

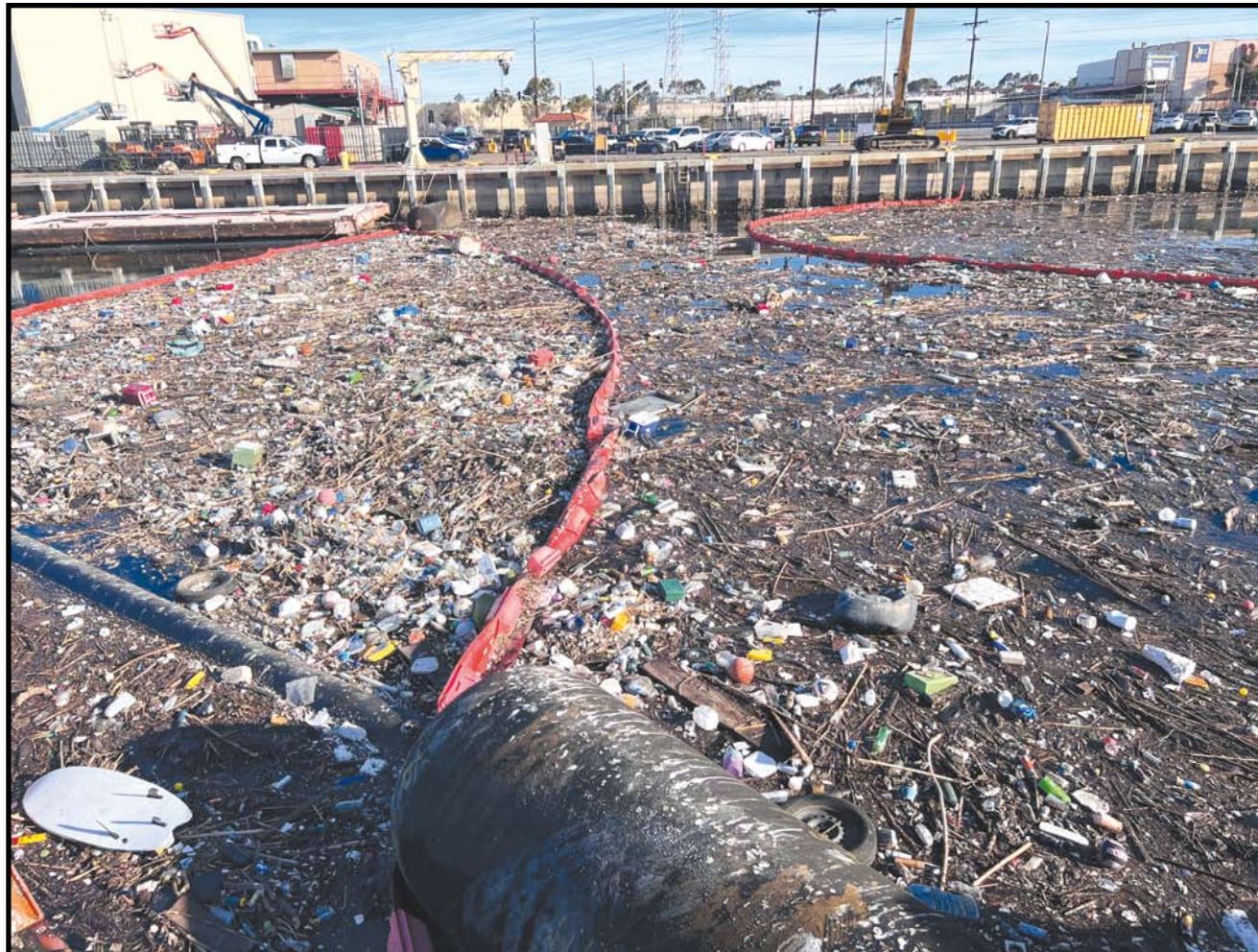
ARMED FORCES DISPATCH



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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 42
 APRIL 1-15, 2026

Navy crews intercept massive debris before it enters waterways



Local agencies continue sustained operations to remove debris from Chollas Creek, reinforcing a long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and fleet readiness. U.S. Navy photo by Lt. Cmdr. Louis Mickey

by Petty Officer 2nd Class Ulrika Mendiola
 Naval Base San Diego

NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO — Naval Base San Diego, in coordination with Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest and in partnership with the City of San Diego, continues sustained operations to remove debris from Chollas Creek, reinforcing a long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and fleet readiness.

Chollas Creek carries a constant flow of urban runoff, vegetation and debris from surrounding areas through NBSD before entering San Diego Bay. Left unmanaged, this accumulation poses ongoing risks to water quality, marine ecosystems and critical waterfront operations.

“Our partnership with the City of San Diego is essential to protecting our shared waterways and sustaining the health of the harbor,” said Capt. Brian Bungay, commanding officer, NBSD. “By working together, we’re not only safeguarding the environment, but ensuring our waterfront remains ready to support the Fleet and the Warfighter.”

NBSD’s Port Operations team actively maintains floating containment booms across key sections of the creek, intercepting debris before it reaches open water. These systems serve as a continuous barrier, capturing materials that would otherwise enter the harbor.

“We deploy containment booms across Chollas Creek to intercept debris carried downstream,” said Ron Ellis, NBSD Port Operations Installation Program Director. “This is a routine, ongoing effort that protects marine life and preserves the health of San Diego Bay.”

Once contained, NAVFAC SW coordinates removal using heavy equipment, including excavators, to clear accumulated material efficiently while minimizing disruption to base operations.

“Chollas Creek is a major outfall in the San Diego region, and Naval Base San Diego is positioned at its primary discharge point,” said Frank Williamson, NAVFAC Southwest Environmental Compliance Branch manager. “Because of that, maintaining the cleanliness of the creek is essential—not only for environmental protection, but for sustaining safe and effective waterfront operations.”

Cleanup efforts target a wide range of debris, including plastics, metal, tires and organic material that routinely collect behind containment barriers.

“Protecting the environment is a core Navy responsibility,” said Errol G. Cooper, hazardous waste disposal specialist for Commander, Navy Installations Command. “By stopping debris before it reaches the harbor, we reduce risk to marine ecosystems and ensure proper disposal.”

see Chollas, page 6

DOJ SUES CALIFORNIA TOWING COMPANY FOR ILLEGALLY AUCTIONING SERVICEMEMBERS’ VEHICLES

from DOJ Office of Public Affairs
 On March 25, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit against S & K Towing, Inc., which is based in San Clemente, alleging that the company violated the

Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) by illegally auctioning motor vehicles owned by members of the military.

The Department’s lawsuit alleges that, from August 28, 2020, through April 15, 2025, S & K illegally sold or disposed of as many as 148 vehicles owned by servicemembers, many of which were towed from Camp Pendleton. Even though S & K’s contract with Camp Pendleton required it to comply with all applicable federal and state laws, the company made no effort to comply with the SCRA, which requires tow companies

to obtain a court order before selling or disposing of a vehicle owned by an SCRA-protected servicemember.

“Towing companies must respect and abide by the federal laws that protect members of our Armed Forces,” said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Servicemembers are often absent for extended periods due to training and deployments and may not know that their vehicle has been towed. The SCRA plays an important role in providing these servicemembers

with adequate legal protections, including notice and the opportunity to have towing and storage fees adjusted in light of their military service.”

“Servicemembers deserve peace of mind in knowing that their legal rights will be protected at home while they are away serving the United States,” said First Assistant United States Attorney Bilal A. Essayli for the Central District of California. “It is unacceptable for a business to sell or dispose of servicemembers’ vehicles without abiding by the laws that protect ser-

continued to next page



GENTCOM reports non-combat related injury aboard USS Abraham Lincoln

MANAMA, Bahrain - In a March 26 press release from U.S. Central Command, a U.S. Navy Sailor was injured aboard USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) while the aircraft carrier was conducting flight operations in the Arabian Sea on March 25. The injury is not combat-related nor life threatening. “The Sailor was transported ashore for additional medical care and remains in stable condition,” according to a U.S. Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet post on X

Commissaries to start selling single-use paper and plastic bags on April 6

Starting April 6, commissaries will start charging a nominal price for each single-use paper or plastic bag. Cost associated with this change is 5 cents for plastic and 10 cents for paper single-use bags. This change will allow the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) to continue to offer its eligible patrons significant savings while strengthening its fiscal stewardship and reducing operating expenses.

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PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR CELEBRATES 106TH BIRTHDAY WITH NAVY TALENT ACQUISITION GROUP NEW ENGLAND

Courtesy Story

Navy Talent Acquisition Group
New England

Pearl Harbor survivor and Navy veteran Freeman Johnson arrived in celebrity-like fashion at the Barnstable Adult Community Center in Hyannis, Massachusetts, March 18.

Johnson, one of the oldest survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was there to celebrate his 106th birthday.

He emerged from a black limousine amidst television news crews and photographers, aided by Barnstable police officer Brian Morrison, who assisted him into a wheelchair. The duo passed through a mixture of military service members and first responders who lined the sidewalk to salute Johnson as he approached the building's entrance.

Sailors, firefighters, police officers and Coast Guard ROTC students from Barnstable High School were among those gathered to celebrate Johnson's birthday and honor his military service.

Johnson was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, and moved to Waltham when he was 5 years old. From there, he joined the Navy in 1939 at the age of 19.

After completing boot camp in Newport, Rhode Island, he was stationed on board his first ship, Brooklyn-class light cruiser USS St. Louis, which was homeported in Norfolk, Va.,



Freeman Johnson greets his great-grandson, Owen McGrath, during his 106th birthday party March 18. U.S. Navy photo by Navy Chief Petty Officer Benjamin Dobbs

at the time, but would later go to the Navy yard in Pearl Harbor for a maintenance period.

Johnson completed his six-year Navy career as a machinist mate first class, but he was a junior sailor with the rank of fireman the morning of Dec. 7, 1941.

In a 2025 interview with Pacific Historic Parks – USS Arizona Memorial, Johnson reflected on his experiences during the attack, recalling the events of that fateful Sunday morning.

"I was in my bunk when the whole thing started [at around] 7:56 in [the] morning," Johnson said. "We'd already had breakfast, that was over. I heard the machine guns fire over my head, then [general quarters] started. Everybody on board has a specific spot they're supposed to be

in. So, I went to my spot."

The Pearl Harbor attack accounted for 2,403 American deaths and 1,178 more wounded. USS St. Louis was remarkably the only major ship to exit the harbor unscathed. Johnson's ship managed to escape without suffering any casualties or major damage during the attack, earning it the nickname "Lucky Lou."

Johnson's story exemplifies bravery in the face of danger and inspired the sailors in attendance.

Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class Cullen McCarthy, a recruiter assigned to Navy Talent Acquisition Group New England, had the pleasure of serving Johnson a slice of cake after everyone sang "Happy Birthday."

McCarthy grew up in Whitman, Mass., just 30 miles from where Johnson did. He felt privileged to take part in honoring his shipmate and fellow New Englander.

"Well, it's always awesome to get out into the community and get more involved, but especially when it's something of this magnitude," McCarthy said. "It's the 106th birthday for Freeman, a true hero, local hero and national hero. It's important for me to be able to get out here and get involved."

Johnson's birthday celebration gave everyone the chance to learn some naval history, and it provided a heartfelt connection with a veteran who served our country at a crucial hour.

Kelly Howley, director of the Barnstable Council on Aging, oversees Barnstable Adult Community Center, which hosted the event.

"Well, today was a wonderful day celebrating Freeman's 106th," Howley said.

"He's a local celebrity here in Barnstable now, and it was an honor to be part of all of the military, first responders, town government and the well-wishers that came by to help celebrate his birthday."

Organizing the birthday party was a joint effort, with State Rep. Kip Diggs and Veterans

Outreach Services collaborating to plan the event.

Navy Talent Acquisition Group New England is respon-

sible for the Navy's enlisted and officer recruiting in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Eastern New York.

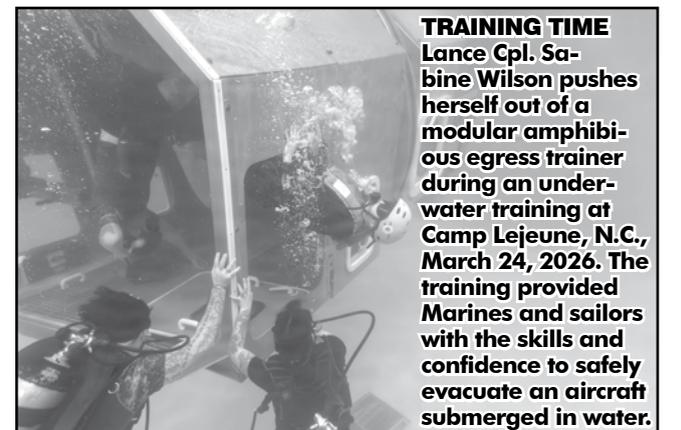
DOJ continued from page 1

vicemembers."

In May 2024, a Military Legal Assistance attorney contacted S & K Towing and explained that the company was violating the SCRA. In response, a manager at S & K Towing told the attorney that "We do this all the time." After this exchange, S & K Towing continued to sell and dispose of vehicles owned by SCRA-protected servicemembers without obtaining court orders. Some of the vehicles S & K sold or disposed of were registered to addresses on Camp Pendleton. In other cases, S & K auctioned vehicles even after they were told that the owner was in the military.

This case is being handled by the Civil Rights Division's Housing and Civil Enforcement Section and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California. Since 2011, the Department has obtained over \$484 million in monetary relief for over 149,000 servicemembers through its enforcement of the SCRA. For more information about the Department's SCRA enforcement efforts, visit www.servicemembers.gov.

Servicemembers and their dependents who believe that their rights under the SCRA may have been violated should contact the nearest Armed Forces Legal Assistance Program Office. Office locations can be found at legalassistance.law.af.mil.



TRAINING TIME
Lance Cpl. Sabine Wilson pushes herself out of a modular amphibious egress trainer during an underwater training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., March 24, 2026. The training provided Marines and sailors with the skills and confidence to safely evacuate an aircraft submerged in water.

Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Channah Chilton

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Army aviation takes major leap with delivery of first autonomous-ready Black Hawk

from U.S. Army Capability Program Executive, Aviation

The Army officially received a groundbreaking H-60Mx Black Hawk helicopter upgraded for autonomous or piloted flight. This next-generation optionally piloted vehicle begins a rigorous testing phase, marking a pivotal moment in the Army's push to build a safer, smarter and more versatile helicopter fleet for the future.

This achievement is not an overnight success. It is the result of more than a decade of pioneering work in autonomous flight. The technology at the heart of this helicopter originated from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's Aircrew Labor In-Cockpit Automation System program. The ALIAS program began over 10 years ago. It was founded on the visionary goal of creating a removable kit for existing aircraft, which would provide a high degree of automation. The goal was to reduce the complexity of flying, enhance safety and allow



An M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System conducts live-fire missions during Operation Epic Fury in the U.S. Central Command AOR, March 9, 2026. Part of this photo was blurred for security purposes. U.S. Army photo

pilots to focus on higher-level mission tasks.

A military aircraft manufacturing company partnered with the research agency on this effort. As a direct result, the company developed technology that enables rotary and fixed-wing aircraft to be flown with and without people on board. After years of successful demonstrations on both commercial and military aircraft, the technology has matured. It is now a reliable system, ready for formal military evaluation.

At its heart, this is no ordinary

Black Hawk. The revolutionary technology serves as the aircraft's powerful flight control and autonomy system. Functioning like a highly advanced digital co-pilot, the system can manage the most complex tasks of flight, from takeoff to landing. This allows the helicopter to perform missions completely on its own or with a remote crew supervising from a secure ground station, offering unprecedented flexibility.

This advanced capability is delivered through the ALIAS optionally piloted vehicle kit. This comprehensive package

includes the system's autonomy mission manager, which serves as the brain of the operation, and a software development kit. The SDK is a crucial feature that allows third-party software and new sensor technologies to be integrated, opening the door for continuous innovation. This kit approach provides a critical pathway to adapt sophisticated autonomy to existing aircraft, significantly reducing the time and cost required to field this game-changing technology across the fleet.

A key part of this upgrade is replacing the helicopter's tra-

ditional mechanical flight controls with a modern fly-by-wire electronic system. This makes the aircraft significantly more stable and easier to handle, particularly in challenging conditions with low visibility. By automating difficult maneuvers, the system dramatically reduces pilot workload, allowing the crew to focus less on the mechanics of flying and more on managing the critical mission at hand.

In the coming months, Army test pilots and engineers will put the optionally piloted Black Hawk through its paces. These tests will check how well the aircraft can be controlled from the ground. They will examine how well the aircraft performs complex, real-world mission scenarios independently. The Army will also evaluate how this technology can keep soldiers safer and more effective.

This single helicopter leads a much broader vision. It is the primary testbed for the Army's Strategic Autonomy Flight Enabler program. The goal of SAFE is to develop a uni-

versal and scalable autonomy kit. This kit could be installed across the Army's entire fleet of Black Hawk helicopters and integrated into future aircraft designs.

Partners in Texas are collaborating on the ALIAS autonomy technology. The state is sponsoring a multiyear autonomy testbed effort through Texas A&M University. This effort uses modified UH-60Ls. This determines the value of autonomous aircraft for wild-land firefighting and related state missions.

By proving this technology, the Army aims to unlock a new era of aviation that will not only save lives but also ensure that critical missions can be completed under any circumstance.

The delivery of the first optionally piloted Black Hawk is more than a hardware handover. It is a tangible step toward a future in which technology and soldiers work together in powerful new ways to ensure mission success.



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GECKO ROBOTICS ANNOUNCES \$71M DEAL TO SLASH NAVY MAINTENANCE DELAYS AND INCREASE READINESS

PITTSBURGH, Pa. - The Navy and GSA recently awarded Gecko Robotics a five-year IDIQ contract with a \$71 million ceiling to deploy artificial intelligence and robotics to assess and maintain the health of military assets.

According to the Gecko website (<https://www.geckorobotics.com/news/navy-idiq>), the company will start work with 18 ships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet with the initial award worth up to \$54M over a five-year period. Customers in all services will have access to this government-wide vehicle.

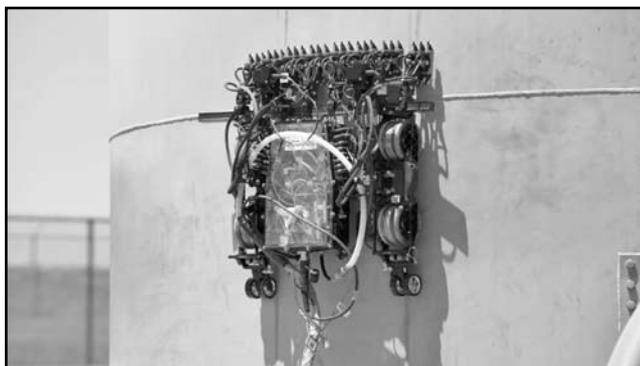
The Chief of Naval Operations has set a target of 80 percent fleet readiness, which Gecko will have a crucial role in helping to meet. Gecko's advanced AI and robotic technology identify repairs up to 50 times faster and more accurately than manual

methods, reducing maintenance delays and boosting battle readiness. This work will be carried out across destroyers, amphibious warships and littoral combat ships.

"Readiness isn't just a metric, it's all that matters," said Jake Loosarian, co-founder and CEO of Gecko. "This growing partnership is about unfair advantages Gecko is deploying to our Navy; and how prediction, through our robotics and AI products, ensure our brave men and women are the most advantaged in the world in their fight to defend freedom.

"Today we announce not a contract, but a new standard that is universal across all industries: if it isn't ready, it doesn't count."

In fall 2024, then-CNO Adm. Lisa Franchetti unveiled a goal



The Navy awarded Gecko Robotics a \$71M contract to deploy wall-climbing robots across 18 Pacific Fleet ships - inspecting hulls, decks, and welds 50x faster than traditional methods, with the aim of keeping 80 percent of the fleet ready for deployment. Courtesy photo

of having 80 percent of the Navy's fleet ready to deploy at any given time by 2027.

The 80 percent plan, meanwhile, was picked up by Franchetti's successor, Adm. Daryl Caudle, who called the rate "an ambitious but essential readiness goal."

"Achieving this requires

shorter maintenance cycles, increased spare-parts availability, improved training pipelines and targeted upgrades across the fleet," Caudle wrote for *Military Times* in December.

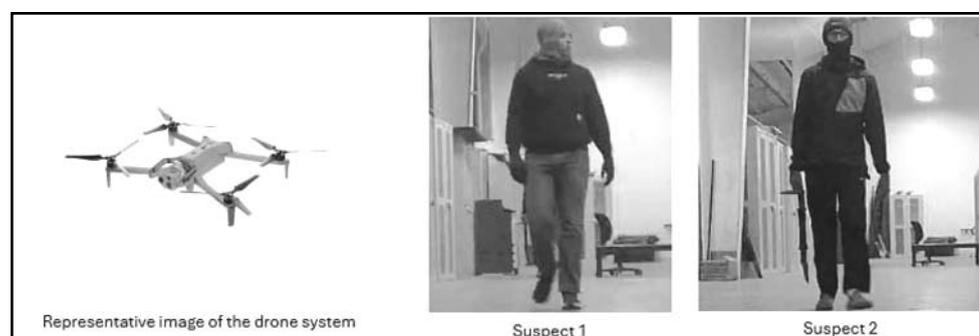
"Readiness is not a budget line — it is a promise to the American people that their Navy will never arrive late to a fight."

Department of the Army CID update on missing drones

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. - The Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division is offering a reward up to \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for the theft of four Skydio X10D Drone Systems (SN: 1668CR40EA005D58D; 1668CR40EA00B5DDD; 1668CR40EA003S9SD; and 1668CR40EA00F29AD).

These drone systems were last seen on the morning of Nov. 21, 2025, at the 326th Division Engineer Battalion, Bldg. 6955, A Shau Valley Rd., Fort Campbell. Between Nov. 21-24, 2025, unknown persons unlawfully gained access to building 6955 and took them.

In a media advisory from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Office of Public Affairs on March 12, they confirmed that the inves-



tigation began in late November 2025 into the theft of four small quadcopter drones from a government building on Fort Campbell.

"As of March 12, we're pleased to report that we have identified two suspects and have gathered credible evidence related to this theft and the possible whereabouts of the missing drones" stated the release.

The active criminal

investigation continues, and "we are working diligently to resolve this matter."

There is no threat to the public. The missing quadcopters are equipped only with small cameras.

These drones were stolen from a locked storage area within a secured government building. The individuals responsible had authorized access to the military installation and the building, and

they defeated the locks on the storage cages to perpetrate this theft.

The Army PAO statement said "this was a targeted act, not a random breach of security. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Army CID would like to thank the members of the public who came forward with information regarding the recent theft of the drones. The tips we received have proven helpful."



Top 5

- Iran and the U.S. harden their positions as Tehran keeps its grip on the Strait of Hormuz
- Pentagon reportedly weighs diverting Ukraine military aid to Middle East
- U.S. deploys uncrewed drone boats in conflict with Iran
- Senate rejects proposal to overturn VA's abortion ban
- Nominee to head U.S. nuclear forces sees no need for warhead tests

Army

- 3D-printed barracks will open within 6 months at Fort Bliss

Navy

- Sailor injured during flight operations aboard carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*
- Navy launches new Golden Fleet-era USV program, terminates old one

Air Force

- Brother and sister are charged after an explosive device was found outside a Florida Air Force base

Space Force

- Space Force seeks proposals for physical test and training range
- Space Force mitigating impacts to programs amid grounding of Vulcan rocket

Coast Guard

- Coast Guard operations, capabilities damaged by continued shutdown, says vice commandant

Veterans

- 100-year-old Navy veteran honored at New York Mets opening game
- Former VA executive charged with accepting \$16K worth of gifts

Cyber, Space & Unmanned

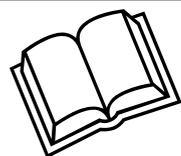
- Ex-NSA leaders say Americans are becoming 'numb' to cyber threats

Defense Industry

- China's top chipmaker has supplied chipmaking tech to Iran military, U.S. officials say
- MBDA to double Aster air-defense missile output in 2026
- U.S. Army seeks sled-mounted air defense for light infantry

Navy's newest destroyer, named for Medal of Honor recipient, arrives in Norfolk ahead of commissioning

Medal of Honor recipient and retired Marine Corps Col. Harvey C. Barnum, Jr., welcomed the warship bearing his name as it arrived to its homeport at Naval Station Norfolk, according to *Stars and Stripes* in late March. The ship arrived ahead of its commissioning ceremony scheduled for April 11. Barnum said standing on the pier to greet the destroyer's crew at their new homeport was a "monumental" moment, according to a service news release. "This warship represents the enduring bond between the Marine Corps and the Navy, and I have the utmost confidence in the crew to carry on the legacy of service and courage that defines our naval forces," Barnum said.



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Career and Education

Department extends invitation to bring back troops separated for refusing COVID-19 vaccine

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

Service members forced to leave the military for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine now have an extra year to return to the service, if they so choose, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said March 20.

In 2021, Pentagon officials issued a mandate that forced service members to either be vaccinated for COVID-19 or forced out of the military. Over the course of 500 days, nearly 8,000 active-duty and reserve service members were involuntarily separated for refusing to take the vaccine. Many others left voluntarily when their enlistments ended.

Last year, President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order regarding reinstating service members discharged under the department's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

Following that executive order, the War Department invited those service members to return and pick up where they left off. Part of that direction included correcting the records of some service members who were discharged with a less than honorable service characterization. Some service members — those involuntarily separated solely for refusing to take the vaccine — were and are still eligible to receive some kinds of compensation.

That initial invitation closes out next month. Now, the War Department is extending the deadline to April 1, 2027, giving those service members an extra year to decide whether they want to continue serving.

“While I am proud of our efforts over the past year, our obligations to make things right are not yet complete,” Hegseth said in a video posted today to social media. “I am therefore extending the application of the department's reinstatement and return to service guidance established last April.”

To encourage the return of experienced and dedicated service members, the active-service obligation for individuals returning to service under this guidance is now reduced from four years to two years, Hegseth said.

That change, he said, isn't just for former service members who choose to return over the next year. Barring a few exceptions, those who have already returned and incurred



Marines await transport with an ultralight tactical vehicle during a Marine Air-Ground Task Force Distributed exercise in Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 10, 2024. The exercise incorporates ground, air and logistics operations over several days. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Sean Potter

a four-year service obligation will need to serve only two years.

“This change reflects our confidence that returning [service] members will make an immediate and positive impact and aligns our reinstatement policy with the needs of both the service members and the military services,” Hegseth said.

While the military services have already reached out to service members who were separated under the COVID-19 vaccine mandate, the secretary

Hegseth announces reforms to Chaplain Corps

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced March 24 a pair of reforms to the military's Chaplain Corps.

Speaking to the public via a video post on social media, Hegseth said the War Department will be significantly streamlining the number of faith code affiliations for service members.

Additionally, the secretary announced that the rank insignia military chaplains wear on their work uniforms will be replaced by their religious insignia.

Regarding the reduction in religions identified by the military's faith and belief coding system — which will now be renamed to “religious affiliation codes” — Hegseth said the overhaul was necessary due to the current system having grown too big.

“The previous system had ballooned to well over 200 faith codes. ... It was impractical and unusable, and many codes were never used at all,” Hegseth said, adding that a significant majority of service members — 82 percent of whom identify as being religious — use only six of the codes.

Hegseth said the number of religious affiliation codes will now be reduced to 31, bringing them in line with their original intent.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4444113/hegseth-announces-reforms-to-chaplain-corps/>



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/>

Service members have options leading up to Tax Day

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

With Tax Day, April 15, quickly approaching, service members have options for help filing their 2025 taxes, including assistance with navigating changes to tax rules, such as those enacted as part of last year's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

First off, said Susan E. Mitchell, executive director of the Armed Forces Tax Council, service members can file their taxes late, if needed, due to deployments or other issues. “There are long-standing tax filing extensions that apply just to service members,” she said. “If they are stationed outside the United States and Puerto Rico, they get an automatic two-month extension to June 15.”

That extension means not only filing two months later but also paying any due taxes two months later.

Beyond that, Mitchell said, all service members, no matter where they are stationed, can ask for an additional extension to Oct. 15. However, that extension is only for filing — any tax due still needs to be paid on time to avoid late filing penalties. “And then of course, for anyone who's deployed to a combat zone, the deadline for filing and paying taxes is generally extended for the period of their service in the combat zone, plus 180 days,” she said.

Some of the changes service members might encounter this year include an increase in the standard deduction for single, married and head of household filers and an increase in the contribution limits for 401(k) plans.

If family members work in the civilian economy, from 2025 through 2028, taxpayers may deduct tips and overtime pay. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act also changed the reporting threshold, increasing it to \$20,000 in gross payments and 200 or more transactions annually on payment apps for the sale of goods and services.

If they're able, service members can prepare their own taxes using resources exclusively from the Internal Revenue Service. But Mitchell said Military OneSource also provides special tax preparation software, MilTax, for service members.

“The great thing about the MilTax program, if they decide to do it on their own, is that the service members

also have available to them tax consultants by phone 24/7 if they have questions when they're completing their tax returns,” she said.

Also, on some installations, there are volunteer income tax assistance sites where service members can get in-person tax preparation assistance.

Mitchell cautioned service members to be on the lookout for unethical tax preparation services.

“There are a lot of scams out there,” she said. Scammers often target people by impersonating the IRS to try to get them to share personal information, by phone, text and email.

“It's important to know that the IRS doesn't initiate contact with taxpayers in these ways,” she added.

Mitchell recommends that if service members have their taxes prepared off base and are due a tax refund, they wait to receive that refund rather than take a refund anticipation loan from their tax preparer, because the fees can be high.

“Generally, the IRS aims to get a refund back to you within 20 days,” she said. “And if service members can just wait for those 20 days and not take that loan, they'll get their entire refund back instead of having to pay a fee out of the refund.”

Also, under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, starting July 5, parents of children under 18 with a Social Security number can open an investment account called a “Trump Account” in their child's name.

“The great thing about these accounts is that parents and employers, and relatives of the child, can contribute up to \$5,000 per year to the account until that child reaches the age of 18,” she said. The government will also deposit an initial \$1,000 into accounts for eligible newborns.

“These are assets that are allowed to grow tax-free, although recipients have to pay taxes on the gains when the money is withdrawn,” Mitchell said. “And after the child turns 18, the account is generally treated as a traditional [individual retirement account] and it's subject to the same rules as other traditional IRAs.”

The program covers children born from 2025 to 2028. For more information, visit trumpaccounts.gov.

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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. All requests must be submitted within 30 days and although we try our best, not all requests can be granted.

<https://california.uso.org/>

Naval Postgraduate School alumni lead Artemis II moon mission

by Daniel Linehan
Naval Postgraduate School

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Armed Forces Dispatch* went to press before the scheduled April 1 launch of Artemis II.

Two Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) alumni will lead the historic Artemis II mission on a 10-day space flight around the Moon - mission commander Navy Capt. (Ret.) Reid Wiseman and spacecraft pilot Navy Capt. Victor Glover.

The target launch window opened on April 1, the first of seven possible launch days in April. Artemis II will be the first crewed lunar fly-by in more than 50 years.

Americans first orbited the Moon during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968, which was piloted by James Lovell, also a Navy captain, naval aviator, and test pilot, in preparation for the Apollo 11 lunar landing. Now, 58 years later, this modern mission will similarly take the four-person crew around the Moon to test their modern spacecraft at a maximum distance of nearly 250,000 miles away from Earth.



The Artemis II mission to travel to the Moon is crewed by (from left to right) Navy Capt. (Ret.) Reid Wiseman, mission commander and NPS alum; U.S. Navy Capt. Victor Glover, mission pilot and NPS alum; scientist and engineer Christina Koch, mission specialist; and, Royal Canadian Air Force Col. Jeremy Hansen, mission specialist. NPS graphic by Andre Adams

The Artemis II mission “will carry astronauts farther from Earth and closer to the Moon than any human has been in over half a century,” according to NASA’s website.

“U.S. Navy Capt. Gene Cernan was the last astronaut to set foot on the Moon,” said Navy Vice Adm. (Ret.) Ann Rondeau, NPS president. “He commanded the Apollo 17 mission in 1972

and was also an NPS alumnus. So, it’s exciting to see us headed back. Since NASA’s inception, NPS and our Navy have had a very strong history in space, from educating future astronauts to record-setting efforts and cutting-edge research. We continue to break boundaries today.”

Both naval aviators and test pilots, Wiseman and Glover received NPS certificates in Space

Systems Fundamentals. And Glover also earned a Master of Science in Systems Engineering from NPS. These programs and others are offered by NPS’ Space Systems Academic Group.

Jim Newman, former SSAG chair and NPS provost, flew aboard four Space Shuttle missions as a mission specialist to the International Space Station (ISS) and made six spacewalks. He understands the magnitude of returning to the Moon and believes extensive education is fundamental to preparing astronauts for the out-of-this-world challenges faced during spaceflight.

“It’s very exciting for NPS alumni to be so involved in NASA’s return to the Moon,” said Newman. “Not only on this upcoming Artemis II spaceflight but on others as well, continuing a long tradition of exceptional service and contribution to our country.”

Having a graduate degree is a requirement for becoming a NASA astronaut. Back in 2013 after Glover’s selection, he reflected on the importance of having an advanced education that integrated real-world

problems and solutions.

“I was a test pilot, working in the systems engineering field, actually doing test and evaluation under the umbrella of weapons systems acquisition,” Glover said of his Navy duties back while concurrently studying for his master’s from NPS. “My work product bolstered my school product, and, likewise, my school product improved my work quality.”

Two mission specialists make

Chollas
continued from page 1

NBSD formalized an inter-governmental service agreement with the City of San Diego in June 2024 to share responsibility and cost for debris removal in Chollas and Paleta creeks, strengthening a unified approach to long-term environmental management.

NBSD has removed more than 320,000 pounds of waste and in March 2025 alone, crews collected nearly 61,000 pounds of debris—demonstrating the persistent nature of the effort.

Cleanup operations include deliberate safeguards to pro-

tect sensitive habitats, including eelgrass beds, ensuring environmental compliance while maintaining mission capability.

“Preventing debris from reaching the bay is central to Port Operations’ mission,” Ellis said. “We hold the line, serving as the last line of defense.”

Through continuous monitoring and coordinated action, NBSD, NAVFAC SW and the City of San Diego sustain a critical line of effort that protects water quality, preserves marine ecosystems and ensures the waterfront remains ready to support the Pacific Fleet.

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SOME RESTRICTONS MAY APPLY

LOCAL: Most recent Marine Corps General and Special Court-Martial dispositions

At a special court-martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Cpl. A. Hull, pursuant to the accused's plea, of assault consummated by a battery. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-1 and two months confinement.

At an article 16 court-martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. J. Frazier, pursuant to the accused's plea, of violation of a lawful general order. Consistent with the plea agreement, no additional punishment was adjudged by the military judge.

At a special court-martial at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center - Twentynine Palms, a military judge convicted Private First Class J. E. Sircus, pursuant to the accused's plea, of possession of a controlled substance, distribution of a controlled substance, and introduction of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge, and reduction to E-1.

At a special court-martial at Camp

Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. N. A. Capote, pursuant to the accused's plea, of one specification of dereliction of duty. Consistent with the plea agreement, the military judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-3 and 90 days confinement.



At a Special Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Lance Cpl. S. A. Madrid, pursuant to the accused's plea, of one specification of unlawful entry. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to reduction to E-1 and 60 days confinement.

At a General Court-Martial at Camp Pendleton, a military judge convicted Sgt. Marjorie A. Andaya, pursuant to the accused's plea, of assault consummated by battery, two specifications of violation of a lawful general order, robbery, solicitation, and communicating threats. Consistent with the plea agreement, the judge sentenced the accused to a bad conduct discharge, 30 months confinement, and reduction to E-1.

Border Patrol receives 15 horses from Army, saving \$105,000

WASHINGTON - U.S. Border Patrol horse patrol units across the Southwest recently received 15 horses from the Army, an interagency transfer that will save the agency an estimated \$105,000.

The horses came from Army posts at Fort Irwin, Calif. and Fort Huachuca, Ariz. Border Patrol Horse Patrol Unit instructors traveled to the posts to evaluate the animals for their suitability in mounted patrol operations. The evaluations included inspections of conformation, groundwork, and riding assessments. Veterinarians also evaluated each horse to ensure its overall health before the transfer.

After completing the initial training, the Border Patrol assigned the horses to sectors across the Southwest border, including El Centro, San Diego, Tucson, El Paso, and Rio Grande Valley. The Border Patrol is evaluating and training the remaining five

taxpayer dollars and strengthens the U.S. Border Patrol's Horse Patrol, a unit that has been critical in securing our nation's borders since our agency's inception."

Mounted patrol units provide agents with enhanced mobility and visibility in areas that are difficult to access by vehicle and support the U.S. Border Patrol's mission to secure the nation's borders. For more information on CBP's border security mission, visit <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security>.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is America's frontline: the nation's largest law enforcement organization and the world's first unified border management agency. The 67,000+ men and women of CBP protect America on the ground, in the air, and on the seas. They enforce safe, lawful travel and trade and ensure our country's economic prosperity.



A Border Patrol Horse Patrol agent prepares horses for work along the Rio Grande near McAllen, Texas, on Nov. 4, 2025. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Perry Shirzad

Following the evaluations, the Border Patrol transported the first 10 horses to the Santa Teresa Station in New Mexico. There, master instructors, and instructor students conducted three weeks of intensive training to condition the horses and prepare them for operational use.

horses in the Tucson Sector for future assignment.

"The transfer of these 15 horses from the U.S. Army further demonstrates the partnership between the U.S. Border Patrol and the Department of War," said U.S. Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks. "This cooperation saves

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MARINE CORPS BARSTOW

When the wild awakes

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story is a condensed version. For the full story see <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/561654/wild-awakes>.

by Katherine Cortez

Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow

For desert animals, in the High Desert ecosystem, Spring marks a season of movement and survival.

From rodents and spiders to slithering snakes, Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow and the surrounding desert are home to a wide variety of wildlife.

Rueben Flores, pest control technician and his team aboard MCLB Barstow, diligently preserves the lives of animals and protect their natural habitats.

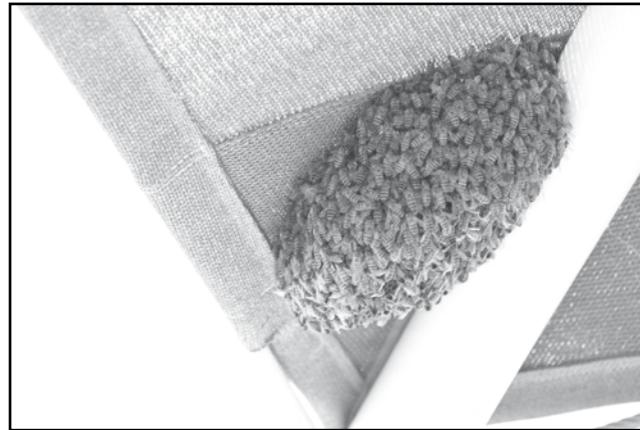
As spring arrives and more people head outdoors, it's important to respect the environments these creatures call home and maintain cleanliness around residential and office areas to avoid wildlife encounters.

"Critters thrive during spring-time because they are coming out from being dormant during the winter. Like flowers blooming, the bees are going to begin looking to collect pollen, the snakes in (brumation and ecdysis) begin to search for the food they have not had for months and shed their old skin which removes parasites, and mammals begin coming out for mating season and in search of survival," said Flores.

There are characteristics that animals portray during spring that humans may not always be aware of.

"Coyotes, some of the common desert wanderers, are naturally cautious because of their vigilance around birds, squirrels, and other prey," Flores says.

In search of food or shelter, they may occasionally wander close to offices, vehicles, or residential areas and it's important that these areas remain free



A large bee hive was located at the Child Development Center aboard Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow California, March 16. It was safely retrieved by pest control technicians utilizing a bee vacuum. Photo by Katherine Cortez/Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow

of debris, build up, and other cluttered mounds to avoid these animals from forming habitats, he said.

The Southwestern Speckled Rattlesnake, Sidewinders, Mojave Greens and other snake species inhabit the areas of the Mojave Desert surrounding the base.

During spring, many people hike through desert areas where snakes commonly live. These critters often live in underground burrows or shaded terrain. It is important to be extra vigilant in watching for wildlife, which is often camouflaged to match their habitat.

"The importance of keeping

in mind the shape of the snake's head in determining whether a snake is venomous or not. Note that the snakes with a more diamond shaped head are likely to be the more venomous," said Flores.

Although snakes can be fascinating to observe, and some species are kept as pets, they should always be left alone in the wild, as they may be venomous and can become defensive if threatened.

"The heat sensing pits, and their sensory tongues allow the snakes to perceive threats, mates, prey, and this enhances their survival" Flores said.

A snake's unique sensory

adaptations help it detect danger and because snakes blend easily into their surroundings, hikers should remain alert to avoid accidentally provoking them, or other wildlife.

Habitat, diet, and behavior have a significant impact on the various species that reside in the Mojave Desert. For example, many of these species include birds that the Bureau of Land Management has been keeping their eye out for, such as the southern fly catcher. This bird is an endangered species within the Mojave Desert. This team spent some time wondering if the bird would still be seen out in the wild, and sure enough they eventually caught sight of it.

"The bird has a bright orange breast," Flores says. "There are a few other bird species that pass through the Mojave Desert during their migration and those are identified as; the turkey vultures, the blue crane, and more. If you are sitting outside before sunrise, you may encounter one of these birds and they are fascinating."

Bees, flies, and other insect species are found frequently in the spring and roam throughout the desert in search of survival. Bees seek cool, dry areas to establish honeycomb structures. Often, these hives go unnoticed until they have grown large enough to become hazardous to children and families.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/561654/wild-awakes>.

Marine detained after explosive round discovered at Palm Springs airport

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. - A Marine was detained after TSA agents discovered an explosive round at the Palm Springs International Airport on March 30, according to a report by KESQ TV Palm Springs.

Police told KESQ that a live 25mm explosive round was found during the airport screening process, in his checked luggage. The discovery prompted a coordinated response involving TSA, the Palm Springs Police Department, the Riverside County Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team, and military authorities.

The subject, 30-year-old Ryan Weaver, of Henderson, Texas, told officers he had found the

ordnance in the field approximately a year earlier and kept it, believing it was not live, according to Palm Springs police.

Palm Springs police told ABC News that Weaver had the explosive round in his checked luggage.

Due to extensive rust and corrosion, the round's original identifying paint markings were no longer visible, making it difficult to determine whether it was an inert training munition or a live high-explosive device.

Out of an abundance of caution, the item was left undisturbed, and the Riverside County EOD Team was requested to respond. After examining the round and using X-ray technology, EOD personnel

confirmed it was a live explosive round, not a training round.

The round was safely removed from the airport and transported to a desert area off Gene Autry Trail, just south of Interstate 10, where it was destroyed without incident. No injuries were reported.

The Marine was detained during the investigation. Palm Springs Police are submitting the case to the Riverside County District Attorney's Office for review of a potential violation of California Penal Code section 18710, related to possession of a destructive device.

He may also face administrative action by the Marine Corps and a potential civil penalty through TSA.

Celebrate America's 250th birthday in Oceanside



The Oceanside Chamber of Commerce announces the Oceanside USA 250 Festival—a community celebration honoring America's 250th birthday. This event will bring together residents and visitors for a festive afternoon recognizing our nation's history while celebrating the pride and spirit of the Oceanside community. The festival will bring the community together in downtown Oceanside for live music, local food and beverage vendors, family-friendly activities, and engaging community exhibits.

Oceanside USA 250 Festival | June 27 | 12-6 p.m. | Junior Seau Pier Amphitheatre | Oceanside, CA 92054 | Free to the public



Department of Justice photos depicting cache of weapons, charging Cpl. Andrew Paul Amarillas with stealing and embezzling a Javelin missile system, which he signed out of the Camp Pendleton School of Infantry West. Photo courtesy of DOJ

Marine corporal accused of stealing, reselling weapons and ammo from Camp Pendleton

Cpl. Andrew Paul Amarillas is accused of using his position as an ammunition technical specialist at the School of Infantry West at Camp Pendleton to access and steal military property, including at least one Javelin missile system, military-grade ammunition and other weapons-related material, between February 2022 and November 2025, according to multiple news outlets

Investigators say he transported the stolen weapons and ammunition to his home state of Arizona, where he sold them to a network of co-conspirators, who then resold the equipment to others.

ABC News reported March 30 that Amarillas pleaded not guilty March 26 in Phoenix to multiple charges including conspiracy to commit theft and embezzlement of government property, and possession and sale of stolen ammunition. A judge ordered him to be held in custody pending trial. Authorities described the items as strictly controlled and dangerous, posing a threat to civilians and law enforcement. Some but not all of the stolen material has been recovered.

"The objects of the conspiracy were to steal property and ammunition from the U.S. military and sell stolen U.S. military property and ammunition to others to earn money," read the complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona in March.

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Military friendly colleges help tame beasts

This time of year, high school seniors open their mailboxes very carefully. Be it an email inbox or a curbside postbox, they cock their heads back as if protecting their faces from flying shrapnel. With one eye shut and trembling hands, they open new mail, fearing they'll be maimed.

What, pray tell, is this vicious beast from which seniors flinch? College decision letters, of course.

Even though college admissions teams try to hide messages among flowery phraseology (e.g., "Most Esteemed Applicant: After convening a council of considerable gravitas, we have completed our annual ritual of deliberation. Your application soared as a radiant comet across our universe. However, the constellations of capacity and circumstance have aligned in such a way that we are unable to extend to you a place within our academic dominion at this time.") college rejection letters puncture vital organs like shotgun blast, leaving recipients mortally wounded.

On the other hand, college acceptance letters mimic instant shots of adrenaline, causing recipients to jump, dance, giggle, pant, and faint with happiness before they've had a chance to notice the massive tuition bills.

All high school seniors applying to colleges are subject to these emotional extremes; however, for many military brats and their parents, there's an additional beast lurking beyond those college acceptances — finances.

Unless you've undergone a lobotomy or won the lottery, you're worried about paying for college. Additionally, you're concerned about military issues affecting your college finances such as proving residency, qualifying for discounts and aid, and tapping into federal benefits.

To fund our three children at private colleges, one might think my husband and I worked night shifts at 7-11 and moved into a cardboard box under an overpass to get by. Not so. Instead, our family used a combination of my Navy husband's Post 9-11 GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon Plan benefits, school financial aid, scholarship grants, private loans, and federal

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

student loan funding. We applied for everything under the Sun, including our base Spouses Club scholarships, MOAA student loans and grants, DeCA-Fisher House scholarships, and local Rotary Club scholarships.

It's a lot for the typical busy military family to manage, but with patience, prompt filing, hard work and good record keeping, it's entirely doable, especially if the colleges you are considering are supportive to military veterans and their dependents who wish to enroll.

These schools are referred to as being "veteran friendly" or "military friendly," but both terms refer to colleges and universities that put extra resources in place to help military veterans and other military-connected students. Our three children went to colleges that were very military friendly, and we found this extremely helpful when seeking assistance with paying tuition bills using several sources of funding. Both schools had special military offices on campus,

where staff were dedicated to handling GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon benefits as well as other aid, loans and scholarships for military-connected students.

MilitaryTimes.com publishes an annual "Best for Vets" list of colleges, using survey data analyzing military student success metrics, the range of military-specific resources, the level of financial assistance offered to military students, and other factors. The list contains 357 U.S. colleges, each with specific information about military programs, statistics and services.

MilitaryFriendly.com maintains an extensive list of post-secondary schools rated for military friendliness. Military students can search the list using criteria such as "G.I. Bill approved," "Yellow Ribbon Participant," "Campus Learning," "Online/Remote Learning," and military friendly awards.

Even Ivy League schools have tried to become military friendly. For example, Brown University banished ROTC from its campus during Vietnam War protests, and didn't invite it back until 2016, establishing the "Office of Military Affiliated Students" and offering veteran scholarship funding.

However, the ivies' efforts may have come too late. On February 27, War Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered a ban on Pentagon-funded military students from attending many top-ranked schools beginning 2026-2027, including Brown, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Columbia, and Yale due to "anti-American resentment and military disdain."

This college decision season, you may approach your mailbox with caution, but as long as you focus on military friendly colleges, you'll have reinforcements to slay the beast.

AutoMatters™ & More by Jan Wagner



If you only see one movie in a theater in the next year, you absolutely must see "Project Hail Mary," starring Ryan Gosling and introducing the Rocky character. The critics love this movie, as so they should. It is so good that I've seen it twice (so far), bought the book and even some movie theater popcorn buckets swag (Grace's space helmet and Rocky in his multi-sided, clear, environmental habitat bubble. Prices are already higher on eBay). The book was highly recommended to me. Now I somehow need to make time to read it!

Some spoilers, which you will probably also deduce from the trailers, follow. "Project Hail Mary," which is based on the novel by Andy Weir, tells the story of school science teacher Ryland Grace (Ryan Gosling) who unexpectedly wakes up from a coma, alone on a spaceship that is far, far away from home, with no recollection of how he got there. Eventually he realizes that he has been sent on a mission that is vital to the survival of life on earth: to figure out why a mysterious substance is causing the sun to die out. If he is to succeed at doing that, he must call upon his knowledge of science, his unorthodox ideas and an unexpected ally (Rocky) to try to save all life on Earth — and on his new ally's planet — from extinction. This effort will be the Hail Mary.

Movie review of Project Hail Mary

Much more than just a great science fiction adventure, "Project Hail Mary" explores cooperation, selflessness, determination and more — essential human characteristics that transcend this genre. As we learn in the movie's Production Notes, Andy Weir, the novel's author, "had already developed a reputation for marrying rigorous science with emotional clarity in stories anchored in near futures. His 2011 best-seller The Martian had proven that audiences would follow complex problem-solving if they cared about the person doing the solving."

Much attention has been given to the science. "One of the things we learned on The Martian was that we don't have to simplify the science," Drew Goddard said. "We were terrified we would have to simplify it for a general audience but what we found was the opposite. The audience loved that the science was complicated and challenging."

Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller "didn't want to reduce the science, they wanted to stage it. That meant restructuring certain passages from the novel so that ideas emerged through action rather than explanation. It would really become an exercise in cinema's purest and most singular function: visual storytelling. If Grace is figuring something out, the audience would have to watch him figure it out. They would watch him fail, watch him test. Discovery had to be active.

Early on Gosling had considered this role an opportunity to make the most epic theatrical experience of his life. "It's such an epic journey," Gosling says, "And Ryland Grace

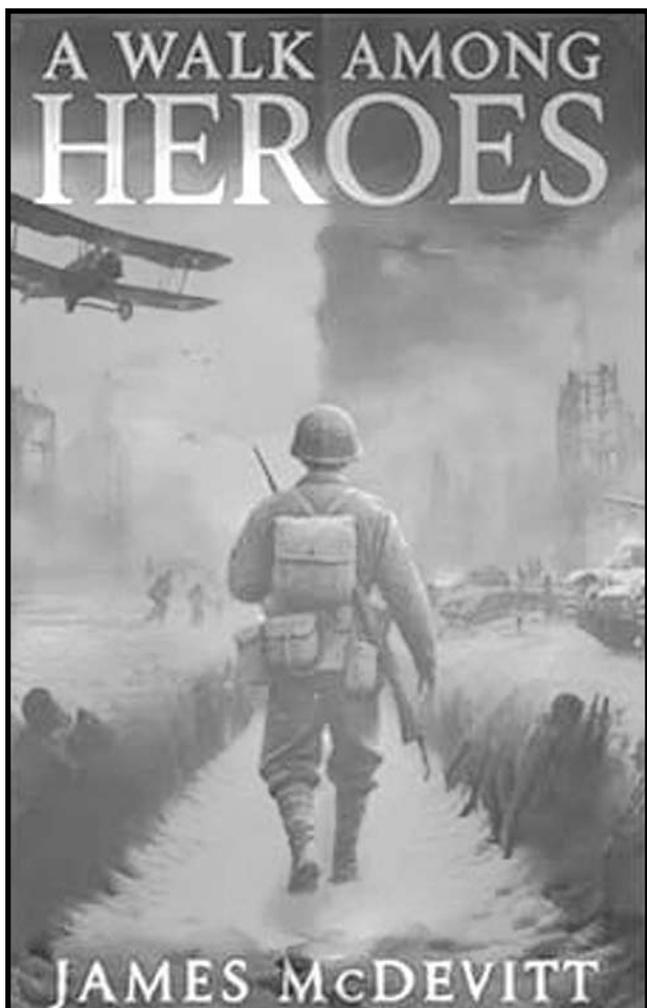
is not stoic in any way. He's not brave in any traditional sense and he doesn't have any illusions about being a hero. But he keeps trying." We care about Ryan Gosling's character (Grace) and Rocky, and we want them to succeed.

I saw "Project Hail Mary" in IMAX 2D, but a Google search revealed that this movie has been for a whopping 12 different movie formats: IMAX 70mm Film and IMAX Dual-Laser (1.43:1 Aspect Ratio), Dolby Cinema (Dolby Vision/Atmos), ScreenX (extends the projected movie onto the side walls of the theater), 4DX/MX4D (adds environmental effects such as wind, scents and moving seats), HDR by Barco (ultra bright, with high dynamic range), Cinemark XD (4K laser projection, immersive audio and shifting aspect ratios for an enhanced visual experience), 5-perf 70mm (superior to standard digital projection but not as large as IMAX), Digital IMAX (larger, brighter and crisper than standard projection), D-Box (seats shake and move with the film's action), Premium Large Format (several branded formats, including Regal RPX and AMC Prime, with larger screens and improved sound over standard) and Standard 2D Digital.

To see the official trailer, visit: <https://www.amazon.com/salp/projecthailmary?hfh>.

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit "AutoMatters & More" at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue 'years' boxes and browse. Copyright © 2026 by Jan Wagner – AutoMatters & More #922

Veterans News



Rosepoint Publishing screenshot

BOOK REVIEW: A Walk Among Heroes by James McDevitt

EDITOR'S NOTE: This book review was provided by Rosepoint Publishing (<https://rosepoint-publishing.com/2025/11/16/a-walk-among-heroes-by-james-mcdevitt-bookreview-military-aviationhistory/>)

BOOK BLURB: Step into the heart of history with A Walk Among Heroes, a novel by James McDevitt. It's a sweeping tale of courage, sacrifice, and enduring love that transcends generations. This powerful World War II novel takes you on an unforgettable journey through the lives of ordinary men and women who became extraordinary in the face of unimaginable challenges.

Through the eyes of T.J., a young soldier returning from World War II, and Smitty, a World War I ace haunted by the ghosts of his past, the story weaves a rich tapestry of interconnected lives shaped by war, hope, and resilience.

Anchored by a love story that defies time, the novel masterfully bridges two world wars, exploring the bonds of family, the weight of duty, and the ultimate cost of heroism.

A Walk Among Heroes isn't

just a novel—it's a testament to the power of love, memory, and courage in the face of humanity's darkest hours. This beautifully crafted tale will inspire and resonate with readers long after the final page is turned.

A Walk Among Heroes visits the bonds that are formed when the people next to you may hold your future in their hands. This is particularly vital when you are moving forward with people shooting at you. Having someone to think about and love back home gives you a goal to strive for staying alive.

James McDevitt provides a very clear picture of the brotherhood of men in arms. It is a testament to someone who has served and watched someone take a bullet to save the life of a fellow soldier. The pain that their sacrifice causes lives with the survivors for the rest of their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: James McDevitt is a firefighter, an infantry officer, and author with a passion for crafting stories that capture the courage, sacrifice, and connections forged in the crucible of war. With two deployments to Iraq, and one deployment to Syria, James draws

on his firsthand experiences to create gripping, heartfelt historical fiction. His debut novel,

A Walk Among Heroes, blends authentic detail with timeless themes of love, loss, and resilience, inspired by true events and a deep respect for history. When he's not writing, James

enjoys woodworking, playing guitar, and jiu-jitsu.

He currently resides in Alabama with his wife, Lindsey, as they prepare to welcome their first child. Connect with James on social media or through his website to follow his journey and upcoming projects.

Legal guardians for vulnerable veterans

The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Justice have signed a memorandum of understanding that will help some of America's most vulnerable Veterans get the ongoing care they need.

VA cares for hundreds of veterans who are unable to make their own health care decisions and have no family or legal representation to help them. This includes some veterans who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The MOU gives DOJ the authority to appoint VA attorneys as special assistant U.S. attorneys. That appointment will give VA attorneys the legal authority to initiate and participate in state court guardianship or conservatorship proceedings in cases where a legal decision-maker is required for post-acute transitions of care for these vulnerable veterans.

The appointment of a legal guardian or conservator can be a lifeline for vets in this situation. Among other things, a legal guardian or conservator can help veterans avoid unwarranted continued hospitalization, protect their rights, and promote appropriate transitions of care from VA hospitalization to other forms of VA care or care in the community, if appropriate.

"The Department of Justice is proud to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs to support our nation's brave Veterans by ensuring that they have the best legal resources available when it comes to making medical decisions and receiving timely care," said Attorney General Pam Bondi. "We owe our Veterans a debt we can never fully repay — but we can give them the support they deserve."

"Our new partnership with the Justice Department reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that every Veteran receives timely, appropriate care, even in complex cases," said VA Secretary Doug Collins.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/>

How TRICARE can help you screen for cancer

by TRICARE Communications

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – Did you know that it's possible to detect some types of cancer before you show any signs or symptoms? Getting preventive screening tests makes this possible.

"Screening tests are a powerful tool for taking care of your health — If you have cancer, finding it early can help make it easier to treat," said Jeannine Pickrell, MS, RN, director, Population Health, TRICARE Health Plan, at the Defense Health Agency. "It's important to know which screenings are recommended for you and when you should get them."

TRICARE covers cancer screenings based on your age, sex, and certain risk factors. Learn about which tests may be recommended for you.

What's covered

Many cancer screenings are covered as part of a Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Examination or a well-woman exam. These exams are a good time to talk to your provider about:

- Your risk factors for different cancers
- Which cancers you should be screened for
- Which screening tests you should use
- How often you should be screened

TRICARE covers certain screening tests for the following types of cancer.

Breast cancer

Mammograms and breast MRI are ways to screen for breast cancer. TRICARE covers mammograms every 12 months for:

- Women ages 40 and older who are at average risk of breast cancer
- Women ages 30 and older who have certain risk factors or a 15% or greater lifetime risk of developing breast cancer
- TRICARE also covers an annual breast MRI screening for women ages 30 and older who have a 20% or greater lifetime risk of developing breast cancer.

Cancer of female reproductive organs

Pap tests and HPV DNA testing are two ways to screen for cervical cancer.

- TRICARE covers Pap tests for women ages 21 and older. Your doctor should also perform a pelvic examination when you get a Pap test.
- TRICARE covers HPV DNA testing for women ages 30 and older. You must get this testing at the same time you get a Pap test.

Cancers of male reproductive organs

• TRICARE covers prostate cancer exams for men based on your age and other factors. Your family history and race determine whether you should be screened

for prostate cancer starting at age 40, 45, or 50.

• TRICARE covers annual testicular cancer exams for males ages 13–39 who have a history of certain conditions.

Colorectal cancer

TRICARE covers various types of colorectal cancer screenings for people ages 45 and older who are at average risk for colorectal cancer. The type of test you use determines how often TRICARE will cover this test for you.

Lung cancer

Do you have a history of smoking? TRICARE covers an annual CT scan to screen for lung cancer if all of the following apply to you:

- You're 50 to 80 years old.
- You have a 20 pack per year history of smoking, you currently smoke, or you've quit smoking within the past 15 years.

TRICARE only covers this screening when you get it from a network provider.

Oral and pharyngeal cancers

TRICARE covers a complete oral cavity exam as part of routine preventive care for adults at high risk due to exposure to tobacco or excessive amounts of alcohol.

Skin cancer

TRICARE covers skin cancer exams for people with certain risk factors, including family history and frequent sun exposure.

Thyroid cancer

TRICARE covers thyroid cancer exams for adults with a history of exposure to radiation to the upper body.

Tips for getting screenings

Knowing how TRICARE covers screenings can help you avoid unexpected out-of-pocket costs. Keep these things in mind before you get a screening.

• Follow your plan's rules. Cancer screening tests are preventive care. This means you'll have no out-of-pocket costs for covered screening tests when you follow your plan's rules for getting care.

• Make sure your test is covered. TRICARE doesn't cover all types of screening tests. For example, TRICARE doesn't cover blood-based or stool-based RNA testing to screen for colorectal cancer. If you aren't sure if TRICARE will cover a certain screening test, you can talk to your doctor or call your TRICARE contractor.

• Do you have TRICARE For Life? In the U.S. and U.S. territories, you must also follow Medicare's rules for getting preventive care.

Emerging ways to screen for cancer

New tests are helping people screen for other types of cancer before they show symptoms. TRICARE's Laboratory Developed Tests Demonstration covers the GRAIL Galleri test. This is a blood test that can screen for more than 50 types of cancer.

For TRICARE to cover this test, you must:

- Meet the eligibility criteria for the GRAIL Galleri test. You might be eligible if you're age 50 or older and you have certain risk factors.
- Get pre-authorization. Your provider will ask you to complete an informed consent document before requesting pre-authorization from your TRICARE contractor.

Here are some other things to keep in mind:

- The GRAIL Galleri test isn't part of TRICARE's preventive health benefit.
- TRICARE will cover one test per lifetime.

Pay attention to symptoms

Preventive screenings are

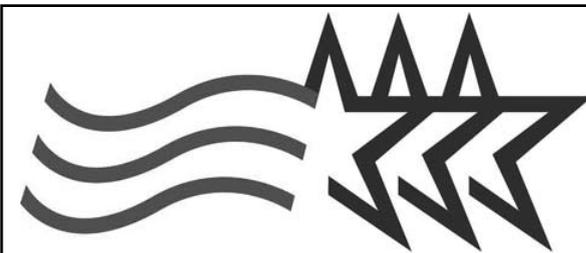
meant to find cancer before you have symptoms. But it's also important to pay attention to changes in your physical health. See your provider as soon as possible if you show signs or symptoms that could mean cancer.

According to the National Cancer Institute, common warning signs for cancer include:

- Swelling or lumps your neck, underarm, stomach, groin, or other body parts
- Sores that don't heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Chronic cough or hoarseness
- Changes in your breasts
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- Obvious changes in a wart or mole

Your provider may order diagnostic testing to determine if you have cancer or another medical condition.

Getting routine preventive care and paying attention to your body are important ways to catch problems early and stay healthy. Be sure to talk to your provider if you have questions or concerns about your health.



TRICARE®

Help for TRICARE beneficiaries displaced back to the U.S.

TRICARE beneficiaries who are displaced back to the United States from overseas can still access health care.

If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

If you need urgent care, visit a TRICARE-authorized provider with urgent care services.

If you need routine care, call International SOS at 877-451-8659 and they will help connect you with a provider.

If you need health care advice, help finding an urgent care or emergency care facility, or to schedule a virtual urgent care appointment call the MHS Nurse Advice Line at 800-TRICARE (874-2273).

If you need mental health support, dial 988 then press 1, text 838255 or call the MHS Nurse Advice Line at 800-TRICARE (874-2273).

If you need to fill a prescription call Express Scripts at 877-363-1303 to receive help finding a network pharmacy.

For more information and links to additional support, see our displaced persons link: <https://www.tricare.mil/displaced>.



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www.sdstrikeforce.com

2026 SCHEDULE

HOME GAMES AT FRONTWAVE ARENA

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Mon., March 23, 6pm | NAZ Wranglers at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Fri., April 17, 5pm | Quad City Steamwheelers at San Diego Strike Force |
| Sun., April 26, 4:30pm | Tucson Sugar Skulls at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Sat., May 23, 7pm | NAZ Wranglers at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Fri., June 19, 7pm | Vegas Knight Hawks at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Mon., July 6, 6pm | Arizona Rattlers at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Sat., July 18, 8pm | New Mexico Chupacabras at San Diego Strike Force* |
| Fri., July 24, 6pm | Tucson Sugar Skulls at San Diego Strike Force* |

*Conference

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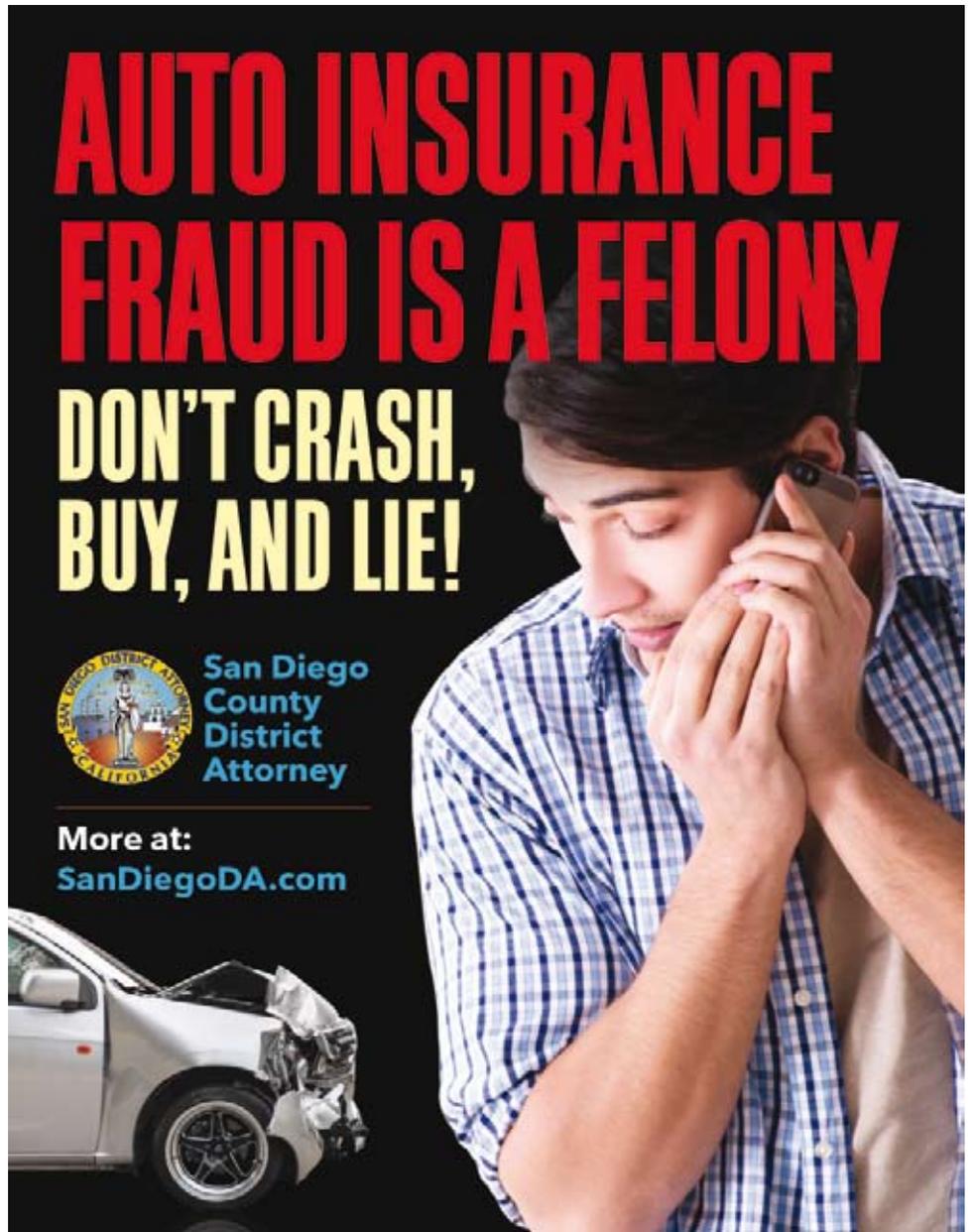
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