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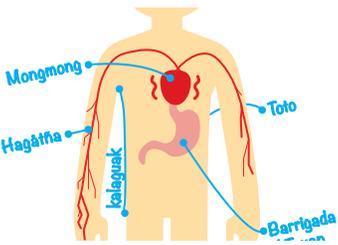
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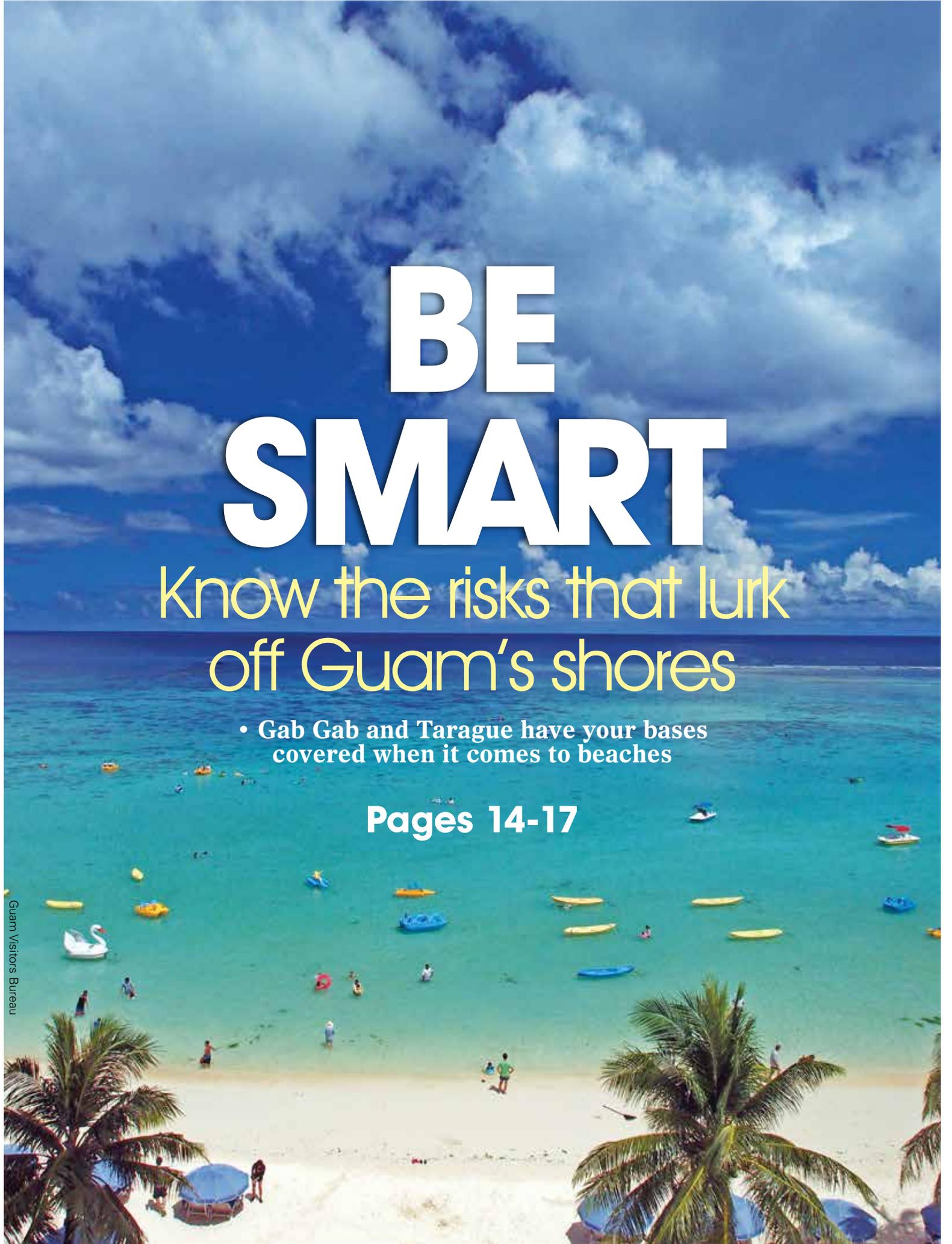
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Island Knights welcome new CO

BY JOANNA DELFIN,
JOINT REGION MARIANAS

ASAN – Cmdr. Frank Loforti relieved Cmdr. William “Easy” Eastham as commanding officer of Guam-based Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 25, during a change of command ceremony at Andersen Air Force Base Oct. 5.

Eastham commanded HSC-25’s 334 Sailors, known as the Island Knights, from July 2016 to October 2018 developing the most operationally ready, safe and capable squadron in the Navy.

“Today is particularly special as we bid farewell to skipper Eastham,” said Capt. Kevin Kennedy, commodore, U.S. Pacific Fleet Helicopter Sea Combat Wing. “The positive change this squadron has taken over the last two years under the command of Cmdr. Eastham is simply remarkable. With Easy it isn’t simply enough to do what is expected, he makes the whole organization better. Over the last couple of years he helped make both the Island Knights and HSC wing-PAC better.”

During Eastham’s time with the command, HSC-25 detachments provided operational support including rotary wing combat capability to the Wasp Amphibious Ready Group and the Ronald Reagan Strike Group.



Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 25 Command Master Chief Keith Wilkerson, left, and Master Chief John Adams, right, present a plaque to outgoing Commanding Officer Cmdr. William Eastham during the HSC-25 change of command. Photo by Alana Chargualaf, U.S. Navy

“Every day I’ve been blessed to drive up to our building and take my spot as the coach of the dream team,” said Eastham. “No matter what the call is, you meet the mission and purpose - one Navy team secluded on an Air Force Base on a tiny island in the Pacific can save lives, can defend an island, can change the world.”

Along with the support the Island Knights provide to the Navy, the squadron is also an integral part of Guam’s

search-and-rescue operations. HSC-25 is the Navy’s only MH-60s squadron to provide 24-hour, all-weather SAR and MEDEVAC support to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. During Eastham’s command, HSC-25 launched 28 searches and MEDEVACs saving 15 lives.

Eastham will report to Navy Personnel Command in Millington, Tennessee.

Loforti assumes command of the squadron after serving as

the executive officer from September 2017 to October 2018 and expressed his eagerness to serve as the commanding officer.

“Today marks the first day of the best job I will ever have,” he said. “The Navy has offered me the opportunity to be your commanding officer. We will focus on developing our people because I believe with my whole heart that every Sailor in this room wants to be part of not just a winning team, but part of the greatest team.”



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Photos of fallen service members who have been identified by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency line a wall inside a laboratory at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

A forensic anthropology display inside the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's headquarters building at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

A UNIQUE MISSION

Soldiers give identity back to fallen troops

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SEAN KIMMONS,
ARMY NEWS SERVICE

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – When her duty day is over, Sgt. 1st Class Jennifer Owen often reflects on if she did enough to help identify fallen service members.

As the morgue noncommissioned officer in charge at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, which is tasked to account for more than 82,000 Americans still missing from past conflicts, she analyzes human remains and personal effects in hopes to close a cold case.

“At the end of the day, I have to be able to look in the mirror and say I’ve done my best,” she said. “And when I get up in the morning, I say I’m going to do better, because these families have been waiting years and years.”

Owens is one of about 100 service members and civilians who work at the agency’s

laboratories here and at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. Each year, the labs identify the remains of around 200 Americans that are then reunited with families.

On Aug. 1, more than 50 caskets of believed-to-be American service members were provided to DPAA after North Korea handed them over as part of ongoing peace negotiations.

The caskets, which may include one or more sets of remains, are now undergoing further analysis and identification at the labs.

The painstaking work, which can take months to years to complete, is Owen’s passion. Whenever a positive identification comes in, she said, it is as if the service member’s name is given back.

“What drives me the most is that these are heroes,” she said, looking

“It’s extremely gratifying,” he said, “and it kind of keeps you grounded where you know why you’re here and why you’re doing this work.”

– John Byrd

ing across a lab room with hundreds of unknown remains. “These are all heroes that have a name and a family.”

IDENTIFYING HEROES

Each year, DPAA has up to 80 investigation and recovery team missions throughout the world to pinpoint last known locations of missing Americans and to attempt to excavate their remains.

“The work is complex, the work is difficult, and it takes that dedication, that passion ... to be able to perform this solemn obligation that we make to the nation and to the families,” said Kelly McKeague, the agency’s director.

The joint agency, which employs many Soldiers and Army veterans, has agreements with nearly 50 nations that assist in its missions, he added.

Most of the missing were lost at World War II battle sites in the Pacific region. There are also almost 7,700 unaccounted for from the Korean War, with the majority believed to be in North Korea.

DPAA teams were allowed to conduct missions in North Korea from 1996 to 2005, but operations halted due to safety concerns. Agency officials hope these missions could soon start up again.

Before he became the agency’s lab director, John Byrd had the opportunity to help recover Americans who fought in North Korea.

One of the sites his team was allowed to go to was where the Battle of Unsan took place. The 1950 battle pitted Chinese forces against American and South Korean armies. Hundreds of Americans eventually died in the battle, later deemed a huge victory for the Chinese army.

When remains are identified by his staff, whether they were found at Unsan or another site, it is always a testament to good field and lab work that solved the decades-old case, Byrd said.

“It’s extremely gratifying,” he said, “and it kind of keeps you grounded where you know why you’re here and why you’re doing this work.”

A majority of DPAA cases involve some type of DNA testing, where samples are taken from the remains and sent to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab in Delaware.

To help this process, family members who have a missing loved one are encouraged to reach out to the agency and provide a DNA sample that will serve as a comparison.

If none are on file, a battalion of professional genealogists working for service casualty offices will try to locate family members.

Many times their starting point is the service member’s home address from the 1940s, if they served in World War II. This makes it extremely difficult to track down a living family member as the years pass on.

“It’s one of the greatest challenges of all. How do you find close family members of a missing serviceman from 1944?” Byrd asked. “It’s not easy. Some [cases] we run into dead ends and we can’t find anybody.”

The Defense Department has kept dental records of troops dating back to World War I that can be used to help in the process.

In 2005, the agency also discovered another method that has proved successful. For troops who served in the older conflicts, many had to get chest x-rays as part of a tuberculosis screening when they first signed up.

Like the dental records, these radiographs were stored in a warehouse by the DOD. The agency later obtained thousands of copies of them. They now assist lab personnel who use them as a comparison tool since the



Sgt. 1st Class Jennifer Owen, a morgue NCOIC for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, examines personal effects that potentially belong to fallen service members inside a laboratory.



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MISSION: Tangible results

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

shape of a person's chest is different from others, like a fingerprint.

"The process of comparing this induction chest x-ray to an x-ray we take from the remains is analogous to doing fingerprint comparison," Byrd said. "It's a very similar kind of mindset that you take when you look at the two side-by-side; you're looking for commonalities and differences."

When a service member is identified, family members often come to the lab so they can participate in escorting the remains back home, Byrd said. For those who work at the lab, those family member visits make the months or years of work seem worthwhile.

"When you have a family member come in and the staff who actually worked on the case get to meet them, they get to see the tangible results of their hard work," Byrd said. "It's definitely a boost to their morale."

INTHE FIELD

Before that sort of closure can start for families, recovery teams spend weeks at a time doing the grunt work of excavating sites.

Capt. Brandon Lucas, who serves as a team leader, recalled his team digging nearly 20 feet into the ground in Laos in search of an F-4 Phantom fighter pilot who vanished during the Vietnam War.

While no remains were found on that mission, they were still able to confidently close the site and shift efforts elsewhere.

Then there was another mission in Slovenia, where the tail gunner of a bomber aircraft from World War II went missing.

When his plane crashed, the gunner was the only one in his aircrew killed. Locals later buried him next to a church.

As Lucas' team arrived at the site, the town still knew about the crash and the gunner. They regularly visited his team, often bringing Lucas and the others food and drinks. An elderly woman even told him that for decades she would clean the

gravesite once a week.

When his team recovered the remains, a somber tone spread through the community.

"A lot of them actually shed tears when we found the remains," he said. "It was special to them and it was special to me."

The poignant moment, along with others he has experienced during missions, galvanized the meaning of the mission for him.

"I'm potentially bringing back a fallen comrade," he said. "I would want to know that if it was me lost out there somebody is trying to recover me and give my family closure."

Recovery missions also extend out into the sea, where many service members have disappeared as a result of aircraft crashes or ships sunk.

While she served as commander of the 8th Theater Sustainment Command, Maj. Gen. Susan A. Davidson was an advocate for her unit to support the solemn mission.

The unit regularly supplies DPAA with highly-trained Army divers from the 7th Engineer Dive Detachment, who often work on the sea floor with no visibility and use a suction hose to remove loose sediment from recovery sites.

On a barge, team members then sift through the sediment for the remains or personal effects of those missing.

When divers returned to Hawaii, she encouraged them to share their experiences and what they got out of the mission with others in the unit.

"They come back a different person and they have a different respect for our Army and for what we do," Davidson said. "And it is hero work that we do."

Back in the lab room, Owen and others strive to identify those heroes who have been found.

"I feel that I am part of something so much bigger that I can contribute to," she said. "It might not be a lot, but it's something."

Combined with all the other efforts made at the agency, her "something" may just one day bring closure to a family that has waited years for answers.

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Guam tops Southern to grab No. 3 seed in playoffs

STARS AND STRIPES
Published: October 6, 2018

AGANA HEIGHTS – Travon Jacobs was limited to two games last season due to an arm injury. He came back this season to play every game for Guam High.

After the Panthers' 38-0 regular season-ending shutout of Southern on Oct. 6, coach Jacob Dowdell said Jacobs is coming into his own.

The sophomore quarterback was 14-for-25 for 280 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 51 yards on five carries. Were it not for a few dropped passes, Jacobs could have been "well over 300 yards" and the best may be yet to come, Dowdell said.

"This was his best game by far," Dowdell said of Jacobs, who was injured in the first game of the season last year and played in the Panthers' 19-16 playoff loss to George Washington.

"He's only going to grow and get better. This is him maturing as a quarterback."

RaSean Jacobs caught three of those passes for 68 yards, rushed for a touchdown and also passed for one. Sincere Powell rushed 12 yards for a score and Jeylyn Powell and



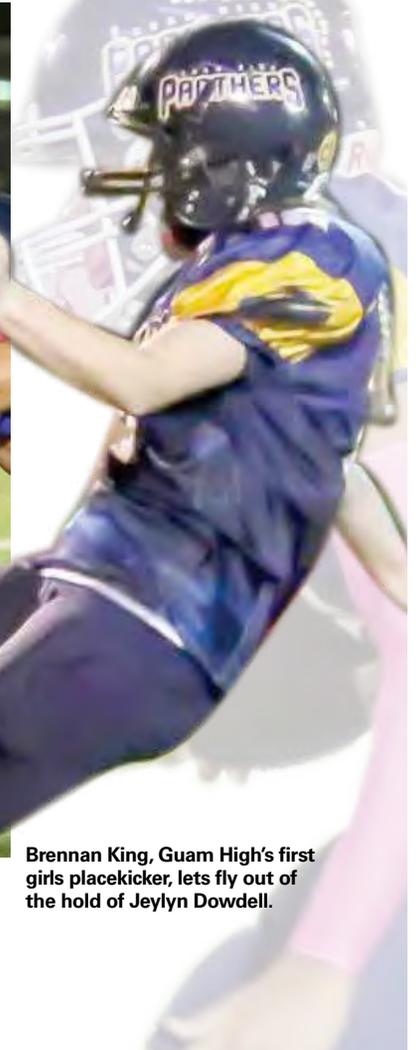
Guam High's RaSean Jacobs takes off around right end against Southern. Photos by Donna Rhodes/Special to Stripes

Julius Gaduang each ran 20 yards for a score. Jalen Thach caught a 15-yard touchdown pass.

Dowdell had 12 tackles as did RaSean Jacobs, Kyle Datu recorded nine tackles and

Max Linforth added seven. "Datu was a surprise player on defense," Dowdell said. "He stepped up tonight. I'm very

proud of him." With the victory, the Panthers closed the regular season on a four-game run and earned



Brennan King, Guam High's first girls placekicker, lets fly out of the hold of Jeylyn Dowdell.

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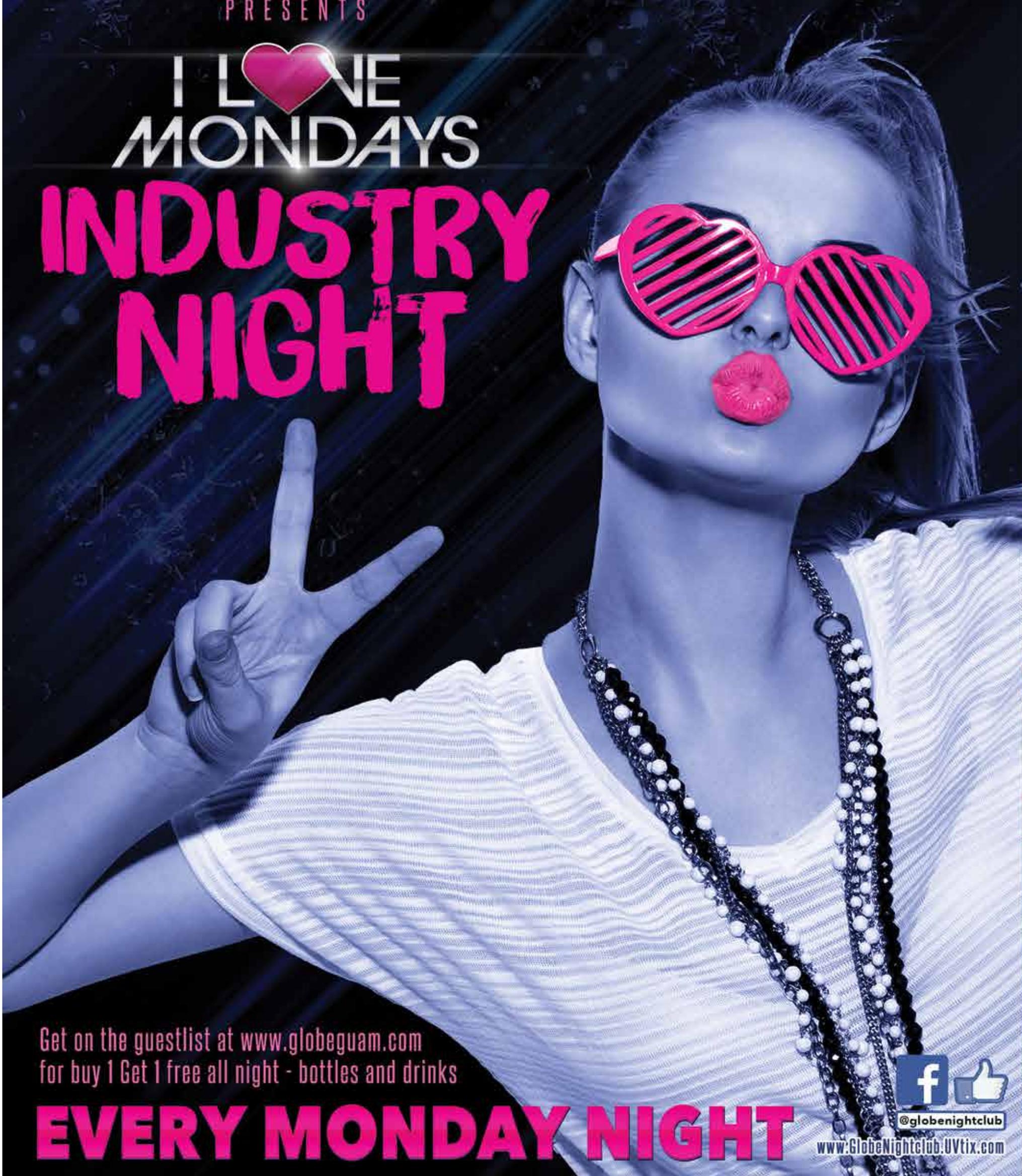
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SAFETY FIRST

Know the risks that lurk off Guam's shores

The best thing about being on Guam is all the opportunities there are for fun in the sun on the beach and beyond. There is an endless array of water sports from swimming, scuba and snorkeling to waterskiing, windsurfing sailing, fishing and more.

While young and old alike should take full advantage of all this, annual water-related deaths and injuries should be a sober reminder that you can never be too cautious when it comes to safety.

There are various dangers to be aware of off Guam's shores where aquatic activities take place. Some of the main ones include powerful rip currents, waves, wind, rain, strong sun and sharp coral reef.

For swimmers and snorkelers, the safest areas are beaches protected from the ocean by a barrier reef. Inside this reef, the water is calm, shallow and has only a slight to non-existent current. However, swimming near the reef can be extremely dangerous because of waves and currents.

Whether using a beach that is off or on base, you should always check the beach warning flags before deciding whether to get into the water. A red flag means it's too dangerous to swim, a yellow flag warns to swim with caution, green indicates all is good, while a blue flag warns that dangerous marine life is present. Also, keep an eye out for signage with specific precautions for beaches.

Active duty military personnel are prohibited from reef walking anywhere on Guam. For these purposes, the reef is defined as the elevated ridge of coral or rock between the shore and the open sea. This ridge may be above

or slightly below water level, depending on the tide. Keep well clear of the outer portion of the reef when the tide is going out. Rip tides are common on Guam and extremely dangerous.

Dangers of reef, current

The first danger to swimming near a reef is caused by the waves breaking on the reef. Even in the calmest conditions, it is difficult and dangerous to cross the reef in surf. The coral itself is extremely sharp and can cause deep and painful cuts. Gloves and foot protection are essential.

The second danger is the current caused by the waves. In almost all cases where the waves are consistently larger than one foot, a strong current runs along the reef. This current, known as

a "long shore" current, is created when the water forced inside the reef by the waves is higher than the sea level outside the reef. When this happens, the water tries to flow back out to sea but the waves bringing more water into the reef prevent it. The water will flow along the reef or shoreline until it finds a place to flow back into the sea. This current can be very strong.

A person swimming too close to the reef's edge can become caught in the current and be swept onto or over the reef. When they attempt to climb back over the reef, not only do they have to fight the current pushing them sideways, but they must also fight the waves smashing against the reef. After struggling to cross the reef, many people become exhausted and are washed out to sea or banged along the reef until they die.

Wrestling a rip current

Tips on what people should do when they are caught in a rip current. Stay calm. Don't fight the current; you will lose all your strength.

- **Escape the current by swimming in a direction that follows the coastline. When over the shallow reef flat, walk or swim to shore.**
- **If unable to escape by swimming, float or tread water. When the current weakens, swim toward the reef flat where the water is shallow.**
- **If at any time you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, call or wave for help.**

Hazardous marine life

Treat all seashells as poisonous. Do not handle shells with your bare hands as some contain live animals with a deadly venom. The beaches on Andersen AFB are designated as a marine preserve; as a result, shell collecting on base beaches is prohibited.

Another danger to keep in mind is hazardous marine life such as scorpion fish, sea urchins, moray eels, cone snails, crown of thorns starfish, stingrays, sea snakes, stone fish, turkey lion fish and sharks.

"There are several organisms living in Guam's waters that can be dangerous," says Brent Tibbatts, a fisheries biologist for the Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources. "Injuries from these organisms are almost always caused by human actions. If you don't bother them, they won't bother you."

Tibbatts points out that there are two common organisms that people should watch out for on Guam.

"Indo-Pacific man-o-war are jellyfish-like creatures," he explains. "These are most abundant during times of strong onshore winds from the north and east, therefore are most often seen on north and east facing beaches. Man-o-wars are most

Have young children or inexperienced swimmers wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets in and around the water. Ensure the flotation devices you already acquired have not deteriorated.

Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist near these structures.

Don't dive headfirst - protect your neck. Check for depth and obstructions before diving, and go in feet first.

When at the beach, check conditions before entering the water. Check to see if any warning flags are up or ask a lifeguard about water conditions, beach conditions, or any potential hazards.

Pay especially close attention to children and elderly persons when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause a loss of footing.

Keep a lookout for aquatic life. Water plants and animals may be dangerous. Avoid patches of plants, and leave animals alone.

If someone is in distress in the water, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1. Throw the victim something that floats - a lifejacket, cooler, or inflatable ball and yell instructions on how to get back to shore safely.

If caught in a rip current, stay calm and don't fight the current.

Swim parallel to the shore until out of the current. Once you are free, turn and swim toward shore.

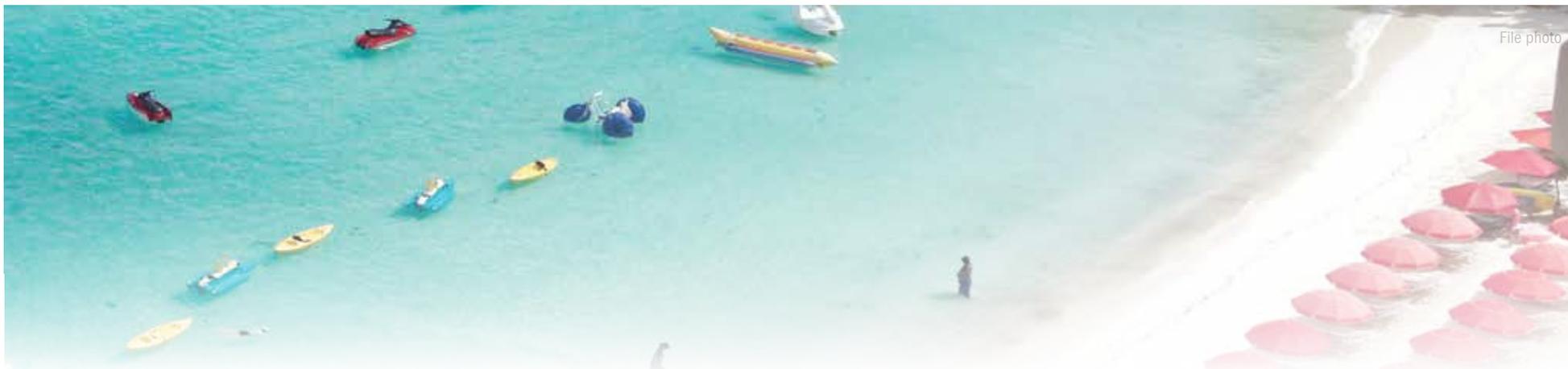
If you can't swim to the shore, float or tread water until you are free of the rip current and then head toward shore.

36th Wing Public Affairs
Andersen Air Force Base, Guam

Responsible Swimming
Tips and tricks you can take to make sure you and your family remain safe.



Photo courtesy of Guam Visitors Bureau



Man-o-wars
Photo by Wikipedia Commons

Tibbatts says. “They can sting even after they are dead. If stung, remove any clinging tentacles with a branch or other solid object, then flush the affected area with large amounts of salt water. Medical care may be recommended.”

Another sea creature to steer clear of is the box jellyfish.

“Guam has at least two species of box jellyfish,” says Tibbatts. “They are not the deadly species known from Australia, but they can deliver a painful sting. If stung by a box jellyfish, any clinging tentacles should be removed with a stick or other hard object. The affected area should be flushed with large amounts of salt water. Vinegar may help ease the pain and markings caused by the sting. If conditions appear severe, seek immediate medical attention.”

– Courtesy of Andersen Air Force Base, Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources

commonly seen during the months of December through February. They look like little blue bubbles, usually about 1-2 inches across, with dark blue tentacles underneath.

“Man-o-wars should not be touched, even if on the beach,”

WATER SAFETY TIPS
The island of Guam has some of the most beautiful and interesting waters and beaches a person can find anywhere. That beauty comes with risks. Get educated before you go out to ensure you can fully enjoy your time.

- Non-swimmers should use Coast Guard-approved flotation vests, even while wading.
- Do not swim in the ocean alone - take a buddy with you.
- Stay sober - do not swim while intoxicated. Alcohol can affect your judgment and your body temperature, impairing your ability to swim.
- Children should swim only with adult supervision.
- Do not swim during rough seas. Broken necks and paralysis have resulted from swimmers being thrown into the ocean bottom headfirst.
- Know the various types of ocean currents and how to get out of them.
- Designate an emergency contact not traveling with your group. Let them know where you are going and when you're expected to return.
- Watch the weather. Storms and squalls come up quickly.

Boating

Even fishing boats in the presumed safety of Apra Harbor are routinely carried out of the harbor by the outgoing tide. Experience has shown that boats drifting in this area travel in a generally westerly direction at a minimum of one nautical mile per hour. Winds in the area of 15 to 20 knots can increase the drift to two knots. That means a rate of drift anywhere from 24 to 48 miles per day. What starts out as a simple frustration (i.e. dead battery within sight of land), can quickly lead to a large search covering hundreds of square miles of ocean.

Always observe a measure of caution and good judgment when boating around Guam. One of the most important measures is to stop and take a good look at the situation. Ask yourself all the “what if” questions you can think of and make sure you have planned for the unexpected. Take plenty of extra water and food. Take as much fuel as possible. Make sure that the proper safety equipment is onboard. Have extra flares, a mirror, a flashlight, and extra flashlight batteries. Let someone know where you're going, when you'll return, and what equipment you have onboard.

No one should ever go out in the ocean without a marine VHF radio.

Snorkeling

Guam offers some of the best snorkeling in the world. However, people venture out into unfamiliar waters and find themselves in serious trouble. The waters around Guam need to be respected.

Always snorkel with another person and use proper equipment: a snorkel, mask, and brightly colored fins. If you are not an experienced Guam swimmer, wear a snorkel vest (this will enable you to stay afloat if you become tired or carried out to sea). If a current carries you away from shore, wave one of your brightly colored fins in the air to signal someone on the shore to seek help.

Before you venture out, contact a local dive shop for information on areas you intend to snorkel. The National Weather Service (dial 211 off base and 99-211 on base) has a recorded message on surf, winds, and tide conditions.

Safest Snorkeling Areas:

- Tarague Beach (swim within buoyed area)
- Any beach in the Tumon Bay hotel row area (Hilton to the Guam Reef Hotel)
- Gab Gab Beach (Big Navy, no lifeguard)
- San Luis Beach (Big Navy, no lifeguard)
- Spanish Steps (Big Navy, no lifeguard)
- Outhouse Beach (No lifeguard)
- Piti Bomb Holes
- Dog Leg Reef (Family Beach)

Hazardous Snorkeling Areas:

- Ritidian Beach
- Tanguisson Beach
- Asan Cut
- Gun Beach
- Haputo Beach

Surfing

Guam's location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean subjects it to many different ocean swells. Unfortunately, these swells hit on dangerously shallow and sharp reefs. Currents in these areas range from friendly to deadly causing surfing to be very deceptive and dangerous.

The best place to learn to surf or boogie board is Talafofo Bay. In addition, pay attention to surfing etiquette and perhaps talk to experienced local surfers before attempting to surf on Guam.

There have been a number of incidents where non-locals were harassed or even threatened by the “regulars” at the limited number of surfing sites.

Scuba Diving

Guam features many excellent dive sites and a robust scuba-training infrastructure with several large dive centers, boat operators, and guides. Do not scuba dive deeper than your certification level. Always use the buddy system and use a dive flag at the surface. Newly assigned military personnel (PCS and TDY) should plan their first few dives through Outdoor Recreation or at one of the local dive shops until you are familiar with the area. Many local dive shops offer free shore dives led by a dive master on weekends. This is a great opportunity to learn the local area and meet new dive buddies.

– 36th Wing Safety Officer



Beachin' good fun on base

Naval Base's Gab Gab Beach

Gab Gab Beach, or Fab Gab as we like to call it, is truly a hidden gem and easily our family's regular go-to place for no-frills low-cost weekend fun.

Great for picnics, birthday parties, unit gatherings, hail & farewells, snorkeling, swimming, diving, sand volleyball, SUP'ing and all sorts of water play. The beach umbrellas and grill grates can be rented for a meager amount, and camping is allowed by reservation with the Outdoor Recreation Center. There is something for everyone.

Gab Gab is located on Naval Base Guam, so you'll need base access to get to it, its also one of the most popular shore dives on Guam, and any given day of the week you're likely to find divers exiting or readying to enter the water via the easy stairs next to the "3-sided pool."

If you get there early enough, make a leisure surface swim due North out to the Atlantis Submarine Tender buoy, and drop down on the plateau reef at about 50', known as Gab Gab II, where baited buckets attract the fish for the viewing pleasure of the underwater tourists. You're almost guaranteed to get an up close view of the docile Nurse Sharks, large schooling fish, and possibly a moray eel in the artificial reef ball. Also look out

for anemones teeming with clown fish at various locations on the reef.

Steer clear of the submarine while diving, but be sure and give a wave to all the tourists peering out the portholes.

It's also a beginner snorkeler's paradise. Enter the water via the stairs and your only yards from colorful coral, sloping reefs, an abundance of fish and there is always a greater than average chance of seeing a turtle along the reef edge. Note, no forms of fishing or collection of marine life (live or dead) is permitted at Gab Gab.

Bathrooms are provided, and outdoor showers are just steps away from the water stairs - convenient for divers and snorkelers exiting the water to rinse their gear and themselves. During your surface interval enjoy some beach volleyball, relaxing under the umbrellas, barbecuing in the poolside grills.

Enjoy Fabulous Gab Gab, but be sure and clean up after yourselves when you leave.

Things to know

- Open 24 hours a day unless noted.
- Gab Gab Beach offers Lifeguards ONLY on weekends, holidays, and DoDEA School Breaks from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Planning on heading out to the beaches this weekend but don't have the proper

outdoor equipment? Don't let it ruin your plans! Drop into Rec-N-Crew and inquire about all your outdoor needs. Call 564-1826.

- There is a \$10 rental fee for Cabanas on the right-hand side of Gab Gab Beach. This is required to guarantee that a spot will be reserved for your function. Patrons can still use unreserved Cabanas for free. For more info, call 564-1826. (Fee is waived for Command Functions. Contact Eric Nikkel at 564-1851 for more info).

– Mike Thornton

Andersen's Tarague Beach

Whether you're with a group of friends or looking for some personal time, Tarague Beach on Andersen Air Force Base is your answer to camping on Guam.

Make the most of the day at the beach enjoying activities such as swimming, snorkeling, beach volleyball or barbeque. The beach also provides a playground for kids, a nature trail for hiking and exploring the different historical highlights and agriculture in the area.

Tarague Beach offers 30 campsites along the sandy beach. Most of the campsites are shaded by beautiful pine trees and the ocean breeze keeps you cool. Each



Photo by Andersen Air Force Base

campsite includes a picnic table and grill. Bathrooms and showers are centrally located so all patrons can use them conveniently.

You also have the option to enjoy dinner or cold refreshments at Bamboo Willies beachfront restaurant.

As the evening approaches, catch a breathtaking sunset, roast marshmallows or make smores.

Camping at Tarague is open all year round. However, December through February usually offers the best weather conditions: slightly cooler with a little less rain and humidity. This makes for perfect camping.

- If you don't own any camping equipment, Outdoor Recreation has all your supplies such as tents and

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Gab Gab Beach Photos by Petty Officer 2nd Class Claire Farin Defense Media Activity

other camping equipment for rent. Reservations for campsites as well as supplies can be made online at www.36thservices.com under Outdoor Recreation or by calling (671) 366-5204 or 5197.

– Tennille Bueno

Outdoor pools

The Navy operates three swimming pools on the island. At Naval Base Guam, the swimming pool is located near South Tipalao Housing and the barracks area. Call the pool at (671) 564-1822.

At the Naval Communications Station, the pool is located on the main drive of the base, next to the laundromat. For more information, call (671) 355-5091.

At the Naval Hospital, the pool is located near the housing area. To reach the Naval Hospital pool please call (671) 564-1822/355-5091.

On Andersen, cool off on a hot, sunny day at Capehart Pool.

The pool features a kiddie pool, designated times for lap swimming, a diving

board and a children’s slide. Capehart Pool offers a wide variety of swim lessons for all ability levels. And Capehart’s best feature is that admission is FREE! Andersen’s Capehart Pool is next door to the youth center.

Capehart Pool is also a fun place to throw your next squadron or birthday party. Whether you’d like a private after hours event or your own reserved area during pool hours the Capehart Pool has a plan for you. Two party areas are for rent and each includes a 20x20 canopy, 4 picnic tables and a BBQ grill.

Marina/boating

Situated on scenic Apra Harbor on Naval Base Guam, Sumay Cove Marina offers a variety of activities for water sports enthusiasts. Enjoy a day of sightseeing, fishing or diving on one of its powerboats, or rent the “party barge” pontoon boat for larger groups. The Marina also offers Fishing and Dolphin Watching Trips on our 23’ Pro-Line charter boat.

For boat owners, two boat-launch

ramps are provided as well as outdoor dry storage pads and wet slips at the Marina pier. And the Marina makes it easy for you to get your small boat license – all you have to do is pick up a study packet, take a multiple choice test, and schedule a Harbor Familiarization Class for just \$10 per person. For more information, call (671) 564-1846.

Rec-N-Crew

Rec-N-Crew at Naval Base Guam has camping equipment, canopies, kayaks, bicycles and sports equipment for rent. Tickets can be purchased through the Rec-N-Crew for local recreational and entertainment events. Rec-N-Crew also offers Sailors a chance to take advantage of the L.I.B.E.R.T.Y. (Life Is Better Everywhere Recreation Takes You) Program.

The program offers “boonie stomps” and kayaking to historical and scenic areas on Guam for single Sailors and geographical bachelors. For information, call Rec-N-Crew at (671) 687-4725.

Heather Colson, 36th Force Support Squadron aquatic director, changes water-condition warning flags at Tarague Beach.
Photo by Airman 1st Class Alexaann Henderson, 36th Wing Public Affairs

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Coffee shop has your caffeine covered

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNE JING PING WEN, STRIPES GUAM

For those seeking a morning pep, one East Hagatna coffee shop is brewing up as memorable as their name.

With a specialty in cold brew and nitro coffee, Coffee Slut creates frothy, smooth and creamy drinks with faster rates of caffeine absorption, according to co-owner Justin Benavente.

"We keg all of our coffee and teas and juices, so we're a coffee bar, and we do shots," said Benavente.

The cold brew comes in either medium or dark roast and is brewed for 24-hours. If a customer orders nitro coffee, the drink is infused with nitrogen and pressurized in a keg.

Benavente and his two partners, Melchor Manibusan and Kyle Aguon, launched the brand last year. In 2016, they were located in Takoyaki Cafe Tama, but the cafe was only open during lunch and mornings. Benavente and his two partners hoped to cover morning, lunch, and dinner. A year later, they relocated to East Hagatna, across from Burger King and Crust Pizzeria.

The coffee shop offers customers a beautiful sunrise and sunset view by the beach.

"A lot of people like to hang out here because it has a nice environment, beautiful view, and good coffee, tea, and juice," said Benavente.

When visiting Coffee Slut during lunch, customers have the option to purchase food from trucks on the outer deck. On Wednesdays after 6 pm, adults are also invited to celebrate coffee and socialize with friends.

Coffee Slut

TEL: +1 671-777-7220
 HOURS: 11 AM - 10 PM
 ADDRESS: 1275 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tamuning, 96913, Guam
 EMAIL: coffeeslutguam@gmail.com
 URL: www.coffeeslut.co

"We try to create a really different environment when you come into our shop," said Benavente. "Our passion is really the coffee."

Not sure what to order? Staff members can help you choose one of the cleverly-named options.

"When we get first timers, we have them try the orgy," Benavente said. "We do single beans, which would be Brazil, Columbia, Kenya, or we can mix them all together to produce our espresso."

For more on the shop, including drinks, ordering kegs and more, visit their website at www.coffeeslut.co.

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War in the Pacific National Historical Park events

BY ART DAVTIAN,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

OCTOBER 13, SATURDAY: 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Asan Beach – “Art in the Park”

Embrace your creativity and learn about Lava Lava traditional weaving techniques. Local artists will help you create your own masterpieces. Registration is suggested. To register visit the T. Stell Newman Visitor Center located in Sumay or contact Park Ranger Kina Lewis at: kina_lewis@nps.gov or park rangers at: 333-4055. Details of this event can be found at www.facebook.com/WarInThePacificNPS.

OCTOBER 21, SUNDAY: 2 p.m. at the Visitor Center - “Science Sunday”

Science Sunday features current research projects happening right here on Guam and the Micronesian region. Presentations are open to all ages. No



Asan Bay Overlook Photo by NPS

OCTOBER 27, SATURDAY: 12 noon to 4:30 p.m. at Asan Beach – “Art in the Park”

Join us at Asan Beach for our Micronesian Islands Arts Showcase. Explore beautiful art pieces created by our Artists-in-Residence who incorporate traditional designs and techniques from around Micronesia. Registration is not required. Open to public. All ages are welcome. Details of this event can be found at www.facebook.com/WarInThePacificNPS, or email kina_lewis@nps.gov or call 333-4055.

OCTOBER 31, WEDNESDAY: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the T. Stell Newman Visitor Center – “Storytime at the National Park”

Join us for a great opportunity to introduce youth to the War in the Pacific National Historical Park and to explore park themes through story, song, and art. This program is appropriate for children age 4 and younger. For more information call 333-4050.

pre-registration is required. For more information, call 333-4050 or email gureefmonitoring@gmail.com

To contact Park Rangers, please call (671) 333-4050 or email wapa_interpretation@nps.gov



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Guam villages that are named after body parts ... and why

GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

Did you know that several of Guam’s villages are named after body parts? This is directly related to one of Guam’s most enduring legends – the legend of Puntan and Fu’una. In this ancient Chamorro story of Creation, Puntan and Fu’una are brother and sister gods who sacrificed their bodies in order to create the universe.

At her brother’s request, Fu’una used her spirit to divide Puntan’s body and use it to create the universe. With his back she made the earth, with his chest she made the sky. One of his eyes became the sun, and the other became the moon. With his eyebrows she made rainbows.

Fu’una admired all they had created, and with her power she made the earth bloom. In her final gift to the world, Fu’una threw her body into the earth and transformed into a towering limestone pillar, from which the first humans emerged.

Because the stone marked the final resting place of the goddess Fu’una, the ancient Chamorro people believed the stone held mystical healing powers. Today, the pillar is known as Fouha Rock (also called Creation Point) and it sits on a secluded bay in the southern village of Umatac.

In addition to Fouha Rock, the legend of Puntan and Fu’una also lives on in these villages that are named after parts of Puntan’s body.

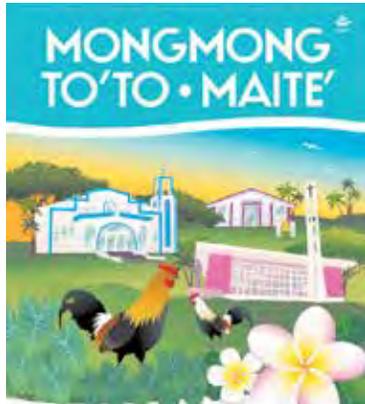
Tiyan

Tiyan is the first and last place almost every visitor to Guam sees, for it’s the area where the Guam International Airport is located. Tiyan takes its name from “tuyan,” the Chamorro word for “stomach.” Dozens of aircraft take off and land on Puntan’s flat stomach every day.



Barrigada

Barrigada takes its name from the Spanish word “barriga” which also means “stomach.” In 1866, during the Spanish era of Guam, the region known for deer hunting was referred to as “Barrigadan Tiyan.” Interestingly, the original Chamorro name for Barrigada was Jalaguac, which comes from “kalaguak,” the Chamorro word that refers to the side portion of the body that runs from the hip to the armpit. Even though the Spanish name Barrigada eventually replaced the original Chamorro name, today you can drive down Jalaguac Street in Barrigada and pay homage to history.



Toto and Mongmong

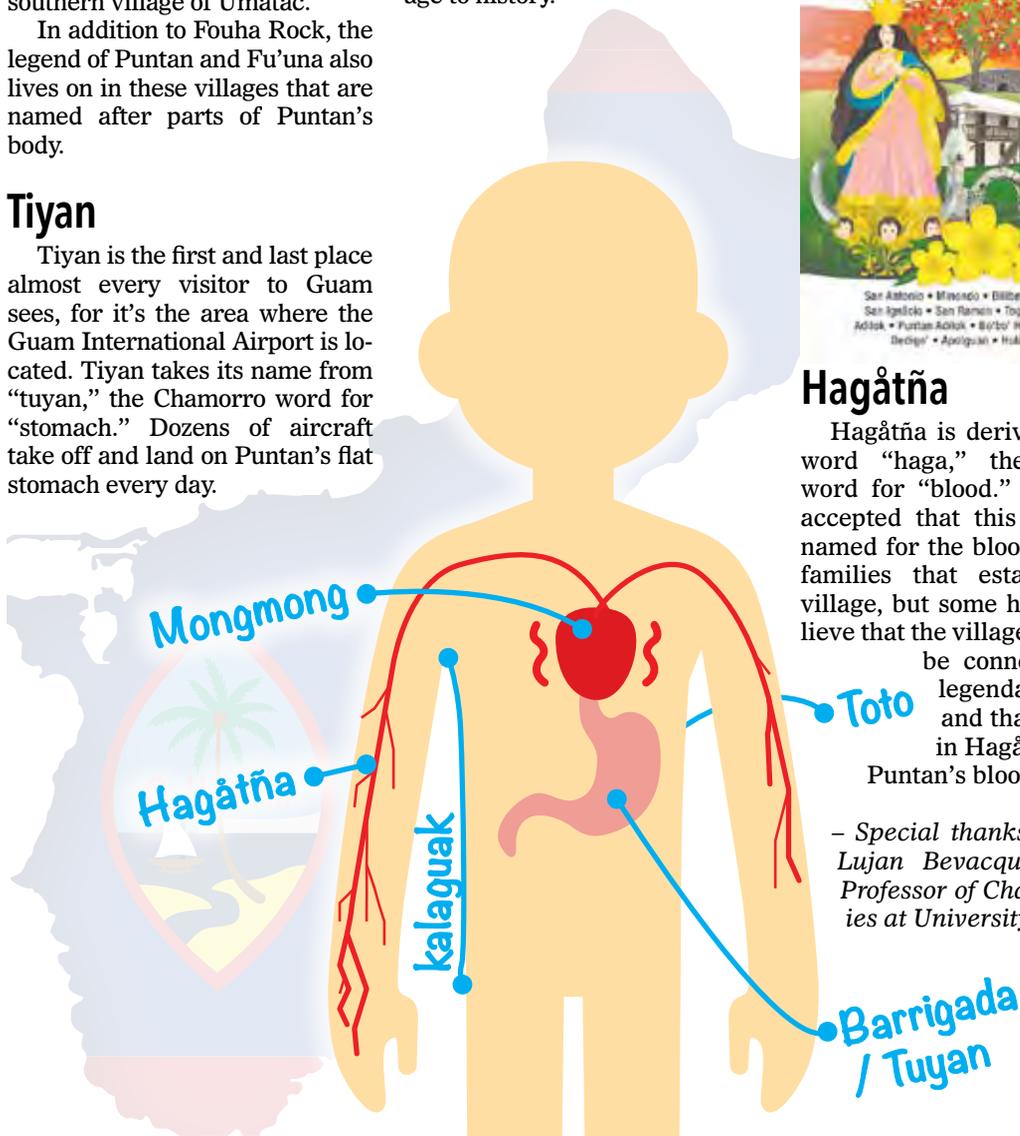
Nearby Barrigada, the three villages of Mongmong, Toto and Maite comprise one municipality. In Chamorro, to’to means “to lie down or to recline on your back,” so the village of Toto is thought to be Puntan’s back. And while Puntan’s back is in Toto, his heart is in Mongmong because “mongmong” is the Chamorro word that describes the sound of a beating heart.



Hagatña

Hagatña is derived from the word “haga,” the Chamorro word for “blood.” It is widely accepted that this village was named for the bloodlines of the families that established the village, but some historians believe that the village name could be connected to the legendary Puntan, and that the “haga” in Hagatña refers to Puntan’s blood.

– Special thanks to Michael Lujan Bevacqua, Assistant Professor of Chamorro Studies at University of Guam



Boonie Stomps Guam

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY GUAM BOONIE STOMPERS

Every Saturday, Guam Boonie Stompers offers public hikes to a variety of destinations such as beaches, snorkeling sites, waterfalls, mountains, caves, latte sites, and World War II sites. We meet at 9:00 AM in the Center Court of Chamorro Village in Hagatna. The cost is \$2.00 for hikers over 12. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. Hikers should provide their own transportation. Guam’s trails are not developed. Weather conditions can make the hikes more difficult than described. No reservations required.

For more information:
www.facebook.com/GuamBoonieStompersInc
 or call 787-4238.

Sinisa Falls

October 13 *Very Difficult*
Tak’hilo Falls *6 hours for 4 miles*

We hike to the tallest waterfall on Guam with excellent views along the way, then walk down a pristine jungle river in a steep walled gorge with 3 major waterfalls that allow jumping and swimming.
Bring: 4 quarts water, hiking shoes, gloves, sun screen, insect repellent, camera, lunch, and snacks.
Special conditions: Mosquitoes, very steep slopes up and down, walking in water, sword grass, and more mosquitoes.

October 20 *Very Difficult*
Sinisa Falls *5 hours for 6 miles*

We hike over the hills of central Guam to Tank Farm, then visit a secluded, beautiful 50 foot falls. We then hike along two rivers with many smaller waterfalls to end up at Lower Sigua Falls for jumping and swimming.
Bring: 4 quarts water, get wet shoes, swimsuit, gloves, sun screen, sunglasses, insect repellent, lunch, snacks, and camera.
Special conditions: Rope climbing, steep slopes, slippery mud, and walking in water.

Complete 10 Boonie Stomps to earn a Boonie Stomp T-Shirt!

Stomp Tip:
 1) Alcohol and hiking do not mix.
 2) Do not bring beverages with caffeine on hikes.
 3) Bring plenty of water with you on hikes.
 4) Do not hike alone and let someone know where you are going and your return time.
 5) Always carry a well stocked personal first aid kit.
 6) When hiking, lots of little snacks are better than one big meal

Guam Boonie Stompers is a non-profit Guam corporation composed of volunteer leaders committed to leading hikes to and protecting the unique destinations on our island.

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Capsule hotels (also called pod hotels) are very popular in Japan. You see them in most cities, and a lot of people really like them for overnight stays because they are relatively cheap (¥3000 – ¥4000). I'm cluster phobic and never really had any interest in staying in a tiny space only big enough for a bed. Also, I'm not really a fan of communal bathrooms. But I just couldn't leave Japan without experiencing it at least once. It'd be like visiting Japan and never eating sushi or ramen. So on a recent trip to Kyoto, I decided to try one out.

I did my research before selecting my capsule. I'm picky about hotels. I'm very particular about cleanliness, and I really like to make sure the location meets my travel goals. So I checked all the hotel travel sites (Hotels.com, Agoda, Kayak, Booking, Trivago, etc.), Trip Advisor and Google. I read reviews, mapped the locations, and looked into amenities for each capsule hotel available. After several hours, I decided on the First Cabin Capsule Hotel in Kawaramachi Sanjo.

Capsule Hotels vary. A lot. They're like hostels in that you share all facilities except the bed. However, the pod itself and types of common areas differ from hotel to hotel. Some are more like fabric-covered bunk beds while others are like stacked cubby holes with mattresses in them. The pods at First Cabin are not stacked, so you have more room than a lot of the other capsule hotels I saw online. The one I stayed in was as wide as a twin bed (the walls of the pod surrounded the mattress on all sides) and maybe six feet tall. I could sit up completely in my bed and even stand on the mattress with only having to duck just a tiny bit (I'm only 5'2"). The room also



includes a TV, temperature control, two plugs, and a secure compartment to store your valuables while you're out. The pod doesn't have a door, but it has a shade that slides all the way down for privacy. This hotel also offers mini-suites (they refer to them as first-class cabins), which are slightly bigger spaces that offer more than just a bed but don't have private bathrooms. All capsules provide guests with disposable slippers, pajamas, and a towel and washcloth.

The two major concerns I had about staying in this kind of hotel were safety and noise. Neither was an issue here. Rooms and floors are separated by gender for safety reasons at First Cabin. This isn't the case at all capsule hotels, though, so if it's something you're interested in, ask before booking. Japan is a relatively safe country, but I prefer staying in all-women dorms when traveling alone (as a

peace of mind thing). At this hotel, the sleeping areas are accessed with key cards so not just anyone can get to the pods. And it's a completely noise-free zone. Guests are not allowed to listen to music or watch television without headphones. They're not supposed to talk on the phone and, honestly, I didn't even hear travelers talk to each other in the capsule space.

The shared spaces at First Cabin exceeded ALL my expectations. The lobby features a few sofas, a big table for travelers to sit around and socialize, and a bar with a variety of beers and cocktails available for purchase. The hotel also hosts special events in the lobby on some nights that offer guests free food or drinks. The bathroom situation is also quite good. Each floor has sinks, toilets, and vanities, and there's a shower area for each gender on one of the floors. The spa (shower area) has several private shower rooms, one or two secluded bathtubs (complete with body wash, shampoo, and conditioner), and a few vanities stocked with everything you could need, to include curling irons, facial care products, and even toothbrushes. There are also irons, steamers, and humidifiers in the dormitories and a spot to store your luggage.

From what I saw, most capsule hotel guests only stay a night or two. I stayed for five, and felt completely at ease and comfortable. The small space didn't bother me at all. It felt way more private than I thought it would, the amenities were great, and the hotel staff was wonderful. I managed to get a business-class cabin for only \$20 per night; a terrific value! I can't imagine a better accommodation for the price. I would definitely try a capsule hotel again. I highly encourage you to try one too.

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- BUFFALO WINGS (5 pieces)
- FRIED CALAMARI

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G.A.I.N. Pet of the Week

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Call G.A.I.N. (Guam Animals In Need) Animal Shelter in Yigo at 653-4246 or visit <www.guamanimals.org> for more information on adopting this pet. G.A.I.N. is a shelter-based humane society with a mission to prevent cruelty to animals, educate the public and promote good animal laws. Under Water World will donate one adult admission for every Pet of the Week adopted.

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FAMOUS TOURIST DESTINATION HAS HAD MANY MOVIE 'ROLES'

BY ARMAND VAQUER, METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

Tokyo Tower has been featured in several kaiju films over the past 59 years, the first being in Mothra (1961). The Tower was also featured in King Kong Escapes (1967), in which the giant ape and Mechani-Kong do battle while climbing it.

The Tower was blasted in 1995 by Gamera in Gamera: The Guardian of the Universe, and it became a nest for Gyaos in the same film. It was briefly shown under repair in Gamera 2: Attack of Legion (1996) and was also blasted by Godzilla in Godzilla, Mothra & Mechagodzilla: Tokyo S.O.S. (2003). It appeared as a ruin in 2004's Godzilla: Final Wars, and can be seen in Gamera: The Invincible (1965).

Tokyo Tower was prominent in the 2005 Toho feature, Always: Sunset On Third Street 2, which included an imaginary scene of a CGI Godzilla blasting the structure with his atomic breath.

It is well-known that Tokyo Tower was modeled after the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Since 1958 it has been the world's tallest self-supporting iron tower, reaching 333 meters into the sky. The Eiffel Tower stands only 320 meters high. Tokyo Tower weighs 4000 tons, which is much

lighter than the 7000-ton Eiffel. Painted in white and orange to meet Japan's aviation safety regulations, it is easily spotted in the city skyline. Before Tokyo Sky Tree was built, Tokyo Tower broadcasted 14 signals for radio and television. It also has a lighting rod at the top.

Visitors can take an elevator to an observatory level which provides excellent views of the city. There's a gift shop on the observation level and more gift shops can be found on the ground floor.

The observation level has several telescopes available for use by visitors, who can ascend to the main observatory at 150 meters and the special observatory at 250 meters to get a bird's eye view of Tokyo. Under good weather conditions, Mt. Fuji can be seen in the distance.

An aquarium, restaurants and several more attractions can be found on the ground floors of the tower. Separate entrance fees apply. Admission to the Main Observation Level: Adults and high schoolers ¥900, Junior high and elementary students ¥500, children over 4 years ¥400.



Tokyo tower File photo

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The Weekly Crossword by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Choir attire
- 5 Sentry's stint
- 10 Senate staffer
- 14 Mountain goat
- 15 In the know
- 16 Enthusiasm
- 17 Horseback game
- 18 Archeologist's find
- 19 Major defeat
- 20 Rarely
- 22 Alienate
- 24 Potato, for one
- 26 Early settler
- 27 Like some DVDs
- 30 Arroz ___ pollo
- 31 Mend a hem
- 32 Piano technician
- 34 Commotion
- 38 Geometric measure
- 40 1970's AMC car
- 42 Remote control button
- 43 Linus' younger brother
- 45 "Dream ___" (Darin hit)
- 47 Kicks
- 48 Wine holder
- 50 Replant timber
- 52 Very disorderly
- 56 Fragrant bloom
- 57 One at the wheel
- 59 Rub the wrong way
- 62 Aquarium growth
- 63 Penniless
- 65 Work hard
- 66 Braid
- 67 "The Biggest ___"
- 68 Arsenal stash
- 69 Seafood selection
- 70 Melancholy verse
- 71 Hunt and peck

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
14				15					16				
17				18					19				
20				21		22			23				
		24			25		26						
27	28					29		30					
31				32			33		34		35	36	37
38			39		40			41		42			
43				44		45			46		47		
				48		49		50			51		
52	53	54				55		56					
57							58		59			60	61
62						63			64			65	
66						67					68		
69						70					71		

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DOWN

- 1 Saws with the grain
- 2 Wind instrument
- 3 Quasimodo's milieu
- 4 Genesis follower
- 5 Ready to play
- 6 Amazement
- 7 Canterbury story
- 8 Like new dollar bills
- 9 Frantically busy
- 10 Every year
- 11 One way to stand
- 12 Assess
- 13 Computer key
- 21 Newspaper bio
- 23 Gable or gambrel
- 25 Concerning the kidneys
- 27 Bygone autocrat
- 28 2002 film, "We ___ Soldiers"

- 29 Room scheme
- 33 Whoop it up
- 35 Monastery dining hall
- 36 Heavy burden
- 37 Litter member
- 39 Mechanize
- 41 Petroleum plant
- 44 Tavern snacks
- 46 Character
- 49 Light-footed
- 51 Drum sounds
- 52 Leather leggings
- 53 Conversation starter
- 54 Like pond scum
- 55 "Brady Bunch" mom
- 58 Cyrano's famous feature
- 60 Like some lettuce
- 61 "If all ___ fails..."
- 64 Beer barrel

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

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

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Stripes Sports Trivia

Ben Roethlisberger and Antonio Brown have led the potent Steelers offense for a while now. The two superstars are both near the top of their positions, and both are likely headed to the Hall of Fame. When it comes to their college days, the duo both played in the same non-power conference. Where did they go to school?

Answer

Miami of Ohio (Roethlisberger), Central Michigan (Brown)

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

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

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GUAM EDITION

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2018

Sobering salute

IAVA display seeks to call attention to suicides

Page 2



MEREDITH TIBBETTS/Stars and Stripes

Sandra Lee Altamirano, a major in the Army Reserve, places a flag on the National Mall as part of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America's effort to bring awareness to military and veteran suicides. A flag was planted for every veteran and servicemember who committed suicide in 2018 through Oct. 3 — 5,520.

VETERANS

IAVA highlights suicide crisis

By **NIKKI WENTLING**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Thousands of American flags filled a grassy expanse on the National Mall on the morning of Oct. 3, each of them representing a veteran or a servicemember who died by suicide in 2018.

Maj. Sandra Lee Altamirano, of the Army Reserve, said she took military leave to help place the 5,520 U.S. flags. She recently lost three friends to suicide, two of whom were veterans.

A couple of years ago, after serving three deployments in Iraq, she contemplated suicide herself.

“Each of these flags is a name, a person. Three of them are my friends, and one could’ve been me,” said Altamirano, now a suicide prevention liaison in the Reserve. “I hope this helps people see how vast of an issue this is. It’s overwhelming. It’s a crisis.”

The flags were placed on the Mall by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, an advocacy group trying to draw awareness to the issue of veteran suicide.

The scene grabbed the attention of tourists, who took photos of the small flags with the Washington Monument in the background.

A new report released recently by the Department of Veterans Affairs shows suicide among veterans and servicemembers

continues to be higher than in the rest of the U.S. population. Veterans accounted for 14 percent of all suicides in the United States in 2016, yet they make up 8 percent of the population.

The rate of suicide among young veterans substantially increased from 2015 to 2016. For every 100,000 veterans age 18 to 34, 45 committed suicide in 2016 — up from 40.4 for every 100,000 in 2015.

Rates have also increased among female veterans and some members of the National Guard and Reserve.

The release of the report coincided with a hearing of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. Several lawmakers questioned why there hasn’t been significant improvement, given that Congress has increased the amount of money that it allots for VA mental health programs.

“I’m beyond frustrated about the numbers and data,” said Keita Franklin, executive director of the VA’s suicide prevention program. “Having worked in this field as long as I have, it’s frustrating. When I try to think about what we’re missing ... we tend to do a lot of one thing at a time and do it very well, full throttle. Preventing suicide takes a bundle of 10 to 12 things done at full throttle, all the time.”

Of the approximately 20 veterans who commit suicide every day, 14 are not receiving health care from the VA. Part of the



MEREDITH TIBBETTS/Stars and Stripes

Stephanie Keegan plants some flags for IAVA on the National Mall. There was a flag for every military person and veteran who committed suicide in 2018 through Oct. 3.

VA’s effort is getting veterans to seek help.

Stephanie Keegan traveled from New York to help plant flags. Her son Daniel was a veteran of the war in Afghanistan who died of a drug overdose in 2016 while struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder. He had waited 16 months to get into a VA mental health program, Keegan said. He was supposed to be admitted Jan. 23. He died

Jan. 8.

Daniel Keegan had wanted to become involved in veterans advocacy. So now, Stephanie Keegan is dedicating her life to it. She has left her son’s photo in every House lawmaker’s office, met with VA secretaries and is involved with IAVA, in addition to other advocacy efforts.

“I get to do the work that he wanted to do, and I feel like he’s sitting on my shoulder all the

time,” Keegan said. “It’s been an opportunity to educate people on what a really struggling veteran looks like because he didn’t look like anything you would expect. He was healthy as could be, but he was catastrophically ill for the last two years of his life.”

To reach the Veterans Crisis Line, text 838255 or dial 1-800-273-8255 and press 1.

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Robotic wheelchair promises vets a better ride

By **WILL MORRIS**
Stars and Stripes

WIESBADEN, Germany — A new robotic wheelchair that shifts its shape and wheel configuration to match terrain could help restore independence for thousands of catastrophically disabled veterans.

The chair, being developed by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, was one of several new mobility technologies the scientists shared recently with medical professionals at Clay Kaserne’s mission command center.

“This type of wheelchair gives you independence, to reach something on a high shelf for example, and to keep the rider safe indoors and outdoors,” said Sivashankar Sivakanthan, a graduate researcher at Pitt. “The benefits add up very quickly.”

The Mobility Enhancement Robotic wheelchair, or MEBot, draws on new developments in robotics and pneumatics to enable



WILL MORRIS/Stars and Stripes

Sivashankar Sivakanthan demonstrates a MEBot on Oct. 3 in Wiesbaden, Germany.

wheels and other parts to change configuration with the flick of a switch.

The wheels, for example, can slide forward or backward to negotiate a curb that a normal elec-

tric wheelchair couldn’t handle. By tilting forward, backward and from side to side, the chair can prevent a rider from falling out of the chair.

The movements also make the chair less likely to topple over, which is the No. 1 reason people in wheelchairs go to the emergency room, said Rory Cooper, director of Pitt’s Human Engineering Research Laboratories.

Development of the chair is a joint project of the laboratory, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The projected cost of the chair — about \$30,000 — puts it on par with current electric wheelchairs, Cooper said. The MEBot is expected to be available for purchase in about five years, he said.

Also at Clay Kaserne on Oct. 1, the Pitt scientists demonstrated a wheelchair powered by compressed air. Besides the environmental advantages, the pneumatic chair can be driven in

swimming pools, giving disabled veterans greater access.

Another wheelchair they displayed is designed for racing. It uses hand cranks and woven composite graphite for areas that would normally succumb to the strains sustained during racing.

According to the Paralyzed Veterans of America, there are 100,000 veterans who suffer from spinal cord injury or disease.

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Correction

On Oct. 5, a story about a new fitness assessment for Air Force explosive ordnance technicians misspelled one of the test’s more grueling components, due to an Air Force error. The exercise is named the “Grusetter.”

PACIFIC

USS Wasp stops for a break in Singapore

By CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

The USS Wasp arrived in Singapore on Oct. 2, a week after its strike group of 2,200 sailors and Marines were denied a port visit to Hong Kong by Beijing.

The Sasebo, Japan-based Wasp — accompanied by the landing dock ship USS Ashland and members of the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit — have been patrolling the Western Pacific since early August.

The Wasp's commander, Capt.

Colby Howard, said the sailors and Marines were “very excited for some well-deserved time ashore after two very successful months” at sea, a Navy statement said.

Late last month, China turned down a U.S. request for the group to stop in Hong Kong in October. The denial came a day after 10 percent tariffs on \$200 billion of annual Chinese imports went into effect.

The U.S. also had recently issued sanctions on China after discovering the country had

bought fighter jets from Russia and a surface-to-air missile system, and in May disinvented China from its large-scale multinational Rim of the Pacific exercise.

The Wasp strike group recently conducted a drill focused on defending its ships in the South China Sea, where on Sunday a Chinese destroyer veered within 45 yards of the USS Decatur in “an unsafe and unprofessional maneuver” in the Spratly Islands, the Navy said.

The Navy regularly sends its ships on patrols through the

South and East China seas to maintain freedom of navigation through the international waters that China attempts to claim.

The country is militarizing reclaimed land in the seas and regularly disputes the sovereignty of islands in the region.

The strike group's patrol has also included disaster relief operations. After Typhoon Mangkhut struck the Northern Marianas on Sept. 10, its ships positioned themselves behind the then-Catagory 2 storm and had aircraft in the air by sunrise the next day,

said Task Force 76 commander Rear Adm. Brad Cooper.

“Within hours, we had Marines and sailors on ground assessing damage and preparing for recovery,” he told Stars and Stripes via telephone from the Wasp on Sept. 13.

Mangkhut later plowed into Hong Kong, becoming the most powerful storm to hit the city since 1979, according to the Hong Kong Observatory.

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SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Air Force Maj. Buckley Kozlowski, commander of Detachment 1, 353rd Special Operations Group, speaks to reporters about the CV-22 Osprey at Yokota Air Base, Japan, on Wednesday.

Japanese press get their first glimpse of Ospreys

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Japanese reporters got a close-up look at one of five Air Force CV-22 Ospreys at the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo on Oct. 3.

The journalists were allowed to take photos and video and clamber inside the tilt-rotor aircraft in a hangar before a short question-and-answer session with Air Force Maj. Buckley Kozlowski, commander of Detachment 1, 353rd Special Operations Group.

The locals wanted to know technical details about the CV-22s, which arrived at Yokota in the spring but departed for training outside Japan over the summer and officially began their tenure at the base Oct. 1.

There have been regular protests near the base this year by activists concerned about noise and safety issues that may be associated with the helicopter-plane hybrids. In February, the commander of one of Okinawa's two Marine Corps Osprey squadrons was fired, about six months after a crash off Australia's eastern coast killed three Marines.

Kozlowski told the reporters that the CV-22 is an “extremely safe aircraft.” The

airmen who fly and maintain it are skilled at accomplishing missions while keeping safety a priority, he said.

“Yokota is the primary Western Pacific airlift hub for peacetime and contingency operations,” he said. “Forward-basing the CV-22 at Yokota Air Base provides increased capability for the defense of Japan as well as capability for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.”

Members of the unit were happy to see long lines of locals lining up to see and learn about the aircraft during Yokota's recent Japanese-American Friendship Festival, Kozlowski said. Reporters wanted to know about the unit operating the CV-22s and what sort of activities they'd be involved in. Officials didn't provide detailed information about plans for the Ospreys.

“All of our tactical training is conducted at approved locations coordinated between the U.S. government and the government of Japan,” Kozlowski said. “The training we conduct is done with an eye towards maximizing safety.”

Ten CV-22s will eventually be assigned to Yokota. The timeline for that to happen will be coordinated between the U.S. and Japanese governments, he added.

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USS Blue Ridge returns to sea after 2 years of maintenance

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — One of the most prominent berths at Yokosuka was unusually bare on the morning of Oct. 3, causing passersby to stop along the sidewalk and take photos of the pier.

The USS Blue Ridge returned to sea Oct. 2 after two years of maintenance, upgrades and repairs, said 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley, leaving empty its berth near a major base intersection where its sat since leaving dry dock in January.

“While at sea, the crew and embarked 7th Fleet staff are exercising the ship's primary mission to command and control 7th Fleet,” Keiley said.

Commissioned in 1970, the Blue Ridge is the Navy's oldest operational ship. It was scheduled in June 2016 to undergo 14 months of maintenance, repairs, refurbishments and system upgrades, but unexpected issues arose with its engineering plant, causing it to be kept in dry dock past the scheduled completion date of August 2017.

The repairs cost more than \$60 million and took about 135,000 man-hours to complete, the Navy previously said. Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. William Moran told Stars and Stripes last month that having the Blue Ridge back to sea would be worth the effort and expense.

“We have invested a lot of money into keeping that ship relevant for what that

ship is made for, which is a command ship for the 7th Fleet commander,” he said. “It's an old ship, but she's got all the modern capabilities and then some, which says a lot about our commitment.”

Seventh Fleet staff moved back onto their flagship this past summer from temporary on-base offices used since 2016 when maintenance on the vessel began.

The ship's boilers were re-lit in June.

In combat, the Blue Ridge would be used as a central planning vessel. During peacetime, bringing the flagship and the 7th Fleet's leadership on port visits sends a strong message to allies.

Keiley said this concept is unique in that it “is the only fleet that brings the staff out to sea to operate this way” for long lengths of time.

The 6th Fleet uses its USS Mount Whitney command ship in a similar manner, but for shorter periods, Keiley said.

After touring the Blue Ridge last month, Moran told Stars and Stripes the specially designed ship serves an important purpose.

“If we have to fight out here, you're going to want to be mobile; you're going to want to be out where the action is and be able to communicate intent by the fleet commander,” he said. “And that ship is custom made for that purpose.”

It is unclear when the Blue Ridge will return to Yokosuka, since the Navy does not discuss ship movements.

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ADAM THOMAS/Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

The USS Blue Ridge is back at sea after two years of repairs and maintenance.

PACIFIC

S. Korea marks 70th Armed Forces Day

By **MARCUS FICHTL**
Stars and Stripes

PYEONGTAEK, South Korea — The South Korean military traded ballistic missiles for glowsticks and peace talk as K-pop stars helped celebrate the country's 70th Armed Forces Day.

A ceremony Oct. 1 at the Korean War Memorial just south of the U.S. military's Yongsan Garrison in Seoul marked the anniversary of South Korean forces crossing the 38th parallel during the 1950-53 conflict.

The event stood in stark contrast to last year's ceremony, during which South Korean leaders spoke of nuclear deterrence and unveiled the Hyunmoo-2C — a ballistic missile with the range to hit anything in North Korea.

"Today, I am overwhelmed with excitement as I am able to discuss an era of peace," South Korean President Moon Jae-in said at the ceremony, according to a translation of his remarks.

"Now is the time for our military to stand at the forefront of peace on the Korean Peninsula," he added. "Peace through strength is the mission of our armed forces."

The upbeat words reflected warming ties that saw some mines removed from the Demilitarized Zone this week and U.S. President Donald Trump stating that he and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "fell in love" over "beautiful letters" after their historic June summit in Singapore. The two Korean leaders have met three times this year, including last month in Pyongyang.

Video screens at the ceremony showed South Korea's recently acquired F-35A Lightning II stealth jets and new attack submarines in action; however, actual military hardware was left back at base.

As the night progressed, a military parade transformed into a concert that included video shout-outs from Korean celebrities and U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris. Even a taekwondo demonstration included more dancing than block-busting.

A pair of K-Pop stars performing mandatory military service starred in the festivities. Ok Taec-yeon, of the boy band 2PM, was part of video game-like demonstration of tactical gear while Im Si-wan, of ZE:A, served as master of ceremonies.

Finally, South Korean singer Psy belted out his 2012 megahit "Gangnam Style"



Courtesy of Ministry of National Defense Republic of Korea

Psy sings his 2012 megahit "Gangnam Style" during the 70th Armed Forces Day in Seoul, South Korea.

backed by dancers while hundreds of uniformed South Korean troops partied around him with glowsticks.

The South Korean military stands at about 600,000 servicemembers strong,

while the U.S. presence on the peninsula is at about 28,500.

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Osprey presence in Hawaii beefed up

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Marine Corps continues to extend its reach in the Pacific with the recent relocation of an MV-22 Osprey squadron to Hawaii and a 6,100-mile trans-Pacific flight by eight of the tilt-rotor aircraft.

Aviators with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 268 completed a three-day flight from Darwin, Australia, to Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii recently.

VMM-268 completed a similar journey for the first time last year while flying only four Ospreys.

By tilting their rotors, Ospreys can take off, fly and land as helicopters, but they can also be flown at high speeds as fixed-wing aircraft.

"We were traveling at fixed-wing top rotor airspeeds," said Lt. Col. Richard Alvarez, commander of VMM-268. He piloted one of the Ospreys from Darwin, where they had been deployed for training since April, along with about 1,600 Marines.

That was an average speed of about 288 mph.

The flight was done in three legs: Darwin to Guam, then to



MATTHEW KIRK/Courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps

An MV-22 Osprey with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 268 stands on the flight line at Marine Corps Base Hawaii after completing a trans-Pacific flight from Darwin, Australia.

Wake Island, then to Hawaii. Each leg took five to eight hours, Alvarez said.

In two legs, the Ospreys flew in smaller divisions of four that are more maneuverable, particularly when aerial C-130 tankers are used for refueling, as was the case in this trans-Pacific flight, he said. In another leg, the eight aircraft flew as one division.

Each Osprey has the capacity to carry 25 Marines, but only the flight crews were aboard the eight aircraft, which had arrived in Darwin aboard a Navy ship.

Alvarez described the trans-Pacific flight as further confirmation that the Marine Corps has "the ability to self-deploy in MV-22s anywhere in the world we need to go."

There are now more Ospreys deployable from Hawaii.

On Sept. 21, the Marines held a ceremony dedicating the relocation of Marine Medium Tiltro-

tor Squadron 363 to Marine Corps Base Hawaii, as well as the squadron's new hangar built at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay.

VMM-363, dubbed The Lucky Red Lions, had been based out of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego under Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Air Wing.

"The arrival of a second MV-22B Osprey squadron to our Hawaii-based Marine Aircraft Group significantly increases our combat capability and allows us to better respond to crises throughout the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility," Col. Stephen Lightfoot, commander of Marine Aircraft Group 24, said in a statement.

The move to Hawaii brings the Osprey squadron about 2,500 miles closer to the Western Pacific.

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Judge denies a US motion to dismiss Guam dump lawsuit

By **CAITLIN DOORNBOS**
Stars and Stripes

A federal judge has denied the United States' attempt to dismiss a Guam lawsuit against the Navy seeking payment for the service's share of the costs to clean a dump it gave to the Guamanian government.

Judge Ketanji Jackson, of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, rejected the U.S. government's motion to dismiss the suit on grounds that Guam exceeded the statute of limitations under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, according to court documents.

In the lawsuit, Guam is claiming the U.S. should contribute funds for the cleanup of Ordot Dump, which was under the supervision of the federal government and Navy for more than three decades before being handed over to Guam in the 1970s.

The previously unlined and uncapped landfill leaked into the Lonfit River and two of its tributaries, according to a 2002 complaint from when the U.S. sued Guam under the Clean Water Act to have it cleaned.

Guam ultimately closed the dump and cleanup began in 2013 with the U.S. territory paying to

"We are now able to continue our environmental law suit against the federal government to recover costs Guam incurred to close Ordot Dump."

Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson
Guam Attorney General

fix the environmental damage, "which included capping the landfill, installing stormwater management ponds, discharge water storage tanks and a sewer line," Stars and Stripes reported in March 2017.

Guam Attorney General Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson called the denial of the motion to dismiss "a significant win for Guam" in a statement from her office.

"We are now able to continue our environmental law suit against the federal government to recover costs Guam incurred to close Ordot Dump," she said. "We have spent over \$200 million to date, with millions more expected based on the receiver's recent report to the court that Guam needs to borrow \$23 million more."

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MILITARY

USAF offers fast track to U-2 piloting

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

The obstacles to soaring 70,000 feet above the Earth are about to shrink for future U.S. Air Force pilots.

The Air Force is launching an experimental program to put pilots into the cockpit of the legendary U-2 spy plane faster and earlier in their careers. The move is in line with a service effort to increase pilot production in all airframes.

The change means that beginning this fall, students in undergraduate pilot training may select the U-2 on their “dream sheets,” just as they would for any other plane, Air Force officials at Beale Air Force Base, Calif., said recently.

Currently, U-2 pilots spend a minimum of six years in other aircraft before applying for the U-2 program, the Air Force said. They come from every military flying background — fighters, bombers, tankers,

transports and trainers — as well as from the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard.

The field is competitive and demanding. U-2 pilots fly solo for up to nine hours, reaching altitudes above 70,000 feet.

Prospective pilots can apply for the U-2 First Assignment Companion Trainer, or FACT, program.

“The well-established path to the U-2 has proven effective for over 60 years,” Lt. Col. Carl Maymi, commander of the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron at Beale, said in a statement. “However, we need access to young, talented officers earlier in their careers. I believe we can do this while still maintaining the integrity of our selection process through the U-2 FACT program.”

The effort to accelerate the U-2 pipeline comes as the Air Force grapples with a shortage of about 2,000 pilots across the service.

Leaders are looking at ways to increase the number of pilot production in all airframes by about 200 a year. The Air

Force will initially select only two U-2 pilot candidates for the program. Every undergraduate pilot training student from Air Education and Training Command’s flying training locations is eligible during the designated assignment window, according to the Air Force.

The first candidate will be selected this fall; the next one will be chosen about six months later.

Each selectee will attend T-38 pilot instructor training at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, before moving to Beale for an assignment as a T-38 instructor pilot for the U-2 Companion Trainer Program.

After gaining experience, the pilot will perform the standard two-week U-2 interview process and, if hired, begin basic qualification training.

Depending on how the two student pilots fare, the Air Force will decide whether to continue with the experimental U-2 pilot pipeline, service officials said in a

statement.

Also known as the Dragon Lady, the U-2 has been flying for more than 60 years. The high-altitude reconnaissance plane was designed during the early days of the Cold War to spy on the Soviet Union. The plane has since been adapted to perform various military and civilian roles, equally adept at tracking terrorists in Afghanistan and the migration of spruce bark beetles in Alaska’s forests, NASA said in a 2015 report on the aircraft.

The Air Force seems to have abandoned plans for now to mothball the venerable spy plane. Once slated for a 2015 retirement, the U-2 has stuck around amid growing demands for surveillance capabilities and rising costs of the Global Hawk, once billed as the U-2’s replacement.

Pentagon leaders said last year they planned to keep the U-2 well into the future.

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ANTHONY FLYNN/Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

A sailor stands on the flight deck during flight operations aboard the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman in the North Atlantic on Sept. 18.

Carrier group conducts rare North Sea patrol

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The USS Harry S. Truman Strike Group was conducting maneuvers Oct. 2 in the North Sea, a rare deployment in northern European waters as the Navy tests its ability to deploy on short notice and keep quiet about it.

Rear Adm. Gene Black, commander of the Truman strike group, said the Navy’s new “dynamic force employment” model, which is designed to make deployments more unpredictable for adversaries, has also introduced new challenges for sailors.

While those problems are not “insurmountable by any stretch, one of them is retraining and I guess re-embracing operational security to a much higher degree than previously,” Black said in a phone interview with reporters.

In the past, the Navy was more open about carrier group deployments, but a new defense strategy requires more secrecy to maintain an element of operational surprise, Black said.

The varying deployment times also presents challenges to families, who have for years scheduled their activities around

sailors getting underway for between six and eight months at a time. Those periods were generally followed by maintenance and several months ashore, barring an unexpected mission.

Earlier this year, the Navy formally introduced its new deployment strategy for its carrier groups, which came in response to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and his emphasis on building a more nimble force. The idea centers on being “strategically predictable and operationally unpredictable,” Black said.

It also means fewer announcements about the comings and goings of carriers as they maneuver from one area of operation to another.

“We’ve pretty much shattered that model,” Black said.

The Truman has been at sea since late August, deploying from its homeport in Norfolk, Va., just 38 days after its previous deployment.

The Truman strike group deployed on April 11 to the Mediterranean and north Atlantic and returned to Norfolk on July 21 for routine maintenance and training.

The Truman’s current deploy-

ment has included patrols in the waters off Iceland and now the North Sea.

“We’ve made the most of operating in an area where American aircraft carriers don’t typically frequent,” Black said.

The mission comes as U.S. European Command has sought to increase the combat readiness of forces because of concerns about a more aggressive Russia. In recent years, there have been numerous close encounters between U.S. and Russian ships and aircraft. The U.S. has repeatedly criticized unsafe Russian maneuvers and the buzzing of U.S. Navy ships.

Black said the Truman strike group has had no encounters with Russian ships during its current deployment.

Operating in northern European waters, the Truman has navigated through rough weather, but the ships are sailing well, Black said.

“We also have shown we can operate in fairly heavy seas and we are gaining confidence in that every day,” Black said.

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VA releases hospital performance ratings

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs released the newest performance ratings Oct. 3 for each of its 146 hospitals, citing improvements in the past year at some of its lowest-performing facilities.

The fiscal 2018 ratings include nine one-star hospitals, the lowest possible, down from 14 hospitals that received one-star ratings in 2017.

The ratings indicate each hospital’s quality of care and are based on data such as death rates, patient satisfaction and efficiency. In years past, the VA had withheld the data from the public. In 2016, the performance ratings were released under pressure that followed a USA Today investigation.

Overall, 38 hospitals improved their star ratings in 2018, 40 dropped in the ratings and 68 stayed the same as last year.

Five VA hospitals received one-star ratings in 2017 and 2018: Big Springs and El Paso, Texas; Loma Linda, Calif.; Memphis; and Phoenix. Four other hospitals were added to the worst-rated this year: Montgomery, Ala.; Tucson, Ariz.; Washington, D.C.; and Atlanta.

VA hospitals in Dublin, Ga.; Fresno, Calif.; Roseburg and White City, Ore.; Walla Walla, Wash.; Harlingen, Texas; Nashville and Murfreesboro, Tenn.; and Biloxi, Miss., improved enough from 2017 to get off the list of lowest-rated hospitals.

Eighteen hospitals received 5 stars in 2018, the best possible. Four of them are located in Pennsylvania.

“With closer monitoring and increased medical center leadership and support we have seen

Highest-rated VA medical centers

Asheville, N.C.
Bath, N.Y.
Bedford, Mass.
Butler, Pa.
Cincinnati
Cleveland
Coatesville, Pa.
West Haven, Conn.
Erie, Pa.
Hot Springs, S.D.
Iron Mountain, Mich.
Lebanon, Pa.
Madison, Wis.
Northampton, Mass.
Saginaw, Mich.
Salem, Va.
St. Cloud, Minn.
Togus, Maine

Lowest-rated VA medical centers

Atlanta
Big Spring, Texas
El Paso, Texas
Loma Linda, Calif.
Memphis
Montgomery, Ala.
Phoenix
Tucson, Ariz.
Washington, D.C.

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

solid improvements at most of our facilities,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement. “There’s no doubt that there’s still plenty of work to do, but I’m proud of our employees, who work tirelessly to move VA in the right direction for veterans and taxpayers.”

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MILITARY

Former Green Beret awarded Medal of Honor

Medic honored for life-saving action in Afghanistan fight

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Dillon Behr never understood how he and Ron Shurer received the same valor award for their actions in the midst of a savage, six-hour firefight in which their Green Beret unit was nearly overrun in the jagged, icy cliffs of eastern Afghanistan.

The entire 12-man force from Operational Detachment-Alpha 3336 had fought valiantly April 6, 2008, on that Nuristan province mountain where they'd been sent to kill or capture a high-value leader of the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin insurgent group, Behr said recently. But Shurer not only single-handedly kept Behr alive after he was shot through the hip early in the fight known now as the Battle of Shok Valley, but he also ultimately was responsible for ensuring all of the American troops on that mountain made it out alive.

"Without Ron Shurer at my side, I would have died that day. No question," Behr said. "His presence gave me the confidence to know I could make it. There's a good chance if he would have been critically injured or killed on the battlefield ... we all might have died out there."

Months after the battle, 10 soldiers who fought that day were awarded the Silver Star, the nation's third-highest honor for valor, representing the most such battlefield awards earned in a single engagement since the Vietnam War. On Oct. 1, Shurer's Silver Star was upgraded to the Medal of Honor when President Donald Trump presented the nation's highest military honor to the former Green Beret during a ceremony at the White House.

Trump smiled widely as he presented the award to Shurer, tapping the former Green Beret on the shoulder of his dress blue Army Service Uniform.

Behr and eight other members of Shurer's unit who fought in the battle with him attended the ceremony, as well as two Afghans who fought by their side. The upgraded award felt right, Behr said.

"Knowing that he was awarded the Silver Star, the same award that I got, it didn't really seem fair," Behr said the day before the ceremony. "So, to see him elevated and given the nation's highest honor — there's nobody else that could deserve it any more, and I'm extremely proud to know him."

For Shurer, 37, who has worked as a Secret Service agent since he left the Army in 2011, the upgraded award was unexpected and the result of a Pentagon review that began in 2016 of high-level, post-9/11 combat awards.

On Sept. 4, Shurer was summoned to the West Wing. There, the president told the soldier that he would receive the Medal of



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL S. DARNELL/Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump presents former Army Staff Sgt. Ronald J. Shurer II the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony Oct. 1.

Honor, Trump said during the ceremony.

"It was a moment I will never forget," Trump said in the East Room of the White House before a standing-room-only audience of senior military leaders, Secret Service agents and Shurer's family and friends. "It's a great story ... for Ron, a good man."

Before his meeting with Trump, Shurer said he was not aware his Silver Star was under consideration for an upgrade.

"Since we got the word, I've felt every emotion — pride, humbled, a little embarrassed," he said. There's "so much to try and process and take in. It's definitely something you grow up hearing about, but never would have considered myself in that conversation."

Ultimately, Shurer said, the award is about recognizing the other men who fought alongside him on that mountain a decade ago.

"I want to dedicate this to the other men in ODA 3336," he said just after he was presented the award. "Without them, this Medal of Honor really never would have been possible. It was truly a team effort."

'Utter chaos'

The Green Berets and some 100 Afghan commandos sent on that mission could sense something was amiss not long after their arrival. The unit was forced to drop about 10 feet from the hovering helicopters, which could not find a place to land, and needed to scale a nearly vertical, 100-foot cliff to reach the compound where their target was expected to be, according to soldiers who served on that mission.

Behr said he felt a sense of "eeriness" immediately.

Then the battle erupted — heavy fire from rifles and machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades rained down onto them from some 200 to 300 enemy fighters in positions overhead.

"It was just an onslaught of fire



Soldiers who fought in the Battle of Shok Valley in Afghanistan on April 6, 2008, stand as their names are called during a ceremony presenting the Medal of Honor to Shurer.

and explosions for a very long time," said Behr, who was then a sergeant first class and the unit's communications specialist. "Utter chaos."

The operation's ground commander, Lt. Col. Kyle Walton, then a captain, split the team into several assault elements, leading the way up the cliff with Behr and several others. Below the cliff, some of the Afghan commandos were wounded. Shurer, the only medic on the operation, began tending to them.

"Blood all over the place," Trump said, describing the details of the battle. "It was a tough, tough situation to be in."

Before long, Walton recalled, the situation for him and the others atop the cliff became untenable.

With his team outmanned, outgunned and taking casualties, Walton was forced to call Shurer to his position.

"When I called for Ron, there was a silence over the radio for a few seconds, because everyone realized what that meant — that it was bad," Walton said. "He had to climb a mountain under fire with a couple other guys on the team. When he showed up, nearly everybody was wounded. We were under direct fire. We were pinned down with nearly nowhere to go except down that 100-foot cliff"

The unit's Afghan interpreter, who they knew by the nickname

C.K., was mortally wounded.

Behr was down, and even after Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons and A-10 Thunderbolt IIs arrived to help, soldiers kept getting hit with the mix of enemy fire and shrapnel from the "danger close" strikes, bombs that were called in close to their own position.

Shurer went to work on Behr, calmly reassuring his friend he would make it.

He checked the others' injuries. C.K. was not going to make it; the others had a chance to live if they could be evacuated. But Behr was in the worst shape, with the gnarled hip injury and another wound to his arm, Shurer recalled.

"Constantly bleeding," the former medic said. "I got to the point where ... I just resorted to using my fingers to kind of shove [a clotting agent] in and then bandaged him up as tight as I could."

Shurer was hit twice — once in his helmet, leaving him momentarily stunned, and then again in his arm. He kept working.

Behr, in a morphine stupor, believed he would die. He said a prayer.

Then "Ron slapped me across the face and said, 'Wake up. You're not going to die today,'" he recounted. "I knew at that point I was going to make it."

'Calm, collected, cool'

After hours of fighting, the unit was still not in the clear.

Walton feared his force was on the verge of being overrun.

With the insurgents nearing his position, Walton reached for a grenade and called in a massive "danger close" strike, expecting it could take his entire team out.

They were "all prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice," he said.

The bomb dropped. And then he saw the image he would forever remember from that fight — Shurer's body draped over the injured men he'd been working on through the fight.

"In that moment, the strike that we had called in on our own position detonated just above us and blocked out the sun. As the dust settled, Ron Shurer was the first thing that I saw on top of his wounded teammates, protecting them even to the end when we had all fully accepted the fact that we were going to go down fighting," the officer said. "Ron Shurer was still thinking of others."

The bomb blast gave the team enough cover to remove the wounded.

Shurer strung together nylon tubular webbing to form a makeshift sling to lower Behr and the others off the cliff to get them to the incoming helicopters. They would survive.

Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Williams, another Green Beret who served on that mission, credited Shurer's sure-handedness with allowing the unit to survive the battle — one of the worst Green Berets have faced in recent years, he said.

"His ability to manage an unmanageable situation and remain calm, collected and cool — always was that guy, hanging out or training or whatever," said Williams, who is still with 3rd Special Forces Group. "It really came to light during the worst possible time and that is the reason we were all able to make it away from that position alive and as a team."

Shurer said that his fellow soldiers' appreciation of his actions that day means more to him than receiving the Medal of Honor.

"That means so much more," he said. "I know these guys' wives, their kids. Just knowing that — it's very humbling for them to say [he saved their lives]. Luckily, it all kind of worked for me to help those guys."

Shurer, who last year was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer, hopes his award can draw some attention to the sacrifice Green Berets have made through the years and continue to make today in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and in countries across Africa.

"Hopefully, [it will] remind the American public about all the servicemembers we still have out there, still doing the missions today, just quietly going about their jobs, you know, not asking for recognition," he said. "Whatever little voice I get, I hope to just be able to direct attention that way."

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MILITARY

Poll: Many see US failure in Afghanistan

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Nearly half of Americans think the U.S. has failed to achieve most of its goals in Afghanistan, 17 years after the start of what has become the nation's longest war, according to a new poll.

Forty-nine percent of Americans say the U.S. has failed in its goals, while 35 percent say it has mostly succeeded, Pew Research Center said in a survey released Oct. 5. Sixteen percent responded that they didn't know whether it was successful or not.

The judgment of the war follows Pew surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015, which also reported predominately negative views.

In 2015, 56 percent described the war as "mostly a failure."

The latest Pew poll, which surveyed 1,745 people, was conducted from Sept. 18-24. There was a margin of error of 2.7 percent.

A major difference between this poll and the earlier ones is that Republicans and Democrats have flipped in their respective outlooks. During the Obama administration, Democrats were more likely to look favorably on progress being made in Afghanistan. Now, Republicans are more optimistic, with 48 percent saying the U.S. has succeeded in Afghanistan compared with 28 percent of Democrats and left-leaning independents.

Overall, however, the Pew survey found little sign of optimism over a conflict frequently referred to among veterans as the "Forever War."

While the decision to use military force in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban — a response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 — was regarded by most Americans as the right move at the time, people increasingly see the decision to intervene



Soldiers hustle from the belly of a Chinook helicopter during a 2007 air assault in Afghanistan.

Stars and Stripes

as having been a mistake.

"As the initial decision to use military force in Afghanistan grows more distant, public opinion has become more divided on whether it was the right decision or wrong decision," Pew said.

In early 2002, support for the war was at 83 percent, and by 2006, 69 percent still said the military campaign was the right decision.

Now, just 45 percent of those polled say the U.S. made the right decision in using military force, and 39 percent say it was the wrong decision. In early 2002, support was at 83 percent, and by 2006, 69 percent still said the military campaign was the right decision.

Despite the steady erosion of public support, the war in Afghanistan garners little active public opposition. And in Washing-

ton, legislators rarely debate the merits of the war.

A new White House counterterrorism strategy, a 34-page document released Oct. 4, does not even mention Afghanistan, though the U.S. is described as a nation at war facing "radical Islamist terrorist groups."

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This Navy image obtained by naval website gCaptain.com shows a confrontation between the USS Decatur, left, and a Chinese destroyer in the South China Sea on Sept. 30.

Close encounter between ships is shown in photos

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Photos of an encounter between a Navy guided-missile destroyer and Chinese warship shed light on just how close the ships came to colliding Sunday in the South China Sea.

Naval website gCaptain.com published a series of photos Oct. 2 showing the USS Decatur and the People's Republic of China destroyer Luyang passing each other during the confrontation. The Chinese ship appears to veer close to the Decatur before the U.S. ship pulls away to avoid a collision.

A Navy official confirmed to Stars and Stripes on Oct. 3 that the photos are legitimate, but said it is unknown how the website got access to the images, which were not publicly released.

The incident happened about 8:30 a.m. Sept. 30 when the Luyang sailed within 45 yards of the Decatur in "an unsafe and unprofessional maneuver," the Navy said. It happened in the South China Sea near the Spratly

Islands, which are a source of contention in the region as China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines each claim land masses in the area and dispute their sovereignty.

The Decatur was conducting a routine patrol of the region at the time — something the Navy regularly does to ensure freedom of navigation through the contested international waters.

Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gorman, a spokesman for U.S. Pacific Fleet, said in a statement earlier this week that "the PRC destroyer conducted a series of increasingly aggressive maneuvers accompanied by warnings for [the] Decatur to depart the area" during the encounter.

"The PRC destroyer approached within 45 yards of [the] Decatur's bow, after which [the] Decatur maneuvered to prevent a collision," he said in the statement.

The Navy is now determining whether it will officially release the images to the public.

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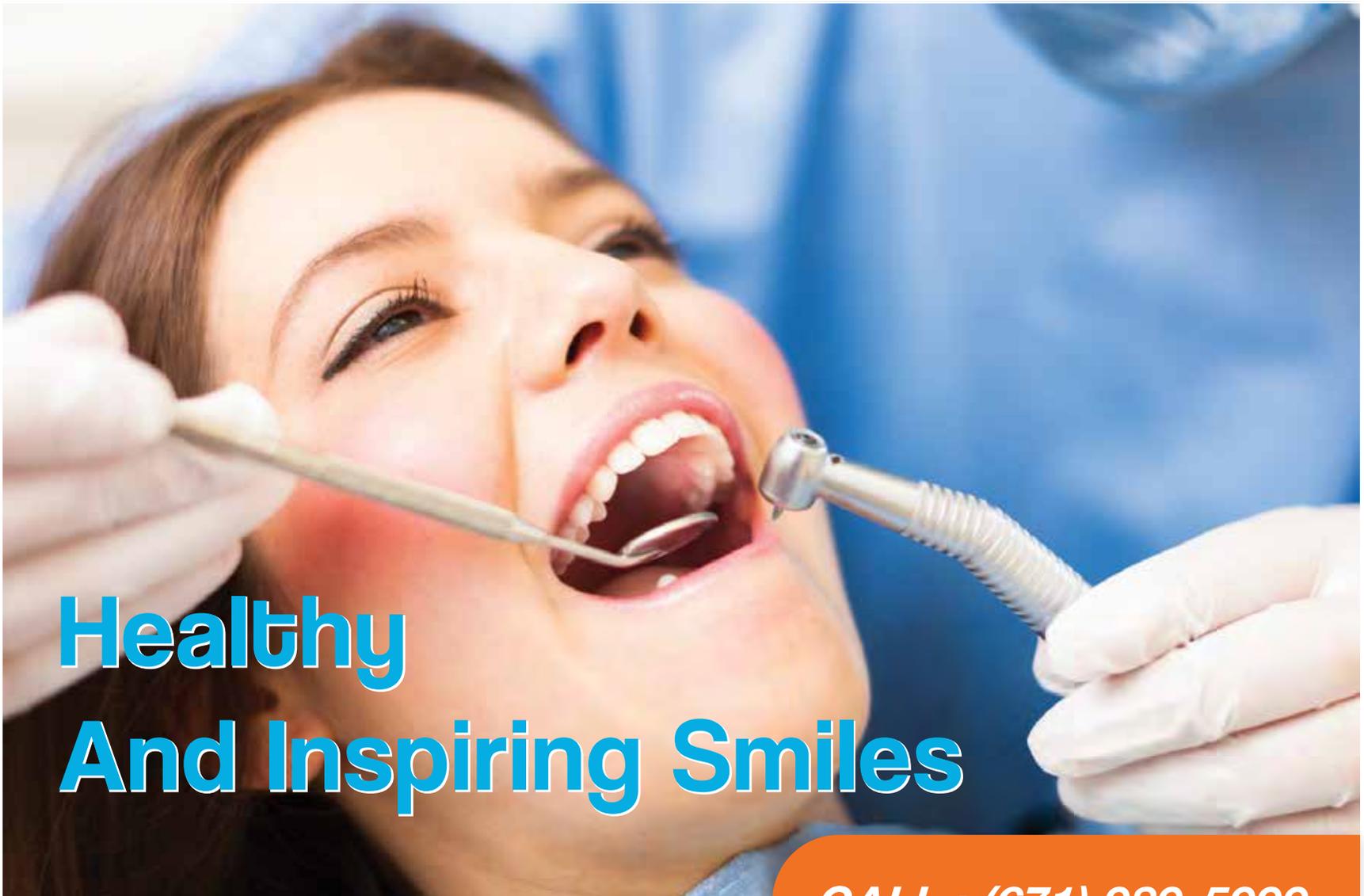
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