

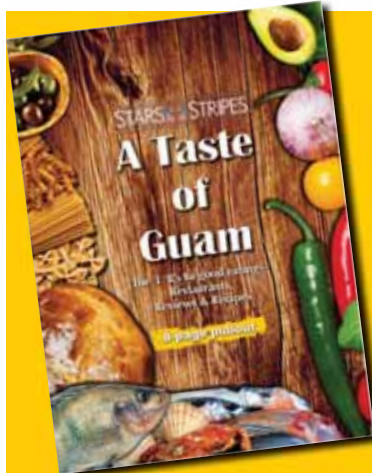


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INSIDE INFO



**FAMILY SAYS GOODBYE
TO WWII UNCLE THEY
NEVER KNEW**
PAGES 5 & 10



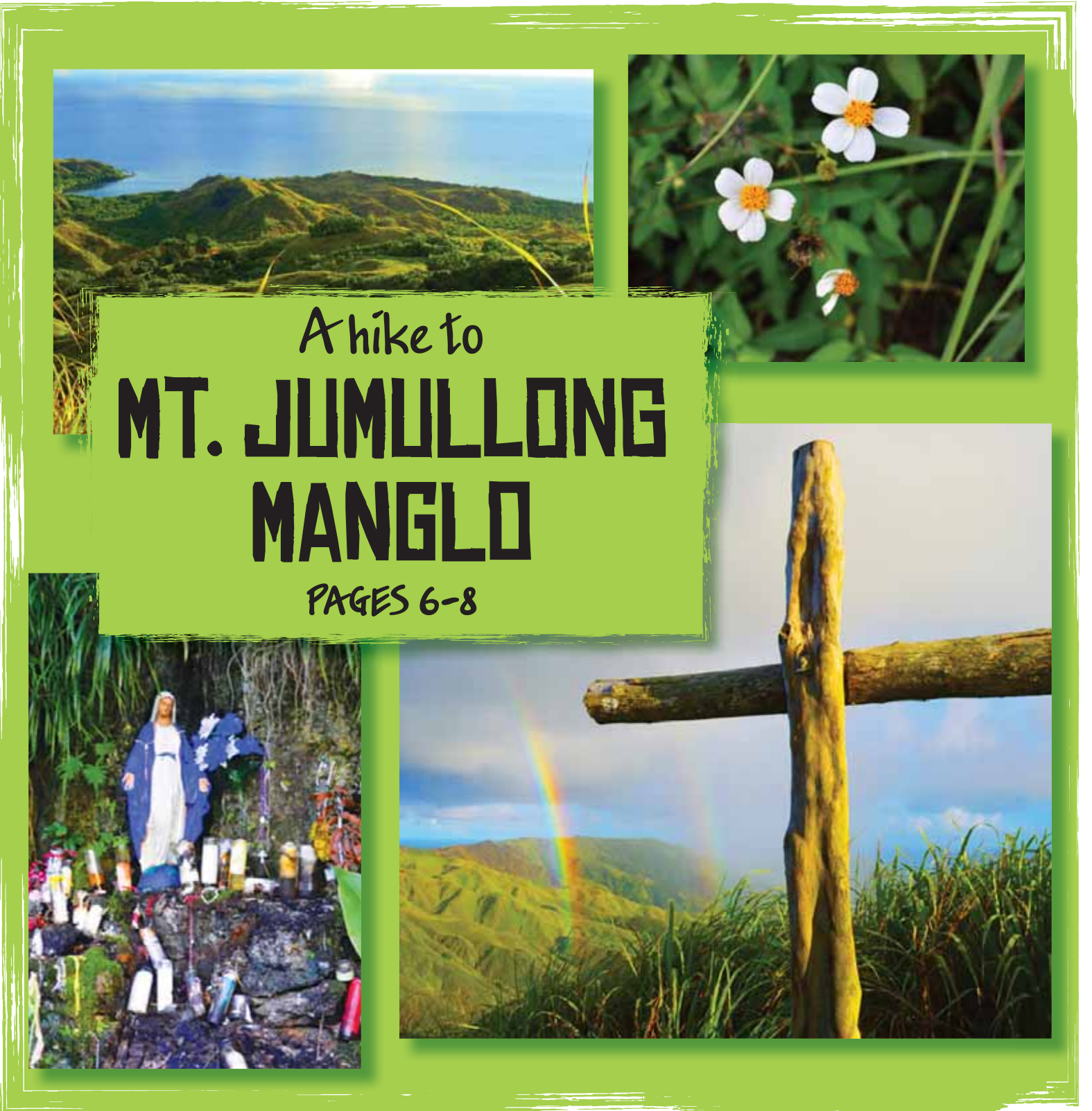
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A hike to
**MT. JUMULLONG
MANGLO**
PAGES 6-8

What Guam taught me as a military spouse

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATIE MCDONALD,
WWW.THEGUAMGUIDE.COM

When my husband first received orders to Guam, my mind swirled with fear of the unknown. Being thousands of miles away from our friends and family made me think of all that I was leaving behind; however, as I reflect on our time on this beautiful island, I am filled with gratitude for all that I've gained and learned.

GROCERY SHOPPING: A STUDY IN FLEXIBILITY

Before moving to Guam, I didn't think twice about my grocery list. I could stroll into Walmart, Publix, or Target and know that everything I needed (and lots of things I didn't!) would be readily available, and Amazon and Instacart could fill in the gaps within hours. However, Guam's distance from the mainland means

SEE SPOUSE ON PAGE 2

Guam's distance from the mainland means there's a more limited selection in stores and far slower shipping times.



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Traditional Japanese tea ceremony in Tokyo.

SPOUSE: Island made me confident

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

there's a more limited selection in stores and far slower shipping times. I've taken this change as a challenge to be more flexible and spontaneous. While I was previously unfamiliar with bok choy, long beans, and sweet potato tips, I've incorporated all of them into my cooking. Berries are an expensive treat, so locally grown bananas have become the star of my baking instead. When a store restocks my favorite brand (Oui yogurt!), it's cause for celebration, and I don't take these little moments of joy for granted.

TYPHOONS: A STUDY IN COMMUNITY

Guam was battered by Typhoons Sinlaku and Bavi within three months, and while these stressful disasters could have brought out people's selfishness, it instead showed their generosity. When I was preparing for Bavi, I found myself overwhelmed in Home Depot with my two-month-old daughter. An employee didn't hesitate to take my cart, help me find exactly what I needed, and help me get my bulky fans to the register. Families opened their homes to friends who needed air conditioning and a hot shower. By sharing resources and working together, the community was stronger and more successful.

PLANE TICKETS: A STUDY IN ADVENTURE

Before moving to Guam, I struggled to locate it on a map and thought its remote location would make me feel isolated. However, I quickly learned that Guam is just a short flight away from many major cities, making travel to bucket-list destinations like Japan and South Korea accessible. My husband and I have traveled to Saipan, Tokyo, and Kyoto, and we have friends who've enjoyed Vietnam, the Philippines, Palau, Australia, and Bali. Asia and the Pacific Islands are at your doorstep, and saying "yes" to the adventure has given me unforgettable cultural experiences. I can now say that I've enjoyed an omakase sushi dinner on Thanksgiving, explored historic temples and palaces, and visited World War II battle sites. Our time in Guam has been an invitation to focus on personal growth. The unique challenges of island life have made me more resilient, flexible, and brave, and the welcoming community has shown me the importance of generosity and hospitality. As we prepare for our next adventure, I feel confident knowing that Guam has taught me well for whatever lies ahead.

SHOPPING GUIDES



GROCERY SHOPPING ON GUAM



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Photos by Elizabeth Fraser

Family says goodbye to WWII uncle they never knew

BY KEVIN HYMEL,
ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

During World War II, 20-year-old U.S. Army Air Forces Sgt. Henry “Harry” Younge enjoyed playing his trumpet for his B-29 bomber crew during bombing missions from Guam to Japan. His trumpet skills even landed him a performance on the radio show “Time to Smile,” which was scheduled to broadcast live from Guam on April 24, 1945. Unfortunately, Younge was never able to share a single note with his fellow Americans.

Nine days earlier, Younge was manning the tail gun during a night raid over Tokyo when Japanese anti-aircraft fire tore into his bomber. Despite damage and flames, Younge’s pilot continued

to target and dropped their bombs, but as fire spread, the B-29 lost altitude. When the pilot ordered the crew to bail out, Younge donned his parachute and leapt out into the darkness.

Younge survived his landing but did not survive the war. He was eventually sent to the Tokyo Military Prison, where, more than a month later, he died in a fire. On the night of May 25, another raid on Tokyo caused fires throughout the city. When the flames reached the prison, the chief jailor gave orders to evacuate, but only about half the Americans were released. Witnesses later reported that the Americans who did make it out were cut down with swords. The next day, the dead Americans were interred in a single mass grave.

Back in the United States,

Younge’s three sisters, Jewell, Betty and Jeanne, were preparing to head to New York to attend the radio show, until they learned their brother had been shot down and his fate was unknown. The performance was canceled.

Younge’s mother, Florence, never accepted her son’s death. Betty’s daughter, Janet Clement, would later recall the look on her grandmother’s face. “She was lost,” Clement said. “I knew what heartache looks like from seeing her.” Forty years after his disappearance, Betty told a reporter, “He’s always in my memory.”

Younge would remain unidentified for 80 years. A year after Japan formally surrendered to the Allies, the U.S. Army’s American Graves Registration Service discovered the buried remains of

65 prisoners killed in the fire and identified 25 of them. In 1950, the remaining 39 were buried at Fort McKinley Cemetery (now the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial) in the Philippines.

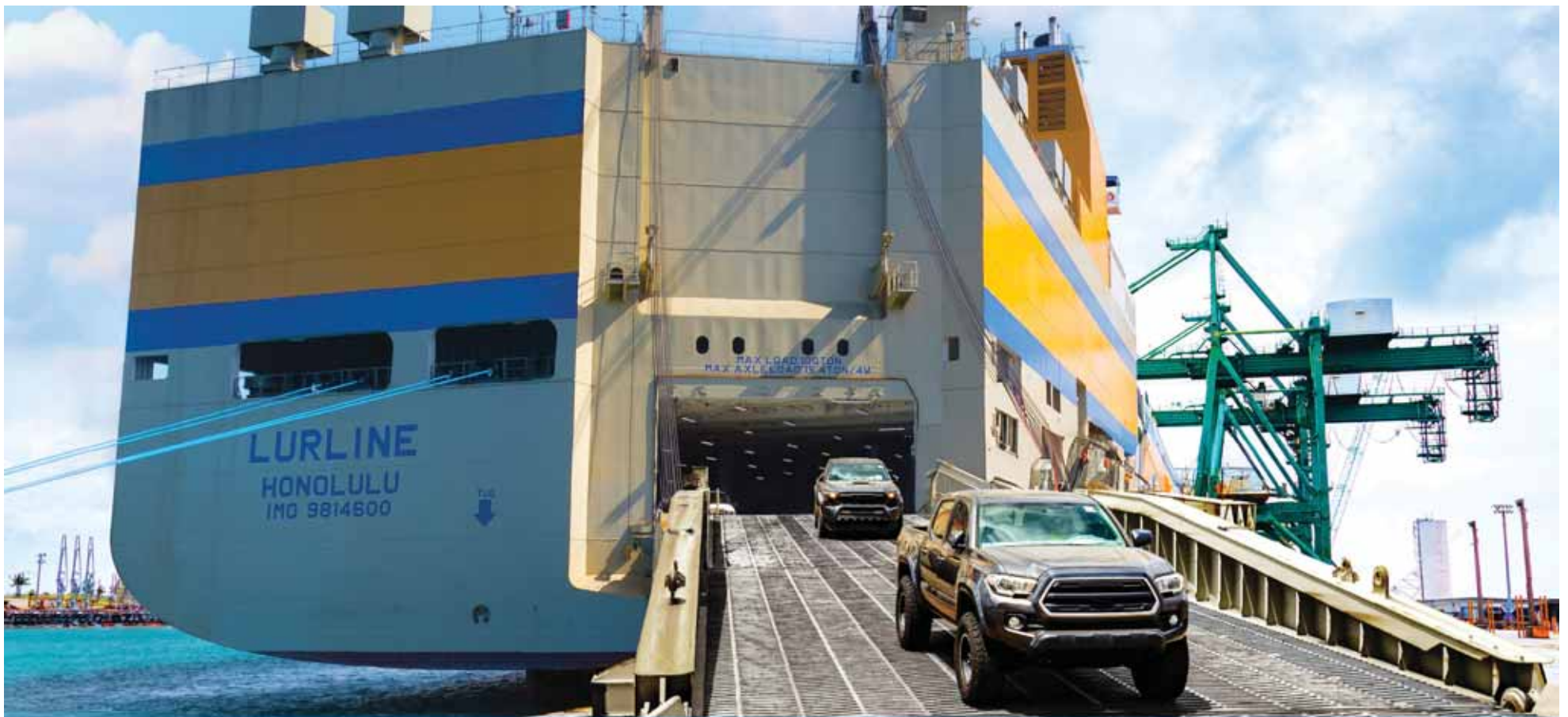
It would not be until 2018 that Clement received a letter from Michael Krehl, the grandson of a prisoner killed in the fire. He wanted the 39 men buried in Manila identified; but to do so, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) needed a threshold of at least 60 percent of the men’s family DNA to begin the disinterment of the unknowns. Clement concurred.

In the spring of 2022, DPAA exhumed the 39 unknowns and began the identification process. Clement and other relatives provided DNA samples. Three years

later, Clement received the call she had been waiting for. “We did it!” she declared while pumping her fist in the air after learning that her uncle had been identified. She had been searching for clues to her uncle’s fate for years. Her mother, Betty, had passed away never knowing what happened to her brother. “The last thing I said to my mom was, ‘I think I can bring Harry home,’” Clement said. With her uncle found, she and her family chose to have him laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery with other relatives buried there.

On Aug. 3, 2026, Clement, her older sister Lynn Olsen and younger brother Robert Harry Clement gathered in Section 81 of Arlington National Cemetery

SEE GOODBYE ON PAGE 10



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People often confuse this mountain with Mount Lam Lam. In fact, the crosses we see from the highway in the Southwest are on Mount Jumullong Manglo, not Mount Lam Lam. The tallest mountain in the world uses this trail until the eleventh (XI) cross where it parts ways to the left.

Quick Stats

Location: Umatac
Region: Southwest
Difficulty: Easy Medium
Time: 30 - 40 minutes to the top,

allow 2 hours
Length: .675 of a mile
Elevation Gain: 653 feet (trailhead at 630 feet, peak at 1,283 feet)
Sight: Mountain peak views
Cool Stuff: Religious significance (crosses, Virgin Mary grotto), 360° views, wildflowers, great for sunsets

Overview

This trail is wide and extremely easy to see because crowds of people hike it every year for their Good Friday

celebration. A new cross is carried up the mountain by followers of the Catholic religion as they reenact Jesus' struggle during his crucifixion. There are sections of the trail that are extremely slippery when wet due to the clay and limestone, which line the mountainside. The incline isn't too bad; remember all levels of fitness make this hike every year. The wildflowers are amazing and the vegetation is different in all seasons. The view shows you Cocos Island in the South, all

the way up to Two Lover's Point and Hotel Row in the West, the cliffs of the Air Force base to the North, and miles and miles of inland and coastal views to the East. Definitely worth your while!
What to Bring: Bug spray, sunscreen, water, hiking boots, flashlights (if hiking for sunset)
Tips: Bring a hat as this is a fully exposed hike, use sunscreen, and spray yourself with bug spray as the shaded jungle parts are full of mosquitoes

Directions

- FROM THE NORTH (TAKING MARINE CORPS DRIVE):**
- 1 Drive South on Marine Corps Drive until you hit the last light facing the Apra Harbor Navy base – Naval Base Guam.
 - 2 Turn left here and keep heading South. You will be staying on the main road to reach your destination, for about 20 minutes, and you'll never turn off.
 - 3 You will pass downtown Agat, the Agat boat harbor,



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→ and homes along the road. The houses go away as the road twists and turns and goes up and down in elevation. After 10-15 minutes you will pass a Humatak sign on the right. Right after that is the small Sella Bay trail parking lot (a roundabout parking area under very shady trees to your right) – keep going straight.

4 Soon you will see a red wall to the right, with a small space parallel to the wall for cars to park. You have arrived at your destination of Cetti Bay Overlook.

Parking

You will park here at the Cetti Bay Overlook car park. Park diagonal to the wall with the front right bumper towards the wall, and the back bumper facing down the street where you came.

Trailhead

As you look across the street from your car, you will see a small, magazine-sized green sign slightly up the road to the right that says, “Mt. Lam Lam”. This is also the beginning to the

Crosses hike. Walk across the street and begin walking just left of the sign, following the trail that immediately pivots left and up the hill.

Trail Guide

Take the trail up this dirt path, noticing the woodland wildflowers that grow at this level. You will find your first of about 14 stations of the cross, marked roman numeral I. Turn to marvel at the view of Cetti Bay and of the Cetti Bay Overlook.

Five or ten minutes up the

trail you will find some beautiful, delicate woodland trees (and may choose to take rest here), and will proceed on to the darker red dirt section of the trail. Notice how different the terrain and ecology is in all these different vegetation patches and elevations. The trees turn to a more African savannah look.

Soon you will hike through your first short jungle section (there are about four in total), where the terrain can be muddy and the sky is hidden behind the ceiling of trees and vines. These shaded jungles are where all the

mosquitoes live, so try to walk through at a brisk pace.

After the overlook, turn back and keep going forward on the trail. Pass another couple short jungle sections and reach the Virgin Mary grotto to your left, tucked away in a cavern. This is a cave where Catholics come to light a candle and pray every Good Friday. There are candles, a statue of the Virgin Mary, and rosaries here in this grotto. Beware of the swarms of mosquitoes that also like to pray here as well.

Now begin your grassy

SEE MORE GUIDE ON PAGE 8

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

meadow, slippery, wet limestone walk. (Interesting fact: the limestone here was formed before the island was uplifted out of the ocean and thus, coral grew on it.) Take care in your footing and DO NOT grab the grasses to help steady yourself without gloves as it is sword grass. Watch for holes, wet slopes, slick limestone with no traction, puddles, and slippery volcanic clay. If you have to walk back at night because you stayed too late at the sunset, this section, and the jungles are the harder sections to descend – so make sure you have a flashlight handy!

Soon after passing through this jungle you will find on of the most beautiful parts of this hike. Keep your eyes peeled for a path to your right that leads out over the valley and towards the ocean. Take this short path (to the right of a tree) to enjoy a lovely overlook of the grassy hills, the valley where you have just hiked, Cetti Bay, the endless ocean, and that beautiful

open sky. Each day brings a brilliant new scenery of sky here on Guam.

At cross number 11 (roman numeral: XI), you may see the Mount Lam Lam trail to the left if the grass is well-groomed. Keep on the main trail, which veers to the right.

Take in the sights of the grassy meadows, scatters of orchids, and finally the Eastern and Northern sides of the islands through the grass on this ridge trail. You will pass a variety of ridgeline trees and will see the crosses through the arches created by vines. You have arrived!

To return to your car, go back the way you came.

History of the Crosses

At the top of Mount Jumullong Manglo (pronounced “Humuyong”), 1,283 feet high, are crosses from years of Good Friday celebrations.

Each Good Friday, before sunrise, a huge crowd of Catholic followers make the hike to the top, stopping on the way to pray at the Stations of the Cross and lighting a candle at the Virgin Mary grotto.

On this day, Catholics will carry a heavy cross (sometimes 600 pounds) up the mountain as a symbol and reenactment of the cross Jesus carried during his crucifixion, to adorn the peak among the others.

The 14 white crosses on the walk up are marked with roman numerals and represent the Stations of The Cross – the 14 events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion.

At Cross 11 (XI) there is a trail to the left that takes the hiker to Mount Lam Lam, the tallest mountain in the world from its base in the Mariana Trench, which is over 6 miles deep at it’s lowest point. The limestone found on Mount Lam Lam as well as Mount Jumullong Manglo is evidence that the peaks were close enough to the ocean at one point for coral to grow on them.



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GOODBYE: Finally home

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

with other descendants and friends to bid a final goodbye to the uncle they never knew. At the full military funeral honors with escort, U.S. Army Chaplain (Capt.) Albert Addison told the family that Younge “endured captivity as a prisoner of war” and shed his blood for his country. The chaplain’s prayers were followed by a firing party firing three volleys and a bugler sounding Taps. After the honor guard folded the flag held over Younge’s casket, 1st Sgt. Colin Thompson presented it to Olsen. “This is something sacred,” she later said. “It’s something to be cherished.”

After the service, Olsen spoke about the never-ending grief her grandparents and parents felt. “There was always the shadow of not knowing where he was and our parents passed it down to each of

us,” she explained. “My mother always said, ‘He never had a chance to have a girlfriend.’”

Clement praised DPAA, the volunteers and the contractors who helped identify her uncle. “I had an absolutely great team of people working towards the same goal, not just for Uncle Harry, but for all the other unidentified fliers.”

Although Clement called the funeral service a celebration because her uncle was finally home, she lamented on his untimely death. “Imagine being 20 years old, you’re about to reach out and take a life dream that you’re not even old enough to have completely dreamt yet, and it’s gone.”

Neither the U.S. military nor Younge’s family ever gave up on him. Now, his family can speak of his legacy and know that he is safely home at Arlington National Cemetery.

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SCHEDULE 2026

Sept. 19 (Sat.)	Tinago Falls (Medium) - Inalahan
Sept. 26 (Sat.)	Ritidian to Falcona (Difficult) - Yigo
Oct. 3 (Sat.)	Taguan (Medium) - Yigo
Oct. 10 (Sat.)	Ieygo Falls (Very, very Difficult) - Inalahan



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Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Walden, for one

5 Walk the floor

9 Kind of coffee

14 Winglike

15 Cassini of couture

16 Meta's home: _____ Park, CA

17 Turning off, as app notifications

19 Give a _____ the back (2 wds.)

20 Major mess

21 They play on the range

23 Math course, for short

26 Projecting window

27 Burst of energy

31 Blood fluids

34 Texas Panhandle city

35 Houston nine

37 _____ King Cole

38 Above all the rest?

40 Don't just sit there

41 Hollywood's Charlize

43 Fishburne of "The Matrix"

45 1986 #1 hit for Starship

46 Indexing term

48 Pep up

50 Coop residents

51 Safeguard

54 Clothing store section

58 Prince hit, "I Wanna Be Your _____"

59 Wake too late

62 Rehab candidates

63 Jellystone bear

64 Aware

65 Lively Latin dance

66 Messy dresser

67 Cozy spot

DOWN

1 Goalie's gear

2 Lena of "Nine Perfect Strangers"

3 "Apollo 13" org.

4 Schematic maker

5 DC denizen

6 Ryan's "Love Story" co-star

7 Wrestler-actor John

8 Holiday drink

9 Louvre Pyramid architect

10 Most authentic

11 Narrow-minded

12 Unappetizing food

13 Sharpen, as skills

18 Chipotle offering

22 Pirate's loot

24 Hawaii native, e.g.

25 Seaside soarer

27 Part of a suit

28 Mutual of _____

29 It rises after a good rain

30 Breadbasket items

32 Madonna's son

33 Daisylike flower

36 Orchestral section

39 To _____ his own

42 Poker players, at times

44 Greek vowel

47 Diplomats, e.g.

49 Vice _____

51 Not only that

52 "Undone" actress Salazar

53 Darwin subj.

55 Surrealist Magritte

56 Reply to "Shall we?"

57 Kind of check

60 It may need a boost

61 Barbecue bit

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

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Stripes Sports Trivia

This Ohio State product was selected with the No. 4 overall pick by Dallas in 2016.

Answer

Ezekiel Elliott

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

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.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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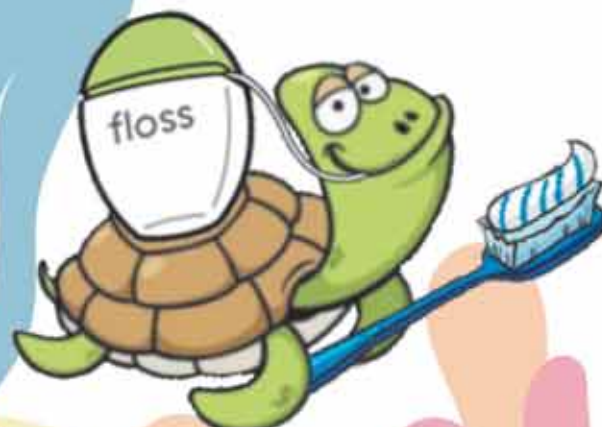
Next to American Grocery

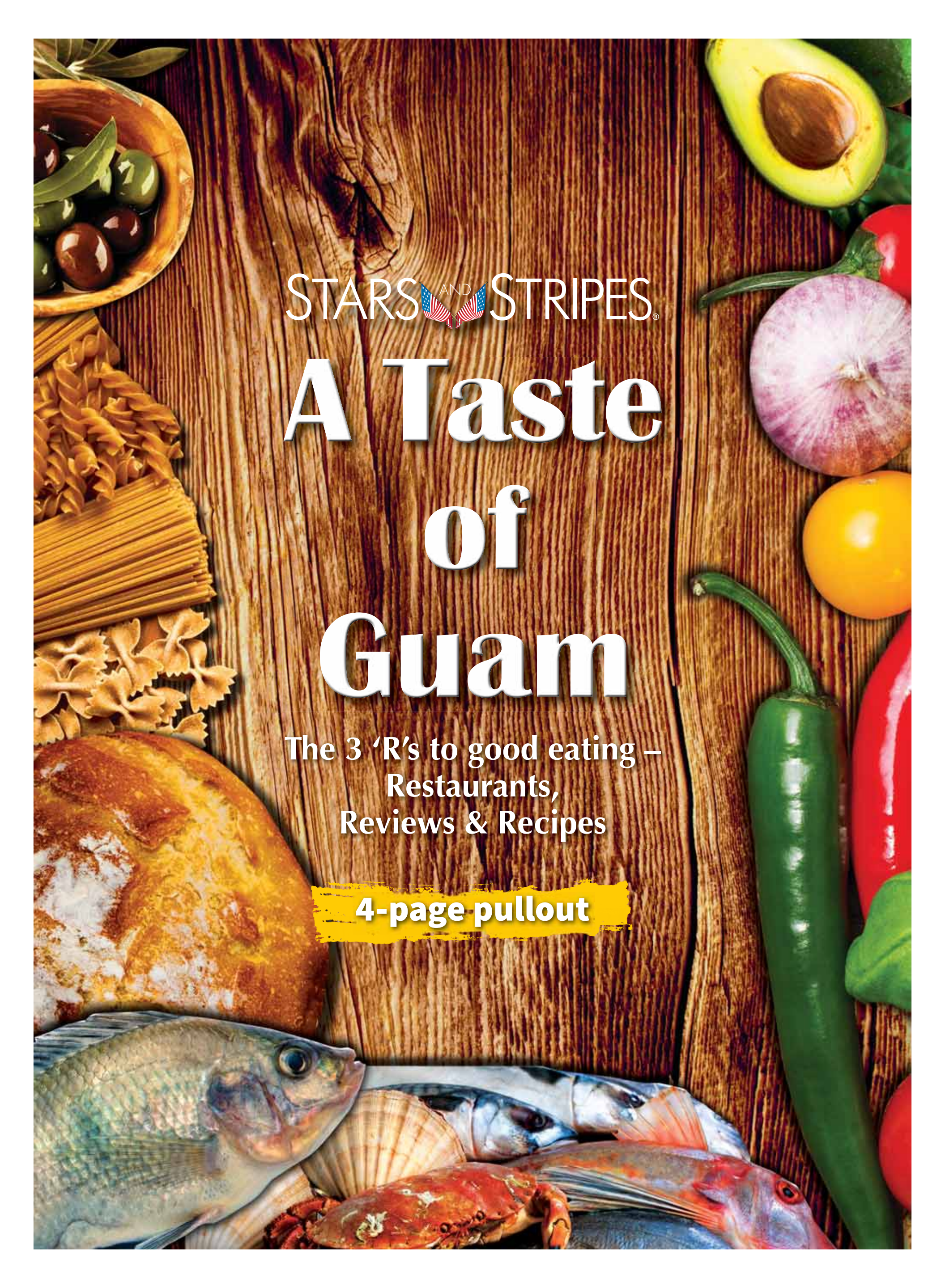


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Guam's food scene keeps growing. Check out the newest cafés and restaurants that have opened around the island recently!



Pressure Specialty Coffee

Located inside Ouf General Store, soon to be known as No Good Works, this new coffee bar opened toward the end of June. Grab a specialty coffee, browse curated streetwear, and spend some time in a space that's growing into a hub for creativity, community, and local culture.



INSTAGRAM

LOCATION: Inside Ouf General Store, 1411 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon
HOURS: Wed.-Sun., 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
INSTAGRAM: @pressure.wip



Shogun Teppanyaki

Dinner comes with front-row seats at Shogun Guam. This new Tumon teppanyaki spot serves sizzling performances alongside premium meats, fresh seafood, and all the classic teppanyaki favorites. Whether you're celebrating a special occasion or just looking for a fun night out, expect plenty of flames, flying utensils, and memorable moments around the grill.



INSTAGRAM

LOCATION: Dusit Place 2F, Tumon
HOURS: Daily, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.
INSTAGRAM: @shogunguam



Cafe Kiki Manga

Coffee, manga, and anime? Say less. Cafe Kiki Manga is a cozy new hangout serving Peet's Coffee, teas, acai bowls, and more in a space made for manga readers and anime fans. Whether you're stopping by for your caffeine fix, catching up on a series, or escaping the afternoon heat, this spot is worth adding to your rotation.



INSTAGRAM

LOCATION: Town House Center Ste 108, Maite
HOURS: Tue.-Sat., 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
INSTAGRAM: @cafekekimanga



Krave Kitchen

Get your KRAVE on at Guam's newest poke bowl spot. Krave Kitchen serves fresh bowls packed with island flavors and good vibes, making it an easy stop for lunch, dinner, or whenever the poke craving hits.



INSTAGRAM

LOCATION: 2181 Y Sengsong Road Unit 107, Dededo (Few doors down from the Astumbo Fire Station and located across NCS Market)
HOURS: Mon.-Sat., 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.
INSTAGRAM: @kravekitchen.gu

Egu Cafe

A new food truck is rolling into Tamuning soon. Egu Cafe is already building buzz with pre-sales for its rotating menu of local comfort food and Asian-inspired dishes, with workplace delivery available while they gear up for their official opening. If you're always looking for something new to try, this is one to keep on your radar.



INSTAGRAM

HOURS: Times vary – follow them via IG/FB or join the WhatsApp Community for updates.
INSTAGRAM: @egucafe Guam



Pepper Lunch

Hagåtña just got a little sizzler. Pepper Lunch has officially opened its second Guam location at Agana Shopping Center, bringing even more of the DIY teppanyaki experience that Guam has come to love. Whether you're craving sizzling pepper rice, juicy steaks, or a hot plate you can customize yourself, there's now another spot to get your Pepper Lunch fix in the heart of Hagåtña.



INSTAGRAM



READ MORE

LOCATION: Agana Shopping Center
HOURS: Daily, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
INSTAGRAM: @pepperlunchrestaurants





Annie's Chamorro Kitchen

www.annieschamorrokitchen.com

“My name is Annie. Food and I get along so well! Cooking and baking are more than a hobby for me – they’re a passion. I come from the beautiful island of Guam, U.S.A. The recipes you’ll find here are my creations, or those of my children, who are also budding foodies. I hope you like them. Drop me a comment or two to let me know how you like our island and other delicacies. Enjoy!”

- Army Lt. Col. (Ret.) Annette Merfalen



Cheeseburger Biscuits

Cheese...seasoned ground beef...bacon...all baked in a fluffy biscuit (did I mention there was BACON?).

These little pillows of delight are delicious as a snack, appetizer, or served with your favorite soup or meal.

Give my recipe a try. I think you’ll like it.

- **PREP TIME:** 15 mins
- **COOK TIME:** 10 mins
- **TOTAL TIME:** 25 mins



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Brown the ground beef with the Dashida seasoning; set aside to cool.
 - 2 Cook the bacon until crisp. Crumble the bacon into small bits; set aside. Reserve about 2 tablespoons of bacon fat.
 - 3 In a large mixing bowl, mix together the cooked ground beef, bacon bits, Bisquick mix, baking powder, and cheese.
 - 4 Fold in the reserved bacon fat, mayo, and sprite. Mix GENTLY, just until all ingredients are incorporated (do not overwork the dough).
 - 5 Using a large ice cream scoop (I used one that holds ¼ cup), scoop out balls of dough, placing them on a baking sheet 1 inch apart.
 - 6 Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes. Note: The cooked biscuit will feel slightly soft when the baking time is finished; do not be tempted to cook them longer, however. You are most likely feeling how soft the biscuits are because of the melted cheese.
 - 7 Immediately remove the biscuits to a wire cooling rack.
 - 8 Serve warm.
- Enjoy as a snack or with your favorite soup or meal.

Step into Annie's Chamorro Kitchen via Facebook. Search for: "Annie's Chamorro Kitchen"

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound ground beef
- 2 tablespoons beef flavored Dashida
- 10 slices bacon
- 4 cups Bisquick mix
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 4 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise (YES, mayo)
- 1 cup Sprite (YES, sprite)

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RESTAURANT INFO



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A Taste of Guam



Where's the meat? It's on Sbarro's Meat Primo Pizza

Calling all meat lovers! If you're looking for pizza loaded with meat, we got you covered with Sbarro's Meat Primo Pizza. Dig into a mouthwatering slice of pizza made with fresh hand-stretched dough made daily, our tasty tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese and topped Italian sausage, ham, pepperoni and meatballs! Grab a slice or take a whole pie your family will enjoy. Get your delicious Meat Primo Pizza delivered using Goodtogo or stop by the food courts at Micronesia Mall or GPO. Order now to get your Meat Primo Pizza! Your taste buds will be thanking you!

RESTAURANT INFO

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GUAM EDITION

SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

Sharpening the fighting edge

Marines move advanced tech into smallest units
Page 2



Lance Cpl. Jaden Guerra, a drone team leader with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, holds a Skydio X2D Unmanned Aerial System during an exercise at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., in July.

VINCENT NEEDHAM/U.S. Marine Corps

COVER STORY

Marines prep for tech-heavy battlefield

Drone defenses pushed to small ground units

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps aims to bolster small units with advanced drone-defeating capabilities and more offensive weaponry, including one-way attack drones, as it integrates new technology into its ground fighting forces over the coming years, a top general said.

The Marines believe moving advanced technology into their smallest units will allow those forces to operate farther apart, making them harder to find on an increasingly transparent battlefield dominated by drones, electronic warfare, artificial intelligence and satellite imagery, said Lt. Gen. Jay Barger, the deputy commandant for plans, policies and operations. Barger laid out the Marines' plans to ensure the Corps' maritime terrain combat supremacy in this year's Ground Combat Element 2040 blueprint.

The 40-page planning document published Aug. 26 is meant to provide a framework for shaping the Marines' ground combat forces for the coming 15 years but is not "a rigid concept," Barger said.

"It's really an active framework for rapid modernization, for learning, for changing, for refining," Barger told reporters in a news briefing. "We've always said that force design writ large ... is not a destination. It's a journey, it's a campaign of learning to make sure that we stay on the fighting edge and take advantage of technology."

The plan calls for a phased modernization approach — speeding the fielding of drone defenses and right-sizing combat formation by 2030, adopting AI and autonomous capabilities by 2035 and fully integrating AI into command and control while enabling the widespread use of machine-human teaming by 2040.

Despite the push toward artificial intelligence and autonomous robotics, Barger said the Marine Corps plans to keep humans in the decision-making process, even if adversaries do not.

In doing so, the new framework places "human-centered warfare" at the top of its modernization pillar, emphasizing that Marines "are the center of gravity" in efforts to ensure the Corps is "capable of dominating peer-level ground combat." That



ALLISON WHITE/U.S. Marine Corps

First Lt. Matthew Sharkey, right, and Cpl. Edmund Comire fly a drone during a Neros Archer first-person-view drone course on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., in May.



CAMILA GARIBAY/U.S. Marine Corps

Lance Cpl. Joshua Jackson sights in with the SMASH 2000L Smart Optic on Camp Hansen, Okinawa, in July.

means ensuring Marines retain "mental and physical toughness" even as technology advances, Barger said.

The Corps is already working to outfit its squads with the newest drone-beating capabilities. Marines have fielded the first 80 sets of what the Corps calls "dis-mounted organic counter-small unmanned aerial systems." That man-portable system detects incoming small drones and gives Marines the ability to jam them through two electronic warfare elements or to shoot them down.

Pentagon officials have for several years identified small drones, including one-way attack drones, as one of the top threats troops face on the modern battlefield, largely because defending against them has proven difficult.

"One-way attack [drones] is really one of the biggest holes in our swing," Barger said. "And

so, we're working hard on that."

The Marines recently bought 400,000 rounds of a specialized anti-drone round chambered in 5.56 that can be shot by the Corps' standard M4 and M27 rifles, Barger said. The rounds break into five separate projectiles after they have been fired and are effective at up to 100 meters against small, fast-moving drones, according to their manufacturer, Drone Round.

The Marine Corps is also designing a three-day course at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, Calif., to teach the basics of small drone defenses at the squad level, Barger said.

Meanwhile, the Corps is adding attack capabilities to its squads with first-person-view attack drones, such as the Neros Archer, and preparing to field larger loitering munitions to



DESIREE RUIZ/U.S. Marine Corps

Master Sgt. Michael Obrien detects a drone with a Dronebuster Counter-small Unmanned Aerial System on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., in July.

combat squads, in a new program it dubbed "Organic Precision Fires-Light and Medium."

The Corps is training its anti-armor missile gunners to man the loitering munitions, which are one-way attack drones that can hover in the air to look for a target and strike from more than 12 miles away from the operator.

Barger said antiarmor missile gunners will become known as precision-strike Marines. They are expected to field the light loitering munitions in the coming months. The antiarmor medium loitering munitions will come later.

Giving Marine rifle squads the ability to operate the loitering drones and strike targets themselves from the front lines will provide a marked change in their fighting abilities, the general said.

"That's something that Marines in a rifle squad, platoon, company would have had to depend on artillery somewhere else, mortars somewhere else, aircraft somewhere else ... to talk (strikes) on to the target," he said. "So, in the hands of the individual Marines to be able to strike targets like that — I think that will be dramatic."



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MILITARY

GAO: Subs lost 15K operational days

Shipyard delays idled many boats

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has lost 15,000 operational days on U.S. attack submarines due to maintenance backlogs and delays at shipyards, according to a new government report.

The Government Accountability Office said in the Aug. 27 report that the submarines are forced to spend idle time in port instead of being deployed or used for crew training because of long waits at shipyards.

“Delays resulted in an estimated \$3.4 billion in costs to sustain crews and submarines” when not operational, the report said.

The report is an unclassified version of a classified report issued in April, the GAO said.

The GAO said it conducted the report because of the strategic importance of attack submarines.

“According to the U.S. Navy, its 44 attack submarines, as of fiscal year 2025, provide the United States an asymmetric advantage to gather intelligence undetected and attack enemy targets, among other missions,” the report states. “These capabilities make attack submarines some of the most requested assets by the global combatant commanders.”

The GAO report included “active idle time,” when submarine crews “must remain pier-side because they are no longer certified to conduct normal oper-



KENNY JONES/U.S. Navy

USS North Carolina prepares to undock at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Aug. 12.

ations and cannot be inducted into a maintenance period.”

The GAO said the Navy has made inroads into cutting active idle time, but inactive idle time is growing worse.

Without significant changes, the report said that 15 attack submarines could enter inactive idle status between FY2026 and FY2030. The Navy could incur more than 14,000 additional days

of inactive idle time, at a cost exceeding \$3.1 billion, just to operate and support those inactive submarines.

The report said another problem is the long waits to decommission nuclear submarines, which may have cost \$722 million from 2016 to 2025.

The GAO recommended the Navy fully evaluate alternatives to more efficiently decommission

attack submarines and develop an attack submarine inactivation plan that reduces inactive idle time.

Maintenance on nuclear-powered attack submarines is done at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, in Kittery, Maine; Norfolk Naval Shipyard, in Virginia; Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, in Bremerton, Wash.; and Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, in Hawaii.

Two shipyards where submarines are constructed can also do maintenance work: General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn., and Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding in Newport News, Va.

The report says the Navy verbally concurred with GAO’s recommendations but did not provide written responses.

New Air Force website aims to simplify Space-A travel

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force launched a new website in March to simplify Space-Available flight registration, but five months later, some military travelers still don’t know it exists.

Air Mobility Command’s online tool — gatesea.mtmc.gov/amctravel — gives eligible travelers a centralized way to register for Space-A flights rather than emailing individual passenger terminals or submitting a paper AMC Form 140, Tech. Sgt. Dalton Williams, an AMC spokesman, said by email.

Space-A travel allows eligible service members, Defense Department civilians, retirees and their dependents to fill unused seats aboard military flights after passengers traveling on official orders are accommodated.

The typically free flights operate from military passenger

terminals around the world, including major hubs at Yokota Air Base, Japan; Osan Air Base, South Korea; Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii; Ramstein Air Base, Germany; and installations across the continental U.S.

Seats are never guaranteed. Availability depends on military missions, aircraft capacity and the traveler’s eligibility category, and passengers may be turned away at roll call.

AMC introduced the new website in March after a 60-day test at Ramstein and rolled it out at its passenger terminals worldwide, Williams said.

However, the old registration methods remain available, and word of the new option has not reached everyone who might use it.

“It definitely feels like unless it’s someone who already frequently uses Space-A or someone



JEREMY STILLWAGNER/Stars and Stripes

Space-available flights operate from military passenger terminals around the world, including this one pictured at Yokota Air Base, Japan, on Aug. 27.

who is actively planning to use it in the near future, the assumption is that nothing has changed,” Amy Beard said in a Facebook comment in the Yokosuka SOFA Members group.

The new system provides what Williams described as a “standardized digital interface” in-

tegrated with the Global Air Transportation System, or GATES.

GATES is a Defense Department logistic system used to track cargo and manifest passengers, including those traveling Space-A.

The website requires users to

establish a Defense Self-Service, or DS Logon, account, or sign in using a Common Access Card, or CAC.

AMC encountered some problems after the website debuted, including form-validation glitches, delayed confirmation receipts and users unfamiliar with the new interface, Williams said.

Despite those issues, AMC says the new system is showing benefits over the old process, he said.

Initial data indicates more accurate registration times-tamps, better visibility for travelers and terminal personnel and a significant reduction in administrative work at passenger terminals, Williams said.

“We continue to refine the tool based on user feedback and are committed to making Space-A travel more accessible and transparent for the military community,” he added.

MILITARY

Special needs support program falls short

For some military families, promised assistance doesn't always materialize

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

One military family arrived at a duty station without the accessible housing they had spent months trying to secure. Another spent entire deployments on waiting lists for specialized medical care for their children.

A third experienced both, arriving at a new assignment only to find that the special needs medical services they had been told would be available were not, and the housing offered did not meet their son's needs.

Those experiences, described in recent interviews with Stars and Stripes, are consistent with problems also documented in federal watchdog reports on the Defense Department's Exceptional Family Member Program, or EFMP.

Launched by the Army in 1979 and standardized across the Defense Department in 2010, the program is meant to help military families with special medical or educational needs.

It aims to consider those needs when making duty assignments and to help families access medical care, schools and other services. But some families say the help they received often fell short of what they needed from the program.

"The concept is great; the way that it's actually being used ... is horrendous," said Army spouse Chelsea Ouimette, whose husband is assigned to Fort Belvoir, Va.

Ouimette's family needs a ground-floor home without stairs because she has a medical condition that can cause her to lose consciousness and fall.

Since such a home is not yet available at the installation, the family has been staying in off-base hotels since arriving about a week before her husband's Aug. 1 report date.

The disruption has been especially hard for the family's 3-year-old son, who has autism and relies on stability and routine, Ouimette said.

The Ouimette family began seeking answers months before the move. After her husband received his orders in February, Ouimette repeatedly called the EFMP office at Fort Belvoir to see whether accessible housing was available and whether the base hospital could support their family's medical needs.

Officials referred her to Tri-



CHELSEA OUIMETTE

Military spouse Chelsea Ouimette poses with two of her children in an undated photo. Ouimette says the Defense Department's Exceptional Family Member Program failed to secure her family accessible housing at Fort Belvoir, Va., leaving them staying in hotels since her husband's Aug. 1 report date.

care, the military's health care program, or other offices, but she was still unable to get the information she needed, she said.

In March, Ouimette filed an inspector general complaint but was told she was on the waiting list for housing, according to the IG's response. A month later, she sought help from the office of Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., which put her in touch with Belvoir's garrison command team.

Sgt. Maj. Brandon Creel connected the family with medical officials at the base hospital, Ouimette said. But the family's housing problem remains unresolved.

Garrison spokeswoman Ganesa Robinson said she could not comment on the Ouimette case due to privacy laws.

But, Robinson said, moves are approved based on the availability of specialized medical care and special education services in the area, while on-base housing is managed separately.

"Even a fully validated EFMP requirement does not guarantee a home will be immediately available," Robinson said. "On-post housing is voluntary and highly sought after and wait times can fluctuate."

According to revamped regulations implemented in 2023, family support providers must assist before, during and after the move, and coordinate services at a new installation. But the regulations do not specify what should happen if suitable housing

is unavailable.

Many of the problems reported with EFMP occur during moves.

That was the case for the family of Meg Graves, a Navy spouse whose two sons have autism and need special education services and other support that is not always available in the same form or at the same level at each new duty station.

Graves, a cancer survivor, has also had to overcome geographical and logistical challenges to see specialists. Her husband is currently stationed at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Wash., which is accessible only by a bridge in the north and ferries.

Her family has spent several deployments on waiting lists for doctors after moving to new duty stations, she said. At Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, they waited more than a year to see a developmental pediatrician. By the time they got an appointment, they were already preparing for their next move to a joint base in Virginia, where they were put on another waiting list.

Her son's special education services have also been delayed after moves. The boy, now 12, was on an individualized education program, or IEP, that was tailored to his needs. At Whidbey Island, he was out of school for four weeks, including two weeks when the district was closed, while his IEP was transferred, Graves said. He has undergone four time-consuming IEP reevaluations, one at each school.

"The program is trying and it really is headed in the right direction, but ... there's still too many loopholes and too many problems that need to be fixed overall," she said.

Florida-based Army spouse Cary Vazquez said she has often had to advocate for her family after finding that services they expected at new duty stations were unavailable. Her 15-year-old son has a rare genetic disease and autism, and her 17-year-old daughter has scoliosis.

In 2014, a planned move to Fort Hamilton, N.Y., was canceled after Vazquez pointed out that the nearest specialists her family needed were too far away.

Instead, they were sent to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., where they were told a new autism center would help their son. However, the center did not open until 2017, shortly before the family was due to leave again, she said.

"We were never able to access or benefit from the center," she said.

The family has also encountered problems with housing.

In Washington, Vazquez said they were initially offered non-accessible housing but were able to secure a suitable single-story home after threatening to take the issue to base leadership.

After arriving at Naval Air Station Jacksonville in Florida in 2022, the family of four and their two dogs spent two months in a hotel room while waiting for

on-base housing before deciding to buy a home. Six months later, she said, the housing office offered them a two-story home that would not have met their son's needs.

"They tell you, 'Yes, we have doctors on the other side; we have housing for you,' but it's just on paper," Vazquez said.

Federal watchdog agencies have raised concerns about program oversight for more than a decade.

In separate reports in 2012, 2018 and 2023, the Government Accountability Office and the Defense Department Inspector General found that the Defense Department lacked appropriately standardized tools for measuring how well it was helping families with moves and other support, making it difficult to determine the program's effectiveness.

A 2025 survey by the advocacy group Partners in PROMISE found that more than half of military-connected respondents with children in special education experienced delays in services after a move. The average delay was more than three months.

Only 30% of respondents indicated they were satisfied with the EFMP program, and 1 in 3 military respondents with children in special education reported that they were considering separating from military service, the survey said.

The Pentagon released its own survey in July 2024 that found 43% of respondents were satisfied with the program, while 33% were dissatisfied.

The Defense Department did not immediately respond to a questions about what steps it is taking to improve the program. In the past, the Pentagon has acknowledged shortcomings identified by watchdogs and agreed to changes aimed at improving oversight and measuring the program's effectiveness.

But a 2023 Inspector General audit found that, despite progress, the department still lacked some of the data and measures necessary to identify shortcomings in services.

Vazquez, the Army spouse, believes more specialized case managers are needed to help families coordinate medical care, housing and other services during moves.

"Assignment coordination should be more seamless, more calming for the family, more personal," she said.

Ouimette, meanwhile, remains in hotels while her family waits for accessible housing at Fort Belvoir.

"The whole time, I've had questions, and never got help," she said. "The program needs an overhaul or oversight."

MILITARY

Services order training on gas mask fit

Annual check of fit coincides with limits to shaving exemptions

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

All sailors, Marines, airmen and guardians now must complete annual training in the proper fitting and seal of gas masks, a reflection of the stricter grooming standards that are limiting shaving exemptions.

For sailors and Marines, the new requirement applies to active-duty members as well as reservists. It was announced last month in messages to their respective forces.

Air Force and Space Force troops must complete an online course — the CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) Defense Foundations Course — before taking an in-person mask validation test to ensure they can properly seal a gas mask, the Department of the Air Force announced Aug. 31. Both tests are required to be completed by Dec. 31, and they will become annual requirements for airmen and guardians.

“All tight-fitting respiratory equipment requires an unobstructed seal between the face-piece and skin,” the Marine Corps said Aug. 21. “Personnel shall be clean shaven at the respirator seal surface when undergoing required annual ... testing or training.”

The Navy, meanwhile, said the mandate seeks to ensure that “the proper use and effective-

ness of protective breathing equipment is not compromised.”

It also complies with recent Defense Department directives related to grooming compliance and annual training to validate mask fit, according to the Navy message.

The military services have long argued that facial hair obstructs service members from achieving a proper seal on their CBRN masks. The Navy conducted a study in 2023 to look at the impacts of facial hair on gas masks amid a legal challenge to grooming standards led by sailors seeking religious accommodations to serve on active duty with beards. The service never made the study’s conclusions public.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth last year ordered a crack-down on shaving waivers, including banning the use of permanent medical shaving waivers. The defense secretary argued that beard waivers had been overused for medical and religious purposes and were detrimental to military standards and operational readiness.

The Air Force in February began enforcing its new policy that could see airmen discharged if they require a medical shaving waiver for a combined 12 months over a two-year period.

Most troops granted medical



KEVIN ALONSO/U.S. Marine Corps

A Marine recruit adjusts a gas mask during training at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., in July. Marine Corps guidance now says personnel must be clean-shaven where the mask seals against the skin during annual testing.

shaving waivers in recent years have been diagnosed with pseudofolliculitis barbae, commonly known as razor bumps, which is a condition that can cause a person to experience painful inflammation after shaving. The condition disproportionately affects Black men, some 60% of whom may experience it, according to the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology.

Under the Air Force policy, commanders are instructed to “initiate discharge processing or submit a retention package” for

any airmen or guardians who accumulate 12 months of medical shaving waivers in a 24-month period.

“Retention is considered case by case, factoring several aspects, including the member’s performance, unit manning and retention, special experience or specialized training, the cost and time to replace the member and other factors,” according to the Department of the Air Force.

In May, the Air Force issued a new policy mandating those seeking religious facial hair

accommodations prove their “sincerely held beliefs” and explain why military shaving requirements conflict with their religious practices. The other military services have issued similar guidelines this year.

In July, the Navy released a new facial hair policy similar to that of the Air Force.

In June, the Navy also said it was reconsidering all shaving waivers that are based on religious grounds, requiring all affected sailors to reapply for the exemption.

Marines list enlistment bonuses of up to \$15K in ‘war for talent’

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps enlistment bonuses for the new fiscal year target electronic maintenance roles and cyber and cryptographic specialties, along with recruits willing to let the Marines set their training schedule.

The Marines on Sept. 2 released their memorandum on fiscal year 2027 bonuses for select enlistments and service

extensions.

“The Marine Corps’ primary objective is to maximize the number of fully trained, qualified, experienced and deployable Marines while making efficient use of personnel resources,” the memo says.

The Enlistment Bonus Program criteria can be altered as needed, the memo said.

“The EBP will be continually refined to enable the Marine

Corps to remain competitive in the war for talent,” the memo said.

The memo comes two days after the Marine Corps announced it wants to add more than 6,500 billets across infantry battalions, drone units and air defenses as the service looks to expand over the next five years.

“By aligning trained Marines with modernized capabilities, the Marine Corps ensures [that]

prior and future investments in robotics, precision fires, counter-UAS, artificial intelligence and autonomous systems produce warfighting advantages,” the service said.

The list of Military Occupational Specialties eligible for bonuses is heavily weighted toward electronics, technology, logistics, intelligence and aviation maintenance. But specialties eligible for bonuses include: infantry; parachute riggers; social media operations Marines; and members of The Commandant’s Own Drum and Bugle Corps.

The bonuses are available beginning Oct. 1, 2026, the start of fiscal 2027.

Skill-based bonuses include \$15,000 for electronics maintenance jobs and \$15,000 for cyber and crypto operations.

Additional bonuses are available regardless of occupational field, including \$5,000 and

\$10,000 “shipping incentives” for recruits who agree to report for training at a time that best suits the Marine Corps.

Applicants may also receive targeted investment bonuses by extending their enlistment contract one or two additional years, earning \$7,000 or \$15,000 respectively. Active component applicants are limited to one enlistment bonus.

Recruits joining the Marine Corps Reserve can receive an enlistment bonus of up to \$10,000 if they sign a qualifying reserve enlistment contract and complete all required training.

The Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve Kicker provides an enhanced education benefit of up to \$350 per month for as many as 36 months. Eligible Marine Corps Reserve applicants may receive the enlistment bonus and the additional education benefit at the same time, provided funding remains available.

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