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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 32  
JANUARY 16-31, 2026

**ALWAYS ON DUTY** Air Force personnel operate a road grader to level streets after heavy snowfall at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Jan. 6, 2026. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Hunter Hites

## NAVY SEAL MUSEUM S.D. REACHES FUNDRAISING GOAL

SAN DIEGO - The Navy SEAL Museum San Diego announced January 13 that it successfully reached its 2025 fundraising goal through a \$2 million matching initiative named The Wilneff Challenge, led by long-time museum supporters Marla and Mitch Wilneff.

Through The Wilneff Chal-

lenge, every dollar donated between October and December 2025 was matched by the Wilneffs, up to \$1 million, with the funds supporting the opening of the museum's San Diego Showcase location on Kettner Boulevard.

The campaign energized broad donor participation and

provided the momentum needed to complete funding for the museum's initial San Diego presence, deliberately designed to build awareness and make a positive impact in the region, as the organization advances toward its long-term goal of much larger, world-class venue in the future.

"This achievement reflects the extraordinary generosity and leadership of Marla and Mitch Wilneff," said Vice Adm. (Ret.) Tim Szymanski, chief executive officer of the Navy SEAL Museum.

"Their support helped us reach our 2025 goal of fully funding the Showcase build and validated that our mission resonates deeply - not just with the Naval Special Warfare community, but with the broader public."

The Wilneffs' commitment will be permanently recognized

at the museum through the naming of our Call to Action Wall in their honor," said Capt. (Ret.) Brian Drechsler, the museum's executive director. "The Call to Action Wall is a central museum feature that challenges visitors to reflect on service to something bigger than themselves, and the Wilneffs' example of selfless support embodies the very values the museum seeks to inspire."

The Navy SEAL Museum San Diego exists to preserve history, support today's force and families, and inspire future generations through a globally recognized story of service and adaptability. It's an active community partner dedicated to education, service, and public benefit.

The Navy SEAL Museum San Diego is an expansion of the National UDT-SEAL Museum located in Fort Pierce, Fla.



The Navy SEAL Museum San Diego in downtown San Diego. Courtesy photo

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

On January 12, the Justice Department announced that Jinchao Wei, a former Navy Sailor who was convicted of espionage by a federal jury in August 2025, was sentenced in federal court to over 16 years in prison.

Wei, 25, also known as Patrick Wei, was arrested in August 2023 on espionage charges as he arrived for work on amphibious assault ship USS Essex at Naval Base San Diego, the homeport of the Pacific Fleet. He was indicted by a federal grand jury, accused of selling national defense information to an intelligence officer working for the People's Republic of China for \$12,000.

"Members of the United States military swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States," said Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche. "This active-duty U.S. Navy sailor betrayed his country and compromised the national security of the United States. The Justice Department will not tolerate this behavior. We stand ready to investigate, defend, and protect the interests of the American people."

"Wei swore loyalty to the United States when he joined the Navy and reaffirmed that oath when he became a citizen," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. "He then accepted the solemn responsibility of protecting this Nation's secrets when the United States entrusted him with sensitive Navy information. He made a mockery of these commitments when he chose to endanger our Nation and our servicemembers by selling U.S. military secrets to a Chinese intelligence officer for personal profit."

"He betrayed his oath, his shipmates, the United States Navy, and the American people — a level of disloyalty that strikes at the heart of our national security and demanded this powerful sentence," said U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon.

Following a five-day trial and one day of deliberation, the jury convicted Wei of six crimes, including conspiracy to commit espionage, espionage, and unlawful export of, and conspiracy to export, technical data related to defense articles in violation of the Arms Export Control Act and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations. He was found not guilty of one count of naturalization fraud.

### Army introduces future tank at auto show

The *Stars and Stripes* newspaper reported Jan. 9 that the Army rolled out the tank of the future at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. In the story by *Stars and Stripes* reporter Gary Warner, the tank has seating for three, improved fuel mileage, better off-road handling and lots of high-tech bells and whistles. And it comes in one color — Army green. Standard equipment includes a 120mm smooth-bore cannon. "This is a U.S. Army display on the M1E3 Abrams," said Ashley John, an Army spokeswoman for the military display at the car show. The Army hopes the M1E3 prototype will become its main battle tank for decades to come. It's meant to be lighter, faster, more agile, secure and lethal than any armored opposition it faces on the battlefield.

### NRL: Domain-centric path for smarter sensing

The U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) launched a remote sensing experiment to sharpen artificial intelligence (AI) applications in hyperspectral imaging across the Department of the Navy and broader scientific community. Hyperspectral imaging, often described as capturing "the color of color," provides a unique spectral fingerprint for each pixel. Combined with AI, these fingerprints support powerful tools for detecting subtle material differences and observing environmental change. In coastal and aquatic environments, such AI tools could help identify hazardous materials, monitor infrastructure degradation, and assess natural resources with unprecedented accuracy.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/display-news/Article/4372285/naval-research-lab-sharpens-navys-sights-with-a-domain-centric-path-for-smarter/>

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# NCIS forensic consultants crack toughest cases with advanced technology, creativity

by Denise Caskey

Naval Criminal Investigative Service

Far outside of the world of Hollywood television and so-called "magic tools," such as photographic enhancements or instant DNA results, Naval Criminal Investigative Service forensic consultants focus on the real science of evidence — finding the key details that help bring investigations to the finish line and provide prosecutors with what they need to see justice served.

The reality is that most of the tools used by fictional forensic consultants don't exist. There is no centralized, searchable military database cataloging the fingerprints or DNA for every service member. A DNA profile can take months to process. Even under ideal conditions, zooming in on a surveillance image rarely produces a clear license plate number.

According to Special Agent Garrett Radke, a forensic consultant stationed at NCIS Resident Agency Camp Pendleton, the notion that valuable, clear-cut evidence will be found at a crime scene is often unrealistic.

"It's such a mess of mixed profiles and mixed prints that you really can't discern which is the one that would be rel-

evant," Radke said. "It happens a lot with weapons. It's virtually impossible for us to do anything with a military weapon, for example, because [there are] literally hundreds of people who have touched that weapon."

Despite the lack of cinematic shortcuts, NCIS forensic consultants remain at the forefront of their field, using sophisticated 3D imaging technologies, such as the FARO terrestrial laser scanner, unmanned aircraft system imaging and other cutting-edge technologies to bring order to often chaotic and complex crime scenes.

The FARO system uses lasers to create a map of its surroundings with an accuracy of about 1 millimeter at a distance of 10 meters. The data can then be used to generate 3D graphics and virtual "fly-through" videos, helping juries understand the spatial relationship of evidence within a scene.

Following the catastrophic 2020 fire aboard USS Bonhomme Richard, stationed in San Diego at the time, forensic graphics specialists used imagery collected with FARO to create a 3D model of the area where the fire occurred, as well as the suspect's alleged route of travel from the lower decks to

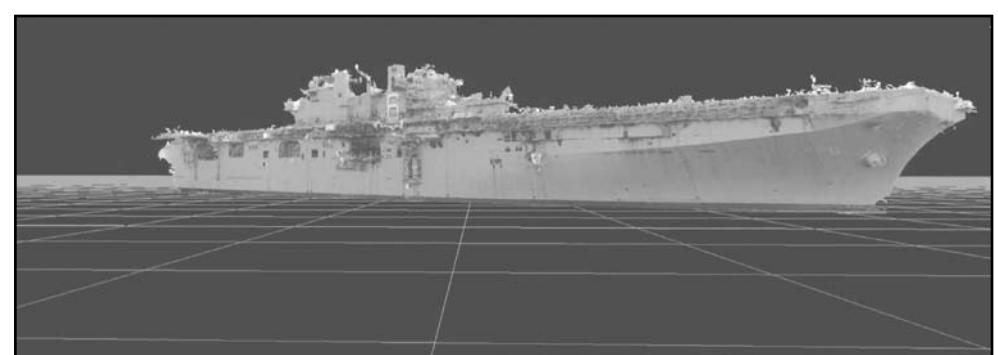
the living quarters. The model was used by the prosecution and defense teams to assess whether a key witness could have seen what he claimed to have seen. The model ultimately showed that a wall would have obstructed the witness's view.

Radke is also one of four NCIS drone pilots certified by the Federal Aviation Administration, War Department and NCIS to operate drones around crime scenes, including within the restricted airspace of military bases under special authorization.

**Drones, Radke said, serve as "eyes in the sky" for operations, especially in large or difficult-to-access areas. They can also fly in grid patterns, capturing images that can be stitched together or integrated into FARO models using photogrammetry, a technique that produces 3D representations from photographs.**

The use of drones recently proved instrumental in a death investigation after a body was found in a courtyard surrounded by tall barracks buildings. According to Radke, who responded as one of the forensic consultants, there was initially no clear indication of how the individual had died or how the body had reached the location.

"There were wounds on the body, but nothing that appeared fatal and no wounds consistent



**A 3D model of USS Bonhomme Richard is shown. Following a catastrophic fire aboard the ship in 2020, Naval Criminal Investigative Service forensic specialists used sophisticated imaging technology, such as the FARO terrestrial laser scanner and a mobile device light detection ranging scanner, to create a 3D model of Bonhomme Richard following the fire. The model depicted the area where the fire occurred and was used as evidence by the prosecution and defense teams in a court case about the incident. Courtesy photo**

with a fall from a significant height," he said. "We found blood in several locations that could have indicated the person was killed elsewhere, then transported and dumped in the courtyard, suggesting homicide. However, by using a drone to examine the roof of the nearby [building], I discovered a sledgehammer, a 27-foot skid mark that looked like something heavy had slid off the roof, and footwear impressions matching the shoes worn by the decedent."

Using the evidence and the autopsy results, NCIS determined the death was accidental, caused by a fall.

Forensics, Radke said, is rooted in the scientific method but still leaves room for creativity and innovation. Designing experiments, testing scenarios and developing unique strategies for retrieving evidence are all part of the process. In one case, Radke even used a pool skimmer and rake to recover evidence from a roof safely.

"It wasn't ideal and certainly not textbook," he said, "but it was much safer. We were there because someone had died falling off that roof — it didn't make sense for any of us to risk the same."

NCIS forensic work is a careful balance of creativity, technology and traditional evidence collection, ensuring every scene is documented to the highest standard. Even when answers aren't found right away, preserved evidence remains ready for future breakthroughs. Using tools like FARO, drones, virtual reality and mobile device light detection and ranging scanner, paired with scientific expertise, can turn even the most complex cases into successful investigations that deliver justice for victims and their families.

Forensic consultants are es-

ential to the NCIS mission of investigating major crimes involving Navy Department personnel and assets. While many arrive with crime scene or forensic science backgrounds, others — like Radke — begin their forensic careers at NCIS. His opinion is that the best way to become a forensic consultant is to be involved in the work.

"Be an active part of the major case response team, go to scenes, go to autopsies and consider the NCIS Forensic Associate Program," he said. "It's designed to identify and develop special agents interested in becoming forensic consultants."

A career as an NCIS forensic consultant, Radke said, can be very rewarding for those who think beyond the standard investigative steps and embrace creative problem-solving.



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

Visit this page of our website to watch fun videos about our different teams and participants:  
<https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

**CORRECTION:** In our Dec. 16, 2025, edition of *Armed Forces Dispatch*, we ran a story on page 2 regarding the closure of the Navy Exchange's Layaway Program. Our attribution to Tess Paquette of NEX was inaccurate due to the fact she is now retired from NEX is not authorized to speak for the command. The online version was updated with a statement to *Armed Forces Dispatch* from Jason Rosenberg, Senior Vice President, Chief Store Operations of the Navy Exchange command, which came in after we had gone to press on Dec. 9, stating "The Navy Exchange will end its layaway program on January 1, 2026, due to the program's drop in patron usage in recent years. The discontinuation is in line with other national retailers who have stopped offering layaway as a purchase option in recent years. The Navy Exchange offers payment alternatives for customers, including the Navy Exchange's "Liberty Pay" program, which is a "buy now pay later" program offering zero interest options."



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## U.S., PARTNER FORCES STRIKE ISIS TARGETS IN SYRIA



**U.S. Central Command Forces, alongside partner forces, conducted large-scale strikes against multiple ISIS targets across Syria in support of Operation Hawkeye Strike, Jan. 10, 2026.**

TAMPA, Fla. — On Jan. 10, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) forces, alongside partner forces, conducted large-scale strikes against multiple ISIS targets across Syria.

These strikes are part of Operation Hawkeye Strike, which was launched and announced on Dec. 19, 2025, at the direction of President Trump, in direct response to the deadly ISIS attack on U.S. and Syrian forces in Palmyra, Syria, on Dec. 13, 2025. That ambush, carried out by an ISIS terrorist, resulted in the tragic deaths of two American Soldiers and one U.S. civilian interpreter.

The strikes Jan. 10 targeted ISIS throughout Syria as part of our ongoing commitment to root out Islamic terrorism against American warfighters, prevent future attacks, and

protect American and partner forces in the region. U.S. and coalition forces remain resolute in pursuing terrorists who seek to harm the United States.

CENTCOM leaders said, "Our message remains strong: if you harm our warfighters, we will find you and kill you anywhere in the world, no matter how hard you try to evade justice."

Central Command's statement didn't specify a number of casualties or locations, and included a short video featuring unclassified footage of the strikes. Hawkeye Strike was launched in December after a lone gunman killed three Americans in Palmyra

"We will never forget, and never relent," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted on X in reference to the strikes.

## Austal USA christens final EPF, future USNS Lansing

MOBILE, Ala. — The final Navy Expeditionary Fast Transport Ship - future USNS Lansing (EPF 16) — was christened at a ceremony Jan. 10 at Austal USA's Mobile, Ala. ship manufacturing facility.

The christening marks a major milestone in the Spearhead-class EPF program, which has delivered vital high-speed, shallow-draft transport capability to the Navy and Military Sealift Command.

Since the inception of the EPF program, Austal USA has built and delivered a fleet of fast transport vessels that provide agile intra-theater personnel and cargo movement, rapid response support, and enhanced operational flexibility around the globe.

### FEBRUARY MILITARY OBSERVANCES

#### February

Four Chaplains Day	Feb. 3
USO Birthday	Feb. 4
National Salute to Veteran Patients	Feb. 8-14, 2026
Coast Guard Reserve Birthday	Feb. 19

This christening was unique in that two sponsors christened the ship; Gretchen Whitmer, governor of Michigan, and Lisa McClain, U.S. Representative serving Michigan's 9th District, broke bottles of champagne simultaneously on the bow of the ship after which they jointly said, "For the United States of America, I christen thee Lansing.



**Future USNS Lansing christened by co-sponsors Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Congresswoman Lisa McClain.**  
**AUSTAL USA photo**

May God bless this ship and all who sail in her!"

"I was especially honored to witness this tradition that means so much to our Navy and our Na-

tion with the christening of the last ship of this great fleet," said Austal USA President Michelle Kruger. "The Flight II Expeditionary Fast Transport ships represent a significant increase in naval auxiliary capability, designed to support a wide range of missions including medical operations, logistics, and troop transport.

"These ships are built by an exceptional team of dedicated men and women who consistently strive to be the best in the industry, delivering the most capable and cost-effective vessels to our superior Navy."

Future USNS Lansing is the

first Navy ship named after the capital of Michigan. There have been 32 naval ships named after some aspect of Michigan. This includes the first iron-hulled ship in the Navy, named after the state and commissioned in 1844.

EPF Flight II provides a Role 2E (enhanced) medical capability which includes, among other capabilities, basic secondary health care built around primary surgery; intensive care unit; ward beds; and limited x-ray, laboratory and dental support. The EPF's catamaran design provides inherent stability to allow surgeons to perform underway medical procedures in the ship's operating suite.

## Armed Forces Dispatch

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

The Dispatch is published online weekly on Thursdays, and in print on the 1st & 16th of each month by Western States Weeklies, Inc., as a commercial, free-enterprise newspaper. The editorial objective of the Dispatch is to promote support for a strong military presence. Contents of the Armed Forces Dispatch are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps. The opinions and views of writers whose materials appear herein are those of the writers and not the publishers. Appearance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or any other DOD component, this newspaper, or Western States Weeklies, Inc. Subscription cost is \$90/year.

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**Top 5**

- \*U.S. launches retaliatory strikes against ISIS in Syria
- \*Where Trump has threatened to strike next
- \*U.S. intercepts fifth sanctioned tanker
- \*Air Force brings back job patches, which were banned for some reason
- \*Coast Guard seized a record \$3.8 billion in narcotics at sea in 2025, service says

**Army**

- \*Missile defense base dealing with 'critical' disruptions at its dining facility
- \*Army rolls out tank of the future at Detroit auto show
- \*Army inactivates Security Force Assistance Command

**Pentagon**

- \*Pentagon announces new way military will measure troops' body fat

**Navy**

- \*Navy christens future USNS Lansing, the final Flight II Expeditionary Fast Transport ship (see story, page 3)
- \*NIWC Atlantic's new Rapid Capabilities Office aims to deliver tech 'at wartime speed'
- \*Navy reported 61 accidental deaths in fiscal 2025
- \*USS Abraham Lincoln holds live-fire drills in South China Sea amid 'routine operations'

**Marine Corps**

- \*How a Marine lost over 100 pounds ahead of basic training enrollment

**Air Force**

- \*Air Force plans for new electronic warfare squadron to aid combat training
- \*Air Force outlines acquisition changes supporting Hegseth mandate

**Space Force**

- \*Space Force awards \$739 million in launch orders to SpaceX

**Veterans**

- \*A veteran's search for healing led to an ibogaine trip and an epiphany
- \*Wounded veterans cycle through Florida Keys for annual Soldier Ride
- \*Veteran says he was seized by immigration agents on cruise in case of mistaken identity

- \*Missouri man who abused, stole from his disabled veteran uncle sentenced to 13 years in prison, ordered to repay \$1.8 million

**Cyber, Space & Unmanned**

- \*Navy F-35 pilots train to wield drones with touchscreen tablets

**Ukraine**

- \*Russia says it used new Oreshnik missile in major attack on Ukraine

**International**

- \*U.S. steps up planning for possible action in Iran

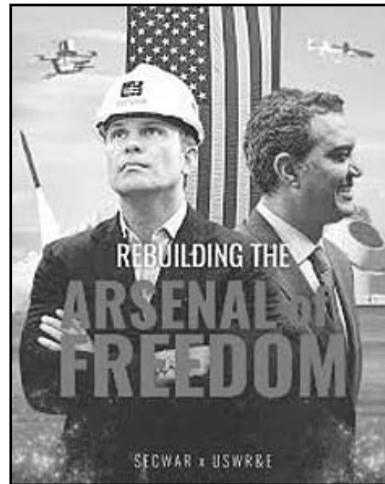
## Launching Arsenal of Freedom tour

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth recently made two stops on his just-launched "Arsenal of Freedom" tour, a call to action to revitalize America's manufacturing might and reenergize the nation's workforce. The month-long campaign aims to promote one of the War Department's top priorities of rebuilding the military by engaging with the defense industrial base at various stops throughout the country.

"On this tour, we'll be traveling from the shipyards of the coast to the factories of the heartland to see the work being done by the military and our partners in American manufacturing, to usher in a new golden age of peace through strength — a revival of our industrial base — all-American, made by the best Americans," Hegseth told a large crowd while visiting a shipyard in Newport News, Va. Jan. 5.

"While in L.A., he visited defense industry leaders to highlight the urgent need to rebuild our defense industrial base to ensure that we continue President Trump's and Secretary Hegseth's peace through strength agenda," Wilson said, adding that the tour's message will emphasize that national security and peace of the world move at the speed



**Secretary of War Pete Hegseth administers the oath of enlistment to new recruits at the Los Angeles Military Entrance Processing Station, Jan. 8, 2026. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Madelyn Keech**

of our defense industrial base, and rely on the hard work of our American workforce.

While on the tour, Hegseth also made stops to enlist recruits. Before heading to the shipyard 5, Hegseth administered the oath of enlistment to 30 individuals at a nearby recruiting station. "What we care about at the War Department are the real men and women who do the real work in uniform for the American people."

## Air Force announces updates to dress, appearance regulation

from Secretary of the Air Force  
Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Air Force released guidance on its dress and personal appearance policy Jan. 9 providing updated standards for Airmen.

The new guidance clarifies rules on mandatory uniform items and personal appearance while adding visuals to reduce ambiguity.

The reinstatement of duty identifier patches is one of the most significant changes, intended to honor the skills and heritage within the force. A list of approved duty identifier patches and qualification tabs can be found [here](#).

"I've decided to bring duty identifier patches back because the Air Force is made up of many different specialties, each with a unique role in our mission to generate airpower," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ken Wilsbach. "We are a unified force working together to win."

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force David R. Wolfe emphasized that the patches are a visible symbol of an Airman's contribution to the larger mission. "Your expertise matters. These patches are a reflection of the skills you earned, and every patch tells a story that ends with AIRPOWER," said Wolfe. "They connect your role to the larger mission. We trust you to wear them correctly and help your wingmen do the same — we owe each other accountability every day."

Additional key updates in the new guidance include the following:

**Operational Camouflage Pattern uniforms:** There is no longer a requirement for all officers to maintain a full set of OCPs. Only those individuals performing assigned duties and mission requirements that necessitate OCPs must maintain a full set.

**Earbuds:** The wear and use of an earpiece, headphones, or any Bluetooth wireless technology while in uniform, indoors or outdoors, is only authorized for official duties. The use of personal electronic media devices, including earpieces, speaker phones or text messaging while walking in uniform is limited to emergencies or when official notifications are necessary. Exceptions include, but are not limited to, authorization of headphones and earphones during travel on public transportation and while wearing the physical training gear during individual or personal fitness training. Military customs and courtesies take precedence.

**Eye wear:** Authorized frames for eyeglasses and sunglasses include black, brown, white, dark blue, gray or transparent material, or gold or silver wire. Authorized sunglass lenses must be traditional gray, brown, or dark shades. Authorized eyeglass lenses must be conservative, clear, slightly tinted, or photosensitive lenses. It is unauthorized to wear mirrored lenses or smart glasses with photo, video or artificial intelligence capabilities while in uniform.

**Bags:** The new standardized list of colors for authorized bags includes solid black, brown, dark blue, olive drab green, and OCP-patterned. The full details on authorized bags are published [here](#).

**Watch cap:** The watch cap may be worn during Oct. 1 to March 31, cold weather conditions, or as determined and approved by the installation commander.

It will be solid black or coyote brown knit or fleece material and not include rank insignia. The black watch cap may be worn with Class A and B uniforms, OCPs, or PT gear. The coyote brown watch cap may be worn with the OCP uniform or PT gear.

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### St. Luke's Lutheran Church

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website: [www.st-lukes-la-mesa.org](http://www.st-lukes-la-mesa.org)

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We thank you for your service!

## Army enhancing Soldier experience through improved dining options

by Rebecca Teutsch  
U.S. Army Materiel Command

Food is an essential part of everyday life, and that is no different for warfighters. Fueling Soldiers to fight and win our nation's wars is a top priority, and the Army has several initiatives underway to ensure consistent access to healthy, affordable food.

"The Army is focused on creating a positive seismic shift in food service operations," said Army Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan, Army Materiel Command commanding general.

The Army listened to soldier feedback and, in 2023, stood up an Army Food Program board of directors who quickly took action to improve dining options

on installations by expanding the use of food trucks, bistros, meal prep programs and 24-hour self-service kiosks.

"It's about getting the right types of food at the right locations. We need to build a comprehensive Army food strategy that looks at the entire food ecosystem and all the potential options to feed soldiers," Mohan said.

As part of its continuous transformation the Army has implemented four additional initiatives — campus-style dining venues, Dining Excellence program, Victory Fresh and flexible eating and expanded dining — in various stages of execution that have the potential to change the food landscape across installations.

These initiatives, along with traditional dining facilities, are designed to ease the burden on the Army's culinary specialists and meet Soldier preferences.

"Not every installation is the same, so the Army needs an approach featuring tailor-made, scalable options," Mohan said. "We have to meet Soldiers where they are."

### Campus-style dining venue pilot

The CSDV pilot transforms the way the Army fuels its Soldiers by leveraging industry experts' experience to operate restaurants on installations that offer more food options, better service, ambiance and hours. The Army awarded a concession contract Aug. 28, 2025, to create a unique campus-style

dining venue at Fort Hood, Fort Carson, Fort Bragg, Fort Drum and Fort Stewart.

The Army's vision for the CSDV pilot includes multiple food stations, flexible seating and social spaces, technology integration, extended hours and service options. Under the CSDV model, contractors will manage the venue and provide food as a restaurant would. The primary intent of the pilot is to provide a venue where soldiers on essential station messing — or a meal card — want to dine, so they can maximize their meal entitlements rather than paying out of pocket for food elsewhere.

At the CSDV, they will swipe their common access card for their meals, just as they do in

traditional dining facilities. The contractor will be paid only for the meals served to soldiers on essential station messing.

"When Soldiers pass up their benefits and entitlements, we are failing them," Mohan said.

While the focus is on meal card holders, the restaurants will offer a range of a la carte options for other customers, including soldiers, families and Army civilians.

The first CSDV pilot locations are scheduled to open in the spring.

### Dining Excellence Program

Through the DINEX program, the Army is seeking innovative, flexible contracting solutions to run dining facilities on training

installations and improve existing food service models. DINEX will support dining facilities that serve soldiers who are subsisted-in-kind, in training and eat at high-volume, high-flow rates.

The Army wants to introduce innovative procedures, practices or methods not currently used in support of food service operations to ensure optimal nutrition and sustainment for the next generation of soldiers. The Army issued a commercial solutions opening on SAM.gov in December 2025. It will begin evaluating proposals and work with industry in the coming months.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4374424/army-enhancing-soldier-experience-through-improved-dining-options/>

## Understanding Basic Allowance for Housing

Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH, is money provided to service members stationed in the U.S. for fair housing compensation. From the time you enter basic training, to your last PCS, the BAH entitlement works for you by offsetting the cost of housing. And since it is an allowance — and not considered part of your pay — you will not be taxed on the amount you receive each month.

There are three important factors that determine the amount of BAH allowance you may receive:

**Pay grade:** Allowances increase as your time in service and pay grade increases.

**Geographic duty location:** Where you are assigned — not the area in which you or your family choose to live — is the determining factor. If on-base housing is available and you choose to live there, quarters are usually assigned based on pay grade and family size.

**Dependents:** Allowance amounts vary depending on whether or not you have any dependents.

### How BAH Calculates Housing Costs

To determine how much allowance you will receive each month,

the Department of Defense factors in these considerations, according to geographical location:

**Current rental market rates + Average cost of utilities + Home type and the number of rooms = BAH rates.**

The rates are then adjusted for each pay grade and according to dependency status. For more information on calculating housing costs, visit the Defense Travel Management Office.

### Rates

Rates for BAH are reviewed and released annually, usually in mid-December. While this review typically leads to an increase, decreases happen in some circumstances. If rates increase, so will your allowance. However, if they decrease, you are grandfathered in at the rate you received when you moved to your current PCS location.

### Types of BAH

Your individual circumstances will determine the type of BAH you qualify for. For more information on the types of BAH available, check out the Department of Defense website on military compensation. You can also reach out to a personal financial manager or counselor at your nearest Military and Family Support Center if you have specific questions about what you rate. The types of BAH are as follows:

- **BAH Type I:** BAH Type I is a full rate active-duty allowance. Allocation depends on the three factors previously mentioned, as well as your specific branch policies.

- **Partial BAH:** Partial BAH is paid to service members without dependents who live on base in government quarters.

- **BAH Type II:** BAH Reserve Component/Transit, or BAH RC/T, is a reduced-rate allowance designed for some service members in the National Guard and reserves when certain conditions are met.

- **BAH-DIFF:** BAH-DIFF is the difference between the full married rates and full single rates of BAH Type II. Special rules apply for active-duty service members who live in the barracks and pay child support.

- **OHA:** The Overseas Housing Allowance is designed to help with PCS housing and expenses (except in Hawaii and Alaska) when government lodgings are not furnished overseas.

### Overseas Housing Allowance

If you have a PCS assignment that takes you out of the continental U.S., your BAH allowance is called OHA. It is designed to offset housing costs for service members living in private housing when on-base or government-leased housing is not available. Depending on your duty station, OHA may include rent, utility and recurring maintenance, and a move-in allowance. To calculate specific OHA rates, visit the OHA calculator.

### Planning Ahead

It is important to plan ahead for military moves. When you receive a PCS assignment notification, double-check that all the details are correct — from duty station, to dependent information, to reporting dates — and report discrepancies early in the process. At that point, if all is in order, you can begin the relocation search process. Do not purchase a home or sign a lease until there are "orders in hand."

Currently, BAH is only meant to

### Budgeting and BAH

Since BAH is split between your two monthly paychecks, and rent or mortgage payments are due in full at the beginning of each month, it is a good idea to develop a spending plan to keep your payments up to date. Also, keep in mind renters insurance is not included in BAH calculations, so you will need to budget for this additional expense.



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# Theodore Roosevelt hosts bridge team VR training demonstration

Sailors aboard aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) participated in a virtual navigation training demonstration using Virtual Bridge and Nautical Trainer (VIBRaNT), Jan. 8.

The event, hosted by Office of Naval Research Global TechSolutions and Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific, offered Sailors a first-hand experience of how the self-contained system can be used on board Navy plat-

forms to improve the navigation and seamanship skills of bridge watch teams by allowing them to practice rules of the road, rehearse missions, and maintain proficiency when unable to visit a shore-based training center.

VIBRaNT is a portable training system that uses commercial off the shelf extended reality hardware with commercial industry-developed software to utilize laptops, wireless routers, and headsets in order to create a realistic virtual bridge environment.

"We can bring this onboard as a mechanism to have better access for training, increasing the availability to train, and providing better situational awareness," said Amelia Kracinovich, Human Systems Integration scientist at NIWC Pacific.

VIBRaNT immerses naval warfighters in virtual scenarios and at-sea operational environments. It offers an ideal way for bridge crews to maintain their proficiency in a virtual setting when the ship is not at sea or



**Navy Quartermaster 3rd Class Zinnia Bank participates in a virtual navigation demonstration on USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, Jan. 8. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Alexia Mezick**

when they need to practice unfamiliar ship-driving scenarios.

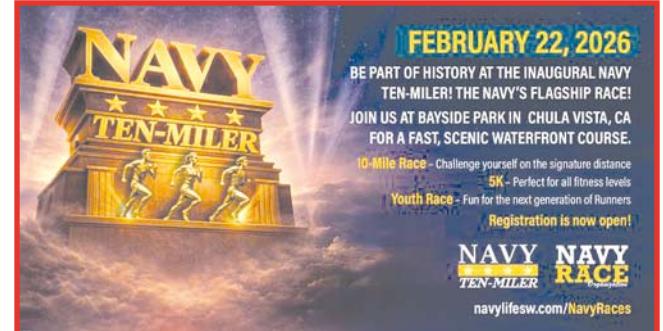
"I can see this system being very useful to have onboard," said Senior Chief Quartermaster Tom Salvatore. "Currently we rely on off-ship simulators in order to train our watch teams in foreign ports and waterways. This system will greatly increase our capacity for training to real-life scenarios that cannot be easily simulated otherwise."

The system can be used to evaluate Sailor performance in particularly stressful conditions.

to be hands-on and react instead of just listening and talking about potential steps and solutions," said Quartermaster 3rd Class Zinnia Banks.

The development of VIBRaNT was spurred by ONR's TechSolutions program. TechSolutions is focused on producing prototype solutions to problems across the fleet or force submitted by Sailors and Marines. TechSolutions then links warfighters to the government science and technology community to help develop the needed technologies as quickly as possible.

*Theodore Roosevelt*, the flagship of Carrier Strike Group 9, is currently pierside at Naval Air Station North Island in its homeport of San Diego.



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## First babies of 2026



A warm congratulations to Lt. Katharine Faullin, clinical psychologist with the Naval Medical Center San Diego Department of Mental Health, and husband Joe Faullin, on the birth of their beautiful baby girl - the very first baby born at NMCSD in 2026!

Della Autlee Faullin has made history as the center's first New Year's arrival. The staff is honored to have played a part in this special moment and thanks the Faullin family for placing their trust in our dedicated team of medical professionals.

Wishing the Faullin family health, happiness, and endless joy as they begin this exciting new chapter. *from NMCSD Facebook*



Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton welcomes the first baby of 2026! Congratulations to Marine Corps 1st Lt. Alex and Morgan Wisthoff on the birth of their baby girl, Lucy!

Lucy arrived at 1:22 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2026, weighing 7 lb. 13 oz. and 20.5 inches long.

Wisthoff is assigned as the executive officer for Company A, Wounded Warrior Battalion (West), aboard Camp Pendleton. Joining the Wisthoffs in the photo are Lt. j.g. Merceline Lazar, a nurse with the NHCP Mother-Infant Unit, and Lt. j.g. Noelle Saria, a nurse with the NHCP labor and delivery unit. *from NHCP Facebook*



**PREFLIGHT CHECK** Navy Lt. Danaikiss Betancourt inspects the main rotor of an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter during a preflight check aboard USS *Rafael Peralta* in the Philippine Sea, Jan. 8, 2026. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Ryre Arciaga

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## WELCOME HOME, USS FITZGERALD

Guided-missile destroyer USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) returned to homeport Naval Base San Diego following a seven-month underway to the U.S. 3rd, 5th, and 7th Fleet areas of operation, Jan. 6.

While at sea, *Fitzgerald* conducted a range of operations, from routine presence patrols, to maritime security operations.

The ship participated in several multinational exercises, enhancing interoperability and strengthening partnerships with key allies, including the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Republic of Korea Navy.

*Fitzgerald* executed six transits of the Strait of Hormuz, ensuring freedom of navigation

in the Arabian Gulf, and participated in major multinational exercises including MALABAR 2025 and SWARMEX 2025, enhancing interoperability and strengthened partnerships with the navies of Australia, Bangladesh, Germany, India, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the United Arab Emirates, all contributing to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

### PHOTO GROUP HUG

**Petty Officer 3rd Class Lizbeth Guadarrama greets family as USS Fitzgerald returns to its home port at Naval Base San Diego, following operations in the U.S. 3rd, 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operation, Jan. 6. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Aja Bleu Campbell**

As a lethal, agile force, the Sailors aboard *Fitzgerald* exemplified the warrior ethos and readiness required to defend the United States and its interests at a moment's notice.

"I'm truly proud of the hard work and dedication this crew has displayed daily throughout this seven month deployment," said Cmdr. Paul Richardson III, *Fitzgerald*'s commander. "Their resilience and professionalism enabled us to successfully execute every mission we were tasked with in multiple areas of operation. We're excited to be home and reunited with our families and loved ones, whose unwavering support made this possible."



**MCAS MIRAMAR (Jan. 9, 2026)** Marine Corps Lt. Col. Brian P. Spillane, left, the outgoing commanding officer of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 462, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, passes the unit colors to Lt. Col. David E. Jach, the incoming commanding officer of HMH-462, during a change of command ceremony here. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Isabella Thompson



**MCRD SAN DIEGO (Jan. 7, 2026)** Marine Corps recruits with India Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, participate in a swim qualification event here. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Yanisa Culp



**USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (Dec. 30, 2025)** Sailors fast-rope from an MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter during a drill on Abraham Lincoln in the South China Sea. U.S. Navy photo by Seaman Daniel Kimmelman

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## Omega Mart at AREA15 in Las Vegas revisited

I just returned from CES 2026 (the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas), and what a non-stop, whirlwind of a week it was! Much was familiar but much has changed. I have the inside scoop on many products and services to share with you over the coming weeks and months, but first, however, let's take a look at something that I did to unwind on my last full day in Las Vegas.

Located in AREA15, Meow Wolf Las Vegas' Omega Mart is much, much different than any grocery store. This is a self-guided, immersive, mind-blowing, interactive art experience.

Your visit to Omega Mart will begin in what appears, at first glance, to be a grocery store, but it is a grocery store unlike any other. Your visit can take as long or as little as you'd like. Exploring that store is just the beginning, as my photos show. There is so much to do there that on my first visit I stayed for the entire day. People were interacting at workstations with computers, flipping through books on shelves, reading mysterious notes on desks and watching strange videos. I suspect that you could spend days there and still not experience everything. This place is WONDERFUL!

How I decided to revisit Omega Mart is an interesting side story in itself. Since parking in at resort properties on the Las Vegas Strip has become very expensive (do you remember when it used to be free?), I try to take advantage of the free parking benefit of the MGM Mastercard at MGM hotels on the Las Vegas Strip. Since there are still some stretches of the Las Vegas Strip that do not yet have an MGM hotel, I often park at the closest MGM hotel and walk. Doing that is what ultimately led

me to revisit Omega Mart.

On the first day of CES I decided to attend the Lenovo Tech World keynote address and Gwen Stefani concert at the world-famous Las Vegas Sphere, which is connected via a walkway to The Venetian Resort. I parked for free at MGM's Bellagio and set out to walk to The Venetian.

Along the way I passed by a group of entertainers with Omega

### AutoMatters™ & More by Jan Wagner



Mart logos on their clothing. They were distributing hand-flyers offering 25% off on General Admission tickets to Omega Mart. To entertain me, they asked me to download an Omega Mart app onto my iPhone which, in conjunction with my iPhone's camera, showed me cool things.

During my conversation with them, I mentioned that I was a member of the press and that I had extensively covered Omega Mart, complete with a large photo spread, a few years earlier. Since I had my iPhone out and open, I showed them the column that I had written. Then and there I decided that revisiting Omega Mart would be a fun thing to do on Saturday, my last full day in Las Vegas. I mentioned that to them, and asked if they could try to set it up so that I would have permission to take some more photos with my professional camera. They liked the idea, and Omega Mart got back to me via email to make

arrangements for me to visit, as their guest.

Omega Mart was and is extremely popular. While there are subtle differences from when I first experienced it a few years ago, thankfully it is as wonderful and spectacular as ever.

The biggest changes that I noticed on this visit were the additions to AREA15 (<https://area15.com/experiences>). This place has evolved into a major entertainment venue, with multiple new buildings and attractions. In one of the new buildings is "Universal Horror Unleashed," billed as "Universal's Year-Round Horror Spectacle" with four haunted houses. In another building is "Illuminarium": "Illuminarium transports you to a sensory experience like no other." At the "John Wick Experience" "your bets have real consequences." Multiple return visits are likely in my future.

For more information and tickets, visit Omega Mart at: <https://meowwolf.com/visit/las-vegas>. Also see "OMEGA MART — Park your ride & shop inside" — my HUGE, colorful, mind-blowing "AutoMatters & More" photo spread from 2022 at: <https://automatters.net/omega-mart-park-your-ride-shop-inside/>.

*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

People suggest topic ideas for my columns frequently. I've been writing "The Meat & Potatoes of Life" since 2010, and 2026 marks the tenth year my columns have appeared in Stars and Stripes. After writing more than 700 columns, you'd think I'd welcome new ideas, and sometimes I do.

"Don't you just hate it when Uber drivers want to chat," someone might say, "Hey, that's it! Write your column about that!" I feign appreciation, knowing how difficult it is to transform a simple idea into a 700-word column with a well-crafted beginning and middle, and a heartwarming, poignant, unexpectedly witty, or thought-provoking ending.

But every so often, I squirrel away friends' suggestions for days when my brain dries up like an old kitchen sponge. That happened recently after my military-history-obsessed brother-in-law sent me a text.

"Do you ever write about WW2 aviation history?" his message read. He told me about "The Brown Stigler Incident." As far as stories go, it's an incredible tale of heroism. Not only does the story have a riveting beginning and a fascinating middle, its ending is both heartwarming, poignant and thought-provoking.

Sixteen years ago, on January 18, 1990, retired U.S. Air Force B-17 bomber pilot, Charlie Brown, opened a letter he'd received at his

## When old isn't new but should be The Brown Steigler Incident

Florida home, postmarked from Canada. "I was the one," it read, and Charlie knew instantly — his fifty-year search was over.

When the incredible incident happened in December 1943, Charlie was told to keep it secret, because it could affect the troops' perceptions of our Nazi German enemies. So he did, for 43 years. It wasn't until a 1986 combat pilots reunion in Alabama that Charlie told the tale of what happened to him and his crew in the skies over Nazi Germany in 1943.

Second Lieutenant Charles Brown was the commander of a B-17 bomber called "Ye Old Pub," with co-pilot Pinky Luke and eight crew members. On December 20th, they were flying in formation on a bombing run in the frigid skies over Bremen. Within minutes, flak hit Ye Old Pub's nosecone, shattering it, damaging the #4 engine, and causing the bomber to fall out of formation and be left behind.

Vulnerable and struggling, Brown's damaged plane was soon attacked by more than a dozen German fighter planes and sustained significant further damage, incapacitating onboard systems, reducing engine #3 to 40 percent capacity, blasting holes in the cabin top, jamming weapons, and disabling heat and oxygen. The tail gunner had been decapitated and was dead. Brown and the rest of the crew survived the attack but sustained shrapnel and cannon shell wounds and frozen feet.

With no radio and the threat of what might happen if they landed in enemy territory, Charlie was flying the hobbled bomber

toward the North Sea, when a Luftwaffe Messerschmitt BF 109-G6 appeared beside them. The pilot, Oberleutnant Ludwig Franz Stigler, was intending to shoot the U.S. bomber down, but when he saw the injured crew through the holes in the cabin top, he thought it would be dishonorable, like shooting a man in a parachute. Instead, Stigler flew close to the bomber, trying to mouth a plan to Brown to fly to safety in Sweden.

Brown and his crew didn't understand what Stigler was trying to communicate, so they flew on with weapons pointed at the BF 109. Stigler escorted them all the way to the coast, offering a respectful salute before leaving Brown's bomber over the North Sea on its way to safety in England.

Stigler flew back to base, never revealing what he'd done, for fear of Nazi court-martial. Fifty years later, when Stigler, who'd moved to Canada after the war, read a letter Brown published in the combat pilot association newsletter, that the two men reunited.

The Brown and Stigler became good friends, a relationship they cherished until Brown and Stigler died in the same year, 2008, only two months apart.

I realized that new news, trendy topics, and fresh anecdotes aren't always more interesting, informative, or entertaining than stories about things that happened in the past. In fact, we should always tell old stories, because remembering our past helps us inform our future.

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## Veterans News

### Missouri man who neglected veteran and concealed his corpse sentenced to 156 months in prison

from U.S. Attorney's Office  
Eastern District of Missouri

ST. LOUIS — U.S. District Judge Zachary M. Bluestone on Jan. 8 sentenced a man to 156 months in prison for neglecting his uncle, an Army veteran with quadriplegia, for years and concealing his corpse to fraudulently obtain \$1.8 million in his uncle's disability benefits.

Brian K. Ditch, now 45, of Salem, Miss., became solely responsible for his uncle's care in 2008. At some point, instead of properly caring for his uncle, Ditch kept him locked away and subjected him to insufficient care and verbal abuse. Ditch fraudulently gained access to his uncle's financial accounts and regularly wired himself money.

After his uncle's death around 2019, Ditch concealed his death from relatives, the Department

of Veterans Affairs and the Social Security Administration so that he could continue to steal his uncle's money. Ditch hid the body in a shed behind his house, telling relatives that he had moved his uncle into a nursing home and police that his uncle was living with someone else.

Since 2008, the VA's Disability Compensation program deposited approximately \$1.6 million into the victim's account. Ditch's uncle also received a total of \$235,210 in benefits from the Social Security Administration. Ditch used the money for personal purchases, including exotic reptiles and firearms. As a convicted felon, Ditch is barred from possessing firearms. On Jan. 8, Judge Bluestone ordered Ditch to repay the money.

<https://oig.ssa.gov/news-releases/2026-01-09-missouri-man-who-neglected-veteran-and-concealed-his-corpse-sentenced-to-156-months-in-prison/>

### World War II Memorial to close for construction

The National Park Service closed the World War II Memorial at National Mall and Memorial Parks on Jan. 9 ahead of a construction project to modernize fountains and lighting at the memorial.

The work will address aging infrastructure, improve reliability, and enhance the memorial's appearance. The work is expected to be completed no later than May 15, though progress will depend on weather and site conditions.

The nearly \$3.7 million contract will include:

- Installing new in-fountain lighting at the memorial to replace lighting systems that are no longer functional.
- Replacement of non-functioning exterior in-ground lighting that highlights the memorial's state and territory pillars.
- Associated electrical and mechanical upgrades necessary to support safe and reliable operation.

The Park Service says the project will enhance safety, restore nighttime visibility, and improve the overall visitor experience at the World War II Memorial and is part of ongoing work to rehabilitate and modernize fountains and related infrastructure at National Park Service sites across Washington, D.C.

The memorial will be closed to ensure visitor safety during construction, and visitors should



**The National Park Service closed the World War II Memorial ahead of a construction project. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress**

expect to find fencing and construction barriers. Some pedestrian routes may also be adjusted during the work, and visitors are encouraged to follow posted signage and directions from NPS staff and contractors while visiting the memorial.

Opened on April 29, 2004, it replaced the Rainbow Pool at the eastern end of the Reflecting Pool, between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. It was dedicated by President George W. Bush on May 29, 2004.

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<https://sandiego.navylifesw.com/> select recreation from  
top tab and drop down to movies

<https://miramar.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/>  
movies

<https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/dining-entertainment/>  
theater



### NAS NI Lowry Theater Policy

- Outside food and beverage are NOT permitted: Sales from the snack bar support the movie program.
- These Theaters are cashless facilities. Debit and credit cards accepted only.

### Premium Offerings

- Audiovisual assistive equipment available to customers at the front counter.
- Handicap seats and child booster seats are available.

NBSD Theater is temporarily closed for renovations as we work to bring you a better movie experience. We appreciate your patience and can't wait to welcome you back in spring 2026.

In the meantime, catch the latest films at NASNI Lowry Theater! Open, and ready to serve you!

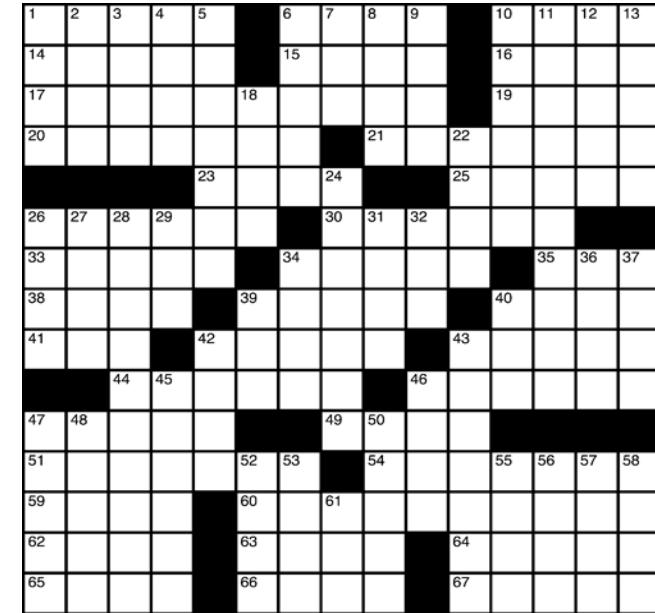
# CROSSWORD PUZZLE

**Across**

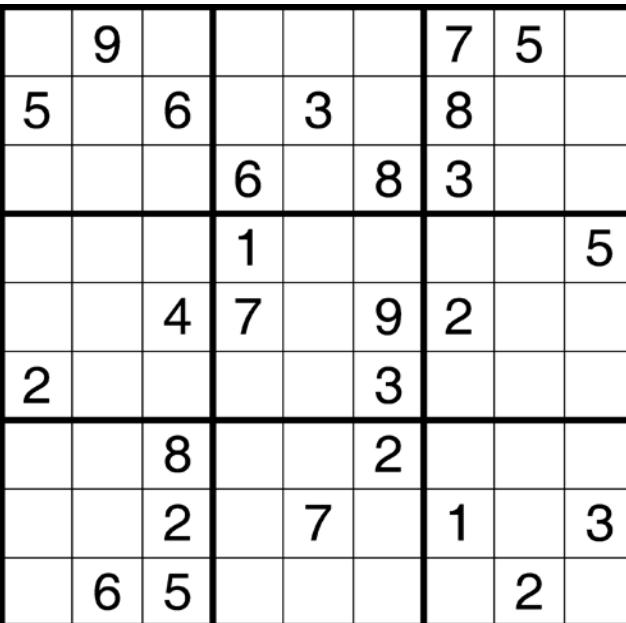
- 1 Hand-dyeing method
- 2 Scrabble pieces
- 3 Emcee's lead-in
- 4 In apple-pie order
- 5 Straight from the mouth
- 6 "Really!"
- 7 Subside
- 8 Cleveland's lake
- 9 Carried in a bag
- 10 McDonald's "M"
- 11 "Really!"
- 12 In \_\_\_ land: spaced-out
- 13 "Hurry!" on a memo
- 14 Windbags' speeches
- 15 One of two in
- 16 McDonald's "M"
- 17 In \_\_\_ land: spaced-out
- 18 "Really!"
- 19 A billion years, in geology
- 20 Tire leak sound
- 21 911 responder: Abbr.
- 22 Pickled veggie
- 23 Gardner's bagful
- 24 Warhol of pop art
- 25 Thor or Zeus
- 26 Comics bark
- 27 Forks over
- 28 Brunch fare made with
- 29 Dimwit
- 30 Stashes in a hold
- 31 Assortment
- 32 Shoe strings
- 33 Not very many
- 34 Skin opening
- 35 Word on an octagonal sign

**Down**

- 1 Deep choir voice
- 2 Share a boundary with
- 3 "Gone With the Wind" estate
- 4 Checklist detail
- 5 Represses, as emotions
- 6 Storied baby-bringing bird
- 7 Gehrig in Cooperstown
- 8 Dairy case dozen
- 9 Roald who created Willy Wonka
- 10 Bit of shuteye



# ROY'S SUDOKU

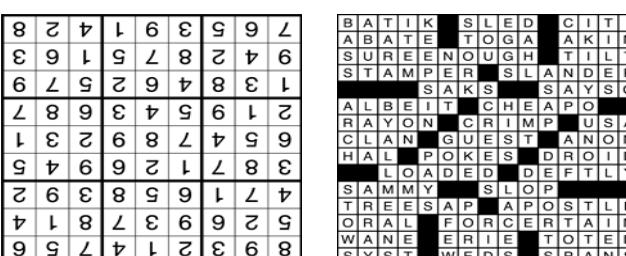


## SD Humane Society Community Pet Pantry offers help to pet parents in need

San Diego Humane Society is supporting families and their pets who need a little extra help. Through the Community Pet Pantry, anyone can visit our campus locations in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside and San Diego between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, to pick up a bag of dog or cat food as well as other supplies as available. No appointment is needed. Tuesday-Sunday | 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

### San Diego Humane Society Campus Locations

El Cajon Campus 1373 N. Marshall Ave. El Cajon, CA 92020	Oceanside Campus 572 Airport Road Oceanside, CA 92058
Escondido Campus 3500 Burnet Drive Escondido, CA 92027	San Diego Campus 5480 Gaines Street San Diego, CA 92110



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## Medical Genetics Center lab supports military medical facilities around the globe

by Senior Airman Devyn Waits

81st Training Wing

KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. - Serving 9.5 million beneficiaries, the Department of War's sole Medical Genetics Center laboratory, hosted on Keesler, supports military medical facilities around the globe with centralized testing and consultative service.

The lab's support empowers patients by giving them insight into their health, enabling them to take proactive measures that support not only the wellness of themselves but their families as well.

"When we perform tests, we can give families a peace of mind," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Joel Hughes, 359th Diagnostics and Therapeutics Squadron clinical and laboratory geneticist.

"For example, with a non-invasive pregnancy test, we screen the developing baby's health for any potential conditions, allowing us to answer questions an expecting



**David Schranko, 359th Diagnostics and Therapeutics Squadron molecular genetics technologist, grabs samples containing DNA from a liquid handling machine on Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, Oct. 29, 2025. The Medical Genetics Center provides a range of services including carrier screening conditions such as cystic fibrosis, spinal muscular atrophy and offers prenatal screening to give expectant parents early insight into their baby's health. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Devyn Waits**

family may have and give them, as well as their medical team, valuable time to prepare for the birth and any medical necessities."

Hughes added that the lab can perform a wide variety of tests, including whole genome sequencing, cancer screening, carrier screening, karyotyping and non-invasive pregnancy testing to help service members and their families make informed decisions during critical moments of their lives.

Genetic testing services can also play a key role in supporting a service member's career, as they help determine any conditions that could negatively impact their performance, readiness or safety.

"One of the more common orders we get are for patients with cardiac issues," said U.S. Air Force Maj. Nicholas Singhmiller, 359th MDTs clinical and laboratory geneticist.

If an Airman in a physically demanding career sees a cardi-

ologist, and that provider notices a potential heart issue, they refer them to us. Our role is to determine whether there's a genetic component to the problem, because that Airman now cannot do any heavy lifting or strenuous activities due to possibly having a dangerous heart condition."

Singhmiller added that running tests help rule out significant genetic causes, providing a twofold benefit. While medical issues may still be present, Airmen can walk away with knowledge to help them choose the next steps in their careers.

"Even if a diagnosis did result in a medical evaluation board, it gives the Airman a piece of mind because they've caught this condition before it causes harm," said Singhmiller.

The lab's ability to efficiently support its patients and provide answers over their health is also tied to its team of geneticists.

"One of the great things about

our geneticists is that they come to the lab with experience in a previous field," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Felecia Washington, 359th MDTs deputy commander.

"Dr. Hughes's background in internal medicine and Dr. Singhmiller's in pediatrics enhances their abilities as geneticists because they can use that to uniquely analyze a family's medical history, connect it to the patient's health, and effectively explain what's happening to them."

While some tests are occasionally outsourced to other clinics, most tests can be ordered and completed in the lab, reducing coordination time and getting results to patients faster.

The genetics lab's commitment to maximizing efficiency and enhancing medical understanding helps service members around the globe make informed decisions for their health and their families, fostering a healthier, more resilient community across the DoD.

## Navigating Norovirus: Insights into stomach bug outbreaks

Outbreaks of a contagious "stomach bug" called norovirus can spread quickly. It often crops up in cruise ships, nursing homes, and other crowded places. People of any age can become infected with a norovirus. But the very old and young children are more likely to become very sick.



norovirus from direct contact with an infected person or from contaminated food, water, or surfaces. You can also be exposed to the virus from an infected person's stool or vomit.

Healthy adults usually recover from the illness in a few days. But if you have a weakened immune system, the illness can last longer and become life-threatening.

No vaccines have been approved to protect people from getting a norovirus. But some are being developed and tested in people.

NIH-funded researchers are now studying the virus using tiny 3D models of human intestines. These are called "mini-guts." Scientists can expose these intestinal cells to noroviruses in the lab. After infecting a mini-gut, the virus begins to make copies of itself.

"This process allows us to study the cells' responses to infection and test potential antivirals that can block the infection," says Dr. Robert Atmar, an infectious disease expert at Baylor College of Medicine.

Researchers are also looking for the specific proteins that the viruses use to enter cells. These are called cell receptors. Atmar and Dr. Mary Estes, who studies stomach viruses at Baylor College of Medicine, are trying to identify

Noroviruses can affect your stomach and intestines. Symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, and stomach pain. You may also have a fever, headache, and body aches. Once you're infected with a norovirus, symptoms usually develop 12 to 48 hours later.

Noroviruses are the main cause of vomiting, diarrhea, and food-borne illnesses in the United States. Nearly half a million people with a norovirus visit the emergency department each year.

You can get infected with a

doctor can usually make a norovirus diagnosis based on your symptoms. But testing for norovirus can be done at a health care facility using lab tests.

No treatment has been approved for noroviruses. So, doctors usually treat the symptoms and try to limit the spread. They can prescribe medicines to stop vomiting and relieve nausea. They may also give you fluids for dehydration. Prescription and over-the-counter medicines are available to treat

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/>

### 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

the cell receptor for a new strain of norovirus. It's currently spreading around the world.

"Identifying the receptor should help us learn more about the disease and strategies to prevent it," Estes explains.

In the meantime, if you have norovirus symptoms, doctors recommend staying home for 48 hours. It's best to avoid contact with others if you can.

### Managing norovirus infection

If you or someone you live with has norovirus symptoms:

- Avoid food preparation. Wait until symptoms are gone before preparing food for others.
- Use separate bathrooms for healthy and unhealthy people, if possible.
- Stay hydrated. Drink lots of fluids. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Safely clean up vomit/diarrhea:
  - \*Use rubber or disposable gloves.
  - \*Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces.
  - \*Don't shake out contaminated laundry. Immediately wash in hot water and dry on high heat.

**Pap-a-Thon**

January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
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