



# STARS AND STRIPES GUAM

Community Publication

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KNOW GUAM

Hågat  
PAGES 8-10



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PAGE 2

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PAGES 12-14

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## VOTING STARTS JAN. 19 AND ENDS FEB. 27!

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**I**t's a new year and it's time once again to turn your attention to the yearly tradition unlike any other – Best of the Pacific voting season!

For the past 25 years, our annual Best of the Pacific magazine has been the authority on the best places YOU need to go to in the Pacific. How do we know? Because you told us so!

You've made your voices heard over the years, and in turn, informed fellow members of the military community like yourselves of the Pacific's best attractions, restaurants, festivals, Sunday brunch, getaways and more. Whether you're in Guam, South Korea, mainland Japan or Okinawa, you can place your vote for all your favorites.

Know where you can get a great phone plan with friendly service? Or is there an off-base dentist you tell all your friends about? We want to know, and we definitely want to know why you like it so much.

Voting is quick, easy and you just might get your name

in the magazine! Take a few minutes and vote for all your favorites online or scan the QR code.

And if you do, you may qualify to win a \$150 gift card.

Thanks to your input, every year we're able to make Stars and Stripes community products to help you enjoy your stay in the Pacific. That's what we're all about. As we are fond of saying, our papers, websites and magazines are "about you, for you, and in some cases, by you."

The votes keep rolling in year after year and it's all thanks to you! We had a great turnout in 2025, and we expect nothing short of a record number of votes in 2026. Vote and share so even more of you can experience the best the Pacific has to offer!

Voting starts Jan. 19 and ends Feb. 27!

– Stars and Stripes staff

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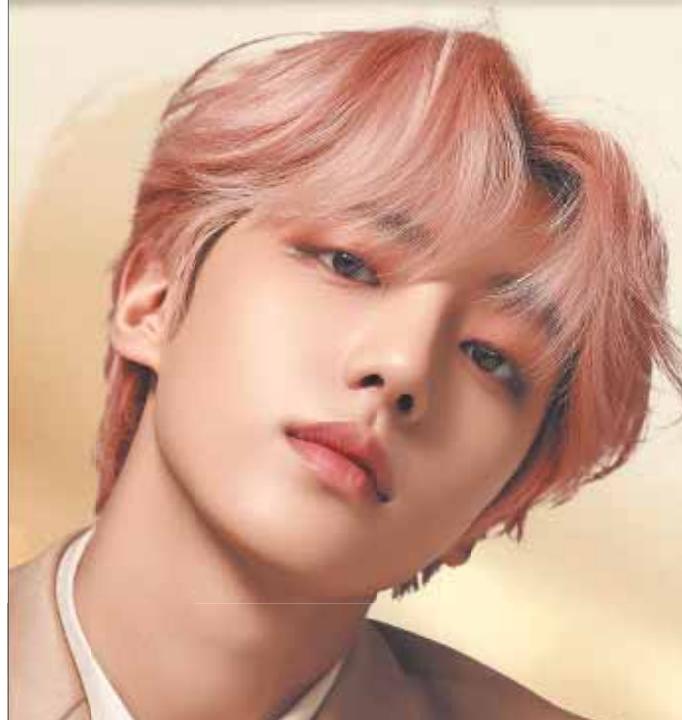
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# When every game is ‘just one more game’

“Just one more game,” I’ve thought too many times to count, as my trembling finger clicks the digital button that will instantly deal me another enticing set of Spider Solitaire. I innocently fell into this deep abyss sometime last year, when I overheard the ladies in my boot camp fitness class talking about a game app on their phones. My life hasn’t been the same since.

As I lay, draped over the love seat, night after night in our living room, binge-watching morally bankrupt reality shows and disturbing true crime documentaries on our television, my reading glasses mirror my cell phone’s screen, hiding dark circles and crazed eyes. I tap madly at the miniature digital cards, jonesing for that burst of endorphins or adrenaline or whatever it is that happens when I complete the game without spending the 50,000 coins I’ve accumulated to buy help.

Years ago, when binge-watching became a thing, our family spent a rainy weekend holed up in our base house streaming “Breaking Bad.” I felt guilty for being a couch potato, but since the pandemic, sloth-like behavior is the norm.

Nowadays, I not only stream episode after episode of my latest shows, I also multitask to double my entertainment. During sheltering in place, I began scrolling through eBay — creating a watchlist of silly items I had no room to store like vintage ceramic Christmas trees and hobnail glass — when watching endless hours of television day after day wasn’t stimulating enough.

When I made my first purchase, I realized that this behavior could easily slip into compulsive shopping, drain our life savings, and fill our house with useless knick-knacks, so I looked for games to play on my phone instead.

My first mistake was downloading Toy Blast. The geek coders who created this game not only made it super fun, they implanted some kind of irresistible stimuli that makes it impossible for players to turn away from their device until they run out of credits, alone and wide-eyed at 3 a.m.

I thought playing more socially acceptable, intellectual

## The Meat and Potatoes of Life

Lisa Smith Molinari



**Years ago, when binge-watching became a thing, our family spent a rainy weekend holed up in our base house streaming “Breaking Bad.” I felt guilty for being a couch potato, but since the pandemic, sloth-like behavior is the norm.**

games would offer healthier brain stimulation along with something to brag about, so I began playing Blockudoku, Sudoku and the free New York Times games. Finally, I could hobnob with my social media friends who posted about solving this week’s Wordle in two tries, and I could beat my husband’s Blockudoku score.

However, when my failure to solve a Connections puzzle became a crushing blow that sent me into a spiral of self-loathing, I thought Spider Solitaire would provide a happy medium — a game that was not so silly that I’d feel the need to keep it a secret, but not so intellectual that I would hate myself if I lost.

Unfortunately, Spider Solitaire was the perfect fit. It filled my need for extra entertainment, its repetitiveness was soothing and it was complex enough to make me feel smart, but random enough to protect my ego. This perfect combination spelled doom for my already weakened circadian rhythms.

Soon, a new dysfunctional habit was formed. My husband, an early bird, would bid me good night around 9:30 pm, leaving me on my love seat with the television clicker and the snoring dog, where I was free to indulge my addiction in cozy isolation until the wee hours.

Before long, the resulting nightly sleep deprivation left me in a perpetual zombie-like state, unable to function at my age level, much less my potential. The time had come, I decided. Time to reverse the damage that the pandemic foisted upon my circadian rhythms.

This New Year, my resolution is to reinstate my previous routine of plugging my phone into the kitchen charger after dinner, not to be accessed until the next morning. I’ll still allow myself nightly binge-watching, which I now consider a basic human necessity after a day of tedious work. If sudden withdrawal causes me to crave a secondary form of entertainment, I’ll limit my activities to innocuous pursuits that won’t interfere with sleep, self-esteem or human relationships, like crochet or filing my nails.

Through it all, I’m learning that folding my hand and walking away from the table can sometimes be the best strategy to winning the game of life.

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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Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Bryan Mai, U.S. Navy

# USS Annapolis returns from deployment

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LT. JAMES CALIVA,  
U.S. NAVY

NAVAL BASE — Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Annapolis (SSN 760) returned to its homeport at Naval Base Guam following a routine deployment in the Indo-Pacific, Dec. 19, 2025.

“USS Annapolis delivered outstanding results, completing an exceptional deployment that showcased the operational readiness of the Pacific undersea force,” said Capt. Neil Steinhagen, commander, Submarine Squadron 15. “The crew’s disciplined execution was central to their success and clearly reflects the strength of our forward-deployed posture in support of our mission in the Indo-Pacific. True to their motto, ‘Born Free, Hope to Die Free,’ the Sailors of

Annapolis remained professional, focused, and effective in every task. Well done, team—welcome home.”

During the deployment, Annapolis conducted a range of missions that strengthened national security, enhanced maritime operational capabilities, and reinforced the strategic value of forward-deployed submarines operating at the tip of the spear. The submarine also conducted a port visit to Yokosuka, Japan, reinforcing the United States’ enduring commitment to the region.

“No matter the mission, this crew executed with precision and professionalism,” said Cmdr. Clint Emrich, commanding officer of USS Annapolis (SSN 760). “Their readiness, discipline, and teamwork were the foundation of a successful deployment, and every Sailor

played a role in delivering results. I’m proud of how this crew performed and how they represented Annapolis throughout the Indo-Pacific.”

During the deployment, 30 Sailors assigned to Annapolis earned their submarine warfare insignia—commonly known as “dolphins” or “fish”. The insignia signifies qualification to operate at the highest standards of the undersea force and reflects mastery of submarine systems, watch stations, and mission execution.

Annapolis’ return was marked by the Navy’s time-honored “first kiss” and “first hug” traditions, with Senior Chief Machinist Mate (Nuclear) Chris Mahmood receiving the first kiss and Chief Fire Control Technician Isaiah King receiving the first hug.



Families of sailors wait for the USS Annapolis to return.



Chief Fire Control Technician Isaiah King greets his family.



Senior Chief Machinist Mate Chris Mahmood embraces his family after receiving the Navy’s time-honored “first kiss.”

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# GET TO KNOW GUAM

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)*

## Agat (Hågat) .....As the crow flies.....



Turtle Rock Balthazar Aguon

BY LEO BABAUTA,  
GUAMPEDIA

**T**he village of Hågat may have been named by the first clan who came to settle in the area from the northern part of Guam. It is also possible that the village name *Hagat* originally was derived from the word *Aga*, which is the Chamorro name of the Marianas crow which is a large black bird that makes the sound “aga” while flying low over the jungle. The village’s name, too, could be derived from the Chamorro word *håga*, meaning blood.



Hågat Beach Unit of the War in the Pacific National Historic Park. Photo by Guampedia



## Village history

It is believed that Chief Coroo headed the first clan of Hågat. Beloved by his people, he was also the eldest

in the clan. Chief Coroo divided the village into families, each with its own surname. Many of these survive today but are referred to as CHamoru family names, such names as Koroo, Kamachili, De’chi, Dagu, Ku-siu, Min, Ato, and Gotgohu, to name a few.

Spanish Governor Jose de Quiroga then designed Old Hågat between 1680 and 1684 as a settlement for rebellious islanders whose homes he had destroyed during the CHamoru rebellion. Many of its citizens were brought from the interior village of Fena. The first church in Hågat was established in late 1680. In the early 1700s, this church was one of only six parishes on Guam.

Pre-war Hågat was a small village with a coast lined with coconut trees that produced copra (coconut meat). The village also supported farming, ranching, and fishing. Rice paddies existed on the coastal flats as well as the flat inland areas.

Throughout the Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1944, new rice paddies were developed in Hågat to support the Japanese troops. Local people were forced into labor with little or no subsistence rations. Thirty days before landing on Guam on 11 June 1944, American air forces bombed the beaches of Hågat to clear Japanese positions. These bombings continued throughout June and July, destroying Japanese fortifications and virtually all of the structures of the village.

The beaches of Hågat and Asan were selected by the US forces for entry into the island, with two Marine Regimental Combat Teams and an Army Infantry Division landing at five points along the Hågat coast. They faced a 75 millimeter gun and a 37 millimeter gun mounted by the Japanese in a concrete blockhouse at Ga’an Point. In just the first day of the American invasion of Hågat beach on 21 July 455 Marines were killed and 536 were wounded. By nightfall, the Americans secured the Hågat beachhead, but were heavily assaulted by Japanese tanks that night. Heavy fighting ensued, and by the morning of July 22, the Americans had won the area and pressed onward toward Ororo Point, eventually joining the forces that had landed in Asan.

After the Americans secured Hågat beach, they established a refugee camp for CHamorus freed from Japanese-made camps. At its peak, 18,000 people lived in the Hågat camp. Following the return of American forces, residents of Hågat lived in temporary houses before a new Hågat village was established at a location farther south. Both the military government and CHamorus built homes at the new site. In August 1978, the US National Park Service established the War in the Pacific National Historical Park on Guam, which included sites at the Hågat invasion beaches.



St. Andrew's by the Philippine Sea Photo by Guampedia

Pre-war Mt. Carmel Guam Museum



## Points of interest

### Institutions

#### Maria Rivera Aguigui Memorial Library

The Hågat public library was named after Maria Santos Rivera Aguigui in 2002 (Bill No. 349). Aguigui served forty years in the Guam Public School System in the villages of Hågat and Sumai. The library is open on Tuesday from 9 am to 5:30 pm with an hour lunch break.

#### Marcial A. Sablan Elementary School

Marcial A. Sablan Elementary consists of Kindergarten through fifth grades, and a Head Start program.

#### Oceanview Middle School

Oceanview Middle School was constructed in 1959 as Agat Junior High School. Later the school was modified into Oceanview High School, but has since reverted to a middle school.



Mt. Carmel Catholic Church Photo by Victor Consaga, Guampedia

#### Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church

Mt. Carmel was dedicated in 1937. It was rebuilt in its present location after World War II and is the center of village activities. A procession and village fiesta are held in July for the church's patron saint, along with a procession for Santa Ana, the patron saint of Christian mothers. The village also holds another procession in honor of Santa Rosa.

#### Our Lady of Mount Carmel School

This Catholic school, located in the heart of Hågat, has pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade classes. In 2007, the threat of a closure loomed because of low enrollment rates, prompting the community and school alumni to rally in effort to keep the school open. Supporters coordinated events to raise funds and pushed for increased enrollment, which kept the school open.

#### St. Andrew's By the Philippine Sea

This Episcopal church was constructed in the 1960s initially serving as a daycare center, but eventually became a parish.

#### Santa Ana Chapel

The Santa Ana Chapel was built in the 1950s and dedicated in 1968. In 2008, the Chapel was rebuilt by the Santa Ana Lancheros Association of Hågat. Currently the chapel is maintained by the Mount Carmel Church.

## This village at a glance

- **Population:** According to the US Census in 2010, the population of Hågat was 4,917.
- **Commissioners/Mayors:** Kevin Susuico, 2017-Present; Carol S. Tayama, Mayor, 2005-2016; Johnny M. Reyes, Mayor, 1997-2005; Joaquin G. Topasna, Mayor, 10/1/96-01/06/97; Antonio C. Babauta, Commissioner/Mayor, 1981-9/30/96; Antonio R. Terlaje, Commissioner, 1977-1981; Jose S. San Nicolas, Commissioner, 1973-1977; Thomas F.P. Muña, Commissioner, 1965-1969; Jose B. Guevara, Commissioner, 1963-1965; Juan L.G. Leon Guerrero, Commissioner, 1956-1963; Antonio P. Carbullido, Commissioner, 1945-1956; Francisco C. Sablan, Commissioner, 1941-1944; Francisco R. Chaco, Commissioner, 1937-1940; Tomas C. Charfauros, Commissioner, 1934-1937; Antonio P. Carbullido, Commissioner, 1930-1934
- Christopher Fejeren, Vice Mayor, 2017-Present; Agustin G. Quintanilla, Vice Mayor, acting Dec. 2009. Officially elected into office November 2010; Jesus B. Chaco, Vice Mayor, 1997-2009; Jessie S. Pendon, Vice Mayor, 10/01/96-01/06/97; Joaquin G. Topasna, Vice Mayor, 1993-1996; John A. Quidachay, Assistant Commissioner/Vice Mayor, 1989-1993; Joseph R. Reyes, Assistant Commissioner, 1981-1988; Antonio C. Babauta, Assistant Commissioner, 1977-1981; Vicente Q. Guerrero, Assistant Commissioner, 1973-1977; Jose S. San Nicolas,

Assistant Commissioner, 1970-1973; Vicente M. Salas, Deputy Commissioner, 1934-1937; Pedro C. Charfauros, Deputy Commissioner, 1931-1933; Jesus Carbullido, Deputy Commissioner, 1903-1908; Jose Pereda, Deputy Commissioner, 1898-1903.

– By Konsehelon Mahot Guåhan/  
the Mayor's Council of Guam

- **Village description:** While many regard Hågat as the western gateway to the south, it is also the commercial center of the south. Numerous businesses – from merchants and restaurants to the 61-room Inn on the Bay – have sprung up in the once-quiet seaside village in the last few decades. Along with Hågat's thriving business center, the old heart of the village still exists, with Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church, Convent, and School.

The seaside village of Hågat lies just south of Naval Base Guam. The village's main road, Route 2, meanders through several commercial and residential areas. The road also leads to a group of public buildings, such as the Hågat Community Center, mayor's office, and post office. Farther south, Route 2 runs along the coast of some of the finest beaches on Guam, including Nimitz Beach. Nearby is the popular Hågat Marina. The village of Hågat is also home to several parks dedicated to the events of World War II. These parks are part of the National Park Service's War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Taleyfac Spanish Bridge Lawrence J. Cunningham

#### Southern Christian Academy

Southern Christian Academy offers courses from preschool to grade 12. The school's curriculum was adapted from A-Beka, McDougal Littell, Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), Harcourt Brace, and Pacific Region Educational Laboratory publications.

## Historical

#### Hågat Beach Unit of the War in the Pacific National Historic Park

The Hågat Beach Unit of the War in the Pacific National Historic Park is one contiguous unit with four segments managed by the National Park Service. Two of these segments, Apaca and Ga'an Point, have visitor facilities including interpretive displays, picnic pavilions, barbecue grills, restrooms, and parking areas. Memorials and monuments have been added throughout the park.

#### Mount Alifan

This mountain rises 871 feet above the Hågat's beaches and contains remains of the fighting between US and Japan's armed forces at the end of WWII during the recapture of Guam. For the most part, the remains are craters, foxholes, emplacements, caves, and rifle-pits. Only two small features are constructed of concrete. Following capture of the mountain, American demolition teams sealed many caves on the forward slopes. The slopes contain many artifacts from the battle, including shell and bomb fragments and bullets.

#### Taleyfac and Taelyag Spanish bridges

These two stone bridges are reminders of Guam's Spanish-colonial era. They are a couple of the few remaining bridges built using Spanish stone and mortar construction, and are listed on the Guam and National Registers of Historic Sites. The Taleyfac bridge, the more commonly known of the two, can still be seen just off the main road south of the main village, and was constructed by Governor Alejandro Parreño in 1785 over Talifac Creek (then called Muja Creek).

## Recreational

#### Hågat Commercial Point Center

Located at the entrance of the village across Inn on the Bay, the Hågat Commercial Point Center houses restaurants and businesses for the southern community.

#### Hågat Sagan Bisita

The Hågat Sagan Bisita, next to the Mayor's Office, is a series of pavilions lined around a courtyard with a large stage. This facility hosts the Tuesday Night Market from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., the Annual Hågat Mango Festival, and is available for reservations.

SEE GUAM ON PAGE 10



Hågat Marina Photo by Victor Consaga, Guampedia

Hågat village Guam Museum

# GUAM: So much history to see

## Points of interest

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

**Hågat Small Boat Marina**

The marina is a modern facility for docking small boats. The facility includes a sea rescue operation, restaurant and icehouse. The marina is a popular location for fishing derbies and daily charter fishing trips for local residents and tourists.

**Hågat Senior Citizens Center**

The Hågat Senior Citizen Center is located on Calle Delos Marteres Road and is a place where the man'amko in the village can go to relax, play bingo, cards, or mahjong.

**Hap's Reef**

Located just off Hågat Bay, Hap's Reef is a popular site for divers and snorkelers to enjoy different marine life. Beachgoers can also spot pilot whales from this location.

**Haya Youth Center**

Haya is located between the Hågat Gymnasium and Hågat Senior Citizens Center. It holds various after school programs. In addition, Haya Youth Center hosts the Hågat Community Youth Summer Camp.

**Inn on the Bay**

A 61-room long-term apartment completed in 1989, Inn on the Bay offers fully furnished rooms. The facility also maintains a backup generator for emergencies. Inn on the Bay's usual customers include military and navy contractors but welcomes all visitors.



Hågat Mango Festival Photo by Victor Consaga, Guampedia

**Mango Festival**

The village of Hågat held the first Hågat Mango Festival in May 2007 at Nimitz Beach. The annual event includes a canoe paddling race, displays, vendors booths, and a mango culinary competition. It is hosted by the Hågat Municipal Planning Council and partially funded by Guam Visitors Bureau.

**Nimitz Beach**

Located at the south edge of Hågat, Nimitz Beach

is a popular public beach and recreational area with pavilions.

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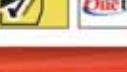
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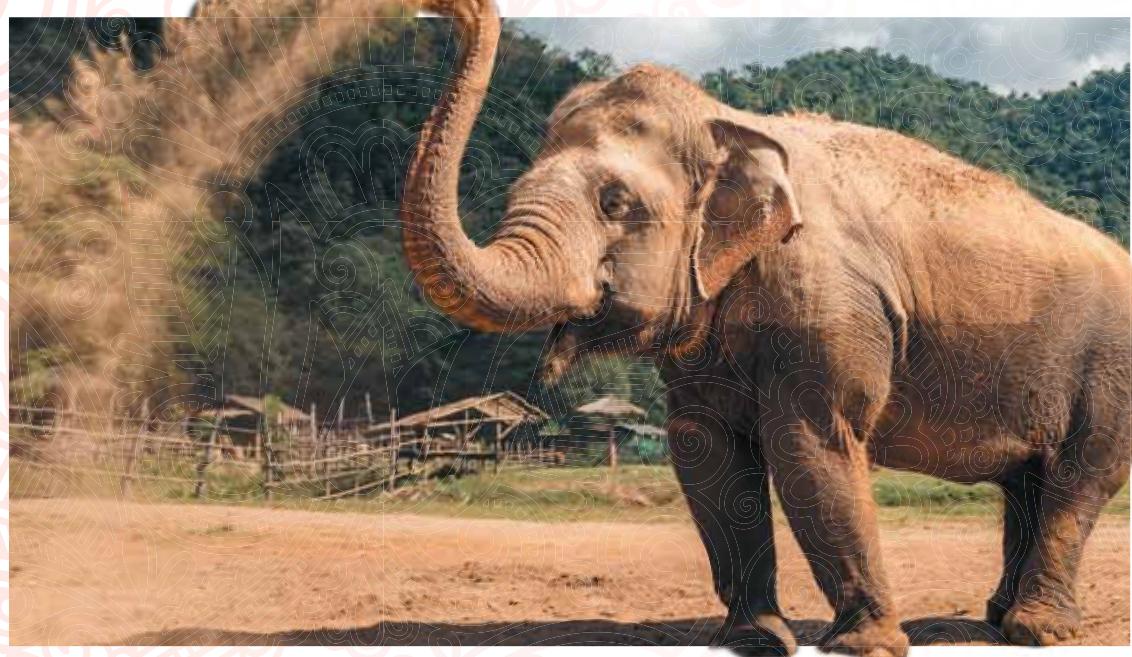


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Elephants at ENP

# Family fun in northern Thailand

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN HENDERSON,  
STRIPES GUAM

**F**ive days in northern Thailand over Thanksgiving was the perfect amount of time to experience many of the highlights, including an overnight in Chiang Rai. November in northern Thailand typically has milder temperatures, which makes it the perfect time of year to visit.

We arrived late in the evening on the first day and took a shuttle van from the airport (they provided car seats) that our Airbnb host had arranged for us. Upon arrival at the Airbnb, we put the kids to bed (it was the best little farm stay) and then were served a welcome dinner that was one of our top meals of the week. They served yellow chicken curry packed with so much flavor we were blown away. The food was phenomenal and the best way to kick off our time in Chiang Mai.

## Day 1: Ancient Town

We enjoyed breakfast at our Airbnb before hopping in a cab to Ancient Town. Our accommodations were located about 25 minutes away from Ancient Town, had a beautiful pool and animals roaming around (including a turkey I gave a wide berth to) and included a fantastic home-cooked Thai breakfast each day. After a quick stop for an iced coffee at Gravity Bistro, we set out to explore the temples. First up, Wat Chedi Luang.

Wat Chedi Luang is one of Chiang Mai's most important temples. Construction began in 1391 on the order of King Saen Muang Ma to house his father's ashes. The temple was finally completed almost a century later, in 1475. Sadly, in 1575, an earthquake struck and destroyed much of the pagoda (chedi). A partial restoration was undertaken in the 1990s, but the damage caused is still visible. They were also working on restoration projects on other buildings inside the walled part of the city while we were there.

After nap time for the kids and a pool break for the adults, we ventured back to the ancient town and visited a few more temples, then ended the day with a fabulous dinner at the House by Ginger.



A monk blessing a scooter in Chiang Mai

## Day 2: Elephant Nature Park

While planning our trip to Thailand, I spent hours researching elephant sanctuaries and through that research, came across renowned conservationist Lek Chailert. Lek has dedicated her life to advocating for ethical elephant practices throughout Asia, creating sanctuaries committed to the rescue and rehabilitation of mistreated elephants.

During my research, I learned that for elephants to be trained to perform for humans or ridden, they undergo a process called phajaan in Thai, which involves breaking their spirit through torture. The elephants are removed from their mothers as babies, chained, beaten, starved and even stabbed in a small box with bull hooks until they submit or, in worse cases, die. If they aren't used in the tourism industry, the elephants are put to work in logging fields, where they are forced to work tirelessly, often sustaining untreated injuries while performing hard labor.

The day finally came for us to embark on a tour of Elephant Nature Park, the elephant sanctuary and rehabilitation center founded by Lek Chailert in Thailand. ENP is located an hour and a half outside Chiang Mai in the Mae Taeng Valley. We departed in a shuttle from their Chiang Mai office, making one stop during our journey to the sanctuary. As we entered the valley, we began seeing other sanctuaries nearby and glimpses of elephants as we drove past, peaking the excitement of everyone in the van.

We opted for the half-day tour since we were traveling

with our two young children. We arrived at ENP around 9:45 a.m. and were shown our assigned table, where we could leave anything we wanted to and where we would have our vegetarian lunch after the tour. We reconvened with our guide for the day and started our tour where they prepare the food for the animals on site.

In addition to elephants, the sanctuary also houses rescued buffalo, boar, goats, cats, and dogs, which require a substantial amount of food. We walked by shelves loaded with bananas, mounds of shucked corn and piles of watermelons prepped by dedicated staff and volunteers who spend their vacation days volunteering at ENP. Each elephant also receives a cake on their birthday (sponsored by digital donors who receive a video of the elephants receiving the cakes, a tradition that was started during COVID-19), so several were prepared on a table nearby to be taken out to the elephants. The sheer volume of food as we walked through was remarkable.

Next, we moved outdoors to where the elephants freely roamed the sanctuary. Having just spent time in South Africa the previous summer, I quickly realized how much smaller the Asian elephant is than the African elephant—other differences I noticed were in their head shape and ear size.

We continued our walk, catching up to a group of elephants just receiving their brunch. Sensing the arrival of the food, a baby trotted over and made sure to wiggle her way into a spot on the feeding platform between the older ladies already partaking in the vegetarian delights.

We spent the next hour and a half slowly meandering around the park, learning about the elephants we encountered along our walk. As we approached one of the last elephants on our tour, I immediately noticed her gait seemed off. As we got closer, it became apparent she had sustained a terrible injury. Medo came from the logging industry, where an accident left her with a broken ankle that went untreated for a long time. When her previous owners realized she could no longer work, they forced her into a pen for breeding purposes. The male bull she was caged with dislocated her hip in an attempt to mate, exacerbating her injuries further.

By the time Medo was rescued and brought to the ENP, there was nothing they could do to fix her ankle. Her story is just one of many like this as you walk



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around and see first-hand the results of human mistreatment of these beautiful animals. The backs of elephants are wholly worn down from being ridden and limps of other elephants who sustained injuries while logging, being chained up or performing for tourists. The magnitude of the mistreatment weighs heavily when you are staring at it directly in front of you.

To care for the elephants and other animals, ENP has nine veterinarians on-site, with three specializing in elephants and the remaining six serving as general practitioners.

As the tour ended, we were left to reflect on the experience and enjoy a buffet lunch before hopping the shuttle back to Chiang Mai.

The sanctuary model created by Lek is being utilized in other parts of Thailand and Southeast Asia, where the shift from riding and watching elephants perform to solely enjoying them in their natural habitat is slowly gaining traction.

Per ENP, "Elephant Nature Park encourages elephant owners and tourism operators to adopt ethical practices for the well-being of elephants under their care. To further promote responsible elephant tourism, Asian Elephant Projects was established to support various Saddle Off projects throughout Thailand, representing a significant advancement in the way these projects operate."

The Saddle Off model seeks to elevate the living conditions of captive Asian elephants by eliminating the burden of elephant riding and performing in shows, while still enabling owners to sustain their livelihood through responsible tourism. By creating a stress-free environment, these programs provide elephants with the opportunity to roam, socialize, and forage in natural habitats, while allowing visitors to have an authentic and intimate interaction with these gentle giants."

The Elephant Nature Park in Thailand spans approximately 200 acres, housing over 100 elephants on site. As they continue to rescue elephants, the need for additional space will inevitably arise. They also have a sister sanctuary in Cambodia, the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary, which is home to a 32,000-acre jungle habitat preserve featuring three elephants and other wildlife.

If you're planning a trip to Chiang Mai, I highly recommend ENP. They offer various ways to get involved through volunteer efforts, as well as full-day and half-day tours for visitors.

### Day 3: Breakfast, then more temples

Our third day brought more temples, starting with Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. To get up to this golden temple, you must ascend 300 steps. With our kids in the carrier packs, we went up. At the top, we removed our shoes and enjoyed strolling around the ornate temple. Up the road from the temple are a campground and a lookout point, so after we walked to that, we made our way back to our farm stay. In the early afternoon, my friend who was with us and I went out and got fine-line elephant tattoos, an optional stop on your itinerary, ha!

Early evening brought a few more temples around the ancient town, including Wat Sri Suphan, a stunning silver temple (though men are only allowed inside the main temple). Next door, local artisans are working on various projects. Dinner time brought us to Aroon Rai, a restaurant that received notoriety as one of the places Anthony Bourdain ate at while filming A Cook's Tour in 2002.

### Day 4: Overnight trip to Chiang Rai

Instead of doing just a day trip to Chiang Rai, we opted for an overnight trip since our flight on our last day was not until 11 p.m. That gave us roughly two days in the Chiang Rai area to explore. If you don't have time for an overnight stay, various tour groups offer various day trips, which are great since they include transportation to each location and back to Chiang Mai.

We hired a private shuttle driver with car seats to take us from Chiang Mai to the White (Wat Rong Khun) and Blue Temples (Wat Rong Suea Ten) in Chiang Rai before dropping us off at our hotel for 4,500 Thai Baht (\$125). The trip is roughly two and a half hours by car. After we arrived at our hotel, we grabbed a late lunch at the resort while waiting for our rooms to become available.

That evening, we enjoyed a lovely dinner and drinks at the resort restaurant at Le Meridien (Marriott family) overlooking



Wat Rong Khun - White Temple



Ourson at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

SEE THAILAND ON PAGE 14

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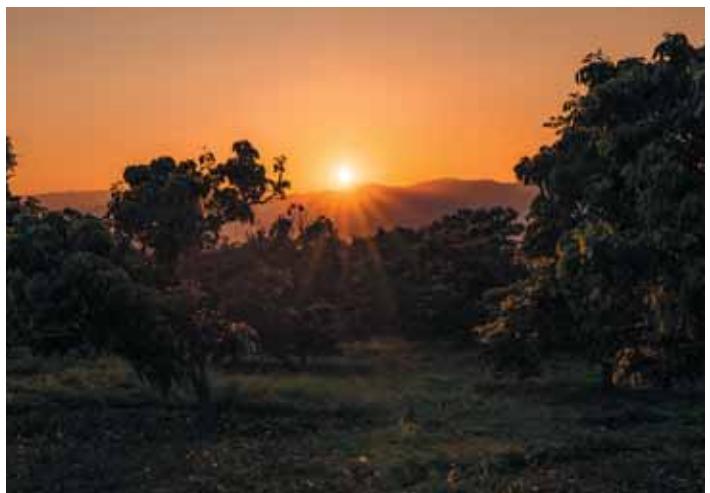




Wat Huay Pla Kang Goddess of Mercy Chiang Rai



Wat Saeng Kaeo Phothiyen



Sunset in Chiang Rai

## THAILAND: Locals very welcoming

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

the water. We decided once we arrived in Thailand to stay overnight in Chiang Rai, and I am so glad we did. There is so much to do up there, and I wish we had spent an extra full day to see the Golden Triangle. The mountainous countryside is beautiful, with pineapple fields, tea fields, and, of course, stunning temples. There are also several waterfalls within an hour of Chiang Rai that would be worth checking out.

### Day 5:

#### Temples, village, tea plantation, airport

Through our resort, we hired a guide to take us to a few more sites around Chiang Rai before driving us back to the airport in Chiang Mai in the evening. We started the morning at Wat Huay Pla Kang, Goddess of Mercy Chiang Rai, then made our way to the Karen Hill Tribal Village nearby.

We finished our morning at the Choui Fong Tea Plantation. The views from the tea plantation are stunning, and to get there, you drive through miles of pineapple fields and countryside.

On our way back to Chiang Mai, we stopped at one more temple, Wat Saeng Kaeo Phothiyen

(which felt a little cluttered and like a theme park inside with all of the statues), and then witnessed a beautiful sunset as we walked back to our shuttle for the airport.

If you are planning a visit to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, a week is ideal for seeing many of the major sites. When we travel with our kids, we try not to pack our schedules as full so they have some downtime in between visiting the sites and we were all experiencing some temple fatigue towards the end of the trip. Despite the temple fatigue, we highly enjoyed Thailand. If you are traveling with older children or no children, you will be able to fit in even more. The food was outstanding, the people were incredibly welcoming and the scenery was unbeatable.

#### About the Author

For 15 years, Erin Henderson has been a photographer capturing compelling stories around the world – from travel and food to conservation and military life. She's published internationally and mentors entrepreneurs from her base in Stuttgart, Germany.

You can find more of her work: [erinhendersonmedia.com](http://erinhendersonmedia.com)



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# Boonie Stomps Guam

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY  
GUAM BOONIE STOMPERS



Tarzan Falls

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

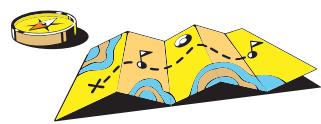
Every Saturday, Guam Boonie Stompers offers public hikes to a variety of destinations such as beaches, snorkeling sites, waterfalls, mountains, caves, latte sites, and World War II sites. We meet at the trailhead on Saturdays at 9 a.m. unless otherwise indicated. Directions to the trailhead will be posted 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.

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

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

## SCHEDULE 2026

Jan. 24 (Sat.)	Agfayan River & Falls (Medium) - Inalahuan
Jan. 31 (Sat.)	Tenjo to Tarzan Falls (Very Difficult) - Piti to Yona <b>*8 a.m. Meet Up</b>
Feb. 7 (Sat.)	Madofan to Sella Bay (Medium) - Humatak
Feb. 14 (Sat.)	Anao Coastline (Difficult w/Very Difficult Option) - Yigo <b>*8 a.m. Meet Up</b>
Feb. 21 (Sat.)	La Sa Fua River (Difficult) - Humatak
Feb. 28 (Sat.)	Pagat Cave/Coast (Medium) - Yigo



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### Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

#### ACROSS

1 One of the "back 40"  
5 Make \_\_\_\_\_ (hurry)  
10 Where some admire from  
14 Attention-getting sound  
15 Anesthetic of old  
16 Cause of misery  
17 Classic wagon  
19 Location  
20 Proportionately  
21 Loomed overhead  
23 Lack of alignment, timewise  
25 Weaken  
28 Pipe fitting  
29 Eight-ish?  
32 Fabric used in adhesive pads  
34 Children's author Beverly  
35 Gallery piece  
36 Performed for the camera  
38 \_\_\_\_\_-Manuel Miranda  
39 Way to make it?  
42 Talk endlessly  
45 California mission founder Junípero  
46 \_\_\_\_\_ in Charlie  
47 Kilns  
48 Corresponded to  
51 Turntable shaft  
53 Winless horses  
57 First portrayer of Obi-Wan  
58 Online pop-up, say  
60 Defensive spray  
61 Brouaha  
62 Actress Lee of "Funny Face"  
63 Observed  
64 "\_\_\_\_ life!"  
65 Blouse fabric

#### DOWN

1 Org. for seniors  
2 Burn a bit  
3 Give a facelift to  
4 Bahrain or Dubai  
5 Weighty  
6 Second largest ocean  
7 Far from forward  
8 Grow incisors  
9 Typo, e.g.  
10 Newman film, "\_\_\_\_ of Malice"  
11 "Cinderella" et al.  
12 It's just for openers  
13 Basket material  
18 They might be spring-loaded  
22 Some winter wear  
24 CPU part  
25 Store up  
26 \_\_\_\_\_ out (proven)  
27 Triptych in a church

30 Incite \_\_\_\_\_ (disturb the peace)  
31 Redgrave et al.  
33 Starr of song  
34 Summer hrs. in Chicago  
37 Right of passage  
40 Moved like a show horse  
41 Cowpoke's pal  
43 Nail at an angle  
44 Chutes partner

46 Tighten, like a jaw  
49 Select group  
50 Roman spirits  
51 Indistinguishable  
52 Wiggle room  
54 Small needle case  
55 Part of NBA: Abr.  
56 Minn. Neighbor  
59 Hot or cold beverage

Answers to Previous Crossword:



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## Stripes Sports Trivia

This player made people flip, and earned the nickname "The Wizard" because of the amazing things he did on the infield.

**Answer**

Ozzie Smith

## SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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

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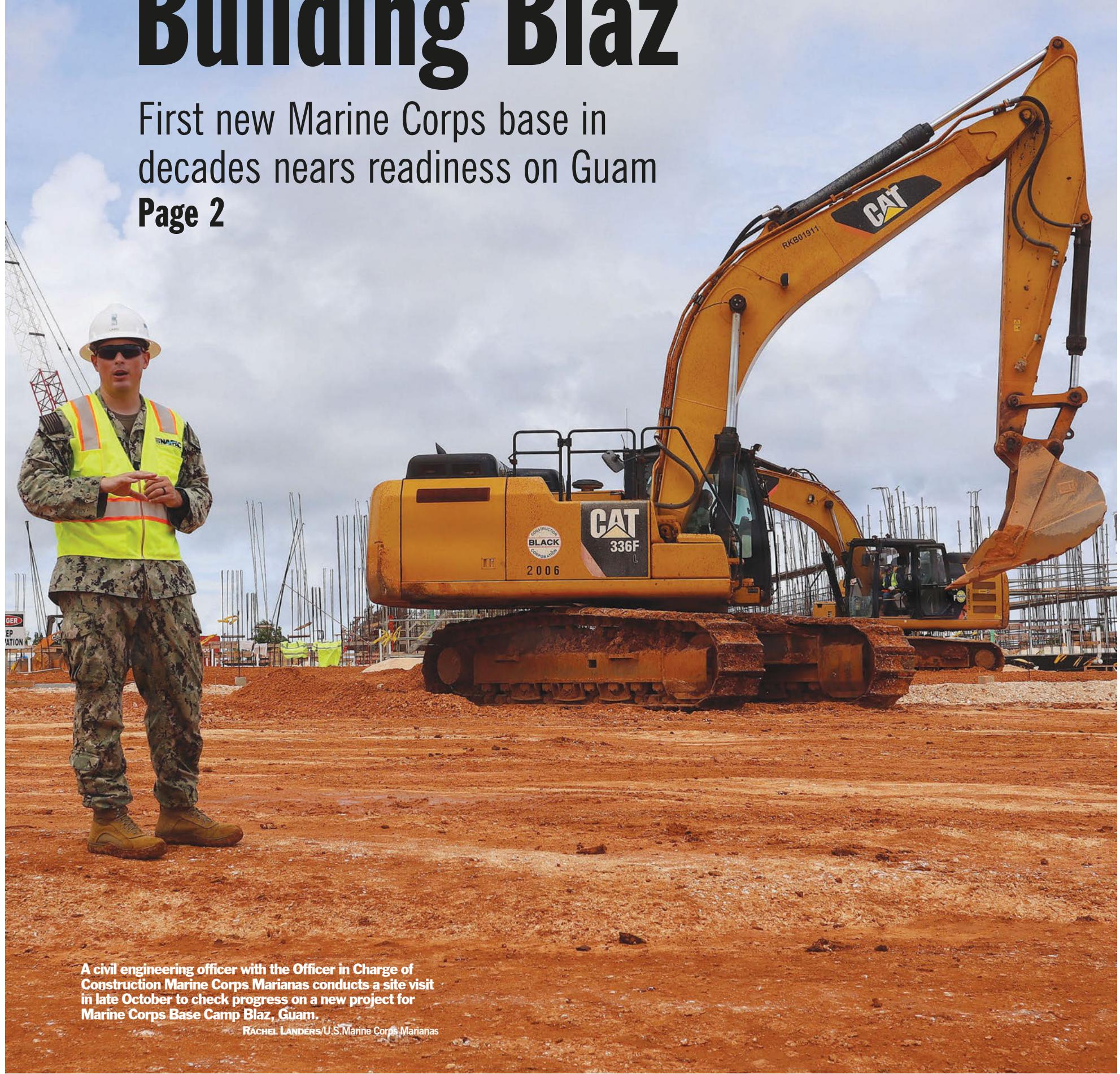
**GUAM EDITION**

JANUARY 19, 2026

## Building Blaz

First new Marine Corps base in decades nears readiness on Guam

Page 2



A civil engineering officer with the Officer in Charge of Construction Marine Corps Marianas conducts a site visit in late October to check progress on a new project for Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, Guam.

RACHEL LANDERS/U.S. Marine Corps Marianas

## COVER STORY

# Marine Corps' Camp Blaz nears readiness

About two-thirds of \$8.9B budget has been spent on new base

BY SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP BLAZ, Guam — About two-thirds of an \$8.9 billion budget has been spent on this 562-acre facility to accommodate U.S. Marines relocating from bases on Okinawa, according to Navy and Marine Corps officials.

Nearly \$6.2 billion of the appropriation has gone toward building and outfitting Camp Blaz to date, according to an email from Capt. Steven Keenan, a Marine Corps spokesman at the Pentagon. Blaz is the service's first new base since 1952.

The Officer in Charge of Construction Marine Corps Marianas, part of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific, was formed in 2016 to oversee work on the new installation.

The command includes 10 Navy Civil Engineer Corps officers and 100 civilian staff, including construction managers, engineering technicians and administrative staff, Keenan said.

Guam — a remote, 210-square-mile island that provides a strategic foothold for the U.S. in the Western Pacific — is expected to grow from about 17,000 U.S. service members to 24,000 by fiscal year 2033.



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Recently completed housing for single Marines is seen last month at Camp Blaz on Guam.

About 4,000 Marines are expected to move from Okinawa to Guam, part of a 2012 agreement between the U.S. and Japan to reduce the American military footprint on Okinawa, where nearly 30,000 of the 55,000 U.S. service members in Japan are stationed.

About 1,300 members of III Marine Expeditionary Force may be permanently stationed on Guam, while another 3,700 Marines could rotate through the island on temporary deployments.

Japan is providing approximately \$3 billion of the money allocated to build Blaz and other Guam infrastructure.

Many new facilities appeared ready for the Marines in December when Marine Corps Installations Pacific commander Maj. Gen. Brian Wolford paid a visit to Guam from his headquarters on Okinawa.

"Camp Blaz offers forward-stationed capabilities and operational flexibility to the United States and Marine Corps," he said in a statement Keenan pro-

vided by email. "Bases and stations such as Camp Blaz serve as critical nodes for generating combat power and providing sustainment to the Fleet Marine Force. Camp Blaz serves as a force multiple for the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the region at large ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific."

One of the 150 Marines already at the base, Maj. Philip King, arrived there from Okinawa in July, he told Stars and Stripes at Blaz on Dec. 10.

The communications officer

said he went to Guam as part of a routine change of station after serving with the 7th Communication Battalion at Camp Hansen, Okinawa.

"My wife and I chose Blaz because we wanted to stay overseas," he said.

The couple moved into a beachside condo in Tumon, Guam's tourist hotspot, King said, adding that he enjoys snorkeling in his spare time.

robert.seth@stripes.com  
@SethRobson1

## New evidence sought in Guam endangered species suit

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A federal judge on Guam recently ordered the U.S. Navy to dive deeper into its record of endangered species protections at a new Marine Corps base on the U.S. island territory.

U.S. District Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood on Dec. 12 rejected the Navy's bid to limit disclosure to records prior to 2017 and said environmental groups suing under the Endangered Species Act are entitled to see more recent evidence.

The case began in 2023, when advocacy groups the Center for Biological Diversity and Prutehi Litekyan: Save Ritidian — now known as Prutehi Guahan — sued the Navy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over insufficient efforts to protect endangered animals.

The lawsuit claims construction at Camp Blaz created mas-

sive environmental impacts and that the two federal agencies have failed "to protect and conserve more than a dozen endangered and threatened species at imminent risk of extinction on Guam," according to an amended complaint filed Dec. 12.

The construction of Blaz, the Marines' first new installation since 1952, is a core component of the Defense Department's planned relocation of Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The base covers more than 4,000 acres and is expected to host approximately 5,000 Marines.

The groups also said that promised mitigation efforts, such as controlling invasive species and restoring habitats, have yet to be enacted.

The Navy and Fish and Wildlife Service denied those allegations.

In the most recent ruling, the



MELISSA WHITE/U.S. Air Force

A U.S. district judge ruled that the Navy must provide information regarding its efforts to protect endangered species, such as this Mariana fruit bat, seen here at the Guam National Wildlife Refuge.

federal agencies sought to limit discovery to "administrative records," particularly environmental reviews and other data prior to the lawsuit.

However, since the advocacy

groups are attempting to "determine the extent of any continuing violations" of the Endangered Species Act, the court determined that the case requires additional discovery and

ordered the two parties to coordinate a plan to share evidence within 30 days.

"For too long, our island has been treated as a sacrifice zone," Leevin Camacho, attorney for Prutehi Guahan, said in a Dec. 18 news release. "This ruling affirms that the military does not get a free pass just because it operates behind fences. Our people, our wildlife and our cultural practices deserve protection and respect."

The construction of Camp Blaz — and an \$8 billion missile defense system spread across 16 sites on the island — have been the subject of scrutiny by locals and environmental advocacy groups due to the destruction of limestone forests, a unique ecosystem home to various endangered species.

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## MILITARY

# Naval name game

‘Trump-class’ battleship latest twist in naming, renaming ships

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

President Donald Trump scrambled Navy ship-naming traditions last month with his announcement of a new “Trump-class” battleship, to be called the USS Defiant, featuring nuclear-tipped missiles and laser defenses.

Battleships are usually named after states — the last commissioned was the USS Missouri in 1944. Ship classes are named after the first ship of the type built — the Missouri was an Iowa-class ship, named for the first of four battleships ordered in 1939.

Trump’s announcement put an exclamation point on the end of a busy year for Navy ship naming.

The period between a presidential election and inauguration is often filled with last-minute ship naming.

In January 2021, Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite traveled to Massachusetts to film a video in front of the Navy’s oldest ship, the USS Constitution, nicknamed “Old Ironsides,” commissioned in October 1797.

“We must always look to our wake to chart our future course,” he said before announcing names for a new frigate, an expeditionary ship, an attack submarine and an amphibious transport dock.

Four years later, it was the turn of outgoing President Joe Biden’s administration to go on a ship-naming spree.

Biden’s Navy secretary, Carlos Del Toro, rolled out 19 new ship names — including new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers to be named for former President William J. Clinton (a Democrat) and President George W. Bush (a Republican).

“When I personally delivered the news to Bill and George, they



The replenishment oiler USNS Harvey Milk conducts a replenishment at sea with the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford in 2024. In 2025, the ship's name was changed from that of a gay-rights leader to that of a Medal of Honor recipient.

MAXWELL ORLOSKY/U.S. Navy

were deeply humbled,” Biden said at the time. “Each knows firsthand the weight of the responsibilities that come with being Commander-in-Chief.”

In 2025, the naming — and renaming — of ships didn’t hit much of a speed bump with a change in the occupant of the White House.

In June, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the name of the USNS Harvey Milk stripped from the official Naval Vessel Register. Milk was a gay-rights leader and San Francisco supervisor assassinated in 1978. The Navy said Hegseth had ordered Navy Secretary John Phelan to make the change, “taking the politics out of ship naming.”

The ship was renamed for Navy Chief Petty Officer Oscar V. Peterson, a Medal of Honor recipient from the World War II Battle of the Coral Sea in 1942.

The ship is the second of new class of replenishment oilers. According to the Congressional Research Service, Congress directed that they be named for prominent civil rights advocates. The class carries the name of the late Black civil rights advocate and longtime U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.

Phelan, Hegseth and Trump have not ordered any further name changes to the Lewis-class ships.

Before the new battleship announcement, Trump scrambled Navy ship naming plans with an announcement canceling the Constellation frigate program after the two ships were already under construction — the USS Constellation and the USS Congress.

The Navy canceled the remaining ships, including those to be named for the French Marquis de Lafayette, who aided American patriot forces in the



A graphic rendering depicts the now-canceled Constellation-class frigate USS Lafayette. USS Lafayette was to be the fourth of the new Constellation-class frigates, scheduled to commission in 2029. The Constellation-class guided-missile frigate represents the Navy’s next generation small surface combatant.

SHANNON RENFRO/U.S. Navy

Revolutionary War; Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton; Spain’s Louisiana Governor Conde Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, a backer of the American Revolution; former Navy pilot Everett Alvarez Jr., who was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War; and Capt. Bright Joy Hancock, one of the first female Navy officers, who served during World War I and II.

Also canceled was the new USS Chesapeake, named after the early American frigate captured by Britain in 1813, renamed HMS Chesapeake and later deconstructed for use as a watermill in Wickham, Hampshire, England. In recent years, the building has housed an antiques store.

In canceling the Constellation program, Trump announced a new generation of frigates called FF(X) based on the U.S. Coast Guard’s large National Security Cutter design. The names of the future ships are to be determined.

A sidelight to the “Trump-class” battleship-naming controversy is that it could affect nam-

ing a future aircraft carrier after the president.

Twelve of the past 17 aircraft carriers have been named for presidents, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. From Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush, nearly every president has had an aircraft carrier named for them.

The exceptions are Lyndon B. Johnson, whose name is on a Zumwalt-class destroyer to be commissioned in 2027, and President Jimmy Carter, a former Navy submarine officer, who has a Seawolf-class attack submarine named for him.

Only President Richard M. Nixon, who resigned office in 1974 because of the Watergate scandal, doesn’t have a ship at sea or in the construction pipeline bearing his name.

Four of six Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers are named for presidents. If the naming tradition is followed in chronological order, future carriers could be named for Presidents Barack Obama, Trump and Biden.

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## Sub names often switch

BY GARY WARNER

*Stars and Stripes*

In December, a welder at a Virginia shipyard etched the keel plate of the USS Barb, the ceremonial birthing of a new submarine.

The Virginia-class fast attack submarine joins hundreds of Navy subs through history named after sea creatures. So will the next three on the construction list: the USS Tang, USS Wahoo and USS Silversides.

The names are throwbacks to an earlier time. Only one Navy submarine has been commissioned with the name of a sea creature since the USS Cavalla, named for a saltwater fish, in 1973.

In 1959, the Navy rolled out a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine. Instead of a fish, the first of its class was named the USS George Washington.

Attack subs retained fish names for another decade. In 1969, the Navy was preparing to christen the USS Redfish when Rep. William H. Bates, a Massachusetts Republican and staunch Navy supporter, died. Navy Secretary John Chafee broke with tradition and named the attack submarine for the congressman.

It was the beginning of a shift that saw submarines increasingly named for cities, then states, with occasional persons thrown into the mix. The Navy built 62 Los Angeles-class nuclear attack submarines from 1976 to 1996, with all but one named after cities.

Adm. Hyman Rickover, the “father of the nuclear Navy,” accepted the politically expedient naming change. “Fish don’t vote,” he said.

Ironically, when Rickover retired in 1984, the future USS Providence was renamed the USS Hyman G. Rickover. It was the only Los Angeles-class submarine to break the naming protocol of American cities.

Of the first 30 Virginia-class boats of its class christened, 28 are named for states. Boats named for former Navy Secretary and U.S. Sen. John Warner, and a new submarine named for Rickover, were the exceptions.

At the end of President Donald Trump’s first term, the Navy decided it was time to bring back the sea creature names.

The switch was short-lived. Under President Joe Biden, a Virginia-class submarine was named the USS John H. Dalton, in honor of the Navy secretary under President Bill Clinton.

Eight more were given place names associated with the Navy, including Potomac, Norfolk and Brooklyn.

## MILITARY

# Navy adds 2nd fitness test requirement

## Change marks a return to testing schedule used before COVID pandemic

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

Active-duty sailors will have to complete two physical fitness assessments per year starting in 2026, the Navy announced in a return to its pre-coronavirus pandemic fitness testing schedule.

All sailors in the active component will now be tested during cycles between Jan. 1 and June 30 and July 1 and Dec. 31, according to a Naval Administrative Message governing fitness standards published last month. Reserve component sailors must complete at least one fitness test during the year, according to the message.

The increase in fitness testing

aligns with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's push for increased physical standards across the U.S. military. The service has also made its fitness tests and body composition standards — which include a measure of waist-to-height ratio and body fat percentage — gender neutral, per Hegseth's orders.

The Navy will now require commanders to integrate some physical training into every workday for their sailors, the messages said. The Navy did not provide specific guidance for commanders to accomplish that.

Most sailors will take the Navy Physical Readiness Test twice per year. That test includes a two-minute pushup test, a timed

forearm plank and a timed 1½-mile walk or run. Commanding officers or officers in charge may authorize a 2,000-meter row, a 14-minute stationary bike ride, or a 500- or 450-meter swim instead of the walk or run, according to the Navy.

Sailors in combat arms jobs — including SEALs, special warfare combat crewmen, explosive ordnance disposal and fleet diving positions — will take the Navy-wide PRT once per year and the new Combat Fitness Test once per year, according to the guidance.

The combat arms test includes an 800-meter swim with fins, a two-minute pushup test, an untimed pullup test and a 1-mile

run. The pushups, pullups and run are to be completed with 20 extra pounds via a weight vest or plate carrier, according to Navy documents.

The service's new fitness policy also changes the requirements to remain in the service. Any sailor who fails three fitness tests during a four-year period will be administratively separated, according to the policy. Those failures do not have to be consecutive. Previously, the Navy moved to kick out sailors after two or more consecutive fitness test failures.

However, on Jan. 1, the Navy was to conduct a one-time reset of all past fitness test failures to zero, according to the new mes-

sage. That means sailors who have a failed fitness test on their record before Jan. 1, 2026, will not have that used against them for reenlistment, promotion or continued service purposes.

Pregnant and postpartum sailors are exempt from physical fitness testing during pregnancy and for an additional 12 months "after giving birth, loss of pregnancy or having a stillbirth," according to the service.

After the 12-month period, postpartum sailors are required to obtain medical clearance and participate in the current Navy fitness assessment cycle, according to the service.

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## B-52 team wins USAF prize for innovation

BY JUAN KING  
*Stars and Stripes*

Airmen who maintain B-52 Stratofortress bombers won the Air Force's top innovation prize after designing a simple adapter that makes one of their most dangerous maintenance jobs faster and safer.

The team from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana took first place at Air Force Spark Tank, the service's championship round for innovators, for a work platform that cuts pylon-loading time from four hours to about 30 minutes while reducing the risk of injury and aircraft damage.

The event, held at the Pentagon in mid-November, featured six finalist projects pitched by airmen. It was delayed more than a month because of the 43-day federal government shutdown, according to a Dec. 19 news release from the Air Force Research Laboratory. The finalists were selected from 441 projects submitted worldwide.

The Barksdale team won with its Airborne Launcher for Expendables-25 Pylon Load Adapter. The device attaches to an existing lift truck and holds an avionics pylon securely beneath a B-52's wing while maintainers work, according to an Instagram video posed by the 307th Bomb Wing.

"We just had to create an adap-



An airman with the 307th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron tests the pylon-loading fixture at Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

THEODORE DAIGLE/U.S. Air Force

ter ... to basically fix it to the lift truck, so it would interface between the pylon and the lift truck," Senior Master Sgt. John Slaughter, 307th Maintenance Squadron production superintendent, said in the video.

Slaughter said the adapter reduces the risk of injury to airmen and damage to aircraft.

"The ALE 25 Pylon Loading Adapter was born out of real-world challenges faced by maintainers," the research lab release said. "By cutting task times from four hours to just 30 minutes and eliminating risky manual lifts, it's transforming safety and efficiency for B-52H Stratofortress operations."

Another finalist, Tech. Sgt. Tylar Cravens, a C-130J Super Hercules engine mechanic at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, represented his team at the competition. His project, Star Forge, uses advanced 3D printing to produce full-scale composite engine models, allowing maintainers to train without removing

aircraft from service.

Cravens — assigned to 373rd Training Squadron Detachment 15 — said Star Forge grabbed plenty of attention at the event.

"We weren't selected as the winner, but leadership is interested in funding and pursuing the project," he said in an email.

Developed through Yokota's YokoWerx innovation cell, the idea grew from Cravens' personal 3D-printing efforts into a system refined by airmen in Japan, the United States and Europe.

Star Forge reduced training equipment costs dramatically — in one case from \$89,000 to \$1 — and is expected to improve training for about 2,300 aircraft maintainers, the research lab said.

Spark Tank — modeled after the television show "Shark Tank" — provides finalists exposure and potential funding. Winners receive support to further develop their ideas.

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## All Marines eligible to apply for 6 new drone piloting courses

BY LYDIA GORDON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps is adding six new piloting courses as the service prepares to field tens of thousands of commercial drones in the coming year.

The plan, announced in December in a memo from the service, outlines a two-and-a-half-year framework to standardize drone training across the Corps.

Under the new framework, Marines of any job specialty can apply through their commands for one of the courses, which include basic drone operator, attack drone operator, attack drone leader, payload specialist, attack drone instructor and payload specialist instructor.

Units on Okinawa, at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Camp Lejeune, N.C., were selected as regional training hubs for the courses, with Quantico, Va., serving as the current central training site, according to the release.

In addition to the six courses, eight new drone-related certifications will be introduced, broadening qualification pathways for Marines with varying experience levels, the Corps said.

Marines who have completed previous service drone training may be granted corresponding certifications under the new system, the memo said.

First-person view drones will be fielded to all infantry, reconnaissance and littoral combat teams across the Corps as early as May, according to a separate statement.



MAURION MOORE/U.S. Marine Corps  
Marines load a simulated warhead onto a drone during training at Camp Santiago, Puerto Rico, in November.

The initiatives align with the Defense Department's broader effort to develop and field approximately \$1 billion in autonomous and remotely operated systems across the services, the Marine Corps said.

Full operational capability for the Corps' drone program is expected by 2028, with initial fielding slated to begin in March.

The new program builds on efforts already underway by the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, which has begun delivering Neros Archer attack drones to select units.

The Corps plans to maintain and expand its use of existing platforms as part of a diverse and adaptable drone portfolio.

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## MILITARY

# Navy aims to extend endurance at sea

Effort includes high-tech galley equipment, freeze-dried food

BY KAYLYN BARNHART  
BATISTA  
*Stars and Stripes*

At a lab in Natick, Mass., a team of Navy civilians and contractors is testing new galley equipment and food recipes with one goal in mind: keeping sailors well-fed, healthy and mission-ready during long deployments at sea.

By combining food science, engineering and frequent feedback from the fleet, the team is working to modernize Navy galleys to extend endurance at sea aboard ships and submarines.

"The long-term goal is to keep the warfighters at sea doing what they have to do," said Rick Watts, a Navy project officer on the Joint Food Service and Engineering Team.

After more than 20 years serving as a Navy culinary specialist, including time aboard submarines, Watts retired as a master chief and now works to solve everyday challenges in Navy galleys.

His team evaluates commercial kitchen equipment to determine suitability for shipboard use, including space constraints, constant motion, power supply and water requirements.

Smart technologies are being tested to address personnel shortages and training gaps in ship galleys. Automated tilt skillets, for example, are designed to simplify complex cooking tasks. With recipes pre-programmed into the system, the skillet guides culinary specialists step by step, producing consistent meals and reducing food waste.

A new deep-fat fryer, developed over the past year, is also being prepared for testing with the submarine force.

"Our No. 1 challenge is obsolescence," Watts said. "We have older equipment, so we have to find new solutions for those."

Looking further ahead, the Breadbot — an automated bread production system — is being explored for potential shipboard use. While promising for the future, Watts said it still has some "growing pains" and is not yet ready for implementation on Navy vessels.

Alongside equipment testing, food technologist Brittany Koukoulas works with Navy recipe development on the Functional Food Nutrition Intervention

Team. Her team constantly experiments with ingredients to develop new food recipes that meet the "Go For Green" nutritional standards for sailors.

Her team is currently experimenting with freeze-dried ingredients to see if they can help extend ship endurance, allowing vessels to stay at sea longer without running out of food. Recently, she worked on a strawberry shortbread cookie recipe.

"There is a push on finding out some information about freeze-dried ingredients based on some conversations with the fleet," said Koukoulas, who is currently conducting research and development in the lab.

Watts added that freeze-dried ingredients have been highly

successful for the submarine force and now surface vessels are beginning to show more of an interest recently.

Developing and finalizing one food recipe can take two to five weeks before it is submitted to Naval Supply Systems Command for review and distribution to the fleet, according to Koukoulas. An average of 15-20 new recipes are implemented in the fleet each year.

Kitchen equipment takes much longer than recipes to reach vessels. Tests take about a week, followed by reports and reviews from NAVSUP and Naval Sea Systems Command, said Watts. Depending on priority, installation of equipment can take months or even years.



ZACHARY WHEELER/U.S. Navy

**Rick Watts, a Navy Project Officer with the Combat Feeding Division at the U.S. Army DEVCOM Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., inspects the Breadbot, an automated bakery by Wilkinson Baking Co., for potential shipboard use.**



U.S. Army

**Brittany Koukoulas, left and Watts, middle, demonstrate rehydration of freeze-dried products.**



U.S. Army

**Koukoulas, a Food Technologist and Navy Project Officer for the Defense Department's Combat Feeding Division, prepares side-by-side comparison samples of beef enchilada casseroles, in the Navy kitchen at the DEVCOM Soldier Center.**

## MILITARY

## US delivers 188 tons of aid to Sri Lanka

Island nation was hit hard by Cyclone Ditwah in November

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. military personnel delivered roughly 188 tons of relief supplies to Sri Lanka in the week following the devastating Cyclone Ditwah in late November, the Air Force said in a news release.

The U.S. rapidly deployed a pair of C-130J Super Hercules cargo planes from Yokota Air Base, Japan, that carried 70 personnel and relief supplies to aid hard-to-reach areas of the island nation off the southeast tip of India.

Heavy rains from the cyclone caused flooding and mudslides after the storm made landfall on Nov. 27. As of Dec. 31, the disaster had displaced more than 205,000 people, damaged or destroyed almost 119,000 homes, killed 644 people and left 175 missing, according to the United Nations International Organization for Migration.

Twelve C-130J sorties from Katunayake Air Base — Sri Lanka's largest air force base — delivered 377,150 pounds of aid, which included caches of food, drinking water, shelters, emergency first-aid items and communications equipment, the Air Force said. The mission was supported by the 36th Contingen-



JACOB WOOD/U.S. Air Force

American and Sri Lankan personnel unload relief supplies last month in Trichomalee, Sri Lanka.

cy Response at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa.

The relief was aimed at the hardest-hit regions of Ampara, Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Mattala, Ratmalana and Trincomalee, according to the release.

The commander of Pacific Air Forces, Gen. Kevin Schneider, touted the aid as a testament to the strength of America's grow-

ing partnership with Sri Lanka.

"By working closely with our Sri Lankan counterparts, we were able to support relief efforts for communities affected by the cyclone and deliver critical assistance where it was needed most," Schneider said in the release. "This collaboration underscores our shared commitment to saving lives and supporting one

another in times of need."

The rapid deployment was possible because of a November defense agreement between the two nations that formalized cooperation in disaster response and relief, among other aspects such as joint training and cyber defense.

That pact allowed the U.S. to issue a \$2.1 million humanitarian

relief package within 72 hours of the cyclone making landfall, the Air Force said.

That package included logistics equipment such as fuel trucks, forklifts, lights, generators, parts and portable cargo loaders, the Air Force said.

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## Religious reboot: Hegseth tosses Army's spiritual fitness guide

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered sweeping changes to the U.S. military's chaplain corps, with a plan to simplify a system that he said has become too focused on "new age" concepts.

"Our chaplains are chaplains, not emotional support officers, and we're going to treat them as such," Hegseth said in a video statement to the force on Dec. 17.

"Faith and virtue were traded for self-help and self-care," Hegseth said, adding that chaplains had been "minimized" and were "viewed by many as therapists, instead of ministers."

He took special aim at the Army, saying its current spiritual

fitness guide is pushing secular humanism, and he ordered the service to cease using the program immediately.

"It mentions God one time. That's it," Hegseth said. "It mentions feelings 11 times. It even mentions playfulness, whatever that is, nine times. ... In short, it's unacceptable and unserious. So we're tossing it."

Hegseth said the Pentagon is working on a new program, which could curtail what qualifies as a faith or belief recognized in the military.

"More reforms will be coming in the days and weeks ahead, he said. "There will be a top-down cultural shift putting spiritual well-being on the same footing as mental and physical health."

In 2017, the Pentagon updated what qualifies as a recognized religious denomination or belief system, with a list of 221 groups that ranged from the mainstream to obscure Christian sects, Wiccans and atheists.

Hegseth blamed such changes on "political correctness" and an "ongoing war on warriors." The department will create a new list of religious affiliation codes, he said without specifying what religions or belief systems are in and which ones are out.

"We're going to streamline it ... so that our chaplains can actually use it to minister better to the flock," Hegseth said.

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MATTHEW GARNIER/U.S. Army  
A U.S. Chaplain provides spiritual support during an exercise at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif., on Feb. 18.

## MILITARY



AUDREY CHAPPELL/U.S. Air National Guard

Personnel at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego practice emergency simulations in July. The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act orders the Defense Department to ensure that it will not engage in "live-fire trauma training" that targets animals, instead directing the military to use human simulators.

## Military ending 'painful' experiments on cats, dogs

BY LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The defense bill that President Donald Trump signed into law puts an end to many military experiments on cats and dogs and declares a ceasefire to shooting animals in "trauma" exercises.

The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, enacted Dec. 18, includes a provision that bans the Defense Department from continuing to conduct and sponsor "painful research" on domestic cats and dogs as live test subjects.

The bill also orders the Defense Department to ensure that it will not engage in "live-fire trauma training" that targets dogs, cats, nonhuman primates and marine mammals.

Supporters said the bill ends exercises that involved shooting, critically wounding and killing goats and pigs to help educate medics in treating combat injuries. The legislation directs the military to use technologically advanced human simulators instead.

The shift is part of a govern-

ment-wide effort to phase out the use of live animals in federally sponsored tests, studies and training, with pressure growing from the Trump administration, Congress and animal welfare groups to end the practice.

The Navy in May implemented a total ban on experiments using cats and dogs. The Department of Veterans Affairs is phasing out research on cats, dogs and non-human primates.

The defense secretary can make exceptions in the interests of national security. Exemptions also may be made for training and studies related to military or service animals.

Lawmakers from both parties welcomed the restrictions on live-animal tests and training in the 2026 defense bill.

"It is indefensible to waste tax dollars designed to boost our national security on cruel and pointless experiments on cats and dogs," said Sen. Jodi Ernst, R-Iowa, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Army National Guard.

"Research and testing methods involving dogs and cats are

outdated. We must adopt more scientific approaches to improve lives," said Rep. Don Davis, D-N.C., a former first lieutenant in the Air Force. The military, for example, increasingly uses technologically advanced human simulators that physicians say better prepare medics for battlefield injuries.

New restrictions on using domestic cats and dogs in military studies target research that is "painful" but does not end all experiments.

Defunded are animal experiments that cause significant and unrelieved pain and distress, under criteria set by the Agriculture Department.

The bill's language banning the military from conducting live-fire trauma tests on animals identifies dogs, cats, nonhuman primates and marine mammals. But advocates say the prohibition applies to all animals. The defense secretary is directed to use alternatives that include advanced simulators, mannequins and cadavers.

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# Sailors charged in fake marriages to Chinese nationals

BY ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

Two Navy sailors are facing federal charges for what authorities say were sham marriages with Chinese immigrants seeking U.S. residency.

Jacynth Bailey and Morgan Chambers are charged with one count each of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, federal court records show.

Bailey and Chambers were to receive \$45,000 and \$35,000, respectively, as part of the scheme to recruit American citizens, preferably U.S. service members, prosecutors said in separate filings last month in federal court in Jacksonville, Fla.

The Navy didn't immediately respond to questions about the rank and duty assignment of the sailors. The service has an air station in Jacksonville.

If convicted, Bailey and Chambers face up to five years in prison. Neither of them has appeared in court or entered a plea, but each waived their right to be formally indicted.

Their attorneys declined comment on Jan. 5, citing the pending case.

At least two other sailors are involved in the case.

In August, former Navy recruiter Brinio Urena pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, The New York Times reported on Jan. 2.

As part of his plea deal, Urena admitted to marrying a Chinese woman for money in August 2024 and also admitted to helping recruit fellow service members to do the same.

His sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 21.

Navy reservist Raymond Zumba pleaded guilty in July to attempting to bribe a Naval Air Station Jacksonville official in exchange for fraudulent military identification cards for two ineligible people with links to China. Zumba's sentencing in that case was set for Jan. 14.

Separately, he also faces a charge of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud related to his April 2024 wedding to a Chinese national, according to a Dec. 5 federal court filing in Jacksonville. A Dec. 12 court entry indicates that Zumba agreed to plead guilty in the case.

Urena and Zumba were not named in charging documents for Bailey and Chambers.

But in their Dec. 5 filing, prosecutors said Zumba recruited Urena in May 2024 to enter a sham marriage.

After Urena's wedding, Zumba asked him to obtain a military identification card for his new wife because it would help the immigration process, according to the filing.

He also asked Urena "to help him find and recruit other U.S. citizens who would be willing to marry Chinese nationals and facilitate their immigration status for money," the filing states.

In October 2024, Urena and an unidentified Navy sailor contacted another service member to recruit her for marriage to an unidentified Chinese national.

About a month later, Urena introduced the service member to Zumba, who specified the payment terms, according to the filing.

That marriage took place on Jan. 2, 2025, after Zumba and another unidentified co-conspirator drove the service member and her soon-to-be husband from New York City to a Connecticut courthouse, according to court documents.

The documents do not name the service member involved, but the dates and payment terms are consistent with information contained in a court filing for Bailey.

Afterward, Bailey attended a "sham wedding party," during which photographs were taken to substantiate the legitimacy of the marriage for immigration application purposes.

Bailey also was paid an additional \$10,000 at the party, court documents show.

She also was asked to apply for and obtain a military identification card for the Chinese national that would allow him access to U.S. military facilities, prosecutors say.

Chambers flew to Las Vegas in October 2024 for her wedding and afterward was paid \$10,000 cash in a restaurant restroom, court documents state.

A separate court document indicates that Urena flew with an unidentified co-conspirator to a sham wedding in Las Vegas that took place on the same day.

The scheme came to light during a conversation between Zumba and a confidential informant, court records show.

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