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NAVY 'ORCA'S'TRA Sailors assigned to the Navy Band Southwest's Harborside Brass Quintet provide musical enrichment for the orcas at SeaWorld San Diego, Feb. 15, 2026. SeaWorld frequently uses live music as a form of enrichment for the orcas, as they can sense the vibrations created by the instruments. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Malaysia Billman

A new process to ease recruits' journey to basic

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

When the day to leave for boot camp finally arrives, military recruits often have a lot of anxious thoughts racing through their minds.

"How long will I have to stay awake during the first couple of days? When will I get to talk to my family again? Is it true they make you mow the lawns with fingernail clippers?"

With all those concerns and many others to mull over, having to pony up just south of \$50 to be given the privilege of boarding an airplane that's about to shuttle you off to some of the most stressful and demanding seven to 13 weeks of your life — depending on which branch you join — might seem like a slap in the face.

And yet, having to pay to get processed through airport security was the potential reality that thousands of recruits nationwide were facing as of Feb. 1, when the Transportation Security Administration rolled out its ConfirmID program.

Under ConfirmID, airport travelers must either present a REAL ID to security or pay \$45 to proceed using a standard ID.

Fortunately, though, the War Department's Office of Personnel and Readiness got ahead of this early by partnering with TSA to ensure recruits who don't possess a REAL ID won't have to dig into their pocketbooks to pass through security.

Even better, recruits are now receiving "white glove treatment" from TSA when processing through airport security en route to basic training.

White glove treatment makes getting through security much quicker and more convenient than standard screening, and it's similar to that afforded to our nation's veterans through the Honor Flight program.

Good enough for our nation's current heroes, good enough for our nation's future heroes.

And here's the really good news: the program is working.

U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command recently conducted a site visit to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, where they observed recruits shipping out from Chicago MEPS and having no trouble getting through screening. **see Recruits, page 5**

COMMISSARY HOME DELIVERY PROGRAM EXPANDS ACROSS THE U.S.

by C. Todd Lopez
 Pentagon News

Home grocery delivery from the commissary has arrived at dozens of military bases across the U.S.

As part of the Defense Commissary Agency's CLICK2GO®

on the GO! program, service members and their families can shop and pay for groceries at the commissary online using a credit card, and then have those groceries delivered to their home.

Delivery fees are distance-based and competitively priced.

The service is typically available Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., though hours may vary by location.

"CLICK2GO® is bringing convenience to our military community, increasing their access to commissary savings and making affordable, nutritious foods even more accessible. Service members and their families can order online, secure household staples, fresh produce and proteins, and have them in hand hours later," said Undersecretary of War for Personnel and Readiness Anthony J. Tata.

Home delivery is not a new concept for the commissary. In May 2022, DeCA piloted home delivery at eight locations, including MCAS Miramar, Camp Pendleton and Naval Base San Diego; MacDill AFB, Florida; Scott AFB, Illinois; Fort Bragg,

N.C.; Fort Belvoir and Naval Station Norfolk, both in Virginia; and Fort Lewis, Wash.

Now, the pilot has expanded to an additional 62 stateside stores, for a total of 70 locations. DeCA is exploring opportunities to expand the service to its other 108 continental U.S. stores.

The delivery program is meant to both enhance the competitive advantage of military commissaries and strengthen readiness in the force by taking a burden off families and service members, so they can better focus on the military mission.

"CLICK2GO® is designed to make their lives easier, providing our military families with the ability to order online from the local commissary the same way they would from a national chain," Tata said.



A CLICK2GO® doorstep delivery service flyer hangs at the entryway of the commissary at Fort Knox, Ky., Jan. 20, 2026. U.S. Army photo by Savannah Baird

Navy fires commander of destroyer USS Mason

The Navy reported Feb. 13 that the commander of the destroyer USS *Mason* was relieved of duty, without providing specific details about the decision. Capt. Chavius G. Lewis, who had commanded the ship since November 2024, was fired by Rear Adm. Alexis T. Walker, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 10, "due to a loss of confidence in Lewis' ability to command," according to a Navy news release. The Navy - like the Pentagon's other military services - often cites "a loss of confidence" when relieving leaders of responsibilities without providing a specific explanation. Lewis has been temporarily reassigned to Naval Surface Group Southeast. Capt. Kevin Hoffman has been named the *Mason's* commanding officer, according to the service.

Destroyer *Truxtun*, oiler *Supply* collide in SOUTHCOM

USNI News reported Feb. 12 that Navy destroyer USS *Truxtun* and fast oiler *Supply* collided during an underway replenishment on Feb. 11, according to a U.S. Southern Command statement. "Two personnel reported minor injuries and are in stable condition. Both ships have reported sailing safely. The incident is currently under investigation," reads a statement provided to USNI News. A spokesperson from SOUTHCOM confirmed to USNI News the injured personnel were Sailors. *Truxtun* left Naval Station Norfolk, Va., earlier this month as an independent deployer. *Supply* is also based in Norfolk.

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Washington Guard ups readiness ahead of World Cup 2026

JOINT BASE LEWIS-McCHORD, Wash. — With millions of soccer fans expected to descend on the Pacific Northwest for the FIFA World Cup 2026, the Washington National Guard and public safety leaders are preparing for the potential of drones falling into the wrong hands.

On Feb. 11 here, the Washington National Guard supported a FIFA Field Ready Range Day focused on countering unmanned aerial system threats. The training brought together military, law enforcement and interagency partners to sharpen their ability to detect, track and respond to potentially hostile drones ahead of major international events, including multiple World Cup matches scheduled in Seattle.

“I spent the last two years as the I Corps chief of staff and I have been all over the Pacific Theater trying to ensure readiness for large-scale combat operations,” said Col. Phillip Lamb, senior Army advisor for the Washington National Guard. “And what I’ve come to determine is that we’ve defined readiness improperly up until this point in time. What we’re doing here now is the future of real readiness.”

Lamb said events like the range day promote the next level of readiness.

“As you look at defense of

the homeland as the priority for this administration and for the Department of War, what we’re doing out here is the beginning of generating real readiness to defend critical infrastructure, like installations and ports, from flying unmanned systems while defending and protecting critical war fighting functions,” Lamb continued. “This is now becoming the priority of effort in what we really mean when we talk about generating readiness.”

The event built on momentum from a Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems Summit hosted by the Washington National Guard in November, which examined drone threats during large-scale public gatherings. Discussions during the February training reinforced the Guard’s role in supporting civil authorities, particularly in detection and monitoring, while operating within federal and state legal frameworks.

Those legal authorities were also a focus during recent testimony before state legislators, where National Guard leaders spoke in support of House Bill 2462. The bill is designed to clarify how the National Guard and Washington State Guard can assist law enforcement in responding to credible drone threats.

“It allows the governor, through the adjutant general, to set clear rules for how agencies respond to drone threats and authorizes the governor to use



Capt. Ryan Hafley, commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 96th Troop Command, talks with the UAS operators during the FIFA Field-Ready Range Day at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., Feb. 11. U.S. Army photo by Joseph Siemandel

the National Guard to support law enforcement when needed,” said Lt. Col. Denny Frey, the adjutant general’s command action group lead. “In short, it improves coordination, closes capability gaps, and gives the state additional tools to protect the public.”

During the range day event, National Guard subject-matter experts outlined how counter-UAS support typically works during major events. Local law enforcement agencies remain responsible for establishing temporary flight restrictions through the Federal Aviation Administration, while requests for National Guard assistance are coordinated through the State Emergency Operations Center.

“The primary role of the National Guard during these missions is detection and monitoring of potentially hazardous drones,” said Lt. Col. Wes Watson, former commander of the 10th Civil Support Team. “That capability is critical when local agencies are stretched or facing a complex threat environment.”

The 10th CST has extensive experience supporting large-scale public events across the region, regularly working alongside the Seattle Police and Fire departments at professional sporting events and concerts at Lumen Field. That established relationship, officials said, will be essential as planning accelerates for World Cup security operations.

As drone technology becomes more accessible and adaptable, Washington National Guard leaders emphasized that training events like FIFA range days are vital to staying ahead of potential threats.

“We’re using FIFA as an example, as a springboard to

generate that readiness. But there are other events coming up, like with Los Angeles hosting the Olympics in 2028,” said Lamb. “Defense of critical infrastructure around the entirety of this nation is so important and we are in the business of making sure that we can protect the homeland.”

Guam Guard hosts clandestine drug lab multi-agency exercise

by Mark Scott, Guam National Guard

BARRIGADA, Guam – The Guam National Guard’s 94th Civil Support Team, together with New Mexico Guard’s 64th Civil Support Team and Andersen Air Force Base’s Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Explosives Response Team, trained Feb. 18 at a clandestine drug lab.

The entry team, composed of one service member from each agency, worked together to detect chemicals, photograph drug-manufacturing equipment and relay information to the command post via radio and live stream.

Lt. Col. Melvin Pilarca, commander of the 94th Civil Support Team, or CST, said from the command post, “This is a full-scale, all-hazards exercise not only for our unit, but with our partners and first responders in the government of Guam and other military units,” Pilarca said. “It’s just as important that we sharpen our skills as it is to learn to work together across agencies.”



Soldiers survey a clandestine drug laboratory during a multiagency exercise hosted by the Guam Guard, Barrigada, Feb. 18. Photo by Mark Scott

According to Pilarca, the exercise began earlier in the day at the A.B. Won Pat International Airport, where the Guam Customs and Quarantine Agency and Guam Police Department tracked suspicious persons to the lab. The Guam Fire Department, or GFD, hazmat team was then called.

“If GFD sees something that is beyond their capability, that’s when they’ll send a request to activate the CST,” Pilarca said. “We have the specialized training and equipment, such as sensors and protective gear, that allows us to perform the Reconnaissance and Site Characterization mission you’re seeing now.”

Pilarca also thanked the New Mexico National Guard, Andersen Air Force Base’s 36th Civil Engineering Squadron, and GovGuam first responders for what he called “the best level of participation we’ve seen in a while.”

“Chemical and Biological hazards can spread like wildfire, including the drugs being produced in this lab,” Pilarca said. “Exercises like this are important because the better we can work together between agencies, the better we can save lives.”



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DOW's new chief information officer seeks to put the warfighter first

by Matthew Olay
Pentagon News

The Pentagon's newest chief information officer, Kirsten Davies, gathered her department's senior leaders and staff together at the War Department's Mark Center in Alexandria, Va., recently, where she laid out a vision for her office that focuses strongly on supporting America's warfighters.

"Our mission is to support the National Defense Strategy ... and the warfighters," Davies told those assembled in the Mark Center's auditorium. "Everything we do should be supporting the warfighter community and their mission."

Just six weeks into the job, Davies is responsible for serving as the principal staff assistant and senior advisor to the secretary of war and deputy secretary of war for information technology — including national security systems and defense business systems — information resources management and efficiencies.

This means that Davies is responsible for all matters related to the War Department's information enterprise, including cybersecurity, communications, information systems and more.

With all those responsibilities under her purview, Davies expanded on the Office of the Chief Information Officer's vision statement, "[building] an information enterprise that is resilient, modern, secure and agile; one that is worthy of the warfighter."

"We need ruthless prioritization of all of our initiatives. There are some things we're just simply not going to do because [they don't] serve the warfighter mission," Davies said, adding that she will be seeking her team's help in identifying those initiatives and prioritizing items to pursue immediately, versus what can be pushed further downstream.

Next, she spoke about OCIO visibility and the need to share it across the entire War Department, including the department's military and civilian-manned field activities.

"We can't defend what we can't see, [and] we can't optimize something if we don't know what's there," Davies said. "So, [visibility] becomes a real priority."

Visibility can help OCIO determine if the office's money is being spent appropriately throughout the department and serving the warfighter most effectively, especially

as it relates to tactical agility, she added.

Davies also spoke about additional topics not listed in OCIO's vision statement, including accountability.

"If you want to own something, own it. There's accountability that's attached to that," she told

the group of leaders.

"We will measure outcomes, not activity," Davies added.

Additionally, she spoke about transforming OCIO's technology landscape in a rapidly evolving information environment.

"We need to execute on data

analytics and AI. ... We need to secure our advantage in the spectrum ... This is a long-term play for us, for national security and for our partners and allies," Davies said.

Two topics she would like to prioritize for all OCIO leaders immediately are getting up to speed on the recently published National

Defense Strategy and becoming familiar with Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's ongoing Arsenal of Freedom tour.

The tour represents Hegseth's initiative to transform the department's acquisition system and processes to accelerate delivery of capabilities to the warfighter and revitalize America's manufacturing might.

"Our mission is to support the warfighter," Davies reiterated.

"You've heard [the secretary] talk about us being on a war footing [and] again, we are not a technology company — we are part and parcel of the warfighter's mission," Davies said, adding that it is essential OCIO align with the warfighter in the realm of cybersecurity and cyber defense.

As her remarks wound down, Davies encouraged those in attendance to be bold while participating in OCIO's journey from that point forward.

"Change requires boldness; it requires courage," she said. "We have a window of opportunity to do some really interesting, exciting, transformative work. I want you to embrace the opportunity and also know that I've got your back."

EOD techs prove Arctic warfare readiness in Norway

by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jackson Adkins
Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group Two

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 8, assigned to Commander, Task Force 68, completed Exercise Arctic Specialist 26 alongside allied forces from Norway and Sweden in early February.

Arctic Specialist is an annual Norwegian-hosted multinational exercise focused on expeditionary mine countermeasure operations and land-based explosive ordnance disposal tactics. The strategic location of the exercise provides valuable training in an extreme cold-weather environment, where conditions are dynamic, and the operating environment continues to evolve.

"The Sailors of EODMU-8 have made me immensely proud, demonstrating unparalleled skill and resolve by executing complex operations across the EOD spectrum in the harshest conditions with our allies," said Navy Cmdr. Matthew Guido, the unit's commanding officer. "Their achievement is a testament to the hard work and professionalism they conduct daily in preparation to maintain security and access in the Arctic corridor. Our partnership with the Norwegian Navy EOD is vital to our shared success in the Arctic, and we are grateful for their collaboration and friendship."

During the 10-day exercise, U.S. Navy EOD techni-

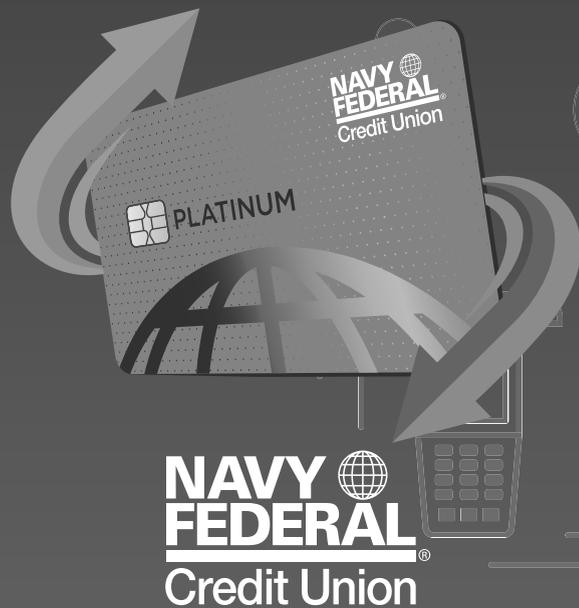
cians conducted a wide range of operations, including underwater demolitions, exploitation of mines, conventional munitions disposal, rapid airfield damage repair, close-quarters combat, rappel operations and trench clearance. These training events collectively contributed to increased lethality and technical expertise in the Arctic domain and emphasized integration among allied forces in preparation for future conflicts.

"The Norwegians are excellent hosts and dependable teammates," said Navy Lt. Andrew Lewis, EODMU-8 officer in charge. "We are lucky to have an exercise that brings together EOD operators that are experts at working in the Arctic domain. Each lesson they teach us pays dividends for the EOD force as we work towards bolstering our extreme cold-weather capabilities."

The exercise provided valuable real-world training opportunities for EOD technicians to refine their professional skills while operating in extreme cold-weather conditions. Arctic Specialist evaluates planning, communications and operational oversight while simultaneously providing warfighters and enablers with valuable operational experience as they test the people, equipment and logistics needed to execute missions in remote and austere locations.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4410693/>

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world views



Sailors perform maintenance on an F/A-18E Super Hornet canopy aboard aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in the Atlantic Ocean, Feb. 21, 2026. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Alexander Morneau

Soloist Master Sgt. Adam Lessard (left), principal euphonium of The U.S. Army Concert Band, performs 'Pershing's Own' Feb. 21 at Arlington, Va. This concert is part of the annual U.S. Army Tuba-Euphonium Workshop, featuring concerts, recitals, exhibits, masterclasses, and lectures by leading low-brass authorities from around the world. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brittany Primavera



Prepositioned motor transport equipment is staged at a Marine Corps Prepositioning Program Norway cave site in January 2026 in Norway in preparation for convoy operations supporting Cold Response 26. The staging supports coordinated movement and timely employment of equipment issued to II Marine Expeditionary Force Marines. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Nicholas Martinez



Photos

Find more DOW photos here: <https://www.war.gov/Multimedia/Photos/>

Topping out ceremony marks investment in future of submarine readiness

by Jeffrey Hamlin, NAVFAC Public Affairs

A topping out ceremony was held Jan. 29 to mark a major milestone in the construction of a new facility for the Nuclear Regional Maintenance Department at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga.

Hosted by NAVFAC Southeast, the event celebrated the placement of the final steel beam on the structure, symbolizing significant progress toward completion of a centralized, state-of-the-art facility designed to support critical maintenance and repair operations for Trident-equipped submarines.

A topping out ceremony is a tradition that dates back centuries to celebrate when a structure reaches its final height. While some ceremonies involve hoisting a tree

or flag, the focus here was on the final beam itself, which was signed by the project's stakeholders, engineers, and construction crews. Its placement serves as a powerful tribute to their hard work and signifies the successful completion of the structural phase.

"This topping out, just over a year after breaking ground, is a testament to the skill and dedication of our team," said NAVFAC Southeast Executive Officer Capt. Elizabeth Durika. "This facility is a critical investment in our nation's strategic deterrence, and this progress brings us one step closer to providing a state-of-the-art space to ensure our submarine force remains ready for decades to come."

The construction has progressed rapidly since the project began, highlighted the significant accomplishments of the construction team. "The sheer scale of work accomplished on this site is remarkable. Our partners have moved mountains, literally," said Lt. Cmdr. John Nurthen, construction management team leader. "We removed and excavated over four feet of rock and soil from the entire project site, replacing nearly 35,000 cubic yards of unsuitable soils to create a stable foundation. This milestone is a credit to the incredible effort of every worker on this project."

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/display-news/Article/4411983/>



Top 5

- Marine declared lost at sea after falling overboard from USS *Iwo Jima*
- Pentagon let CBP use anti-drone laser before FAA closed El Paso airspace: Report
- Two Navy ships collide in Caribbean, leaving 2 Sailors injured
- Syria says its forces have taken over al-Tanf base after handover from U.S.
- Health care access a top complaint among troops, top enlisted leaders tell lawmakers

Army

- The military really wants people to stop trespassing on its test range in the desert
- Former Army colonel sentenced to 2 years for sharing classified war plans with woman he met online
- Former leader of Army battalion in Alabama sentenced to 4 years for secretly recording house guests

Navy

- 2027 defense budget could double 2026 ship requests, Navy secretary says

Marine Corps

- Virginia Supreme Court rules U.S. Marine's adoption of Afghan war orphan will stand

Air Force

- Air Force's CCA program advances with auto-flying software integration
- Air Force now denies receiving F-35s without radars

National Guard

- Louisiana National Guardsman leaves M4 carbine in Bourbon Street bathroom

Veterans

- Air Force veteran is gifted Super Bowl tickets; he gives his Purple Heart in return



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AFSOC strategizes on adapting special air warfare for an evolving world

from Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs

HURLBURTFIELD, Fla. - Air Force Special Operations Command opened the 2026 Special Air Warfare Symposium with senior leaders underscoring the command's enduring focus on people and rapid adaptability to win the future fight in a complex and ever-changing global security environment.

Lt. Gen. Mike Conley, AFSOC commander, and Chief Master Sgt. Courtney Freeman, AFSOC command chief, emphasized AFSOC's role in aligning with the 2026 National Defense Strategy priorities: protecting the homeland, deterring China through strength, increasing burden-sharing with allies, and accelerating defense industrial base innovation.

Conley described AFSOC's persistent forward presence, unique access and placement advantages, and the command's ability to perform high-risk missions from counterterrorism to humanitarian assistance any place, anytime, anywhere.

"Our formation is strong," Conley said. "We are forward

deployed in the places the nation needs us to be. We must be able to do multiple missions well, counter terrorism today while preparing for the next fight tomorrow. That balance is central to AFSOC's contribution to the joint force."

Freeman also thanked senior leaders and partners for their continued advocacy and support.

"As we engage with our international and industry partners this week, we must keep elevating our people-focused narrative while continuing to identify faster ways to deliver capability to the warfighter," Freeman said.

Topics at SAWS ranged from the use of AI, acquisition reform, AFSOC's role in irregular warfare, to the need for persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

On the topic of irregular warfare, Col. Stewart Parker, 353rd Special Operations Wing commander, stressed that upholding high ethical standards is an advantage in competition against adversaries who do not follow the same rules.

"I think that [upholding high ethical standards] is our advantage," Parker said. "Competition is inherently values-based and we do ourselves no favors and will not attract the right partners when we are undermining the very values that we espouse."

Speaking on the need for ISR, Brig. Gen. Clay Freeman, AFSOC director of operations, characterized it as an essential capability in a volatile security environment.

"We are in an era of rapidly evolving threats," Freeman said. "The demand for continuous, unblinking watch is really driving a monumental shift in our approach to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. For ISR, we are moving away from a reliance on centralized, high-end assets to more tactical, easily accessible and widely proliferated capabilities."

SAWS is an annual forum for service members, international partners, interagency and industry representatives, to deepen connections, exchange ideas, and accelerate solutions that strengthen joint capabilities.

STAY INFORMED

Mental armor: How a calm mind builds a stronger heart

Now is the time to focus on a critical component of your readiness: your cardiovascular health. You already know that nutrition and PT are key, but there's another powerful weapon in your arsenal that is often overlooked: mindfulness.

The mind-heart connection

The demands of a military career can lead to chronic stress, which takes a physical toll. Constant pressure can increase blood pressure, heighten inflammation, and contribute to heart disease over time. Mindfulness—the practice of being fully present and aware—is a powerful countermeasure.

Practicing mindfulness may help:

- * Lower stress hormones such as cortisol.
- * Reduce blood pressure.
- * Improve heart rate variability (a sign of a healthy heart).
- * Strengthen your overall mental resilience.

One of the most significant operational benefits of mindfulness is better sleep. Quality sleep supports heart function, assists the body in recovery, and helps regulate blood pressure. By calming the mind before bed, you create the conditions for deep, restorative rest that prepares you for the next day's mission.

Tactical mindfulness drills

Incorporate these simple drills into your nightly routine to decompress and prepare for quality sleep.

Body scan relaxation

* Spend five to 10 minutes scanning your body from head to toe, gently noticing areas of tension. This helps release stress and prepares the body for rest.

'Physiological sigh' breathing

* Take one deep inhale through your nose, followed by a second shorter inhale. Then exhale slowly through your mouth. This technique helps calm the nervous system.



Image courtesy of <https://pendleton.usmc-mccs.org/>.

End-of-day debrief

* Write down or mentally note three things that went well or that you are thankful for. This simple reflection can reduce stress and shift your mindset before sleep.

Small adjustments, meaningful impact

* Mindfulness isn't about emptying your mind or achieving perfection. It's

about building small, consistent habits that give you an edge. Over time, these simple practices will help you manage stress, sleep better, and protect your heart, ensuring you stay in the fight for the long haul.

For tools, classes, and guidance on mindfulness and sleep, contact your local WARR-Semper Fit team.

Recruits

continued from page 1

And this included applicants without REAL-ID-compliant identification.

"Putting our recruits first is a priority. These young men and women have volunteered to serve our nation. When they are shipping out to basic training, we want them focused on the fight, not worried about what type of ID they have or whether they will need to pay a fee to make it there," Undersecretary of War for Personnel and Readiness Anthony J. Tata recently said of the joint DOW-TSA partnership.

Tata said that it is the War Department's duty to take care of the young men and women who volunteer to serve their country from the moment they sign up to protect the nation, and that the new security screening initiative is a great example of innovation and cross-government collaboration.

"The department identified a challenge and partnered with TSA to put in place a solution, bolting over the bureaucracy to provide thousands of new recruits with the white glove treatment they deserve," said Tata.

One senior TSA official — who served 10 years in the

Marine Corps and noted that one in five TSA employees are veterans — concurred that easing young recruits' journey to boot camp should be a top priority.

"TSA is honored to be a part of the journeys young men and women take to reach initial military training and begin their service in America's armed forces. ... We are committed to ensuring recruits can stay focused on what lies at the end of their travels, serving America, instead of worrying about how they'll get there," explained Mike Turner, TSA's assistant administrator for domestic aviation operations.

"By leveraging the pre-vetting processes [that] we already have in place, TSA will assist America's newest service members reach their training safely and smoothly," he added.

With airport security crossed off their list of worries, the men and women who raised their right hands and swore an oath in anticipation of embarking on one of the most exciting and honorable adventures they'll ever go on are ready, with or without nail clippers.

Welcome Aboard Brief

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Armed Forces Dispatch

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Local Military

Oklahoma Marine provides critical intelligence on southern border

Courtesy story

Department of War Southern Border

SAN DIEGO - From the small town of Stilwell, Oklahoma, a young Marine is filling a crucial role in securing the nation's southern border.

Cpl. Shade Andrew Watie is a geospatial intelligence specialist with the 1st Marine Division's S-2 section, which is supporting Joint Task Force-Southern Border. His work provides a vital, detailed understanding of the terrain for those operating on the front lines of border security.

JTF-SB is tasked with execut-

ing full-scale, agile, all-domain operations in support of U.S. Customs and Border Protection to protect the territorial integrity of the U.S. and achieve 100 percent operational control of the southern border. To achieve this, decision-makers rely on the intelligence provided by Marines like Watie.

"As an 0261 geospatial intelligence specialist, I am responsible for analyzing and exploiting geospatial data to support planning and operational requirements," Watie explained. "My job is to provide detailed terrain analysis, geospatial products and critical data that enable freedom of maneuver and enhance the

commander's understanding of the operational environment."

This involves a meticulous process of capturing, analyzing and processing geographic data.

The products he creates include in-depth studies on cross-country mobility, counter-mobility, and line-of-sight analysis. Watie's analysis extends to key infrastructure, such as lines of communication, drainage systems, vegetation and urban areas, to determine their impacts on military operations.

This detailed understanding of

the physical environment is essential for the success of the mission.

"I work in collaboration with imagery analysts (0241) and other intelligence sections to integrate geospatial findings into the all-source intelligence picture," Watie added, highlighting the collaborative nature of intelligence work.

The contributions of Watie and his fellow Marines in JTF-SB provide the critical information needed to support the men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in their efforts to secure the southern border.

New maintenance program for Navy's F-16 Viper

Fleet Readiness Center Southwest established a new maintenance program for the Navy's F-16 Viper aircraft. The new maintenance effort, designed to deliver vital Programmed Sustainment and Structural Repairs to the aircraft, was launched in an unprecedented 18-month timeline, an achievement that set a new standard for depot line activation. The origins of the F-16 maintenance evolution at the command began when PMA-226, the Program Office for the F-16 aircraft, approached FRCSW with a pressing need. With other facilities unable to take on the workload at the time, FRCSW stepped forward to assume responsibility.

Coast Guard interdicts 14 aliens near Point Loma

SAN DIEGO - The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Forrest Rednour (WPC 1129) interdicted 14 suspected aliens aboard a vessel 18 miles west of San Diego, Feb. 13. At 4:34 p.m. Forrest Rednour's crew detected a vessel and launched their boarding team to investigate. The cutter's boarding team intercepted the 14 aliens aboard the 20-foot cuddy cabin. All 14 aboard claimed Mexican nationality. The boarding team transferred custody of the aliens to a boatcrew from Coast Guard Station San Diego. The aliens were then transported to Ballast Point and transferred to another DHS agency for investigation on the aircraft.



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Lethal kinetic strikes on narcoterrorists

On Feb. 23, at the direction of the commander of U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations.

Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Caribbean and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.

Three male narco-terrorists were killed during this action. No U.S. military forces were harmed.

On Feb. 20, at the direction of Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations.

Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.

Three male narco-terrorists were killed during this action. No U.S. military forces were harmed.

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Ens. Chiara Rappa pets Navy Capt. Fathom, an expeditionary facility dog assigned to aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*, in the classroom of destroyer USS *Frank E. Petersen Jr.*, in the Arabian Sea, Feb. 11, 2026. *Frank E. Petersen Jr.* is deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Christian Kibler

Capt. James Hoey, left, reports his assumption of command as commodore, Littoral Combat Ship Squadron (LCSRON) 1, to Vice Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Force, Pacific Fleet, center, during a change of command. Hoey relieved Capt. Jose Roman as commodore, LCSRON-1. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Claire M. Alfaro



Command Master Chief Mario Rivers, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Defense Commissary Agency is shown here with commissary staff during a visit to Naval Base San Diego, Feb. 19, 2026. U.S. Navy photo by Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Ulrika Mendiola

USS *Theodore Roosevelt* hosts Norwegian Foot March



Story by Lt. Julia Doggett
USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71)

Sailors assigned to *Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier participate in a Norwegian Foot March hosted by MWR, Feb. 20. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Alexander Bussman

NAVAL AMPHIBIOUS BASE Coronado - Sailors from USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, USS *America*, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 (HSC 3) and first responders from Coronado Fire Department participated in a Norwegian Foot March here on Feb. 20, testing physical and mental resolve in an 18.6-mile ruck for time.

"Building team cohesion through fitness is the most beneficial in my opinion. There's something poetic about putting your body through strenuous activities, especially around other like-minded individuals," said Marc Scherette, *Theodore Roosevelt's* command fitness boss. "There's a huge emphasis on military fitness from the

highest levels and events like the Norwegian Foot March show our commitment to rising to the challenge."

The Norwegian Foot March is a strenuous evolution originally held over 100 years ago by the Norwegian Army to train forces to transport Soldiers and equipment over long distances and provide for combat-readiness. Now, many allied militaries hold Norwegian Foot Marches as an exercise in unit readiness. Sailors from several San Diego-based units, completed an 18.6-mile march while carrying a 25-pound rucksack, competing against the clock to achieve a finish time of under four hours and thirty minutes.

"These events are important to support combat readiness, to build and maintain a good healthy mentality, and honestly, why not," said Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Shawn Davis. "I want to see how far I can go and see where my mindset is at. Mindset is the most important part, it's all about that."

Sailors who successfully completed the march under the four hour, 30-minute mark were awarded the Norwegian Marching Award, an honor recognized by our partner and ally nations for participating in this military tradition. This award also signifies the distinction of completing a demanding challenge, demonstrating superior physical and mental fitness.



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RIDING HIGH: MEET THE MILITARY'S LAST REMAINING MOUNTED COLOR GUARD

by **Katie Lange**
Pentagon News

For the individuals who serve in the Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard, every day is a test of composure, discipline and adaptability — essential skills they demonstrate alongside wild palominos that were specifically domesticated for the job.

These Marines are unique in that they're the last mounted color guard remaining in the military.

"The unit perseveres because it consistently demonstrates value: connecting the American public to the Corps' legacy while constantly reinforcing Marine professionalism and core values," said Marine Corps Capt. Elizabeth Kemp, the unit's officer in charge.

Based at Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow in California's Mojave Desert, the Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard allows a few dedicated Marines the rare but honorable opportunity to present the service's colors and U.S. flag on horseback at military-related parades, ceremonies, commemorations, civic events, and other activities.

Their work is a show of dignity and respect for those who have served the nation, but being selected for the role itself is also considered an honor.

"Marines are entrusted with representing the Corps' history, traditions and standards in front of national and international audiences," Kemp said. "The level of trust and confidence embedded in the unit's core, coupled with the [increased] visibility, makes this a prestigious assignment for all Marines who serve here."

Dedication, reliability required
The mounted unit consists of a senior Marine who carries the

U.S. flag, known as the color sergeant; a Marine who carries the Marine Corps colors; and two rifle bearers.

Any mid-level enlisted Marine from any career field can be selected for the role. They must possess an outstanding professional reputation and a high level of physical fitness, discipline and reliability. Candi-

discipline, patience, humility and commitment."

Marines selected for the prestigious role spend hours working with the base's civilian horse trainer to learn maintenance and how to ride, as well as all the duties required to work on a ranch.

High-level performances
The mounted unit is invited

well beyond ceremonial contexts," Kemp said.

The Mounted Color Guard is currently on tour at various rodeos throughout Texas until March 7.

The team mostly performs in the western U.S. However, in 2024, it made its first trek to the East Coast in about a decade.

The unit also works with public schools, including through the Junior ROTC and the Young Marines Program. The team used to participate in competitions in the 1980s and 1990s, where they received several national awards; however, they no longer do so because of military regulations.

From wild and free to tame and disciplined

Another unique aspect of the job is that these active-duty Marines ride wild palominos adopted from the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program, which protects wild equines on public lands. When there are too many animals to manage, the bureau finds qualified private care for them through adoption or sales.

According to the color guard's website, stablemen initially found the wild horses on their own and trained them. But a chapter of the 1st Marine Division Association eventually got involved and started the process of adopting the horses through the bureau. That eventually became the official process.

Adopted horses are tamed and progressively trained to meet the unit's performance standards. They're then slowly integrated into ceremonial presentations. Kemp said the horses are handled with a strong emphasis on safety and welfare by trainers and experienced stablemen.

Developing ready, lethal Marines

Kemp said the unit directly supports Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's focus on readiness and lethality by developing Marines who are disciplined, adaptable and can represent the force with credibility.

"It strengthens recruiting, public trust and institutional pride, all of which directly support the Marine Corps' ability to attract and retain high-quality warfighters," she said.

The Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard received its official designation in November 1968. The Army, the only other branch with dedicated mounted color guards, deactivated its last unit in 2023.



Marines assigned to the Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard visit Alief Taylor High School in Houston, March 3, 2025. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Capt. Bryanna Kessler

dates are screened for maturity, attention to detail and their ability to represent the Corps at the highest level.

And if you're a Marine who doesn't know much about horses, that's not a problem. Kemp said many qualified Marines come to the stables with little to no experience in horsemanship or ranch operations.

"What matters most is character, work ethic and the ability to learn quickly while operating as part of a team," she said. "Prior experience is beneficial, but is far less important than

to all sorts of events, including the famed New Year's Day Rose Parade in Pasadena. The unit has appeared in every iteration of the parade since 1990, and it's had the honor of leading it several times as the first military unit.

The unit also takes part in rodeos, which can help with recruiting efforts.

"Rodeos combine high energy, unpredictable environments and large crowds. Performing in this setting highlights the Marines' ability to stay composed, disciplined and professional under pressure — skills that translate

They presented the colors at the Preakness Stakes, participated in the National Memorial Day Parade and visited various historical sites, including the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va.

Kansas native recognized as Military Instructor of the Year

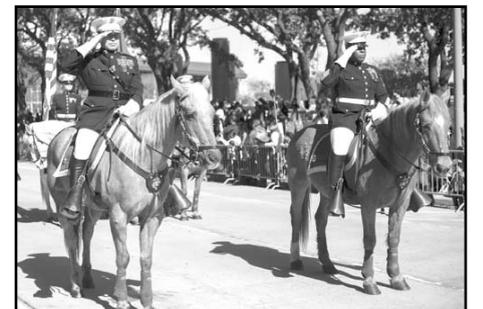
by **Ensign Thomas Kane**

Naval Education and Training Command
PENSACOLA, Fla. - Lt. Augusta Garies, a Bonner Springs, Kansas native, accepted the 2025 Officer Military Instructor of the Year award on Feb. 19 for her work as a Navy Instructor assigned to the Mariner Skills Training Center Pacific in San Diego.

Garies was selected by Naval Education and Training Command (NETC) as a top instructor among nearly 7,500 other accomplished individuals serving across the domain, from Navy Boot Camp through the Navy's advanced training centers and schoolhouses. Garies received the award at the instructor of the year ceremony where Rear Adm. Greg Huffman, commander of NETC, spoke on her achievements as a military instructor.

"Our Officer Instructor of the Year, Lt. Augusta Garies, brings an enthusiasm for learning to her work every day," said Huffman. "She takes to heart the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, 'No one can make you feel inferior with-

Marine Corps Col. Russell Savatt, left, Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard commanding officer, salutes during a rodeo parade in Houston, March 1, 2025. The parade kicks off the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Ryan H. Pulliam



Lt. Augusta Garies, an instructor assigned to Mariner Skills Training Center Pacific, poses for a portrait at Naval Education and Training Command Headquarters onboard Naval Air Station Pensacola during NETC's annual Military Instructor of the Year event. Garies was recognized as the Officer Military Instructor of the Year 2025. U.S. Navy photo by Austen McClain

out your consent.' This ethos carries through her work as a BDOC [Basic Division Officer Course] Instructor, instilling in her students the confidence and competence they need to drive ships and succeed as Surface Warfare Officers."

Garies is thrilled when seeing the successes of sailors she has led over the years in her naval service. She says, "I am most proud when I hear that my Sailors advance to the next paygrade and receive awards for their hard work even years after our service together."

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"Come Pitch with Us!"



Velodyne Space vehicle-mounted drone-catching system at CES 2026

It seems as if every year new uses are found for drones for private individuals, companies and governments, and more people seem to be flying them. Drones are popular and that has become a serious problem.

Unauthorized drones can pose a growing national security and economic threat. They can shut down airports, disrupt stadium events, smuggle contraband into prisons or threaten critical infrastructure. Hundreds of thousands of drone incursions are reported annually. Airport shutdowns alone can cost hundreds of millions of dollars per day.

To meet the growing challenge of drone threats, Velodyne Space has introduced a non-destructive drone-catching system, and presented it — complete with video of the system in operation, at CES 2026 — the Consumer Electronics Show.

This drone-catching system is fascinating to watch. Basically, what this vehicle-mounted system does is it detects incoming drones, tracks them, targets them, fires net-bearing projectiles at them and gently lowers them by parachute, for softer landings without destroying them. Destroying a drone can cause fiery debris to fall on people or property. This system reduces risk to people and preserving evidence for forensic investigation.

This system does not rely on radio jamming or spoofing, it works against single drones and potential swarm scenarios and its soft landing prioritizes public safety, making it safe use in populated areas. The parachute.

The system launches a net using a magnetic electronic launch system (not explosives). The net opens mid-air, entangles the drone, and deploys a parachute so everything comes down safely.

The Magnetic Electronic Launch System (MEL) replaces traditional chemical rockets with clean, efficient technology.

It uses coils and magnetic fields powered by capacitors to accelerate a projectile at near Mach 1 speeds. There is no physical rail, no explosive charge, and minimal wear, ideal for fast relaunching and long-term use. The same magnetic Electronic Launch (MEL) technology has been under development for space material launch applications for five years. The system draws energy from the vehicle's 400V battery system to charge capacitor

AutoMatters™ & More
by Jan Wagner



banks capable of rapid firing, up to 5 times per second. Its range is up to a 1,000 feet limit, per government safety requirements.

To detect and catch incoming drones, the system combines cameras (visual confirmation), LiDAR (for precise distance measurement), thermal imaging (for low visibility conditions) and AI-assisted object detection and tracking. All sensor data appears on a single display for the human operator, who always makes the final decision before engaging.

CamLidar detects and tracks drones with pin-point precision. AI differentiates the drone threat from birds, kites, and other false targets. Lidar tracks the speed for accurate intervention. It calculates distance and automatically leads the target based on drone speed and direction, similar to how a shotgun hunter leads a moving target. The system is effective against fiber-optic controlled drones that cannot be jammed. It is immune to frequency-hopping.

The drones descend toward a soft

landing led by a parachute attached to the net, enabling safe recovery. This preserves evidence, leaving open the possibility to identify operators, intent and origin.

The electric four-wheel-drive van is designed for urban, rural, and border environments. This system can be used around airports, stadiums, power plants, water treatment centers, correctional facilities, borders and other critical infrastructure.

The system reads FAA Remote ID broadcasts and cross-checks detected drones against the LAANCE database. Registered drones are avoided; unidentified drones are flagged for further evaluation.

David Hall is the inventor of CamLidar and MEL. He has been inventing for over 35 years, with an admirable record of success in design, prototyping, and finished product delivery. Hall is widely recognized for his involvement in lidar technology for self-driving cars, having founded Velodyne Lidar. Hall's sensor designs have been used in robotics, mapping, industrial automation and advanced navigation systems. Hall spurred the autonomous revolution, and currently holds more than 150 scientific patents, primarily revolving around sensor technologies and lidar systems.

Currently, drone engagement authority is restricted and evolving. This system is designed to operate only under proper authorization and keeps a human operator in the decision loop at all times. Planned testing will occur in remote, FAA-approved locations such as the Mojave Desert or Montana. There is a planned demonstration in Spring 2026. The company is currently taking orders, with delivery expected in late 2026.

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.

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

Somewhere in my mother's attic is a dusty blue metal canister containing an aging reel of 8mm film. Our family watched it many times on an old projector, the moving images silent, but for the rapid clicking of the ancient machine's motor. One vacation scene is strangely meaningful to me now that I've raised children of my own.

Bathed in the milky pastels of aging film, the shot opens on a sunny beach in North Carolina. The camera pans along the shoreline, stopping on my brother splashing fearlessly in the ocean waves. His flaxen crew-cut head turns—someone has instructed him to wave. His thin arm flails only for a moment, before his attention is drawn back to the bubbling surf.

Suddenly, my father's face is close in the frame, young and devoid of life's eventual complications. My mother is the twenty-something camerawoman, capturing glimpses of her little family's day at the beach. The lens pans to my three-year-old self, clutching my father's leg, wearing sandy blonde pigtails and a purple calico bathing suit.

I hold my father's hand and smile with tiny white teeth like perfect rows of shoe-peg corn. My dimpled finger points toward the water and I

It won't hurt you, mommy

mouth to the camera, "It won't hurt you, Mommy!" My father leads me by the hand toward the waves. As I am tugged along, I look back over my shoulder to echo, "It won't hurt you, Mommy!"

I squeal and jump over foamy ripples, tightly gripping my father's hand. But suddenly, a wave takes us by surprise and I am knocked into the roiling water. My father reacts quickly, plucking me, drenched and rigid, out of the surf, my tiny hands clawing for support. Smiling, he carries me quickly toward my mother. Just before she drops the camera to hold me, the frame captures my panicked face reaching for the safety of my mother's arms.

The film goes on to depict other moments, but the beach scene was always a family favorite years later. As we watched together, we'd all add the missing line to the silent film at the appropriate time: "It won't hurt you, Mommy!" And then we'd laugh at the irony of the wave knocking me down.

When my own kids were young, I felt overwhelmed as a military wife and mom in a world swirling with seemingly endless demands and details. I sometimes felt I might be swept away.

Why did I get so stressed about chore charts, bills, marble jars, car pools, parent-teacher conferences, and the minutia of daily life?

"What is wrong with me?" I wondered countless times.

Now I know: I was simply afraid.

Afraid of not living up to expectations. Afraid of not being smart enough, cool enough. Afraid of letting people down. Afraid of being revealed as a fraud. Afraid of not being loved. Afraid of failure.

Fear was the underlying emotion behind every moment in which I found myself overwhelmed as a child, adolescent, young adult, military wife and mother. My over-connected, over-informed, over-competitive modern life threatened to hold me under, and made me feel like I was drowning, unable to catch my breath.

I could no longer reach for the safety of my mother's arms. I had to find my own lifeline. I had to make my way through the confusing chaos of daily life, taking hold of the things that would lead me to solid ground.

Writing helped me to focus on what was truly important, so I could laugh at myself and the meaningless minutia I tried so desperately to manage. Submitting 700 words every week for my column also gave me the mental clarity to carry on through the various stages of family life.

And more stages are to come. Still a wife and mother, I'm negotiating the unfamiliar spaces of our now-empty nest. I look out at what lies ahead, and I sense the familiar mix of excitement and fear I felt at age three on the beach, standing before the great, big ocean. But now, I take in the chaos and the joy around me and remind myself with confidence, "It won't hurt you, Mommy."

Veterans News

Medal of Honor spotlight: Army Staff Sgt. Clifford Sims

by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

Many Medal of Honor recipients come from humble beginnings, but perhaps none more so than Army Staff Sgt. Clifford Chester Sims, who spent much of his early life with nowhere to call home. Sims grew into a humble and thoughtful man, so when an explosive device threatened his fellow soldiers in Vietnam, he didn't hesitate to give his life to save theirs.

Sims was born June 18, 1942, in Port St. Joe, Fla., as Clifford Pittman. He was orphaned at an early age and sent to live with his stepfather's family, according to an account from his wife, Mary, in a 2015 *The Leaf-Chronicle* newspaper article out of Clarksville, Tennessee.

However, that family already had many children, so Sims decided he wouldn't stay. To get by, he either spent the night with acquaintances or in an old, abandoned bus shelter in Panama City, Florida. The *Leaf-Chronicle* article reads.

At age 13, however, the young man was adopted by James and

Irene Sims and took their family name. Through all that adversity, he continued his education and made it to high school, where he became inseparable from his girlfriend, Mary. They married on Christmas Day 1961, just a few months after he enlisted in the Army.

Sims initially served with the 82nd Airborne Division. In 1965, the unit was sent to the Dominican Republic to protect American interests there during the country's civil war.

Once Sims returned to the U.S., and as the Vietnam War was escalating, he was transferred to the 101st Airborne Division, where he was assigned to Company D of the 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment — known as the Delta Raiders.

Shortly before Sims was deployed to Vietnam in late 1967, he and his wife adopted a young daughter, named Gina, who was born to his wife's sister.

Sims was not in Vietnam long before the Tet Offensive began, when North Vietnamese troops and their Viet Cong sympathiz-

ers flooded into South Vietnam in an onslaught that caught American and South Vietnamese troops off guard.

While U.S. and South Vietnamese troops were able to retake most of the territory the enemy had taken rather quickly, the fight over Hue City — known as the Battle of Hue — led to weeks of urban combat. That is where Sims gave his last full measure of devotion.

On Feb. 21, 1968, Sims' squad was assaulting a heavily fortified enemy position in a densely wooded area when they came under heavy enemy fire. Sims furiously led his squad in an attack against their aggressors, helping free a platoon that had been pinned down and nearly overrun.

Sims was then ordered to move his squad to provide cover fire for the company command group while linking up with another platoon that was under heavy enemy pressure.

After they had moved about 30 meters, Sims noticed that a brick building stocked with ammunition was on fire. An ex-



Army Staff Sgt. Clifford Sims was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. Army/National Archives

plosion was imminent, so Sims immediately moved his squad away from it, but not before the stockpile blew and injured two of his squad's soldiers. Still, Sims' prompt actions kept more people from getting hurt.

The squad continued through the dense woods while under

fire. As they neared a bunker, they heard a noise no one ever wanted to hear — the sound of a hidden booby trap being triggered.

Without hesitation, Sims quickly yelled a warning and threw himself on top of the device as it exploded. He sacrificed his life so his fellow soldiers could live.

"Sims saved the lives of at least three of his squad and two of the company headquarters by absorbing the shock of the blast himself," Sims' commander, Army 1st Lt. Cleo Hogan, later wrote in an eyewitness statement. "Sims made the greatest sacrifice a soldier can make ... and no mark of tribute can be too great."

For his valor, Sims' wife and daughter received the Medal of Honor from Vice President Spiro

Agnew during a White House ceremony on Dec. 2, 1969.

Three other men also received Medals of Honor for their actions during the Battle of Hue: Army Staff Sgt. Joe Ronnie Hooper, Marine Corps Sgt. Alfredo Gonzalez and Army Chief Warrant Officer Frederick Ferguson.

Sims is buried in Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, Florida.

His name has not been forgotten. A state veterans nursing home in Springfield, Florida, and the garrison headquarters building at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, are both named in his honor. And since 2019, the Florida county where Sims grew up has celebrated every June 18, his birthday, as Clifford Sims Day.



TRICARE Prime beneficiaries in the U.S. have access to new virtual urgent care

By TRICARE Communications

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — Are you enrolled in a TRICARE Prime plan? If you see a primary care manager at a military hospital or clinic, you may now have a new way to get urgent care. The Defense Health Agency has expanded its virtual urgent care options in the U.S. This allows TRICARE Prime enrollees ages 12 and older to schedule virtual urgent care through the Military Health System Nurse Advice Line.

“Now, if your local military clinic is booked, you can call the MHS Nurse Advice Line. A nurse will assess if you can get a virtual urgent care appointment for the same or next day,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ryan Shubat, chief, Primary Care and Mental Health Healthcare Optimization at the DHA. “This is part of the Defense Health Agency’s effort to improve health care access.”

What conditions does virtual urgent care treat?

Virtual urgent care providers can work with you to treat these common urgent care issues:



- Sinus congestion/infections
- Cough
- Allergies
- Sore or hoarse throat
- Rashes
- Acne
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headaches

Where is virtual urgent care offered?

Currently, it’s offered in the U.S. It isn’t available overseas or in U.S. territories.

How to schedule an appointment

Getting virtual urgent care is simple. Call the MHS Nurse Advice Line at 800-TRICARE or visit MHS Nurse Advice Line

24/7.

A nurse will ask you about your symptoms and decide if your condition can be treated virtually. If virtual care works for you, the nurse will set up your virtual appointment with providers from the Virtually Integrated Patient Readiness and Remote care clinic.

Appointments are available from 6:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. ET. This extended availability makes it easier to get care when you need it most. You can expect to get an appointment the same day or the following day.

Quality care you can trust

All virtual urgent care providers meet high standards for patient care. Each provider has credentials and privileges at a DHA military hospital or clinic. Your virtual visit gets recorded in MHS GENESIS, keeping your health records complete and current.

Virtual urgent care providers can also write prescriptions and send them directly to your preferred pharmacy.

Benefits of virtual urgent care

This new virtual option improves your access to care and reduces wait times for urgent medical needs. Instead of waiting for routine appointments or visiting emergency rooms for nonemergency issues, you can receive quality care from home. Virtual care saves time and

helps you get treatment faster. This approach supports DHA’s strategy to build a health care system that gives you more choices in managing your health.

Service member support

DHA continues to explore ways to expand virtual health care options for service members and their eligible family members. Virtual health care represents a key part of building a more modern and integrated health care delivery system.

More information

For more details about your TRICARE benefit and virtual care options, visit Virtual Health at <https://tricare.mil/Getting-Care/VirtualHealth> or call 800-TRICARE. The MHS Nurse Advice Line at <https://tricare.mil/PatientResources/ContactUs/CallUs/NAL> can help you determine if virtual care is right for your situation.

Would you like the latest TRICARE news sent to you by email? Visit TRICARE Subscriptions at https://t1.news.dha.mil/lp/DHA_TRICARE_NEWS_SUB to get benefit updates, news, and more.

Guide to understanding and managing your MHS Genesis medical records

Medical records are an essential part of your healthcare to ensure everything that happens when you receive care, whether during a routine outpatient visit or a hospital stay, is documented accurately. Understanding what medical records are, what they include, and how you can access and manage them is key to taking control of your health.

The Basics of Medical Records

Medical records are detailed documents where healthcare professionals record all aspects of your care. They serve as a comprehensive history of your health and are used to ensure you receive the best possible treatment. These records include both personal and medical information.

What Medical Records Contain

Medical records include two main types of information:

- 1. Personal Information:**
 - Name, date of birth, and contact details.
 - Social Security number, driver’s license, or other identification numbers.
 - Insurance plan details and appointment history.

- 2. Medical Information:**
 - Notes from doctor visits, including the reason for the visit and findings from physical exams.
 - Vital signs, such as blood pressure, heart rate, and temperature.
 - Medications, lab results, and

imaging (e.g., X-rays, MRIs).

- Diagnoses, treatment plans, and follow-up instructions.
- Orders from doctors, such as prescriptions or referrals.

Who Contributes to Medical Records

Healthcare professionals contribute to your medical records based on their role on your healthcare team:

- **Administrative Staff:** Enter personal and administrative data, such as contact information and appointment details.

- **Nursing Staff and Medical Assistants:** Record vital signs, medications, and intake information, such as the reason for your visit and health screening questionnaires. For hospitalized patients, they also document nursing checks, administered medications, and other care provided.

- **Doctors and Providers:** Document clinical evaluations, including the reason for the visit or inpatient stay, history, physical exam findings, diagnoses, treatment plans, and medical decision-making. They also enter orders for medications, tests, or procedures.

Access to Medical Records and Safeguards

Access to medical records is strictly controlled to protect your privacy. Only authorized medical staff can access your records, and they must have a valid reason to do so as part of their duties related to your care.

- **HIPAA and Privacy Rule**

Training: All personnel accessing medical records are trained in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Privacy Rule regulations. They can only view the parts of your record necessary to accomplish what is needed for their role in your care.

- **MHS Genesis Safeguards:** For patients in the Military Health System (MHS), the MHS Genesis system includes an additional safeguard. When a staff member accesses a record, a pop-up box requires them to select their relationship to the patient (e.g., covering provider, emergency access, peer review) before proceeding.

- **Technology:** Systems like MHS Genesis include features to track and monitor who accesses your records and why.

Your Rights as a Patient

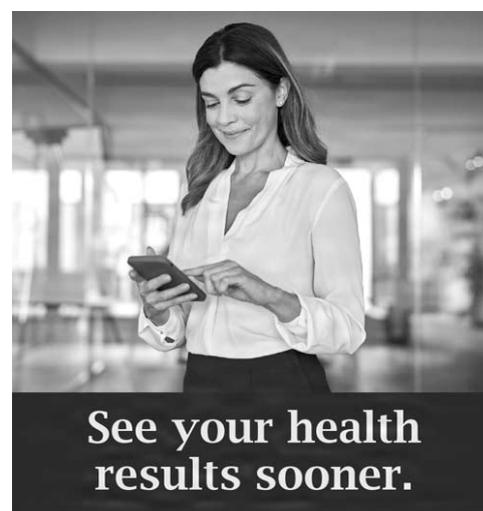
As a patient, you have important rights regarding your medical records:

- **Access:** You have the right to view and obtain a copy of your medical records.
- **Accuracy:** You can request corrections if you find errors in your records.
- **Privacy:** Your records are protected by law, and only authorized individuals can access them.

What You Can See in Your Medical Records

Through the MHS Genesis Patient Portal or similar systems, you can access:

- Complete clinical notes from



your visits. • Vital signs, lab results, and imaging reports. • Medications and prescriptions.

- **Immediate Access to Results:** As part of a recent change in DHA policy, all clinical results, including lab tests and imaging reports, are now immediately released to the patient portal as soon as they are available. This means you may see your results before your doctor has had a chance to review and interpret them.

Interpreting Results in the Patient Portal

With the immediate release of clinical results, it is important to approach your records thoughtfully. Here are some tips to help you navigate this change:

- **Stay Calm:** Medical test re-

sults often include technical terms or numerical values that can be difficult to interpret without medical training. Seeing these results without context may cause confusion or unnecessary worry.

- **Wait for Your Doctor’s Input:** Even if you see your results in the portal, your doctor will contact you to

discuss their interpretation and what the results mean for your health. Be patient and allow them time to review your case.

- **Take Notes:** Write down any questions you have about your results so you can discuss them with your doctor during your next appointment or follow-up.

- **Use Trusted Resources:** If you want to research your results, use reliable medical resources, such as those provided by the DHA or other reputable health organizations. Avoid jumping to conclusions based on unverified online sources.

Reviewing and Managing Your Medical Records

It’s a good idea to review your medical records regularly to ensure they are accurate. Here’s

how you can do it:

- **When to Review:** • At least once a month. • After every clinical visit or hospital stay. • Whenever new test results or imaging reports are released.

- **How to Review:** • Log in to your patient portal (e.g., MHS Genesis Patient Portal). • Review the clinical notes, test results, and other information. • If you find an error, submit a request to the medical records representative at your healthcare facility.

Final Thoughts

Your medical records are a powerful tool for managing your health. By understanding what they include, who can access them, and how to review them, you can take an active role in your healthcare.

The immediate release of clinical results to the patient portal is a step toward greater transparency, but it also requires patients to approach their results with caution and rely on their healthcare providers for interpretation and guidance.

Regularly checking your records ensures they are accurate and up to date, which helps you and your healthcare team make the best decisions for your care.

If you have questions about your medical records or need help accessing them, don’t hesitate to reach out to your healthcare provider. They are there to support you every step of the way.

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