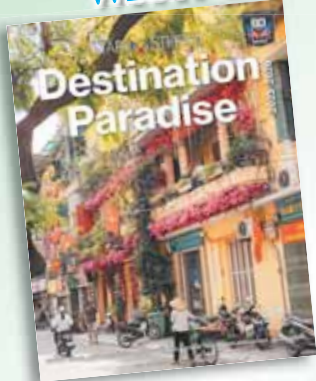


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Marines pitching in at Finegayan Elementary

BY CHELSEY SUAREZ-PIERCE,
MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP BLAZ

DEDEDO – Marines assigned to Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz (MCBCB) participated in an official community relations (COMREL) event with Finegayan Elementary School, continuing the installation’s commitment in supporting the school’s students, faculty, and campus improvement efforts.

Throughout the spring 2026 semester, Marines and civilian staff worked alongside Finegayan Elementary faculty through supply drives, grounds beautification projects, and student activities. In recent weeks, Camp Blaz personnel have been assisting the school with a large-scale classroom clearing effort aimed at relocating bulk office and school supplies from two large, centralized classrooms.

“A few months ago, we received a bulk school supply order from the Guam Department of Education that resulted in two of our largest classrooms becoming a storage space for copy paper, office equipment, and other supplies,” said Mr. Melvin M. Finona, Finegayan Elementary School Principal. “For the next school year, we’re trying to convert the impromptu storage classrooms into the new CHamoru language classroom to accommodate our students.”

To bring the task to a close, MCBCB staff



“Projects like this are rewarding because we get to see a direct impact from the work we’re doing”

– LCpl Dondre Tate



Pfc. Kamakana Waiolamacruz and Maj. Michael Guard move a TV during the a community relations event.

Maj. Michael Guard moves paper during a community relations event at Finegayan Elementary School. Photos by Sgt. Brayden Daniel, U.S. Marine Corps

organized this month’s COMREL efforts to clear, and prepare the classroom space for the upcoming summer renovations. Over 17,000 pounds of supplies were moved to a permanent storage location, effectively preparing the space for updates and renovations ahead of the fall semester.

“Projects like this are rewarding because we get to see a direct impact from the work we’re doing”, said LCpl Dondre Tate, admin clerk, Headquarters Company, Marine Corps Base

Camp Blaz. “When we come back for the next school year, we’ll be able to see the finished classrooms and know we helped make that possible for the kids”.

The event reflected the continued partnership between Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz and Finegayan Elementary School, reinforcing the installation’s commitment to community engagement and supporting educational opportunities for local students. Through sustained volunteer efforts and collaboration with faculty and staff, Marines and civilian personnel continue building strong relationships with the surrounding community while contributing to projects that positively impact Guam’s future generations.

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USS springfield returns home

SUBMARINE SQUADRON 15

NAVAL BASE – Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Springfield (SSN 761) returned to its homeport of Naval Base Guam, May 31, 2026, after completing a routine deployment in the Western Pacific.



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

“Springfield’s presence in theater reaffirmed its role in maintaining security and stability throughout the region,” said Capt. Neil Steinhagen, commander, Submarine Squadron 15. “Through sustained forward presence and operational readiness, Springfield embodied its motto, ‘United for Freedom,’ while promoting peace through strength in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Springfield’s deployment underscores the Navy’s commitment to maintaining a persistent, forward-deployed undersea presence ready to respond to evolving challenges across the Pacific.

“Springfield’s operations directly supported forward-deployed readiness and reinforced the Navy’s ability to operate where it matters most,” said Cmdr. Greg Storer, commanding officer of USS Springfield. “The crew performed exceptionally, remained determined through every challenge, and executed every task with professionalism and purpose. I am

incredibly proud of what they accomplished and grateful for the commitment they demonstrated every day.”

During the deployment, four Springfield Sailors advanced in rank, while three officers and fifteen enlisted Sailors earned their submarine warfare insignia, commonly known as “dolphins” or “fish.” The insignia signifies qualification in submarine operations and reflects mastery of watch stations, systems, and responsibilities required to operate in the undersea domain.

“Every day brought new challenges, and this crew met each one head-on,” said Master Chief Information Systems Technician (Communications) Chris Ries, Springfield’s chief of the boat. “They came together as one team, remained focused under pressure, and consistently looked out for one another. Their hard work, resilience, and dedication show why our Sailors are the true strength behind this submarine and our fleet.”



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Soldiers help Saipan rebuild one roof at a time

STORY AND PHOTO BY PACO HAMM,
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
HONOLULU DISTRICT

Two U.S. Army Reserve engineer units based in Guam and Hawaii are concluding their role in a critical mission in Saipan supporting the temporary roofing mission as the island continues recovering from the devastation of Super Typhoon Sinlaku, which made landfall in CNMI April 14 as a Category 4 storm and carved a destructive path across the Commonwealth, damaging homes, infrastructure, and the environment.

The units, the 797th and 871st Engineer Vertical Construction Companies, deployed in support of the Sinlaku recovery mission as part of the Army Reserve's responsibilities under Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) and at the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

The USACE Honolulu District, in close partnership with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) government, island Mayor's office, FEMA and the U.S. Department of War, installed the first temporary roofs in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, bringing immediate protection to storm-damaged homes.

The joint roofing operation brings together U.S.

Navy Seabees from Combined Task Force 75, U.S. Army Soldiers from the 797th and 871st EVC Companies, and contracted teams to accelerate installation and reach more families in need. Though support from the two Army units will drawdown, the overall temporary roofing mission continues.

"This has been an exceptional mission for our engineers to support their community," said Col. Mary Jayne "MJ" Durham, commander of the 303rd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. "We have Soldiers who live here in Saipan, and the Army Reserve plays an essential role in the Pacific mission."

For eligible homeowners, the program installs tin metal sheeting over damaged roofs, allowing residents to remain safe in their homes while planning permanent repairs.

"Our engineers have been performing a vital

mission to help the community get back on its feet, and our Soldiers continue to maintain high morale," Durham said.

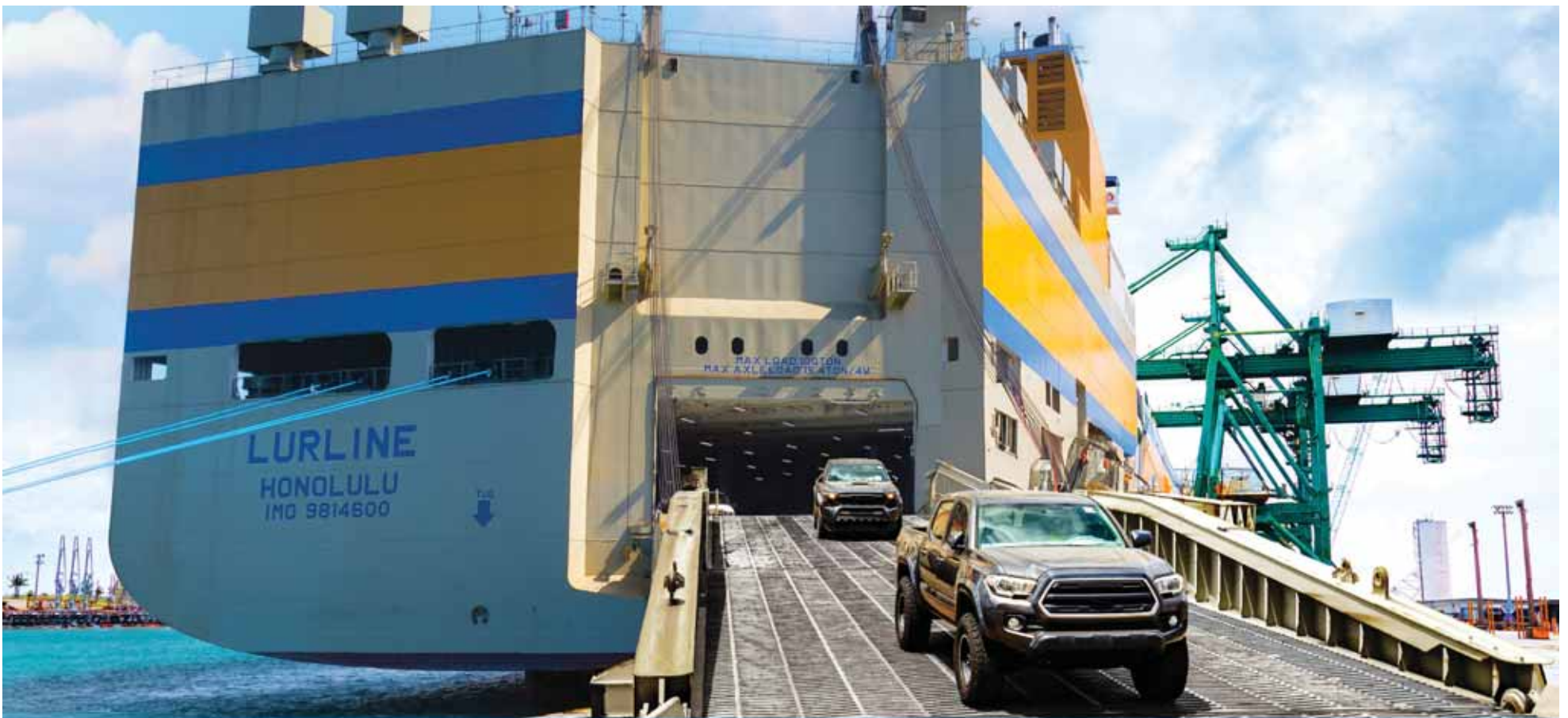
Since early May, the two Reserve units have completed temporary roofing on 50 homes, directly impacting families across the island.

"As these Soldiers leave Saipan, they're taking with them the relationships they've built with each other and with the communities they served," Durham added. "They're leaving with a deep sense of pride in what they've accomplished."

"Our engineers have been performing a vital mission to help the community get back on its feet, and our soldiers continue to maintain high morale."

– Col. Mary Jayne "MJ" Durham

Soldiers assigned to the 797th and 871st Engineer Vertical Construction Companies support temporary roofing operations in Saipan.



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Volunteers keep tabs on Mariana fruit bat population

STORY AND PHOTO BY
ROBERT BALAJADIA,
NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING
SYSTEMS COMMAND MARIANAS

SANTA RITA – Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) and regional environmental agencies throughout the Marianas are making collaborative conservation efforts across the Mariana Islands during the Annual Fanihi Count on Guam, Saipan, and Tinian.

This year, more than 160 volunteers and over 30 partner organizations participated in the April 2026 count. These efforts continue to support a species of deep cultural and ecological importance: the fanihi, or Mariana fruit bat. The fanihi is a vital pollinator and seed disperser, playing a key role in maintaining healthy island ecosystems. The species travels between islands to roost and forage, serving as a living link across the archipelago. It is listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act in both Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

Just as the fanihi connects the islands, the annual counts unite volunteers, agencies, and conservation partners in protecting one of the region’s most important native species. A total of 269 fanihi were recorded across the islands: 241 on Guam, 24 on Saipan, and four on Tinian. These sightings were made possible by 168 volunteers



Members from NAVFAC Marianas and other regional agencies are all smiles after conducting the Annual Fanihi (bat) Count in April.

monitoring 94 observation stations.

“Since the fanihi can fly between islands, being able to conduct a coordinated count covering multiple islands allows us to get an accurate picture of how our fanihi population is doing,” said Laura Duenas, Natural Resource Specialist and fanihi program manager, 36 Civil Engineer Squadron (CES), Joint Region Marianas (JRM) at Andersen Air Force Base (AAFB). “The information we collect from these surveys will be used to determine

**NAVFAC Marianas, Regional Agencies
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what conservation actions are needed to help manage and protect this species.”

The initiative started in 2014 at AAFB and has since grown to include volunteers and partner agencies from across Marianas. In the Northern Mariana Islands, Saipan

and Tinian began their annual counts in 2022 through a partnership between NAVFAC Marianas and the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife (DLNR). Tinian DLNR joined the effort in 2023. On Tinian, where Department of

“Since the fanihi can fly between islands, being able to conduct a coordinated count covering multiple islands allows us to get an accurate picture of how our fanihi population is doing.”

– Laura Duenas

War activity is quickly increasing, fanihi surveys are being conducted to help set baseline conditions so they can be tracked for future activities.

Beyond data collection, the annual counts serve as an important outreach effort, helping raise awareness about the fanihi’s ecological role and the threats it faces, including habitat loss and poaching. Community involvement remains essential to the species’ long-term survival and recovery.

“The annual count is a great opportunity for the community to participate in fanihi conservation,” said Henry Fandel, wildlife section supervisor with CNMI’s Division of Fish and Wildlife.

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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

Agueda (also known as Fort Apugan) and Government House.

Agana Heights (Tutuhan)

.....A good place to begin.....

Village history

Before World War II, Agana Heights was primarily farm land for the residents of Hagåtña. It was also the site for the Spanish militia's "lookout" for incoming ships and possible danger. That site today is Fort Santa Agueda, also known as Fort Apugan, which is a popular tour site because of its panoramic view of the island's capital city, bay of Hagåtña, the Philippine Sea, and the sheer northern cliffines of Oka Point and Urunao Point.

The US military also used the area before World War II where the US Naval Hospital Marianas now stands, for officer's quarters and a sick bay. During the war, the Japanese military used the facilities for training carrier pigeons as a means of communication. After the recapture of the island by US forces, the facilities were utilized as an internment camp for prisoners of war.

The village grew substantially after World War II, as people who owned land in Agana Heights moved there since the bombed capital of Hagåtña was off limits.

Today, Agana Heights is home of two of the island's oldest organizations: the Elks Club and the Shriners Club. It is also home to churches of the island's major religions: the Agana Heights General Baptist Church, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Scottish Rite Temple, and the Christian Science Church.

Agana Heights is also the birthplace of Little League Baseball on Guam where in 1955, the first Little League game was played. The Agana Heights team won three consecutive championships in 1955, 1956, and 1957. The Agana Heights Cougars, a major league team, also won the first Guam Major League Baseball Championship which was held in 1974. Today, many baseball teams continue to play for the village. ↗



Fort Santa Agueda, one of the last standing Spanish installations, was used during the Japanese occupation. Photo by Lacey Martinez, courtesy of Guampedia

BY PETER A. SAN NICOLAS, GUAMPEDIA

Agana Heights sits just above the capital city of Hagåtña and was a resettlement community for many residents of old Hagåtña after World War II ended in 1944. Agana Heights is one of two villages (the other is Santa Rita), that does not derive its

name from a Chamorro word.

Before it was a village, many say the area was called Tutujan. Some village elders say that the place name Tutujan is derived from the Chamorro word "tutuhon" which means 'to begin,' 'start,' or 'set out.' However, other elders say the tutuhan name is derived from the name of a trail along the cliffline between Fort Santa

This village at a glance

- **Population:** The US Census in 2010 listed Agana Heights population at 3,808.
- **Commissioners/Mayors:** Richard B. Arroyo, Mayor, 2025-Present; Paul M. McDonald, Mayor, 1993-2024; Frank M. Portusach, Commissioner/Mayor, 1977-1992; Juan E. Garcia, Commissioner, 1969-1977; Juan L. Pangelinan, Commissioner, 1956-1969 (first elected village official); Anselmo Garrido, Commissioner, 1946-1953 (appointed by naval governor); Beldad S. Santos, Commissioner, 1944-1946 (appointed by naval governor); Juan L. Pangelinan,

Deputy Commissioner, 1952-1956 (under Sinajaña)

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

- **Village description:** The villages of Asan/Maina, Hagåtña, Ordot/Chalan Pago and Sinajana border Agana Heights.

The sections of the village are As Apugan, Tipugan, Fonte, Hilaan, Taigigao and Charito. Fonte River divides Agana Heights from Maina village and Taigigao Street is the boundary separating Agana Heights from Ordot/Chalan Pago. Sinajana village and Agana Heights village are also separated by a shared roadway.

Before World War II, Agana Heights was a farming community for residents who lived in Hagåtña. Today, sprin-

kled throughout the village are some beautiful homes with gated and manicured lawns, quaint residential homes, apartment complexes, and a row of buildings that serve as homes to different religious denominations and organizations. Agana Heights has been transformed into a thriving community.

Agana Heights is home to historic Fort Apugan, also known as Fort Santa Agueda, located next to Government House. The village of Agana Heights also features Tutujan Park, completed in 2002, also known as "Triangle Park" for the triangular shape it takes as it located at the fork – in the middle of the road – that separates San Ramon Hill from Pale' Kiernan Drive.



Left: Agana Heights Mural George Miller, 2014 Right: U.S. Naval Hospital, Guam_1959 Photo courtesy Paul Souder, Micronesia Area Research Center (MARC)



Agana Heights

Points of interest

↘ Institutions

Agana Heights Elementary School

Agana Heights Elementary School was opened in 1958 and has grades kindergarten through fifth.

Archbishop's Residence

The Archbishop's Residence was constructed in the early 1960's. The late Catholic Bishop Apollinaris W. Baumgartner was the first to take residency.

Elks Club

The Elk's Club is one of Guam's oldest organizations established before World War II. The club house was located in Hagåtña and was relocated after the war to its present site in Agana Heights.

General Baptist Memorial Church

One of the island's first Baptist churches, this church was built in 1955. It is one of the first buildings located among a row of religious institutions along one of the village's main roads.

Government House

The architectural design of the governor's official residence incorporates elements of both CHamoru and Spanish-cultural heritage. Its design was completed in 1951 by renowned architect Richard Nuetra. The structure has undergone several renovations as new governors took office and after the island was devastated by typhoons.

Maria Artero Catholic Pre-School and Kindergarten

Nestled in the middle of the village, this school is one several Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Agana's school system.

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church

The Agana Heights Catholic Church, dedicated in 1951, sits in the center of the village. It underwent a



Completed in 1951 by world-renown architect Richard Nuetra, the Government House, Guma I Taotao-tano (the People's House) is an historic landmark that incorporates elements of both Chamorro and Spanish-cultural heritage. JR Manuel

major renovation in 1995 after the structure was continually damaged by series of typhoons in the early 1980s and a powerful earthquake in 1993.

The annual village fiesta of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is celebrated in November.

Scottish Rite Masonic Center

This organization was formed in 1899. In January 1955, through the combined efforts of all the Masonic Bodies in Guam the organization's current home, a concrete block two-story structure was completed. It is the home of Charleston Lodge as well as other active Masonic bodies.

St. Fidelis Friary

In 2002, Super Typhoon Pongsona damaged the St. Fidelis Friary beyond repair. The 50 year old building was demolished and a new friary built on the same site was dedicated in June 2007.

Seventh-day Adventist Church

On 11 June 1960, the Agana Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church opened. The Agana Heights chapel was dedicated to Mrs. Ana T. Gay, an early SDA convert who donated the property for erecting a church for the Guam-Micronesia Mission.

U.S. Naval Hospital, Guam

The first US Naval Hospital on Guam was established in Hagåtña, in August 1899. The current naval hospital, built in 1953, sits on 47 acres of prime real estate in Agana Heights overlooking the capital. The facility opened in 1954 and today remains the primary medical provider for military members and their families.

Guam High School

The Department of Defense Education Activity's islandwide high school, Guam High, is also located on this base. It was formerly located in the neighboring village of Maina in the former Commander Naval Forces Marianas headquarters, Nimitz Hill.

It is one of the three US Department of Defense (DoD) Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) on Guam for children and wards of active-duty military members, and federal employees hired from the U.S. with "return rights". The DoD DDESS schools on Guam opened 29 September 1997.

Historical

Fort Santa Agueda

This bateria (battery), built during the administration of Spanish Governor Manuel Muro (1794 to 1802), was developed for tactical purposes. It sits atop Apugan Hill and is also commonly called Fort Apugan. It is one of the few surviving Spanish forts on Guam. It provides a commanding view of the capital village of Hagåtña, the Philippine Sea, and the sheer northern cliffines of Oka Point and Ritidian Point. The fort is also in a prime location to study the northern topography of the island with its raised limestone plateau.

Recreational

Fonte River

This river is the border of Agana Heights and Maina. A bridge across the Fonte River is the the topic of a local ghost story about the "White Lady." It is also the location of the first dam built on Guam, the Libugon Dam. This dam was the main source of fresh water for the capital city of Hagåtña before World War II. The Fonte Valley River remains a popular swimming spot and hiking trail.



Fonte River serves as a natural border between the villages of Agana Heights Maina. Prior to World War II in 1941, water from Fonte (also known as Libugon) Dam was the main fresh water source for Guam's capital. Photo by Victor Consaga, courtesy of Guampedia

Sgt. Pedro C. Pangelinan Baseball Field

One of Guam's first and oldest baseball fields is the Agana Heights Sgt. Pedro C. Pangelinan baseball field, named after the Guam soldier killed in action in 1968 in Vietnam. The ballpark was developed in 1949 and completed in 1951 and was the site of the first Little League Baseball game on Guam.

The Cliff

Seated along one of Agana Height's cliff lines, The Cliff, is one Guam's first hotels. It was established in Agana Heights in 1959. It has more recently become a business and residential condominium.

Tutujan Park

Tutujan Park, also known as "Triangle Park", complete with water and power, was built in 2002, funded by the A.B. Won Pat Guam International Airport Authority. For a small fee, the park can be reserved for private functions through the Agana Heights mayor's office.

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



Fort Santa Agueda_Apugan Lawrence J. Cunningham



St. Fidelis Friary Capuchin Order, Guam

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



Ahi Tuna Poke, Four Ways

My family just loves seafood. One of our favorites is ahi tuna poke. One of our best memories of one of our vacations to Oahu, Hawaii is being able to find a variety of poke almost everywhere, even in grocery stores, and not just ahi tuna poke but poke made with smoked octopus, salmon, shrimp, and other seafood delights!

Here are four of our ahi tuna poke favorites. Clockwise from the top left: Shoyu Poke, Ogo Seaweed Poke, Kimchee Base Poke, Spicy Mayo Poke. Give them a try. I think you’ll like them.

All four recipes below have a few ingredients in common: ahi tuna, green onions, and either yellow, Maui, or any other sweet onion variety.

Cut the tuna steaks into 1/2-inch cubes. I find it easier to cut them while still partially frozen.

Now for the four variations – Shoyu, Ogo Seaweed, Spicy Mayo, and Kimchee Base.



1. Shoyu Poke

Ingredients:

- ½ pound ahi tuna
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- ¼ cup sliced yellow onions
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- Chili pepper flakes, to taste



Shoyu — or soy sauce — poke is probably the simplest to make. Mix soy sauce, sesame oil, and chili flakes in a small bowl. Pour the Shoyu mixture over the ahi. Add green and yellow onions. Stir to combine.

2. Ogo Seaweed Poke

Ingredients:

- ½ pound ahi tuna
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- ¼ cup sliced yellow onions
- 2 pinches dried ogo seaweed
- 1 teaspoon alea (Hawaiian) sea salt
- Chili pepper flakes, to taste
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons nori komi furikake



Ogo seaweed gets its name from — you guessed it — the Ogo seaweed that’s in it. Ogo seaweed poke is also pretty simple to make. It’s getting the ingredients that’s going to prove challenging, especially if you don’t have an international market nearby.

You’ll need dried ogo — a little goes a long way. I used maybe a couple of pinches of ogo for this recipe. I got a good supply of dried ogo on my last trip to Hawaii, but I have seen it sold in international markets. You can even order it from Amazon.

I also used Alaea (Hawaiian) sea salt in this recipe, but if you can’t find it, pink Himalayan sea salt will work in a pinch.

To make Ogo Seaweed Poke, add a couple of pinches of dried ogo, alea sea salt, sesame oil, Chili pepper flakes, green onions, and yellow onions to the bowl of ahi.

Stir to combine. Sprinkle nori komi furikake over the top.

This is the furikake to use (nori komi furikake).



3. Spicy Mayo Poke

Ingredients:

- ½ pound ahi tuna
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- ¼ cup sliced yellow onions
- 2 tablespoons kewpie mayo
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon aji mirin
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon sriracha, more or less to taste



Spicy Mayo Poke is a popular one. The beauty of this version is you can make it as spicy (or not spicy at all) as you want. I usually make it not spicy, then add the spice (sriracha) to my own serving. This way pleases everyone in my family. One doesn’t like spicy foods, another likes it mild, I like it a little more than mild, and another likes it mouth-on-fire hot.

To make Spicy Mayo Poke, you’ll need kewpie mayo, soy sauce, aji mirin, garlic powder, lime juice, and sriracha.

Mix the ingredients together in a small bowl, including sliced green and yellow onions.

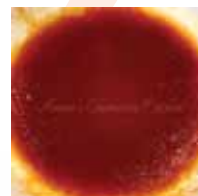
Stir to combine. Pour the mixture over the ahi. Stir to combine.



4. Kimchee Base Poke

Ingredients:

- ½ pound ahi tuna
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- ¼ cup sliced yellow onions
- 1 tablespoon kimchee base
- 1 tablespoon aji mirin
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ teaspoon rice vinegar



Kimchee Base is a unique ingredient for most, but it’s commonly sold in Asian or international markets. It’s usually used for — you guessed it — making kimchee, but I like to use it in many different recipes.

To make kimchee, in a small bowl mix together kimchee base, aji mirin, sesame oil, and rice vinegar.

Pour the mixture over the ahi. Add green and yellow onions. Stir to combine.



That’s it!

Four versions of ahi tuna poke, all delicious (trust me), and all super easy to make. Serve with hot steamed rice and enjoy!

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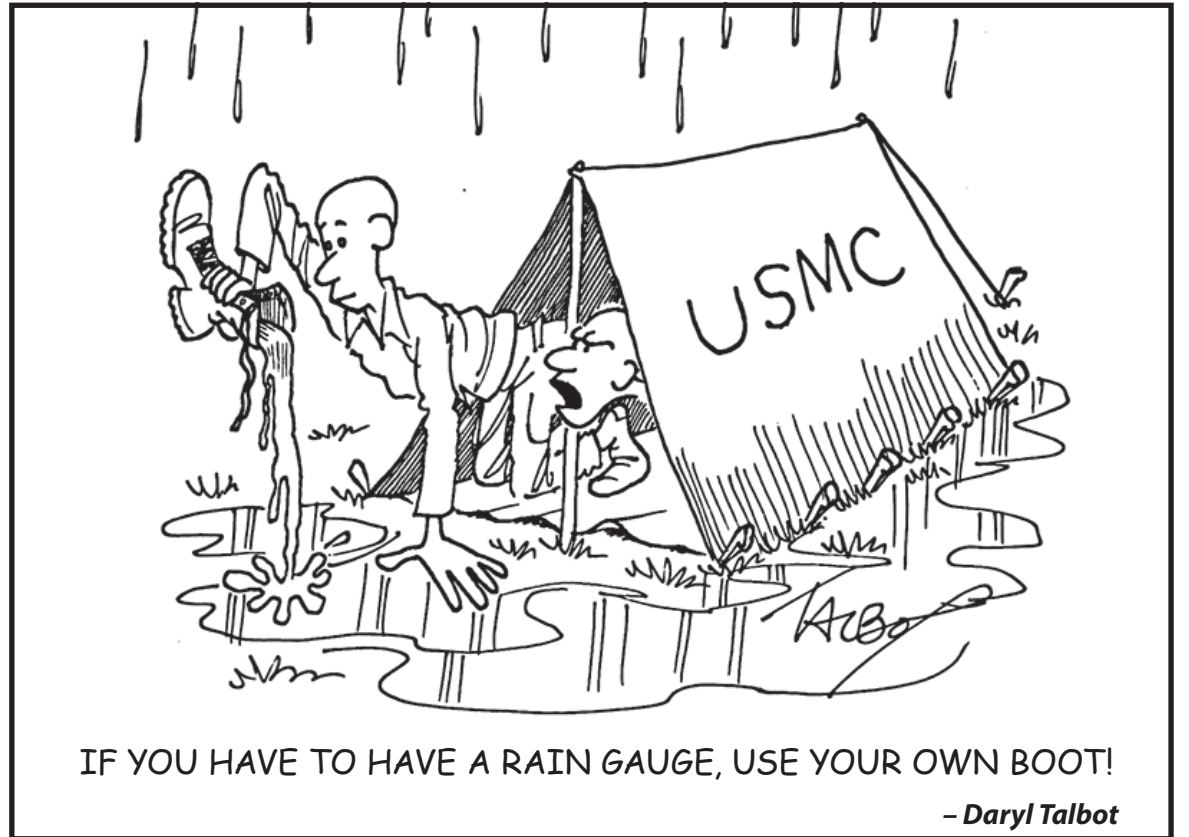
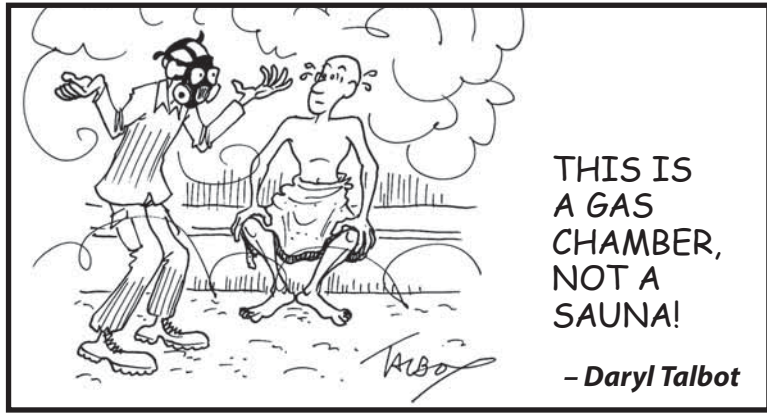
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Boonie Stomps Guam

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY
GUAM BOONIE STOMPERS





Invasion Hike

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



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

July 11 (Sat.)	Fonte Dame/Libugon Radio Station (Medium)- Nimitz Hill
July 18 (Sat.)	Invasion Hike (Asan to Asan Bay Overlook) (Very Difficult)- Asan
July 25 (Sat.)	Korean Airline Memorial (Easy)/ Charlie Corn (Medium)/Hidden Bunkers (Medium)- Nimitz Hill
Aug. 1 (Sat.)	Tenjo SUNSET HIKE (Medium)- Piti *4:30 p.m. Meet Up, 4:45 p.m. Brief, 5 p.m. GO, Sunset 6:37 p.m.
Aug. 8 (Sat.)	Southwest Coast (Very Difficult) - Hagat to Humatak, 1-way *8 a.m. Meet up



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NOTE: Schedule subject to change, please check Boonie Stomps' Facebook in advance.

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Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Scottish miss

5 James who played Sonny Corleone

9 Woodworking files

14 Like a mechanic's rag

15 Pakistani language

16 French farewell

17 Philanderer

19 Part of NOW

20 Courage

21 Voicemail precursor

23 Like pie?

25 Stand for a portrait

26 Bold and outspoken

29 Crime-fighting turtles, briefly

30 One of the Gershwins

33 Company stationery

35 Point on a bus map

36 Neat anagram

37 Eagle's nest

38 Havana's home

39 Psychic

40 Checkout device

42 Royal flush card

43 ___ the hatchet

44 Oscar winner Borgnine

45 Certain believer

47 Guitar part

48 Francis, in Florence

51 Polite

55 Dentist's direction

56 Exhibiting angst

58 Misbehave

59 Genesis son

60 Narrow aperture

61 Winter runners?

62 It's tied at the altar

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

DOWN

1 Homebuyer's need

2 ___-de-camp

3 Talk like a lush

4 "Looney Tunes" lisper

5 Word before card or stick

6 Wide assortment

7 Mideast's Gulf of ___

8 Mother's helper

9 Least refined

10 Put on a pedestal

11 Likeness

12 Hammerhead part

13 Performed an aria

18 Make fun

22 Vagabond

24 Erie Canal city

26 Dynamite time?

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

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Stripes Sports Trivia

In 2019, this golfer successfully defended his title at The PGA Championship, a year after doing the same thing at The U.S. Open.

Answer

Brooks Koepka

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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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:

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

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GUAM EDITION

JUNE 22, 2026

Vertical exit

Marines bid farewell to venerable AV-8B Harrier II in 'Sundown Ceremony'
Page 2



A Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier II with Marine Attack Squadron 223, flies over the Outer Banks of North Carolina on May 15. The "sundown" of the AV-8B Harrier II paves the way for 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing's full transition to the F-35B and C Lightning II.

PERRI WOOD/U.S. Marine Corps

COVER STORY

Marine Corps Harriers fly into sunset

Departure of jump jet paves way for F-35

Stars and Stripes

The 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing bid farewell to the AV-8B Harrier II in a "Sundown Ceremony" on June 3 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina.

The Harrier jump jet was in service for over 40 years.

The farewell ceremony featured a five-jet formation flyover, which landed in front of a crowd of service members, veterans and aviation fans.

The U.S. Marine Corps posted a memorandum announcing the "Harrier Sundown Celebration" in March, as the Harrier will reach the end of its service life at the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.

British Harriers made their reputation during the 1982 Falklands War, flying for the British against Argentine forces that had occupied the British territory of the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic.

The Marines procured the aircraft as the AV-8A Harrier. The design was extensively modified, and its engines were upgraded, in a joint effort by McDonnell Douglas and British Aerospace. The Marines introduced the AV-8B Harrier II in 1985. Boeing took over the aircraft program when it acquired McDonnell Douglas in 1997.

The vertical takeoff and landing ability made the Harrier well-suited to operations from the rough runways and Marine amphibious assault ships from which Marines operated during Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait and Iraq and other Middle East conflicts after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. While capable of air-to-air combat, the Harrier was frequently used in ground-attack roles, supporting infantry.

The Harrier is being replaced in Marine squadrons by the



BRYAN GIRALDO/U.S. Marine Corps

A Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier II from Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 223, Marine Aircraft Group 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing hovers over the runway at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., on June 3.



ORLANYS DIAZ FIGUEROA/U.S. Marine Corps

Harriers fly over Cherry Point during the "Harrier Sundown Celebration."

Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning II, a fifth-generation stealth fighter and ground-attack aircraft. The B variant also has vertical takeoff and landing capability.



ORLANYS DIAZ FIGUEROA/U.S. Marine Corps

A Harrier passes under a water salute at Cherry Point on June 3.



BRYAN GIRALDO/U.S. Marine Corps

Harriers line the flightline at Cherry Point on June 3.

MILITARY

Guam-bound cutter named for 9/11 hero

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Coast Guard has commissioned its newest fast response cutter, one of two bound for Guam this year as the service expands its capabilities near the westernmost U.S. territory.

The USCGC Vincent Danz — the Coast Guard's 62nd Sentinel-class fast response cutter — officially entered service May 22 during a commissioning ceremony in New York City, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam announced in a news release.

The cutter is named for New York City police officer and Coast Guard reservist Vincent Danz, who died responding to the 9/11 attacks when the World Trade Center collapsed. His family, including his widow, Angela Donohue, attended the ceremony.

"Vincent Danz's legacy will live on not only through his family and his brothers and sisters in the NYPD, but through the Coast Guard crew who will breathe life into this cutter today," Vice Adm. Thomas Allan, vice commandant of the Coast Guard, said at the ceremony, according to the release.

Danz, a Marine Corps veteran, joined the New York Police Department in 1987 and simultaneously served as a port security specialist with the Coast Guard Reserve. He was working with the department's Emergency Service Unit when he died and was posthumously awarded the NYPD's Medal of Honor, according to the



SYDNEY PHOENIX/U.S. Coast Guard

The Coast Guard Cutter Vincent Danz, seen here in New York on May 20, is expected to arrive on Guam sometime this summer.

release.

"The Coast Guard Cutter Vincent Danz will perform the Coast Guard's vital work across Oceania — projecting U.S. presence, countering illicit maritime activity, and strengthening our international partnerships," Allan said.

The ship will be the fourth fast response cutter to be homeported

on Guam, joining the Myrtle Hazard, Oliver Henry and Frederick Hatch.

The Vincent Danz will arrive sometime this summer, although a more precise arrival date was not immediately available, Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam spokeswoman Lt. Sara Muir said.

"We're proud to welcome USCGC Vincent Danz to the fleet and to this region," she wrote. "Their team joins three cutter crews that have already distinguished themselves across Micronesia and the broader region — and the Vincent Danz crew is ready to continue that work and honor his legacy of public ser-

vice."

A fifth cutter, the Jeffrey Palazzo — named in honor of New York City firefighter and Coast Guard reservist Jeffrey Palazzo, who also died responding to the 9/11 attacks — is expected to arrive later this year.

It is slated for a September commissioning, Muir said.

Theodore Roosevelt to lead record-setting RIMPAC exercises

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt will lead America's participation in the biennial Rim of the Pacific maritime exercise that begins June 24 in Hawaii.

A record 31 nations are joining the five-week exercise, which will feature about 40 surface ships, five submarines, 140 aircraft and more than 25,000 personnel, according to the U.S. Navy.

The Nimitz-class carrier, commissioned in 1986, has been operating and training along the West Coast since early this year. It completed its last deployment in October 2024, returning to its homeport of San Diego after 278 days at sea.

The Theodore Roosevelt carries a crew of about 5,000 while deployed and is the flagship for Carrier Strike Group 9.

It will lead a small fleet of U.S. vessels during RIMPAC. Among them will be the guided-missile destroyers USS Paul Hamilton, USS Decatur, USS Wayne E. Meyer and USS Carl M. Levin and the cruiser USS Chosin.

Participating submarines are USS Charlotte and USS Columbia, both Los Angeles-class fast attack vessels. Several Navy oilers and a dry cargo ship will also join, along with the Honolulu-based Coast Guard cutter Kimball.

Ships from Pacific nations have slowly begun making their way to Hawaii for the exercise.

South Korea's Aegis-equipped



IKIA WALKER/U.S. Navy

The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt docks at Naval Magazine Indian Island, Wash., in February.

destroyer Jeongjo the Great departed Jeju Naval Base for the exercise, according to a June 2 report by the Asia First News Agency.

The ship will play a prominent role in the exercise, as South Korea will command the drill's maritime component, according to the U.S. Navy.

Canada will command the air

component.

South Korea is also sending the 3,000-ton submarine Dosan Ahn Changho, the frigate Daejeon, the landing ship Cheon Ja Bong and a P-8A maritime patrol aircraft.

Ships with the Philippine navy and coast guard departed for RIMPAC on June 4, according to a June 4 report by the online

news site Inquirer.

The Philippine coast guard sent BRP Gabriela Silang, marking the first time that service will participate in the exercise.

The Philippine navy, which has not dispatched a ship to RIMPAC since 2022, sent Naval Task Group 84 aboard guided-missile frigate BRP Miguel Malvar, according to the Inquirer.

MILITARY

Decoys may be key to shielding air defenses

Army report: Tactic could protect assets against Iran

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The key to protecting billion-dollar U.S. air defense systems from enemy attack could be one of the oldest tricks in warfare: decoys.

The time-tested tactic, most recently used by Ukrainian air defenders to deceive Russian forces, could be useful in protecting high-value U.S. targets in the Middle East, where expensive military radar systems have been destroyed in recent Iranian attacks, according to a new Army research report.

“These techniques have enabled Ukrainian Patriot units to survive for more than three years under constant threat of surveillance, targeting, and attack by a capable and motivated enemy,” the report published by the Modern War Institute at West Point said.

Those same methods could help protect U.S. air defenses in the Middle East, according to the report, which notes that Iran is receiving targeting support from Russian intelligence.

Decoys that have proved effective in Ukraine could therefore help thwart strikes in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, it said.

However, the report adds that U.S. air defense commanders currently lack the resources, authority and training needed to effectively employ decoys.

The report’s authors, Lt. Col. Trevor Alexander and Capt. Christopher Burlison, are currently attached to Security Assistance Group-Ukraine, a command based in Wiesbaden, Germany, focused on capturing and applying lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war.

Since receiving U.S.-made Patriot air defense systems from Western countries, Ukraine has used them to defend against missile and drone attacks, making them one of Moscow’s high-priority targets.

To protect the Patriot systems, the Ukrainians have built convincing replicas using wood, metal and salvaged equipment, the report said. That has yielded decoys that look real to reconnaissance drones flying overhead.

“Although decoys can sometimes be identified upon closer



U.S. Army

An Army air defense artilleryman works on a Patriot missile launcher in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility on Feb. 8, 2025. A report from the Modern War Institute at West Point says decoys similar to those used by Ukraine against Russia could help protect high-value air defense systems from Iranian attacks.



BRITTON SPENCER/U.S. Army

Army Reserve soldiers assigned to the 801st Engineer Company, the 157th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, and the 91st Training Division set up a decoy tactical operation center, using salvaged materials to disrupt opposition force intelligence collection during Combat Support Training Exercise 24-01 on June 9, 2024, at Fort Hunter Liggett, Calif.

inspection and review of attack footage, by the time one is identified as a decoy it has served its purpose,” the report said. “It delayed enemy targeting efforts and disrupted the targeting cycle, allowing the real unit to ei-

ther conduct engagements or move to a new location.”

To add realism, Ukrainian teams will remain near a struck decoy, repositioning other elements of the system such as fake radars, launchers or life support

equipment, which is intended to leave Russian forces with the impression their attack succeeded.

Russian forces have posted videos on Telegram celebrating the destruction of Patriot systems

only for closer inspection to reveal they had struck decoys, the report said.

While Alexander and Burlison focused on lessons from Ukraine, the use of decoys in warfare is hardly new.

Ahead of the D-Day invasion in 1944 during World War II, Allied forces used inflatable equipment, dummy landing craft and fake radio traffic to convince German commanders that the main assault would occur elsewhere.

The deception helped keep enemy forces away from the actual landing beaches in the Normandy region of France.

In the new Army report, the authors say military bureaucracy and regulations can slow innovation. The service needs to delegate authority to lower-level commanders when it comes to developing such equipment, the report said.

In addition, U.S. Army Materiel Command should provide resources to air defense battalion commanders to construct decoys, which also would be incorporated into training programs on passive defense tactics.

Preparing soldiers for future battlefields can be done only by addressing those issues, the report concluded.

MILITARY

'Joint warfighting ability' to be tracked

Pentagon seeks focus on merit, readiness in promotions

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon plans to begin assessing service members' ability to wage joint warfare as part of promotion and advancement considerations for officers and senior noncommissioned officers, according to a recent memorandum.

The memo issued by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on May 20 was confirmed as authentic by Task & Purpose after it circulated online among military communities.

It directs the military services to develop a new evaluation metric focused on identifying and measuring what Hegseth's memo calls "joint warfighting ability."

"The character and competence of our officers and non-commissioned officers will be the decisive factor in all future conflicts," Hegseth wrote in the memo.

"We therefore must ensure our system for identifying, developing, and promoting leaders is ruthlessly meritocratic and focused squarely on what matters most: joint warfighting ability," he added.

The release did not state when the implementation would take place, but directed Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Anthony Tata to lead the effort.



CHRISTOPHER SANCHEZ/U.S. Army

Soldiers participate in African Lion 26 at Cap Draa, Morocco, on May 8. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has mandated that "joint warfighting ability" be factored into promotion criteria for leaders.

The directive aligns with Hegseth's broader push to emphasize warfighting readiness — the ability to fight and meet mission demands — throughout the military.

Since taking office, he has repeatedly called for a focus on merit, physical fitness and combat effectiveness, arguing those traits should guide how the military develops and promotes leaders.

"Real toxic leadership is endangering subordinates with low standards. Real toxic leadership is promoting people based on immutable characteristics or quotas instead of based on merit," Hegseth said in a 2025 speech.

Hegseth has faced criticism from lawmakers and the media for what has been described as unusual involvement in the services' promotions of senior officers, including blocking some promotions and reportedly urging leaders to promote others who did not meet eligibility requirements.

The Pentagon did not respond to requests for comment about

what the new metric will entail. The memo does not specify how the Defense Department will define or measure "joint warfighting ability," including how the concept would apply to service members in career fields that rarely participate in joint operations.

"As a maintainer on jet engines, I don't understand how this is supposed to work," one user wrote in a popular Air Force Reddit discussion about the memo.

"My (job) has nothing to do with joint operations, and the engine I maintain is only used by

the USAF, not any of the other branches. Does that make me less lethal?" the user added.

Joint military experience is not a new concept for advancement evaluation. The Defense Department already maintains a Joint Qualification System that recognizes officers for joint assignments, education and training completed throughout their careers.

While joint billets are distributed somewhat equally across military departments, "a good number of joint positions are competitively sourced," a 2019 RAND Corp. study found.

The study also noted that the Army and Marine Corps have increased their number of joint-qualified officers over time, while the Air Force maintains the largest overall number.

It remains unclear whether the new "data-driven" metric outlined in Hegseth's memo would build on that existing framework or create a separate standard focused on warfighting ability among both officers and senior enlisted leaders.

The challenge may be further complicated by the fact that each military branch maintains its own promotion and evaluation system.

Although officers and senior enlisted leaders across the services are generally promoted through selection boards, the criteria used to evaluate candidates can vary by branch.

Factors often include performance evaluations, assignments, professional military education, awards and leadership experience.

Company tests rocket launchers on logistics drones

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A company that builds logistics drones for the Army and Marine Corps successfully fired a three-shot rocket launcher from its autonomous quadcopter last month at Fort Rucker, Ala., Army officials said.

Survice Engineering Co. officials outfitted their Tactical Resupply Drone 150 — or TRV-150 — with a three-pack Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System, a 70 mm rocket launcher known as APKWS, and engaged targets, according to a Fort Rucker news release. The May 20 test came amid ever-increasing efforts across the U.S. military to test new ways to use drones and to add more lethal capabilities to the unmanned systems.

Army officials said they did not request the new capability

for the heavily used TRV-150 system, which the service and the Marine Corps have employed for more than three years, mostly for resupply and other logistics operations. Survice officials believed they could outfit their drone with the BAE Systems-made rocket launcher and decided to pitch it to the Army.

"In this case, we saw that there was something that we could prove out, a new capability, and we didn't want to wait for a requirement" from the Army, said Clark Dutterer, Survice Engineering's vice president of business development. "We self-funded this to go ahead and do that."

But the Army was involved in the testing. Soldiers from several organizations, including the Army Aviation Center of Excellence, Army Combat Capabilities Development Command, and the



LESLIE HERLICK/Aviation Center of Excellence

A TRV-150 resupply drone undergoes flight testing while carrying a 70 mm rocket launcher at Fort Rucker, Ala.

Aviation Future Concepts Design Directorate participated in the efforts, according to the service.

Army officials said the effort was a step toward the military's eventual aim to be able to arm all of its drones with some kind of lethal capability.

The TRV-150 is an electric,

vertical takeoff and landing drone with a wingspan of just more than 6.5 feet that can carry payloads up to 150 pounds. Soldiers and Marines have been experimenting with the drones for various logistics purposes and using it for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

missions. At Fort Stewart, Ga., soldiers recently used TRV-150s outfitted with smoke machines to try to provide cover while moving large vehicles, including tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles across training grounds.

The drone is designed to be easy to use and provides power, data and expansion ports to carry many different payloads, said Rob Baltrusch, Survice's chief engineer.

"It calculates all of the range estimation and takes a lot of the pilot duties away from the soldier, to where they can literally give it a grid coordinate, wait, and it tells you if it can make it there, delivers the payload and calculates the route," he said.

The APKWS has been used in the military since the late 2000s, and it has been mounted on dozens of platforms, including on the Army's AH-64 Apache gunships.

MILITARY

'It's the veteran's drive' Military experience can help entrepreneurs build businesses

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

Nick Grillo's 12-year career in the Air Force involved repairing unmanned aircraft in Afghanistan and providing support stateside during natural disasters and for anti-terrorism initiatives.

Post-military, Grillo launched Elevate Vending in 2023 with the lofty aim of modernizing vending machines with consumer touch screens, AI-equipped cameras and open shelves filled with healthy snacks and freshly made meals.

"We offer smart-driven coolers as an alternative to old-fashioned vending machines. Tap any digital payment. Take what you want and close the door," Grillo said.

Since 2025, the company has landed contracts with the Washington Capitals and Wizards, University of Maryland Athletics and 365 Retail Markets, an equipment manufacturer.

There are 1.6 million veteran-owned businesses in the U.S., generating \$1 trillion in revenue annually, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Grillo, 34, who lives in Virginia, attributes much of the early success of Elevate Vending to the technical and operational skills he learned in the military, as well as the mentoring and assistance he received from a nonprofit foundation.

"It's the veteran's drive — the determination not to stop but to figure the problem out. It's tied back to service," he said.

But the rapid growth, while promising, yielded a set of new challenges, from hiring staff to securing financing, to keep pace with the costs and demands of servicing more clients.

"You don't have a perfect battlefield picture. But you are making the best decisions with the information you have on hand," said Grillo, who launched Elevate Vending about a year after leaving the military.

Veteran business owners are more likely to be turned down for loans or to be given smaller loan amounts than non-veterans with comparable credit scores, according to the Small Business Administration.

Research indicates that veterans are somewhat more likely to lack the established credit histories or sufficient assets required by traditional lenders, the Small Business Administration said.

For example, some lenders may be unfamiliar with the kinds of skills and experience veterans gained from military service or even the specific business for which a veteran seeks financing, according to a 2025 blog post by the Government Accountability



NICK GRILLO/Elevate Vending

Nick Grillo, right, and Chris Schaefer are partners at Elevate Vending, a 3-year-old company that services the Washington Capitals and Wizards, among other clients. Elevate Vending received technical support in 2025 from a foundation that guides veteran-owned companies just starting out or expanding.

"Running a small business is a moving target. It's never linear. There is no straight pathway to success."

Nick Grillo
Air Force veteran

Office.

Critical to Elevate Vending's expansion was assistance from The PenFed Foundation for Military Heroes, Grillo said.

PenFed provided mentorship and a six-week boot camp that Grillo described as an "eye-opener."

"Just being small and not having experience in the business and financial worlds posed challenges," Grillo said. "PenFed helped to fill in those gaps."

Since 2018, PenFed's Veteran Entrepreneur Program has supported more than 120 veterans and military spouses who were starting or expanding their businesses, according to the organization.

"By focusing on business fundamentals and practical guidance, we help veterans and military spouses gain the confidence



Grillo, who served in the military from July 2010 to June 2022, was deployed during Operation Enduring Freedom, including to Afghanistan.

and skills they need to develop, improve and launch their ideas," said Terry Williams, director of PenFed's Veteran Entrepreneur Program.

Grillo, who participated in 2025, said the program underscored a critical lesson, which is "not to go it alone" as a new business owner.

Grillo runs his business with partners Joe Allnut, a 16-year Air Force veteran who handles government contracting; Sebastian Rivera, chief financial officer; and Chris Schaefer, chief operations officer. Rivera and Schaefer are non-veterans.

Allnut and Rivera were co-founders but initially acted in an advisory role, Grillo said.

Grillo launched Elevate Vending after he and his wife, a master sergeant in the Air Force, left New York for her new post at the Pentagon in the Washington, D.C., area.

Grillo said he believes that Elevate Vending fills a niche that others overlooked — providing freshly prepared and local foods with the convenience of a vending machine.

The fresh fast foods and meals are sourced from other independent small businesses.

They include My Dad's Chips, Zenjoy herbal teas and Mighty Meals, which offers mac-and-cheese, Louisiana shrimp pasta and other hand-prepared meals.

Elevate Vending's "smart coolers" have a continuous internet connection to process transactions, track payments and give customers greater access to browse and choose products.

Just as drones have become an efficient alternative to traditional manned surveillance and airstrikes, the computerized vending machines are transforming an old business model, Grillo said.

But for all the high-tech wizardry, Elevate Vending relied on PenFed's help to expand successfully, Grillo said.

"It's not an accident that we got here. There is a team of people behind us who've helped along the way," Grillo said.

Veteran-focused programs — at federal agencies, peer-to-peer

lending platforms and private nonprofits — offer a range of assistance, from direct loans to technical support, according to Victory Capital.

The Small Business Administration's Office of Veterans Business Development, for example, provides training, counseling, mentoring and financial help.

The Agriculture Department also has loans for veteran-owned small businesses engaged in farming, ranching and other agricultural activities in rural communities.

PenFed offers both an incubator for startups and an accelerator program for businesses seeking to expand.

The nonprofit does not provide direct loans or grants to businesses, or take a financial stake in a company, the organization said.

"Programs like PenFed help create the business relationships, recognition and trust that can carry a small business through challenging environments," Grillo said.

Elevate Vending, for example, received help from PenFed in renegotiating a contract with a primary lender, Grillo said.

In May, PenFed announced a new class of veterans and military spouses who will receive intensive education through its accelerator program.

The lineup includes Ascend HealthTech Systems, founded by Army veteran John Meseroll.

Ascend runs an online clearinghouse that helps hospitals track and redistribute unused medical supplies before they expire.

"By improving visibility across departments, the platform prevents unnecessary purchases, reduces supply shortages and lowers operational costs," the company said.

PenFed has a competitive application process for accepting candidates to its programs.

Veteran or military spouse entrepreneurs with an idea-stage business concept may apply at <https://penfedfoundation.org/our-programs/incubator/>.

PenFed plans three more accelerator programs in 2026. For details, including the schedule and locations, go to: <https://penfedfoundation.org/our-programs/accelerator/>.

"PenFed has been there for us — to celebrate the big wins but also to provide help through the growing pains, as we secure financing, hire additional staff and negotiate contracts," Grillo said.

"Running a small business is a moving target. It's never linear. There is no straight pathway to success."

MILITARY

Better tracking of suicide program urged

GAO: Pentagon's prevention office lacks information to monitor departmentwide completion

By **MATTHEW ADAMS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's Defense Suicide Prevention Office lacks the information to monitor department-wide completion of suicide prevention training, a government watchdog said.

A defense official told the Government Accountability Office that the DSPO does not receive data from the military services on whether they are completing the training, the report said.

The GAO also said the military services' headquarters suicide prevention offices generally do

not effectively monitor whether training is completed. The Army, Navy and Marine Corps offices do not regularly track required annual training completion and only the National Guard Bureau takes action to help ensure training completion.

"Developing and implementing evaluation plans would help the services ensure a systematic approach to assessment and determine if trainings are achieving intended outcomes, such as recognizing risk factors for suicide," the 54-page report says.

The GAO made 17 recommendations, including:

- Requiring Pentagon guidance for the services to report suicide prevention training completion data to DSPO.

- Developing training evaluation plans.

- Regularly monitoring training completion by the Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

The Defense Department agreed with nine recommendations, partially agreed with six and did not agree with two.

"(The) GAO clarified two recommendations and maintains all recommendations remain valid," the report states.

The suicide rate among active-

duty troops decreased in 2024 from the previous year, according to an annual report released by the Pentagon in March.

Overall, there were 471 reported suicides across the total force in 2024, the most recent year for which statistics are available, compared with 531 in 2023.

However, the suicide rate for the active component has increased since 2011.

"It remains to be seen whether the short-term decreases observed in 2024 in the active component will signal a change in long-term trends," the report says.

For years, the Pentagon has

struggled to bring down the number of suicides in the ranks. The Defense Department began collecting and reporting quarterly surveillance data on service member suicides in 2018 to help guide prevention efforts.

The rate is calculated based on an active-duty force of about 1.33 million troops and about 770,000 reserve and National Guard personnel combined.

The Defense Department in recent years has aimed to improve mental health care access for troops, amid increases in suicide rates and an outcry from Congress and others.

Coast Guard museum to open in spring 2027

By **EMELY MIRANDA-AGUILAR**
Stars and Stripes

Visitors to the future National Coast Guard Museum in New London, Conn., will find themselves standing beneath a suspended HH-60J Jayhawk helicopter, offering a glimpse into the work that has defined the Coast Guard for decades.

Dedicated to sharing the branch's 235 years of maritime service, the National Coast Guard Museum Association plans to open the museum to the public in spring 2027.

"We really felt the Coast Guard has never received the attention and regard that it deserves," said Sue Curtin, current chair of the association's board and former Coast Guard reservist. "Helping build this national museum would really elevate the Coast Guard, and give back to the country, and really honor men and women who have served in the Coast Guard."

The 83,000-square-foot museum, currently under construction, will feature more than 5,000 images and 600 artifacts in exhibits highlighting the Coast Guard's history and missions, according to the museum's website.



An artist rendering of the National Coast Guard Museum.

The building is slated for completion by the end of 2026 before being turned over to the Coast Guard for exhibit installation. The museum association has planned a series of events leading up to the opening to draw extra attention.

The museum is designed around five major themes that reflect the Coast Guard's missions: Defenders of the Nation, Enforcers on the Seas, Lifesavers Around the Globe, Champions of Commerce and Protectors of the Environment.

"It's a stunning, iconic, waterfront museum that really gives the nod to the service," Curtin said.

The museum has been careful-

ly curated to provide an immersive and educational experience. In addition to the helicopter — an aircraft that has played a symbolic role since it entered service in the 1990s — the museum will include a movie theater, learning centers and simulated Coast Guard missions expected to engage an estimated 300,000 visitors annually.

"Our goal is, it's not just a museum for us, it's a platform for the service to really get in front of the American public, in front of the Congress, in front of an international venue to really give it a place to tell its whole story," said Wes Pulver, president of the National Coast Guard Museum Association and a re-



National Coast Guard Museum Association

The new National Coast Guard Museum in New London, Conn., under construction. The museum is expected to open in the spring of 2027.

tired Coast Guard captain.

Once construction is complete, it will be the only national military museum dedicated to one of the service branches located in the Northeast. The Army and Marine Corps museums are in Virginia; the Navy museum is in Washington, D.C.; and the Air Force museum is in Ohio.

New London was selected as the museum's home since it is one of the original Coast Guard cities and home to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

The project officially moved forward in 2014 when the National Coast Guard Museum Association, the city of New London, the Coast Guard and the state of Connecticut entered a Memorandum of Agreement to develop a "world class National Coast Guard Museum" and bring the long-discussed project closer

to reality.

The following year, the association began hiring staff, including Pulver as executive director following his retirement, and launched fundraising efforts, marking the start of the museum.

Construction for the museum began on Aug. 4, 2025 — Coast Guard Day.

The project is funded through a combination of federal appropriations and about \$57 million raised privately, Pulver said. The federal appropriation was about \$100 million.

"Let's get the building done, let's get it open, and let's bring in our 300,000-plus visitors a year to the region, and experience — what Sue and I got to experience in the Coast Guard — a wonderful service that serves our nation in so many ways," Pulver said.

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