

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH

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SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR NO. 29
DECEMBER 23, 2025


SEE STORY ON PAGE 4

TEAMMATES Army Spc. Matthew C. Skalisky, patrol explosive detector dog handler, and Beza, a military working dog, complete an explosive detection training lane at Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy, Nov. 6, 2025. The Canine Holistic Health and Fitness Program mirrors the soldier H2F model, promoting total health and readiness for the Army's canine teams. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Westendorf

NATION GIFTS SERVICE MEMBERS \$1,776 'WARRIOR DIVIDEND'

 by C. Todd Lopez
 Pentagon News

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

billed as the "Warrior Dividend."

"Tonight, I am ... proud to announce that ... 1,450,000 military service members will receive a special, we call, 'Warrior Dividend' before Christmas," Trump said during a White House speech to the nation. "In honor

of our nation's founding in 1776, we are sending every [service member] \$1,776."

And service members will not wait long to see that dividend, the president said. "The checks are already on the way," he said. "Nobody deserves it more than our military, and I say, 'congratulations' to everybody."

The president also told the nation that, now more than ever, Americans are interested in joining the military. "We now have record enlistment [numbers] in our military," he said. "Last year, we had among the worst recruitment numbers in our military's history — a lot of difference a year makes."

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said the dividend represents the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States and the history of the service military members have given in defense of the nation, even before its creation.

"1776; as you know, our great nation was founded in the crucible of revolution in that year," Hegseth said in a video posted to social media. "Now, some 250 years later, we're proud to provide '1776' with a whole new modern meaning for our joint force."

The dividend, he said, also illustrates the nation's commitment to military service members.

Trump announces new class of battleship

by Matthew Olay

President Donald J. Trump announced Dec. 22 the Navy's intent to develop a new class of American-designed, 30,000 to 40,000-ton large surface combatants, or battleships, that will be employed to meet the realities of modern maritime conflict.

"As commander in chief, it's my great honor to announce that I have approved a plan for the Navy to begin the construction of two brand-new, very large — largest we've ever built — battleships," Trump announced from his Mar-a-Lago residence in Palm Beach, Fla. He was joined by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Navy Secretary John Phelan.

The new Trump-class of ships — which the president said will contribute to a new "golden fleet" of advanced warships — are currently in the design phase, with construction of the first battleship, USS Defiant, targeted for the early 2030s.

Phelan said that the new class of battleship is something the Navy "desperately needs." The president noted that the Navy aims to have a fleet of 20 to 25 ships eventually.

"The future Trump-class battleship, USS Defiant, will be the largest, deadliest and most versatile and best-looking warship anywhere on the world's oceans," Phelan said, adding that he wanted to thank the president for his vision to make the future battleship a game-changing capability for the Navy.

Phelan also compared the future Trump-class battleships to the former Iowa-class battleships, which were a cornerstone of the Navy's warship fleet for much of the 21st century.

"The Iowa was designed to go on the attack with the biggest guns, and that's exactly what will define the Trump-class battleships: offensive firepower from the biggest guns of our era," Phelan said.

"This ship isn't just to swat the arrows; it is going to reach out and kill the archers," he added.

During his remarks, Hegseth said that strengthening the Navy's fleet ties directly to the War Department's key goals of restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding the military and reestablishing deterrence.

"American strength is back on the world stage, and the announcement of the golden fleet anchored by new battleships — the biggest and most lethal ever — accomplishes all three of those things and marks a generational commitment to American sea power across the entire department," Hegseth said.

Border Defense Medal to JTF Southern Border

by C. Todd Lopez, Pentagon News

President Donald J. Trump and War Secretary Pete Hegseth teamed up recently at the White House to recognize service members who have been defending the U.S.-Mexico border with the Mexican Border Defense Medal. The medal recognizes service members who deployed as part of Joint Task Force Southern Border to the U.S.-Mexico border to provide military support for the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Since January 2025, Joint Task Force Southern Border has deployed over 8,500 personnel, intercepting cartel operations, stopping fentanyl flows and securing our border once again. The secretary said border security is a core mission of the military and is about defending the U.S. in its own hemisphere. "It's getting down to that border and getting control of it; and whether it's hanging concertina wire and reinforcing fencing or patrolling ... you guys have jumped at the mission, gotten after it, and I think it's been six months of effectively zero crossings on the southern border, which [was] the goal," the secretary told medal recipients during the White House ceremony.



Soldiers look over the area of operations during Exercise Hydra at the Utah Test and Training Range, May 8, 2025. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Danny Whitlock

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Show Dates & Times

Thursday, January 1: 10am – 9pm
Friday, January 2: 10am – 9pm
Saturday, January 3: 10am – 9pm
Sunday, January 4: 10am – 6pm

Location

San Diego Convention Center
111 W Harbor Drive

Tickets

All tickets must be purchased online at **SDautoshow.com**.



MOST RECENT 2026 CONTINENTAL U.S. COST-OF-LIVING ALLOWANCE RATES

The Department of War recently released the 2026 Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance rates.

The new rates will go into effect Jan. 1, 2026. As a result of the 2026 adjustment, \$99 million will be paid to approximately 127,000 uniformed service members stationed within Continental United States next year.

Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance is a supplemental allowance provided to service members and designed to help offset higher living expenses in the highest-cost locations in Continental United States. An area is considered high-cost if the non-housing cost of living for that area, inclusive of categories such as transportation and goods and services, exceeds a threshold of 107 percent of the national average.

By law, a Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance rate is only prescribed when the index meets a certain threshold above the Continental United States average. Service members assigned to duty stations where the non-housing cost of living is at least seven percent above the national average are eligible for Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance. Data is

adjusted to account for Basic Allowance for Subsistence, which is meant to offset the costs for a service member's meals and cost savings gained from shopping at commissaries and exchanges.

For 2026, these are the Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance changes:

- Six military housing areas will begin receiving Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance;
- Eight military housing areas will receive an increase in Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance;
- Two military housing areas will continue receiving the Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance;
- Two military housing areas will receive a decrease in Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance;
- Nine military housing areas will no longer receive Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance; and
- 21 counties will lose Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance for non-military housing areas in non-metropolitan counties.

Military housing areas with the highest Continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance rates:

- San Francisco, Calif. 8%
- Oakland, Calif. 6%
- Santa Clara County, Calif. 5%
- Staten Island, N.Y. 5%
- Seattle, Wash. 5%

Military housing area with the largest decrease:

- Humboldt County, Calif. 5% to 0%

Military housing area with the largest increase:

- Seattle, Wash. 0% to 5%

The total amount of this allowance a service member receives varies based on geographic duty location, pay grade, years of service, and dependency status. Service members can calculate their allowance rate at <https://www.travel.dod.mil/Allowances/CONUS-Cost-of-Living-Allowance/CONUS-COLA-Rate-Lookup/>.

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 has been updated.

SAN DIEGO AUTO SHOW ROARS INTO SAN DIEGO JAN 1-4

The San Diego International Auto Show, or SDIAS, one of the most anticipated events for both new car buyers and enthusiasts, and - Where the Cars are the Stars - roars back into the San Diego Convention Center, Jan. 1-4, 2026.

"With so many new and exciting vehicles and technologies being introduced, we can't wait to open the doors to the 2026 edition of the San Diego Auto Show," said enthusiastic Scott Webb, show director, SDIAS. "Our show is truly a celebration of all things automotive, and once again we've been working closely with vehicle manufacturers and a variety of other exhibitors to create an event that will inspire, educate and entertain."

The automotive landscape continues to evolve rapidly, with automakers introducing innovative features, advanced safety technologies, next-generation powertrains and refreshed lineups across every category. There is no better place to explore this changing marketplace than at the San Diego Auto Show - California's second-largest auto show.

Webb said show-goers should look forward to getting up close and personal with hundreds of new cars, trucks, SUVs, crossovers, EVs,

hybrids and other vehicles in a convenient, non-selling environment. Among the vehicles on display will be a wide variety of all-new models not yet in showrooms. Both behind-the-wheel test drives and an indoor EV Test Track experience will enable attendees to experience the handling and performance characteristics of today's newest vehicles.

"Test drives provide an exceptional opportunity for car-buyers to experience a variety of vehicles, and consumers may even find brands new to the show offering drives this year," Webb said. "Our EV Test Track continues to give attendees a unique chance to feel the instant torque and smooth performance of electric vehicles, as professional drivers demonstrate their capabilities on a special course created inside the convention center."

Other special displays and exhibits expected to return to the show include Electric Avenue, the Mobility Zone, Classic Cars and more. Electric Avenue will showcase a selection of EVs and charging solutions in one central location, providing attendees with a clear, easy-to-understand look at electric mobility options and ownership considerations.

Auto show tickets will be on sale in early December and

tickets will only be available online at www.sdauto show.com. Purchased tickets may be printed at home or shown and scanned on the smart phones of show patrons at the convention center.

This year, Toyota supports the San Diego Auto Show as the new Military Appreciation sponsor. As part of that program, free tickets to the Auto Show will be available at participating Toyota dealerships across San Diego County and Imperial County for active and retired military personnel beginning in mid-December (while supplies last).

Ticket prices are as follows:

Adult (ages 13-61): \$18
Military (active duty w/ ID): \$15 (one ticket per ID)
Senior (ages 62+): \$15
Child (ages 7-12): \$12
Child (6 and under): Free
Child (12 and under): Free on Family Day, Sunday, Jan 4 (when accompanied by a paid adult)
Show hours:
Thursday, Jan 1: 10am-9pm
Friday, Jan 2: 10am-9pm
Saturday, Jan 3: 10am-9pm
Sunday, Jan 4: 10am-6pm (Family Day)



Top Story

•Warrior dividend' is on the way to troops, Trump says

Navy

•Navy launches suicide drone from ship at sea for first time (see story on this page)

Marine Corps

•Marine Corps' top drill instructor explains the correct way to yell at recruits

Air Force

•Air Force shakes up acquisition leadership

•Air Force drops quarterly standards reviews, moves to annual checks

Coast Guard

•Coast Guard abruptly deletes swastika, noose entry from policy manual

Veterans

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Cyber, Space & Unmanned

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Defense Industry

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•Industry flags DOD's lack of standardized software attestation processes

•Denmark buys Kongsberg missile systems to defend strategic coastlines

•Rheinmetall joint venture wins \$2 billion space-reconnaissance contract

nse group as geopolitical tensions remain elevated.

International

•ISIS never really went away

•U.S. preps massive weapons package for Taiwan valued at over \$10 billion

War Department reevaluates discharges for COVID vaccine refusal

by C. Todd Lopez
Pentagon News

For service members involuntarily discharged solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine, the War Department has ordered a reevaluation of their discharge status to see who might be eligible for an upgrade to an honorable discharge.

Between Aug. 24, 2021, and Jan. 10, 2023, over 8,000 service members were involuntarily discharged from the military for refusing to take the vaccine.

Most of those service mem-

bers received an honorable discharge, but over 4,000 had their service characterized as general (under honorable conditions). That's one step below honorable, and that discharge characterization meant they were ineligible to use GI Bill educational benefits for themselves or a family member. While nearly 900 veterans have already had their discharge characterizations upgraded, over 3,000 remain to be reviewed.

In a Dec. 6 memorandum, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth ordered the military services to provide relief to those service members who received a gen-

eral discharge but might have deserved an honorable one.

"It is unconscionable that thousands of former service members who held true to their personal and religious convictions were not just separated, but separated with general [discharges], rather than honorable discharge characterizations," Hegseth wrote. "While many have applied for and received relief from our military department review boards, I believe the onus is on us to make this right."

Now, Hegseth said, the services will uncover all those who received a general discharge rather than an honorable one - and fix them, where appropriate. Former service members won't

need to do anything; the department will look into the potential upgrades on its own.

"I hereby direct a proactive review of personnel records to identify individuals who were involuntarily discharged solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine and facilitate appropriate discharge upgrades," Hegseth wrote.

The secretary directed each of the military services to identify individuals who were discharged and eligible to have their records reviewed. Those eligible are former service members who were involuntarily separated solely for refusing to be vaccinated under the department's COVID-19 vaccine mandate and who received a general discharge characterization.

Navy in Middle East employs attack drone at sea for first time

from Commander Naval Forces Central Command
Public Affairs

Personnel assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet successfully launched a one-way attack drone from a ship at sea for the first time, Dec. 16.

Littoral combat ship USS Santa Barbara achieved the historic milestone in the Arabian Gulf while launching a Low-cost Unmanned Combat Attack System.

"This first successful launch of LUCAS from a naval vessel marks a significant milestone in

rapidly delivering affordable and effective unmanned capabilities to the warfighter," said Vice Adm. Curt Renshaw, commander of NAVCENT/C5F. "This achievement demonstrates the power of innovation and joint collaboration in this critical region."

On Dec. 3, Central Command announced the deployment of the U.S. military's first one-way-attack drone squadron to the Middle East. The LUCAS drone that took off from Santa Barbara is part of the Task Force Scorpion Strike squadron formed to equip U.S. service members with the latest cutting-edge tools.

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Editor.....Scott Sutherland

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K9 holistic health is doggone delightful

by Army Staff Sgt. Raquel Birk
Army Southern European Task
Force, Africa

For the handlers of the 525th Military Working Dog Detachment, 18th Military Police Brigade, readiness isn't just about the mission - it's about maintaining the total health of their most trusted partners.

Through the U.S. Army's new Canine Holistic Health and Fitness program, the detachment based in Vicenza, Italy, is redefining what it means to be mission-ready, one paw at a time.

The Army established the K9H2F program under Army Directive 2025-16 to enhance the wellness, performance and quality of life of MWDs Aug. 21. The directive mandates all Army MWD units to implement comprehensive health and welfare standards, aligning with War Department and Army veterinary care policies.

Modeled after the Soldier Holistic Health and Fitness system, K9H2F takes a science-based, whole-dog approach - addressing physical fitness, nutrition, behavioral health and recovery. For the 525th MWD team, that means every dog receives the same level of conditioning and care as any elite military athlete in uniform.

"Our dogs are tactical athletes," said Army Staff Sgt. Payton R. May, kennel noncommissioned officer in charge, 525th MWD Detachment, 18th Military Police Brigade. "They train hard, they work hard and they deserve the same attention

to fitness, nutrition and injury prevention that we give our soldiers. The H2F program helps us keep them in top condition so they can perform safely and effectively in any environment."

A key component of the directive, the Partner and Wellness program, ensures handlers and their assigned MWDs relocate together during permanent changes of station, strengthening continuity and the human-K9 bond.

"When I [moved] to Italy, being able to bring my dog with me made a huge difference," said Army Spc. Matthew C. Skalsky, a patrol explosive detector dog handler assigned to the 525th MWD. "It helps us maintain that trust and teamwork that can't be replaced. The PAW program makes sure that bond doesn't get broken."

Each MWD now follows structured conditioning routines designed to build strength, endurance and agility while reducing the risk of injury. Specialized diets, recovery protocols and enrichment activities round out their regimen, ensuring each dog remains physically capable and mentally resilient.

According to Army Sgt. Maj. Viridiana Lavalley, Headquarters, Army Military Working Dog program manager, the initiative marks a major step forward in modern K9 care.

"Proactive and data-driven K9 care is essential for optimizing the performance and longevity of MWDs, directly impacting mission readiness and

effectiveness," Lavalley said. "By leveraging advanced analytics to monitor health metrics, exercise regimens and behavioral patterns, handlers can implement tailored care strategies that enhance the holistic health of MWDs."

This strategic approach not only improves the physical capabilities of these vital assets but also supports K9 mental resilience, ensuring they are fully prepared for the demands of their critical roles.

"Ultimately, investing in comprehensive K9 care through data-driven insights enhances operational effectiveness, contributing to mission success and the overall safety of military personnel," Lavalley added.

The holistic approach extends beyond the kennel. Handlers train alongside veterinary and behavioral specialists to better understand each dog's unique needs, improving communication and enhancing mission effectiveness.

"The bond between handler and dog is everything," May said. "When you have that trust, that connection, the dog performs with confidence. The H2F program helps us strengthen that bond through better training, stress management and recovery practices."

From explosive and narcotics detection to patrol duties across Europe and Africa, the 525th's military working dogs play a vital role in safeguarding soldiers and installations. The K9H2F program ensures those capabilities remain sharp on every mission, in every environment.

"Investing in our dogs' health is investing in readiness," said Spc. Abigail M. Bentle, a patrol narcotics detector dog handler assigned to 525th MWD. "They're not just assets, they're teammates. When they're healthy, confident and capable, our entire formation is stronger."

Under the directive, the Army Provost Marshal General oversees program criteria and compliance, while the Surgeon General of the Army coordinates implementation guidance. Commanders are required to meet new kennel and enrichment standards within 90 days, and the policy will be incorporated into Army Regulation 190-12 within two years.

For the soldiers and K9s of the 525th MWD Detachment, holistic fitness isn't just a program; it's a commitment to excellence that keeps both handlers and their four-legged partners ready for any mission.

Navy announces new small surface combatant

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Navy announced Dec. 18 its plan to introduce a new class of smaller combatant ships, the FF(X), as a critical component of the Navy's fleet of the future. The FF(X) will be a smaller, more agile surface combatant designed to complement the fleet's larger, multi-mission warships and enhance operational flexibility around the globe.

"To deliver at speed and scale, I've directed the acquisition of a new frigate class based on HII's Legend-Class National Security Cutter design: a proven, American-built ship that has been protecting U.S. interests at home and abroad," said John C. Phelan, Secretary of the Navy. "President Trump and the Secretary of War have signed off on this as part of the Golden Fleet. Our goal is clear: launch the first hull in the water in 2028. To expand capacity and production across our maritime industrial base, we will acquire these ships using a lead yard, and competitive follow-on strategy for multi-yard construction. Shipyards will be measured against one outcome: delivering combat power to the Fleet as fast as possible."

The FF(X) is a highly adaptable vessel. While its primary mission will be surface warfare, its ability to carry modular payloads and command unmanned systems enables it to execute a broad spectrum of operations, making it ready for the challenges of the modern maritime environment. Small surface combatants have always been essential to the fleet, handling a wide range of missions where a large warship isn't required. The FF(X) will continue this vital role, and will take on more routine operations, enhancing the fleets operational flexibility, adaptability, and mission readiness.

"Like the Medium Landing Ship, leveraging a complete design and production baseline approach will allow the Navy and shipbuilders to reduce costs, schedule and technical risk," said Adm. Daryl Caudle, 34th Chief of Naval Operations. "We know this Frigate design works, we know it operates with the Fleet, and most importantly, we know how to build it now."

FF(X) is engineered for rapid, cost-effective production, enabling this vital capability to the fleet faster. This is made possible by basing the new frigate on HII's proven Legend-Class National Security Cutter. This approach leverages a mature design to deliver ships to our sailors without delay.

The introduction of the FF(X) symbolizes the Navy's 250-year commitment to innovation and maritime dominance. From seabed to space, the Navy delivers power for peace – always ready to fight and win.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4364538/>

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Marine Corps announces updated physical fitness standards

from Marine Corps Training and Education Command
MCB QUANTICO, Va.- The Marine Corps is implementing changes to its Physical Fitness Test and body composition standards in accordance with the Secretary of War's Military Fitness Standards memorandum issued on Sept. 30. These changes will take effect on Jan. 1, 2026.

The Marine Corps will institute sex-neutral scoring for the Physical Fitness Test for Marines with a combat arms Primary Military Occupational Specialty. The PFT will require combat arms Marines to achieve a minimum score of 210 points (70 percent of the total possible points) using the male, age-normed scoring standard outlined in Marine Corps Order 6100.13A. The PFT will continue to be administered annually, from Jan. 1 to June 30.

Non-combat arms Marines will continue to follow existing sex- and age-normed standards.

The new PFT standards reflects the unique physical demands of combat arms roles, ensuring Marines are



Marine Corps recruits conduct the run portion of an initial strength assessment at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Sept. 6. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Sarah M. Grawcock

prepared for the sustained physical performance required in direct combat. Those who do not meet the 210-point requirement by the end of the reporting period will be assigned to remedial physical training and may be subject to PMOS reclassification and / or promotion restriction.

Navy launches improvement projects for Sailors living in barracks

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) is enhancing the safety, comfort, and cleanliness of barracks across the Navy Shore Enterprise with \$375 million of Barracks Task Force funding.

Driven by the Secretary of War Barracks Task Force initiative and "Sailors First" principle, these investments will improve the well-being of Sailors living in barracks throughout the Navy's Unaccompanied Housing (UH) program.

To swiftly improve quality of service, CNIC identified several projects focused on immediate needs, encompassing safety repairs, improved cleanliness, accelerated maintenance, and

upgrades to essential building systems. These improvements will address critical living conditions for Sailors living in Navy barracks.

"Quality of service is inseparable from readiness," said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, commander of Navy Installations Command. "Providing safe, comfortable, and clean housing is not optional. It is a responsibility we owe to every Sailor who volunteers to serve."

The Navy received approximately \$375 million from the One Big Beautiful Bill for Navy UH program investments. About \$75 million will support 95 prioritized projects across 50 installations, tailored to the unique needs of each base and may include kitchen modernizations, HVAC system

upgrades, flooring replacements, and new furniture. The remaining \$300 million will be used for six sustainment, restoration, and modernization projects, which range from enhancing energy efficiency and renovating bathrooms to replacing HVAC, plumbing, and electrical distribution systems.

"This is not a one-time fix, but a sustained commitment," Gray said. "We are dedicated to continuous improvement and ensuring our Sailors have the quality housing they deserve throughout their careers."

Commander, Navy Installations Command is responsible for worldwide Navy Shore installation management, designing and developing integrated solutions for sustainment and development of Navy shore infrastructure as well as quality of life programs. CNIC oversees 10 Navy regions, 70 installations, and more than 48,684 employees who are focused on warfighting and manning, training and equipping the Shore to fight and win. Navy installations are warfighting platforms essential to every Fleet operation.

FY25 sees best recruiting numbers in 15 years

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

In fiscal year 2025, the military's recruiting efforts returned to levels not seen in more than a decade.

"Since November 2024, our military has seen its highest recruiting percentage of mission achieved in more than 15 years," stated Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell.

This fiscal year, all active-duty services made mission. Most reserve components also met their mission goals, with the exception of the Army Reserve, which met 75 percent of its goal.

How the active-duty components of each branch met their goals breaks down as follows:

The Army had a goal of 61,000 recruits and attained 62,050, totaling 101.72 percent had a goal of 40,600 recruits and attained 44,096, totaling 108.61 percent of its goal.

The Air Force had a goal of 30,100 recruits and attained 30,166, totaling 100.22 percent of its goal.

The Space Force had a goal of 796 recruits and attained 819, totaling 102.89 percent of its goal.

The Marine Corps had a goal of 26,600 recruits and attained 26,600, totaling 100 percent of its goal.



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Interior Department transfers public land to Navy to support border security, national defense

WASHINGTON - In a Dec. 10 press release from the Department of the Interior, they will transfer jurisdiction of roughly 760 acres of public land in San Diego and Imperial Counties, to the Navy for a three-year period for the Navy to establish a National Defense Area to sup-

port ongoing border security operations.

"President Trump has made it clear that securing our border and restoring American sovereignty are top national priorities," said Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum. "This action delivers

on that commitment. By working with the Navy to close longstanding security gaps, we are strengthening national defense, protecting our public lands from unlawful use, and advancing the President's agenda to put the safety and security of the American people first."

The withdrawal area stretches from the western boundary of the Otay Mountain Wilderness Area to about one mile west of the California-Arizona state line. This corridor is one of the highest traffic regions for unlawful crossings along the southern border, creating significant national security challenges and contributing to environmental degradation.

The land, originally reserved in 1907 by President Theodore Roosevelt for border protection purposes, will be used by the Navy to strengthen operational capabilities while reducing eco-



View of the border in the Otay Mountains Wilderness. BLM California photo

logical harm associated with sustained illegal activity. Interior and the Navy coordinated closely to ensure the action is both

lawful and targeted, reinforcing the historic role public lands have played in safeguarding national sovereignty. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-transfers-public-land-navy-support-border-security-and-national-defense> 12/10/2025

doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-transfers-public-land-navy-support-border-security-and-national-defense 12/10/2025

Coast Guard offloads 27,551 pounds of cocaine, worth more than \$203M in San Diego

SAN DIEGO — The crew of USCGC *Active* (WMEC 618) offloaded approximately 27,551 pounds of cocaine, with an estimated value of more than \$203 million, in San Diego, Dec. 15.

The offload was the result of three separate interdictions of suspected drug-smuggling vessels in international waters off the coasts of Mexico, Central America, and South America. Two of the three interdictions were conducted by *Active* crew members and one by USCGC *Munro* (WMSL 755) crew members.

The interdictions were conducted as part of Operation Pacific Viper, a Coast Guard surge effort aimed at disrupting

transnational criminal organizations and reducing the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States.

These operations play a key role in protecting U.S. communities from the effects of cocaine and synthetic drugs such as fentanyl.

Rear Adm. Jeffrey Novak, deputy commander of Coast Guard Pacific Area and commander of Coast Guard District Southwest; Cmdr. Earl Potter, commander of *Active*; U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon; and James Nunnallee, special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration, were all on hand to answer questions and brief the media.

Secretary of War officer announcements

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced Dec. 19 that the President has nominated Marine Corps Col. **Seth E. Anderson** to brigadier general. Anderson is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, G-2, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

Hegseth announced Dec. 18 that the president has nominated Navy Rear Adm. **Douglas C. Verissimo**, to vice admiral, with assignment as commander, Naval Air Forces/Commander, Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet, San Diego. Verissimo most recently served as commander, Naval Air Forces, Atlantic Fleet, Norfolk, Va.

Military Sealift Command takes delivery of newest Fleet Replenishment Oiler USNS Lucy Stone

by Sarah Cannon
Military Sealift Command Pacific
Military Sealift Command recently took delivery of its newest fleet replenishment oiler, USNS Lucy Stone (T-AO 209), from shipbuilder General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego.

The 746 foot Stone is the fifth ship in the 20-ship John Lewis-class, previously known as the TAO(X). Following more testing and trials, the ship will be crewed and sailed by MSC, providing logistics support to Navy ships at sea.

Lewis class oilers, such as Stone will replace the current Kaiser Class fleet replenish-

ment oilers and they age out of the fleet.

The ship honors American suffragist Lucy Stone, who joined other notable advocates such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Ernestine Rose, and Antoinette Brown Blackwell to petition for suffrage and abolition in the 19th century.

Her efforts as a founder of the Women's National Loyal League were essential to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery.

"It is my pleasure to welcome MSC's newest ship to our fleet," said Capt. Dustin Lonero, com-

mander, Military Sealift Command Pacific.

"The ships of the Lewis Class are the future of our Combat Logistics Force, and we are ready to have them in service, providing logistics services to the ships of the U.S. Navy as they operate around the world."

The John Lewis class honors prominent civil rights leaders and activists. Several more Lewis class oilers are currently under contract to be built by General Dynamics NASSCO which are USNS Sojourner Truth (T-AO 210), USNS Thurgood Marshall (T-AO 211), USNS Ruth Bader Ginsburg (T-AO 212), and USNS Harriet

Tubman T-AO 213.

MSC directs and supports operations for approximately 140 civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships at sea, conduct specialized missions, preposition combat cargo at sea around the world, perform a variety of support services, and move military equipment and supplies to deployed U.S. forces. MSC exists to support the joint warfighter across the full spectrum of military operations, with a workforce that includes approximately 6,000 Civil Service Mariners and 1,100 contract mariners, supported by 1,500 shore staff and 1,400 active duty and reserve military personnel.

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While the duties of a volunteer may vary, the goal is always the same — to improve the quality of life of service members, boost their morale, and serve as the link between service members and the American people.

Ready to apply to be a USO San Diego volunteer?

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Navy celebrates completion of major energy generation project at NWS Seal Beach

by Gregg Smith
Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach
The Department of the Navy, through a leasing initiative with energy solutions provider, Ameresco, today announced the completion of a major energy generation project at Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach (NWSSB), in Seal Beach.

To mark this significant achievement, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held officially recognizing the commencement of commercial operations under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) between Ameresco and

San Jose Clean Energy.
The energy project—developed through a forward-thinking leasing initiative—represents a model of collaboration between the Navy and the private sector. Ameresco financed, designed, and constructed the project on Navy-owned land and will continue to operate and maintain the energy generation and storage assets through the term of the lease.
Designed with a focus on mission readiness and energy dominance, this project includes

12 megawatt solar photovoltaic installation paired with a 16.7 MW-hour battery energy storage system, as well as switchgear and local distribution upgrades. Instead of traditional cash rent, Ameresco is providing infrastructure upgrades and completion of mission critical projects at NWSSB, delivering long-term value to the installation and its mission supporting the warfighter.
“This successful leasing initiative strengthens our national security by allowing us to leverage the value of our land to fulfill

mission-critical projects that harden our infrastructure against disruptions and deliver resilient energy where it matters most,” said Capt. Kyle Caldwell, commander of NWSSB. “It ensures that NWSSB remains a ready, capable installation prepared to support the Fleet at any time.”
By leveraging Naval Facilities and Engineering Systems Command, Southwest’s team of professionals and available Title 10 Real Estate authorities, NWSSB successfully aligned real property solutions with mission objectives – achieving



smarter, faster and more strategic outcomes than traditional contracting methods.
Ammunition pier at Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach. U.S. Navy photo

LOCAL PHOTO GALLERY



CLOSE-UP Lance Cpl. Jual Kujet posts simulated security during a combat readiness evaluation at Camp Pendleton Dec. 13, 2025. The evaluation was designed to certify Marines as the ground combat element for an upcoming deployment. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Kyle Chan



FUELING UP USS Frank E. Petersen Jr., sails alongside USS Abraham Lincoln during a refueling in the Pacific Ocean, Dec. 10, 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Seaman Angel Campbell



FITNESS 101 Marines conduct burpees during a company physical training event at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego Dec. 18, 2025. Physical training boosts morale, esprit de corps, and improves overall physical fitness. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Jesse K. Carter-Powell



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FRCSW Comptroller team pauses to celebrate the season. Photo by Michael Furlano

Mission success amidst holidays

by Michael A Furlano
Fleet Readiness Center Southwest
What looks like a holiday celebration is also a snapshot of mission success.
The Fleet Readiness Center Southwest Comptroller Team pauses to celebrate the season during their holiday party, but behind the festive sweaters and smiles is a group that has played a [critical role in enabling FRCSW’s exceptional performance in 2025.](https://www.dvidshub.net/news/551584/frcsw-journey-success-story-leadership-accountability-and-execution)

Through disciplined financial stewardship, precise execution, and unwavering support to the warfighter, this team helps ensure the command can deliver on its military readiness mission every day. Moments like this remind us that while the work is serious, the people who make it happen are worth celebrating.

Camp Pendleton Marines conduct inaugural training on Range 710A

by 1st Lt. Chase Fortier
1st Marine Division
A new live-fire range is giving Marine infantry units the unique ability to train entire companies with reinforcements using the full arsenal of weapons available to the infantry battalion at Camp Pendleton.

Range 710A was used for the first time this month, when Marines with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, conducted a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation, or MCCRE, to prepare for their 2026 deployment on the Marine Rotational Force – Darwin Marine Air-Ground Task Force. The new range enables a company reinforced with combat engineers and other enablers to conduct live-fire training in one location.

The need for the new facility arose after severe weather rendered a previously used training

area, Range 600, inaccessible. Following the weather event, Lt. Col. Mark Saville, the commanding officer of 1st Bn., 5th Marines, suggested finding a new area to support complex, live-fire training for a company reinforced on which every weapon system organic to an infantry battalion could be used.

The site is a former vehicle convoy operations range. Surveys showed that the weapon systems could be safely employed. For the MCCRE, the battalion’s intelligence section developed a comprehensive layout for the simulated adversary force and a detailed obstacle plan to challenge the attacking Marines.

Engineers were instrumental in preparing the range - excavating trench systems, building bunkers, establishing mortar firing positions, and constructing wire obstacles. The exercise included a full rehearsal of simulated casualty evacuations to a field medical facility.

“I want to give specific thanks to the Marines from 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st CEB,” said Gunnery Sgt. Jason Lintz, one of the lead developers of Range 710A. “Not only did they construct all of the enemy obstacles and trenches for the MCCRE, but they then integrated into 1st Bn., 5th Marines to execute the MCCRE with them. We could not have done it without them.”

How programming found worldwide supports the U.S. military community

(StatePoint) When you think about the USO, you likely think about entertainment tours or airport lounges, but the organization’s scope is much wider than that.

USO programs support service members and their families stationed in the U.S. and overseas, as well as service members training in isolated locations or deployed to areas around the world. Each program meets a specific need to ease the isolation and loneliness of military life - during times away from loved ones, during moves and deployments, and when returning to civilian communities.

With more than 250 locations worldwide, including on military installations, at airports, and on board Navy ships, USO Centers offer ways for service members to connect with each other and with their families far away. These centers provide free Wi-Fi, computers, televisions and gaming equipment, and organize events and activities designed to strengthen morale.

For service members and military families who are stationed or deployed in remote locations, Mobile USO vehicles travel thousands of miles to provide many of the services of a traditional, brick-and-mortar USO Center.



One example is the USO Canine Program. The program acknowledges the strong bond between humans and animals, and the critical role dogs play within the military community, addressing diverse mental, emotional and physical needs. Through interactions with certified therapy dogs at USO events and USO Centers, service members and their families experience the profound emotional support that only a four-legged friend can offer. The USO Canine Volunteer of the Year competition recognizes outstanding contributions from USO therapy dogs and their handlers.

With military life comes many challenges. However, these programs strengthen and support service members and their families at every step of their military journey. Courtesy photo

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The Meat & Potatoes



of Life

by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

Late one snowy Christmas Eve in Germany, when our three children were snuggled in their beds, my husband, Francis, and I were in our Patch Barracks apartment, yawning, and putting the finishing touches on what would be another magical Christmas morning.

“This one’s for Hayden from Santa,” I said after wrapping a large Lego set, “put it over there,” I pointed behind the Christmas tree. With a Sharpie, I scrawled on another name tag, while Francis took a hug from the glass of milk the kids left out for Santa.

“What about these carrots?” Francis asked, grimacing. He was perfectly willing to partake in the cookies and milk left for Santa each year, but he avoided vegetables unless they were drowned in ranch dressing or smothered in melted cheese. Francis thought nibbling on reindeer carrots was asking way too much.

I laughed and nibbled the carrots myself.

“We almost forgot the hoof prints and glitter!” I whispered. Our old house in Virginia had a fireplace for Santa’s entry, but our top floor stairwell apartment on Patch Barracks had none. In case we were interrogated about how Santa got all those gifts inside, we opened the slanted roof window in our family room, and using a wooden spoon, scooped reindeer tracks out of the snow

Part One: Santa’s out of the bag

and sprinkled silvery glitter on the roof. With a trail of glitter left between the window and the tree, staging was complete.

“Looks good,” Francis said, and we smiled, proud that we’d pulled off another enchanting Christmas scene while our children were fast asleep.

Or, so we thought.

Unbeknownst to us, our fifth-grader Anna had woken up when she heard a noise. Thinking it was Santa making a ruckus, she’d climbed down from her bunk and peeked through the keyhole in the bedroom door, expecting to see the jolly old elf himself.

What Anna witnessed would squash her sugar plum visions forever. There was no man in a red suit. It was only Dad, setting gifts under our tree.

Her mind raced with the implications of this bombshell. She’d heard rumors about Santa Clause being made up by parents, but she hadn’t believed it. For the first time, she wondered, had it always been Dad taking bites out of the cookies we left for Santa? Was Santa’s curly-cue script on the gifts really Mom’s handwriting all along?

Seeking comfort, Anna climbed into the bottom bunk with her sister, who was fast asleep. “Lilly,” she whispered.

Squinting, Lilly croaked, “Whah, huh?”

“We’re going to sing Christmas carols now,” Anna demanded.

Throughout their sisterhood, Anna had always been the unequivocal boss. Lilly’s birth had

ushered in Anna’s reign as social director, peer mentor, master manipulator, camp counselor, benevolent queen or evil dictator, depending upon her mood. Her sovereignty had only one loyal subject — her little sister — but that was enough, at least for now, to satisfy Anna’s desire for world domination.

Lilly, having always been a content child, accepted this lot in life without question or complaint. After being woken up from a dead sleep and told to sing, she looked groggily up at her big sister, and said quite simply, “Okay.”

Anna snaked her arms around Lilly’s little torso, hugging her tightly for her own solace, and began in a whisper, “Silent night, holy night ...” Lilly didn’t know the words, but she followed Anna’s lead, as usual. With their heads resting forehead to forehead on Lilly’s pillow, they sang the song over and over in the dark until Anna fell into a fitful sleep.

The next morning, Merry Christmas chaos ensued. Anna never revealed the traumatic realization that had been foisted upon her the night before. In fact, Anna hid her secret so well, her older brother still believed in Santa for at least another year. It wouldn’t be until Anna and Lilly were in college that they divulged the story. Francis and I were surprised by the tale of that fateful night, and heartened to learn that Anna had selflessly preserved Christmas magic for her siblings.

However, just as we were about to praise Anna for her generous sacrifice, we learned the shocking sequel. Tune in next week for the rest of the story

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Celebrating Christmas in coastal North County

Hanukkah is over for 2025 but Christmas celebrations are in full swing in coastal North County San Diego. Holiday lights sparkle in neighborhoods throughout the county, and the “Coastal Christmas Holiday Light Spectacular” and holiday village lights up the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

Some of you may recall, as do I, that a visit to enjoy the special animated holiday lights displays at the Del Mar Fairgrounds used to require driving slowly in a long procession of cars along a meandering path. You remained in your vehicles, looked once as you slowly drove past all the beautiful displays and then you left. According to my Google search, this popular “Holiday of Lights,” around the Del Mar Racetrack, ran from 1995 until it ended in 2012. Then, in 2020, it returned as “Holidays in Your Car.” This was during the days when there was a need for social distancing due to COVID-19. Thankfully times have changed, for the better.

This year fantastic animated holiday lights displays have returned to the Del Mar Fairgrounds, but now they can be more fully enjoyed at your leisure, together with a wonderful coastal holiday village.

“Coastal Christmas — A Holiday Light Spectacular” includes so much. When you first enter you will see, and can pass through, colorful arches of lit hearts and candy canes.

Jolly Santa is there too, waiting to speak with you and to pose with you for your memorable Christmas photos.

Next there is a large “Glice” skating rink (see Glice.com), where skates are available for rental. Since this is in Del Mar

and it is thankfully not cold enough for an actual ice-skating rink, the Glice is a Swiss-engineered synthetic ice, enabling skating rinks year-round. Skaters were having a great time gliding around the rink’s tall, central Christmas tree, which was lit in everchanging patterns of colorful, twinkling holiday lights.

Surrounding the skating rink are holiday igloos, enclosed for



by Jan Wagner

our chilly coastal North County San Diego nights (brrrr!). These igloos are comfortably furnished, and serve as a nice place to sit, rest and chat with your friends and family. In the area you will also find the “Topsy Elf Bar.”

Another arch, this one taking the form of a gigantic holiday teddy bear, guides you to a food court. It is much like a scaled-down version of what you would find at the annual San Diego County Fair, with vendors offering a wide variety of tasty treats: cannoli, pizza, Kettle Corn, corn dogs, falafel, gyros, burgers & fries, Mexican foods, turkey legs, kabobs, funnel cakes, crepes and much more. Trust me, you will not leave there unsatisfied!

Also in that area is an arcade, filled with carnival games — again like a scaled-down version of what you would find at the San Diego County Fair.

The highlight of the activities is a leisurely, meandering walk along the colorful “Holiday Light Trail,” past display after display consisting of millions of colorful, twinkling lights, many of them animated to together-form breathtaking scenes. To see my photos of many of them, visit <https://automatters.net>. You will continually be surprised as you round corners and emerge to see additional displays.

Also, along your journey you will find a vendor village that is filled with merchandise including clothing, baked goods and all sorts of other things that you might find at a fair.

Of course, this is not the only way to experience lights of the holiday season. For that, many neighborhoods have light displays at individual homes. Sometimes whole streets-full of homes are decorated. I discovered one such street in Encinitas. While some people slowly drove along the streets, much like people did when the Del Mar Fairgrounds had drive-through experiences, I found that the best way to experience these displays is to slowly walk along the neighborhoods’ sidewalks, and sometimes up their driveways and entrance-ways — stopping frequently to take in the magnificent displays and take photos of them.

For more information about the Coastal Christmas Holiday Light Spectacular visit: <https://www.coastalchristmasdelmar.com>. If you miss it this year, I am hopeful that it will return next year.

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 © 2025 by Jan Wagner – AutoMatters & More #910

Veterans News

Medal of Honor Spotlight: Army Tech. Sgt. Peter Dalessandro

by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

By valiantly fighting his way through Europe and surviving as a prisoner of war, Army Tech. Sgt. Peter Joseph Dalessandro became one of the most highly decorated soldiers of World War II. When he started a career as a state senator afterward, he did so as a Medal of Honor recipient.

Dalessandro was born May 19, 1921, in Watervliet, N.Y. He had three brothers and two sisters and was educated in public schools. Little else has been published about his childhood.

When World War II broke out, Dalessandro joined the Army, and it didn’t take long for him to get involved in combat overseas. He took part in the invasions of North Africa, Sicily and Normandy, France, before fighting his way across Europe toward Germany.

Dalessandro was part of Company E, 1st Battalion, 39th



President Harry S. Truman talks to Army Tech. Sgt. Peter Dalessandro after awarding him the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony Aug. 23, 1945. Photo courtesy of Congressional Medal of Honor Society

Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, during the winter of 1944. Around Christmastime, his unit was ordered to replace another on the Belgian-German border during what became known as the Battle of the Bulge, Germany’s last major offensive that surprised exhausted Allied troops in the region.

On Dec. 22, 1944, Dalessan-

dro’s platoon was preparing to hold the line at an important road junction on high ground near Kalterherberg, Germany. They had only been there for about two hours when three enemy companies fired an intense round of artillery and mortars in their direction. Soon after, enemy soldiers charged at them in an attack that threatened to overwhelm the platoon’s position.

Dalessandro saw his men faltering, so he braved the intense fire and made his way through the group to give them encouragement. Dalessandro then moved to a fully exposed observation post, where he adjusted mortar fire onto the enemy soldiers while firing at them with his rifle. The whole time, he continued to encourage his platoon to push back the attack.

When the enemy launched a second attack later that day, Dalessandro again took control of the situation by rushing to a forward position and calling for

mortar fire.

When he ran out of rifle ammunition, Dalessandro crawled 30 yards across exposed ground to grab a light machine gun, which he took back to his position and fired toward the enemy at nearly point-blank range until it jammed. Thankfully, Dalessandro managed to get the gun to fire one more burst, which took out four German soldiers who were about to kill two wounded U.S. soldiers and a medical corpsman in a nearby foxhole.

As the enemy moved in, Dalessandro didn’t retreat. Instead, he hurled grenades and called for mortar fire that came closer and closer to his position, all while covering his platoon so they could withdraw. As German soldiers swarmed him, Dalessandro was heard calling for yet another barrage, yelling, “OK, mortars, let me have it right in this position!”

Dalessandro’s bravery and

fearlessness allowed his fellow soldiers to escape. However, he was captured and held prisoner for about five months until the war ended. He was then sent back to the U.S.

During a White House ceremony Aug. 23, 1945, Dalessandro received the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman for his courage in Europe. He was one of 28 service members who received the honor that day. Dalessandro had also received three Purple Hearts, two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star and the French Croix de Guerre, making him one of the most decorated soldiers of World War II.

Soon after returning home, Dalessandro turned to politics. He was elected as a Democrat to the New York state senate in 1946 and served six terms in that capacity until resigning in 1957 to become the secretary to the Senate minority leader,

according to a 1997 article in the Massachusetts newspaper the North Adams Transcript.

That same year, Dalessandro married Patricia Farley. The pair had two daughters, Maribeth and Bernadette.

Dalessandro moved to Latham, N.Y., in 1969, where he remained until he died on Oct. 15, 1997. The World War II veteran is buried in Saratoga Springs National Cemetery in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

In 1987, Dalessandro Boulevard in Albany County, New York, was dedicated in his honor.

This article is part of a weekly series called “Medal of Honor Monday,” in which we highlight one of the more than 3,500 Medal of Honor recipients who have received the U.S. military’s highest medal for valor.

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Sign up today to play in the Navy MWR Esports Winter 2025-2026 Series!

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Rocket League

Tournament Dates and Times
Fri., Dec. 26, 2025 at 8pm EST
Sat., Dec. 27, 2025 at 2pm EST
Fri., Jan. 2, 2026 at 8pm EST
Sat., Jan. 3, 2026 at 2pm EST

Rocket League Format:

Single Elimination
Best of 3 Games
Teams Size: 3
Total Players: 96

Tournament Prizes For All Events:

First Place: \$150 gift card for each member of the team
Second Place: \$100 gift card for each member of the team
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ber of the team | The Redemption Bracket (often called a "con-
solation" or loser's" bracket") gives teams a second chance to
showcase their skills and win prizes. Teams that lost in the 1st
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Who Can Play:

The competitions are open to authorized Navy MWR patrons
ages 18+, with priority given to active-duty Sailors. If you have
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*Navy MWR Esports is a Community Recreation initiative designed to provide
entertainment and recreation opportunities through competitive sports. This
multidimensional initiative will also increase programming opportunities at
MWR Liberty Centers through technological improvements and provide top-
quality esports competitions to the Navy community.*



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

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

I'm in poor health and need to know my options

*Dear Rusty: I plan to stop working very soon. My health is not
good. I am 66 years old, born in June 1959, so my full retirement age
is 66 years and 10 months. My wife passed away in March 2024, and
she was collecting SS benefits when she died. I have no dependent
children. In general, what benefits am I entitled to?*

Signed: Unhealthy and Struggling

Dear Unhealthy and Struggling: Sorry to hear that your health
is failing, and that you will need to stop working soon. But do not
fear – Social Security will be there for you. Here is some info to
help you decide your next possible steps:

Since you will not reach your full retirement age until next year
(in April 2026), your earnings limit from working for this year is
\$23,400 (or \$1950/month). The earnings limit will apply only if you
decide to claim Social Security early (this year). If you decide to
take Social Security this year, your earnings from before you take SS
won't count, but your monthly earnings for the remaining months of
this year will be subject to the 2025 monthly limit (\$1950). If your
monthly earnings exceed that amount, you won't be entitled to SS
benefits for that month, unless your total earnings for 2025 are less
than \$23,400. If you don't exceed the annual limit, your 2025 Social
Security benefits won't be affected by your work earnings.

Next year, the year you attain your full retirement age (FRA), your
earnings limit will be much higher (about 2.5 times more, or something
more than about \$63,000). If your 2026 earnings up through March
do not exceed that limit, then you can claim your SS benefits a bit
earlier in 2026 (before your FRA), and your benefits won't be affected,
except that your monthly benefit amount will be permanently reduced
by .556% for each month you claim before your FRA. For example, if
you were to claim for your SS to start in January 2026, you would get
98.3% of your FRA amount. So, provided your work earnings won't
exceed about \$63,000 between January and March 2026, you could
claim effective January 2026 without worrying about Social Security's
earnings test. So, depending upon your health, you could claim SS to
start in January 2026, likely without worry about the earnings test, and
would get about 98.3% of your FRA benefit. Or, health permitting,
you could wait to claim SS starting in April 2026 to get 100% of the
benefit you've earned from a lifetime of working. Point is, you just
need to be careful not to exceed Social Security's earnings tests prior
to reaching your full retirement age, or SS will take away some of your
benefits. They "take away" by withholding future monthly payments
as long as needed to recover what you owe. Worse case penalty for
exceeding the 2026 monthly limit would be no benefits for any month
you exceed about \$5300, or a penalty of \$1 for every \$3 over the limit
if you exceed the 2026 annual limit before your FRA.

Continued on page 11

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Health & Fitness

DASH-style diet helps control blood sugar

For over 30 years, doctors have recommended the DASH diet to help people reduce high blood pressure. Studies have repeatedly shown that the DASH eating plan can improve heart health. The DASH diet seems

to have other health benefits. But its effects on blood glucose, also called blood sugar, in people with type 2 diabetes were unclear.

The DASH diet encourages

eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. It favors beans and lean meats for protein. It suggests limiting saturated fats and sugar-sweetened food and drinks.

In a new study, researchers tweaked the DASH diet to help improve glucose control. The adjusted diet for diabetes is called DASH4D. It includes slight changes, such as eating even fewer sweets and starchy foods like potatoes.

Researchers studied 89 people with type 2 diabetes. Participants followed four different diets, in random order, for five weeks each. Two of the diets were variations on DASH4D. The other two were similar to the typical American adult diet.

Compared to a typical diet, the DASH4D eating plan led to more time with blood glucose in the recommended range. The results suggest that a modified DASH diet could help control blood sugar levels in adults with type 2 diabetes.

"The original DASH diet has long been recommended for people with diabetes and other health conditions due to its ef-

fectiveness in lowering blood pressure," says Dr. Elizabeth Selvin at Johns Hopkins University. "But this is the first time a controlled study has shown a significant improvement in glucose control as well."



Pink Eye: What you need to know

Pink eye, or conjunctivitis, causes swelling and redness inside your eyelid and the white part of your eye. Your eye may also feel itchy and painful. The condition is common and can sometimes spread very easily.

Anyone can get pink eye. It's usually caused by a virus or bacteria. You can also get it from allergies irritating your eyes. Symptoms include pain in your eye, a very red eye, and a lot of fluid coming from your eye. You may also notice blurred vision or light sensitivity.

Pink eye can cause serious health problems for newborn babies. Check for symptoms like puffy red eyelids and unusual fluid discharge from your baby's eye. Call a doctor immediately if you see these symptoms.

If you have symptoms of pink eye, talk with your doctor. Usually, it gets better on its own in about 7 to 10 days. But you might need treatment.

The best way to prevent pink eye is good hygiene. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially if you're around someone with pink eye. And be sure to have clean hands before touching your eyes. Don't share personal items, like makeup, towels, eyeglasses, or pillows, with someone who has pink eye.

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Continued from page 10

You do, however, have another option as your wife's surviving spouse: You can claim your benefit as a surviving spouse prior to claiming your own SS retirement amount. But the earnings test described above (if you claim before your FRA) would also apply to your survivor benefits. So, again, your plans for working enter this decision. If you decide to stop working this year, you could, for example, decide to claim your survivor benefit this year and collect that until you reach your FRA in April 2026 when you would get 100% of your personal SS retirement amount. In fact, you might even decide to collect your survivor benefit longer, allowing your own SS benefit to grow until you are 70, at which time you would get about 25% more than your FRA amount. Indeed, if your survivor benefit is higher than your personal age 70 amount, you can just continue to claim the higher amount.

I suggest that when you decide that you must stop working full time, you contact Social Security at 1.800.772.1213 to discuss whether it is best to claim your survivor benefit from your wife first and delay claiming your own until a later time (to get a higher amount). You can make an appointment to discuss your options with SS over the phone, before deciding when (and what) to claim. And, of course, if you have any further questions, we are always here to assist you with your decision.

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Digital Appointment Portal (DAP)

NMCS's laboratory now offers Saturday appointments!

To better serve our patients and optimize the efficiency of our services, NMCS'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

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