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STARS AND STRIPES. OKINAWA

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YOUR VOTE COUNTS! STARTS JAN. 28

A new year is upon us, and it's time once again to turn your attention to the yearly tradition unlike any other – Best of the Pacific voting season!

For the past 18 years, our annual Best of the Pacific magazine has been the authority on the best places YOU need to go in the Pacific. How do we know? Because you told us so!

You've made your voices heard over the years, and in turn, informed fellow service members like yourselves of the Pacific's best attractions, restaurants, festivals, Sunday brunch, getaways and more.

Have a favorite bowling alley that also just happens to serve the best wings around? What about that on-base lodging that goes above and beyond in the service department? We want to know what you like and most importantly, why you like it so much.

Voting is quick, easy and you just might get your name in the magazine. So, please take a few minutes to vote by going to bestofpacific.stripes.com. And

if you do, you may qualify to win a \$300, \$200 or \$100 Exchange gift card.

We at Stars and Stripes want to thank you for helping us make

our community products ones that help you enjoy your stay in the Pacific. That's what we're all about. As we are fond of saying, our papers, websites and magazines "are about you, for you, and in some cases, by you."

The votes keep rolling in year after year and it's all thanks to you! We had a great turnout in 2018, and we expect nothing short of a record number of votes in 2019. So, be sure to take a minute or two and vote for your favorites so even more service members can experience the best the Pacific

has to offer!

– Stars and Stripes staff



VOTE BY GOING TO: bestofpacific.stripes.com

Custom-car show to rev up Okinawa

STORY AND PHOTO BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES OKINAWA

As the temperature drops, the custom car scene is staying hot on Okinawa. Come Jan. 26 and 27, the Okinawa Custom-car Show 2019 will be held at Chura Sun Beach Toyosaki, featuring customized sports cars, sedans and more. Around 100 vehicles will be on display, including those which were exhibited and awarded in the Tokyo Auto Salon 2019. Entertainment and vendors will also be on hand with food and drinks. Come and enjoy this season opener for car enthusiasts in Okinawa.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

OKINAWA CUSTOMCAR SHOW 2019

DATE: Jan. 26 & 27
TIME: 1-7 p.m.; 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
LOCATION: Chura Sun Beach Toyosaki
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.156719, E 127.647747
TICKETS: 1,200 yen (same-day ticket)
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/okinawacustomcarshow/

STARS AND STRIPES

www.stripes.com

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The lame duck in the chicken coop

BY LISA SMITH MOLINARI,
SPECIAL TO STARS AND STRIPES

In my 23 years as a military spouse, we lived in base housing four times, for a total of 11 years. Although living among sterile government buildings enclosed by fences sometimes made me feel like an inmate in an asylum, the social culture in military housing more closely parallels the behavior of chickens in a coop.

Of course, no one ever threw feed corn at me. I never laid an egg, or molted my feathers. However, people who live on post are constrained by a social “pecking order” that can make military spouses feel like they live in a cage full of clucking hens, strutting roosters and peeping chicks.

Every time we moved into a base house or stairwell apartment, I became cognizant of the unspoken hierarchy in the neighborhood. As a new arrival, I took time to establish a new home with my family (“feather the nest”). But after my husband, Francis (“the rooster”), went to work (“flew the coop”) and the kids (“the chicks”) went off to school, loneliness inevitably set in.

I found myself wandering the base in search of a flock to huddle with. Sure, there were always hens everywhere — and a few stay-at-home roosters, I wouldn’t

The Meat and Potatoes of Life

Lisa Smith Molinari



want to ruffle any feathers — but I soon realized that I was at the bottom of the pecking order. I knew I would have to walk on eggshells before I could roost with the established military spouses on base.

Careful not to count my chickens before they hatched, I got my ducks in a row and laid the foundation for my social acceptance into the flock. I watched the other spouses like a hawk, waiting for right opportunity to introduce myself. Sometimes the hens took me right under their wings, but quite often, my desperation made me seem crazy as a loon, and establishing friendships took time.

It wasn’t overly easy, but I never chickened out. Usually, by the end of my first year, I became an integral part of the gaggle, clucking away as we walked our chicks to school, hatching plans for shopping trips, and cackling about our wattles and

chicken fat.

By the end of my second year, I was securely perched at a comfortable elevation in the social pecking order, as proud as a peacock. As new chickens entered the coop, it was clear to them that my friends and I ruled the roost.

Frankly, we got downright cocky.

But then, toward the end of every tour, my family would receive new orders telling us to take wing to our next duty station. Thoughts of moving would leave me a little wistful and reflective. I found myself pondering weighty ideas such as, “Why did the chicken cross the road?” and “Who came first, the chicken or the egg?”

This melancholy state would compel me to seek the comfort and companionship of the other hens in my coop, but alas! I discovered that, as an outbound hen, I’d slipped to the bottom

of the pecking order again! Did I do something fowl? Do I have egg on my face? Had I become an albatross around someone’s neck?

My pea-sized brain realized, “You silly goose, you’re the lame duck in this chicken coop.” I was no longer a contender in the social order because I was leaving. My friends began to look for my replacement in our bunco group and book club, and I heard them clucking about plans for a girls’ trip after our move. Clearly, the other hens didn’t want to invest valuable time further incubating our friendship.

As the lame duck, I had to understand that it wasn’t personal. There was nothing to crow about; the sky wasn’t falling. It was a bitter pill to swallow (although it tasted strangely like chicken), but I had to accept that it was just the way things worked.

I had to stop myself, cold turkey, from brooding over my social status. Instead, I offered each of my fine friends a peck on the cheek, bid them a final cock-a-doodle-doo, and flew away. As graceful as a swan, as wise as an owl, as happy as a lark, and as free as a bird.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari’s columns at:
themeatandpotatoesoflife.com
Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@googlemail.com

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GOOAAAALLLLL!!!

Pro soccer squads head to island in prep for upcoming season

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES OKINAWA

Okinawa is a training destination for professional soccer players as well as baseball players.

From mid-January through late-February, 21 football teams from Japanese professional leagues (J.League and Nadeshiko or Japan Women's Football League) along with two South Korean teams (K and WK leagues) will host their preseason training camps in Okinawa.

The teams will spend several weeks on the island preparing for the 2019 season, which is slated to start next month.

Several well-known players may make an appearance with their current clubs, like Andrés Iniesta with Vissel Kobe and Fernando Torres with Sagan Tosu.

With some locations near U.S. military facilities, this is a great opportunity to see some quality soccer for free.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



J.League (Division 1)

Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo

DATES: Feb. 1 - 3
LOCATION: Kin Town Athletic Stadium (near Camp Hansen)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.454779, E 127.913274

Vegalta Sendai

DATES: Jan. 14 - 29
LOCATION: Nishizaki Sports Park
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.146818, E 127.660798

Urawa Reds

DATES: Jan. 22 – Feb. 8
LOCATION: Kin Town Football Center (near Camp Hansen)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.458429, E 127.943065

FC Tokyo

DATES: Jan. 14 - Feb. 9
LOCATION: Kaigin Field Kunigami (till Jan. 29) & Nishizaki Sports Park (Feb. 2 - 9)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.725281, E 128.161727 (Kaigin Field Kunigami); N 26.146818, E 127.660798 (Nishizaki Sports Park)

Kawasaki Frontale

DATES: Jan. 31 - Feb. 9
LOCATION: Kochinda Sports Park Soccer Field & Gosamaru Athletic Field
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.153633, E 127.714737 (Kochinda Sports Park Soccer Field); N 26.258929, E 127.793832 (Gosamaru Athletic Field)

Gamba Osaka

DATES: Jan. 22 - Feb. 9
LOCATION: Gosamaru Athletic Field (until Feb. 2) & Nanjo City Athletic Field (Feb. 5 - 9)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.258929, E 127.793832 (Gosamaru Athletic Field); N 26.145436, E 127.769817 (Nanjo City Athletic Field)

Vissel Kobe

DATES: Feb. 10 - 13
LOCATION: Kin Town Football Center (near Camp Hansen)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.458429, E 127.943065

Sagan Tosu

DATES: Jan. 20 – Feb. 3
LOCATION: Yomitan Athletic Field (near Torii Station)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.399455, E 127.745315

J.League (Division 2)

FC Mito Holly Hock

DATES: Jan. 28 - Feb 5
LOCATION: Gushikawa Multi-purpose Park (near Camp McTureous & Courtney)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.358536, E 127.864982

Omiya Aldija

DATES: Jan. 16 - 25
LOCATION: Gushikawa Multi-purpose Park (near Camp McTureous & Courtney)
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.358536, E 127.864982

Nadeshiko (Japan Women's Football League)

INAC Kobe Leonessa

DATES: Early Feb. to late Feb.
LOCATION: Cape Zampa Ballpark & Kochinda Sports Park Soccer Field
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.436880, E 127.716708 (Cape Zampa Ballpark); N 26.153633, E 127.714737 (Kochinda Sports Park Soccer Field)

K League 2

Gwangju FC

DATES: Feb. 3 - 22
LOCATION: Gushikami Athletic Park
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.131724, E 127.744252



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STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN MANNSCHRECK, JAPAN TRAVEL



An area of absolutely astounding beauty, Higashi-son village is a paradise in paradise. Higashi-son village is located in the northern regions of the tropical

paradise of Okinawa. The village lies inside the almost untouched Yanbaru forest, a natural national treasure of Japan. Dive deep into the rich blues of the ocean and the Gesashi river. Bask in the

green light filtering through the mangrove forests. Enjoy every natural color of this ecological tapestry that is Higashi-son village, which is ready to welcome visitors looking to connect with the local culture.

Delving deep into Higashi-son



Over 72 percent of northern Okinawa is covered in forest. This area is lovingly called Yanbaru and has evolved some very unique flora and fauna. The forest section near Higashi-son is ribboned with a large river, the Gesashi river, that is home to many local species. Recently Yanbaru has been made a candidate for a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site. Higashi-son village is also home to Hirugi Forest Of Gesashi Bay, hirugi trees being very rare the site has been deemed a natural treasure. The small village has a population of 1,900 people. Everyone of them is working on the preservation of this area as well as promoting its tourism.

Okinawa is well known for its traditional crafts passed down from the original inhabitants of the island. A particular favorite in Higashi-son village is the art of Bingata. Bingata is a form of resist dyeing for cloth utilizing natural inks, stencils, and hand painting. This particular art form has been used to make everything from clothing to patterns on sails. While visiting Higashi-son Village try out their Bingata class where you can make your own keepsake and purchase some professionally made local items.

Higashi-son village is a great producer of pineapples. Despite its small amount of flat land for the roaming crop, Higashi-son enjoys growing the sunny fruit. Enjoy fresh pineapple dishes such as refreshing pineapple juice, grilled pineapple slices, and seasoned pineapple over pork and rice.

If your ready for a caffeine pick-me-up check out Hiro Coffee Farm. Locally grown in small batches right there in Higashi-son, Hiro (the owner), learned the skills to cultivate such a blessing on his uncle's farm in Hawaii. Enjoy a whole pot of fresh roasted, I mean as you order, coffee while you rest in the shade of his little getaway. You know you're there when you see the shops floors covered in coffee beans. Be ready for good smells.



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San-Ae

Best things to do in Higashi-son

- **Higashi-son Fureai Hirugi Park:** A park made up of the large mangrove forests of Higashi-son. Canoe through the forest on the peaceful river. Walk the promenade winding through the hirugi trees. Then get up close and personal with the native wildlife at the petting park! Meet several species of adorable fiddler crabs, tiny mudskippers, and elegant egrets.
- **Fukujigawa Seaside Park:** Banana boat, canoe, snorkel, barbecue, camp, dive, and enjoy the soft white sands of this little beach park. A perfect place for families, small groups, and large events there is something for everyone. For more information you can refer to their English brochure. <http://fukujipark.com/image/shisetsu/panf2.pdf>
- **Higashi-son Azalea Festival:** March 1st till the 24th, Higashi-son celebrates the azalea flower. No small festival, the Azalea festival even has its own dedicated park. A large stretch of space chock full of expansive networks of bridges, towers, pavilions, viewpoints, and of course tons of azaleas. A picturesque stroll of multiple elevations affording you a majestic view of the coastline. When you need a rest there are many vendors selling festival treats of chocolate bananas, shaved ice, and more. A farmers market outside sells honey, fruits, and plants. Rest your feet and watch the Eisa drumming performances accompanied by traditional dances. Entrance fee is 300 yen.



Experience Hirugi Park at Higashi Village

Get to know the Higashi-son locals

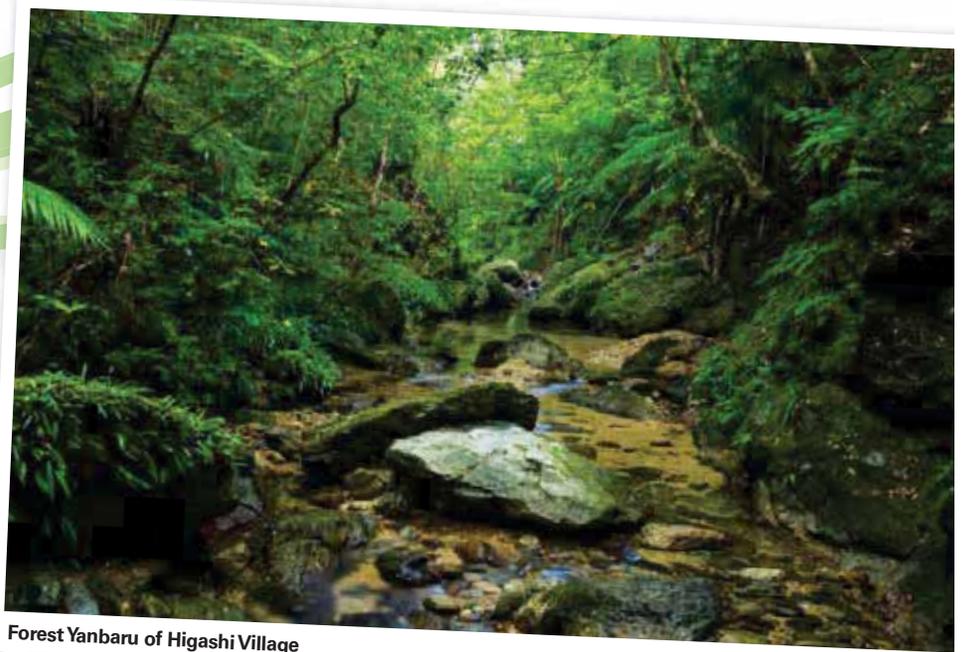
The locals of Higashi-son Village invite you to participate and enjoy their three branched approach to tourism.

GREEN: Agricultural experiences

- Enjoy the bounty of the forest with the freshest fruits, mangos, pineapples, and citrus depressa.
- Learn to play the traditional Okinawan stringed instrument the san-shin.
- Create your own bingata dyeing masterpieces with local artisans.
- Try your hand at traditional Okinawan farming.
- Enjoy living life like an Okinawan in one of Higashi-son's guesthouses or become a part of a Japanese family with their homestay program.

ECO: Eco-friendly experiences

- Trekking with local guides through the numerous ecosystems of Northern Okinawa.
- Embrace nature and sleep out under the stars in one of several camping grounds.
- Observe nature in all its forms by visiting the mangrove parks or Tsutsuji eco park.



Forest Yanbaru of Higashi Village

Booking your Higashi-son experience

Higashi-son offers many different types of accommodations for its guests. Here are a few detailed suggestions and a couple of recommendations for your stay.

- **Stay at Matayoshi Coffee Farm:** This cabin retreat features several 6-person capacity cottages with fabulous views. On the Matayoshi Coffee Farm premises, take part in harvesting or roasting coffee beans, enjoy their cafe and bakery or experience your own barbecue outside. <https://www.matayoshicoffee.jp/stay.html>
- **Canaan Slow Farm and Eco Stay:** This is a large eco-friendly farm resort and a great stay for those who love the rustic lifestyle and farm fresh meals. They offer a cafe stocked by their very own crops and livestock. A true farm to table experience in sustainable living. Keiji

Yoda the owner built the resort on the concept of humans living in harmony with nature. Accommodations and the fee varies depending on the season

- **Yanbaru Lohas:** A gorgeous villa on its own private beach. Enjoy a restful luxurious stay at this private resort that only takes two couples at a time. Relax in the hammock or swing adorning the front tropical garden. After taking in the gorgeous home walk down to the private beach to feel the true luxury of your own beach space. The home is split into two types of accommodations. The Private Villa from 13,500 yen per night per person, or the private Tamashida room from 5,400 yen a night per person (minimum two nights stay). The villa does have a full kitchen for longer stays or enjoy breakfast in the cafeteria for 1,080 yen. <https://yanbaru-lohas.com/>



Unique experiences



BLUE: Marine, seaside experiences

- Kayak down the Gesashi river or over the cresting waves of the ocean.
- Bath in the warm sunlight on the white sandy shores.
- See the fishes with snorkeling or diving experiences.
- Get one of the best views of the ocean and island while paddle boarding (SUP).
- BBQ fresh fish from natures grocery store that you fished up yourself from shore or boat.



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Churaumi Flower Festival




*Photos from past events.

Centering around the Fountain Plaza, the Ocean Expo Park will be bursting with beautiful flora.

Jan. 26 Sat through Feb. 24 Sun, 2019

Time: 8:00-19:00 / Place: Ocean Expo Park, Fountain Plaza environs / Admission: Free

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Lantern Festival a celebration of everything Okinawa

STORY AND PHOTO BY BONSON LAM, JAPAN TRAVEL

DATE: Until March 3
HOURS: 6 p.m. - 10 p.m.
ENTRANCE FEE: ¥600
LOCATION: Murasaki Mura Ryukyu Kingdom Theme Park
ADDRESS: 1020-1 Takashiho, Yomitan-son, Nakagami-gun, Okinawa-ken 904-0323
URL: <https://lantan.ryukyu/>

GETTING THERE
 Interestingly, Murasaki Mura conjures the original village of Kumemura of 1393 more closely the modern day Kume in Naha downtown. It is 28 km between these two points, with national route 58 taking you there by car in 50 minutes.

Prize Winners



Christian Hayes

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STARS AND STRIPES

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The name of the Ryukyus evoke a time past, to the 14th century when this archipelago had its golden age of trade and cultural exchange. So much so that in 1393 the Chinese Emperor Hongwu sent a delegation of thirty six artisan families from Fuzhou to Kume Village, Naha, and in the process creating one of the oldest Chinatowns the world has seen.

In those days, it was the movement of the moon that marked the times for planting and harvesting. The new moon on New Year's Day was a time of darkness, when it was hidden on the other side of the sun in the middle of winter. Fifteen days later, it would come out in its full glory, a time to celebrate the coming of light, with lanterns and festivities. Maybe this was why folklore didn't allow Chinese women to be out at night, except on the 15th day of the Chinese New Year, creating a Valentine's Day atmosphere. The lantern festival is a time of partying, games and honouring the past, one that continues here in this village that would not look out of place in 1393.

In many ways the Ryukyu kingdom looked to these Fuzhou families for wisdom and knowledge, to the extent that when the walls of Chinatown were dismantled, both politically and physically during the Meiji restoration, it was hard to tell Chinatown ended and Okinawan culture began, with exception of the Shi-seibyō Confucian Temple nearby. This eclectic mix of Ryukyu, Chinese and Japanese influences was mesmerising for artists and adventurers alike, with Hokusai painting a series called the Eight Views of Ryukyu, of which you can view the Evening Glow at Jungai at the British Museum.

These days, you need not go far to come under the sway of these founding fathers from Fuzhou. An example of this is the Ryukyu lantern festival in Murasaki Mura. The Chinese practice of writing poems and riddles is

manifested in the public declarations of love and wisdom in the many lanterns that line the laneways here.

Scratch the façade of lanterns depicting the old Ryukyu kings living under the patronage of the Ming Dynasty though, and you will find the heart of a people who are also filled with pride for everything that this island has provided for them. Whether they were born here or have adopted it as their own, the people here hold this place deep in their affection.

Modern and more home grown Japanese influences also take their place here, from the projection lighting displays to the sizzle of juicy charcoal grilled chicken skewers that would not look out of place in a Tokyo street festival. Add to that a line up of entertainment featuring Box Theater Hanehituji, Poemarama Ori Tahiti, the bewitching sway of the Hula studio and the pulsating beats of the Eisa drum and now you are ready to celebrate.

Okinawa shows us the way forward, with its gentle and accepting people showing us how to live in peace with its neighbours, even if the neighbours themselves are at war with each other. This little group of islands is showing its giant neighbours a better way to live, and that is something worth celebrating.

Stripes Sports Trivia

Soccer, football - whatever you call it - the game is massively popular around the world. There are countless leagues across the globe, but right at the top of them all is the English Premier League. With 13 overall titles, including a pair of three-peats, which club stands above all others in the EPL?

Answer

Manchester United

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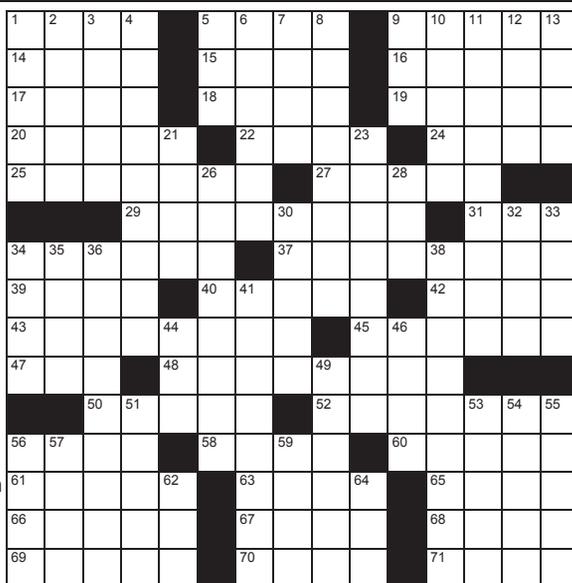
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Like some points
- 5 Desert Storm missile
- 9 Cries a river
- 14 Farm unit
- 15 Nonchalance
- 16 Work ____
- 17 Ground grain
- 18 Uno + dos
- 19 "All My Children" vixen
- 20 Buccaneer's buddy
- 22 Excursion
- 24 Ledger entry
- 25 Buttercup's cousin
- 27 Search blindly
- 29 Makeup bag item
- 31 Greedy one
- 34 Grant
- 37 What hunting dogs do
- 39 Teen spots?
- 40 Facebook option
- 42 Indian bread
- 43 Desktop icon, e.g.
- 45 Crib plaything
- 47 Scatter seeds
- 48 Starting point
- 50 Impudent
- 52 Go through again
- 56 Cream additive
- 58 Comparative word
- 60 Cunning ways
- 61 Three-seater, e.g.
- 63 Hankering
- 65 GM make until 2004
- 66 Warm-water ray
- 67 Hunt for
- 68 Took the train
- 69 Furnish with a fund
- 70 Aesop's also-ran
- 71 "Mr. Roboto" band



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DOWN

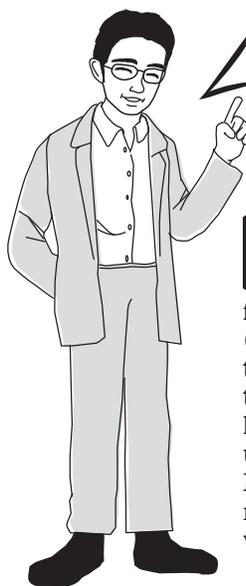
- 1 Musical " ____ Mia!"
- 2 Neptune's realm
- 3 Make a speech
- 4 Surveyor's tool
- 5 Movie backdrop
- 6 OPEC, for one
- 7 Manipulator
- 8 Fashion bigwig
- 9 Quilting party
- 10 Take ____ (travel)
- 11 1949 Cagney film noir classic
- 12 Scalp misery
- 13 Cheat
- 21 Toy that does tricks
- 23 Past tense
- 26 Nightly TV fare
- 28 Bobby of hockey
- 30 Fit to be tied
- 32 Face shape
- 33 "Star Trek" creator
- 34 Stereo knob

- 35 Canyon effect
- 36 Wintry poem by Whittier
- 38 Decorator's domains
- 41 Super-secret
- 44 As yet unsheduled: Abbr.
- 46 Over again
- 49 Stay a while
- 51 Right-hand page
- 53 Parcel out
- 54 Presidential nickname
- 55 Roaring Twenties auto
- 56 Crowning point
- 57 Bank offering
- 59 Code starter
- 62 Hem and ____
- 64 Barely make, with "out"

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

S	T	E	P	H	I	S	P	A	N	E	L
C	H	A	R	U	N	I	T	A	B	I	D
U	R	G	E	T	I	D	E	T	O	N	G
B	E	E	C	H	T	I	T	L	E	D	E
A	E	R	I	E	I	N	S	A	N	E	
			P	A	R	A	G	O	N	O	H
M	A	R	I	T	A	L	N	O	M	I	N
A	V	O	C	E	T		L	E	N	T	I
D	E	S	E	R	T	S	D	I	S	T	O
E	R	E		L	I	C	E	N	S	E	
			P	A	E	L	L	A	U	R	B
S	T	I	R	F	R	I	E	D	P	R	A
P	I	C	O	T	C	A	S	E	U	R	S
A	T	O	N	E	O	V	E	R	P	R	E
T	O	N	E	R	N	E	A	R	T	E	A

DID YOU KNOW?



Each cow carcass in Japan is given a score based on its yield (from A to C) and level of marbling, firmness, color and overall quality (from 1 to 5). The overall grade of the beef is determined by combining these two criteria, with A5 being the highest possible mark. Matsuzakashi, Yonezawa-gyu, Miyazaki-gyu, Maezawa-gyu and Kobe Beef are ranked the top five of 170 registered wagyu brands.

Kanji of the week

都

Miyako/To (Metropolis)

Language Lesson

Take your time.

Goyukkuri.



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STARS AND STRIPES

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

				5				
7				1	8	3		
	8		6	7				
1	3						8	2
				2				
			3			9		6
				6	7		9	
5	2				4			
	1	9			2			

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

9	7	4	5	2	3	8	6	1
6	1	5	7	8	4	2	3	9
2	3	8	9	6	1	4	5	7
3	5	7	4	9	2	6	1	8
8	6	2	3	1	7	9	4	5
4	9	1	6	5	8	7	2	3
5	4	9	8	3	6	1	7	2
7	2	3	1	4	9	5	8	6
1	8	6	2	7	5	3	9	4

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Check out the new, improved StripesOkinawa.com for more base, travel & culture stories



Staff Sgt. Eduardo Alcaraz stands guard with his military working dog at Kadena Air Base on Nov. 19. Photos by Carlos Vazquez, Stars and Stripes



Senior Airman James Burger plays with his military working dog before training to search for explosives.



Staff Sgt. Charles Gamez prepares his military working dog partner for search training.

Dog teams work to keep America's largest Pacific air base safe

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: Dec. 14, 2018

KADENA AIR BASE — The newest military working dog handler at the Pacific's largest U.S. air base was on guard as he searched Kadena's passenger terminal late last month.

Senior Airman James Burger, 21, walked cautiously a few steps behind the 18th Security Forces Squadron's most experienced canine, a 13-year-old German shepherd named Judi.

The pair was on the lookout for explosives that had been stashed throughout the terminal, under the watchful eye of squadron leadership and their Japan Air Self-Defense Force counterparts.

Burger and Judi were taking part in bilateral training aimed at sharpening their skills to ensure

that U.S. working dog handlers and their Japanese counterparts operate at the same skill level.

"What did you have for breakfast this morning?" Staff Sgt. Mario Rey, a trainer, asked Burger as he approached the pair. Burger ignored him and pushed on.

"I'm trying to distract him," Rey said.

Without warning, Judi rushed toward the baggage-claim conveyor belt and indicated she had found explosives. Burger followed with a spring in his step.

He congratulated his partner in a high-pitched voice and tossed her a rubber dog toy as a reward. Judi's tail wagged and her tongue hung from her open mouth, as if she were smiling.

Voluntary servitude

Burger has come a long way from working with horses on his grandparents' ranch, just outside his hometown of Plainview, Neb., to working as a dog handler and military policeman on Okinawa. To obtain the kennel master recommendation needed to apply for a handler's position, he had to clean the squadron kennels in his spare time for more than a year.

Being a handler is important, he said, "because, if I know that we can do our job well enough, I can save other people's lives."

Burger arrived at Kadena, his first duty station, in June 2016. He had always wanted to be a police officer, so he joined security forces as a "straight-leg" — a dog handler's term for a regular military policeman. A desire to work with animals came naturally to him, Burger said.

"I think my raising had a lot to do with it," he said. "I'm used to caring for those animals."

His grandparents always stressed that the horses eat first, Burger said. He brought that attitude to becoming a dog handler.

"It's incredible what a dog team can do," he said. "It just can't be matched by any machine."

Burger approached the kennel staff in February 2017 about becoming a military working dog handler. They told him he would have to clean the kennels for a year at their remote headquarters at the base munitions facility.

Burger said he obliged enthusiastically. "For me, it wasn't that difficult," he said. "I'm used to farm work, cleaning out kennels, spraying out kennels, doing little grunt stuff here and there."

Following his year of voluntary servitude, Burger spent 11 weeks training with the military working dog program at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. The 341st Training Squadron there trains all Defense Department dogs and handlers in patrol, drug and explosive detection and "specialized mission functions," according to the unit's website.

The dogs are not pets, but their handlers are often required to care for them even when they are off-duty, kennel master Master Sgt. Arthur Sawyer said.

The 18th Security Forces Squadron has nine dogs and 14 handlers.

Burger returned to Kadena at the end of October. He's had Judi ever since.

He must now build a rapport with his dog before going through an arduous validation process — a series of trials — before he is certified to join the fleet.

"I feel pretty confident," Burger said. "Judi's a very good dog. I can learn a lot from her."

Bite and hold

A dog handler's day is usually spent working to stay sharp or checking vehicles for explosives or narcotics, the 18th Security Forces Squadron handlers said.

On Nov. 19, they gathered for training at a field on base. Burger donned a thick protective bite suit. He then feigned beligerence and ran, allowing Staff Sgt. Charles Gamez and his 4-year-old dog, Biba, to work on their commands and apprehension techniques.

"They're not only looking for their handler's cues, they're looking for aggressive behavior," Sawyer said. "All the dogs are trained to bite and hold."

Burger bolted and Biba gave chase. She was about to lunge at the airman, but he froze. Gamez gave a command. She sat and turned back toward her handler waiting for instructions.

Gamez waited a moment, then gave her a command: "Get him."

Biba obliged, sank her teeth into the padded sleeve over Burger's arm and hung on limply.

Back at squadron headquarters, Gamez

ran Biba through an obstacle course, up and over obstacles, beams and stairs. He directed her to check for scents in certain nooks and crannies and to halt on command. Biba shined.

"Good job, mama," Gamez said in the high-pitched voice used by all handlers. He tossed her a rubber toy.

The handlers generally spend five hours a day working with their dogs.

On the other side of the base, Staff Sgt. Eduardo Alcaraz and his rambunctious 4-year-old dog, Sony, were getting ready for a guard shift at the base's gate.

During a shift-change meeting at squadron headquarters, the handler and his dog received their tasking orders — foot patrols, building checks and vehicle inspections at the gate — before heading out for the day.

As trucks arrived at Kadena's front gate, Alcaraz let Sony run around the vehicles, sniffing, on a long leash. He pointed to things for her to inspect.

Sony has a reputation for being hard to work with because she is so energetic and independent. However, Alcaraz — a 27-year-old Texan — said that's an advantage, because Sony isn't afraid to make a mistake checking something out.

"She's not the one to stand in one place," he said. "But she's independent enough to go for something. In the kennel, she's skittish, but out here, she's sassy."

A dog and handler team can average 60 vehicle inspections in a shift, Alcaraz said. On this day, Sony didn't find anything.

"We're here to make sure nobody brings anything or sneaks anything on base," he said. "This is our job. I love it."

The handlers have had to respond to three real-world situations in the past year, Sawyer said. Two were for reports of an active shooter and the third was a bomb threat.

That is why they are constantly testing themselves, each and every week.

"You see an airman up at the gate every day, protecting the flight line every day, and the dogs, with their potential capabilities, can expand that even more," Sawyer said. "[The teams are] just a force multiplier for our defender force."

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Senior Airman James Burger trains with a military working dog.