today aren’t able to enjoy snow days like I did. Thanks to the remote learning platforms put in place during the COVID pandemic, some kids have virtual school on snow days.

New York City Public Schools, for example, mandate attendance via remote instruction when weather closes schools. Students are expected to log into classes online so the instructional day still “counts” to avoid extending the school year. Other districts in Illinois have e-learning or Flexible Instruction Day (FID) policies mandating students to take lessons remotely, logging attendance through platforms like Google Classroom or SeeSaw. And many districts in snow-plagued states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota and my state of Rhode Island, permit districts to require virtual instruction on snow days if they see fit. Currently, DoD schools do not require remote learning during school closures of less than five days.

To the poor children who must log onto computers during school closures who, will never feel the unbridled joy of a snow day in winter, my heart goes out to you.

“Indiana Area Schools are closed today,” the DJ finally says, granting my ultimate wish. I rolled over, drooling in triumph, snoozing in the sweet silence without AC/DC. I didn’t learn anything that snow day, but sometimes kids become better school students on the days when there’s no school at all.

Reviews of ‘The Last Bus’ on Apple TV & KODA power failure night lights

For many years I have been reviewing movies and products here. Usually, the companies who make these movies and produce these products make them available to the Press to do these reviews, in the form of Press screenings and complimentary review products. Other times, I discover them on my own, just as you would.

You might be wondering, how do I select products for review? I try to entertain and inform here, so I am inclined to review movies and products that I think you and I might like. Such was the case with “The Last Bus” on Apple TV, and the KODA power failure night light.

Review of “The Last Bus” on Apple TV

Recently, while I was at home, I felt like taking a break and decided to watch a movie on TV. There were probably hundreds, if not thousands to choose from, between the usual broadcast channels, my Spectrum On-Demand service and several streaming channels. With all of those channels, there was a lot to choose from.

As I checked out my Apple TV streaming service, one movie in particular caught my attention: “The Last Bus.” I read the description and learned that it is an Oscar nominated (for best visual effects), 2025 film drama about the terrible Paradise fire in California. I live in California, so the possibility of wildfire directly impacting my life is a constant concern. Thankfully I have only had to evacuate my home once, and the damage was limited to a fine covering of black soot on my property, which I was able to wash away.

Since this is an important subject in so many people’s lives, and the movie — which was inspired by real events — is well regarded enough to receive an Academy Awards nomination, I decided to watch it, and then review it here.

Apple Original Films provides this synopsis: “The Last Bus” is a white-knuckle ride through one of America’s deadliest wildfires as a wayward school bus driver (Academy Award winner Matthew McConaughey) and a dedicated school teacher (Emmy, SAG and Golden Globe Award winner America Ferrera) battle to save 22 children from the terrifying inferno.

Thankfully there is not an over-emphasis on the backstory. We learn just enough to care about the people involved. The drama is intense and the portrayal of events realistic. It conveys a powerful sense of authenticity. The consequences are life-or-death.

The news at the time showed us the terrible devastation that occurred. We did not know how it would turn out for these people, who we grew to sincerely care about. I will not spoil this for you. To find out their fate, watch the movie. I highly recommend it.

To watch the official trailer and to learn more about “The Last Bus,” visit: <https://www.apple.com/tv-pr/originals/the-last-bus/>.

Review of KODA power failure night lights

Over the years I have bought several different night lights at Costco Wholesale. I can almost always count on Costco for competitive pricing with an industry-leading returns policy. When I saw the 3-packs of these KODA night lights at Costco last week, combined with them being sold for \$5 off, I bought two 3-packs to try them out.

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

These are the best night lights that I have ever used — by far. Aside from their versatility for use as a nightlight with selectable colors and as a rechargeable flashlight, these lights are also very sensitive to motion from near or far, unlike my older night lights. Depending upon the color you select, they can either be quite bright to illuminate a large area (the lights can be rotated, to aim them), or relatively dim, if that is your preference. Blue seems to be their least illuminative color, and bright white the most illuminative. I liked them so much that I bought three more 3-packs, for a total of 15 night lights.

For some reason, I could not find them on Cosco.com or the KODA website, although I did find them on Costco.ca (Canada): <https://www.costco.ca/koda-modern-power-failure-night-light%2C-3-pack.product.4000370278.html>. I phoned KODA, who told me that this is their most advanced night light. I suggest that you try to buy them at your local Costco Wholesale.

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

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Veterans News

How to live to be 100 years old

(StatePoint) Living to 100 may sound extraordinary, but research suggests it’s more “achievable and enjoyable” than many people think. Studies show the majority of centenarians rate their health as good, and large numbers of people in this age group are mobile, active and optimistic.

According to the American Medical Association, adopting these seven habits can improve longevity and quality of life:

1. Eat healthy. Think of food as medicine. Choose nutritious, whole foods. Eat more fruits that are dark in color - blue, purple and red - to get the most nutrients, as well as fiber-rich vegetables, especially non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and leafy greens. Incorporate whole grains, nuts, seeds, lean meats and fish. Drink more water, or as an alternative, flavored or sparkling water with no added sugar.

Reduce your intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and unhealthy ultra-processed foods, especially those with added sodium and sugar. Drinking sug-

ary beverages, even 100 percent fruit juices, is associated with a higher mortality risk, according to a study published in JAMA Network Open. Eat fewer processed meats, which tend to be high in fat and heavy on added salt and preservatives. Limit your intake of refined grains, such as breads, crackers, baked goods and white rice. Drink less alcohol.

2. Exercise. Adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity weekly. A recent study published in JAMA found that putting down the television remote and walking can improve healthy aging - highlighting the importance of small everyday habits.

3. Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep improves memory, reduces stress, improves mood, and primes the body’s natural defenses against disease. But sleep quality decreases with age. Improve your sleep quality by setting a regular bedtime and wake-up time, insulating your bedroom against noise, avoiding exercise within an hour of

bedtime, maintaining a cool and dark bedroom, and limiting fluids within two hours of bedtime. Also avoid alcohol before bedtime and make your bedroom a tech-free zone as screen-time can impact your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

4. Live with purpose. A sense of purpose can lead to increased energy, motivation, emotional stability and resilience. Take time for self-reflection and try meditation or yoga. Prioritize your values and beliefs and put them into action toward a goal that’s meaningful to you and benefits others.

5. Stay positive. To bust stress, take a break from decisions, connect with others, pet your dog or cat, write a to-do list (stick to three items), take time to recharge, laugh, sing, curb clutter, set boundaries, perform mindfulness exercises, practice gratitude, and seek help from a professional when stress becomes overwhelming.

6. Stay connected. Research shows that having social connections is a significant predictor of longevity and better

physical, cognitive and mental health, while social isolation and loneliness are significant predictors of premature death and poor health. Unfortunately, there is a nationwide loneliness epidemic that medical experts consider a major public health concern. Combat loneliness with social clubs and community groups, or by taking up a hobby, learning something new or volunteering. If you’re struggling with loneliness, reach out to a professional, your doctor, family member or friend. You can also call the 988 crisis helpline for support

7. Get screened. Schedule preventive care, tests and health screenings to help your doctor spot certain conditions before they become more serious. Your doctor can recommend needed tests based on your age, gender and health conditions, including colonoscopies, mammograms, gynecological and prostate exams, and vision screenings.

Today, there are many at-home screening options available. Some are more effective than others, and all work best, and minimize stress around re-

VA delays annual suicide report

FLEET RESERVE ASSOCIATION - During the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs hearing to examine the VA’s Restructure for Impact and Sustainability Effort, known as RISE, lawmakers sharply questioned Department of Veterans Affairs leadership over a delayed release of the VA’s annual veterans suicide report, an in-depth analysis of suicide trends that is typically issued each December.

The report, which was completed in September, has been held up and is now expected to be released sometime this month after lawmakers publicly pressed VA Secretary Doug Collins for an explanation.

Senators emphasized that accurate and timely suicide data is critical to shaping effective prevention programs and allocating resources for veterans’ mental health care, particularly as veterans remain roughly one and a half times more likely to

sults, when taken in consultation with a doctor.

For more resources on staying healthy, visit <http://www.ama-assn.org>.



die by suicide than non-veterans. Committee members also cited reports of long wait times for mental health appointments, highlighting ongoing concern about access to care.

VA acknowledged that last year’s federal government shutdown disrupted work on the report, though senators noted the document was complete before the funding lapse began, raising questions about internal decision making and transparency.

The delay arrives against a backdrop of heightened attention to veteran mental health needs and workforce challenges within VA facilities, which advocates say must be addressed to prevent further loss of life.

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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Can my wife get a Spouse Benefit while I'm alive?

Dear Rusty: A friend of my wife told her, and she believes, she could receive a Social Security benefit based on my SS benefit that I'm currently receiving while I'm still alive. I told her she could only receive spouse survivor benefits. Is there any truth to what she now believes? Would you settle this issue for us please? Thank you.

Signed: Uncertain Husband

Dear Uncertain Husband: Well, surely don't want to get in the middle of your martial discussion, but I'll be happy to explain Social Security's rules about your wife's eligibility for spousal benefits while you are both still living. And just for awareness for both of you, the rules about spousal benefits are one of the most confusing areas of Social Security.

Per Social Security's rules, a spouse (e.g., your wife) can receive a "spousal boost" from you – while you are still living – if the SS retirement benefit she is personally entitled to at her full retirement age (FRA) is less than 50% of the SS retirement benefit you are (were) entitled to at your FRA (full retirement age amounts are used to calculate living spouse benefits, regardless of when each of you actually claimed your Social Security).

So, if your FRA entitlement benefit amount is more than twice your wife's FRA entitlement benefit amount, she can, indeed, get a "spousal boost" from your record while you are both still living. The spousal boost is added to her own SS retirement amount and will be based on the difference between her FRA entitlement and half of your FRA entitlement. Thus, in this discussion, your wife may be correct - she may be able to get a spousal boost from you while both of you are living, depending on how your personal FRA retirement amounts compare. The best way for your wife to find out is to contact Social Security on 1.800.772.1213 to inquire, and if she's eligible, also make an appointment to apply for her spousal benefit.

And to clarify your wife's options as your possible widow, a surviving spouse can also get a survivor benefit if their marital partner passes away, but only if the deceased spouse's current benefit (at death) was more than the surviving spouse is already receiving. The surviving spouse receives the higher amount, instead of their own smaller Social Security retirement benefit.

But here is an important thing to know: Whenever any Social Security benefit (including a spousal or surviving spouse benefit) is claimed before the recipient's full retirement age, the payment amount is permanently reduced (both spousal and survivor benefits do not reach maximum until the recipient's full retirement age). And just to complete the picture for survivor benefits, a surviving spouse is also entitled to a one-time, lump-sum death benefit of \$255 if their marital partner dies, in addition to any other benefit they are entitled to.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

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Naval Base San Diego takes part in major security exercise

Naval Base San Diego (NBSD) participated in a large-scale force protection training exercise conducted at Naval installations across the country, through Feb. 6. Held annually, Exercise Solid Curtain/Citadel Shield enhances the training and readiness of Navy security personnel to respond to threats to installations and units. It is not a response to specific threats but is regularly scheduled for practical experience and learning.

"Measures have been taken to minimize disruptions to normal base and workforce operations, but there may be times when the exercise causes increased traffic around bases or delays in base access," said Capt. Brian Bungay, commanding officer, NBSD. "Area residents may also see increased security presence associated with the exercise."

"The exercise scenarios are designed to be both realistic and challenging," said Bungay. "Testing the seamless interoperability between Navy commands, other military services, and our essential municipal agency partners allow the base to validate the Navy's ability to deter and respond to threats in real-time."



NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO (Jan. 23, 2026) Capt. Andrew Bucher, commanding officer, USS Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125), gives State Legislative Staff Members a tour of the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer DDG 125 at Naval Base San Diego (NBSD), Jan. 23, 2026. Established in 1922, NBSD is the largest West coast naval installation and principal homeport of the Pacific Fleet, supporting more than 60 combatant and auxiliary surface ships and more than 250 shore commands. U.S. Navy photo by Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Ulrika Mendiola

Tendon trouble: Finding a fix for injured tissue

newsinhealth.nih.gov

Tendons connect muscles to bones. Without them, your muscles couldn't move your body. When you injure a tendon, it can affect your everyday activities.

"No matter how strong your muscle is, you're not going to be able to have the functionality and the stability that you need if a tendon is impaired," says Dr. Nelly Andarawis-Puri, a bioengineering researcher at Cornell University.

Tendon troubles can arise from inflammation, a rupture, or breakdown (degeneration) of the tendon tissue. These conditions are called tendinopathies. Symptoms include swelling, pain, stiffness, and weakness.

Problems can stem from a sudden, awkward movement. But they're usually a result of overuse. Overuse injuries are common in athletes. But daily activities that require repetitive movements can put anyone at risk. For instance, repeated exercises that require jumping may cause knee problems. Typing all day at work may lead to pain in your hands.

Tendon injuries can lead to long-term (chronic) issues if they don't fully heal. And they often don't. That's because our bodies' ability to repair tendon tissue declines with age.

Researchers are trying to unravel why tendons often don't heal properly and what's needed to repair them.

Breaking the Cycle

"The most common type of tendon injury is an overuse, or wear-and-tear, injury," explains Andarawis-Puri. "It's not necessarily painful once it starts and can be silent for a long time. Essentially, you predispose yourself to more and more accumulation of damage. Then, eventually you have degeneration."

Getting treatment early can help keep tendon problems from getting worse. Your doctor may recommend icing the area, pain relievers, and resting the tendon.

These treatments don't help repair your tendon. "But they can make you less miserable and manage the pain and the discomfort," Andarawis-Puri says.

Physical therapy is often recommended for treatment as well. But there is a fine balance between exercise that promotes healing or causes damage. "That's tricky," Andarawis-Puri says, "because that's different for every person."

Her team is studying the biology of tendons to better under-



stand how and when exercise promotes healing.

Tendons are made up of cells called tenocytes and bundles of a protein called collagen. These bundles form long helical chains.

"These helices look almost like springs—that allows them to coil and uncoil," says Dr. Adam Abraham, an expert on chronic tendon disease at the University of Michigan. Coiling helps the fibers absorb the force from your body movements.

"A tendon is a unique connective tissue that's highly ordered and made primarily of collagen. That's what gives it its strength," explains Dr. Jenna Galloway, a regenerative medicine expert at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. "When you do too much movement, you can damage some of those collagen fibers. Normally, we can repair a little bit of damage. But if you do this over and over again, you change the properties of the tendon."

When collagen fibers are injured, they look kinked under a microscope, says Andarawis-Puri. Her team has shown in animals that exercising too soon after an injury worsens that kinking. They've also found that waiting two weeks before letting the animals exercise gives time for the coils to straighten out.

"Our research shows that with the right timing and conditions, movement can actually trigger the tendon to repair," Andarawis-Puri says.

Her team hopes to find ways to easily tell when exercise will help rather than hurt.

Reversing Chronic Conditions

The highly organized nature of tendons is key for them to work properly.

"But tendons are a rather lazy organ," Abraham explains. "They are slow to adapt, if they adapt at all."

Abraham's team is trying to understand the changes tendons undergo from chronic injuries. They've developed a system that allows them to grow 3D tendon-like structures using cells from patients' tendons.

"We're developing a system that basically allows us to make microtendons," Abraham explains. "The goal is to grow hundreds to thousands of these from a single person. That may sound very large, but they're the size of a human hair."

This 3D system allows the researchers to expose the microtendons to different conditions. Then, they can look at how the microtendons respond. They're comparing microtendons grown with cells taken from people who have healthy tendon tissue to those with chronic tendinopathies.

"We can stress out healthy microtendons and get them to behave like those from patients with chronic injuries," says Abraham. "The cells that come from patients with a chronic

condition are already stressed. They become locked in this stressed state."

His team is trying to restore chronically injured cells to a healthy state. "We're hoping with this 3D system, we will be able to synthesize many hundreds of different environments at the same time. So we can screen what might be a possible fix," he explains.

Abraham's team is also testing an injectable hydrogel to mimic a healthy environment. They hope to deliver it to injured tissue to restore an organized tendon structure.

Coaxing Repair

Unlike people, some animals can fully repair tendon tissue as adults. For instance, zebrafish completely regenerate tendons throughout their lives. Galloway hopes to learn from them.

Her group has shown that tenocytes can repair fully torn tendon tissue in zebrafish. Her recent study showed that the cells bridge fully severed tissue back together.

People and other mammals have tenocytes, too. But after a tendon is injured in mammals, the tissue usually doesn't recover. Instead, a scar forms and disrupts the carefully crafted collagen structure.

There's something different about how mammals respond to a fully torn tendon injury, Galloway says.

"The cells in the zebrafish can respond to an injury to regenerate the tissue, but the cells in mammals cannot," she adds.

Her team is comparing differences between fish and mammals after a tendon injury. And they're testing potential compounds in injured tissue in mammals. They hope they can make the process of healing go better for them, too.

Scientists are still trying to fully understand tendon biology. In the meantime, it's important to protect your tendons (see the Wise Choices box) and get injuries treated early.

Protect Your Tendons

- Warm up or stretch before exercise.
- Do strengthening exercises for the muscles around your joints on a regular basis.
- Don't sit still for long periods.
- Take frequent breaks when doing activities that require repetitive motions.
- Practice good posture and position your body properly for tasks.
- Begin new physical activities slowly. Gradually increase the intensity over time.
- Stop activities if they cause you pain.
- Cushion your joints while using tools and sports equipment. Try padding, gloves, or grip tape

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