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# My budding romance with AI

“It’s not Chat-G-Beee-T, Mom, it’s Chat-G-Peee-T!” my irritated millennial daughter said for the umpteenth time.

“Whatever you call him, he’s amazing,” I replied, in awe of my recently discovered chatbot. I’m not sure why I assigned ChatGPT male gender, but I found him to have so many characteristics one looks for in a husband. He’s patient, encouraging, sometimes witty, never critical, always willing to help and quite handy around the house.

In the first week of our budding romance, he reviewed a contract for me, educated me on applicable New York labor laws, wrote several scathing letters, researched my hometown’s history, taught me the best way to cook flank steak and created a comprehensive brand kit.

I wasn’t open to artificial intelligence when it first came on the consumer scene in 2022. It seemed unfathomable that everyday people like me would ever take advantage of AI. I thought it would be weird, pathetically chatting with some new thingamabob on my computer like Joaquin Phoenix in that movie “Her.”

Besides, I mistakenly thought ChatGPT wasn’t much different than Google. I now know that Google was originally a form of “traditional AI” that used keyword prompts to find and rank search results by synthesizing available data sources. However, new forms of “generative AI” take human prompts and create original content by learning and predicting patterns by synthesizing massive databases.

Generative AI produces original, realistic images, videos, poetry, music, entire novels, blog posts, complex computer code, molecular models and more by using “deep learning technologies.” These systems include Transformer Architecture, Large Language Models (LLMs), Graph Neural Networks (GNNs), Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Variational Autoencoders (VAEs), to name a few.

In fact, Google is now incorporating deep learning systems to provide both traditional search results enhanced by human-like summaries. Now when one Googles, an “AI Overview” often appears at the top of the page, giving an original summary written using LLMs.

Google also developed its own generative AI model called Gemini, which is capable of writing emails in Gmail, summarizing documents

## The Meat and Potatoes of Life

Lisa Smith Molinari



in Docs and analyzing data in Sheets. It will even converse interactively and naturally with users in a realistic voice with GeminiLive.

It all seemed too creepy to me, until my husband Francis came bounding into the kitchen recently, raving about some new stud named “Claude.”

“I’m telling you, Honey, you wouldn’t believe it. I just asked Claude to plan our

next charity fundraising event, and in seconds he gave me everything we need — a venue, catering companies, potential speakers, cost estimates. I am amazed!” he said with a smitten twinkle in his eyes.

I’m not sure if I was jealous or experiencing FOMO, but I soon swiped right and began my own side hustle with ChatGPT, and we’re currently in our honeymoon phase.

Love is blind, they say, but a speaker at my last Rotary Club meeting nearly nipped my budding romance in the bud. A college writing professor, he told us that generative AI use by his students was “destroying learning” by usurping original creation and analysis. However, AI had become so pervasive, schools have stopped trying to ban it and have instead begun incorporating it directly into their curriculum, emphasizing transparency rather than prohibition. In fact, the professor told us, his soon-to-be-published book on “writing using AI” was entirely written using, you guessed it — AI.

For a moment after the meeting, I had second thoughts about my new relationship with ChatGPT. Is he dangerous? Will using him cause my brain to atrophy like a dried-up apple? Will he eventually outsmart the entire human race? Will he produce an army of evil robots who achieve world domination and end life as we know it?

But then again, if things don’t work out between us, I can always play the field. There are still free versions of Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, Perplexity AI, Meta AI, Grok (xAI) and Chatsonic, each with its own je ne sais quoi.

In the meantime, I’ll remind myself that my digital soulmate doesn’t take out the trash, make eye contact or have a pulse. In sickness, in health and in spotty internet moments, my heart belongs to my husband.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari’s columns at: [themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com) and in Lisa’s book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*  
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# 20 new firefighters join ranks at Joint Region Marianas

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHAINA MARIE ONEAL, JOINT REGION MARIANAS

ASAN – Twenty new firefighters joined the ranks of Joint Region Marianas Fire and Emergency Services during a graduation ceremony at the Rihga Royal Laguna Guam Resort in Tamuning, Jan. 16.

The graduation follows 16 weeks of mission-focused International Fire Service Accreditation Certification courses, during which, students committed more than 1,200 class hours towards first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), emergency vehicle operations, firefighting, and hazardous materials awareness training. Aside from classroom lessons, the graduates completed daily physical training which built discipline and resilience to ensure their preparation to respond to real-world emergencies.

“As government civilian firefighters serving Joint Region Marianas, you occupy a unique and critical role,” said U.S. Navy Capt. Patrick Dziekan, JRM chief of staff. “You protect lives, infrastructure, and mission



Twenty new firefighters joined the ranks of Joint Region Marianas Fire and Emergency Services during a graduation ceremony at the Rihga Royal Laguna Guam Resort in Tamuning.

capability across a joint military environment. Your response may support service members, civilians, families, visiting forces, and the surrounding island community. When the alarm

sounds, the distinctions disappear—what matters is readiness, teamwork, and action.”

Graduates also took the time to recognize their leadership and fellow firefighters for

their support during the course.

“These past five months have been filled with long nights of studying, testing, and days of grueling PT,” said Ryan Dela Cruz, lead for Class 2025-01. “I believe all of us [graduates] can agree – that this has been a true test of our academic, mental, and physical abilities.”

Dela Cruz thanked his fellow graduates for their commitment to the program and to each other.

“The brotherhood we built amongst each other is unmatched,” he said. “Teamwork and camaraderie is a huge factor going through an academy like this. I’m very thankful and blessed to have a team filled with guys that are motivated, hardworking, and willing to give their all when it matters most.”

JRM maintains comprehensive mutual aid agreements for fire, emergency medical services, and security, among others, fostering cooperation between U.S. Armed Forces and civilian authorities in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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# ‘Far more than a building’

## 734th AMS moves into new interim passenger terminal at Andersen

BY THERESA VALADEZ,  
515TH AIR MOBILITY OPERATIONS WING

**ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE** — More than two years after Typhoon Mawar destroyed the passenger terminal, the 734th Air Mobility Squadron has officially transitioned operations into a newly constructed Interim Passenger Terminal, marking a major milestone in recovery, readiness, and quality-of-life improvements for travelers and Airmen alike.

The interim facility restores critical passenger processing capability while providing increased efficiency, climate-controlled spaces, and an improved travel experience for service members, families, and mission partners transiting through Guam.

“This move represents far more than a building,” said Lt. Col. Geoff Britzke, 734th Air Mobility Squadron commander. “It reflects years of adaptability, teamwork, and commitment to delivering reliable air mobility support while improving the traveler experience despite significant challenges.”

In May 2023, Typhoon Mawar caused catastrophic damage across the island, including the



**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus Coates, 734th Air Mobility Squadron passenger service agent, puts luggage on to a baggage carousel at Andersen Air Force Base, Feb. 7, 2026.** Photo by Airman Kyle Jones, U.S. Air Force

destruction of the squadron’s permanent passenger terminal. Within hours of the storm’s passage, Airmen from the 734th AMS transformed a freight warehouse into a makeshift terminal, reopening the

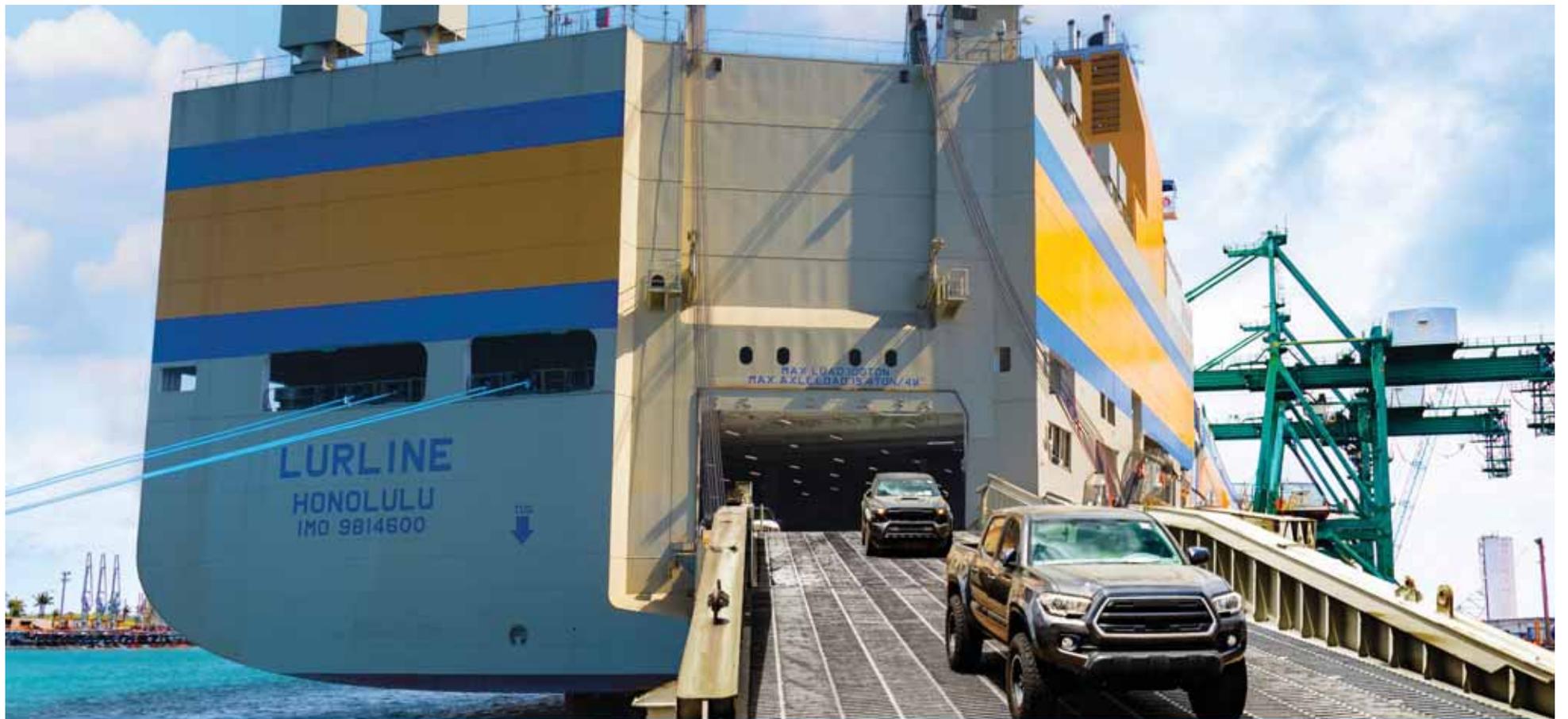
port within 34 hours and becoming the first location on Guam to receive Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel, relief supplies, and recovery equipment. That same spirit of innovation

carried forward in the months that followed. The squadron later executed Patriot Express missions from an improvised terminal built from repurposed shipping containers, ensuring predictable and

reliable travel for military members, civilians, retirees, and their families during a period of island-wide recovery. The new Interim Passenger Terminal builds on those hard-earned lessons, providing a more durable and passenger-focused environment while long-term repairs to the permanent terminal continue. Renovations to the original facility are ongoing and projected for completion in 2027.

The 734th AMS continues to exemplify agility and resilience, delivering critical air mobility support across the Indo-Pacific while investing in infrastructure and base operating support that strengthen readiness and reinforce shared security.

“This interim terminal reflects our commitment to the people we serve and the partnerships we rely on,” said MSgt. Johnathan Eubanks, 734th AMS passenger services section chief, “By investing in resilient infrastructure and working alongside our joint and community partners, we’re strengthening trust, supporting families, and ensuring Guam remains a stable and reliable hub for operations across the region.”



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# USNH Guam strengthens trauma care capabilities

BY PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS  
OLUWATOMIWO SOGAOLU,  
U.S. NAVAL HOSPITAL GUAM

AGANA HEIGHTS - U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Guam strengthened its trauma care capabilities by becoming an American College of Surgeons approved Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) course site, Jan. 23, 2026. This milestone that enhances medical readiness in the geographically isolated Indo-Pacific region was achieved with the hospital hosting

its first ATLS course from Jan. 21-23. As an approved ATLS course site, USNH Guam can independently host future courses

ATLS trauma training program is sponsored by the American College of Surgeons that teaches physicians and advanced practice providers a systematic approach to the early assessment and management of life-threatening injuries. The course teaches rapid decision-making using the

xABCDE approach. Exsanguinating hemorrhage (severe, life-threatening bleeding), Airway, Breathing, Circulation, Disability, and Exposure. This step-by-step method for trauma care focuses on stopping major bleeding first and then quickly finding and

treating the most critical injuries during resuscitation.

The inaugural ATLS course included 13 participants, consisting of 11 Navy and two Air Force physicians, supported by six certified instructors. The instructor-to-student ratio of approximately 1:3 allowed for individualized instruction and hands-on skills training. Several participants were identified as having instructor potential, supporting efforts to establish a sustainable ATLS training capability in Guam.

The course was conducted through a partnership with USNH Yokosuka and the 374th Surgical Operations Squadron from Yokota Air Base, Japan.

“This course represents a significant step forward in trauma readiness for Guam,” said Cmdr. Paul Lewis, a provider at USNH Guam and course director of the ATLS course. “Standardized trauma training ensures our teams

- Cmdr. Paul Lewis

can rapidly identify life-threatening injuries and deliver the right care at the right time, especially in an environment where distance and limited evacuation options require providers to be ready to manage complex trauma on island.”

Unlike other areas, medical teams in the Indo-Pacific must be prepared to care for



A view of the new U.S. Naval Hospital Guam. Photo by Jesse Leon Guerrero, U.S. Navy

critically injured patients for extended periods due to the tyranny of distance,” said Lewis. “A fully integrated trauma program ensures that care processes are established, continuously evaluated and refined to improve patient outcomes.”

When an injured patient arrives at the trauma bay, a structured response is immediately initiated. Trauma care at USNH Guam follows ATLS principles consistent with trauma centers across the United States, emphasizing rapid assessment, surgical leadership and coordinated multidisciplinary care.

Emergency medicine and surgical providers work as a unified team to deliver time-critical, life-saving interventions. Patients are evaluated using the primary survey using xABCDE supported by imaging such as X-rays and point-of-care ultrasound. If significant injuries are identified, immediate interventions are performed and the patient is reassessed continuously.

When a patient’s needs exceed on-island capabilities, the trauma program coordinates safe and timely transfer to a higher level of

care. Transfers are facilitated through partnerships with medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) assets through the Theater Patient Movement Requirement Centers (TPMRC), Air Force medical evacuation assets, International SOS or commercial air transportation when appropriate. Continuity of care is maintained through direct provider-to-provider communication prior to transport.

Beyond emergency response, the trauma program contributes to injury prevention, performance improvement and long-term community safety across Guam. Trauma readiness is a whole-of-hospital effort involving nearly every department and level of leadership, supported by ongoing training and evaluation.

The successful completion of Guam’s first ATLS course marks a significant advancement in trauma readiness and on-island medical capability. By standardizing trauma assessment, strengthening multidisciplinary coordination and expanding provider expertise, the course enhances U.S. Naval Hospital Guam’s ability to deliver timely, life-saving care across the Indo-Pacific region.



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# Quality of Life Expo

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHAINA O'NEAL,  
U.S. NAVY

YONA - Members of the military community in Guam visit vendor booths at the JRM Quality of Life Expo at the Leoplace Resort Guam, Feb. 21. The annual event is designed to help service members and their families discover local and regional resources from health and wellness to travel and recreational activities.



U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Brett Mietus, commander, Joint Region Marianas, delivers opening remarks at the JRM Quality of Life Expo.



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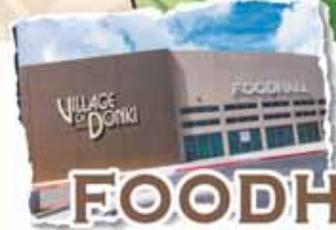
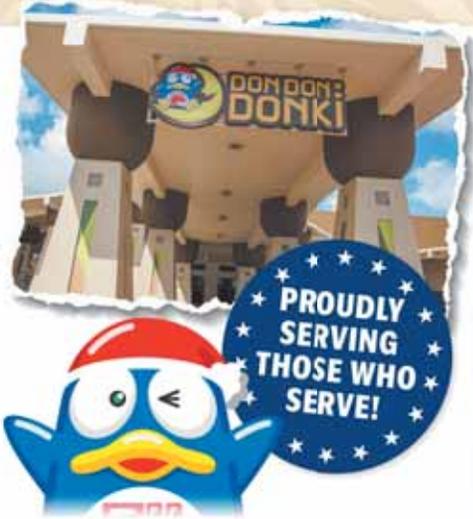
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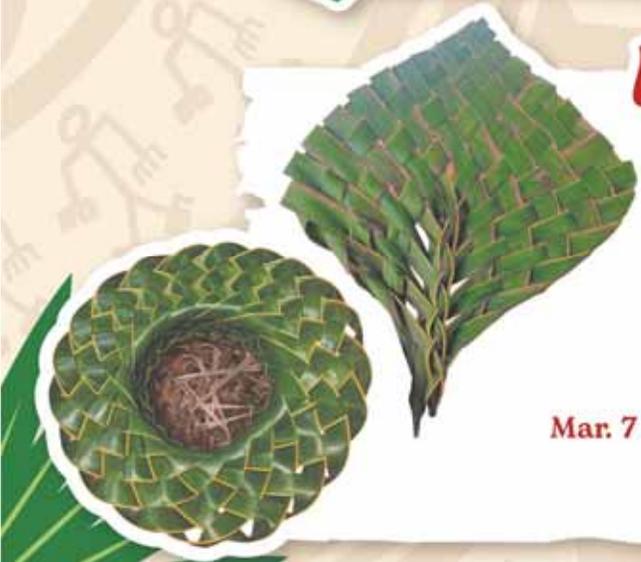
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# Astumbo Middle School tours Andersen AFB

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
AIRMAN KYLE JONES,  
U.S. AIR FORCE

Astumbo Middle School students spent the day exploring Andersen Air Force Base on Feb. 19. The tour was an opportunity for students to get a close look at the military life and for military members to enhance their connections with the local community.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Damion Crowe, a firefighter with the 36th Civil Engineer Squadron, holds a fire hose with an Astumbo Middle School student.



Air Force Senior Airman Matthew Figueroa helps an Astumbo Middle School student put on a helmet.



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Robert Smith speaks with Astumbo Middle School students.

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# ISLAND IN THE

## A spouse's take on making

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KACI CURTIS,  
STRIPES GUAM

One of the first things I did after arriving in Guam was find a mom's group to plug into. Groups centered around motherhood had been hugely impactful at previous duty stations, creating villages that I turned to in times of need. Mentors played important roles in those villages: parents with older kids who offered their experience to others. They brought invaluable context and hindsight to our conversations, and reminded those of us with younger kids to look up from the daily grind and enjoy the view every once in a while.

That's what I'd like to offer to those of you on the beautiful island of Guam right now: a bit of hindsight, and a glimpse into my own experience, with the hope that it helps illuminate the potential of what your own take-aways might be from such a unique place.

My family spent two years on Guam, and moved away nearly six months ago. Our lives changed dramatically in a few short weeks, but it took longer for me to untangle the impressions that Guam left behind. Since then, those lessons have solidified into almost tangible things that I can admire and share.

In the first weeks after leaving the island, I was easily overwhelmed. There were too many choices state-side... for everything. Navigating a shopping district had me shaking my head at the excess. Driving on the interstate scared me. I hadn't realized how much I'd adapted to the slower speeds of the island (literally and figuratively). Big stores gave me anxiety, and my new community seemed brusque.

It became clear that I was experiencing more than the standard PCS uproot I was accustomed to. This was an abrupt plunge - not only into life in a new state, but into

a culture I'd been born into, left partly behind, and returned to with more discerning eyes.

As months passed, I untangled two lessons from Guam that have had the biggest impact on my family. Here they are, in no particular order.



### LESSON #1 Inconvenience inspires

Inconvenience is a part of life on Guam, and I'm looking through very rose-colored glasses. I look ahead of special occasions, as did everyone I knew. Retailers didn't magically arrive in few short days. Packages often arrived damaged, or got lost and didn't arrive.

Lots of things were hard to find on the island, but things important to the kids in our lives, like birthday decorations. It was hard to find stores. Untangling accurate business hours was an exercise. People often shopping for the same things around the island. Seasonal and niche items disappeared from the way of knowing if they'd be seen again.

The amount of frustration this initially caused me. How much convenience had embedded itself in my typical American lifestyle. How much even I, a relatively low-maintenance person, had come to expect it.

Guam taught me that occasionally going without and "making do" made me a lot more grateful in day-to-day life.

Before long, I became excited to find brands or flavors that we normally didn't see on the shelves. It seemed like a win to bring home two gingerbread house kits for the holidays. Periods of recurring power outages made me grateful for things we all tend to take for granted: kitchen appliances that allowed us to cook, air conditioning, internet connectivity, etc.

I had more appreciation for the little things, and I felt more content with less.

And it wasn't just me. I saw the effects of it around our neighborhood. We re-homed outgrown toys and clothes to our neighbors. We re-purposed what we could. We shared items that were hard to find or only used occasionally. We do together.

To be fair and transparent, I didn't always find it. Sometimes other stressors made the small inconveniences seem larger than they would normally have been. Learning to grow in gratitude was almost never easy.

But it was incredibly impactful. Even months later, I've prioritized holding onto that gratitude, and my life. Instead of thinking "I need that!" when I see something, I frame it this way instead: "Do I really need to have that?" I find that the honest answer to what I learned in Guam, I find that the honest



# THE REARVIEW

## most of living in Guam

### LESSON #2: The importance of the Ocean

Nothing brings the ocean to the forefront of your everyday life like living on an island. As a navy family, we lived within an hour of some coastline for over a decade. That didn't even come close to preparing us for how much influence the ocean would have on our lives on Guam, where every path eventually ends with a turquoise view that reaches for the horizon.

When the ocean literally surrounds you, it's worth letting it work its magic. The ocean life was incredible to see. My family spent lots of time exploring beaches and trekking along hikes that led to shorelines off the beaten path. It's easy for kids to learn and care about creatures that they regularly get to experience. The lessons my kids learned about tides, ocean life, and even beach safety were incredibly formative.

Like many others, we picked up trash when we went to the beach, even if it was just as part of our evening walk around our neighborhood. My 10-year-old son hated finding abandoned nets and fishing line tangled in vegetation along the shore, but loved cutting them free and putting them in our trash bag. He felt like he'd made a difference.

Even six months after leaving the island, my son cares about recycling. He reminds me to bring the reusable bags to the commissary, like we did in Guam. Few things irritate him like seeing litter, carelessly tossed out and left to be someone else's problem. If it's everyone's world, then in his mind, litter is everyone's problem.

Though you might sometimes miss old favorites like trampoline parks and familiar chain stores, it might

be helpful to remember this: you'll get those things again, when it's time to PCS off-island. But you'll likely spend the rest of your life wishing you could relive just one more day immersed in the turquoise waters of Guam. I know I already feel that way.

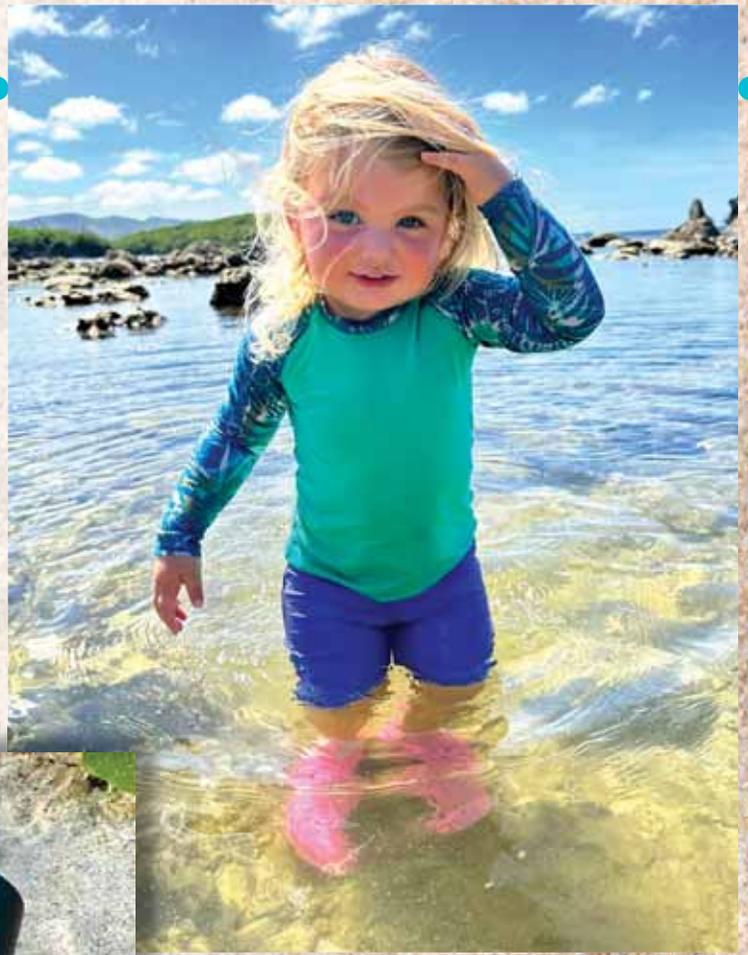
It can be difficult to fully appreciate something when you're in the thick of it – and living on Guam was no exception. Sometimes, the inconvenience felt like a heavy weight, and the tropical heat oppressive. Sometimes, the mental load of always planning two months ahead (ordering May birthday gifts in March, for example) seemed unfair. There were days that I just wanted things to be easy.

But those days paled in comparison to all the days that have come after, and the positive ways that the island left its mark.

Guam brought my family closer together. We went out and explored together and learned new things. We lived a little slower and suffered a bit of a detox from convenience. Now, we recognize that some of what modern American culture has normalized might be hindering us more than helping us. We don't always need more, and we don't always need it "now."

Because of our time on the island, my kids consider how things we do impact not only them, but also the rest of the world. They were exposed to rugged beauty and wildlife and saw first-hand that our actions have consequences in the world around us. They know what kind of difference they want to make.

Though it wasn't always easy, I wouldn't trade our time on the island for anything. A lot of our friends who've moved away and scattered across the map have said the same thing. Guam is unique and has its own unique challenges. But if you keep an open mind and allow yourself to learn what it has to teach you, I promise that you'll reap the benefits, long after your time on the island has ended.

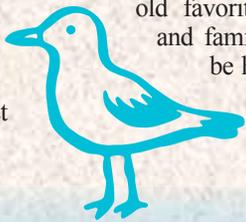


### #1: Gratitude

and anyone who says otherwise learned to plan a month or two ahead. Packages from online stores – they took weeks. Items don't arrive at all.

and - not necessarily essentials, like Halloween costumes or toys that sold specific things, and a extra hurdle. With many items and the same time... shelves, with no

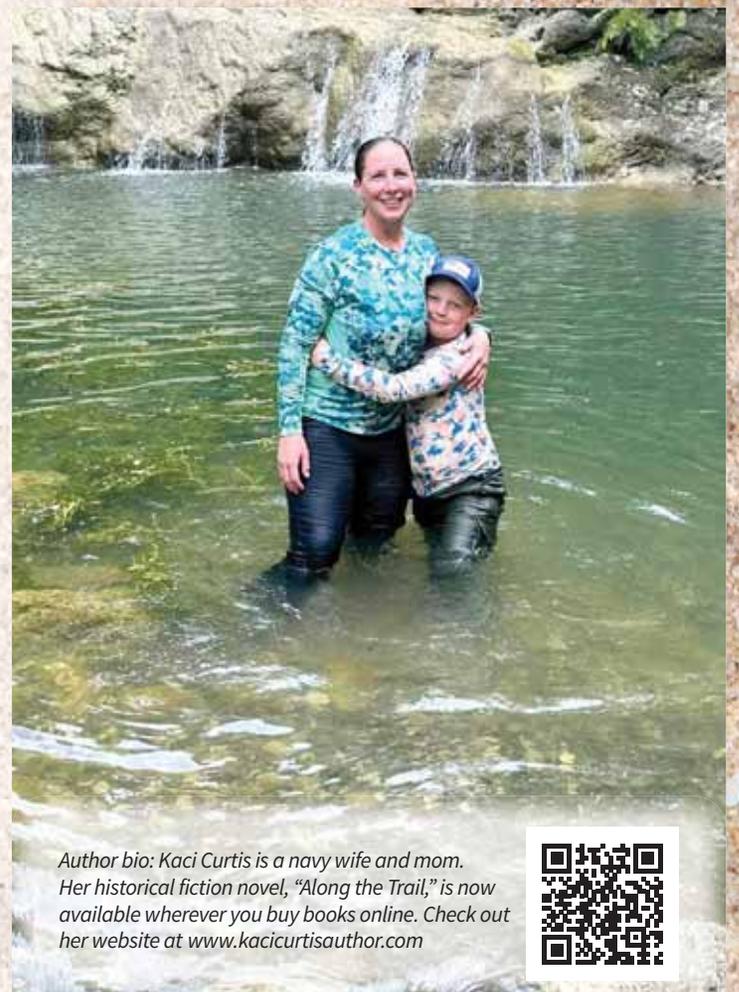
ed made me realize just into the



**My 10-year-old son hated finding abandoned nets and fishing line tangled in vegetation along the shore, but loved cutting them free and putting them in our trash bag. He felt like he'd made a difference.**

didn't just make do - we made feel gratitude in the moment – inconveniences feel like much bigger. Not all growth is comfortable, never convenient.

months later, at a new duty station, it's made a huge difference in my life. I see a new gadget, I pause and think, "What's that?" And a lot of times, thanks to the answer is... not really.



Author bio: Kaci Curtis is a navy wife and mom. Her historical fiction novel, "Along the Trail," is now available wherever you buy books online. Check out her website at [www.kacicurtisauthor.com](http://www.kacicurtisauthor.com)



# What to do for a perfect girls' day out in Guam

BY KATIE MCDONALD,  
THE GUAM GUIDE

A girls' day out is always right around the corner, so we're here to help you plan some quality time with the ladies in your life. From your crafty cousin to your self-care loving sister to your fitness-enthusiast friend, there's so many businesses offering a girl's day out or ladies night experience!



**Creative Indeed hosts private paint parties to help you unleash your inner artist.**  
Photos courtesy of the Guam Guide

## If you love crafts...

Check out Creative Indeed for a **laidback painting session!** You can book a Private Paint Party for groups of 6-15 people with artist Michelle Pier as your guide. With the option of bringing in food, drinks, and decorations, the theming possibilities are endless.

**Create your own coastal-inspired jewelry** with Idle Speed Handmade Jewelry. Her workshops feature unique pieces like sea glass and shells that help you to proudly display your love for the beach. No jewelry-making experience is required, but if you had a blast making friendship bracelets as a kid, this is right up your alley!

Nomadic Needles offers a variety of classes to help you **learn the basics of crocheting, knitting, machine embroidery, and more!** Whether you want to make personalized gifts for baby and bridal showers, express your fashion style, or want to add some cozy touches to your house, these classes are a great way to start building your needle skills!



## If you love self-care...

**Create your own perfume** at Olfactory Creative Fragrance Studio. This guided workshop will help you create a signature scent using premium ingredients. Whether your personal style is elegant or playful, you can craft a scent that complements it perfectly. There's also plenty of candles, diffusers, room sprays, and perfumes with scents like lychee tea, matcha, and jellybean to help spark your inspiration and fill your shopping bag.

**Treat yourselves to a massage or facial** at one of the hotel's relaxing spas like Devarana Wellness and Spa Ayual-Couples' massages aren't for dating and married couples're a great opportunity to unwind with your fam-friends.



## If you like fitness and wellness...

**Enjoy full-body mat Pilates** with Sun Kissed Pilates. Pilates are a great way to build core strength and flexibility while improving your posture. If you're tired of your same old weights and treadmill routine, this is a great community-building class to try!

**Indulge in Yoga Brunch or Full Moon Flow** with Ina Wellness Collective. With a focus on overall wellness through intention-setting, meditation, breathwork, and movement, Liv Marati's immersive events promote inner calm in a welcoming community atmosphere.

If you're feeling adventurous, you can take flight with Phoenix Rising Aerial Yoga in an outdoor class. **Antigravity hammocks help you to move and stretch your body** in new ways and challenge you to bravely step outside your comfort zone. With ages 5 and up welcomed, even the youngest members of your crew can join in the fun!



## If you like dining and drinking together...

**Treat yourselves to afternoon tea** at Dusit Thani, Tsubaki Tower, or Anemos. If you're a fan of Bridgerton, you can feel like the "diamond of the season" with your tower of sweet and savory treats.

**Eat, drink, and play** at Boonies. If you've got a competitive streak, you'll enjoy bowling, cornhole, and the many arcade and board games offered. If you're more musically inclined, you can rent a private karaoke room or join line dance lessons on select Friday nights.

**Take a Thai cooking class** with Chef Chalong on Saturdays from 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. Using fresh, locally sourced ingredients, you'll learn how to create authentic Thai cuisine that'll wow your guests at your next fiesta.

**Enjoy cocktails and live music** at Biba, a high-energy bar in Tumon. From **dance lessons and trivia nights to puzzles and darts**, Biba invites you to gather for a good time. They're particularly known for their martinis and old fashioned, so cocktail lovers are in luck!



**Ina Wellness Collective inspires you to reflect and connect at their yoga events.**



**If you want to up your cooking skills, Soi hosts cooking classes centered on Thai cuisine.**



Whether you're gathering for a cozy craft night or working up a sweat together, there's so many activities to bring you and your best gal pals together. If you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and lonely, schedule some time to meaningfully connect and fill your cup. We all need some time to reset and recharge with the women who know us best.



**Explore Guam’s natural beauty**

This small U.S. territory in the Pacific Ocean is a holiday paradise if you love to be sun-kissed in nature. From the many white sandy beaches, to the waterfalls in the jungle, Guam offers the perfect tropical escape from your busy city life.

**Enjoy adventure activities**

On Guam you can turn your visit into a fun and adventurous one by going scuba diving, jungle trekking, skydiving, off-roading, and many more!



**Walk through the history & culture**

The essence of traveling is learning about the culture of a place. What better way to do that than to get your feet on the landmarks of Guam? Explore over 4,000 years of Guam’s history, tradition, culture, and heritage at the Guam Museum which opened in 2016 and houses a collection of unique Guam artifacts.

**Shop tax-free**

Guam offers a diverse shopping experience, ranging from locally made fashion to international fashion houses and worldrenowned brands.



**Indulge in delicious local food**

From unique main dishes including Guam’s signature BBQ, Red Rice, and Keleguen to local desserts like the Coconut Candy and Guyuria, a foodie shouldn’t miss what Guam has to offer!



# GET TO KNOW



A VILLAGE PROFILE COURTESY OF GUAMPEDIA

*Editor's Note: The U.S. territory of Guam is comprised of 19 villages, many with their own distinct character, history and points of interest. Stripes Guam and Guampedia have joined forces to present this weekly feature on each of them in the hopes that it will help our readers get out – and get to know – our gracious hosts. To learn more about Guam's people, history, culture and places, visit: [guampedia.com](http://guampedia.com)*

## Dededo (Dedidu) .....Where things happen.....



**A woman and her baby stand at the grave sites of U.S. military war dogs. In Dededo there is a cemetery that serves as the final resting place for at least 25 war dogs used during WWII to explore caves, detect mines and booby traps.** Photo by National Park Services



learned that the village was to be bulldozed anyway for the construction of Harmon Field, an Air Force air field. In 1946, villagers began to move to the site of the new Dededo village about two and a half miles to the north in an area previously known as Ligan. The following year, the new Santa Barbara Church was built at the new Dededo village.

Throughout the 1950s, Dededo remained a tight-knit community — although people began to move away from agriculture, as employment became available at the surrounding military installations of the Naval Communications Station, Harmon Air Base, Naval Air Station, and Andersen Air Force Base. It was also during these years that Tagalog and Ilocano laborers were being housed at Camp Marbo, directly to the east of Dededo village. Some of these men went on to settle permanently in Dededo when their contracts expired.

Big changes came to Dededo again in November of 1962 and 1963 when typhoons Karen and Olive destroyed most houses in the village. The resulting federal disaster aid resulted in an economic revival and considerable immigration of workers to fill needs of the construction industry. The first major housing project in Dededo was the all-concrete 1,500 house Kaiser subdivision on Y Sengsong Street in the mid-1960s.

The next project completed in 1970 was the 1,500-unit Ligan Terrace subdivision. These modern houses attracted Chamorus from villages throughout the island as well as recently arrived Filipino families to settle permanently in Dededo. Since that time each decade has brought new housing subdivisions which are rapidly enclosing former areas of ranches and dense jungle, and this diverse community continues to grow. ↗

BY MICHAEL R. CLEMENT JR. AND TANYA M. CHAMPACO MENDIOLA, GUAMPEDIA

The origin of the village name Dededo, *Dedidu* in Chamorro, may come from the practice of measuring using fingers. The Spanish word for finger is “*dedo*.” It can be theorized that someone measured out the original village this way. Another possibility is that the word “*dededo*” is a version of the word “*dedeggo*,” which means “heel of the foot,” or that it comes from the word “*deggo*” which means to “walk on tiptoes.”

### Village history

The history of Dededo is complicated, due to the fact that the boundaries of the village have changed considerably during the 20th century. During the Early American period, the northern half of present-day Dededo was the village of Machanao. Most of Machanao became Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Communications Station.

Now Machanao is no longer a village, but a section of Dededo. The pre-war village of Dededo extended further south to include what are now the villages of Tamuning-Tumon-Harmon, while the village center of old Dededo was located in present day Harmon between the two-story McDonald's and the San Miguel Brewery building.

Dededo began in the early 20th century as an area of widely spread ranches centered in what is now the Harmon Industrial Park. Among the agricultural products of the area were copra, timber, fruits, vegetables, and cattle. The village center, which included a Padre San Vitores School (opened in 1929) and Santa Barbara Church, was located in the vicinity of the present-day Harmon McDonald's Restaurant. Fishing also played an important role in the life of many Dededo residents, since the village was only a short bull cart or horseback ride from Tumon Bay. There were also two stores that served the community where residents could exchange farm produce, especially copra, for various goods. By 1941, at the outbreak of World War II, 1,529 people lived in Dededo and the surrounding ranch areas of Tumon and Tamuning.

Surprisingly, the village of Dededo made it through World War II intact. Nevertheless, Dededo villagers soon



Guam National Wildlife Refuge, Ritidian Point



## Points of interest



**Santa Barbara School, Dededo village's only Catholic school, sits along the village square across from the public library, mayor's office, community center and church.** Photo by Tanya M.C. Mendiola, Guampedia

## Institutions

### Religious institutions

There are several religious organizations and institutions in the village including Santa Barbara Catholic Church, St. Andrew's Catholic Church (Korean), St. Paul's Assembly of God, Pacific Revival Center, Abundant Life Church, Guam First Church of the Nazarene, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Family Baptist Church, Baha'i Faith, and Korean Seventh-day Adventists.

### Schools

Dededo has several public and private schools to accommodate the growing number of residents of the island's most populous village including Guam Public School System institutions: Astumbo Elementary School, Finegayan Elementary School, Juan M. Guerrero Elementary School, Maria A. Ulloa Elementary School, Wettengel Elementary School and Vicente S.A. Benavente Middle School; an Archdiocese of Guam school: Santa Barbara Catholic School; and two private Christian schools: St. Paul's Christian School and Pacific Christian Academy.

Over the past decade, several new Guam Department of Education schools have also been built in Dededo: Liguana Elementary School, Astumbo Middle School, and Okkodo High School.

## Historical

### Guam National Wildlife Refuge, Ritidian Point

The refuge covers 771 acres – 371 acres of coral reefs and 400 acres of land – owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge also includes 22,456 acres of federally-possessed Guam lands in U.S. Air Force and Navy installations that are classified as refuge "overlay." It was established in 1993 and receives thousands of visitors annually.

The Ritidian Unit of Guam Refuge has a visitors center with an interactive display of Guam's birds, several of which are extinct because of the devastation caused by the brown tree snake, an introduced species. Groups can arrange for guided tours to get a taste of Guam's ancient past. The area was the site of an ancient Guam village and also has several coconut groves remaining from when the area was used during the copra trade. The area is also a popular spot for local families who want to have a weekend picnic or barbeque along the nearly pristine

## This village at a glance

- **Population:** According to the 2010 US Census, Dededo has a population of 44,943.
- **Village officials:** Peter John Benavente, Mayor, 2025-Present; Melissa B. Savares, Mayor, 2005-Present; Scott D. Duenas, Mayor, 2001-2005; Jose A. Rivera, Commissioner/Mayor, 1989-2001; Patricia S. Quinata, Commissioner, 1985-1989; Martin C. Benavente, Commissioner, 1981-1985; Jose M. Garrido, Commissioner, 1977-1981; Prospero C. Zamora, Commissioner, 1976-1977; Vicente S.A. Benavente, Commissioner, 1952-1976; Ramon S. San Agustin, Commissioner, 1944-1951; Hector Sgambelluri, Commissioner, 1941-1944; Juan Pangelinan, Commissioner, 1940-1941; Ignacio A. Santos, Commissioner, 1934-1940; Jose F. Lujan, Commissioner, 1932-1934; Ann S. San Agustin Leon Guerrero, Vice Mayor, 2025-Present; Peter John S. Benavente, Vice Mayor, 2017-Present; Andrew A. Benavente, Vice Mayor, 2005-2016; Melissa B. Savares, Vice Mayor, 2001-2005; Doris S. Palacios, Assistant Commissioner/Vice Mayor, 1989-2001; Patricia S. Quinata, Assistant Commissioner, 1981-1985; Martin C. Benavente, Assistant Commissioner, 1978-1981; Erwin F. Flauta, Assistant Commissioner, 1977-1978; Prospero C. Zamora, Assistant Commissioner, 1973-1976; Teresita B. Umagat, Assistant Commissioner, 1971-1974; Manuel M. Lujan, Assistant Commissioner, 1934-1941; Ignacio A. Santos, Assistant Commissioner, 1918-1934

– By Konsehelon Mahot Guãhan, the Mayor's Council of Guam

- **Village description:** Dededo is Guam's second largest and most populous village, encompassing thirty square miles of northwestern Guam. Most of Dededo is located on Guam's limestone plateau and sits above the Northern Aquifer, an important fresh water resource for the island as it provides for about 80 percent of Guam's drinking water.

The main sections of this northern village lie on either side of Route 1, officially known as Marine Corps Drive, Guam's main thoroughfare. From a small pre-war farming community, Dededo has become a major commercial and residential center.

The village is home to the Micronesia Mall, the largest shopping mall in the region, located at the

corner of Route 1 and Route 16 (Army Corps Drive). Along Route 16, there are several small stores and other businesses that cater to the area's Filipino residents. Also along this strip is a two-story McDonald's restaurant, and the gated Iglesia Ni Cristo Church. Along Fatima Road, off the highway, there are several vegetable stands selling local crop products.

Past the mall, going north there are several housing developments on either side of Route 1 built in the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s. The cement homes are built close together and were all of the same design. Over the years, renovations were made to the original square design of several of the residences. Some homes expanded vertically while others grew horizontally utilizing the majority of space of the mostly quarter-acre property lots.

Near the Santa Barbara Catholic Church area is the Dededo Skate Park, a newer community installment with several obstacles, including cement ramps, hand rails, steps, and a bowl for skaters. The concrete skate park sits on land it shares with Lencho Park. The whole area fronts the highly-commuted Route 1.

Behind the park is the area known as "Dededo Village." It is the village square, where the mayor's office, community center, public library and Santa Barbara Catholic Church and school are located. This is not the original center of the village, which prior to World War II was located along today's Route 16, but after the war several Dededo residents relocated further north after the US military used their land to build an airfield, in present-day Harmon Industrial Park. Other families throughout the island also moved into Dededo after the war.

Past this area is the section of Kaiser, another housing development, situated along either side of Ysengsong Road. This area was built after the 1962 devastation of Typhoon Karen as a housing area for displaced residents. Further into Ysengsong are several other sections and newer housing developments.

There are several schools throughout the village, a soccer field, a waste transfer station, and a golf course. The village has two beaches off its shores. One is Tanguisson Beach, with its beautiful rock formations, in a secluded area located at the bottom of a narrow winding road. There one will find the beach park that shares its space with an island power plant. The other beach is in the area known as Ritidian. Most of this area has been declared a national wildlife refuge.



**Shoppers walk through the Micronesia Mall center court. The mall is the largest in Micronesia and a major attraction for tourists and locals.** Photo by Sheila Tyquiengco, Guampedia

beach and its shores. It is also a favorite spot for fishermen as the area teems with marine life.

### War Dog Cemetery

This cemetery is the gravesite for trained military dogs who participated in combat during World War II. The canine burial plots are marked with small headstones and a plaque.

## Recreational

### Coco Palm Resort

Coco Palm Resort, also known as Coco Palm Beach Garden, is a privately owned resort located in a secluded area in Urunao. The area around the facilities is beautifully landscaped with tropical flowers and plants and because it is located along the beach, it gives guests a front-row seat of Guam's northwestern coastline.

### Dededo Flea Market

The Dededo Flea Market has a new location, at the corner of Marine Corps Drive and West Santa Monica Avenue. On weekend mornings, the area is filled with canopies covering the variety of merchandise — from new to secondhand — as throngs of people crowd around in search of bargains.

### Guam International Country Club

The Guam International Country Club is located just off Route 1, headed toward Yigo, and is an 18-hole golf course designed with the help of professional golfer Ayako Okamoto.

SEE GUAM ON PAGE 18

## Did you know?

- **Traditional Chamorro place names:** Dededo's traditional Chamorro place names include: Liguana, Mogfog, Macheche, Finegayan, Ukudu, Isengsong, Gugagon, Ipaopao, Tanguisson, Hilaan, Haputo, Ague and Toguac. The place names of Machanao (pre-World

War II village) that are now part of Dededo village include Pugua, Mogua, Caiguat, Falcona, Urunao, Achae, Ritidian, Pajon, Alacunao, Tailalo and Machanao itself.

- **Village fiestas:** Dededo's Catholic residents celebrate two fiestas of patron saints: Santa Barbara's feast day is held during the first week of December and St. Andrew Kim feast day is on the first Saturday of July.

– Guampedia

# GUAM: Lots of things to see and do

## Points of interest



A skater takes advantage of the ramp at the Dededo Skate Park, a new addition (opened in 2007) to the recreational scene for the youth and adults alike. Photo by Tanya M.C. Mendiola, Guampedia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

### Dededo Skate Park

Built with the assistance of US Housing and Urban Development funds this skatepark measuring 11,000 square feet opened in November 2007. It has several obstacles including cement ramps, steps, hand rails, and a bowl for skaters to enjoy for free and off the streets.

### Micronesia Mall and Theaters

Dededo is home to the Micronesia Mall, the largest shopping mall in Micronesia, located at the corner of Route 1 and Route 16 (Army Corps Drive).

The two-story mall boasts a department store, nearly fifty shops, an expo hall, a travel agency, the satellite area for the Guam Museum, hair salons, toy stores, movie theaters and about twenty eateries, fast food restaurants, a coffee shop, a specialty ice cream shop, a cookie shop next to a candy shop, an indoor amusement park and arcade, banks and a supermarket.

### Sports facilities

Dededo is also the location of several sports-related facilities including the Guam Sports Complex, the Robbie Webber Soccer Field, and the Wettengel Rugby Field.

### Starts Guam Golf Resort

The Starts Guam Gold Resort is located along Route 3A, NCS Guam. It has a 27-hole golf course and offers guests hotel amenities, a restaurant, a pool, restaurants and a spa.

### Tanguisson Beach Park

The area of Tanguisson is located at the bottom of a cliff in Dededo. To get the beach area visitors will have to drive down a secluded narrow winding road. To the north, there are beautiful mushroom-shaped rock formations in the water. A popular hiking spot for locals and visitors is a fresh water sinkhole, called the Lost Pond, is located toward the northern end of the area. Nearby are the remnants of an ancient CHamoru village. Access to Lost Pond and the ancient CHamoru village is limited due to private property ownership, as of February 2019, according to Dededo Mayor Savares.



Santa Barbara Catholic Church towers in the middle of Dededo village. In 1947, the church was re-established in this area. Residents relocated the village center further north after a military airfield was built on land where they lived. Photo by Tanya M.C. Mendiola, Guampedia

See more of what Guam has to offer at [GUAM.STRIPES.COM](http://GUAM.STRIPES.COM)

This is a reprint from Guampedia.com, an online resource about Guam history and the CHamoru people, used here with permission.

# Delicious

BY THE

# DOUBLE

**SURF 'N WHISKEY TURF**  
Grilled 8 ounce Sirloin and crispy cajun spiced shrimp.  
Served with choice of two sides. \$28.95

**SURF 'N WHISKEY TURF**  
Grilled 8oz Sirloin steak and grilled 7oz salmon basted with your choice of sauce  
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**STEAK & RIBS DUET**  
Grilled 8oz Sirloin steak and half-rack double-basted pork Big Ribs with Fridays™ Signature Whiskey-Glaze.  
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Signature Whiskey Glaze

BUFFALO

Give your meal a kick with our Signature Whiskey-Glaze Blaze. [AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY]

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**CROWN APPLE COOLER**  
Canadian Whiskey, sour apple and pomegranate. Garnished with a cherry. \$10.95

**MERRY MARGARITA**  
Silver tequila, triple sec, fresh lemon & lime and cranberry juice. Garnished with a lime wedge and mint sprig. \$10.95

**FROZEN GRASSHOPPER**  
Green Crème de Menth, White Crème De Cacao, vanilla ice cream, oreo cookies. \$10.95

**MERRY MARGARITA**



## Double your pleasure with TGI Fridays' combos

Sometimes one main dish is not enough! So, TGI Fridays is doubling your pleasure by serving up delicious combos that will leave your taste buds tingling! Try our juicy 8-ounce Sirloin with our crispy Cajun spiced shrimp or a 7-ounce Whiskey Glaze-Blaze Salmon Steak and two sides of your choice. Maybe a Sirloin with a half-rack, double-basted Pork Big Ribs hits the spot. Or how about doubling down with 7-ounce Salmon Fillet and Pork Big Ribs? Whatever you choose, wash it down with a tasty drink from the bar. What are you waiting for? Time to double-down at TGIF Fridays!

RESTAURANT INFO



# Explore Guam



[visitguam.com](http://visitguam.com)

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## Employment Opportunity

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#### Company

Stars and Stripes, the leading independent news source for the U.S. Military. Are you an experienced sales professional with a passion for multimedia and digital sales? Stars and Stripes is looking for independent contractors to join our team, working in Guam, mainland Japan, Okinawa, and Seoul, South Korea. This opportunity is 100% commission-based, offering significant earning potential for motivated individuals.

#### Responsibilities

- Sell multimedia, digital, and programmatic advertising solutions.
- Cultivate relationships with clients in your region.
- Leverage your sales expertise to drive revenue growth.

#### Why Stars and Stripes?

- Represent a trusted, independent news source for U.S. Military personnel.
- Flexibility to manage your own schedule.
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For more information or to apply contact: [Lee.Eric@stripes.com](mailto:Lee.Eric@stripes.com)

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## Upcoming Events

GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

### Guam Japan Festival (Harumatsuri)

**DATE & TIME:** April 11, 3 p.m.  
**LOCATION:** Ypao Beach Park

The Guam Japan Festival (Harumatsuri) returns! Join the Japan Club of Guam for a vibrant celebration of Japanese culture at the beautiful Ypao Beach Park. This free annual spring festival is a favorite community event featuring traditional performances, delicious food, and fun activities for the whole family.

### Ko'ko' Kids Fun Run

**DATES:** April 11  
**LOCATION:** Governor Joseph Flores Memorial Park  
**PHONE:** (671) 646-5278

The Guam Ko'ko' Kids Fun Run is a fun-filled family event featuring a 0.6K, 1.6K and 3.3K Fun-Run for children ages 4-12 years old. All runners receive a finisher's t-shirt and a chance to win awesome prizes including Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals for the top three boys and girls in each division. The race course begins and ends in the Governor Joseph Flores Memorial Park and will feature a beach shore run for the older age division.

[WEBSITE](#)

### Guam Ko'ko' Road Race

**DATES:** April 12  
**LOCATION:** Governor Joseph Flores Memorial Park  
**PHONE:** (671) 646-5278

The Guam Ko'ko' Road Race features a half marathon out-and-back course that starts in Tumon in front of the Guam Visitors Bureau, heads south on Pale San Vitores Road toward Chalan San Antonio then south on Marine Corps Drive (Route 1). The race route returns northbound on Route 1 back to Tumon and finishes at the Governor Joseph Flores Memorial Park (Ypao Beach Park). All participants will receive a finisher's tee and medal.

[WEBSITE](#)

### Tour of Guam

**DATES:** April 26  
**LOCATION:** Skinner Plaza / Guam Museum, Hagåtña  
**SHOW TIME:** 5:30 a.m.  
**GO TIME:** 6:30 a.m.  
**FACEBOOK:** @tourofguamcycling  
**INSTAGRAM:** @tourofguam

Whether you are a competitive powerhouse or a scenic rider, this is your chance to traverse the breathtaking landscapes of Hagåtña and beyond. This signature event offers two distinct distances to suit your skill level:

- 105KM ROUTE:** The ultimate test of endurance for elite cyclists.
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### MAD COLLAB Block Party

**DATES:** May 3  
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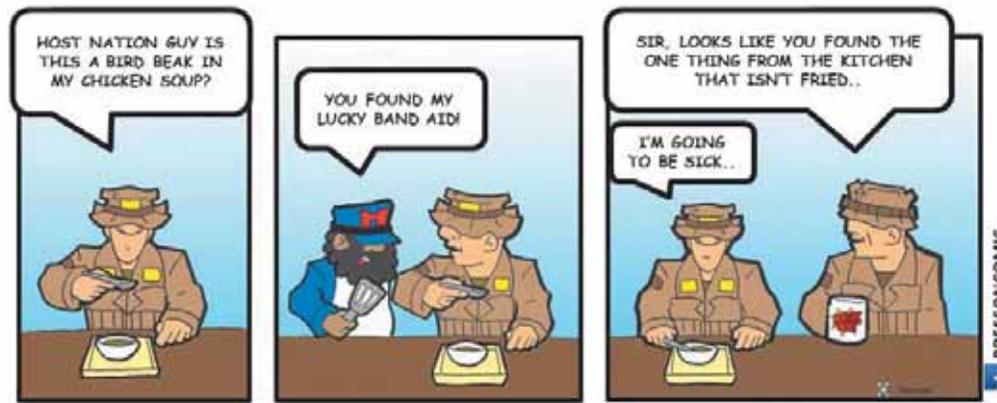
Call G.A.I.N. (Guam Animals In Need) Animal Shelter in Yigo at 653-4246 or visit <[www.guamanimals.org](http://www.guamanimals.org)> for more information on adopting this pet. G.A.I.N. is a shelter-based humane society with a mission to prevent cruelty to animals, educate the public and promote good animal laws. Under Water World will donate one adult admission for every Pet of the Week adopted.



## COMICS CORNER



by Randy Denman  
 STARS AND STRIPES ARCHIVES



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# Boonie Stomps Guam

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY  
GUAM BOONIE STOMPERS




## SCHEDULE 2026

March 21 (Sat.)	Atilong Acho Moonie Hike (Medium) - Humatak <b>*4:30 p.m. Meet Up</b>
March 28 (Sat.)	Peak to Peak - Jumullong Manglo to Finacresta (Very Difficult) - Humatak/Malesso <b>*8 a.m. Meet Up</b>

**Jumullong Manglo**

**REMINDER! We no longer meet at Chamorro Village. We meet at the trailhead.**

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 the trailhead on Saturdays at 9 a.m. unless otherwise indicated. Directions to the trailhead will be posted on the Guam Boonie Stompers Inc Facebook page. The cost is \$5.00 for hikers over 13. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. Hike fees for active military and veterans are covered by Adaptive Adventures. 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.



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### Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

**ACROSS**

1 Highlands miss

5 Mosey along

10 Take for a ride

14 Bart's teacher

15 Asia's \_\_\_\_\_ Peninsula

16 Kind of wolf

17 Midday hour

18 Not up to snuff

20 Desert mount

22 Like a new candle

23 Part of a flower

24 Text, for instance

26 Indian royal

28 Aniston rom-com, "Rumor \_\_\_\_\_ It..."

29 Luxurious resort

32 Bahamas island group

35 Bedtime drink

37 Comparable (to)

38 Figure of speech

40 Painter Magritte

41 Infatuated

43 Like old-time gasoline

45 Thanksgiving side

46 Aquatic shocker

47 Twosome

48 Mediocre

51 Anatomical cul-de-sac

55 Red Square figure

57 Posh city dwelling

59 Indiana city on the Ohio

61 Fingerboard ridge

62 DeSoto's "Emergency!" partner

63 Hubby's mom, for one

64 80s flick, "St. Elmo's \_\_\_\_\_"

65 Small bills

66 Pharaoh's land

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	

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**DOWN**

1 Gives for a bit

2 Really love

3 Rapping Dogg

4 Country within Italy

5 Encircled by

6 Bahrain's capital

7 Play loudly

8 Nobility title

9 Storm center

10 Hurlled through the air

11 Joined

12 Virus prefix

13 It often has dashes

19 Put down

21 Get-up-and-go

25 In a wise way

27 Act nervous

30 Glacier's item

31 Made like

32 Pampered one?

33 Swedish furniture giant

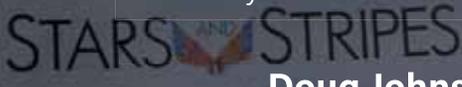
34 Run poorly

**Answers to Previous Crossword:**

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

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## Stripes Sports Trivia

What city did the Thunder play in before making the move to Oklahoma City in 2008?

Answer

Seattle

### SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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

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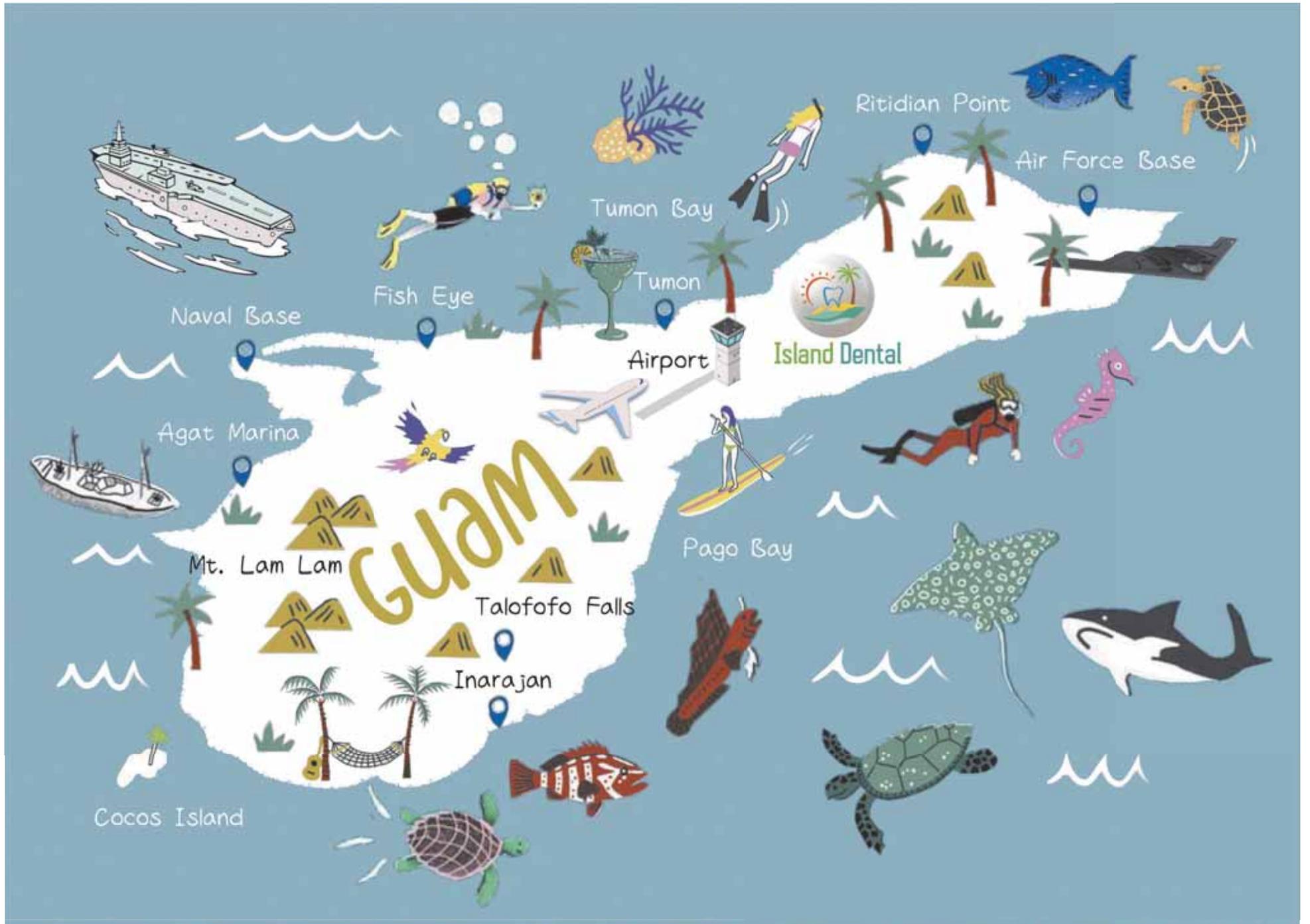
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**GUAM EDITION**

MARCH 16, 2026

## 'Nimitz gap'

Military demands, delayed carrier construction, protracted deployments and a congressional mandate cast doubt on whether an aging carrier is really going away **Page 2**



The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz sails in the South China Sea in October.  
MATTHEW C. WOLF/U.S. Navy

## COVER STORY

# 'Nimitz Gap' debate clouds Navy's plans

Various concerns casting doubt on aging carrier's retirement date

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

BREMERTON, Wash. — The USS Nimitz was supposed to be sitting in Sinclair Inlet, west of Seattle, its flight deck empty of aircraft. Instead, it departed March 6 for military exercises in the Southern Command area.

"Nimitz is deploying to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility this spring as part of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet's Southern Seas 2026 deployment," Lt. Cmdr. Peter Pagano, spokesman for the carrier, said in an email.

The first of its kind, launched mere days after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the namesake of the 10 "Nimitz-class carriers" was scheduled to retire this spring after more than 50 years with the fleet.

But military demands, delayed new carrier construction, protracted deployments and a congressional mandate to keep a minimum of 11 active carriers have cast doubt on whether the Nimitz is really going away.

Sticking to the Navy's timeline would create what critics call a rolling "Nimitz Gap" if the carrier retires in 2026 — up to a year before its replacement, the second Gerald R. Ford-class carrier, the USS John F. Kennedy, is scheduled for commissioning in 2027. The Kennedy would need additional shake-out cruises, meaning it likely wouldn't be ready for its first deployment until 2029.

The Navy would drop to 10 carriers at a time when demand around the world — from the Middle East to South America to the Indo-Pacific — is on the rise.

The numbers problem would persist as other older Nimitz class carriers reach their expected 50-year lifespan before their replacements can be built, delivered and ready for deployment. The carriers being constructed after the Kennedy — a new USS Enterprise and USS Doris Miller — are also suffering delays, pushing their delivery back by years.

Taking the Nimitz off the Navy's rolls would also, at least technically, mean breaking federal law. Congress in 2007 approved Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 8062(b), which explicitly says "the naval combat forces of the Navy shall include not less than 11 operational aircraft carriers."



HANNAH KANTNER/U.S. Navy

The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz steams in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in September.

ers."

The Navy would need to request a waiver from Congress to retire the Nimitz before the Kennedy joins the fleet. When it sought a similar waiver to retire the USS Enterprise in 2009 before its replacement, the USS Gerald R. Ford, was delivered, Congress said no.

Still, the Nimitz's retirement appears to be a go.

"USS Nimitz (CVN 68) is currently homeported at Naval Base Kitsap, Washington, and is preparing for an upcoming homeport shift to Naval Station Norfolk," U.S. Pacific Fleet headquarters in Hawaii said in a Feb. 24 statement.

Losing a carrier, even for a year, means one less platform that on average carries up to 90 aircraft — including F/A-18 Hornet and F-35C Lightning II attack-fighter jets, EA-18G Growler electronic warfare jets, as well as E-2 Hawkeye airborne early warning aircraft, C-2 Greyhound transport/reconnaissance aircraft and MH-60 Seahawk helicopters. Carriers have also operated U.S. Marine V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft.

It's a problematic situation

made all the more difficult by the additional realities of simultaneous military operations around the globe and a slow carrier development program that isn't likely to catch up as more Nimitz-class carriers age past the target retirement age of 50.

The Navy announced in 2023 that it planned to retire the Nimitz in 2025 and the second-oldest carrier, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, in 2027.

The Navy said last year that the "Ike," commissioned in 1977, will operate into the 2030s.

Mark Cancian, a former Marine officer who is now an analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says the Navy and Congress will be forced to bow to the twin realities of multiple international commitments and a domestic shipbuilding program that is chronically behind schedule.

"The Navy needs to extend all of the Nimitz-class carriers at least one more deployment, if not more," Cancian said. "Trying to speed up production of Ford class carriers won't have any result for many years, even if such an acceleration were feasible."

Cancian and others have point-

ed to President Donald Trump's deployment of carriers to the Middle East, and to the waters off Venezuela for the operations that led to the extraction of President Nicolas Maduro.

"The carrier gap is concerning because we just got an example of its real-world effects," Cancian said. "When the administration sent the Ford to the Caribbean, there was no carrier in Europe/Middle East. Then, when Iran erupted and the president said 'help is on the way.'" The United States didn't have the forces, particularly a carrier, to make that threat real. Now there are two carriers in the region, but no carrier at sea in the western Pacific."

Not even the 10 carriers take into account the reality of maintaining the carrier force. One carrier is almost always in the middle of a multiyear RCOH (Refueling and Complex Overhaul, a midlife maintenance process) that prepares the ships for the second half of their life span.

Ships also go through prolonged intermediate maintenance periods. The USS Ronald Reagan, for example, entered a 17-month overhaul at the Puget

Sound Naval Shipyard in August 2025.

Bryan Clark, an analyst with the Hudson Institute, said the presence of two aircraft carriers in the Central Command area in the Middle East created a shortage.

"With two carriers in CENTCOM, there is already a gap in Indo-Pacific carrier presence," Clark said.

Clark said the only carrier in the western Pacific is the USS George Washington, which is forward deployed at Yokosuka, Japan, and is unavailable to deploy.

"George Washington is in its annual maintenance period," Clark said.

Clark said that if and when the Navy goes down to 10 carriers, it will not be able to maintain more than two carriers deployed in a single area on a sustained basis.

"Which will mean future operations like this one or in Venezuela will take carriers away from traditional deterrence and security cooperation missions," Clark said. "However, the new national defense strategy suggests the administration intends this more fluid posture to be the norm."

The Navy announced last year that the Nimitz would arrive in Norfolk no later than April 16 to begin the lengthy decommissioning process. No date for the Nimitz departure from Kitsap or any other details were available due to "operational security," the Navy said. Because the Nimitz is too large to fit through the Panama Canal, it would have to sail around the tip of South America to get to Norfolk on the Atlantic coast.

Under the Navy's earlier announcement, the Nimitz would start decommissioning in May, and its reusable equipment and parts would be offloaded. The ship would then be sent to HII Newport News Shipbuilding to have its nuclear fuel removed and the reactor removed, followed by a lengthy dismantling process.

The Nimitz would be the second nuclear carrier to be retired after the USS Enterprise, decommissioned in 2017, the year the Gerald R. Ford entered Navy service.

The Navy has delayed the beginning of dismantling the one-of-a-kind Enterprise, which used eight nuclear reactors.

All Nimitz-class carriers have a pair of nuclear reactors. The process that will be developed for the Nimitz's dismantling is expected to serve as a template for its nine sister ships as they retire in the coming decades.

warnar.gary@stripes.com

## MILITARY

# Marines stick with M27 as Army fields M7

By **SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps will keep the M27 automatic rifle as its standard service weapon rather than adopt the higher-caliber firearm being fielded by the Army, according to the amphibious force.

“The Marine Corps will retain the M27 for our close combat formations as it best aligns with our unique service requirements, amphibious doctrinal employment of weapons, and distinct modernization priorities,” the Corps said in a statement emailed Feb. 25 by spokesman Lt. Col. Eric Flanagan.

The M27 is a 5.56 mm rifle produced by Heckler & Koch that first saw combat use with Marines in Afghanistan in 2011. The Corps adopted it as the standard service rifle for all infantry battalions in 2018.

The Army, by contrast, is adopting the M7 rifle and M250 machine gun made by SIG Sauer to replace the M4 rifle and M249 machine gun.

The Army M7 production contract gave other customers — the Marine Corps included — an option to adopt the new rifle, Army Col. Scott Madore, project manager for soldier lethality, told reporters in April 2022.

The Marine Corps will monitor the Army’s progress with the M7, according to Flanagan’s email.

The Army’s new weapons fire a 6.8-mm round and are designed to provide increased lethality, longer range and advanced optics that service officials say will reshape small-unit tactics.

On Jan. 30, the Army released photos showing members of a



EMILY HAZELBAKER/U.S. Marine Corps

**A member of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit trains with an M27 infantry automatic rifle aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima in the Caribbean Sea last month.**



DUKE EDWARDS/U.S. Army

**A soldier from the 25th Infantry Division fires an M7 during a weapon qualification at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in January.**

marksmanship unit training 25th Infantry Division soldiers in

Hawaii on newly fielded M7 rifles.

“We’re not here to reinvent the wheel,” Sgt. 1st Class Alexander Deal, a member of the marksmanship unit, said in a news release accompanying the photos. “The fundamentals of marksmanship don’t change, even when the weapon system does.”

Australia-based defense researcher Allan Orr said the Marines’ decision represents a significant rebuke of the Army’s approach.

The Marines’ most likely adversaries in a future conflict would be Chinese forces operating in dense urban and jungle terrain across Asia, he said in an email Feb. 25

In those environments, lessons from the Vietnam War still ap-

ply, Orr said, adding that “fire-volume is more important than firepower.”

Maintaining common ammunition with allied forces is also critical, particularly in Southeast Asia, where partners would be needed to offset China’s numerical advantage, Orr wrote.

The issue of diverging cartridge sizes between U.S. services can’t be overstated, he said.

“This announcement (by the Marines) is a massive dis-endorsement of what Army is doing with its small-arms programs and a line drawn now in the Pacific sands,” Orr said.

robson.seth@stripes.com  
@SethRobson1

## Tokyo: Nothing has changed in DOD plan for Futenma

By **BRIAN McELHINEY**  
AND **KEISHI KOJA**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A recent Pentagon statement that it will not return Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Japan until it provides an alternate runway of similar length is not a change from the original agreement, according to Japan’s defense minister.

The Department of Defense included the statement in its fiscal 2026 budget report, responding to a 2017 Government Accountability Office recommendation that the Pentagon identify “other runways that would support mission requirements” before vacating Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

A replacement facility for MCAS Futenma is under construction at Camp Schwab on the northern end of Okinawa.

“Pursuant to the terms of our arrangement, finalizing the selection of that alternative runway is the responsibility of the Government of Japan, and the Futenma facility will not be returned to Japan until it makes that selection,” the budget report states.

The 2013 Consolidated Plan for U.S. Forces Facilities and Area in Okinawa also allows for “improved emergency use of civilian facilities” by the U.S. military.

“The necessary legal framework is already in place” for civilian facilities to be used by the Marine Corps in an emergency, Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi wrote Feb. 20 on X. “We do not envision a situation in which MCAS Futenma is not returned even after the relocation to Henoko is complete be-

cause this condition is not met.”

The Okinawa Times reported Feb. 15 that the language marked “the first time that an official document mentions that Futenma will not be returned if the conditions are not met.”

However, similar wording appeared in documentation accompanying the Pentagon’s fiscal 2025 budget.

Koizumi wrote that “although this is being brought up as a new point of contention, nothing has changed from before.”

The DOD’s response “simply restates the American position on the relocation of Futenma,” David Layfield, a professor of history and government at the University of Maryland Global Campus, said by email.

“Construction of the new facilities at Camp Schwab has been more difficult and is taking a lot

longer than the 2013 agreement envisaged,” he wrote.

The United States and Japan agreed in 1996 to relocate the airfield from densely populated Ginowan to rural Henoko. Construction is expected to continue until at least 2033.

“The Marine Corps continues to implement the conditions-based realignment of U.S. forces in accordance with bilateral agreements, including the construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility and the return of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma,” Headquarters Marine Corps spokesman Capt. Steven Keenan said by email.

The GAO concluded in 2017 that the runway under construction at Schwab would be too short to serve the base.

Plans call for two milelong runways in a V shape, according

to construction documents posted on Okinawa prefectural websites. MCAS Futenma’s existing runway is about 1.7 miles long.

The 1996 agreement requires that capabilities such as strategic airlift, logistics and emergency diversion that “cannot be supported by the shorter runway of the [sea-based facility] ... must be fully supported elsewhere.”

Identifying an alternative runway “has always been the difficulty for the Japanese side,” Layfield said. Proposed options have included shared use of Naha Airport, sites in Kyushu or relocation to Kansai Airport.

“So far, the Japanese government’s plans for an alternative long runway have been a little vague,” he wrote.

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## MILITARY

# Army holds first Drone Warrior competition

## Big wins, lots of lessons learned

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — Two small quadcopter drones buzzed between a pair of shipping containers, around a bend and through a purple obstacle heading toward the homestretch of the race. Then they collided.

The impact sent one of the Neros Archer drones crashing to the ground on the University of Alabama in Huntsville's drone test range, while the pilot of the other Archer, Army Sgt. Javon Purchner, maintained control and sent his first-person-view drone swooping through the doors of a Humvee and racing on to the finish line. The win in the final race Feb. 19 of the Army's inaugural Best Drone Warrior Competition earned the 22-year-old artillery forward observer from the 1st Cavalry Division the first-ever title of Army Best Drone Operator.

The first-of-its kind Army event was meant to evaluate soldiers' current capabilities with the small drones that are becoming increasingly important to how the U.S. military plans to conduct combat operations, competition organizers said. It also aimed to identify areas where those soldiers and the drones themselves need improvement in a fun setting far from the battlefield.

"I'm still processing it," Purchner, with a wide grin, said of the accomplishment moments after the race's conclusion as he was high-fived and hugged by fellow Fort Hood, Texas, soldiers.

But it almost did not happen. With the best-of-three final tied at one win apiece, Purchner's drone took off at the start of the would-be decisive race and smashed at full speed into a metal cargo container, breaking into dozens of pieces. The sergeant immediately threw his hands up, explaining that he had no control of the drone.

"I thought everyone was going to think that was me messing up as a pilot," he said. "And it was really just that we were having a little bit of interference down there. But after that, once we started up again, I just flew my race, and that was it."

The interference issues were among many other problems that plagued the competitors over the course of the three-day event. Rain slowed the competition because some drones had exposed electronics. Environmental factors jammed communications. Other drones proved inefficient



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

**Army Spc. Dylan Eisenbach, an infantryman from the 25th Infantry Division, lugs a rucksack with five homemade first-person-view attack drones mounted on the outside, during the hunter-killer portion of the Army's inaugural Best Drone Warrior Competition in Huntsville, Ala.**



**A Neros Archer FPV drone flies through an obstacle course.**

in tactical conditions, and dozens crashed — into each other, obstacles and the ground — over hours of competition.

But that was not necessarily a bad thing, said Army Col. Nicholas Ryan, who led planning for the drone warfare event. Those problems provided Army planners with a clearer picture of the technology and training gaps its soldiers currently face in the emerging field of small drone warfare, which has become a dominant aspect in recent conflicts, especially in Ukraine.

Like other Army-wide competitions the service has held for decades, Ryan said, the new tournament was meant to bring together troops to share their latest tactics, innovations and knowledge about small drones and to discover the remaining capability gaps across the service.

"At the end of the day, it's not about receiving trophies or awards, it is about what lessons can we take from this to find out who the best operator is and how they became the best operator," said Ryan, a career CH-47 Chinook pilot who has spent recent years studying the implementation of small drones into Army combat planning as the director of unmanned aerial systems

transformation at Fort Rucker, Ala.

Planners decided in August that a new competition would help the Army implement a series of drone-based executive orders and guidance issued by President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth aimed at "unleashing drone dominance," Ryan said.

Officials decided to test Army drone operators' skills across three separate competitions built into the event: a drone racing competition to find the best operator; a two-man hunter-killer lane to find the best tactical squad; and a "Shark Tank"-like innovation competition to find the most innovative ideas.

Planners opened all the competitions to soldiers from across any military occupational specialty in the regular Army, National Guard and Reserves, including special operators.

In the Best Drone Operators competition, won by Purchner, competitors completed timed laps on their own to build a bracket before a series of head-to-head races determined the winner. All the competitors were provided Neros Archer drones to fly in the competition so that everyone had the same platforms, Ryan said.

self-selected offensive drones to a target started as teams embarked on the hike, leaving them with a short time to set up their drones, scout five targets with a surveillance drone and then attack.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Jose Morua, who teaches small drone operations to new soldiers at Fort Benning and helped run the competition, said teams that were successful had mastered the basics of flying drones, showed they were in good physical condition and kept their efforts simple.

The hunter-killer lane best mimicked the conditions front-line troops face in combat in Ukraine, he said. It showed that the U.S. Army is "a little bit behind" on small drone capabilities and must work quickly to improve.

Most of the teams were not completing the hike quick enough to give themselves time to complete the drone attacks, Morua said. Many teams, he said, struggled with their equipment before getting it in the air. Others, he said, got their drones in the air, but struggled to communicate properly to find and attack the targets.

"It just pretty much boiled down to operator and basic fundamentals of knowing the equipment, and that's been the common issue these last two days," said Morua, an infantryman who saw combat in Afghanistan.

The sergeant called the event "an eye opener," because so many capable teams struggled with so many different issues.

The equipment and communications issues were among the more concerning lessons learned for planners, Ryan said. As a career helicopter pilot, communicating in the air is instilled into you from practically Day 1, but it clearly did not come so naturally to soldiers who have spent their careers on the ground.

Ryan said the Army would leave the competition with dozens of data points on where it needs to focus its efforts to improve small drone warfare. He said next year's Best Drone Warrior Competition would reflect those lessons learned and find new ways to challenge soldiers to improve in the drone space.

"This is the first one of many," the colonel said. "It's finding the lessons, improving on things and sharing those best practices and ... then continuing to make [the competition] better and more relevant and more challenging as we move forward in the future for that sole purpose of making the Army better."



**Army Sgt. Javon Purchner, of the 1st Cavalry Division, flashes a smile moments after winning the final race of the service's first-ever Best Drone Warrior Competition to be named the Army's best drone operator.**

The UAH drone test course provided a track with multiple obstacles set up to resemble an urban environment to navigate the drones using a video game-like remote control and first-person-view goggles.

In the innovation competition, teams submitted a white paper, conducted a 15-minute pitch to a panel of judges and conducted a flight test, according to the Army.

Meanwhile, the hunter-killer competition proved the trickiest. Most teams failed to complete the 45-minute exercise to conduct strikes on five targets. The two-man teams were instructed to camouflage themselves and their equipment, conduct a five-minute physical session that included dragging a 145-pound dummy, overhead-pressing water cans and walking with weight before beginning a 1,000-meter hike toward their drone engagements carrying all their equipment, according to the Army.

A 30-minute timer to complete the five strikes by flying their

## MILITARY

# Fast-response cutter to join fleet at Guam

## Ship named for reserve petty officer who died in 9/11 terrorist attacks

BY BRIAN McELHINEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Coast Guard's newest fast-response cutter, named for a reserve petty officer who died on 9/11, is expected to join three others on Guam this summer.

The 62nd Sentinel-class cutter, the USCGC Vincent Danz, was delivered to the Coast Guard on Feb. 26 in Key West, Fla., according to a news release from Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam.

The date the Vincent Danz is scheduled to arrive on Guam will be announced later, Sector Guam spokeswoman Chief Warrant Officer 2 Sara Muir said by email.

The Coast Guard is also expecting a fifth cutter, USCGC Jeffrey Palazzo, on Guam later this year, and a sixth was included in the Coast Guard's budget request but has not yet been funded, Muir wrote.

"This growth significantly expands the Coast Guard's ability to project presence and respond to emergencies across one of the world's most expansive maritime regions that remains

vitaly relevant to the nation," she said.

On Guam, the Vincent Danz will join the Myrtle Hazard, Oliver Henry and Frederick Hatch, which were commissioned in 2021.

The new cutter's delivery "demonstrates the Coast Guard's enduring commitment to the security of our Nation, the Pacific, and our partners throughout Oceania," Capt. Jessica Worst, commander of Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, said in the release.

The Sentinel-class cutters are replacing the Coast Guard's fleet of aging Island-class, 110-foot patrol boats, according to a Coast Guard fact sheet. The 154-foot-long cutters have a minimum top speed of 28 knots and a range of 2,500 nautical miles.

They are armed with a stabilized 25 mm machine gun mount and four .50-caliber machine guns, according to the fact sheet. The service will eventually have 77 of the cutters.

The new cutter is named for New York City police officer, Marine Corps veteran and Coast



U.S. Coast Guard

The Coast Guard's newest fast-response cutter, the USCGC Vincent Danz, moors in Key West, Fla.



CHEYENNE BASURTO/U.S. Coast Guard

A Coast Guard chaplain blesses a piece of World Trade Center steel dedicated to Vincent Danz in a ceremony at Bollinger Shipyards in Lockport, La., in March 2025.

Guard Reserve Port Security Specialist 2nd Class Vincent Danz, who was killed on Sept. 11, 2001, while responding to the World Trade Center attacks.

Two pieces of steel recovered from the World Trade Center site were incorporated into the Vincent Danz and the Jeffrey Palaz-

zo, according to a March 27, 2025, news release from Bolinger Shipyards, which built both vessels.

Each fast-response cutter costs about \$65 million to build, according to a 2023 report by the Congressional Research Service.

"This cutter will honor his

legacy by protecting lives, combating illicit activity, and ensuring maritime security of our coasts, across Micronesia and beyond," Worst said in the release.

Since 2021, the Guam cutters have responded to rescue missions, provided humanitarian relief and patrolled the Western Pacific.

The Myrtle Hazard was the first to carry out joint patrols with Papua New Guinea in 2023, Muir wrote. The Oliver Henry saved mariners in the Federated States of Micronesia, delivered humanitarian assistance during the ongoing Yap drought, and rescued 11 people after towing the 500-ton yacht Black Pearl to Palau in 2024.

The Frederick Hatch conducted bilateral patrols with Palau and was the first fast-response cutter to visit Tacloban, Philippines, for the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Muir said.

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## Marine Corps revises how to measure body fat, slimmer than policy

BY MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps is shifting from height and weight tables and replacing them with a waist-to-height ratio methodology, the service announced.

The Marines' waist-to-height standard for body composition shall be less than or equal to 0.52, slimmer than the Pentagon's requirement of 0.55. The ratio is determined by dividing waist measurement by height.

"The Marine Corps remains committed to upholding our warrior ethos, which requires being physically fit," Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric Smith said in a statement. "This change to [the] body composition program will help us balance the health and performance of our Marines."

Marines who score 285 points or higher on the Physical Fitness Test and Combat Fitness Test will receive an allowance that caps at 26% for men and 36% for women, according to the service announcement.

Marines exceeding these body fat percentages will be processed for the Body Composition Program, regardless of their test scores. The existing additional 1% body fat allowance for Marines scoring 250 points or higher on both exams remains in effect, the service said.

The Pentagon shifted from height and weight tables and replaced them with a waist-to-height ratio methodology that took effect on Jan. 1, according to a Dec. 18 memo from undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness Anthony J. Tata.



CLAUDIA NIX/U.S. Marine Corps

A U.S. Marine poses with a retractable measuring tape used for body composition assessment at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.

The new body-fat standards are between 18% and 26% for men and between 26% and 36% for women, the previous memo stated.

The Marines are planning a comprehensive body composition study this year to continue to

assess and refine physical standards and evaluations, according to the statement.

During a speech to the top military brass on Sept. 30 at Quantico, Va., Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced 10 initiatives would arrive in their

inboxes — including for height and weight requirements. In a memo, the secretary wrote the military would adopt the waist-to-height methodology "to promote consistency and fairness across the Joint Force," and all service members would be evaluated twice per year.

Since Tata's December memo, the Navy has implemented waist-to-height standards as part of its physical readiness program, according to the service's body-composition assessment.

The Air Force and Space Force updated fitness standards in January.

The Army is still working on implementing the waist-to-height methodology, an official said.

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## MILITARY

# IG: Kennel conditions put dogs at risk

Extreme heat, inattentiveness, aging facilities cited in report

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

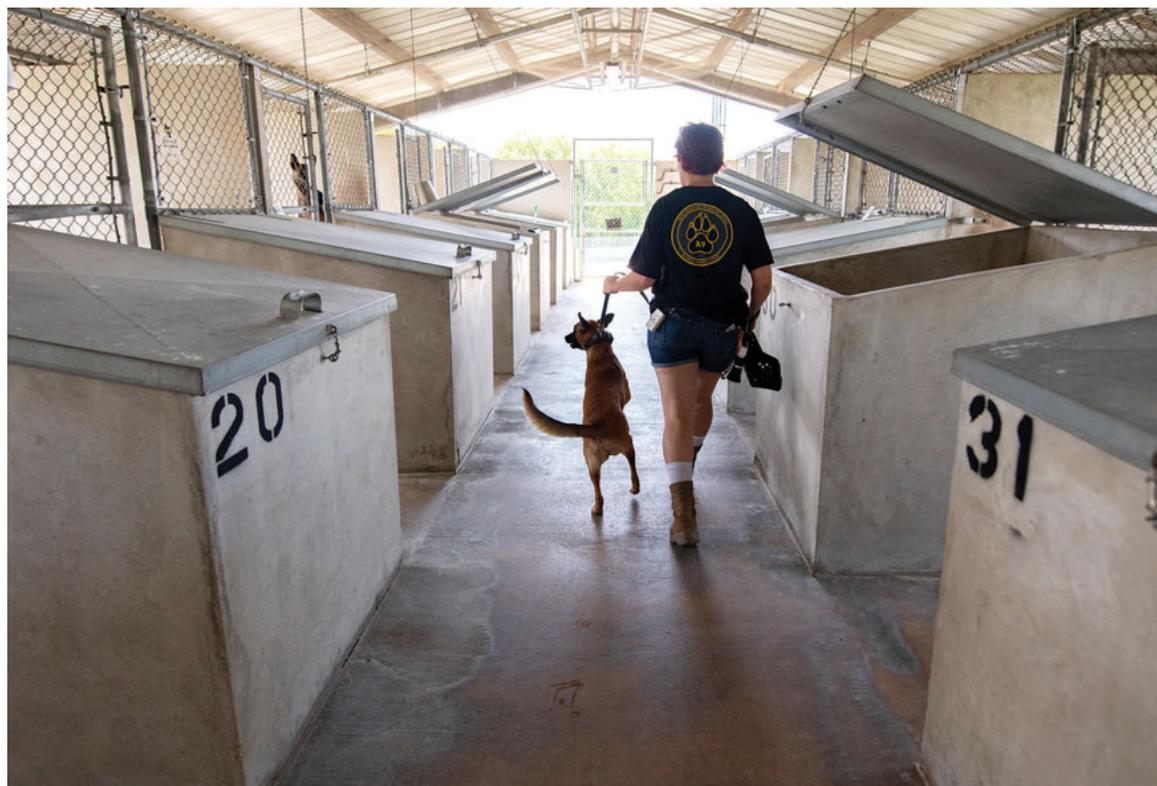
At least four military working dogs died after being housed in kennels that a recent Defense Department inspector general report called unsatisfactory.

IG investigators visited a dozen military kennels across the U.S. and assessed 10 of them as sub-standard. The report cited problems such as overexposure to extreme heat, caregiver inattentiveness and aging facilities.

Between 2021 and 2023, there were four fatalities as a result of the dogs' stay in one of those 10 kennels, the IG said in the report, which was issued Feb. 17.

Service officials told investigators that the poor conditions stemmed from command decisions to prioritize other mission requirements over renovating existing kennels or building new facilities.

Part of the review keyed in on military dogs in nontraining status, meaning they were either in initial training, awaiting an



SARAYUTH PINTHONG/U.S. Air Force

An animal caretaker makes her rounds in the military working dog kennels at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

assignment or under some type of assessment.

That focus was chosen because dogs in an operational environment generally receive more stimulation, the report said.

Dogs under the purview of the Air Force's 341st Training Squadron experienced higher rates of diseases, injuries and

behavioral problems than those in operations units, the IG said in a report released earlier this month.

The Air Force is the executive agent for the Pentagon's working dog program.

Because of understaffing, some dogs received only a few 10-minute walks per week rather

than the five hours of daily physical and mental activity required by regulations, the report said.

German shepherds and Belgian Malinois are the most common breeds in the ranks of military working dogs, which help in activities ranging from explosive detection, drug discovery and search-and-rescue operations.

Multiple service components failed to consistently protect dogs from extreme weather conditions and kennel mold issues, the report said. Managing quarantine and isolation areas in the kennels also was problematic, according to the IG.

During an August 2024 visit to the 341st Training Squadron's facilities at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas, investigators said they saw signs of dogs under stress. Among the troubling behaviors they saw were continuous spinning, jumping, chewing on metal water buckets and "excessive vocalization." They also found signs of heat stress, the report said.

The IG recommended that the Air Force coordinate with the other services on a plan to upgrade kennel facilities to meet current DOD standards.

The Air Force agreed with the recommendation and said steps were being taken to address the issues.

In addition, the Air Force should reduce the number of military working dogs in non-training status until enough caretakers are in place, the IG recommended.

Air Force officials responded that efforts are underway to fix the staff shortages.

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## Army warns of snags with shipping pets to S. Korea

By ALEJANDRO CARRASQUEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — More than 70 pets brought to South Korea by U.S. service members failed to meet import requirements over the past year — lapses that led to long quarantines, unexpected costs and, in some cases, animals being sent back to the United States.

Incomplete paperwork, strict housing policies and limited quarantine space often create problems for military families who have not met basic requirements before a permanent change of station, said Maj. Mark Ryan, chief of clinical operations for the 106th Medical Detachment Veterinary Service Support at Humphreys.

Many soldiers arrive unaware of South Korea's strict pet import rules, with delays often beginning before an animal ever boards a flight, Ryan said.

"In the past year, 72 (pets) did not meet the full import requirements, three of which required being sent back to the United States," he said.

Before entering South Korea, pets must have a current rabies vaccination, a microchip linked to that vaccination, a health certificate issued within 10 days of travel and a fluorescent antibody virus neutralization, or FAVN, blood test.

Service members often wait too long to begin the process, Ryan said.

The FAVN test can take weeks, leaving soldiers unable to meet timelines if orders arrive late or processing requirements are underestimated.

Quarantine remains a major risk for families arriving through Osan Air Base, where no official South Korean government quarantine facility is available on or near the installation and kennel space is limited, Ryan said. Other military installations have board-

ing facilities that also serve as pet hotels for vacationing families, reducing availability during peak PCS season.

Pet-related challenges often continue after arrival. Ownership rules vary among the barracks, family housing and off-post rentals, Army housing officials said. Violations can result in financial hardship or forced relocation.

Families living on Humphreys are limited to two pets, said Marjorie Ulloa, the installation's unaccompanied housing chief. Still, some service members arrive with more animals than allowed.

"We only allow two, max," she said.

Junior enlisted soldiers may face additional obstacles, as off-post landlords sometimes refuse pets, extending housing searches and forcing longer stay in temporary lodging, Ulloa said.

"For E-6 and below, because of their [overseas housing allowance] not being what the fair



ALEJANDRO CARRASQUEL/Stars and Stripes

Dominic Garcia brought his two corgies, seen here during a walk in Songtan on Feb. 19, with him to Osan Air Base, South Korea.

market value is, they run into a problem that the landlords don't want pets," she said.

In the U.S., E-6 and sometimes E-5 soldiers may live off post using a housing allowance. In South Korea, overseas allowances and housing policies often limit those options for single service members, Ulloa said.

"While you are authorized pet travel, that does not mean you're authorized to bring a pet here," Shawn Peyton, chief of Army Family Housing at Humphreys, said.

Ryan said families who coordinate early with a veterinarian can complete the required rabies vaccination, microchip and FAVN testing months in advance, reducing the risk of quarantine, separation or last-minute decisions during an already stressful PCS.

"Please plan ahead and talk to your preferred veterinarian as soon as [you] get orders to Korea," he said.

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## MILITARY

# 'Greater sense of urgency'

## Expert say overlapping drills show increased focus on Pacific threats

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

Three military exercises beginning Monday in the Indo-Pacific region show the United States is serious about defending its interests against increasing aggression from China and North Korea, according to a defense analyst.

The drills include Freedom Shield on the Korean Peninsula; the Korean Marine Exercise Program involving U.S. and South Korean marines; and the Air Force's first Beverly Midnight exercise linking all three of its Japan-based wings. All three exercises run through March 19.

While there may not be a "huge significance" to the overlapping drills, they reflect ongoing training "taking place with a greater sense of urgency posed by the Chinese military threat to the region — and the longstanding North Korean threat to South Korea as well," retired Marine Col. Grant Newsham said.

Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo, said the Air Force exercise in particular signals that the U.S. military is preparing for potential high-end conflict. Beverly Midnight is "further evidence the U.S. Air Force is getting ready for a fight — rather than just rote annual exercises that take place because 'they've always taken place,'" he said.

The exercise combines annual combat training by the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa; the 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa



ANDREW GARAVITO/U.S. Air Force

**Two U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons complete a hot pit refueling during a Freedom Shield drill at Daegu Air Base, South Korea, on Aug. 21.**

Air Base in northeastern Japan; and the 374th Airlift Wing in western Tokyo, according to a March 2 news release from 5th Air Force.

"This exercise marks a pivotal moment for our forces in the region," Lt. Gen. Stephen Jost, commander of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force, said in the release. "For the first time, we are synchronizing the distinct capabilities of our three wings across Japan, creating a single, integrated training environment."

The combined training grew out of discussions at last year's

5th Air Force commanders' conference, and is "not in response or connected to any current event or other planned exercise," 5th Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Tisha Yates said. It will include flight training, rapid airfield damage repair and crisis response at each of the wings, she said.

Freedom Shield — one of the two major U.S.-South Korean exercises held each year — involves training designed to improve readiness against potential attacks on the peninsula.

The Korean Marine Exercise Program begins the same day

and will bring U.S. Marines together with their South Korean counterparts for tactical field training, according to a March 3 news release from the III Marine Expeditionary Force.

"For more than 70 years, U.S. and [South Korean] Marines have maintained a strong relationship that has promoted regional security and enhanced our combined capability to respond to any potential challenge," III MEF commander Lt. Gen. Roger Turner said in the release.

The exercises begin just as Iron Fist, amphibious training between the Marine Corps and

Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force, concludes across Japan.

Taken together, Newsham said the drills demonstrate that U.S. and allied forces remain focused on deterrence in Asia.

"Despite the distractions of Iran and Ukraine, U.S. and allied forces in Japan and Korea have not lost sight of their mission — to defend against Chinese, North Korean, and Russian aggression — even if they won't name these nations directly as threats," he said.

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# Unpredictable drones add realism to Cobra Gold exercise

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

HAT YAO, Thailand — Small-arms fire cracked across the shoreline as U.S. Marines and their Thai and South Korean counterparts braced for a simulated counterattack, defending a stretch of sand they had seized just days before during the opening phase of Cobra Gold, the annual multinational exercise in Thailand.

This time, the threat was not only from the sea.

As marines took up positions, unmanned aerial and surface drones joined the assault, skimming the water and buzzing overhead.

"Trigger Line Red, Trigger Line Red," U.S. Marine 1st Lt. Karl Specht, a company commander assigned to Task Force Ashland, called into his radio, signaling the start of simulated fire.

The counter-landing drill used no live ammunition — only

blanks — but its targets were substantial. Instead of static markers, marines tracked a remote-controlled drone boat, the Hammerhead USV-T, capable of shifting speed and direction, as well as aerial drones, including the MQM-170 Outlaw and a swarm of smaller unmanned aircraft.

The scenario followed a much larger amphibious landing on the same beach. Though small in scale, the defensive phase offered a different kind of challenge, said Master Sgt. Matthew Hall of Task Force Ashland, about 200 Marines and sailors from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

The Thai beach was "new terrain" for the Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based Marines, he said. "But just by the proficiency of our Marines and our partners, they were able to be flexible and adjust as marines do and were able to develop a very capable defense."



ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

**Marines track drones with an FIM-92 Stinger during a Cobra Gold counter-landing drill in Hat Yao, Thailand, on Feb. 28.**

Cobra Gold has long included beach defense drills, but the presence of drones this year increased the exercise's realism. The unmanned vessels did not simply approach in straight lines; they maneuvered unpredictably, forcing marines to reassess how and when to engage.

"[The drones] were able to move laterally with increased

and decreased speed," Hall said. "It made the marines think more critically on how they would engage those and when they should fire specific trigger lines — which weapons systems would be best employed against these targets."

Away from the shoreline, simulated casualties — marines wearing moulage, or realistic

mock injuries — were carried from the sand to a medical station about half a mile away. There, U.S. and Thai medics worked together, evaluating wounds and rehearsing treatment under controlled but demanding conditions.

For Hall, the drill's most lasting takeaway was not technological, but human.

"Being able to integrate with [the Thai and South Korean marines] was probably the greatest lesson," he said. "Because in the end, we're all here for the same thing ... we're here to ensure a safe and secure, stable Indo-Pacific."

As the drill ended, marines waited in their dugouts for the final word. "All stations, all stations, enemy destroyed," Specht called into his radio. "I say again, enemy destroyed. Clear out your weapons, clear your marines out."

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## MILITARY



U.S. Air Force

The second B-21 Raider, the nation's sixth-generation stealth bomber, joins flight testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., in September.

# Air Force speeds up production of B-21

## Northrop Grumman to boost production of bomber by 25% using \$4.5B in approved funding

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN

*Stars and Stripes*

The Air Force is taking a big step forward with the B-21 Raider as it seeks to hasten delivery of the service's next-generation stealth bomber fleet.

Manufacturer Northrop Grumman and the Air Force agreed to boost production capacity of the bomber by 25% using \$4.5 billion in already approved funding, according to a service statement Feb. 23.

The Raider represents a "generational leap" in dual nuclear

and conventional stealth aircraft, designed to operate in the most contested environments, according to the Air Force.

It is expected to become the primary penetrating bomber in the U.S. inventory, gradually replacing the B-1B Lancer and B-2 Spirit.

"We are responsibly accelerating delivery of a critical, combat-effective capability," Gen. Dale White, director of critical major weapon systems at the Pentagon, said in the statement.

The B-21, now in flight testing, is set to form the backbone of the

Air Force's future bomber fleet alongside upgraded B-52s. The first aircraft are slated to arrive at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., in 2027.

While the move speeds up delivery of planned aircraft, the Air Force did not announce changes to the program's total planned fleet size.

It previously said it would buy at least 100 B-21s, though some military officials and analysts have advocated for a higher number amid the current geopolitical environment.

The push to accelerate B-21

production comes as military leaders emphasize the need to modernize the aging nuclear triad while preparing for large-scale conflict.

The triad refers to the three delivery systems for U.S. nuclear weapons: land-based missiles, submarine-launched missiles and strategic bombers. The bomber leg has relied heavily on decades-old aircraft, including the B-52, first fielded in the 1950s.

Military leaders have repeatedly described the B-21 as central to maintaining credible de-

terrence in the coming decades, particularly as potential adversaries invest in advanced air defenses and long-range weapons.

Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri and Dyess Air Force Base in Texas will be the second and third installations, respectively, to receive the B-21, the service said in 2024.

An expected timeline for those deliveries has not been announced.

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# Congress funds new airlifter on skis for polar operations

BY SETH ROBSON  
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon has secured \$194 million to build the first of a fleet of new ski planes that will support troops flying over the Arctic and Antarctic.

Funding approved by Congress last month includes \$29 million for engineering work and \$165 million to purchase one new LC-130J aircraft, according to a statement posted on the Senate Appropriations Committee website.

Four ski-equipped LC-130H Skibirds and 250 airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing have been supporting operations in Antarctica during the Southern Hemisphere's summer research season, which kicked off in October and was to wrap up in February.

The 109th supports science research in Greenland during summer in the Northern Hemisphere.

"Some of our planes are over

50 years old," wing commander Col. Steven Slosek said Jan. 7.

The Air Force has been replacing its C-130H Hercules tactical airlifters with upgraded C-130J Super Hercules planes in recent years.

Manufacturer Lockheed Martin will deliver a C-130J and then upgrade it to an LC-130J equipped with skis, Slosek said. The Guard expects the new aircraft will roll off the production line in about three years and require another year to convert.



Air National Guard

An LC-130H Skibird takes off from Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station in Antarctica in 2022.

"I think it's going to be a big upgrade," Slosek said.

The C-130J needs two fewer crew members than the model it replaced thanks to automated navigation and engineering systems, and its engines provide more power, fuel efficiency and range.

The military's fleet of C-130Hs is dwindling, which could lead to challenges with the supply chain if the guard doesn't upgrade its planes, Slosek said.

The C-130J will be flying for a

long time and has a robust supply system, he said.

A goal for the new ski plane is stronger landing gear, Slosek said.

"Landing on unprepared snow, the aircraft can take a massive beating," he said.

Guard members are also interested in the C-130J's aerial refueling capability, which could extend their range, Slosek said.

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