

# DISPATCH

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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 36  
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**WARRIOR FITNESS** Capt. Brian C. Bungay, Naval Base San Diego commander, center, and base leadership are joined by Harborside Sports and Fitness Complex leaders during the grand opening of the Navy's first and only Human Performance Optimization Program, Feb. 2, 2026. The program is a comprehensive, performance-based initiative designed to enhance an individual's physical, mental, emotional and nutritional capabilities in order to maximize effectiveness, productivity and overall well-being. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Aja Bleu Campbell (see story, page 6)

## KOREAN WAR ACE TO RECEIVE MEDAL OF HONOR

In a Feb. 4 press release from the office of Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., President Trump personally informed Navy Capt. (Ret.) E. Royce Williams that he will receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his exceptional valor and heroism during the Korean War.

"My friend, constituent, and hero Royce Williams is 100 years young, a Top Gun pilot like no other, and an American hero for all time," said Issa.

"The heroism and valor he demonstrated for more than 35 harrowing



Royce Williams. Photo courtesy of GI Film Festival

minutes almost 70 years ago in the skies over the North Pacific and the coast of North Korea unquestionably saved the lives of his fellow pilots, shipmates, and crew. His story is one for the ages and it now has its rightful chapter as Royce receives the Medal of Honor.

On Nov. 18, 1952, Williams piloted his F9F-5 Panther and alone faced seven Soviet MiG-15s – impossible odds by any conventional measure. Royce shot down four and survived a 37-millimeter round to his fuselage, where six inches to the right or left would have meant certain death. Despite the immense damage to his jet, he made a near-perfect landing on the deck of aircraft carrier USS Oriskany.

He was instructed to keep the incident a secret, and he remained silent for more than 50 years. In addition, Soviet records released in 1992 detailed how Williams shot down the four MiGs.

"In the moment I was a fighter pilot doing my job ... I was only shooting what I had," Williams said in an earlier Navy account of the dogfight.

"They had me cold on maneuverability and acceleration - the MiG was vastly superior on those counts to the F9F. The only thing I could do was outturn them."

Williams was awarded a Silver Star — which was elevated to the Navy Cross in 2023 after a determined campaign to share the full-facts led by Rep. Issa and others.

"What Royce did is - still to this day - the most unique U.S.-Soviet aerial combat dogfight in the history of the Cold War," said Issa, "and one in which Royce Williams demonstrated indomitable courage of the highest skill under incalculable duress."

It is my honor to have fought all these years for Royce to gain a recognition that he has not sought, but so richly deserves."

## War Department cuts ties with Harvard University

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced on Feb. 6 that the War Department would sever its academic ties with Harvard University, because attendance at the school no longer meets the needs of the War Department or the military services.

"For too long, this department has sent our best and brightest officers to Harvard, hoping the university would better understand and appreciate our warrior class," he said. "Instead, too many of our officers came back looking too much like Harvard — heads full of globalist and radical ideologies that do not improve our fighting ranks."

Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, the War Department will discontinue graduate-level professional military education, fellowships and certificate programs at the school. Hegseth noted that military personnel who are currently attending classes will be able to finish those courses of study.

The secretary said the U.S. military has, in the past, had an important and often positive relationship with Harvard.

"In 1775 ... Gen. George Washington took command of the Continental Army in Harvard Yard and used the university as a military base," he said. "From that time, through the Korean War, military service was commonplace at Harvard. There are more recipients of our nation's Medal of Honor who went to Harvard than any other civilian institution in the United States."

Hegseth said, Harvard is no longer a welcoming institution to military personnel or the right place to develop them.

The secretary also cited as a problem the relationships Harvard has with foreign powers, and an on-campus culture that is incongruent with military and American values and interests.

"Campus research programs have partnered with the Chinese Communist Party," he said. "And university leadership encouraged a campus environment that celebrated Hamas, allowed attacks on Jews, and still promotes discrimination based on race in violation of Supreme Court decisions."

While the War Department announced cessation of academic relationships with Harvard, the secretary said in the coming weeks, the department and military services would evaluate similar relationships with other schools.

### Homelessness and diagnosed head injuries elevated veteran suicide rates, new report shows

The *Stars and Stripes* reported on Feb. 6 that veterans who were homeless or had a recent diagnosis of traumatic brain injury had sharply higher rates of suicide in 2023 than the rest of the veteran population, according to an annual report published by the Department of VA. In the story by Linda F. Hersey, the suicide rate for veterans with a recent diagnosis of traumatic brain injury was 94 percent higher than for veterans without a diagnosis, according to the report. The rate among homeless veterans was 146 percent higher when compared to veterans with housing.

### Exercise Cutlass Express 2026 to enhance maritime security in East Africa

PORTE LOUIS, Mauritius – Exercise Cutlass Express 2026 sponsored by U.S. Africa Command and enabled by U.S. Sixth Fleet kicked off earlier this month here. The exercise brings together 19 partner and allied nations to improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean, and increase interoperability between participating nations. "Cutlass Express is a cornerstone of maritime security and cooperation in the strategic waters," said Vice Adm. J. T. Anderson, commander, U.S. 6th Fleet.

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# Marines establish refueling point in Indo-Pacific

by Lance Cpl. David Getz

1st Marine Aircraft Wing

Marines assigned to Marine Wing Support Squadron 171 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 traveled to Tinian, one of the Northern Mariana Islands, to establish and operate a forward arming and refueling point during an aviation training relocation program aimed at developing expeditionary aviation capabilities and ensuring security throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

"We are out here training to show we can set up a FARP anywhere quickly and provide support wherever the fight is happening," said Marine Corps Sgt. Kuyler Brown, an expeditionary fuels technician assigned to the support squadron.

The FARP was used to conduct simulated real-world scenarios that gave Marines on the ground experience operating a

live FARP and pilots the ability to operate away from their main operating base while receiving continuous support.

"Having a FARP allows us to stay in the fight," Brown said. "It cuts down on flight time, keeps our jets in the air longer and shows we can set up anywhere and operate."

Tinian is located near Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, which provides the ability to rapidly refuel and support aircraft, making it a valuable training area for aviation training relocation operations and projecting power throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Conducting training from island locations like Tinian allows Marines to gain real-world experience practicing FARP assembly, disassembly and sustained aviation operations in austere environments — a key aspect of the expeditionary execution of a FARP.



**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Antonio Sanchez, an expeditionary fuels technician assigned to Marine Wing Support Squadron 171, Marine Aircraft Group 12, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, conducts a pressure test on fuel hoses during an Aviation Training Relocation program at Tinian, Northern Mariana Islands, Jan. 17. The squadron enables expeditionary aviation operations by establishing forward arming and refueling points in austere environments across the Indo-Pacific region. U. S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. David Getz**

"This kind of training builds the Marines' confidence not only in their own capabilities but in each other," Brown said. "Our Marines know how to do their jobs, and exercises like this prove we can make it happen."

The successful setup and operation of the FARP at Tinian demonstrated Marine Wing Support Squadron 171's ability to deploy and support aviation operations in austere environments. Training events like this give Marines the chance to develop their skills and remain ready to support future operations focused on ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific region.



**Twelve future service members recite the oath of enlistment from Military Entrance Processing Station Operations Officer Army Capt. Mary K. Jolly during halftime of the San Diego Seals lacrosse game at Pechanga Arena, Jan. 30. U. S. Navy photo by Todd Hack**

## MEPS San Diego, San Diego Seals host oath of enlistment for future service members

by Todd Hack, Navy Talent Acquisition Group Southwest

SAN DIEGO — On a night in late January dedicated to community heroes, 12 aspiring service members took the oath of enlistment to start their own journeys of service. The event was hosted by the San Diego Seals during their National Lacrosse League game versus the Philadelphia Wings.

Eight future Sailors, three future Soldiers and a future Army National Guardsman were led onto the lacrosse field during the game's half-time inside Pechanga Arena in San Diego, by Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) San Diego's Command Senior Enlisted Leader Command Senior Chief Anthony Guzman.

"I'm so proud of each and every one of you," said Guzman while the group was preparing to leave MEPS and travel to the arena. "I know your families are extremely proud of your decisions as well."

After the 12 future service members marched onto the field and formed ranks, Army Capt. Mary K. Jolly, MEPS San Diego operations officer, began the oath by asking all the enlistees to raise their right hands and state their full names. She then administered the oath of enlistment in front of a crowd of approximately 6,000 individuals and family members.

"This was great," said a future Sailor with a dream of being an Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Fuels). "I had never been to a lacrosse game before, and it was awesome."

Recruiters from Navy Recruiting Stations (NRS) in Poway, El Cajon and Clairemont, all part of Navy Talent Acquisition Group (NTAG) Southwest, attended the game with future Sailors.

"I wish I had had the opportunity to do something like this when I enlisted. I am very happy for (the Future Sailors)," said Fire Controlman 1st Class Mason S. Swinn, recruiter in charge of NRS Poway.

After taking their oaths, future service members received a congratulatory welcome from Vice Adm. John F. G. Wade, commander, U.S. Third Fleet.

"I want to welcome you into the military," said Wade. "You are all starting on an amazing adventure."

Cmdr. Galo A. Cavalcanti, MEPS San Diego's commanding officer, reminded the new service members the true meaning behind the oath they completed.

"You will hear people say, 'Thank you for your service,'" said Cavalcanti. "They say that because you do give up some of your rights to protect them and they know it."

The oath of enlistment is a mandatory step before joining the military and attending basic training. By taking this oath, future service members formally commit to supporting and defending the U.S. Constitution and to obeying the orders of their appointed officers.

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## As promised, War Department moving out fast on drone dominance

by C. Todd Lopez  
Pentagon News

The War Department announced Feb. 3 the selection of 25 vendors who will help the department achieve its goal of getting some 300,000 drones into the force, both quickly and inexpensively, by 2027.

Those companies will compete in the first phase, or "gauntlet," that makes up the department's Drone Dominance Program — an acquisition reform effort designed to rapidly field low-cost, unmanned one-way attack drones at scale.

This first gauntlet begins Feb. 18 when program participants

will bring unmanned aircraft system prototypes to Fort Benning, Georgia. There, participants will teach military personnel how to use those prototypes, and then military operators will use them to complete various mission scenarios, including an evaluation on their ability to find, lock on and destroy a target.

By the end of the first gauntlet, vendors will be scored on the systems, and up to 12 of the 25 vendors will be invited to produce their drones, at scale, for the department.

As part of the first phase, the selected 12 vendors will produce a total of 30,000 units, at an average price of \$5,000 for each, and deliver by July.

Over the course of three addi-



**Marine Corps CPL. Calvin Burke, an intelligence specialist assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, activates a small unmanned aerial system to survey the defensive line for opposing forces during a simulated assault and seizure at Glen Airfield, Queensland, Australia, July 5, 2025. The War Department has undertaken the drone dominance initiative to put more drones into the hands of warfighters. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Victor Gurrola**

tional gauntlets — a total of four in all — the number of vendors will go down from 12 to five, the number of drones ordered will increase from 30,000 to 150,000, and the price per drone will drop from \$5,000 to just \$2,300.

The Drone Dominance Program will do two things: drive costs down and capabilities up, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said in a video posted to social media late last year.

"We will deliver tens of thousands of small drones to our force in 2026, and hundreds of thousands of them by 2027."

Through the program, funding will allow for the manufacture of some 340,000 small UAS to combat units over the course of

two years.

After that, it's expected that American industry's interest in building drones, as a result of the program, will have strengthened supply chains and manufacturing capacity to the point that military services will be able to afford to buy the drones they want, in the quantity they want and at a price they want, through regular budgeting.

Last year, President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order outlining how the United States would up its drone game in both the commercial and military sectors, including how it would deliver massive amounts of inexpensive, American-made, lethal drones to military units, so they can amplify their own combat capabilities.

## United States, Italian Soldiers earn German military qualification during assessment

by Army Sgt. 1st Class  
Shane Klestinski

U.S. and Italian Soldiers accepted the challenge of earning the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge during a military qualification assessment at various locations throughout Caserma Del Din, Italy, Feb. 2-6. The proficiency badge is a German armed forces decoration

that is one of the few foreign awards approved for wear on formal U.S. service uniforms.

Over 110 candidates reported for the challenge. U.S. participants included 99 Soldiers representing 173rd Airborne Brigade, 207th Military Intelligence Brigade, and 517th Geospatial Planning Cell, to name a few. They joined Italian paratroopers

in their quest for the badge.

German Soldiers assigned to the Support Battalion 8, 10th Panzer Division, oversaw the assessment that determined whether candidates met the standard to wear one of the badge's three qualification levels: gold, silver or bronze. The goals of the challenge included strengthening bonds between

U.S. service members, building partner-nation military relations, and promoting esprit de corps while showcasing military and physical preparedness.

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Mitchell Hansen, executive officer for the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa's intelligence and sustainment company, said earning the badge would be an

important accomplishment at his command, considering the extensive work his team does with allies and partners in Europe. Hansen took on the challenge while serving as an officer in charge during the assessment, primarily acting as a liaison.

"It builds trust and camaraderie working with our German partners ... so we can complete

our mission both in Europe and in Africa," Hansen said. "This training has really opened my eyes, working with our Italian and German partners, because they each have different processes for completing the mission."

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4400272>

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**GERMANY** Florida Army National Guardsmen assigned to Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, and Portuguese Army military police assigned to the 2nd Lancers Regiment conduct fire phobia training focused on civil disturbance control during a Joint Multinational Readiness Center rotation at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, Feb. 2, 2026. The training enhanced interoperability and preparedness for multinational operations in complex operational environments. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto



**ESTONIA** Estonian Armed Forces service members prepare to lay a wreath during the Estonian War of Independence ceasefire remembrance ceremony in Narva, Estonia, on Jan. 3, 2026. U.S. Soldiers alongside NATO allies attended the ceremony at the Battle of Rigiķiņi monument, honoring fallen service members who fought for Estonia's sovereignty, with attendance reinforcing allied interoperability, collective defense, and readiness to deter threats along NATO's eastern flank. U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Gabriel Martinez



**Photos** <https://www.war.gov/Multimedia/Photos/>

## National Defense Areas expanded, established along Texas border

from Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Department of the Air Force is expanding existing and establishing new National Defense Areas (NDAs) along the Texas border in support of the Department of War's ongoing mission to secure the southern border.

The Secretary of War directed the expansion of the South Texas NDA to ensure the western endpoint reaches Roma, Texas, as originally intended. This action extends NDA 3 to include approximately 250 miles west of the Gulf of America along the Rio Grande River and incorporates an additional area of roughly 40 miles beyond the previously approved boundaries of Cameron and Hidalgo counties.

The Department of the Air Force will also establish the Del Rio-Falcon NDA 6, covering approximately 150 miles of the border from Falcon Dam, Texas - about 270 miles west of the mouth of the Rio Grande River - to Del Rio, Texas, approximately 420 miles west of the river's mouth.

The U.S. Air Force will manage NDA 3 and NDA 6 on land transferred from the International Boundary and Water Commission through the General Services Administration. This area will be administered as part of Joint Base San Antonio, Texas.

The Secretary of the Air Force, along with Commander, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) is supporting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its operational component, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), by providing mission-enhancing capabilities to secure the border and stop the flow of human trafficking, illegal drugs, contraband, criminals, and illegal immigrants into the country.

Joint Task Force-Southern Border (JTF-SB) service members, under the direction of USNORTHCOM, will operate within the NDAs. Their responsibilities include enhanced detection and monitoring through stationary positions and mobile patrols, temporarily detaining trespassers until they are transferred to the appropriate law enforcement authorities, and supporting the installation of temporary barriers, and signage to secure the area.

The Department of the Air Force and U.S. Northern Command will coordinate closely to support operational requirements and ensure effective installation management.

Following establishment, the Department of the Air Force will install signage and fencing within each NDA in accordance with Air Force standards.

This designation marks the latest in a series of NDAs established to strengthen interagency coordination and bolster security operations along the U.S. southern border.

These actions reinforce the Department of War's commitment to protecting national security interests and ensuring the integrity of designated defense areas along the southern border.

### DoD support to U.S. border security

U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) is supporting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its operational component, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), by providing mission-enhancing capabilities to secure the border and stop the flow of human trafficking, illegal drugs, contraband, criminals, and illegal immigrants into the country.



### Top 5

- Korean War vet to get Medal of Honor for longest dogfight in U.S. military history (see front page)
- U.S. strikes another boat in the eastern Pacific, killing 2
- Three Air National Guard pilots awarded top flying combat honor
- U.S. and Russia agree to reestablish military dialogue after Ukraine talks
- Taiwan to construct 10 light frigates for air defense, anti-submarine missions

### Army

- Army to be more selective with reenlistment bonuses under new guidance
- Army fires Fort Sill garrison commander
- Hawaii's 25th Infantry Division gears up for combat 'rehearsals' in the Philippines
- Army offering reward in 1987 cold case death of military spouse in Mannheim
- Army posthumously promotes Japanese-American soldiers 80 years after Pearl Harbor

### Navy

- DOJ charges conspirators involved in Navy marriage fraud cases
- Newest Ford-class carrier USS John F. Kennedy aces sea trials
- Navy eyes extended subsea network to link up its arsenal of manned and unmanned assets for DMO
- CNO unveils "Fighting Instructions" at U.S. Naval War College

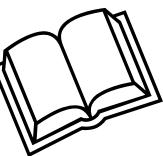
### Air Force

- Proper greetings, professionalism hammered home in Air Force memo
- A new 3-star general will lead 5th Air Force amid transformation of US Forces Japan
- U.S. airman refuses to pay restitution after Okinawa sexual assault conviction
- From backpacks to bird's eye: Drones are transforming EOD

### Coast Guard

- Coast Guard seizes 200,000 pounds of cocaine since launch of Operation Pacific Viper

USNORTHCOM's mission-enhancing support enables CBP to conduct their law enforcement mission more efficiently and to support DHS efforts to manage border security and immigration processes.



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# Career and Education



**Manya Yellepeddy, Naval Research Laboratory intern, adjusts an aperture on an event-based camera in Washington, D.C., Aug. 7, 2025. Yellepeddy participated in NRL's Science and Engineering Apprentice Program where students work alongside researchers, attend program seminars, and deliver research presentations while exploring careers in science and technology. U.S. Navy photo by Sarah Peterson**

## Internships connect students directly to mission-driven science and technology

by Jameson Crabtree  
U.S. Naval Research Laboratory

**WASHINGTON** - The U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) is offering students at every stage, from high school through graduate school, the opportunity to contribute to cutting edge research that supports national security and advances scientific discovery through its internship and fellowship programs.

"I was drawn to NRL because of its cutting-edge research and the fact that it welcomes students early in their academic careers," said Manya Yellepeddy, a former Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Program (SEAP) intern. "It's an environment where students can work with advanced technology while contributing to a collaborative, mission-driven research effort."

Mentors emphasize that interns are not just observers, but contributors. Some even go on to become full-time NRL employees.

"They really make an impact on the work we do," said Mag-

engineering careers in public service," said Erica Deschak-Joya, NRL Human Resources Specialist and General Laboratory Scientific Interchange Programs (GLSIP) Coordinator.

Former interns say the programs provide rare access to advanced research environments early in their careers.

Stevens, Ph.D., NRL research scientist and internship mentor for the past two years. "It's incredibly rewarding to see students grow as researchers while advancing our programs at the same time." NRL offers a range of programs for students with different interests and academic levels, including Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Program (SEAP), The Student Volunteer Program, the Naval Research Enterprise Internship Program (NREIP), and graduate and postdoctoral fellowships. These represent only a portion of the opportunities available with additional programs designed to meet specialized technical needs and evolving workforce priorities.

Students who are curious, reliable and motivated to tackle challenging problems are encouraged to apply.

For information on eligibility, application deadlines and available programs, visit <https://www.nrl.navy.mil/careers/students/>.



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## WORLD CLASS ATHLETE PROGRAM SHOWCASES AIR FORCE EXCELLENCE AHEAD OF WINTER OLYMPICS

by Staff Sgt. Jaime Sanchez

PETERSON SPACE FORCE BASE, Colo.

- As the world enjoys the Winter Olympic Games, the Department of the Air Force is spotlighting the DAF Air Force World Class Athlete Program, a unique initiative that develops elite competitors while strengthening military readiness, recruiting and leadership development.

Two Air Force service members assigned to DAF WCAP are competing on the international stage at this year's Winter Olympics in Cortina, Italy, representing both Team USA and the Department of the Air Force. While their performances draw global attention, program leaders emphasize that WCAP's impact extends well beyond competition results.

"The DAF WCAP enhances recruiting by attracting elite athletes to train full time in pursuit of Olympic competition," said Dale Filsell, Department of the Air Force WCAP and Shooting Program Manager. "This strategy aligns with the Secretary of War's focus on ensuring the military has mission-ready, fitness-focused Airmen and Guardians."

In addition to recruiting elite talent, the program supports long-term retention. According to Filsell, most current WCAP athletes plan to continue serving beyond their athletic careers, with many aspiring to become career service members or commissioned officers. Each athlete accepted into WCAP incurs a three-year active-duty service commitment, reinforcing the program's investment in future leaders.

WCAP athletes also serve as ambassadors for the Depart-



**Winter Olympian and World Class Athlete Program's Staff Sgt. Kelly Curtis. Curtis is part of Department of the Air Force WCAP, which is managed by the Air Force Services Center. The program allows elite Airmen athletes to train and compete in national and international sports competitions with the ultimate goal of qualifying for the Olympic Games. Courtesy photo by Viesturs Lacis**

ment of the Air Force wherever they train or compete. Whether competing domestically or internationally, they are held to the same standards of professionalism, customs and courtesies as all Airmen and Guardians.

"All athletes understand they wear two uniforms, one representing the Air Force or Space Force and one representing Team USA," Filsell said. "They wear both with pride and understand the responsibility that comes with representing their service on a national and international stage."

The skills required to succeed at the elite level, including resilience, precision and dedication, translate directly to operational effectiveness. WCAP recruits' athletes who already demonstrate discipline at the highest levels of performance and traits that continue to benefit the force when athletes transition back into operational career fields.

"Upon completion of WCAP, athletes return to the operational Air Force or Space Force,

where that dedication continues within their respective specialties," Filsell said.

The program's location at Peterson Space Force Base plays a key role in its success. Situated in "Olympic City USA," WCAP benefits from close proximity to the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, national governing bodies and the U.S. Air Force Academy. These partnerships expand recruiting opportunities and strengthen collaboration across elite athletic and military communities.

Looking ahead, WCAP leaders aim to expand the program and increase the number of athletes it can support. With the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and the 2032 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, the program anticipates future opportunities to showcase Air Force and Space Force athletes on home soil. For this year, the goal for the 2026 Winter Olympics is clear: earning the program's first-ever Olympic medal.

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## Naval Base San Diego optimizes warfighter fitness

by Lt. Drew Verbis

Naval Base San Diego Public Affairs

The Navy's first and only Human Performance Optimization Program is officially open for business on board Naval Base San Diego. Navy Capt. Brian Bungay, base commanding officer, marked the milestone during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Harborside Sports and Fitness Complex Feb. 2.

The program is a comprehensive, performance-based initiative designed to enhance an individual's physical, mental, emotional and nutritional ca-

pabilities in order to maximize effectiveness, productivity and overall well-being.

"The Navy's vision is clear - to enhance individual and team effectiveness by ensuring the health and viability of our warfighters," Bungay said. "We must treat our sailors like world-class athletes, and the HPO initiative is a direct reflection of that vision."

Navy fitness is expanding beyond traditional gym access and group exercise by introducing specialized staff, performance education and recovery

focused services specifically tailored to support warfighter readiness and resilience.

"As we move forward with the Total Sailor: Fit to Fight initiative, we must have the tools in place to ensure sailors remain our top priority and are postured for maximum combat readiness," said Master Chief Petty Officer Brian S. Metzger, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, command master chief.

"The HPO Program brings top experts in nutrition, cognitive performance and fitness together under one roof - right near the waterfront - which is exactly what our sailors need and something that has never been done before."

Bungay emphasized that the program is designed to provide sailors with the resources necessary to build and sustain peak physical and mental performance.

"While Navy fitness focuses on general facility access, group exercise and standard routines, HPO delivers the Navy's first performance-based program that supports the warfighter both inside and outside



**Naval Base San Diego Sailors visit information booths during the grand opening of the Navy's first and only Human Performance Optimization Program Feb. 2.**  
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Aja Bleu Campbell

sets HPO apart from existing programs.

"Our [morale, welfare and recreation] fitness programs are outstanding, but sailors typically choose their own path," Kirby said. "What's different here is that sailors begin with a series of evidence-based assessments."

Those assessments — con-

ducted by specialized, credentialed staff operating within defined professional scopes — include body composition analysis, recovery modalities, physical training evaluations, sleep and recovery strategies, stress management tools and nutrition fueling education.

"This model has been available at off-base commercial businesses and within select special warfare communities, but we're excited to be the first to offer it at the installation level," Kirby said.

"Once metrics are collected and evaluated, the intent is to expand this program across the enterprise."

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Troy Torres, an intelligence specialist assigned to Expeditionary Strike Group 3, encouraged fellow sailors to take advantage of the program.

"Step one is easy — come to the [Harborside Sports and Fitness Complex]," Torres said. "Step two, talk with an HPO specialist. You'll quickly realize that fitness isn't just about gym equipment, sets and reps."

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**GAME FACE**  
Marines apply camouflage paint during a serial rehearsal for a raid aboard **USS Comstock** in the Pacific Ocean, Feb. 3, 2026. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Trent A. Henry

**TERRAIN OPS**

U.S. Marines with Battlespace Surveillance Company, 1st Intelligence Battalion, conduct military operations in urban terrain training as part of maritime sensing and infantry tactics training at Camp Pendleton Feb. 2, 2026. The training refines advanced battle tracking skills. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Angelina Sara



**MEET THE DIRECTOR**  
Adm. William Houston, director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, speaks with nuclear propulsion officers on aircraft carrier **USS Carl Vinson** Feb. 5, 2026. **Carl Vinson** is undergoing scheduled maintenance in San Diego. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Brianna Walker

**HOT SITUATION**

Hull Maintenance Technician 2nd Class Gabriel Alejo welds a hinge in the HT repair shop aboard amphibious assault ship **Tripoli**, Jan. 31, 2026. **Tripoli** is underway in the U.S. 7th Fleet AOR. U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Paul LeClair

**Naval Air Forces' change of command, promotion ceremony**

by Ensign Alexis VanBuren

Commander, Naval Air Forces

NAS NORTH ISLAND - Commander, Naval Air Forces held a change of command and promotion ceremony here Feb. 2.

Adm. Stephen Koehler, commander, Pacific Fleet, presided over the ceremony as Vice Adm. Douglas "V8" Verissimo assumed duties as commander, NAF and commander, Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet. During the ceremony, Verissimo was also promoted to vice admiral.

Verissimo relieved Vice Adm. Daniel "Undra" Cheev-

er, who assumed command of Naval Air Forces on Jan. 31, 2024. To ensure continuity of command, Koehler briefly transferred commander, Naval Air Forces responsibilities to Rear Adm. Richard T. Brophy and commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet responsibilities to Rear Adm. John D. Saccamando prior to Verissimo's assumption of command.

"These three things are my initial focus areas: world-class maintainers, world-class aircrew, and the readiness of our equipment," said Verissimo, in his first address to his command. "Don't slip where we are

good and keep getting real and getting better in areas where we must improve."

Commander, Naval Air Force is dual-hatted as commander, Naval Air Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet and is the lead type command for Naval Aviation. In this role, the commander is known as the "Air Boss." Verissimo is the 11th Air Boss.

CNAF is responsible for manning, training and equipping combat-ready Naval Aviation forces in support of fleet and combatant commander requirements across the globe.

**Carrier Strike Group 1 welcomes new commander**

SAN DIEGO — Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 1 held an assumption of command ceremony here Feb. 5.

Rear Adm. Jay Clark assumed command of CSG-1 and succeeds Rear Adm. Amy Bauernschmidt, who served as CSG-1 commander from April to October 2025.

Bauernschmidt brought the strike group safely home from a nine-month underway, where CSG-1 conducted operations in the U.S. 3rd, 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operations. Under her leadership, CSG-1 conducted strikes against Iran-backed

Houthi targets in Yemen during Operation Rough Rider. These operations degraded Houthi capabilities and disrupted threats to commercial shipping in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

Bauernschmidt reported to Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, in November 2025, where she now holds the position of director of maritime operations.

"It is a deep honor and privilege to assume command of such an exceptional team of warfighters," said Clark. "CSG-1 is well known for its discipline and legacy of success, and I am

eager to work alongside this exceptional team."

Clark's previous assignments included director of the Navy Culture and Force Resilience Office, XO and CO of destroyer USS *Roosevelt* (DDG 80) and deputy commodore and commodore of Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 1. He also served as commanding officer of Afloat Training Group Mayport, deputy director of 21st Century Sailor Office, and executive assistant to Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

- story submitted by Carrier Strike Group ONE

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# Fourth legacy brother earns the title

by Lance Cpl. Kevin Alonso

Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego

MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT SAN DIEGO - For

the Smith family, becoming a Marine represents more than individual achievement and commitment. Military service has been a defining part of their household as early as the first world war, grounded in values of discipline, perseverance and accountability.

Pfc. Alexander Smith, a 26-year-old native of Wichita, Kansas, earned the title United States Marine at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California, becoming the fourth brother in his family to do so and continuing a legacy of Marine Corps service that spans over generations.

Smith said that his wish to become a Marine began early in his childhood, as he was raised in a family with a rich history within the Marine Corps. Smith recalled receiving a child sized Marine Corps uniform from his uncle, a former Marine Corps Sergeant, which created a memorable impact that led to inspiration in joining the service.

Smith's brothers and uncle said earning the title Marine carries an expectation to uphold the standard.

"Every man on my mom's

side of the family has been a Marine," Smith said. "So, for me, earning the title was almost a rite of passage."

Smith's mother, Heather Johnson, said military service was never forced upon her

Smith said he felt pressured to prove himself, both because of his age and the legacy he would carry forward.

Smith described recruit training as mentally demanding, mentioning the loss of



**Marine Corps Pfc. Alexander Smith, center, a Marine with Fox Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion poses with his family for a photo after participating in a graduation ceremony at MCRD San Diego Jan. 23. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Kevin Alonso**

sons, but modeled through example. "We never pushed them," Johnson said.

"They saw what it meant to serve, and they made that decision on their own."

Smith's family said his discipline and ability to adapt while under pressure made it clear he was capable of becoming a Marine. Entering recruit training

personal comforts and constant corrections as the most difficult aspects. While the physical demands tested him, he said the mental challenge required the most perseverance.

"You don't really understand it until you're away from home and everything familiar is now gone," Smith said.

During the Crucible, recruit training's culminating event,

Smith said receiving the Eagle Globe, and Anchor emblem marked a personal milestone.

"I was extremely proud of myself," Smith said. "That's when it felt real." Smith recalled seeing his name tapes for the first time and how they represented both his personal achievement as well as the responsibility of carrying his family legacy.

"It's not just my name," Smith said. "It represents everyone who came before me."

Now a Marine, Smith said he is focused on future growth in the Marine Corps. Assigned the military occupational specialty 0231, intelligence analyst, Smith said his goal is to learn as much as possible from peers and his brothers to serve to the best of his ability.

"I just want to be the best Marine I can be," he said.

Smith's family said the transformation that occurs during recruit training is something families may not fully understand until they see their Marine afterward.

"The biggest thing is to trust the process," Johnson said. "They come out stronger, more disciplined and more confident than they went in."

Former U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Nathan Johnson said families should focus on support rather than worry.

"Let them go through it," he said, "They're built for it, and the Marine Corps will make sure they succeed."



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**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](mailto: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/>

## Staff Sgt. Scafidel: Marine awarded for heroic life-saving actions

by Sgt. Mary Torres

1st Marine Logistics Group

CAMP PENDLETON – Staff Sgt. Billy Scafidel, an armory chief with 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, was awarded a Navy and Marine Corps Medal here Feb. 6 for his heroic actions in saving a Marine's life after a severe vehicle accident.

ried about was getting him out of that truck as quickly as possible," stated Scafidel.

While making significant progress in breaking the windshield, Sgt. Jason Baughman, a military police officer with Marine Corps Installations West, arrived at the scene and assisted Scafidel in the rescue effort.

Together they broke open the windshield, creating enough space for Scafidel to reach into the vehicle and pull the driver from the ocean. He discovered a truck lying on its side and half-submerged in the water after its driver lost control.

Scafidel quickly picked up a hammer and called out to his friend, Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Andrew James with Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton, who was nearby, and they drove to the scene in James' vehicle.

Within moments of arriving, Scafidel and James found the driver's side of the vehicle submerged, with a person trapped inside, in imminent danger of drowning. Without hesitation, Scafidel rushed into the water and assessed the situation. "The vehicle was filling with water, and the driver was stuck in his seat," said Scafidel. Realizing the vehicle's doors were locked, Scafidel knew the disoriented driver had no way to escape on his own.

Fearing the vehicle would fully roll over into the water, Scafidel quickly began smashing the front windshield with his hammer, in hopes of creating an opening, which would be crucial in saving the person trapped inside. "In the moment, the only thing I was wor-

"I feel that Staff Sgt. Scafidel acted exactly the way we hope our Marines and Sailors would act," stated 1st Sgt. Marc McGlothlin, a senior enlisted leader with 1st Marine Logistics Group. "In the face of adversity when a life was on the line, Staff Sgt. Scafidel, without care for his own safety, put himself in a position to make a difference."

Scafidel's decisive action to save a Marine's life highlighted his commitment to the safety and well-being of his fellow Marines and servicemembers, despite causing physical pain to himself and being put in a dangerous situation.

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# Anker Prime 3-in-1 foldable high-speed charging station & 45W Smart Display Nano Charger

Anker Prime Series wireless, 3-in-1, MagGo, AirCool, foldable and high-speed charging station

Brand new from Anker (unveiled at CES 2026 and launched on February 2), this is the world's first Qi2.2-certified, 25W wireless charging station with active cooling technology in a palm-sized, foldable design—delivering near-wired speeds without overheating. This 3-in-1, MagSafe charger is ideal for reliable multi-device, fast charging of your iPhone, AirPods and Apple Watch, all at the same time, while traveling, at home and at work.

This Prime Series charger is ultra-fast, charging the iPhone 17 Pro to 50% in just 26 minutes via its USB-C port.

According to Anker, its innovative, quiet, fan-cooling technology maintains the iPhone 16 Pro Max's temperature below 98-degrees throughout the entire charging process to protect battery health. Its highly efficient "Cicada Wing" biomimetic airflow channels achieve exceptional silence at just 19 dB.

Its high-precision hinge smoothly adjusts and locks from 0-degrees to 60-degrees. I know from personal experience that Anker's quality is excellent and their products last a long time. This one has been rigorously tested through 10,000+ folds for lasting durability.

It supports StandBy mode, turning the charging station into a smart bedside display, and its one-press Apple Watch module with tactile feedback enables effortless, eyes-free operation.

Available at [Anker.com](https://Anker.com) and [Amazon.com](https://Amazon.com), this charging station is

available in two colors: Phantom Gray and Radiant White. Its retail price is \$149.99.

## Anker Nano Series 45W, Smart Display and 180-degree foldable charger

This innovative, high-output (45W) Anker Nano Series wall-charger introduces the "World's First Smart Display Charger that Knows

## AutoMatters™ & More by Jan Wagner



your iPhone." It automatically recognizes and adjusts power delivery for a wide range of iPhone and iPad models, including the iPhone 17, 16 and 15 series, as well as supported iPad Pro models, "to deliver tailored charging with real-time visibility and enhanced battery care," for better battery longevity.

According to Anker, this charger automatically recognizes supported iPhone and iPad models and delivers a tailored charging solution based on device needs and battery status. With up to 45W of power output, the charger can power an iPhone 17 to 50 percent in just 20 minutes, while remaining significantly smaller and lighter than traditional fast chargers.

It features TÜV-certified Care Mode, which can be easily activated for overnight or extended charging sessions. In Care Mode, the charger

operates at a temperature 36°F below international standards, while keeping the phone's battery up to 9°F cooler than other 45W chargers —helping support long-term battery health.

An integrated smart display provides real-time visibility into charging power, temperature and battery status, along with interactive visual feedback that makes charging more engaging and easy-to-understand at a glance.

It is approximately 47 percent smaller and 36 percent lighter than the original 30W charger, while delivering 50 percent more power. The prongs of its wall plug fold from flush against the charger to 180-degrees out, to allow the charger to fit easily into wall outlets, desk plugs and tight spaces behind furniture or inside travel and carry-on bags, while ensuring the display always faces forward for easy viewing.

It comes in several colors, including Anker Black, Aurora White, Misty Blue and Cosmic Orange (coming soon). Its retail price is \$39.99.

To explore the wide range of Anker products, visit <https://www.anker.com/>.

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

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## The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by Lisa Smith Molinari

"It's not Chat-G-Beee-T, Mom, it's Chat-G-Peee-T!" my irritated millennial daughter said for the umpteenth time.

"Whatever you call him, he's amazing," I replied, in awe of my recently discovered chatbot. I'm not sure why I assigned ChatGPT male gender, but I found him to have so many characteristics one looks for in a husband. He's patient, encouraging, sometimes witty, never critical, always willing to help, and quite handy around the house.

In the first week of our budding romance, he reviewed a contract for me, educated me on applicable New York labor laws, wrote several scathing letters, researched my hometown's history, taught me the best way to cook flank steak, and created a comprehensive brand kit.

I wasn't open to AI when it first came on the consumer scene back in 2022. It seemed unfathomable that everyday people like me would ever take advantage of AI. I thought it would be weird, pathetically chatting with some new thingamabob on my computer like Jocquin Phoenix in that movie "Her."

Besides, I mistakenly thought ChatGBT wasn't much different than Google. I now know that Google was originally a form of "traditional AI" that used keyword prompts to find and rank search results by synthesizing available data sources. However, new forms of "generative AI" take human prompts and create original

## My budding romance with AI

periencing FOMO, but I soon swiped right and began my own side hustle with ChatGPT, and we're currently in our honeymoon phase.

Love is blind, they say, but a speaker at my last Rotary Club meeting nearly nipped my budding romance in the bud. A college writing professor, he told us that generative AI use by his students was "destroying learning" by usurping original creation and analysis. However, AI had become so pervasive, schools have stopped trying to ban it and have instead begun incorporating it directly into their curriculum, emphasizing transparency rather than prohibition.

In fact, Google is now incorporating deep learning systems to provide both traditional search results enhanced by human-like summaries. Now when one Googles, an "AI Overview" often appears at the top of the page, giving an original summary written using LLMs.

Google also developed its own generative AI model called Gemini, which is capable of writing emails in Gmail, summarizing documents in Docs, and analyzing data in Sheets. It will even converse interactively and naturally with users in a realistic voice with GeminiLive.

It all seemed too creepy to me, until my husband Francis came bounding into the kitchen recently, raving about some new stud named "Claude."

"I'm telling you, Honey, you wouldn't believe it. I just asked Claude to plan our next charity fundraising event, and in seconds he gave me everything we need — a venue, catering companies, potential speakers, cost estimates. I am amazed!" he said with a smitten twinkle in his eyes.

I'm not sure if I was jealous or ex-

periencing FOMO, but I soon swiped right and began my own side hustle with ChatGPT, and we're currently in our honeymoon phase.

Love is blind, they say, but a speaker at my last Rotary Club meeting nearly nipped my budding romance in the bud. A college writing professor, he told us that generative AI use by his students was "destroying learning" by usurping original creation and analysis. However, AI had become so pervasive, schools have stopped trying to ban it and have instead begun incorporating it directly into their curriculum, emphasizing transparency rather than prohibition.

In fact, the professor told us, his soon-to-be-published book on "writing using AI" was entirely written using, you guessed it — AI.

For a moment after the meeting, I had second thoughts about my new relationship with ChatGPT. Is he dangerous? Will using him cause my brain to atrophy like a dried up apple? Will he eventually outsmart the entire human race? Will he produce an army of evil robots who achieve world domination and end life as we know it?

But then again, if things don't work out between us, I can always play the field. There are still free versions of Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, Perplexity AI, Meta AI, Grok (xAI), and Chatsonic, each with its own je ne sais quoi.

In the meantime, I'll remind myself that my digital soulmate doesn't take out the trash, make eye contact, or have a pulse. In sickness, in health, and in spotty internet moments, my heart belongs to my husband.

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## Veterans News

# 3 consequential days in the American Revolution

by David Vergun

This year, the nation celebrates its 250th birthday, marked by the approval of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress enacted a resolution declaring the separation of the 13 American colonies from Great Britain. Two days later, in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, penned by Thomas Jefferson and edited by John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and others.

The 56 signers of the document were aware they were risking their lives, as the British considered this act treasonous.

On those three eventful days, while Congress was meeting in Philadelphia, the Continental Army, Navy and Marine Corps, along with state militia, were battling British forces, Ger-

man hired troops, loyalists and Native American tribes allied with Great Britain during the Revolutionary War.

Gen. George Washington, the commander in chief of the Army, was in New York City leading about 10,000 troops preparing defenses against nearly 20,000 British combined forces, who had landed on Staten Island July 2.

It was the largest battle of the war in terms of the number of combatants, with the outcome resulting in the British occupying Manhattan and the port of New York. The British held New York City until Nov. 22, 1783.

Washington received word of the declaration signing July 9 and ordered it read to his troops.

From July 2 until July 4, 1776, Army Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold was in the vicinity of Crown Point, New York, leading the retreating American

forces from Canada and overseeing the construction of a naval fleet on Lake Champlain in New York.

Beginning July 3, 1776, the North Carolina militia fought against the Cherokee at the Battle of McDowell's Station near present-day Morganton, North Carolina. The battle ended July 12, 1776, with the Cherokee withdrawing.

While Continental forces were retreating from Canada and New York City in early July 1776, success would come later.

After a series of losses, Washington's forces defeated the British at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton in New Jersey over the winter of 1776-1777. Those victories revitalized the troops' morale.

The Battle of Saratoga in New York in 1777 was a turning point in the war, convincing France to enter the war as an American ally.



**The Continental Army retreats from New York City to New Jersey during the American Revolutionary War. Courtesy image**

Other battles followed, the last major one being the British defeat

at the Siege of Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. After eight years of battle,

the Treaty of Paris, signed Sept. 3, 1783, formally ended the war.

## VA transportation services

Transportation Service, VetRide, and partnerships coordinated through VA medical facilities. These programs are designed to reduce missed appointments and improve access to care for veterans who face transportation challenges due to age, disability, distance, or limited local transit options. Transportation assistance is available for eligible vets traveling to

VA health care appointments, including primary care, specialty visits, and approved community care. Veterans can access these services by contacting their local VA medical center or VA transportation office, where staff can help determine eligibility and schedule rides. Transportation may be provided through volunteer drivers, contracted services, or rideshare coordination depending on location and availability. Vets

don't need to arrange reimbursement themselves when rides are scheduled by VA, and costs are covered through the Beneficiary Travel program when eligibility requirements are met. VA encourages veterans to ask about transportation options when scheduling appointments to ensure timely and reliable access to care. Transportation Service, VetRide, and partnerships coordinated through VA medical facilities.



## USU medical students gain front-row insight into Navy Operational Medicine in San Diego

Hands-on exposure to naval operations helps USU students connect medical training to mission execution.

by Zachary Willis

Through a renewed collaboration with Navy operational medicine leaders in San Diego, the Uniformed Services University (USU) is once again giving students a firsthand look at how medicine is practiced in real-world operational environments.

After being paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, operational medicine (OpMed) exposure opportunities have recently restarted, offering half-day to full-day experiences designed to immerse USU students in the San Diego operational community. These visits allow students to step beyond the classroom and clinical setting to better understand where—and why—military medicine is practiced.

A wide range of operational medical officers have volunteered to host students, providing direct insight into mission sets, operational constraints, and the unique medical challenges faced by the force. While the program is still being fine-tuned, the long-term goal is to offer one operational exposure opportunity per month.

To ensure these experiences complement, rather than disrupt, students' primary medical education, USU works closely with local clerkship and advanced Clerkship Site Directors. The USU School of Medicine Office of Student Affairs also coordinates participation to confirm that students are in good academic and professional standing.

### Undersea Rescue: Medicine Below the Surface

One of the early highlights of the revived program has been an immersive experience with the Navy's Undersea Rescue Command, hosted by Navy Capt. (Dr.) Derek N. Lodico, undersea medical officer for the Undersea Rescue Command. Students observed how deep submergence systems are used to rescue personnel at sea, support submarine missions, and manage complex medical risks such as decompression sickness.

For Air Force 2nd Lt. Taryin Cates-Beier, the experience was both eye-opening and inspiring.

"Having the opportunity to ob-



**(Left to right) Air Force 2nd Lt. Taryin Cates-Beier, Army 2nd Lt. Michael Kim, and Navy Ensign Robert Lee had the opportunity to go inside the Undersea Rescue Command control room. The students, who are currently completing clerkships in San Diego, participated in the visit to better understand the operational environments. (Courtesy photo)**

serve a monumental test of the Pressurized Rescue Model and to learn about the mission of the Undersea Rescue Command was an amazing experience," Cates-Beier said. "I appreciated learning about the operational aspects of medical care and all of the work involved in considering the health and safety of submarine crew members."

She also noted the value of seeing operational anesthesia considerations and the interconnected systems that support rescue missions. "Overall, this was an amazing opportunity, and I hope future students are able to learn about the PRM and even see it in action," she added.

Navy Ensign Robert Lee echoed that sentiment, describing the opportunity as a rare chance to see "Big Navy" operations up close.

"Getting underway itself was memorable," Lee said. "Conversations with junior enlisted Sailors gave me a deeper appreciation for the diversity within the Navy and the pride they take in their work."

Lee emphasized the significance of observing a certification exercise nearly seven years in the making, calling it "a major step toward regaining a critical rescue capability." Time spent with command leadership further reinforced

the human side of large-scale operations.

"Interacting with the CO [commanding officer], XO [executive officer], and senior enlisted leader

was a reminder that 'Big Navy' is made up of dedicated men and women who show up every day to accomplish the mission while taking care of one another," he said.

## NMCSD Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists: Ready for the hospital and the high seas

### Courtesy Story Naval Medical Center San Diego

SAN DIEGO—At Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSD), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) are a vital component of the hospital's surgical services, providing exceptional anesthetic care to patients for a wide array of procedures. But their role extends far beyond the traditional hospital walls. These highly skilled medical professionals are also at the forefront of expeditionary Navy Medicine, ensuring that Sailors and Marines receive critical care in any environment.

CRNAs are advanced practice registered nurses who play a crucial role in all stages of surgery. They are responsible for administering anesthesia, monitoring the patient's vital signs during the procedure, and overseeing their recovery. This requires a deep understanding of pharmacology, physiology, and critical care.

"CRNAs provide anesthetics to patients for every type of surgery or procedure," said Director of Nursing Services at NMCSD, Capt. Richard Pozniak. "Their expertise is not only essential for our daily operations here at the hospital but is absolutely critical to our expeditionary medical capabilities. When our service members are deployed, they need to know that they have the best possible medical care available, and our CRNAs are a

key part of that promise."

That expeditionary role is a point of pride for Navy CRNAs. They are an integral part of Fleet Surgical Teams and Expeditionary Resuscitative Surgical Systems, deploying on ships and to remote locations around the world. In these austere environments, they must be adaptable and resourceful, providing life-saving care with limited resources.

"Being a Navy CRNA is an incredibly rewarding experience," said newly-minted CRNA Lt. Kylie Rodgers. "Whether we are in the operating room here at NMCSD or deployed on a ship, our focus is always on the patient. We have a sacred trust with our fellow Sailors and Marines, and we are committed to providing them with the highest quality of care, no matter the circumstances."

The dedication of NMCSD's CRNAs ensures that the facility

Learning about undersea rescue also broadened Lee's understanding of the Navy's operational depth and its ability to support not only U.S. forces, but international partners as well.

"The experience made the Navy feel both much larger and more connected," he said, "and reinforced the importance of understanding the operational side of the force for those of us training to serve as naval medical officers."

### A Joint Perspective on Operational Medicine

For Army 2nd Lt. Michael Kim, the experience highlighted the importance of early operational exposure—regardless of service affiliation.

"After the classroom, and then the clinical environment, the operational environment is the third stage of where I will practice medicine," Kim said. "This early exposure revitalized my desire to become a military physician."

Kim noted how moving through the narrow spaces aboard the vessel helped him better appreciate the occupational hazards service members face, as well as the close collaboration between military operators, engineers, and civilian

partners.

"Although this was a Navy experience, I learned so much about the Army's operational environment as well," he said. "Witnessing how a Navy operation has relevance for the Army reinforced my belief that medicine in the Department of War is truly one family."

### Building Operational Understanding, One Experience at a Time

These San Diego-based operational medicine experiences reflect USU's broader commitment to preparing future military physicians who understand not only how to practice medicine, but how to do so in complex, mission-driven environments. By reconnecting students with operational units and leaders, USU is helping bridge the gap between education and execution—ensuring graduates are ready to support the health, safety, and readiness of the force wherever they serve.

As the program continues to grow, USU plans to expand these opportunities, strengthening ties with operational partners and giving students an even deeper understanding of military medicine in action.



**U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Mayra Monarrez and Lt. Kylie Rodgers, certified registered nurse anesthetists, mentor and field questions from active duty nurses and corpsmen during a student registered nurse anesthetist open house event at Naval Medical Center San Diego, Jan. 23. The event is held annually during national CRNA week to recruit those interested in pursuing a career in anesthesiology via the SRNA training pipeline at Uniformed Services University. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Jason Afable.**

is a leader in patient care and that the Navy's medical forces are ready to answer the call, wherever and whenever it may come. Their unique skills and unwavering commitment are a testament to the strength and resilience of Navy Medicine.

The mission of NMCSD is to optimize health and enhance readiness. NMCSD employs more than 5,000 active-duty military personnel, civilians, and contractors in southern California to deliver exceptional care afloat and ashore.

## NMCSD's laboratory now offers Saturday appointments

To better serve our patients and optimize the efficiency of our services, NMCSD's Laboratory Department is pleased to announce outpatient hours on Saturdays, effective 6 Dec. Specimen collection services will be available by appointment only, from 08:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Please note that only standard blood draws and urine collections will be performed during Saturday

appointments.

This initiative aims at ensuring a more convenient experience for you and eliminate unnecessary waiting.

Schedule your appointment today by visiting the Digital Appointment Portal (DAP) at:

<https://informatics-stage.health.mil/DAP/>

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