From the time I toddled around in droopy diapers, to the day I drove off to college in my VW Bug, I lived in one small Pennsylvania town. The kids who picked their noses next to me in Mrs. Rowley's kindergarten class were the same kids who walked across the stage with me at our high school graduation. I had one hometown, one high school, one brick house, one yellow bedroom, and one best friend whom I gabbed with nightly on one rotary telephone while draped across one mock-brass twin bed.

By contrast, as a military child, our oldest went to three high schools. He grew up in eight homes, in three states and two foreign countries. He has said goodbye to six best friends, six piano teachers and four Boy Scout troops. He played on three varsity football teams, and his academic transcripts are almost as complicated as the U.S. Tax Code.

I have often looked at my own children with worry and curious wonder. How do military kids cope with so many military moves? What effect do frequent school changes have on them? Does this instability leave them less prepared for life after high school?

Military kids seek understanding, a level playing field

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This year’s Halloween photos submitted by Stripes’ readers were amazing! We had many submissions and many votes. This year, Austin Siegel from Korea won the $50 prize; Rose Betts and her family from Japan won the $30 prize in the group costume category; and, Sarah Arellano Santos from Yokota Air Base won the $20 prize in the individual category. Check out their submissions as well as some other honorable mentions below. And, don’t forget to follow us at Facebook.com/StripesPacific for more great contests like this!
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Andersen airmen fix Guam weather radar system

**BY STAFF SGT. NICHOLAS CRISP, 36TH WING**

The 36th Operation Support Squadron’s Radar, Airfield & Weather System technicians recently repaired the klystron, a power source for the antenna amplifier, on the Next-Generation Radar system on Guam Oct. 27.

The NEXRAD, used by the U.S. National Weather Service, is the sole weather radar for Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, making it vital to the safety and well-being of the island’s people.

“We normally make small repairs like this,” said Staff Sgt. Matthew Hawkins, NCO in charge of 36th OSS RAWS. “We’ve replaced transmitters, fixed motors that rotate the radar, and amplifiers over the last couple of months. It’s the bigger jobs we aren’t normally asked to cover.”

One of these bigger jobs was the repair and maintenance of the NEXRAD waveguide, a 100-foot tube, which holds pressurized air to enable the electrical signal to transfer from the station below to the radar above.

The tube is delicate and normally requires climbing gear to work on. Technicians from the NWS Radar Operations Center, based in the United States, would normally travel to Guam to make such repairs.

“The waveguide had been having trouble for nearly two years,” said James Colson, air-space manager assigned to the 36th Operations Group. “Our guys would do patch jobs while we tried to get ROC out here, but between exercises, and then COVID, they just couldn’t make it out.”

On March 25, the waveguide was leaking pressure to a degree where it needed to be replaced. Without a working waveguide, the radar was non-functioning. It was then that Lt. Col. Brian Neal, 36th OSS commander, decided his team would tackle the challenge.

This job was outside of the normal knowledge base for RAWS, and they worked remotely with the ROC to troubleshoot the issue. Eight Airmen worked in two-man teams, night and day, to get the critical weather system operational, which brought about unforeseen issues for the teams to overcome.

“One setback we ran into was the climbing gear,” said Hawkins. “The climbing mounts don’t all adhere to Air Force safety guidance. That’s why we contacted CE [civil engineering] to use one of their cranes.”

With the assistance of the crane, the RAWS technicians were able to repair the waveguide in less than 72 hours and were awarded decorations for their effort.

“Having a working radar is a big deal,” said Capt. Matthew Wetmore, 36th OSS weather flight commander. “Without it, we rely on satellites, but satellites don’t give us three important data points: precipitation, lightning, and wind speed.”

All three factors are critical to how the Air Force operates on the flightline. Heavy rain lowers visibility, wind speeds affect take-offs and landings, and lightning puts aircraft and personnel in danger. Satellite imagery can help forecast these conditions, but, with the radar, those predictions become more accurate.

“It’s the difference between saying it might rain within the hour or 30 minutes, or it’ll rain in this five-minute window,” said Wetmore.

For eight months, the 36th OSS RAWS maintained the radar system much to the appreciation of the local community, military missions, and the island chain.

This radar is even more important to an island with no surface stations to relay what the weather is like over the Pacific Ocean. Without the NEXRAD, the island people wouldn’t know what the weather was until it was happening.
Sequoia returns from successful deployment

SANTA RITA — The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia (WLB 215) returned Sunday from a deployment that furthered maritime safety and security improvements with the Republic of Palau in late September and October.

The mission was an ongoing effort between the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Embassy Koror, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Palau to improve the aids to navigation infrastructure and further Palau’s maritime transportation system.

“Palau and the Coast Guard have a long, sustained partnership and the Sequoia’s deployment furthered this relationship,” said Capt. Christopher Chase, commander, U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam. “Through teamwork between ourselves and Palau we overcame COVID-19 limitations allowing Palau to become the first country to welcome U.S. military deployments to conduct critical aids to navigation, maritime law enforcement, and humanitarian assistance missions.”

During the 21 day patrol the crew of the Sequoia established or serviced 12 aids to navigation in Palau while also working closely with the Palau Ministry of Justice’s Department of Maritime Law Enforcement during the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Operation Kurukuru to protect Palau’s National Marine Sanctuary and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU).

Aids to navigation perform a vital function by providing navigational markers facilitating safe movement of private, commercial, and government vessels through Palau’s waters while contributing to the overall safety of the global marine transportation system.

Prior to the mission, the crew of the Sequoia, U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Army dive teams undertook extensive COVID-19 precautions including testing and quarantine to ensure the safety of both the crews and the people of Palau.

An important goal of the mission was to establish aids to navigation with the support of Coast Guard and Army divers and enhance Palau’s maritime domain awareness capabilities. I am proud of the skill, resilience, and determination demonstrated by the crew of Sequoia throughout this patrol.”

Crew members from the Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia visit Sonsorol, Palau, to deliver food, fuel, and medicine from the Palau Ministry of Health on Oct. 22. Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia, U.S. Coast Guard
Team Andersen conducted an antiterrorism/force protection exercise dubbed Sling Stone 21-1 on November 5, 2020, on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, with its Joint Region Marianas partners to strengthen the base’s ability to respond to security threats.

The purpose of the exercise is to ensure members of the 36th Wing are prepared to respond to real-world disturbances and actively use preventative measures to deter any potential security threats.

“Sling Stone gives Team Andersen, Naval Base Guam, and other JRM installations a valuable opportunity to all work together when faced with a common threat scenario,” said Lt. Col. Richard Marby, Inspector General, 36th Wing. “In order to be successful, the various JRM installations must communicate to share intelligence and threat assessments, and must coordinate a unified response.”

Members of the installation’s Wing Inspection Team held a series of simulated events throughout the day with the objective of seeing how first responders and individual units identify and respond to spontaneous high-risk scenarios.

Among the simulated events are scenarios testing the base’s response times to security breaches, internal and external attacks, and managing high-traffic areas in times of emergency. During the event, Airmen of 36th Security Forces Squadron played integral roles testing their ability to properly prevent hostile individuals from breaching security.

“Training and evaluating these skills are extremely valuable to make sure we are ready for anything, anytime, anywhere,” said Maj Thomas Kel- lams, commander of the 36th SFS. “Security Forces train year round and we validate that training by conducting exercises at the squadron through wing-level exercises.”

Simulated events like these are not only intended to evaluate our capabilities, but to also identify effective practices which extend beyond written instructions and could be shared and implemented across the installation.

In addition to testing first responders, WIT members test Team Andersen’s responses to security threats in their workplaces.

“Units constantly train on their particular niche, but large exercises like Sling Stone are great opportunities to practice and evaluate teamwork between units,” said Marby. “Security forces, civil engineering fire department, emergency management, and medical group personnel all work together to protect the base, while the crisis action team, emergency operations center, and command post serve vital command and control functions that ensure a swift, coordinated, and effective response.”

Installation health protection conditions are enforced during the exercise, ensuring scenarios and responses are developed around condition guidance.

“As changes occur,” said Kellams, “we incorporate different procedures to overcome those changes and conduct exercises as a way to validate and assess our capabilities.”

“The American people rely on us to perform our mission,” said Marby. “This exercise proves to our allies and adversaries that Team Andersen remains ready to defend the base and perform our mission, even in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

At the conclusion of the exercise, members of the WIT team and inspector general office gathered together as part of the threat working group to make recommendations to the 36th Wing commander on actions to take in order to improve the base’s response processes in the future.

**BY STAFF SGT. NICHOLAS CRISP, 36TH WING**

**EXERCISE SLING STONE**

Responding to a threat

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This is a brief description of the features of Calvo’s SelectCare. Before making a final decision, please read the Plan’s Federal brochure RI 75-474. All benefits are subject to the definitions, limitations, and exclusions set forth in the Federal brochure, Airfare benefit, Dental Plan and Free Gym Membership are non-FEHB benefits.
Earlier this year U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command kicked off the new Bomber Task Force deployment structure.

Recently, the U.S. Air Force has shifted the primary defense focus to preparing for future potential conflict against peer threats in alignment with the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS).

In response, AFGSC has prioritized adjusting the locations and the way that bombers deploy to better train and prepare for the future landscape of warfare.

The BTF missions provide Airmen the opportunity to conduct joint-training with U.S. allies and partners.

“U.S. Strategic Command units regularly conduct training with, and in, support of all Geographic Combatant Commands. In our case, this takes the form of Bomber Task Force missions which provide our Strikers opportunities to integrate with allies and partners and to become familiar with multiple forward areas of operation,” said Gen. Tim Ray, AFGSC and Air Forces Strategic-Air commander. “All of this feeds into a larger effort to assure allies and partners, and to help maintain global stability and security.”

“BTF missions are routine demonstrations of the credibility of our forces to address a diverse and uncertain security environment, and particularly AFGSC’s ability to deliver lethal, long-range strike options across the globe anytime, anywhere,” Ray said.

In May this year, approximately 200 Airmen assigned to the 7th Bomb Wing deployed to Andersen AFB, Guam, for the first BTF in the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility. While there, they conducted approximately 385 flight hours and executed over 30 training missions; 12 of which were higher-headquarters directed, historically completing 100% of the assigned missions.

Now, the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron and 7th BW Airmen have returned to Andersen AFB to participate in another BTF to help support a free and open Indo-Pacific region while also testing and redefining B-1B Lancer capabilities.

“Our first BTF in May proved the concept that B-1s could quickly deploy and operate halfway across the globe,” said Lt. Col. Ryan Stallsworth, 9th EBS commander. “Now, reflecting on Dyess and Ellsworth’s last three successful B-1 BTF’s to the Indo-Pacific region, we have shown that the B-1B is back in business; providing combatant commanders with consistent airpower, desired effects and, ultimately, options.”

Stallsworth continued, “This is a clear and strong deterrent message to our adversaries and a reassuring message to our steadfast allies and partners.”

With the landscape of war constantly changing, it is crucial to frequently and consistently adapt to the shifting of potential climates of conflict, which is why it is important to continuously train to support any mission, regardless of the time or location.

“The B-1B community has a proven history of lethality from the Cold War to the war on terrorism, and now we are proving ourselves once again at the tactical and strategic levels with the next phase of global operations – Bomber Task Force,” said Stallsworth. “While the last year has been dynamic and turbulent, the entire B-1B crew force and supporting agencies are excited about conducting BTF’s around the world.”
Safety

Know the risks that lurk off Guam’s shores. The sun on the beach has many meanings. It can quickly lead to a large search covering hundreds of square miles of ocean. This ridge may be above or slightly below water level, depending on the tide. Keep well clear of the outer portion of the reef when the tide is going out. Rip tides are common on Guam and extremely dangerous.

**Dangers of reef, current**

The first danger to swimming near a reef is caused by the waves breaking on the reef. Even in the calmest conditions, it is difficult and dangerous to cross the reef in surf. The coral itself is extremely sharp and can cause deep and painful cuts. Gloves and foot protection are essential. The second danger is the current caused by the waves. In almost all cases where the waves are consistently larger than one foot, a strong current runs along the reef. This current, known as a “long shore” current, is created when the water forced inside the reef by the waves is higher than the sea level outside the reef. When this happens, the water tries to flow back out to sea but the waves bringing more water into the reef prevent it. The water will flow along the reef or shoreline until it finds a place to flow back into the sea. This current can be very strong.

A person swimming too close to the reef’s edge can become caught in the current and be swept onto or over the reef. When they attempt to swim counter to the current, they must also fight the waves smashing against the reef. After struggling to cross the reef, many people become exhausted and are washed out to sea or bagned along the reef until they die.

**Wrestling a rip current**

Tips on what people should do when they are caught in a rip current. Stay calm. Don’t fight the current; you will lose all your strength.

- Keep calm. Don’t panic. Panicking can cause you to sink faster.
- Escape the current by swimming in a direction parallel to the coastline. When you have reached the low reef flat, walk or swim to shore and avoid the waves.
- If unable to escape by swimming, float on your back. When the current weakens, swim toward the reef where the water is calmer. If at any time you feel you will be unable to reach shore, call for help. Treat all seashells as poisonous.

**Boating**

Even fishing boats in the presumed safety of Apra Harbor are routinely carried out of the harbor by the outgoing tide. Experience has shown that boats drifting in this area travel in a generally westerly direction at a minimum of one nautical mile per hour. Few people can paddle against a one-knot current for any length of time. Winds in the area of 15 to 20 knots can increase the drift to two knots. That means a rate of drift anywhere from 24 to 48 miles per day. What starts out as a simple frustration (i.e. dead battery within sight of land), can quickly lead to a large search covering hundreds of square miles of ocean.

Always observe a measure of caution and good judgment when boating around Guam. One of the most important measures to stop and take a good look at the situation. Ask yourself all the “what if” questions you can think of and make sure you have planned for the unexpected. Take plenty of extra water and food. Take as much fuel as possible. Make sure that the proper safety equipment is onboard. Have extra flares, a mirror, flashlight, and extra flashlight batteries. Let someone know where you’re going, when you’ll return, and what equipment you have onboard.

**Surfing**

Guam’s location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean subjects it to many different ocean swells. Unfortunately, these swells hit on dangerously shallow and sharp reefs. Currents in these areas range from friendly to deadly causing surfing to be very deceptive and dangerous.

The best place to learn to surf or boogie board is Talofofo Bay. In addition, pay attention to surfing etiquette and perhaps talk to experienced local surfers before attempting to surf on Guam. There have been numerous incidents where non-locals were harassed or even threatened by the “regulars” at the limited number of surfing sites.

**Scuba diving**

Guam features many excellent dive sites and a robust scuba-training infrastructure with several large dive centers, boat operators, and guides. Do not scuba dive deeper than your certification level. Always use the buddy system and a dive flag at the surface. Newly assigned military personnel (PCS and TDY) should plan their first few dives through Outdoor Recreation or at one of the local dive shops until you are familiar with the area. Many local dive shops offer free shore dives led by a dive master on weekends. This is a great opportunity to learn the local area and meet new dive buddies.

**Hazardous marine life**

Treat all seashells as poisonous. Do not handle live coral. Active duty military personnel are prohibited from reef walking anywhere on Guam. For these purposes, the reef is defined as the elevated ridge of coral or rock between the shore and the open sea. This ridge may be above or slightly below water level, depending on the tide. Keep well clear of the outer portion of the reef when the tide is going out. Rip tides are common on Guam and extremely dangerous.

**Man-o-wars**

Photo by Wikipedia Commons
OFF GUAM’S SHORES

SAFETY FIRST
Know the risks that lurk off Guam’s shores

- If unable to escape by swimming, float or tread crown of thorns starfish, moray eels, cone snails, marine life such as scorpion fish, sea urchins, etc. is prohibited.
- Reach shore, call or wave for help.
- When the current weakens, swim to low reef flat, walk or swim to shore.
- Another danger to keep in mind is hazardous conditions caused by the sting. If conditions appear severe, vinegar may help ease the pain and markings should be flushed with large amounts of salt water. Medical care may be recommended.

Another sea creature to steer clear of is the man-o-war. “Indo-Pacific man-o-war are jellyfish-like creatures,” he explains. “These are most abundant during times of strong offshore winds from the north and east, therefore are most often seen on north and east facing beaches. Man-o-wars are most commonly seen during the months of December through February. They look like little blue bubbles, usually about 1-2 inches across, with dark blue tentacles underneath.

- Man-o-wars should not be touched, even if on the beach,” Tibbatts says. “They can sting even after they are dead. If stung, remove any clinging tentacles with a branch or other solid object, then flush the affected area with large amounts of salt water. Medical care may be recommended.”

- Always snorkel with another person and use proper equipment: a snorkel, mask, and brightly colored fins.
- Treat all seashells as poisonous. Do not handle.
- Do not handle some contain live Haputo Beach

Hazardous snorkeling areas:
- Ritidian Beach
- Tanguisson Beach
- Asan Cut
- Gun Beach
- Hagatna Beach

- Dog Leg Reef (Family Beach)
- Outhouse Beach (No lifeguard)
- San Luis Beach (Big Navy, no lifeguard)
- (Hilton to the Guam Reef Hotel)
- Any beach in the Tumon Bay hotel row area
- Tarague Beach (swim within buoyed area)

Snorkeling
Guam offers some of the best snorkeling in the world. However, people venture out into unfamiliar waters and find themselves in serious trouble. The waters around Guam need to be respected. Always snorkel with another person and use proper equipment: a snorkel, mask, and brightly colored fins. If you are not an experienced Guam swimmer, wear a snorkel vest (this will enable you to stay afloat if you become tired or carried out to sea). If a current carries you away from shore, wave your brightly colored fins in the air to signal someone on the shore to seek help.

Before you venture out, contact a local dive shop for information on areas to snorkel. The National Weather Service (dial 211 off base and 99-564-1826) has a recorded message on surf, winds, and tide conditions.

Safely on base
Naval Base Guam’s Gab Gab Beach

Gab Gab Beach, or Fab Gab as we like to call it, is truly a hidden gem and easily our family’s regular go-to place for no-frills low-cost weekend fun.

- Great for picnics, birthday parties, unit gatherings, hail & farewells, snorkeling, swimming, diving, sand volleyball, SUP’ing and all sorts of water play.
- The beach umbrellas and grill grates can be rented for a small amount, and campfire long-burning is allowed by reservation with the Outdoor Recreation Center. There is something for everyone.

- Gab Gab is located on Naval Base Guam, so you’ll need base access to get to it, also one of the most popular shore dives on Guam, and any given day of the week you’re likely to find divers exiting or repositioning to enter the water via the easy stairs next to the “5-sided pool.”

- If you get there early enough, make a leisure surf, winds, and tide conditions. This makes for perfect conditions.

As the evening approaches, catch a breathtaking sunset, roast marshmallows or make s’mores.

Camping at Tarague is open all year round. However, December through February usually offers the best weather conditions: slightly cooler with a little less rain and humidity. This makes for perfect camping.
The Navy operates three swimming pools on the island. At Naval Base Guam, the swimming pool is located near South Tipalao Housing and the barracks area. Call the pool at (671) 564-1822.

At the Naval Communications Station, the pool is located on the main drive of the base, next to the laundromat. For more information, call (671) 355-5091/564-1822.

At the Naval Hospital, the pool is located near the housing area. To reach the Naval Hospital pool please call (671) 564-1822/344-9009.

The Andersen pool is located near housing, directly next to the Youth Center and Skate Park. They have an aquatics program for all ages and interests. Red Cross certified instructors teach swim lessons to all ages and all ability levels. They also have lap swim, open recreation swim, a wading pool for your little ones and a picnic area that is available on a first come, first serve basis. For inquiries, email andersenaquatics@gmail.com, or call 366-3202.

Situated on scenic Apra Harbor, Sumay Marina Adventure center offers a variety of activities for water sports enthusiasts. Enjoy a day of sightseeing, fishing or diving on one of our 19’ Edgewater rental boats. The Marina also offers fishing and dolphin-watching trips on its 23-foot Pro-Line charter boat.

To rent boats, you must have a National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) endorsed certificate. If you need a certificate, go to BOATUS.ORG, click the link for Online Courses, then on to the Free Boating Safety Course. Choose any state that is endorsed by NASBLA. Print a certificate and present it to the marina staff and they will assist you with scheduling a check ride on our boats. Reservations start at $100 plus the cost of fuel for four hours of boating.

For boat owners, two boat-launch ramps are provided as well as outdoor dry storage pads and wet slips at the marina docks. For more information, call (671) 564-1826.

Enjoy beautiful sunsets and fun at Tarague Beach. Photo courtesy of Marc Gonzales CJRM Marketing
Given the extraordinary challenges presented this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s open season will be like no other in the way you’ll access information and choose a plan. Get Ready!!!

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For those of you not currently enrolled, Open Season is your opportunity to join the FEHB program for 2021. If you are currently enrolled and want to make a switch from your current carrier to TakeCare, or change your current TakeCare enrollment option, you will need to take action through your agency’s benefit enrollment system or complete an enrollment form (SF2809).

Learn more. Scan QR Code or Visit: https://takecareasia.com/openseason20 or Call: 647-3526

Our Island, Your Health Plan®
Editor’s Note: Every year on Dec. 8 – an island-wide holiday – Catholics flock to the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica to honor Guam’s patron saint. No source better chronicles the history and mystery behind this cultural phenomenon than Guampedia.com.

A STARS AND STRIPES COMMUNITY PUBLICATION 75 YEARS IN THE PACIFIC

NOVEMBER 27 – DECEMBER 10, 2020

Santa Marian Kamalen, also known as Our Lady of Camarin, is the patron saint of Guam. The 300-year-old Santa Marian Kamalen statue is a revered icon, and although its origins are unknown, they are explained through oral tradition. Every year on Dec. 8, a procession around the island’s capital celebrates the Immaculate Conception.

The statue of Santa Marian Kamalen is 28 3/4 inches tall and weighs 48 1/2 pounds. It is made of wood, except for the ivory face and folded hands. It is painted with a regal blue and green gown and sits high in the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica in Hagåtña, behind the altar.

Santa Marian Kamalen’s origins are shrouded in legend and she was the subject of front-page headlines when she was stolen from her home in the cathedral on three separate occasions in the last few decades. She is one of the most important icons in Guam’s history, religious or otherwise. A longtime effort to place a replica of the statue in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. was realized in 2006.

The statue was brought to Guam in 1698 by Catholic priests. It is also known as Our Lady of Camarin. The statue’s wood is from a Spanish ship. The statue has been stolen from its home 16 times, and there is no way to track the statue’s movements.

According to one version of the legend, a fisherman from Canarao jumped from a galleon into the sea. At the galleon’s stern was a statue of a lady with flowing hair. The galleon Nuestra Senora del Pilar sank off the coast of Cocos Island in 1690, before the building of the Presidio. The galleon’s crew was rescued from the burning ship and the statue was taken to Manila. One of the more famous legends is that of a great earthquake in 1902, when the Dulce Nombre de Maria church was severely damaged. Many of the statues of the church were broken but not that of Our Lady of Camarin. The statue was returned and the incident made front-page headlines in Guam.

Infamous thefts

Santa Marian Kamalen made front page headlines in Guam newspapers when the statue was stolen in three separate cases. The first case occurred on May 19, 1968, when police conducted a desperate search and residents flocked to the cathedral to view the empty niche and pray for the statue’s safe return. The identification along with records of local suspects. The statue was returned and the incident was closed. Bishop Apollinaris Baumgartner wouldn’t disclose the details of who returned the statue. It has also been reported that there would be no arrest and the return would be confidential.

Three years later, on May 3, 1971, the statue was stolen from the cathedral. Church officials asked for it to be returned. Archbishop Anthony Baumgartner wouldn’t disclose the details of who returned the statue. It has also been reported that there would be no arrest and the return would be confidential.

Another version of the legend has it that the fisherman saw the statue floating in the water, escorted by two gold-spotted crabs, each bearing a lighted candle between its claws. The statue also became known as the Lady of the Crabs. When the fisherman, who was a member of the Dotacion, was dressed in his Sunday clothes and ordered to carry the statue to the Presidio, or main barracks which were still under construction. There the statue was relegated to a tool room. In 1876, Father Calvo speculated that the statue came from a Spanish galleon that sailed between Acapulco, the Philippines, and Guam. Galleon crews, according to custom, gathered before such a statue reciting the litany and singing the Salve Regina. The statue was returned and the incident made front-page headlines in Guam.

One of the more well-known stories about the statue took place when Japan bombed Guam and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii as war broke out between America and Japan during World War II in 1941. Guam was bombed on December 8, the day of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Throughout the war, the statue was cared for by a teenager named Mariquita “Tita” Torres (who later became Mariquita Torres Souder), after Father Jesus Baza Duenas, who was beheaded by Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Another version of the legend has it that there would be no reparation. Throughout the war, the statue was cared for by a teenager named Mariquita “Tita” Torres (who later became Mariquita Torres Souder), after Father Jesus Baza Duenas, who was beheaded by Japanese soldiers.

The Japanese ordered everything returned to the church and followed Duenas to the Torres residence. While there, the church officials asked for the statue standing in the family’s living room, but Tita Torres claimed it was the church’s property, and that it was only lent to the church on special occasions. Duenas vouched for this and told the officers that it was not the church’s property.

Torres carried the statue to the family ranch near Tiasin where the family was moved from their home. The family also moved the statue to bomb shelters during the numerous attacks. When the Americans returned to Guam and bombed the capital and surrounding areas, the statue was miraculously saved from destruction.

Other Santa Marian Kamalen legends

Numerous other legends exist around the patron saint. Legend has it that when the Spanish militia men were about to retire for the day, if they indulged in more tuba (fermented coconut palm sap) and aguardiente (high potency alcohol beverage) than is prudent, they often fell asleep while saying their prayers or would act immediately before the statue when drunk. The doors of the niche would slam shut violently, wakening the sleepy soldiers so they could finish their prayers.

One of the most famous legends is that of a great earthquake in 1902, when the Dulce Nombre de Maria church was severely damaged. Many of the statues of the church were broken but not that of Our Lady of Camarin, which was found standing in the family’s living room. The statue also survived fire, when on December 8, 1945, it was rescued from a burning float by Jose D. Leon Guerrero. Because the statue had suffered discolorations, nicks and other minor defects in the course of time, minor repairs have been made. According to one story, during one occasion when repairs were being made, the scraping of her face was too rough, and the face began to bleed.

Other miracles attributed to the statue include belief in her powers of intercession, cures of dreadful diseases, and safe removal from great danger. She has long been considered by many the protector of the island and its people.

World War II

One of the more well-known stories about the statue took place when Japan bombed Guam and Pearl Harbor. Hawaii as war broke out between America and Japan during World War II in 1941. Guam was bombed on December 8, the day of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Throughout the war, the statue was cared for by a teenager named Mariquita “Tita” Torres (who later became Mariquita Torres Souder), after Father Jesus Baza Duenas, who was beheaded by Japanese soldiers.
Apuron promised that no criminal action would be taken against the responsible person or people if the statue was returned. The statue was found more than a month later, on Feb. 3, 1993, by a government worker who claimed the sacred statue waved to him. Parks and Recreation worker Juan C. Perez said he was cutting the bushes at about 9:45 a.m. that morning, near the stone bridge in the Serena park in Hagåtña, when he noticed someone waving at him. It turned out to be Santa Marian Kamalen. It was in good shape but was missing its necklace and crown.

Hagåtña procession

While processions are held every month to celebrate the patron saints of the various villages, the procession for Guam’s patron saint celebrated on December 8 each year is by far the largest.

Beginning mid-afternoon on December 8, large numbers of parishioners from each village church begin to assemble outside the Cathedral-Basilica in Hagåtña. A rosary and novena are said, usually starting at 3:30 p.m., and as the thousands of people gathered cannot fit inside the large cathedral, it is held outside, on the lawn and the streets surrounding the cathedral.

Once the novena is over, the procession starts at 4 p.m., making a loop around Hagåtña along the connecting roads of Archbishop Flores St., West O’Brien Drive, and West Sole-dad Avenue.

December 8 is a government holiday on Guam.

Gown and ornaments

The statue of Santa Marian Kamalen has real human hair and two crowns are used to dress the statue. One of the crowns is made from gold pieces given to the church by the late Ana Martinez Underwood, who donated the gold pieces (given to her by her husband as a wedding gift) in thanksgiving for the safe return of her husband from prison camp following World War II. Preparing the statue for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 is an honored job that was held by Mariquita “Tita” Torres Souder for many years after the war. She would comb the long black hair of the statue, arrange her crown and jewelry and place roses on her carriage. In December 2003, that job was given to her daughter, Laura M. Torres Souder, after Mariquita Souder died in October 2003.

The real Santa Marian Kamalen is used only for the islandwide procession on December 8, and on other occasions a replica is substituted.

National Shrine project

In 2004, former Senator Pilar Lujan, Guam Regent of the Catholic Daughters of America, working with Archbishop Apuron, began a petition for the inclusion of Santa Marian Kamalen into the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C., which includes more than sixty chapels and oratories with various tributes to Mary from around the world.

In October 2004, Lujan made a presentation to the Shrine Iconography and Plant and Facilities Committees. Guam was subsequently awarded a spot in the Shrine and was given one year to design, develop and construct a physical representation of Santa Marian Kamalen’s story. A Guam-based committee was then formed to develop the project.

The committee raised $75,000 for construction of the niche, and another $20,000 for accessories, and Father James Benavente personally raised $10,000 for the statue itself.

Construction was completed and the ceremony to enshrine a replica of Santa Marian Kamalen at the Basilica took place on September 17, 2006.
A new survey provides some answers. The Military Child Education Coalition’s Military Kids Now 2020 Survey identifies the greatest challenges to military children’s education. Conducted over four months in early spring 2020, the survey polled more than 5,100 military-connected students (age 13 and over), parents with school-age children and educators. According to the Summary Report, the “respon- sibilities were both heartening and heartbreaking,” reflecting “the strength of their commitments to their country, their families and their education while also highlighting continuing gaps in services, bumpy school transitions and fears about student preparedness for life after high school.”

The report states that 25% of military kids report moving two or more times during high school, but the real eye-opener is how students responded to questions like “I wish my school/teachers understood ...” and “I wish my peers understood ...” Military children want educators and peers to be more cognizant of military lifestyle challenges such as transitioning schools, adjusting to curriculum differences, experiencing social disruptions, coping with deployments, being stereotyped and finding acceptance. Military kids also expressed that, although they deserve the same educational opportunities as civilian students, they are not offered a level academic playing field. They reported frustration with changing graduation requirements, gaps in learning, disparities in school resources and constant reassessments. Military parents reported the need for support with everything from placement in gifted programs to state immunization requirements to IEPs and 504 plans to graduation waivers.

Moreover, although 97% of professionals believe that military children encounter more stress than their civilian peers, only 38% reported feeling confident “[m]anaging behavioral and mental health issues related to transition, mobility, deployment and return from deployment.”

The report contains a “Wish List” of resources parents believe would support their children’s education, including standardized curriculum, a “buddy” system for the critical first days of a new school, military liaisons in schools, help navigating the college process, and “school choice for all military-connected students (e.g., public, private, charter, home, etc.).”

Senior military, government, education and thought leaders will offer an in-depth analysis of the Military Kids Now Survey and other issues affecting military-connected children at MCEC’s Education Summit 2020 on Nov. 17 and 18. Military parents, professionals and educators are invited to attend the free webinar, titled “Mission Steady, Future Ready: Meeting the educational needs of military children in a changing environment.” The agenda includes speakers such as Dr. Mitchell Zais, Deputy Secretary of Education, and Dr. Marc Brackett, child studies professor at Yale University; discussion of the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3); guided chats; and presenters offering boarding school scholarships for military children.

As a child who lived in one small town, I never had to move, change schools, or leave my friends. But as a Navy spouse and mother of three, I’ve learned that military-connected kids can cope with an ever-changing environment with the right help, resources, and understanding. Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari’s columns at: themeatandpotatoesoflife.com Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
**Boonie Stomps Guam**

**INFORMATION PROVIDED BY GUAM BOONIE STOMPS**

**Nov. 28**

**San Carlos Falls**

**With Bataan Falls Option**

We journey to a beautiful secluded waterfall in central Guam for swimming and pictures, then hike along a pristine jungle river to enjoy a second waterfall with jumping and swimming.

**Bring:** 2 quarts water, hiking shoes that can get wet, swimsuit, sun screen, insect repellent, lunch, and camera.

**Special conditions:** Steep slopes, walking in water, mud, rocky slippery river bottom, and climbing up and assisted by a rope.

**Bataan Falls:** add 1 quart water, extra snacks, extra river walking, and extra, steeper rope climbing.

**Dec. 5**

**Inarajan Falls**

**Difficult**

4 hours for 5 miles

We hike through the red clay badlands of southern Guam, through the grassy central savannah and finally down to the Inarajan River to enjoy swimming and showering in one of Guam’s most scenic waterfalls.

**Bring:** 3 quarts water, good shoes, gloves, sun screen, insect lunch and snacks, camera, and swimsuit.

**Special conditions:** Steep slopes up and down, sword grass, little shade, climbing with a rope, and a long hike.

**Boonie Stomps**

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**Biweekly Sudoku**

**Week of 11/23/20**

**Volume 2, Issue 11**

**GUAJ**

Complete 10 Boonie Stomps to earn a Boonie Stomp T-Shirt!

**How to Solve:**

1) Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

2) Each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each number can only appear once in each column.

3) Each number can only appear once in each row.

4) The numbers 1 to 9 must appear once in each of the 3x3 grids.

**Hints:**

- **Try starting with the corner boxes and working your way in.**
- **Look for cells where only one number fits.**
- **Consider using pencil marks to note possible numbers.**
- **Keep an eye out for patterns or clues that can help you fill in the blanks.**

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**Memories with STARS AND STRIPES, Pacific**

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**Stripes Sports Trivia**

**SAY MY NAME!** Are you a quarterback? If so, I’m in your nightmares. I’m not that weak offensive lineman on your team. No, I aim him for breakfast. That strict diet led me to the 2016 NFL Defensive MVP award with my former team. Nowadays, though, I play for a franchise known for its defense. Who am I?

**Answer**

**SUDOKU**

**Edited by Marjorie E. Burke**

**Difficulty: Medium**

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Leaving a legacy

As retirement nears, a look at Rep. Phil Roe, a force for veterans’ health care issues

Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., plays a tune on a guitar he keeps on hand in his office on Capitol Hill in Washington. Roe, a powerhouse figure in policy impacting veterans’ health care and education, announced his retirement in January.

CARLOS BONGIOANNI/Stars and Stripes

Page 2
Powerhouse legislator on vet issues leaves legacy

By STEVE BETHANY

WASHINGTON — The deep red Tennessee 1st Congressional District is known to send its representatives to Washington for a long time.

Rep. Phil Roe, a powerhouse figure in policy impacting veteran's health care and education, is only the 15th member from the district since World War II, and the district hasn’t elected a Democrat since 1879.

Roe, 75, has been serving in Congress since 2009, a relatively short career compared to his predecessors. He announced his retirement in January, despite what would have been an easy reelection. “It’s arithmetic,” he said in an interview with Stars and Stripes. “I’m just getting too old.”

“I missed my family,” said Roe, who has three children and five grandchildren. He lives with his wife, Clarinda.

“I wanted to let off the gas a little bit. I’ve been at it a long time, and I will miss that,” Roe said. “All this stuff on TV... you’d think everybody was some sort of ogre, but they’re not. There are a lot of good people on both sides of the aisle, and I’ll leave a lot of good friends.

The early years

Roe took his seat in the House after defeating his opponent David Davis in the 2008 primary by 46% to 44%. Davis blamed his defeat on Roe’s ability to persuade Democrats to vote for him.

But Roe’s political career started years before Washington. In 2003, he was first elected as a commissioner in Johnson City, a relatively small city on the eastern border of Tennessee, about 100 miles from Knoxville. He served as vice mayor from 2001-2007 and then as mayor from 2007 to 2009.

After earning his medical degree from the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in 1972, he joined the Army’s medical corps and served with the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea. On top of his time in the Army, Roe was immersed in military culture and advanced in his medical career.

He grew up in a military town — Clarksville, Tenn. — and said all of his friends’ dad’s served in the armed forces.

“My scoutmaster was a first sergeant,” Roe remembered. “So when I went to boot camp, he said, ‘Well, you’re going to have a job in the Army and you’re going to be a medic and you’re going to be able to help people and make a difference.’”

He left the service as a major in 1974 and went on to work as an OB/GYN in Johnson City for 31 years, delivering 5,000 babies. His residency was at the Memphis VA Medical Center in 1971, which spurred him to build a career out of veterans’ policy.

Legacy in VA committee

During his entire time in Congress, Roe served on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, which dictates policy impacting benefits, health care and education for veterans. It also oversees the Department of Veterans Affairs, second only to the Defense Department in size and budget. The VA is the largest health-care network in the United States, providing care to over 9 million veterans.

With a dual background in medicine and the military, Roe made veterans’ policy the cornerstone of his time on Capitol Hill. His fingerprints are on some of the most impactful measures for current and former service members over the past decade. Many consider him to be one of the effective legislators on veterans’ policy in years.

In a statement issued shortly after Roe announced his retirement, Veterans of Foreign Wars said, “Without him, the Mission Act, Forever GI Bill and other significant legislation may not have been achieved or for our nation’s heroes.”

Roe penned one of the biggest reforms of education benefits for veterans in decades through the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act, often referred to as the “Forever GI Bill.” It combined 18 separate bills and terminated the 15-year limit for veterans to use education benefits. It also created more incentives for veterans to pursue a degree in science, engineering or math. The measure expanded benefits to recipients of the Purple Heart.

From 2017-2019, Roe served as the VA committee chairman, ranking member since Democrats took back control of the House last year. Roe led the committee and continues to lead his party through one of the most pivotal times for health care, as veterans are increasingly encouraged to seek care in the private sector.

“The Mission Act ... was our crowning achievement, and we’re still rolling that out,” Roe said. “I think the Mission Act takes the best of the VA and the best of the private sector and tries to marry those two.”

The Mission Act is among the most consequential reworkings of veteran care in decades. Under the measure, veterans can seek mental health services, urgent care and primary care outside the federal system. The landmark effort was spurred by concerns surrounding excessive wait times for care at VA facilities and long distances that some veterans had to travel to federal hospitals, especially patients from rural areas.

He was fantastic, he was a great chair,” said Joe Chenevey, executive director of AMVETS, a national veterans organization. “He was probably an underappreciated leader who led the veteran community through a difficult time trying to get community care going.”

The Mission Act was passed in 2018 with a 92-5 vote in the Senate and a 347-70 vote in the House.

Taking care of an aging and expanding population of veterans is expensive. Yet excessive wait times and inaccessible care for rural veterans was unacceptable for the public and Washington after the explosive 2014 Phoenix VA scandal. Long wait times led to the death of more than 200 veterans, according to the federal watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office.

In a 2014 hearing on the scandal, Roe said of the VA, “The culture, I don’t understand it, [patients] drop through the cracks... I’m embarrassed by this.”

Roe said in his interview with Stars and Stripes that the “lightbulb went off” when he visited Oregon’s second congressional district, represented by Republican Greg Walden. His rural district is the largest in the country and 20,000 square miles larger than Roe’s home state of Tennessee.

“Someone living on the west side of Oregon may have to travel hundreds of miles if they need care at the VA hospital in Portland, on the other side of the state.”

“Are there veterans that may have to travel five or six hours, to come down and find out their doctor’s not there that day, and turn around and go home,” he said. “And I thought, ‘That’s wrong... I’ve got to write a bill, that’s good for urban America, and for rural America’.”

The Mission Act built upon the Veterans Choice Act, which passed in 2014. President Donald Trump routinely touts the Mission Act as a signature achievement of his presidency.

Yet there have been concerns that privatization of VA care could lead to federal hospital closures or funding stripped in favor of private sector care.

Many advocates believe that privatization is an issue to explore, yet without private sector care supplementing the VA, rural veterans would be without easy access.

In an interview with Stars and Stripes in September, then-former Vice President Joe Biden said he would never support “total privatization,” but said community care is part of the puzzle, especially in rural areas.

Roe dismissed concerns about privatization as “utter hogwash.”

“The present ask in this fiscal year is north of $240 billion,” he said. “We’re doing a damn poor job of privatizing if that’s what we’re doing.”

The VA is one of the only federal agencies not getting a budget cut and is the only Cabinet department eying a double-digit budget boost — 14%, according to Trump’s proposed budget. VA is set for a $250 billion budget next year. This year’s congress gave the department about $10 billion more than the administration requested.

The ballooning budget follows a trend of the agency rapidly expanding in size to support an aging veterans population. In 2001, the budget was $48 billion.

VA’s budget growth comes as it tries to modernize its record-keeping system, expand outreach to veterans and offer more gender-specific services for women.

The runaway budget is an issue on Capitol Hill, but taking away from VA could be political suicide and blocking new initiatives could be equally damaging, as veteran initiatives pass Congress with few skirmishes.

“Spending more money isn’t necessarily getting better care,” Roe said.

Next VA secretary

It is unclear who is in line to be Biden’s secretary of veterans’ affairs. Yet he is expected to make a relatively safe pick for easy confirmation, especially if Republicans control the Senate.

A number of veteran advocates have suggested the best route for VA is to bring in an Obama-era bureaucrat who knows the agency, and others have signaled they will push for a veteran to be in charge at the VA looks to make its hospitals more accommodating to women.

Roe says the VA’s former Secretary Robert Wilkie has done a great job, especially building up private sector care, and that there is plenty of work to be done on that. Roe urged Biden to pick his next VA secretary carefully.

What’s ahead?

Roe is not sure who the next top Republican on the House Veterans’ Affairs committee will be once he leaves but believes the next VA secretary to be close to the veteran community.

“A lot of young members got put on the Democratic side. I admit that,” Roe said. “But we, on the Republican side, we probably have a strong bench.”

“We’ve got strong people. Jim Banks, a veteran, as you well know. Mike Boest, a veteran, have been on there for a long time,” he added. “I feel really good about our team. And I don’t know who the ranking member is going to be. But it will be good, it will be solid.”

Roe isn’t sure how he’s going to spend retirement, but he is going to stay in the veteran’s space by serving on the board of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, an organization dedicated to the needs of military families and caregivers.

He’s also going to do work for the U.S. Israel Education Association, a pro-Israel advocacy group.

Roe doesn’t expect work for those two organizations to monopolize his time as much as Congress did. Roe lives near a part of the Appalachian Trail and hikes with friends most weekends and plans to play a lot of golf.

“You still get asked to go do a lot of things. I’ve been visiting schools and other organizations, you know. ‘Around here, we’re still pretty much busy.’”

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A nonprofit that supports Navy SEAL Foundation has pledged $50,000 to support a major post-traumatic stress disorder study involving the use of MDMA, commonly known as Molly or ecstasy.

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Training prepares troops for Indo-Pacific deployment

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The Army’s 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade is halfway through a training rotation set to prepare its troops to advise partner countries in the Indo-Pacific — a region where American forces seek to gain a foothold against Chinese influence.

“Our goal is to be a partner of choice in a dangerous world. What we want is our partners to see the way we operate,” Brig. Gen. Scott Jackson, commander of the Security Force Assistance Command, said during a call with reporters.

His command serves as the higher headquarters for one of the Army’s active-duty advisory brigades, known as SFABs. A sixth SFAB was established in the National Guard.

Based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., more than 600 soldiers from the 5th SFAB are running through a first-of-its-kind, large-scale training rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., to prepare for deployment next year to several countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

The 14-day exercise simulates guiding a partner nation’s military through an invasion and insurgency from a hostile neighbor, said Brig. Gen. Curtis Taylor, brigade commander.

“How do we enable our partners to do that? How do we give them the right capacity? How do we give them the right training?” are the questions he said his brigade must answer.

About 2,300 soldiers from Lewis-McCord’s 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, the 2nd Infantry Division are serving as the opposing force for the rotation. They’ve been told to fight and operate as they would in combat.

“It’s a different experience working with a really capable partner who really wants to win,” Taylor said.

Previous training rotations for security force assistance brigades have focused on counternarcotics and stability but, earlier this year, the Security Force Assistance Command regionally aligned each of its five brigades with combat commands of the world: Southern Command, Africa Command, Central Command, European Command and Pacific Command. Now the brigades are beginning to train specifically for the region they support, Jackson said.

The National Guard’s SFAB is designed to augment the active units. This alignment is consistent with the National Defense Strategy, Jackson said. In the Pacific, the defense strategy calls for strengthened alliances and partnerships.

“You’re not helping them by taking the American processes and insisting that they do our way,” Jackson said. Instead, countries want to learn how the American Army invests in junior leaders and its noncommissioned officer corps and adapt that to their military, he said.

Before this month’s training rotation, the brigade sent seven teams to Thailand and one to Indonesia. Soldiers worked with those countries’ militaries to lay groundwork for a future Stryker brigade and develop schools and training programs.

American troops have worked closely with one group of soldiers from the Royal Thai Army for three training events in Hawaii, Thailand and Fort Polk to build a relationship.

The brigade’s teams range from four to 12 soldiers and are all lead by a captain. Capt. Matt Brown, who participated in those training events with the Thai army, said he was struck by the level of engagement from the two countries when “a collective team and not a U.S. unit with a Thai unit operating separately.”

During his trip to Thailand, he said his team lived and worked on a Thailand military base which also helped build trust between soldiers.

“That’s the model we see going forward,” Taylor said. “We really believe that through a sustained forward presence we can build trust over time with partners and allies in the Pacific. That’s what we’re setting the conditions to do across the region.”

Moving forward, the SFABs plan to have a greater enduring presence in the countries with which they are aligned. Taylor expects that about a third of his brigade will deploy every six months to keep a steady rotation and presence. That would give troops an operational tempo of six months deployed and 12 months at home.

Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite announced earlier this month his service branch’s pitch to increase its presence in the same region. He called for the reactivation of the Navy’s 1st Fleet, possibly in Singapore. Currently, the Navy’s Pacific Fleet is the only one in the region, based out of Japan.

While Taylor and Jackson did not name all the countries the assistance brigades work with, Taylor did say not just about working with nations struggling to build a baseline-level military.

“We’ve found that we’ve got an awful lot to offer very capable militaries on interoperability and in integration, a lot of warfighting functions like artillery, engineers and logistics that have been the core tenets of U.S. military,” he said. “If we work closely with those militaries in the Pacific, we’re going to find that that’s our greatest strength.”

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6 finalists announced for Space Command headquarters

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has narrowed its choices on the permanent headquarters location for the U.S. Space Command to six finalists, Air Force officials announced.

The remaining candidates to house the newest combatant command are Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico, Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, Port San Antonio in Texas, and Redstone Arsenal in Alabama, according to the Air Force.

A final decision is expected in early 2021, said Ann Stefanek, a spokeswoman for the service charged with making the final basing decision for SPACECOM.

“The Department of the Air Force evaluated each location and will now conduct both virtual and on-site visits at each candidate location to assess which location is best suited to host the U.S. Space Command Headquarters,” Stefanek said. “This assessment will be based on factors related to mission, infrastructure capacity, community support and costs to the Department of Defense.”

The Air Force initially expected to announce a home base for Space Command’s 1,400 military and civilian workers by late 2019, even releasing a different list of six finalists as possible locations last year. But the service scrapped those plans in May and began a new search.

The new effort allowed American communities to self-nominate themselves for consideration to host the Space Command.

Air Force officials at that time announced that, to be considered, communities must be within 25 miles of an existing military base within one of the 15 most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas within the country, and score at least 50 out of 100 points on the American Association of Retired Persons’ Livability Index.

SPACECOM was formally established in August 2019 to oversee and control the U.S. military’s myriad space-based infrastructure and operations. It has been temporarily housed at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs since it was established.

Peterson Air Force Base is one of two locations to twice be named a finalist. The Army’s Redstone Arsenal near Huntsville, Ala., is the other.

Stefanek said the Air Force considered locations in 24 states before naming the finalists Nov. 19.

Air Force officials have said previously the service estimated it could take some six years to build the facilities necessary to house the U.S. Space Command, once a location is chosen.

The Space Command’s establishment last year was actually a re-establishment of the combatant command, after the Pentagon shuttered it in 2002 as part of the post-9/11 government restructuring.

It was established just months before the newest military branch, the U.S. Space Force, was founded last year.

Under Defense Department structure, the military services — in this case, the Space Force — are responsible for training and equipping troops who then operate under the leadership and control of a combatant command — in this case, the Space Command.

The Space Force, as it grows, is expected to provide the bulk of the troops assigned to the Space Command, but other military services will also provide some troops to the command, officials have said.

The Space Command is now led by Army four-star Gen. John Raymond.

The Space Force, like all military services, is headquartered at the Pentagon, where it will remain. It is led by Gen. Jay Raymond, former head of the Air Force space operations.
**MILITARY**

**Forearm planks added to Navy fitness test**

By Caitlin M. Kenney Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy is changing its fitness test in the spring, adding the forearm plank to better assess a sailor’s core strength and rowing as an alternative cardiovascular exercise, the service announced Wednesday.

“Feedback I’ve received from the fleet as I’ve traveled ... is, for the most part, sailors are excited and they’re just ready to start,” said Senior Chief Petty Officer Eric Anderson, who is with the Navy Physical Readiness Program at the 21st Century Sailor office based in Millington, Tenn. The Navy is responding to feedback from sailors who asked for a test that better determined core strength and relates more to the work that they have to do on ships, Anderson said.

The updated events are the biggest change to the test since the stationary bike and the elliptical machine were added as cardio exercises in 2007, Anderson said. The elliptical machine was eliminated in 2018.

The Navy’s Physical Readiness Test, or PRT, is typically conducted twice a year for sailors in a spring and fall cycle, or time frame, and involves three events: pushups, forearm planks replacing curls and a cardio event, such as a run, swim or now the row exercise.

The fitness test cycles in 2020 were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In 2021, the Navy will only have one cycle for sailors to take the test, between March 15 and Sept. 15, according to the service. March will be the first time sailors will have to do the forearm plank and can choose the row event.

“I am excited about these changes coming to the Physical Readiness Test as I believe the plank is a better measure of core strength, it’s easier on the back and I think it is safer in a [coronavirus] environment,” Vice Adm. John Nowell, the chief of naval personnel, said in a statement. “Additionally, the row is a great full-body exercise and it’s easy to fit a rower onboard ships. These changes will challenge us to be better, stronger and a more fit Navy.”

First mentioned in 2019 by former Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson for the PRT, the forearm plank and row were then tested by 500 sailors at three locations: Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii, Naval Station Mayport in Florida and Naval Station Norfolk and Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia. The tests helped determine what the appropriate standards needed to be for each event.

The test takers “were happy that a change was coming,” Anderson said.

The forearm plank was chosen to replace the curlup because curls also risk aggravating the lower back whereas the planks actually strengthen those muscles, Anderson said.

“When you’re pulling on that line to moor the ship or carrying a box to put it in the storeroom, the stabilization of your core is where you’re developing all that power from. So being able to do that and test that and make sure that our sailors have a strong core is going to help make us more ready and healthier,” he said.

The addition of the 2,000-meter row provides sailors another cardio option for the test, along with a 12-minute stationary bike ride, a 500- or 450-yard swim, and a 1.5-mile treadmill run. The row is a low-impact exercise that puts less stress on the legs and engages about 80% of the body’s muscles, according to a Navy fact sheet on the PRT update.

For the forearm plank, sailors can use a mat or pad, but they have to be fully on the mat, not just placing their forearms on it. The time limit is based on age and is different for men and women, with older sailors having more time. The plank standards are based on age and not separated out for men or women, a carryover from the curlup, Anderson said. It’s also because abdominal strength is similar for men and women, he said.

The 2,000-meter row is done on a rower machine, and the Navy is recommending sailors train on the machine prior to the test to understand how they need to pace themselves to pass.

“Something we saw during the testing was they would get, say, 500 meters into the test and re-alize that this is not as easy as I thought it was going to be. And we don’t want sailors failing just because they didn’t know what to expect,” Anderson said. If a sailor does not pass the row event, they can do the same event as the plank event because they pick their cardio option unlike the mandatory plank event, Anderson said. They could be offered another attempt at another cardio exercise by fitness leader overseeing the test.

**Army to review ‘bad paper’ discharges as part of settlement**

By Nikei Wentling Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — As part of a lawsuit settlement reached Nov. 17, the U.S. Army will be required to review and potentially upgrade thousands of other-than-honorable discharges dating back to April 2011.

The agreement is pending approval by the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. It orders the Army Discharge Review Board to reconsider tens of thousands of cases in which the board denied upgrades, despite evidence that veterans were struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or military sexual trauma when they separated from the military.

Andrew DeGuglielmo, an attorney in the case, said the agreement would provide “durable, long-standing relief” to veterans who were denied upgrades and those who will apply for upgrades in the future.

“This lawsuit has challenged decades-long, systemic deficiencies in the Army Discharge Review Board,” DeGuglielmo said. “I’m confident this settlement will make the discharge upgrade process more accessible, just and fair for Army veterans who endure the invisible wounds of service.”

The Defense Department instituted a policy in 2017 to give “liberal consideration” to veterans looking to upgrade other-than-honorable discharges, or “bad paper,” in situations where a service-related medical disorder could have led to misconduct. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit argued that the Army Discharge Review Board ignored the policy and denied warranted upgrades.

The wrongful discharges go back even further, according to the Government Accountability Office. The GAO has reported that the Pentagon didn’t consistently apply previous policies going back to 2011 that required discharge review boards to take mental health issues into consideration.

“Bad paper” discharge upgrades generally only occurred when commanders approved the request, not when required by policy. According to the GAO, many veterans were not even aware they had a claim that was eligible for review.

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War support not affected by female deaths

Joint study seeks public views on combat fatalities

By Nancy Montgomery
Stars and Stripes

Women’s combat deaths do not erode public support for armed conflicts any more than the deaths of male soldiers, according to a new study.

And although the thought of female combat deaths appears to reinforce women’s views on gender equality, it does not do so among men, said “At War and at Home: The Consequences of U.S. Women Combat Casualties.”

The joint study by Harvard University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,400 adults and more than 4,000 respondents in follow-up surveys.

“Many of the policy arguments about whether women ought to be allowed to serve in combat rest upon untested empirical claims about the consequences of allowing them to do so,” said the report published in the Journal of Conflict Resolution.

This study brings new evidence to bear on these speculative debates.

In 2015, the Defense Department ordered that women be allowed to fill all combat positions despite resistance from some quarters, including the Marine Corps.

Opponents suggested that female casualties would dampen public support for a war and that political leaders “might find their ability to fight and win wars severely diminished,” the study said.

But study author Dara Cohen, a professor at Harvard University, said “we found no evidence of that whatsoever.”

The study presented respondents with hypothetical battle scenarios featuring either soldier “Molly Ryan” or soldier “Todd Ryan.”

They were then asked to answer questions meant to measure support for such a conflict, including whether it was a mistake.

“In sum, we find an abundance of evidence challenging the idea that women fighting and dying in combat will erode the public’s willingness to mobilize and to support war efforts,” it said.

Respondents were also asked a set of standard questions designed to ascertain their views of women’s roles in public and private life after reading the scenarios.

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Respondents were also asked a set of standard questions designed to ascertain their views of women’s roles in public and private life after reading the scenarios.

“Women dying in combat increases support for gender equality, particularly in the public sphere of work and politics, but only among women respondents,” the study found.

“Telling women they can serve in these roles — it becomes somewhat aspirational for women,” Cohen said.

The willingness to fight and die in combat is inextricably linked with what it means to be a full and equal citizen of the state, the study noted, citing the examples of Black soldiers until the early 1950s, and gay, lesbian and bisexual service members until 2010.

But male participants in the study were no more likely to say they thought women made good leaders after reading scenarios in which valorous female troops had been killed in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria, according to the Congressional Research Service.

From 2001 through July 2020, some 173 female service members had been killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The U.S. military has upgraded its land-based defenses as it guards against threats from rogue states with developing nuclear missile technology.

The destroyer USS John Finn, equipped with an Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, shot down the ICBM on Nov. 16 northeast of Hawaii with the latest version of the Standard Missle-3, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency said in a statement.

“This was an incredible accomplishment and critical milestone for the Aegis BMD SM-3 Block IA program,” said Vice Adm. Jon Hill, the agency’s director.

The missile, designed to kill midcourse enemy missiles in space, has longer range and higher speed than its predecessors. It could be used to protect Hawaii, Guam and other U.S. interests in the Pacific, as well as Japan, against missile threats from North Korea.

The same interceptor could be used in Romania and Poland against threats in that region.

An animation of the successful interception shows the missile firing from USS John Finn as the ICBM target launches from the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, and arcing through space over the Hawaiian island chain.

Nearly all Navy cruisers and destroyers have a variant of the Aegis BMD system, which was originally designed to intercept short-, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, though data collected by its radar systems could be used to help other systems track and destroy ICBMs, the Congressional Research Service said in a recent report.

About three years ago, Congress mandated that the military evaluate by the end of this year the feasibility of using an SM-3 to defeat an ICBM.

Preliminary data show that Monday’s test met that objective, the Missile Defense Agency said.

The Raytheon-built SM-3 is equipped with a “hit-to-kill” warhead that collides with the target missile’s warhead to destroy it. The Block IA variant has a larger diameter than other versions, allowing for more fuel, a higher maximum velocity and a larger warhead, the CRS report said.

Last week’s test used “engage-on-remote” capabilities, in which data from systems other than the ship’s own radar provide the targeting solution to guide the missile.

The tracking information was fed to the destroyer from the Missile Defense Integration and Operations Center, based at Schriever Air Force Base, near Colorado Springs, Colo.

The event was the sixth flight test of an Aegis BMD-equipped vessel using the SM-3 Block IA. Originally planned for May, it was delayed by restrictions on movement of equipment and personnel aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

The interceptor was originally intended for use in regional defenses, but ships allow it to be “surged in a crisis or conflict to thicken defensive capabilities for the U.S. homeland” against long-range threats, the Pentagon said in a January 2019 review.

It could also be used on land, though it isn’t considered a replacement for larger land-based interceptors.

The Aegis Ashore system based in Romania as a defense against potential Russian aggression has been upgraded to fire the new SM-3 variant. Hill said earlier this year.

The missile threat from U.S. adversaries is complex and includes evolving ballistic and hypersonic missile threats, he said, and the U.S. needs to develop defensive capabilities to outpace “rogue state offensive missile capabilities.”

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Ronald Reagan from May to October as it patrolled the Sea of Japan and South China Sea. The guided-missile cruiser steamed this year to the Indian Ocean, as well as dual-carrier operations with the USS Nimitz in July.

The cruiser that month also trained with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and Australian Defense Force in the Philippine Sea, and in September took part in Valiant Shield, a U.S. multilateral exercise in the waters off Hawaii, according to the statement.

“Four 260 days of COVID-free bubble operations, Antietam’s sailors performed with honor, courage and commitment,” ship commander Capt. Russell Caldwell said in the statement. “I cannot be more proud, and it was my privilege to lead and serve alongside each and every one of them.”

Though most sailors hadn’t seen their families since February, some waved from the ship’s bow to their loved ones when the cruiser briefly pulled into Yokosuka in March. In a letter to Antietam families posted to the ship’s Facebook page last month, Caldwell said sailors may face extra challenges adjusting to life on land, especially after this deployment.

“Reintegration for the crew will take two forms,” he wrote. “The first being reintegration with the family and the second being reintegration into a COVID world.”

While the base community has had eight months to adjust to coronavirus precautions and numerous associated restrictions, Antietam crew members have not yet lived in a Japan where travel is restricted, and bars are banned.

“We have been protected for over 200 days and are not used to the restrictions and rules, especially in Yokosuka,” Caldwell said in the letter. “I will ensure your sailor is armed with the information, but I ask you to reinforce the rules once back at home.”

USS Antietam returns to ‘a COVID world’

BY CAITLIN DORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy’s oldest operational warship turned another year older earlier this month, marking a half-century of service on the seas.

The 7th Fleet flagship USS Blue Ridge commemorated the 50th anniversary of its commissioning on Nov. 14, 1970, according to a Navy statement. The command ship has been stationed in Yokosuka since 1979. There is no better ship to support us as our flagship,” 7th Fleet commander Vice Adm. Bill Merz said in the statement. “Year after year, she has enabled operations of the largest forward fleet, while at the same time participating in enduring joint service and multinational exercises and supporting disaster relief operations.”

Merz added: “Everyone knows Blue Ridge; she has a rich history here in the region.”

Commissioned at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, the ship was the first of the Navy’s two Blue Ridge-class amphibious command ships, which also includes the 6th Fleet’s USS Mount Whitney, according to the Navy. At about 19,000 tons, it can accommodate about 1,200 enlisted and 250 officers.

The Blue Ridge is likely to keep its oldest-operational ship title for at least another 18 years. Its service life was extended an additional two decades after completing a 23-month maintenance period in May 2018.

The 223-year-old frigate USS Constitution is the Navy’s oldest commissioned warship, but its mission is education and outreach in Boston Harbor.

Command ships are used as central planning vessels for fleet leaders. During times of peace, they are often used for both diplomatic engagements and humanitarian efforts.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the Blue Ridge made frequent port visits, bringing 7th Fleet leadership to regional nations to send messages of support to allies and partners. In 2019, it visited 11 ports in nine Indo-Pacific countries during a four-month patrol.

In January, the Blue Ridge stopped in Japan, South Korea and Thailand before the Navy halted port visits in response to the coronavirus’s spread.

The ship later broke its personal days-at-sea record with 70 days in a row without a port visit before returning from deployment in June. Its prior at-sea record of 64 days was set in 1972 during the Vietnam War.

The Blue Ridge also takes part in numerous annual U.S. and allied training exercises, routine patrols and special operations,” according to the statement.

The Blue Ridge has a storied history of participation in humanitarian efforts in the Pacific. From 1979-84, the ship rescued Vietnamese refugees off the coast of Vietnam as part of Operation Boat People, according to the statement. It also earned the Humanitarian Service Medal in 1980 for rescuing 91 refugees from two separate small boats in the South China Sea.

More recently, the ship was used in Operation Tomodachi, which provided disaster relief and supplies to Japan in the wake of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, according to the statement.

“Blue Ridge’s vital role and commitment is a testament of her enduring participation in joint service and allied exercises addressing humanitarian and security crisis in the region, in addition to the partnerships shaped over the years,” the Navy said.

Oldest operational warship in the Navy celebrates 50 years
Army looks to sports tech for help with injuries

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Looking to solve the costly training injuries that have long-plagued its soldiers, the Army is set to test technology popular with major sports programs to help the service build individualized approaches to its troops’ fitness workouts.

The technology, force plates outfitted with machine learning software, will be tested during the coming months as part of a health and fitness pilot program the Army is running with new officers training at Fort Sill, Okla., service officials said. The Army hopes the technology will fit into its new Holistic Health and Fitness — or H2F — program that it rolled out last month in an effort partially aimed at reducing the trove of some 8,000 soldiers considered nondeployable, most often for training-related injuries.

Soldiers will conduct a series of movements on top of the force plates — 30-pound rectangular metal panels that look like oversized bathroom scales — from which the software can predict specific injury vulnerabilities and help fitness experts tailor training programs to reduce those risks, said Dr. Phil Wagner, the founder and CEO of Sparta Science, the company supplying the technology for the Fort Sill pilot. The key factor is the massive accumulation of data the Silicon Valley, Calif., company has collected from more than 2 million scans via its force plates, Wagner said.

“The system gets better with more data that comes in — the insights become more accurate and more specific,” he said.

“And then the machine learning is able to identify patterns in individuals through comparison with others. It can say you just did your balance assessment [on the force plate] and it’s immediately comparing against all these data points it already has, and it can tell you, ‘You need to do X and Y to address this issue you have.’”

The methods have been successful with athletes, according to Wagner. Sparta’s client list includes teams in Major League Baseball, the National Football League and the National Basketball Association and major Division I collegiate programs, including Clemson University, the defending college football champion.

For the past four years, Sparta has also worked with the NFL, collecting data during its annual pre-draft scouting combine to help teams assess the health of potential draft picks.

That is essentially what the Army wants to do. The thought is, if it can assess a service member’s vulnerability to injury — especially in areas that commonly break down in the military such as knees, ankles and backs — it can avoid some of those nagging musculoskeletal problems that keep troops sidelined and cost the Army an estimated $575 million to treat each year.

The technology is not new to the military. Sparta has worked with U.S. Special Operations Command since at least 2016, and it has recently begun other pilot programs, including with the Marine Corps Training and Education Command. The Marines agreed to a five-year contract with Sparta this year to purchase an indefinite number of the force plate systems for approximately $640,000 each, according to contract documents.

The Corps is already using the technology in initial entrance training programs, including Recruiting Training and Officer Candidate School, “in a limited fashion in order to assess” its usefulness, said Marine Capt. Sam Stephenson, a spokesman for the command.

The technology has also captured the attention of some lawmakers. The House-passed version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets annual policy and spending priorities for the Pentagon, would mandate the Defense Department study force plate machine learning’s applications for troops. If the language is adopted in the final version of the NDAA, which must still be reconciled with the Senate version, it would require the defense secretary to submit a report on the technology to Congress by September.

“These technologies could provide accurate, actionable insights regarding the physical condition of each service member and customized fitness programs for each service member to help minimize injuries during combat, thereby increasing the medical readiness and the military lifecycle of service members,” the House version of the 2021 NDAA reads. “The [House Armed Services] Committee notes that there have been some elements of the military services that have previously used this technology to increase readiness, decrease injuries and avoid a significant amount of expenses related to unnecessary injuries.”

For soldiers, the process is simple, Wagner said.

A person performs a series of movements on the force plate, including balancing on each foot, a series of jumps, and planks. Scans take less than five minutes to collect the data, which can predict a person’s injury risk throughout their entire body, Wagner said.

Athletic programs that have adopted Sparta’s technology often scan their athletes at least once a week to document progress in their training to prevent injury or assess an injured person’s rehabilitation progress, Wagner said. His hope is the Army and other military services consider a similar approach.

Retired Army Maj. Gen. Malcolm Frost envisions the Army adopting the use of the force plates throughout all of its formations as low as the company level as part of its new H2F program, which he helped craft before retiring last year as the commander of the Army’s Center for Initial Military Training.

“The Fort Eustis, Va.-based CIMT is the service’s lead for health and fitness matters and, among other things, led the way in the creation of the new Army Combat Fitness Test,” Frost said. “I’ve had back injuries and shoulder injuries and leg injuries that has affected me for life in my readiness. And had I been conducting fitness the right way up front that I would have been at a much, much better place.”

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