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# CELEBRATE CHAMORRO

Umatac to host festival Feb. 28 – March 3

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# Yap Day

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Boot Camp breakthrough for ‘mature’ woman

“Hey, Lisa,” my friend, Marcia approached me after our Boot Camp exercise class this week. “That dinner you told us about was at Castle Hill, right? I told my husband about it, and he just couldn’t believe it.”

I was taken aback. Marcia was referring to a story I’d told a few boot-campers recently, and I was touched that she found my tale interesting enough to tell her husband.

Call me pathetic, but this little crumb of social success felt like a breakthrough.

Even though my Navy husband retired after 28 active duty years and we now live in a tiny town in Rhode Island, I still have a military spouse’s mindset, prone to insecurity after so many military moves.

After every PCS move our family experienced, I’d turned into my middle-school-aged self. “Will anyone like me?” I’d wonder, awkward and uncertain. I’d eventually find my people, but it was never easy. Even after my husband’s military retirement and move to our current home, I’ve struggled to find close pals in my local community.

Since leaving base life, I’ve longed for one or two “kitchen door” friends. The kind that show up unannounced without makeup on. The kind that tell you the commissary is out of strawberries. The kind that let you vent about how long it took for your number to be called at the base pharmacy. The kind that let you be yourself and appreciate you for it.

About a year ago, I discovered that the local recreation center offered Boot Camp exercise classes, so I signed up and became a twice-a-week regular. I wanted to get in better shape, but the women in the class were equally interested in the social opportunity Boot Camp classes offered.

On Fridays after class, we’d all meet up at a local coffee shop for sweaty chat sessions. Over time, these little doses of camaraderie were like Prozac. I hadn’t found a kitchen door friend yet, but I’d found camaraderie.

Boot Camp classes were not in session over the recent holidays, so five of us met up on the morning of New Year’s Eve to make a feeble attempt at self-directed exercise before we gave up and headed to a

coffee shop. After exercising, we opened a bottle of Prosecco one of the ladies had brought on a bench outside the rec center, hoping we wouldn’t get “busted” by any local cops. Giggling with my plastic cup and clowning around, I felt like a goofy middle-schooler, but in a good way.

At the coffee shop, I experienced a sense of comfort I hadn’t felt before, so I decided, for the first time with this group, to tell a meaty story.

I’ve always been a story-teller, sometimes to the chagrin of my audience, because I enhance every detail with elaborate descriptions, exaggerated hand gestures and facial expressions. I pride myself in telling a good story, but I don’t fully reveal this essential element of my personality until I can trust that listener will appreciate it. My best friends know that whether they laugh, cry, are fascinated or outraged, they will be entertained.

With the Prosecco’s liquid courage in my bloodstream, I relayed my story of the dinner at Castle Hill to my Boot Camp friends. To tell it right, it was necessary to transport my consciousness back to the evening in question and recount every detail. I was deep into my story-telling trance when I approached the plot’s climax, so I paused for dramatic effect.

In that brief moment of silence, my consciousness was restored. I glanced around at the four ladies, and realized that none of them was rolling her eyes, having a side conversation or falling asleep. They were looking right at me, frozen in suspense.


Then, I delivered the crucial pinnacle, and my friends gasped in disbelief. “What? Are you kidding? No way! That’s outrageous!” I walked home feeling great. I’d finally let go and was unguarded. I wanted to trust that my new friends’ appreciation of my authentic self was genuine.

“My husband couldn’t believe it when I told him your story!” Marcia said at Boot Camp this week, and then I knew for certain. I’d found my people.

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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# Take a drive to these destinations

GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

**W**hen it comes to travel, if you feel that the journey is just as important as the destination, then Guam is the perfect destination for you. Named “Best Overseas Self-Driving Tour Destination” by Ctrip, China’s leading online travel agency, Guam was selected for its stunning coastal routes and serene driving experience.

Being on your own gives you the freedom to explore the island at your own pace, the flexibility to visit the areas and sites that interest you, and a drive that takes you away from busy urban villages to wide coastal lanes that cut through shifting, breezy landscapes.

Ready to hit the open road? It’s hard to choose a favorite but here are some sites around the island that you shouldn’t miss.



license in the visitor’s home country and a passport. An international driving permit is not required. Some car rental companies have a minimum age to rent a car such as 21 years or older, and might also require a deposit and credit card.

## Plaza de España

Plaza de España served as the center of cultural, religious, and government activities for centuries.

In the 1660s, the Spanish colonial government chose this site as the Plaza Principal. Historic sites here include the Azotea, the last remaining structural element of the Governor’s Palace; the Almacén Arches, Guam’s signature triple arches that were once the entrance of the royal warehouse built in 1736; and the Chocolate House, the small round building that was used by both the Spanish and American administrations to host meriendas where beverages and pastries were served. While you’re in Hagåtña, take some time to explore the Heritage Walking Trail that connects 17 historical sites and brings to life the resilient and fascinating history of the Chamorro people.



## Cetti Bay Overlook and Fort Nuestra Señora de la Soledad

The village of Umatac is located on the southwestern coast of the island and is home to some of Guam’s most visited scenic and historical sites including the Cetti Bay overlook and Fort Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, or Fort Soledad. “Umatac” is derived from the Chamorro word “uma,” which means to carry something on the back or a heavy load on the shoulders. Umatac is the smallest and the second oldest Guam village, and Umatac Bay is believed to be the site where explorer Ferdinand Magellan made first contact with Guam on March 6, 1521. There are a number of historical sites to see in Umatac and many of them can be explored by walking along the quiet streets of the village.



## Historic Inarajan

Considered Guam’s oldest and best-preserved village from the Spanish era. Inarajan’s history predates the island’s discovery by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1977. There are 17 National Register of Historic sites in Inarajan, and many can be explored on foot. As you further along the coast, look out for the “Bear Rock” sitting on the edge of Agfayan Bay and stop to take a dip in Salagula Pool, a set of natural seawater pools that is a popular spot for swimming and relaxing.



doubt one of Guam’s most iconic sites. Every year, hundreds of thousands of visitors are drawn to the towering cliff that is the site of one of Guam’s most renowned and romantic legends. The site features tiered lookout points that offer a dramatic view of the Philippine Sea and breathtaking Tumon Bay. From the top, it is a 400-foot drop to the crashing waves below. Visitors can walk the plunging face of the cliff on walkways that hug and hang over the jagged rock. There are also telescopes for long range views of the ocean and Guam’s western coastline.



## Like the landscapes, renting a car in Guam is a breeze

Requirements may vary between car rental companies but basic requirements include a driver’s

## Slow down and go with the flow

We want you to have an unforgettable – and safe – holiday in Guam. To get the most out of your around-the-island road trip, plan your route ahead of time and remember that driving is on the right-hand side of the road. Seat belts are required by law and it is against the law in Guam to talk or text on a mobile phone while driving without a hands-free device.

It is also important to mind traffic signs and signals. According to Richard Kuntz from Blake’s Car Rental Guam, one of the most common mistakes is obeying the traffic lines and signs. “Be careful and please obey the traffic laws. Enjoy your time on Guam and get lost in the beauty and splendor of Guam. Go see all the sites around Guam. I have seen too many times a family will come to Guam, stay four days and not even go around the island one time. It’s so sad,” said Kuntz.





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Photos courtesy of Umatac Village

## Things to know

■ Guam History & CHamoru Heritage Day Festival 2025

LOCATION: Around Umatac Bay Park

HOURS: Feb. 28: 6 p.m. – midnight,

March 1-3: noon – midnight

TEL: 828-8251-2 (Umatac Mayor's Office)



Facebook

# Celebrating Chamorro history, culture

## Umatac to host festival Feb. 28 – March 3

TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES GUAM

If you are interested in learning more about the history and people of Guam, March is a great month to get started.

Each March, Guam celebrates History and Chamorro Heritage Month, aka Mes Chamorro, with the Guam History and CHamoru Heritage Day Festival, hosted in Umatac Village.

Held in conjunction with the Guam History and CHamoru Heritage Day, which is celebrated on the first Monday of March (March 3 in 2025), the festival celebrates the history, progress and evolution of the rich Chamorro culture. This year it will run from Feb. 28 to March 3 around the village park.

This annual festival is a great way to get a taste of the Chamorro culture. Along with food booths serving up scrumptious local delicacies, the festival includes heritage exhibitions, carnival games, local musicians, bands, cultural and modern dance groups, cultural competitions, land and water racing events, athletic competitions and the special Magellan Mock Landing.

Along with Liberation Day on July 21,



which commemorates the U.S. liberating the island from Japan's occupation in 1944, Guam History and CHamoru Heritage Day is considered one of the most important holidays on Guam, with most government facilities, schools, companies and shops closing.

"This holiday is equally if not more important than other holidays," says Joe Quinata, chief program officer of the Guam Preservation Trust. "The community of Guam is small and most often we celebrate with food as we showcase the importance of a given holiday."

The reason why Umatac Mayor's Office



conducts the Guam History and CHamoru Heritage Day events every year is that it all started when Ferdinand Magellan landed near the beautiful village, according to the Umatac Mayor's Office.

On March 6, 1521, Magellan landed on Guam, marking the first European contact and the beginning of the island's recorded history. Soon thereafter, Guam became the place for Spanish galleons to replenish their supplies of food and water during its annual voyages from Mexico to the Philippines. Missionaries and soldiers arrived in the 1600s, establishing Guam as a colony for the king of Spain. Hence the

island's predominantly Catholic community, culture, architectures, family names with strong Spanish influence, according to the Umatac Mayor's Office.

So, during the festival, the historical reenactment of Magellan's landing is a must-see, although it must be noted that it is not a pleasant scene. Umatac locals in traditional attire reconstruct the historical events of March 6, 1521. Guam natives greet Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan after his three ships anchor in Umatac Bay. Magellan and the ships' crews are welcomed with water and food.

However, things took a turn for the worse when Magellan, angered after the natives took possessions from one of his boats in compensation for the water and food, had his men slaughter some of them and burn the village before leaving the island.

"In an effort to reinstate the once celebrated Guam History and CHamoru Heritage Day holiday, the local residents requested that the change be made to reflect Guam's culture in general and not just Discovery Day in the village of Umatac," Quinata explained.

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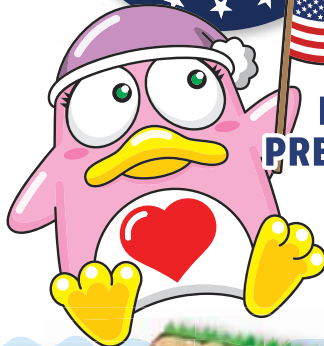
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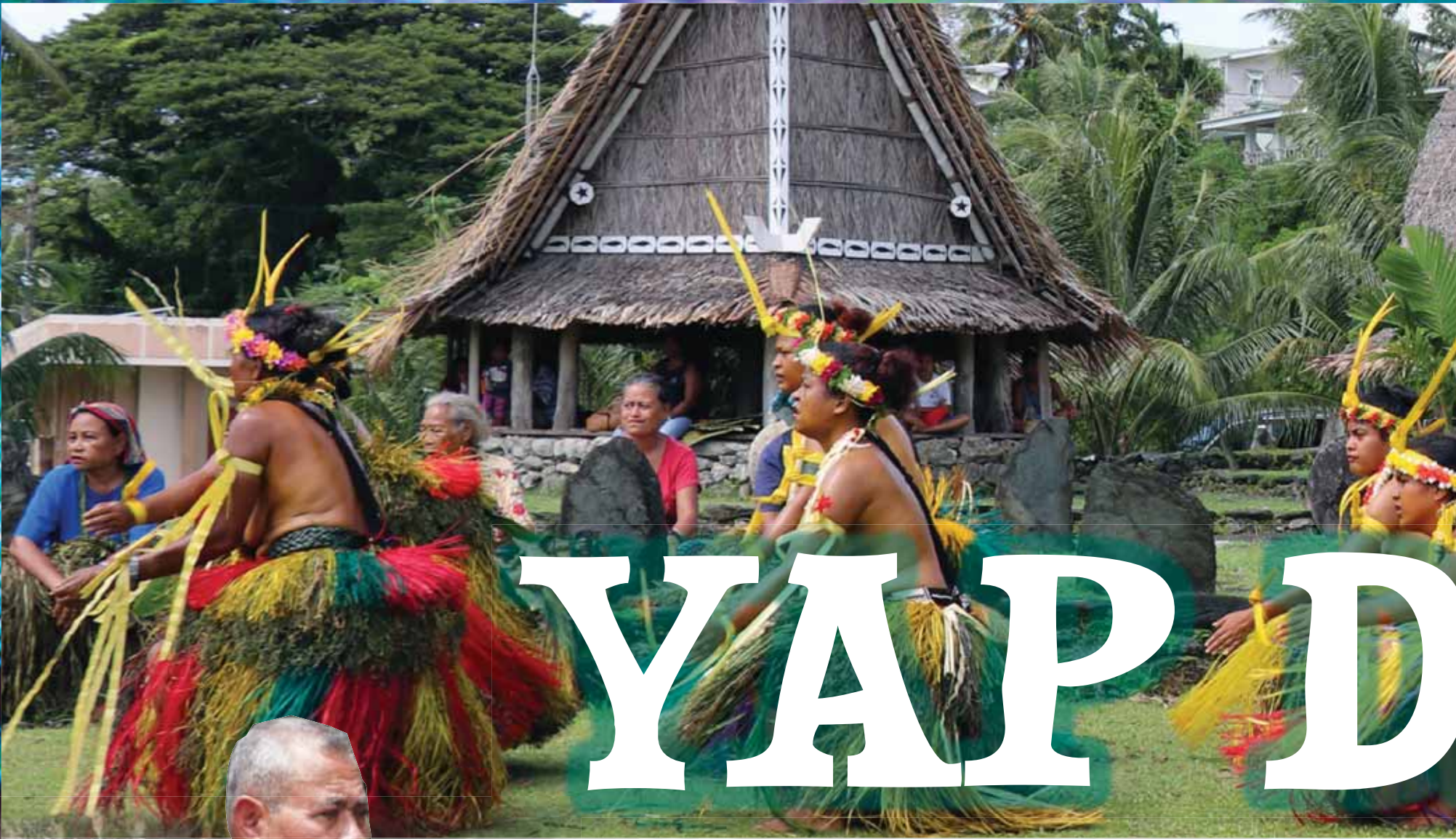
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# YAP

## One of the most authentic

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOYCE MCCLURE,  
WWW.JOYCE-MCCLURE.COM

**T**he long, low sound of the conch shell announces the beginning of Yap Day, an annual holiday set aside to celebrate the unique culture of this remote island, one of the best-preserved in the entire Pacific region.

I was among those gathering together for the annual “mit-mit” hosted by a different village every year on or around March 1st.

During the weeks leading up to the event, there was talk among my friends about the intense practice sessions they were involved in every evening for nearly a year to prepare for their village’s dance, or “churu.” Fines are levied if they miss a practice session. This is serious business.

All of the dances are a form of oral history that tells stories about ancient seafaring journeys, conquests, myths, and exploration in sitting dances, kneeling dances, standing dances, and stick dances.

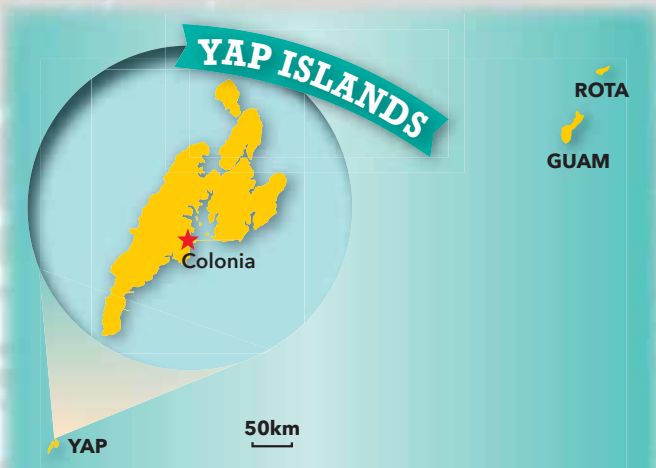
Each is accompanied by a loud, often wailing, chant in a long-forgotten language by a line of solemn dancers wearing a traditional dress like multicolored hibiscus-grass skirts for the women and intricately wrapped loincloths called thu’us for the men, ornamental flower crowns called nunus, and leis called marmars.

Their bodies are covered with coconut oil and yellow turmeric powder that provides a golden sheen.

On the first day, I arrived around noon at the Living History Museum in the middle of the island’s only town, Colonia. I watched, while booths were being set up to sell local food, like breadfruit, pounded and wrapped and steamed in banana leaves, and sweet bread made with one of the more than three dozen varieties of bananas that grow on the island.

I saw jewelry made of coconut shells and the polished shell of sea turtles legally caught for food during certain times of the year; hand-carved household items like the tall cup made from a thick stalk of bamboo that I use to hold kitchen utensils; and hot sauce, dried lemongrass, and lemon powder all made from local ingredients.

My favorite is breadfruit chips, small rounds baked to crispness. And don’t forget to pick up a cold coconut with a straw



### ABOUT YAP

Yap is an island in the Federated States of Micronesia, in the Pacific Ocean that is ringed by spectacular coral reefs and famous for its scuba diving with giant manta rays, sharks and mandarin fish. Other key activities on the island include kayaking, hiking, deep-sea fishing and exploring the many World War II historical sites. Yap is also uniquely famous for its stone money (huge disks of stone, which are still used today in major transactions), strong traditional culture and way of life, and welcoming residents. Just a short flight away from Guam or Palau, this Pacific gem is one of the tourism industry’s best kept secrets.

poked through one of the “eyes.” The sweet water inside will keep you hydrated all day.

Day one is devoted to the opening ceremony with the police doing color guard duty, the governor and other officials giving speeches, and a teenage girl leading everyone in singing the national anthem.

I found a seat on the raised stone platform covered with stone backrests to watch the first dance that’s performed at the end of the day against the backdrop of the museum’s traditional



Yapese man wearing traditional thu’u and standing in front of stone money.





# Yap Day

## Yapese cultural celebrations in the world

structures made without nails of mahogany, coconut rope, and dried palm fronds.

One of the most memorable Yap Days for me was held in the northern municipality of Gagil, the site of one of the island's most beautiful traditional community houses and stone money banks. My camera got a workout that day.

The day's activities included the ceremonial stone money carrying, recognizing the seafarers who traveled 250 miles across the ocean to Palau by canoe centuries ago to quarry and bring back the massive rounds used as currency known as stone money.

Next was the entrance of four men, each carrying an item of cultural importance including a large betel nut pounder, shell money, and other forms of valuable currency.

In between the dances, I wandered around to view traditional-skill demonstrations that were also on display with one man making a fish trap of twine and twigs, women weaving baskets of dried palm fronds, and others making nunus.

Another man offered tuba, the fizzy drink made of fermented coconut water. Baskets of watermelon, passion fruit, small bananas, lemons, and other locally grown fruits were set out.

One of the highlights of the day was the races – the men's telnut tree climb and the women's combination foot race and basket-weaving challenge -- accompanied by lots of laughter and loud encouragement from the sidelines.

The third day focused on traditional navigation, canoe carving, and sailing the mahogany and bamboo vessels with visitors invited to take a ride. Nearby a man was carving up a fresh tuna caught that morning for sushi.

By the end of the third day, everyone was tired and I was no exception. But my photos continue to remind me of those unique cultural celebrations and my good fortune to be among a few outsiders who have attended them.

Although visitors to the island are welcomed, Yap Day is not staged for tourists, it is by-Yapese-for-Yapese and therefore one of the most authentic celebrations in the world.

Contact the Yap Visitors Bureau at [www.visit Yap.com](http://www.visit Yap.com) for more information.



### Villages of Rull & Weloy to host festivities Feb. 26 - March 1

YAP VISITORS BUREAU

The 55th Annual Yap Day Festival will be held Feb. 26 to March 1 in the villages of Rull and Weloy. One of Micronesia's largest and most anticipated cultural events, Yap Day will celebrate Yapese traditions, culture, and community through a variety of activities and performances.

The festival kicks off Feb. 26 at 4 p.m. with an opening ceremony featuring traditional dance, local arts and crafts, and authentic Yapese cuisine. The following day will

include an arts and crafts exhibition, live entertainment, and more dance performances, as well as traditional navigation, ocean sports, and island tours.

The official Yap Day celebrations begin Feb. 28 at 10 a.m. with the traditional seating of chiefs, the ceremonial blowing of the conch shell, and the arrival of the Canoe WAAB. Stone money presentations, cultural dance performances, and weaving demonstrations will follow this. On March 1, the festivities continue with speeches from local leaders, traditional performances, and a variety of competitions, including tug-of-war and the passing of the torch ceremony for the 2026 Yap Day celebrations.



Traditional dance by Men's Group  
Photo courtesy of Yap Visitors Bureau



**DOLPHIN STAR  
NEWSPAPER  
EXTRA EDITION**

# Fun things to do on Guam



*Editor's Note: These two stories are written by Andersen Elementary students and appeared in the school's Dolphin Star Newspaper.*

## Chamorro Village & beaches

BY HANNAH PASTOR,  
ANDERSEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**G**uam is such an amazing place to see. Guam has an amazing historical site called Chamorro Village and amazing beaches! Guam is so cool you will want to come here and stay!

The historical sites here in Guam are so cool, there are so many! One of them is Chamorro Village. Chamorro Village is very important because when the Chamorro people lived there, the village unified them and turned them into strong, united, kind people. This village is still standing on Guam. If you go there on Wednesdays, you will see food trucks, merchants and people performing cultural songs and dances. Some of the food you can get there are chicken wings, Chamorro barbecue and red rice. Tourists like going there on Wednesdays because of the night fest! They play music and have activities like rock climbing, bouncy castles and go kart riding! Even if you come to Chamorro Village on other days, it is still very nice and full of Chamorro culture.



**Chamorro Village**



There are also many beaches on Guam. They are known for clear, warm waters and amazing sea life. One of the best beaches is Tumon Beach. If you go paddle boarding or on a boat ride, you might see white tip sharks, turtles, octopi, fish and many more cool creatures. The sharks are harmless, but fun to spot! There are many activities you can do by the beaches. You can go scuba diving or snorkeling! You can also rent boats and go to hotels right next to the beach! When you are on the sand you can build sandcastles, play with water balloons, listen to music and dance, collect shells and take pictures of the beach while on a walk. There are many other things to do, too.

Guam beaches are really amazing.

Chamorro Village is really cool and a fun place to visit and learn about some history of the island. Tumon Beach is so amazing and full of activities. Hopefully, one day you can come to Guam and be excited and amazed by these breathtaking places!



**Tumon Beach**

Photos courtesy of Guam Visitors Bureau

**PIC**



**Onward Water Park**



Pool photos courtesy of  
Guam Visitors Bureau

**Hyatt Regency Guam**



## Cool pools & yummy food

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRYNN BADUA,  
ANDERSEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**G**uam is a wonderful place for tourists and locals to visit and there are so many places to experience. There are a lot of things to do on Guam to help keep cool and delicious places to eat. These places will help you enjoy your time on Guam.

There are many places you can go on Guam to stay cool, including the pools. The pools I like best are ones with water slides! You could go to Onward Water Park and you could also stay there if you are a tourist or are on a staycation. It is a super fun place to swim with lots of water rides. The next fun place you and your family could go visit is Hyatt. It is also a hotel and you could also swim in their swimming pool. Another fun family place is PIC. It has swimming pools and water slides, which are really fun to slide down.

Another fun thing you could do on Guam is eat yummy and delicious food. One place to go out and eat is at the food trucks. Some types of food they have are barbecue, tacos, fun drinks, funnel cake and more. They are next to Chamorro Village and they are there every Thursday. The lines are always super long, but it is worth it! You could also go to Caliente and try their yummy Mexican food. If you are lucky, there will be available because they are always really busy!

Another fun place you could go and eat is Jamaican Grill. It serves barbecue, ribs, chicken, fish and burgers with sides. It is open for pick up or dine in at the restaurant. Guam is a great place to enjoy food.

Having the opportunity to explore Guam is

amazing. You may even come across other fun places on Guam and make many memories.

**Jamaican Grill**



**Caliente (Food truck)**

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For more information



SCAN ME





# Tumon Bay Music Fest to showcase Guam talent

GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

The 2025 Tumon Bay Music Festival is celebrating their 20th year showcasing musicians from Guam, the Marianas, and beyond! It is one of the largest music events in the region and will be held from February 26, 2025 - March 8, 2025 at various locations throughout Guam.

This event is open to musicians and music groups of all ages and experience levels. The Festival will also include seminars, school visits, and will feature over 80 performances involving 900 performers. Most concerts will be free and open to the public!



Photo courtesy of Tumon Bay Music Festival

### CALENDAR

| Mon        | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat       | Sun |
|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|
| Feb.<br>24 | 25  | 26  | 27  | 28  | Mar.<br>1 | 2   |
| 3          | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8         | 9   |

### Things to know

**DATES:** Feb. 26, Feb. 27, Feb. 28, Mar. 1, Mar. 2, Mar. 3, Mar. 4, Mar. 8  
**LOCATION:** Dededo, Tumon  
**TIME:** 6:00pm Feb. 27 - Mar. 4, 1:30pm Mar. 8

WEBSITE



#### OPENING CEREMONIES

**DATES:** Feb. 26  
**LOCATION:** Center Court, Micronesia Mall  
**TIME:** Doors open at 5:30pm, Concert is at 6:00pm

#### CHORAL FESTIVAL

**DATES:** Feb. 27 & 28  
**LOCATION:** KAHIDA, Guam Plaza Resort  
**TIME:** Doors open at 5:30pm, Concert starts at 6:00pm

#### SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE FESTIVAL

**DATES:** Mar. 1  
**LOCATION:** Episcopal Church of Saint John the Divine & the Micronesia Mall

#### POPS CONCERT "JAZZ, ROCK, & BEYOND"

**DATES:** Mar. 2  
**LOCATION:** Ypao Ampitheater

#### WINDS & STRINGS FESTIVAL

**DATES:** Mar. 3 & 4  
**LOCATION:** Grand Ballroom, Hyatt Regency Guam  
**TIME:** Doors open at 5:30pm, Concert starts at 6:00pm

#### FINALE CONCERT & CLOSING CEREMONIES

**DATES:** Mar. 8  
**LOCATION:** Center Court, Micronesia Mall  
**TIME:** Special Ceremony starts at 1:30pm, Concert starts at 2:00pm, and awards follow at approximately 7:30pm



RESERVATION



## Sign up for cultural workshops at Valley of the Latte

GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

Looking for a unique weekend adventure that brings you closer to culture and tradition? The Valley of the Latte invites you to experience hands-on cultural workshops where you can learn traditional skills, create meaningful crafts, and enjoy an unforgettable day with family or friends.

### Discover Authentic Cultural Workshops

At the Valley of the Latte, every workshop is designed to honor and celebrate traditional skills that have been passed down through generations. Our workshops are perfect for families, cultural enthusiasts, crafting hobbyists, students, corporate groups, or anyone looking to explore something new.

- Feb. 22

**Coconut Leaf Weaving Workshop – Basket Making**  
Become skilled in traditional coconut leaf weaving to create stunning baskets.
- Mar. 1

**Hotnu Oven Bread Making Workshop**  
Experience the traditional hotnu oven baking process and savor the freshly baked bread made with your own hands.

### A Workshop Like No Other

Each cultural workshop starts with an exciting Adventure River Cruise. You'll be transported through the serene waters to the Valley's ancient Latte site, where our main demonstration area awaits. Guided by skilled cultural practitioners, you'll enjoy learning traditional skills in a breathtaking, immersive environment.

### Why Join These Workshops? Learn a New Skill

Whether you're weaving a basket, crafting a pandanus bracelet, or making coconut oil, each workshop offers a hands-on experience with expert guidance.

### All Materials Included

We fully provide everything you need—crafting supplies, tools, and materials.

### Island BBQ Lunch Plate

After your creative session, indulge in a mouthwatering island BBQ plate, included with every workshop.

### Bond and Connect

These workshops are a fantastic way to bond with loved ones, classmates, or coworkers while exploring authentic Chamorro culture.

### An Experience to Remember

Whether you're a weekend explorer or someone passionate about preserving rich cultural traditions, the Valley of the Latte workshop series is an opportunity to deepen your appreciation for the island's heritage while creating something meaningful.

### Reserve Your Spot Today!

Spaces for each workshop are limited, so don't miss your chance to join one—or try them all! Visit our website to reserve your spot and prepare for a day of culture, creativity, and delicious food. Start your adventure with us and bring home not just a craft, but a memory to cherish forever.

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MALESSO' GUPOT  
CHAMORU/CRAB FESTIVAL

March 28, 29, 30

**LOCATION:** Malesso' Veterans Sons & Daughters Pier Park  
**CONTACT:** Malesso' Mayor's Office at (671) 828-8312/ (671) 828-2941

Experience one of the island's largest annual celebrations—the Malesso' Gupot CHamoru/Crab Festival. This event is a Chamorro celebration of southern hospitality featuring great food and barbecue, live music and dancing, Guam gifts and handcrafted items, friendly contests and carnival games for children. But the real stars of the Malesso' Crab Festival are the local land crabs. Crab culinary competitions, as well as contests for talaya (fishing net) throwing, coconut husking and even jet ski racing, take place throughout the weekend.

UPCOMING  
EVENTS ON GUAM



AGANA HEIGHTS  
COCONUT FESTIVAL

April 1

**LOCATION:** Fort Apugan  
FPFX+84X, Tutuhan, Agana Heights, Fort Ct, Hagåtña, Guam

Agana Heights will be celebrating their 17th annual Coconut Festival this year at Fort Apugan, overlooking the island's capital city. Residents and guests can expect a fun-filled weekend and will be able support a variety of local vendors. Games, activities, petting zoos, food trucks, and activities for the whole family will be available to the public!

- Guam Visitors Bureau

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Cleopatra

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



GREEN LIZZARD

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# Boonie Stomps Guam

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY  
GUAM BOONIE STOMPERS



Ague Cove

**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 AM. Directions to the trailhead will be posted on the Guam Boonie Stompers Inc Facebook page. The cost is \$5.00 for hikers over 17. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. Hikers should provide their own transportation. Guam's trails are not developed. Weather conditions can make the hikes more difficult than described. No reservations required.

**For more information:**  
[www.facebook.com/GuamBoonieStompers](https://www.facebook.com/GuamBoonieStompers)



**SCHEDULE 2025**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Feb. 22 (Sat.)  | Mt. Finacresta (Schroeder) (Difficult)           |
| March 1 (Sat.)  | Ague Cove (Medium)                               |
| March 8 (Sat.)  | Pagat Cave to Coast (Difficult)                  |
| March 15 (Sat.) | Ija to Mt. Finacresta (Schroeder) (2x Difficult) |
| March 22 (Sat.) | Talofofo Caves (Medium)                          |
| March 29 (Sat.) | Manunu Valley to Fouha Point (Difficult)         |




**FOR EVERYONES SAFETY:**  
No Pets Allowed  
No Drones Allowed

**NOTE: Schedule subject change, so please check Boonie Stomps Facebook in advance.**


**Complete 10 Boonie Stomp hikes to earn a free Boonie Stomp T-Shirt.**

## Exploring the Beauty of the Pacific

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## Stripes Sports Trivia

Baseball analytics are becoming more widely accepted, and one of the stats at the forefront of that is Wins Above Replacement (WAR). According to Baseball Reference, the all-time leader in WAR is Babe Ruth with 182.5. With 100, who is the active player with the most Wins Above Replacement?

**Answer** *Albert Pujols*

### SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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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:

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

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### The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

**ACROSS**

1 Like some gases  
6 Hearts or darts  
10 Transfer  
14 More upscale  
15 Tehran's land  
16 On vacation  
17 Pot spot  
18 Provide fresh air  
20 Moray, e.g.  
21 Out in front  
23 Dressed to the

**DOWN**

1 Map in a map  
2 Gunpowder stuff  
3 Environment-related  
4 Gun, as an engine

5 Loom's pedal  
6 Assumed as fact  
7 Word after gray or Bay  
8 Kind of orange  
9 Med. specialty  
10 Cotton fabric  
11 McGregor of "Moulin Rouge!"  
12 Check information  
13 Peepers  
19 Not up to the task  
22 Ship steerer  
25 Wine and  
27 Horse with high odds  
29 Piper product  
30 Persevere  
31 Up to the task  
32 "The \_\_\_ Before Time" (1988)  
33 Jane Austen classic  
34 Letters  
39 Not to mention

40 Double-decker checker  
42 Litmus reddeners  
44 Cord for an ID card  
46 "Modern Family" actor Ed  
49 Facebook tally  
50 Like Odin

51 One beyond help  
52 Teen spots  
53 "Rush Hour" star, 1998  
54 Some H.S. math  
56 Bank statement abbr.  
59 CD follower  
61 John or Jane

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**Answers to Previous Crossword:**

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

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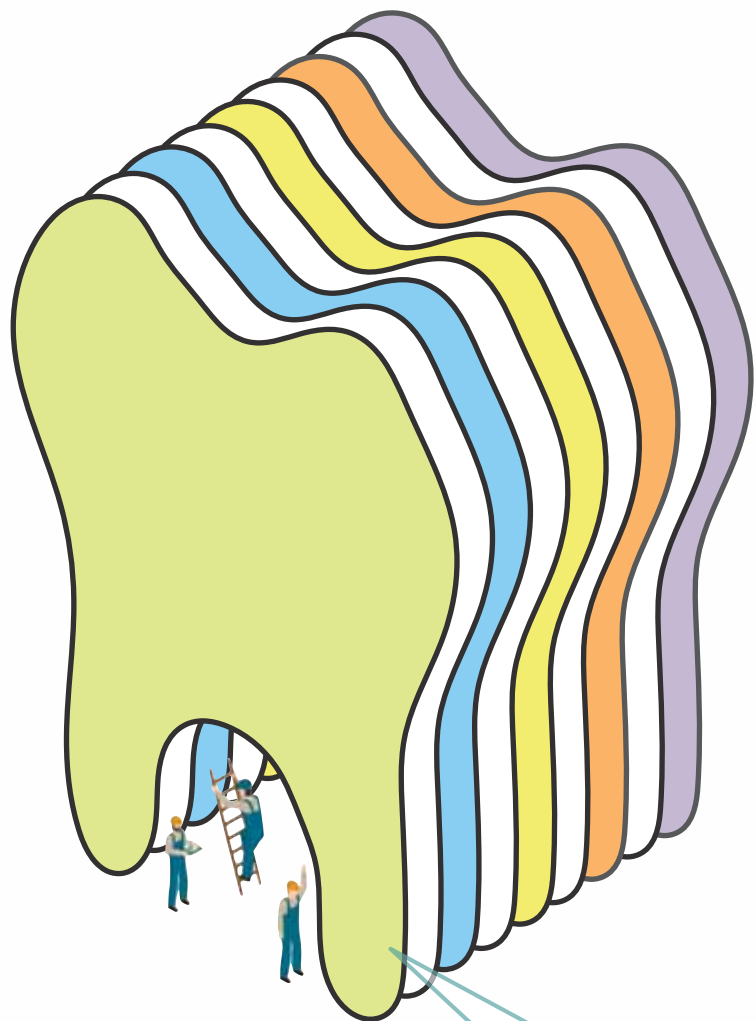
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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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Volume 10 Edition 23 ©SS 2025

**GUAM EDITION**

**FEBRUARY 17, 2025**

## Jungle classroom

Guam course prepares airmen  
for remote deployments **Page 2**

Airmen participate in a beta test for the  
Jungle Agile Combat Employment Course  
at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in July.

ADASHA WILLIAMS/U.S. Air Force



## COVER STORY



PHOTOS BY ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

The 36th Contingency Ready Group's training facility on Guam features a variety of structures for its courses.

# Air Force launches jungle survival course

Guam course helps airmen learn to operate at remote airfields if squadrons must disperse

BY ALEX WILSON

*Stars and Stripes*

NORTHWEST FIELD, Guam — A new Air Force course in jungle survival is preparing airmen to operate from remote airfields if a conflict forces their squadrons to disperse.

Under the agile combat employment, or ACE, doctrine, Air Force units, including fighter squadrons, will scatter to contingency airfields, making them harder targets. These airfields may be in austere locations or cut off from regular supply lines.

"We basically made a course for every airman — not just defenders — that focuses on if supply is interrupted and you have to survive," course instructor Senior Airman Christopher Bennett said during a tour in December. "Food, water, shelter — can you do that, and can you be tactically proficient enough to survive in a small team until you get that supply reintroduced?"

The Jungle Agile Combat Employment Course places trainees in the heavily forested northwest corner of Guam for 10 days of survival skills and tactics, said Capt. Wyatt Huff, operations officer for the 736th Security Forces Squadron.

The training covers water purification, trap making, evasion tactics, wilderness navigation, game cleaning and other survival skills, Bennett said.

The course takes place at the \$300 million Pacific Regional Training Center at Northwest Field on Andersen Air Force Base. It is one of only three such facilities globally in the Defense Department and the only one of its kind in the Air Force.

The program, which complet-



A static F-16 Fighting Falcon is used for fire-rescue, survival and other training at the 36th Contingency Ready Group's training center.



Course instructor Senior Airman Christopher Bennett, left, and Capt. Wyatt Huff, operations officer for the 736th Security Forces Squadron, discuss the Jungle Agile Combat Employment Course on Guam in December.

ed beta testing over the summer, has already graduated airmen, Marines, soldiers and members of the Air National Guard.

"There's really only two places you can do it right now, and they're oversaturated," Huff said. "So that's where getting this course stood up goes — it allows it to get to more people."

The Air Force adapted aspects

of its training from the Marine Corps' Jungle Warfare Training Center on Okinawa and the Army's Lightning Academy in Wahiawa, Hawaii, but with less emphasis on combat, said Bennett, also with the 736th.

Along with survival skills, the course emphasizes agile combat employment, first codified in 2021 to enhance flexibility and

**"The main thing is it's getting airmen exposure to an environment that a lot of people probably haven't thought about in their lifetime."**

**Capt. Wyatt Huff**

736th Security Forces Squadron

adaptability.

The ACE doctrine calls for dispersing Air Force assets — including aircraft, personnel and maintenance gear — across multiple sites. It follows a "hub-and-spoke" model, moving operations from spots like Kadena Air Base on Okinawa to a network of smaller, dispersed airfields.

This strategy "can complicate adversary planning and provide more options for joint force commanders," according to a June report by the Congressional Research Service.

Troops completing the survival course come from various back-

grounds, including ground combat support, security forces, communications and airfield operations, Huff said.

Some attend for team operations experience in jungle environments, but the course is also useful for personnel stationed in locations such as Hawaii or Japan.

"The main thing is it's getting airmen exposure to an environment that a lot of people probably haven't thought about in their lifetime," Huff said.

wilson.alex@stripes.com  
@AlexMNWilson



## MILITARY

# Study: DOD should update BAH calculations

Changes could help insulate troops against a changing market

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Pentagon should consider changes to its Basic Allowance for Housing methodology to better insulate troops against swift changes to the housing market and better reflect the types of residences in which they choose to live, a new study suggested.

Most troops surveyed by the Defense Department in recent years have reported monthly BAH payments were sufficient, yet the Rand Corp. study published recently found housing allowance calculations would benefit from localized adjustments to better reflect the types of housing that troops tend to choose around their installations. The study also found the data used to determine BAH rates might not always reflect the best housing options for service members, especially when rent prices skyrocketed, as they did during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

“Overall, our analysis suggests that, in many ways, BAH is generally adequate for Army personnel, though not necessarily when the housing market is changing rapidly and dramatically, as it has in recent years,” the Rand analysts wrote in the 115-page report.

Rand completed the study last year at the Army’s request, relying largely on data collected from soldiers stationed at six stateside posts — Fort Campbell, Ky.; Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Cavazos, Texas; Fort Liberty, N.C.; Fort Moore, Ga.; and



ERIC GLASSEY/U.S. Army

**A neighborhood in Iroquois Village on Fort Carson, Colo., is shown. A Rand Corp. study found Basic Allowance for Housing calculations would benefit from localized adjustments to reflect the types of housing troops tend to choose.**

Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., just outside Washington, D.C. The analysts noted despite using only Army data, the BAH rates are set by the Pentagon for the entire military, and the analysts’ findings extend to the other service branches.

BAH rates are calculated annually based on a service member’s geographic location, rank and status of dependents, and they are meant to cover some 95% of housing costs for service members, according to the Pentagon. The methodology that the department uses to set rates has gone unchanged since 1998, according to Rand.

**“BAH is generally adequate for Army personnel, though not necessarily when the housing market is changing rapidly and dramatically.”**

Rand Corp.

The Pentagon pays BAH based on six housing profiles for its service members that range from a one-bed apartment profile for an E-4 — a specialist or corporal in the Army — up to a four-bedroom, single-family home for an O-5 — a lieutenant colonel in the Army — or higher rank with dependents. It sets

BAH rates annually based on a complex methodology meant to estimate the local median rental places across 340 locations near military installations around the globe.

Rand analysts found — at the six Army posts it studied in the U.S. — service members generally chose to live close to their

installations, but the vast majority also chose to live in larger housing units than their BAH profile suggested.

Rand suggested the Pentagon further study its BAH profiles and consider adjusting how they are determined.

“While [military] members are not required to live in the profile assigned to their grade and dependency status, the small share of soldiers living in the assigned profile challenges the face validity of using these profiles to set BAH rates for Army personnel in these locations,” the analysts wrote.

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## Government credit cards wrongly charged \$500K in 2023

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Charges at bars during the Super Bowl, withdrawals from casino ATM machines and Roblox game purchases were among \$500,000 of worrisome spending that went unnoticed on government credit cards in 2023, according to a Pentagon watchdog report.

The Defense Department inspector general found the problematic spending during fiscal year 2023, which ended Sept. 30, 2023, according to the report released last month. Much of the money went under the

radar because one-third of program supervisors were not using available data systems to track potentially fraudulent spending.

The credit cards are issued to employees and service members to cover the cost of work-related travel and do allow for cash withdrawals, according to the report. The contracts for the cards require certain fraud prevention measures be in place, and the report focused on strengthening those guardrails.

While 70% of the \$6.4 billion charged on 2.3 million government cards that year was found to be appropriate, 12% was inad-

vertently spent on the wrong things, such as alcohol or in Google’s online store for games, smartphone applications and video streaming services. Inspectors also found cards used on federal holidays and during major sporting events when employees were unlikely to have work expenses.

About 2% of spending was considering abuse and less than 1% fraud, according to the report.

That’s down from a decade ago, when the inspector general found about \$1 million had been charged to government cards at

casinos and adult entertainment venues.

The most egregious case highlighted by the IG was an Air Force airman who withdrew more than \$10,500 from two Maryland casinos between April and August 2023. The airman tried the card nine more times totaling \$3,500, but those transactions were rejected because the card had reached its spending limit.

That service member received nonjudicial punishment after the Air Force program manager reached out to the commander a year after the problem began,

according to the report.

The inspector general made 15 recommendations to review, update and create rules to better identify high-risk merchants and transactions, and better ensure that program supervisors are watching how much is spent using online spending data. It specifically called for transactions to be flagged for review that involve Everi, the company behind the casino ATMs used by the airman. It had recently changed its name, according to the report.

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MILITARY

# USAF nixes 57 shades of nail polish

Career field identifier patches are also out, reversing loosened regulations

**By JONATHAN SNYDER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Career field identifier patches and 57 colors of nail polish are out, gig lines and short hair are in, according to an Air Force order that reverses dress and appearance regulations loosened just one year ago.

“I expect compliance with these updates as the military duty of the total Air Force,” Air Force chief of staff Gen. David Allvin wrote in a recent memo. A copy was later posted on the unofficial Air Force amn/nco/snco Facebook page, where it quickly accumulated more than 700 comments.

Allvin banned without comment the career field identifier patches worn on airmen’s camouflage-pattern utility uniforms.

He also reduced the permitted colors of nail polish from 60 to three; now only “clear, or French or American Manicure” are allowed.

He also clarified that hair may not touch the ears and all male airmen not on a waiver must be clean shaven at the



**A pavements and construction equipment duty identifier patch is seen on an airman’s uniform during training at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center in Edinburg, Ind.**

start of each duty day.

The update also defines the dress uniform’s “gig line” — the front edge of a buttoned-down shirt’s alignment with the out-

side edge of a belt buckle or trouser fly.

“The gig line should be straight and neat,” Allvin’s memo states.

The policy updates have taken effect but do not apply to Space Force guardians, according to the memo. It does affect the Air National Guard.

In its last update to dress and appearance regulations in February 2024, the Air Force expanded the authorized nail polish colors, ponytails for female airmen and updated mustache guidelines, among many others.

A spokesperson for the Secretary of the Air Force did not respond to an email seeking further information.

Some comments on the Air Force amn/nco/snco post were critical of the memo.

One person sarcastically wrote he was glad to see the Air Force “tackling important issues” that will help stem the service’s “overwhelming mental health crisis.”

Others saw the updates as a step forward, with one commenter saying the Air Force should “bring back boot polishing and uniform ironing.”

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## Give sound cannons to Philippines, expert says

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

The United States should provide its ally the Philippines with the type of sound cannons the Chinese coast guard employs to harass Philippine vessels, according to an expert on international relations in the Indo-Pacific.

China’s coast guard recently deployed a sound cannon, able to blast noise loud enough to cause pain and damage hearing, as part of a harassment campaign targeting Philippine vessels in disputed South China Sea waters.

The long-range acoustic device was used Jan. 25 against a Philippine coast guard vessel, according to Philippine navy and coast guard officials quoted by Philippine media.

The nation’s coast guard did not reply to questions emailed Monday about the incident.

However, Patricio Abinales, a professor at the University of Hawaii’s School of Pacific and Asian Studies, recommended the U.S. provide the Philippines with its own sound cannons to deter Chinese vessels pushing deeper and deeper into the country’s territorial waters.

“This is a game of brinkmanship now,” he said by email Monday.

Sound cannons are relatively inexpensive, according to Arizona State University engineering professor Braden Allenby.

“Over 25 navies around the world currently deploy such devices, and civilian ships may use them to discourage piracy,” he said in an email Tuesday.

Police in the U.S. and elsewhere have such devices, Allenby added.

“Whether to deploy them in a confrontation with an aggressive Chinese force is, of course, another matter entirely,” he said.

The Chinese could respond with an array of nonlethal, gray-zone tactics, including irritating gases and chemicals, energy devices, tasers and rubber bullets, Allenby added.

Cyber sabotage and disinformation campaigns are also possible, he said.

The sound cannon incident occurred near Capones Island, just off the coast of the Philippines’ main island of Luzon and about 20 miles from Subic Bay, once home to America’s largest overseas naval base, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported.

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## Expiration dates to be reset for shaving exemptions in USAF

**By JONATHAN SNYDER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Air Force is resetting the expiration dates on waivers for airmen and guardians with shaving exemptions, or profiles, according to a memo from the service’s surgeon general.

“All current shaving profiles remain valid but will expire 90 calendar days after the next Periodic Health Assessment,” said a memo from Dr. (Lt. Gen.) John DeGoes.

A periodic health assessment is an annual screening by the armed forces to evaluate the individual medical readiness of their service members.

The Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs Office did not immediately respond to an email seeking further information.

In 2020, Air Force surgeon general Dr. (Lt. Gen.) Dorothy Hogg authorized shaving waivers up to five years for airmen and guardians diagnosed with pseudofolliculitis barbae, which causes painful razor bumps and disproportionately affects Black men.

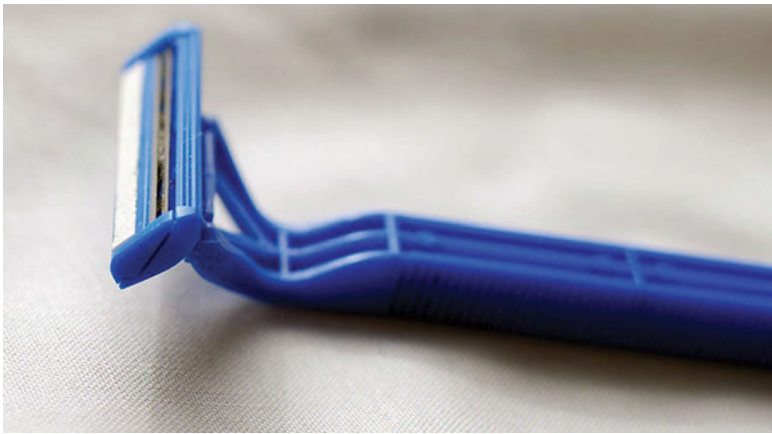
The number of shaving waiv-

**“But when I see an Airmen with a scraggly, 8 haired goatee 1½” long and a baby face everywhere else it infuriates me.”**

technical sergeant in a comment on the Leadership University Facebook page

ers for medical conditions granted to airmen and guardians has nearly doubled over the past three years, according to an April report by Military.com.

In December, Congress decided against a pilot program to allow airmen and guardians to grow beards but asked the Air Force to brief it by April on the feasibility of such a program, the military news site reported Dec. 10.



Pixabay

**A study published in Military Medicine found that Air Force shaving waivers are associated with longer times to promotion, which disproportionately affects Black service members.**

DeGoes’ memo directs airman and guardians with a medical necessity for a shaving profile to be re-evaluated by a health care provider. Commanders may request a service member be evaluated “due to operational concerns stemming from a medical condition,” according to the memo.

The memo states that extended shaving profiles are reserved for severe cases of pseudofolliculitis barbae while mild-to-moderate cases would be given temporary profiles. It does not state how long a waiver may last based on the severity of the case.

Shaving waivers based on religious accommodation are excluded from the new policy, according to the memo.

A study published last year in Military Medicine found that Air Force shaving waivers are associated with longer times to promotion, which disproportionately affects Black service members.

In the study, only 13% of the cohort were Black, of whom 64% were on shaving waivers.

“I have absolutely no issues with shaving waivers for those who need them,” a technical sergeant wrote in a Tuesday comment on the Leadership University Facebook page. “But when I see an Airmen with a scraggly, 8 haired goatee 1½” long and a baby face everywhere else it infuriates me.”

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## MILITARY

# GAO: Less training affected readiness

## Report details impact on US military of Ukraine support

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — U.S. Army troops in Germany scaled down some training in favor of Ukrainian forces and faced challenges in keeping equipment functional, according to a recently released federal watchdog report.

Some U.S. troops stationed in Grafenwoehr, Germany, reported they were negatively impacted by scheduling conflicts, additional equipment wear and tear and delays in meeting their own training requirements while supporting the training of Ukrainian troops, according to a Government Accountability Office report.

In a few instances, U.S. training had to be canceled or moved to sites in other countries to accommodate Ukrainian forces. Officials told the GAO that most units completed training as planned, but some training equipment that is available at Grafenwoehr — for gathering data and measurements, for example — was not available. Host nation requirements also led one battalion to scale down its training.

Additionally, U.S. Army units initially faced challenges training Ukrainian forces because the Defense Department did not always implement a total ap-



SPENCER RHODES/U.S. Army

**Ukrainian artillerymen fire the M109 self-propelled howitzer during training at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, in May 2022. Soldiers from the U.S. and Norway trained Ukrainian artillerymen amid Ukraine's ongoing defense of its country.**

proach for some defense materials and weapons delivered under the presidential drawdown authority, which allows equipment to be pulled from existing U.S. military stocks and sent to Ukraine on an emergency basis.

Between February 2022 and April 2024, the Defense Department trained Ukrainian military personnel — mainly at U.S. training ranges in Germany — using various security assistance processes.

“However, the expanded size, scope, and speed of equipment deliveries to Ukraine contributed to training challenges,” the report read.

The Army units were generally notified 18 days in advance about the training requirements for arriving equipment, which was not sufficient time to plan that

training for Ukrainian forces. Typically, units need 30 to 60 days to plan and schedule such training, the GAO said. The federal watchdog was also told some equipment items arrived late, in insufficient quantities, and in some cases, were not in working condition.

As a result, the training unit needed additional time and resources to repair the remaining Paladins to use them for training, according to officials.

“The U.S. Army trainers also told us they had to adapt the programs of instruction for the training by rearranging the order of training events until they had time to repair the equipment,” the report read.

The GAO recommended the Pentagon require combatant commands to identify resources

necessary for training when proposing a security assistance package, including situations that require rapid execution.

“U.S. Army officials told GAO they overcame these challenges by adapting training schedules and obtaining contractor support, among other strategies. By issuing additional guidance to ensure that combatant commands identify training needs when proposing a security assistance package, [the Defense Department] would be better positioned to avoid challenges that might disrupt associated training. This is especially relevant for future situations that require the rapid execution of [a presidential drawdown authority],” the report read.

Officials from three U.S. Army units that served as trainers told

the GAO that challenges ultimately did not significantly reduce readiness because they had sufficient personnel, maintenance resources, and technical expertise available for the training mission from U.S. Army Europe and Africa.

Unit officials also described some positive effects on general readiness that might not be captured in a unit's readiness reporting, including morale and retention, repetition, and knowledge sharing.

While the Defense Department has processes meant to assess training for Ukrainian forces and develop lessons learned from U.S. efforts, the department has not clearly communicated how U.S. European Command and subordinate commands should document this data nor attribute that data in information systems as required.

“As a result, [the Defense Department's] lessons learned may not be comprehensive or timely, leading to missed opportunities for improvement,” the report read.

The GAO recommended EU-COM provide clear guidance to subordinate organizations on documenting approaches for assessing training provided to Ukrainian forces.

The federal watchdog also recommended that EUCOM direct subordinate organizations to capture and share relevant observations from ongoing efforts to train Ukraine's forces through the Joint Lessons Learned Information System in a timely manner.

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## Snakebite antidote needs additional study

By JOSEPH DITZLER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A yearlong clinical trial of a promising cure for venomous snakebites fell short of its backers' goal, but it still may provide a fast, immediate remedy for frontline troops.

The trial in India and the United States showed that varespladib may benefit snakebite victims within the first five hours after they are “envenomed,” according to the trial results published in October.

But the drug's effect apparently did not extend later into emergency room treatment.

“Although we did not meet the primary endpoint, encouraging results emphasized the critical importance of rapid intervention and the need for a treatment that can be easily administered in a

pre-hospital setting,” said Sally Stephens, a spokeswoman for Ophirex Inc., a California public benefit corporation, in an email.

The trial results “underscored the principle that earlier treatment improves patient outcomes.”

Ophirex was founded by Dr. Matthew Lewin with a handful of investors, including Jerry Harrison, a member of the influential rock band Talking Heads, to develop varespladib as a snakebite antidote. Derrick Rossi, a stem cell scientist who co-founded Moderna, a COVID-19 vaccine maker, is also a board member.

The Defense Department, through Army Medical Materiel Development Activity, awarded Ophirex a \$13.8 million contract in 2022 to develop varespladib for use with Special Forces,

which sometimes operate in austere conditions where venomous snakes are common. The following year, Ophirex raised another \$37 million in private financing for the project.

A spokeswoman for the activity did not respond to requests for information.

Developed years ago by pharmaceutical maker Eli Lilly, varespladib blocks sPLA2, a basic neurotoxin in venom that causes paralysis, tissue damage and respiratory failure. In lab settings, the drug neutralized venom in test tubes and stopped or reversed its effects in laboratory animals, Lewin said.

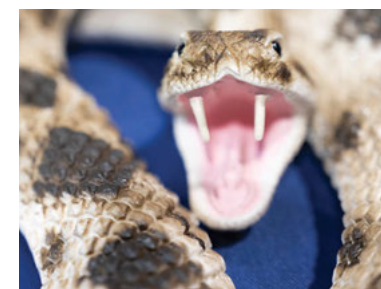
The drug is available as a pill and requires no refrigeration, unlike traditional antivenom, and is easier to administer.

During the clinical trial be-

tween August 2021 and November 2022, researchers selected 95 snakebite victims who were offered varespladib or a placebo, in addition to the standard antivenom treatment, over several days, according to the report. The study looked for a change in the expected results of antivenom treatment alone. Russell's vipers, common in India, copperheads and rattlesnakes were the most common sources of snakebites in the study.

The study was hindered by the inability to administer the drug earlier than six hours after the bite, the fact that the drug was administered in conjunction with antivenom and other factors, the report states.

Ophirex remains committed to a goal of delivering “safe, effective treatment for snakebite,”



T.T. PARISH/U.S. Army

**A rubber rattlesnake sits on display at the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Development Activity booth during the annual Military Health System Research Symposium in Kissimmee, Fla.**

easily administered, “especially in austere environments where our military members and civilians do not have immediate access to hospital facilities or antivenom,” Stephens' email states.

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## MILITARY

# ‘We want to optimize their potential’

## Special warfare school brings holistic health under one roof

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT LIBERTY, N.C. — The massive new gym space on Fort Liberty boasts more than 40 weightlifting power racks, state-of-the-art strength and conditioning equipment, an indoor turf field and some 30,000 pounds of weights.

But the \$43 million facility is for far more than working out, officials at the Army base said.

“It’s really cool. It’s actually incredible,” Lt. Col. Michael Handlan said as he looked out at the 43,000 square feet of gym space inside the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School’s new Human Performance Force Generation building on Jan. 23, a day after officials on the North Carolina post officially opened the facility.

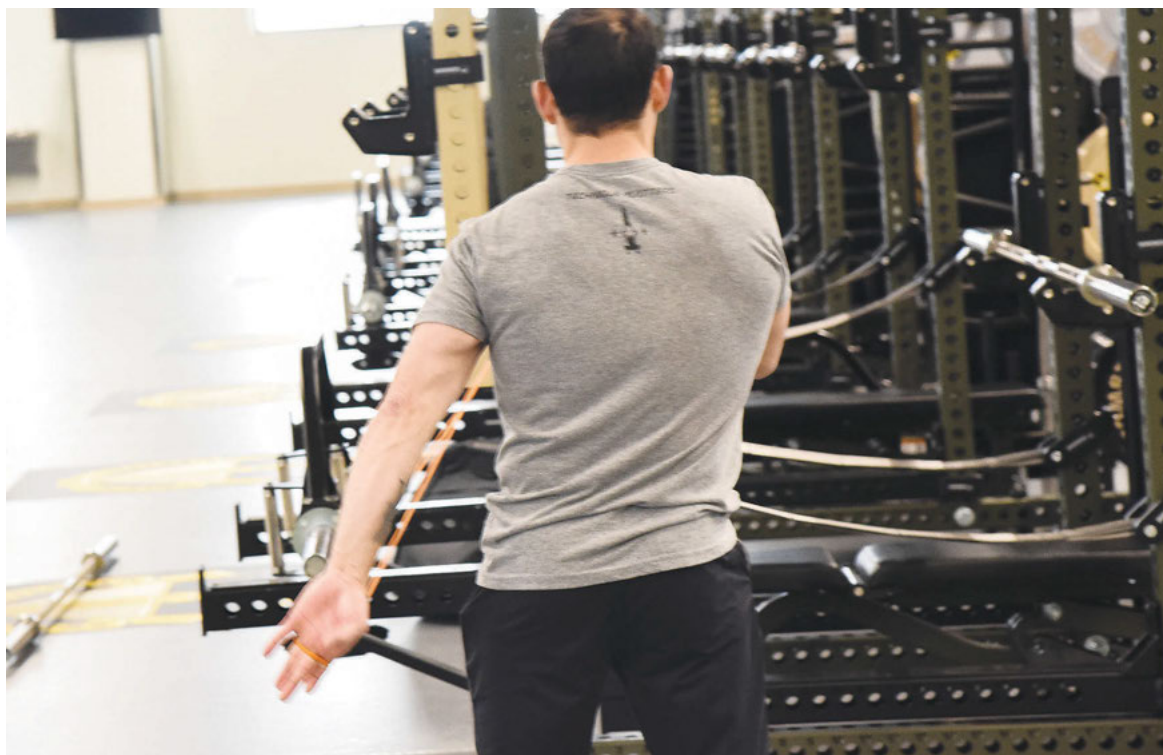
Handlan, the Special Forces officer who directs the human performance program for the Special Warfare Center, known as SWCS, said the opening of the 90,000-square-foot building known as HP Forge marks a new step in his program’s efforts to build soldiers best suited for special operations.

SWCS is responsible for running the courses that produce Green Berets and psychological operations soldiers. It also provides advanced military education for experienced special operators.

HP Forge “is a place where we have a wide range of human performance and wellness resources housed in one place so that we can synchronize our efforts and provide a holistic approach to training and supporting our service members,” Handlan said.

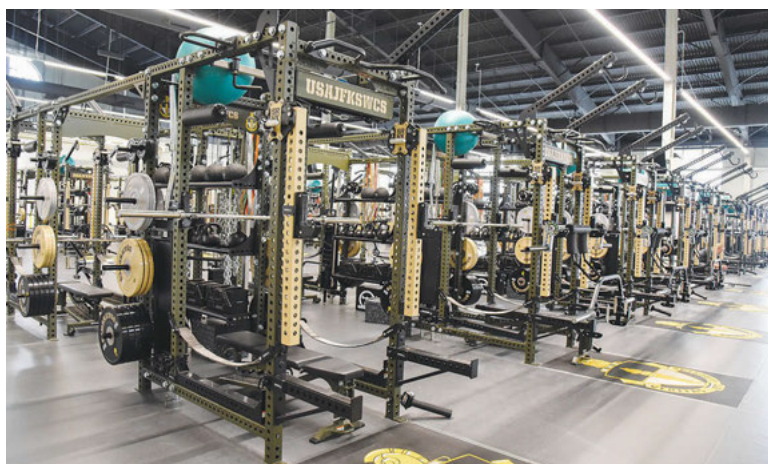
The human performance program dates back roughly 15 years and was essentially a precursor to the Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness — or H2F — program the service adopted for its conventional forces in 2018.

The program aims to provide its forces with the opportunity to improve their mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing, while also training them in ways that would aid them in completing the grueling courses to enter the Special Forces or psyops fields and on the front lines in combat, Handlan said. HP Forge provides those troops access to strength coaches, physical therapists,



**A soldier assigned to the Army’s John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School works out in its new 90,000 holistic health and fitness center known as the Human Performance Force Generation facility.**

PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes



**The new center houses a 43,000-square-foot gym and access to physical therapists, nutritionists, behavioral health specialists and mental coaches.**

mental performance coaches, nutritionists and behavioral health specialists all within the building.

The access to that team of professionals for SWCS soldiers in the training pipelines and the cadre that runs those programs, Handlan said, is the key for ensuring the service produces elite special operators.

“This building, this facility is incredible,” the lieutenant colonel said. “But the resource is the people, the experts that we hire — the people that we bring who are willing to do this ... for our folks.”

The human performance program has come a long way since its beginnings a few years into the Global War on Terror, when the command founded the program to focus on rehabilitating soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Command Sgt. Maj. Lionel Strong, the SWCS senior enlisted leader, who is a Green Beret.

The program began in make-shift gyms — about 500-square-foot repurposed supply rooms, he said. Units within SWCS each had one strength coach and one physical therapist who shared space in those facilities, instead of the large teams of coaches that they have access to now.

“You would literally be tripping over each other working out with one strength coach while the teammate was 10 feet away being worked on by the one and only sole physical therapist,” Strong said. “It’s important to understand where we came from and evolve to where we are.”

The HP Forge facility now includes a physical therapy facility with more than a dozen beds and a host of specialized recovery equipment designed to get injured troops back into the field as quickly and safely as possible, Handlan said. The facility also has digital tools that can help troops understand their physical makeup including muscle and fat

tissue and their bone density.

The program seems to be working. Mike Fields, the deputy director of the SWCS human performance program, said the command is gathering data on injury prevention and return to duty times among its population. Recently, SWCS saw 149 of 170 candidates who trained with its human performance program after failing a training stage in the Special Forces pipeline return to their course, often after an injury, and complete it.

“That saves a lot of money,” Fields said. “Horses are not cheap.”

Handlan is also focused on preventing injury and maximizing performance for SWCS’ troops. That includes focusing on proper sleep and proper nutrition — two of the areas that he said SWCS officials have long struggled to convince young soldiers to embrace.

“Getting everyone to buy in on the nutrition and the sleep is really tough,” he said. “What we’re learning is those are the things that ultimately affect us the most significantly long term. If your sleep and your food are horrible for years, no matter what you do in the gym, you’re not going to be able to continue to perform because all the other things are falling off.”

Nutritionists opened a “performance kitchen” in the HP Forge facility where they are focused on providing troops with knowledge about food and the tools to prepare it properly.

“Our dietitians are teaching people how to fuel with the right things at the right time to perform at max level on the ob-

jective,” he said. “So, if you’re carrying a ruck for 12 hours through the woods and you know you’re getting ready to hit an objective at [3 a.m.], it’s when do I need the fuel so that my body and my mind are functioning in the right place?”

SWCS has long been great at physically training its soldiers, Handlan said, but its coaches are really working now to develop proper lifestyle habits the troops can adopt for their entire careers.

Another aspect of the human performance program is designed to set baseline understandings of troops’ bodies, which can be measured as they progress forward in their careers, Handlan said.

For Special Forces hopefuls, that process starts when they arrive at SWCS before going into the Green Beret qualification pipeline, he said. Officials gather metrics on every new soldier coming into the command, including identifying muscle imbalances or other musculoskeletal issues that have long plagued soldiers in strenuous physical training programs.

“If we can identify that you are weaker on your left shoulder or your ratio of strength on your left side versus right side is off balance, then we can come up with a dedicated program to fix that [before beginning] training so that you are more successful in your effort to get through an [assessment and selection] program and through a qualification course,” Handlan said.

For the Green Beret community, those early efforts at SWCS mean more Special Forces troops getting to units, he said. The program’s success has meant producing each year an extra five or more operational detachments — the 12-person Green Beret teams that form the base of Special Forces units, Handlan said.

Strong credited the human performance program with improving what the special warfare school can accomplish with its students, and he said the holistic health approaches that they learn at that early stage of their special operations careers should set a baseline for them as they move forward in the Army and even after they leave the military.

“We want to meet them where we’re at, and we want to optimize their potential across these physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional domains throughout their career,” the command sergeant major said. “And on the other side of that service, whether it’s a five-year career or 20-year career, we want to push a healthy veteran back into society.”



## MILITARY

# PCS program plagued with problems

Initial phase-in of DOD's renewed system hits some bumps in the road

BY WYATT OLSON  
Stars and Stripes

About 1,000 service members have faced late pickups or deliveries of household goods under the initial phase-in of the Defense Department's revamped system for relocations, defense officials said.

"Right now, we anticipate roughly 1,000 service members have been impacted, either at the pickup-delivery or [by] poor communication," Andy Dawson, director of the Defense Personal Property Management Office inside U.S. Transportation Command, told reporters during a conference call.

"The majority of them have been in the last 30 to 45 days," he said.

The Defense Department is transferring oversight of the roughly 300,000 annual moves by the military and Coast Guard to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture between Tier One Relocation and KBR, formerly Kellogg Brown & Root.

The Transportation Command awarded HomeSafe a \$20 billion contract in late 2021 to implement the Global Household Goods Contract, or GHC.

Under GHC, HomeSafe is replacing about 900 companies that until now managed military moves by contracting with movers and trucking, shipping and warehousing companies.

Implementing GHC began in April 2024 with a handful of moves per month but has progressed with a "deliberate walk-crawl-run approach," Dawson said. GHC is slated to handle all domestic moves by this summer, with international moves beginning in the fall.

The program has met with resistance from much of the moving industry, which objects to lower rates being offered by HomeSafe as compared to the



U.S. Army

**A mover rolls a service member's household goods onto a truck at Fort Knox, Ky. Late pickups and deliveries have plagued the Pentagon's revamped streamlined program for military moves.**

**"Right now, we anticipate roughly 1,000 service members have been impacted, either at the pickup-delivery or [by] poor communication."**

Andy Dawson

Defense Personal Property Management Office

legacy system, as well as other terms of the contract.

Regardless of problems with the rollout, the Defense Department has no intention of giving up on it.

"GHC is the department's future household goods relocation program," Dawson said. "We're committed to it, and despite some early challenges, we have seen many positive aspects in GHC that we truly believe will improve our service member relocation experience."

In an emailed statement, Ho-

meSafe said it is "focused on continuously improving all of our systems and processes."

"While the vast majority of HomeSafe's moves have been successful, logistical challenges have caused delays for some moves in these early stages of our program," the email stated.

"We are implementing additional measures to strengthen our network's agility and to minimize the risk of future delays. We are onboarding and training new highly qualified movers to service relocations. We also have

several process improvements underway to enhance our 24/7 customer service."

As of Jan. 30, HomeSafe has been given 5,195 relocation orders, with 1,737 of those orders picked up and 922 delivered, he said.

Those orders account for just over 1% of the approximate volume for 2025, with most moves still to come during peak moving season beginning in May.

The numbers provided by the Transportation Command suggest that about a fifth of households that have relocated using GHC have been unsatisfied with the service.

By comparison, the dissatisfaction rate was just over 23% in 2024 for domestic household moves under the legacy system, according to the Transportation Command.

"In terms of quality and capacity, we did begin to see some issues in late December, as we started to increase the volume of shipments," Dawson said. "Mostly these have been centered around scheduling issues, missed pickups and missed delivery dates."

"We've been in constant contact with HomeSafe and have expressed our concern regarding these performance issues," he said.

Many companies in the moving industry have resisted signing onto the GHC contract.

Rates being offered under GHC are on average 20% less than those under the legacy system, Kenneth Brennan, the command's director of acquisition, told reporters.

The degree to which GHC lacks contractor capacity is something even the Transportation Command does not know.

"Due to the contract construct, I cannot quantify that capacity by metrics," Brennan said.

"The reason is that we are contracting for an outcome via the GHC contract, just like all of our contracts," he said. "We don't tell the folks how to do it. We don't necessarily need insight into how many employees they have. We just need to have the assurance that they've got the capacity."

Dawson said the GHC contract creates a "tough program" in which HomeSafe is required to fulfill each and every relocation job that enters the pipeline.

For example, earlier this month more than a dozen service members asked to be moved the very next day, he said.

"HomeSafe is expected and required by the contract to support those moves," Dawson said. "It was designed that way to support our service member needs."

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# ISLAND *FLAVORS*



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