

# THE SKYLINE



Volume 60, Number 25

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December 8, 2022

## On Base

### NMCRS Holiday Hours:

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society Office will be closed from Dec. 23 to Jan. 11, 2023.

For emergencies, please contact the on-call case worker at 601-679-2504.

For after hours, please call the American Red Cross Armed Forces Service Center at 1-877-272-7337.

### NEX Holiday Hours:

Christmas Eve, Dec. 24: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Christmas Day, Dec. 25: Closed

New Year's Eve, Dec. 31: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

New Year's Day, Jan. 1: 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.



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B-21 Bomber

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## Military COVID-19 vaccine mandate repealed in proposed defense bill

By Leo Shane III and Bryant Harris  
Defense News

House and Senate lawmakers unveiled plans for a compromise defense authorization bill which would boost the military budget by 8% over fiscal 2022 levels and rescind the military's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for service members.

The \$858 billion plan (which includes roughly \$817 billion in Department of Defense spending) also includes plans for a 4.6% pay raise for troops starting next month and nearly \$19 billion in extra funding to deal with extra inflation costs on construction, fuel prices and other military purchases.

House lawmakers are expected to pass the measure by the end of the week, setting up a Senate vote next week. If it passes both chambers, it could be signed into law by the president before the end of the month, continuing a six-decade streak of advancing the legislation into law.

Although the authorization bill is considered must-pass legislation annually, this year's deliberations have dragged on for months.

For the second consecutive year, the Senate did not pass its own version of the bill, opting instead to make adjustments to the House-passed version from this summer rather than taking amendment votes on their own military policy priorities.

And in recent days, numerous Republican lawmakers in the House and Senate threatened to oppose the measure unless it included language dumping the military's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

● Budget, page 2

## Congratulations to Sailors who advanced in rank



**NAS MERIDIAN**  
ABH1 Travis Bond  
AC1 Justin Clark  
MA1 Nathan Dehart  
MA1 Justin Fields  
AC1 Collin Stenten  
**NTTC MERIDIAN**  
YN1 Scott Layfield



**NAS MERIDIAN**  
AC2 Kristofferzson Frades  
AC2 Mark Lendowski II



**NAS MERIDIAN**  
AC3 Donte Derickson  
AC3 Xavier Estrella  
AC3 Sean Greeley  
AC3 Kenneth Netemeyer  
AC3 Jirrad Nielsen  
AC3 Quentin Smith  
MA3 Ariel Urban  
MA3 Natasha Williams

## Navy League honors service members



The Mississippi Council of the Navy League honored Sailors, Marines and Instructor Pilots of the Year at their annual meeting, Dec. 6. President Roger Burke, far right, presented the awards to (first row, from left) HM2 Shawnte J. Bryant, Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Unit Sailor of the Year; AC1 Christopher Schmidt, NAS Meridian Senior Sailor of the Year; RSC Sulficio A. Anza Jr., Naval Technical Training Center Meridian Senior Instructor of the Year; Sgt. Natalie Camarena, Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One Instructor of the Year; LT Keith Barth, Training Squadron (VT) 7 Navy Instructor Pilot of the Year; Capt. Drake McBreaarty, VT-7 Marine Instructor Pilot of the Year; Capt Jared Shaker, VT-9 Marine Instructor Pilot of the Year; and LT Adam Pang, VT-9 Navy Instructor Pilot of the Year. Not pictured are YN1 Shayla Johnson, Navy Reserve Center Meridian TAR Sailor of the Year; and AM1 Jeremy Crowsey, Navy Reserve Center Meridian SELRES Sailor of the Year.

Photo by Penny Randall

## Congratulations NAS Sailors, Civilians of the Year



Senior Sailor  
of the Year

**AC1 Christopher Schmidt**  
Air Operations



Junior Sailor  
of the Year

**ABH2 Travis Bond**  
Field Support



Blue Jacket  
of the Year

**AC3 Riley Pfeiffer**  
Air Operations



Senior Civilian  
of the Year

**William Gaines**  
Air Operations



Junior Civilian  
of the Year

**Kevin Blythe**  
Fire & Emergency Services



## Pearl Harbor Remembrance



Photo by Adam Prince

Chiefs from Naval Technical Training Center Meridian and NAS Meridian muster for morning colors to commemorate Pearl Harbor Day onboard NAS Meridian, Dec. 7. In one of the defining moments in U.S. history, the Japanese attack the U.S. Pacific Fleet and nearby military airfields and installations at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and remove the U.S. Navy's battleship force as a possible threat to the Japanese Empire's southward expansion. The U.S. is brought into the World War II as a full combatant.

## AC2 Morgan Reenlistment



Photo by Adam Prince

LT Andrew Samp, right, Field Support division officer, presents a reenlistment bonus check to AC2 Michael Morgan during his ceremony at Air Operations onboard NAS Meridian, Dec. 5.



Photo by Sgt. Alexa Hernandez

Pilots and aircrew with the French Army conduct flight deck qualifications during Exercise NARVAL 2022 off the coast of Toulon, France, Nov. 21. Exercise NARVAL is designed to assess the potential for future battalion or brigade-level amphibious exercises with French amphibious forces.

## US Marines partner with French military for Exercise Narval

By Sgt. Alexa Hernandez  
2nd Marine Division

The beautiful city of Toulon, France is located along the Mediterranean coast and is best known for its naval base and harbor. With its rugged landscape and crystal, clear blue waters, it is home to many naval ships and vessels of the French Maritime Forces Command, or French Navy.

This year, United States Marine and Naval officers with 2nd Marine Division traveled to Toulon for Exercise NARVAL to conduct planning with French forces for Exercise ORION 2023, scheduled to take place this upcoming January.

ORION will be the largest airborne and amphibious exercise coordinated by French forces since the 1980s, with an emphasis in high intensity combat and amphibious warfare.

NARVAL was an exercise crucial to the success of this upcoming large operation. Units from both the French Army, Navy and

other European countries, along with Marines and Sailors with 2nd MarDiv took part in this large-scale planning exercise.

"An invitation was sent from 6th Light Armored Brigade to have Marine Corps officers integrate into specific staff cells. They specifically requested officers from operations, intelligence, logistics, fire support, engineering, and reconnaissance," said Major Robert Viehmeyer, a key staff member of NARVAL, and the Future Operations officer of 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd MarDiv.

These officers were hand selected to collaborate as subject matter experts in their fields to ensure ORION was effectively planned for with French and other European counterparts.

Allowing officers who specialized in their field to participate in NARVAL gave the Marines and Sailors personal insight into the French military's training facilities, equipment, capabilities, and allowed them to give proper guidance on courses of action for each mission.

[Read more, click here](#)

### ● Budget

President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin both defended the vaccine requirement this week as necessary for military health and readiness. Whether the president may veto the final legislation because of the provision's inclusion remains unclear.

So far this year, more than 8,000 active-duty service members have been dismissed from the ranks for refusing the vaccine. The vast majority of troops have agreed to the shots.

Oponents have argued that because most troops are young and fit, and because the military is in the midst of a recruiting crisis, the vaccine mandate is discouraging some potential recruits and forcing others out of the ranks.

The authorization bill language does not include any language mandating troops dismissed for refusing the vaccine to be reinstated, another demand of conservative lawmakers.

The \$817 billion topline for military spending is about \$45 billion above what the White House requested in its budget proposal last spring. Included in that extra money are a host of personnel and equipment priorities that lawmakers say are needed to counter inflation and ensure force readiness.

The 4.6% pay raise included in the authorization bill will be the largest troops have received in 20 years.

For junior enlisted troops, the 4.6% hike would mean about \$1,300 more next year in take-home pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$2,500 more. For an O-4 with 12 years' service, it's more than \$4,500 in extra pay.

The measure also includes language allowing service officials flexibility in housing stipends in high-cost regions of the country, in an effort to blunt the effects of high inflation on military families.

It expands the new Basic Needs Allowance from 130% of the federal poverty line as a

baseline for help to 150%, and even higher in certain circumstances.

And along with reauthorization of a host of existing recruitment bonuses and specialty pays, the measure includes "targeted recruitment incentives to ensure the military can meet its recruiting and retention needs."

Beyond that, the bill authorizes \$32.6 billion to increase the U.S. naval fleet, including for 11 battle force ships. For the Army, it also authorizes funding increases for the CH-47 heavy lift helicopter, the UH-60 Blackhawk medium lift helicopter and the MQ-1 Gray Eagle drone.

It also allocates \$2.7 billion to procure new munitions. This is in part to backfill equipment sent to Ukraine but also designed to generally expand production capacity going forward.

Notably, it waives some restrictions for Pentagon contracts on munitions to Ukraine or to increase the Defense Department's critical munitions stockpile.

And the measure provides \$1 billion to more than double the National Defense Stockpile — the U.S. strategic reserve of critical minerals — after years of depletion, highlighting congressional efforts to decrease Chinese influence in the U.S. defense supply chain.

The bill also authorizes funding for five more F-35A aircraft as well as F-22 modernization. It does allow the Biden administration to proceed with plans to retire the A-10 aircraft, a move that Congress has long opposed.

Even with apparent agreement on the authorization bill, lawmakers will still need to pass an appropriations bill for fiscal 2023 in order for the Defense Department to get and spend the money outlined in the \$817 billion policy measure. Government agencies have been operating off a temporary budget since Oct. 1, the start of fiscal 2023.

The House and Senate have until Dec. 16 to pass a full year budget or another budget extension or risk a partial government shutdown. Chamber leaders have said they are hopeful to announce a compromise on those spending issues in the next few days.

## The Skyline ~ Naval Air Station Meridian, Miss.

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# Local Happenings

## DECEMBER

**1-31: Merrehope Trees of Christmas** Mondays-Saturdays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Sundays 1-4 p.m. at Merrehope. Enjoy the Christmas spirit as you tour these beautiful historical homes and see over 50 exquisitely decorated trees and holiday exhibits. Tickets are \$15 for adults; \$10 for seniors, military and students; call 601-483-8439.

**9: Emmylou Harris** at 7:30 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. Few artists have achieved such honesty or revealed such maturity in their writing. Harris continues to share the hard-earned wisdom that comes with getting older. And, as always, she continues to resolutely look ahead. Call 601-696-2200.

**8-11: Meet me in St. Louis** at 7 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday at the Meridian Little Theatre. It is the summer of 1903, and everyone in the Smith family eagerly anticipates the opening of the 1904 World's Fair. Over the course of a year, the family's mutual respect, tempered with good-natured humor, helps them through romance, opportunity, and heartbreaks. Call 601-482-6371.

**18: Christmas with Classical Guitarist Giovanni De Chiaro** from 5-8 p.m. at Merrehope. After many years, acclaimed classical guitarist Giovanni De Chiaro returns to Merrehope to lend his talents to some of the most celebrated Christmas music of all time. Tickets are \$50 (includes concert, tour & hors d'oeuvres); call 601-483-8439.

# First woman to serve as a submarine XO reports for duty

**By MC2 Molly Crawford**  
Commander, Submarine Force,  
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

"It's 2022 and women are still doing the 'first' of things?" is how Lt. Cmdr. Amber Cowan started her conversation in the Public Affairs office at Submarine Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The submarine officer stopped by for an interview between classes while completing the Submarine Command Course in Pearl Harbor. The Colorado Springs, Colo. native has two grandfathers who served in the U.S. Air Force, and she attended the University of Washington on a scholarship from the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps, her head full of dreams of becoming an aviator. Her eyesight kept her grounded, but then the opportunity to be among the first women to serve aboard submarines opened up. It was everything she was looking for, and she's never looked back.

Lt. Cmdr. Amber Cowan, the executive officer of the gold crew of the Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737), from Colorado Springs, Colorado, poses for a portrait at Deterrent Park onboard Naval Base Kitsap - Bangor, November 18, 2022.

On Nov. 12, 2022 Cowan became the executive officer (XO) of the Gold Crew of the Ohio-class ballistic missile subma-

rine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737), making her the first woman to serve as XO of a U.S. Navy submarine.

Cowan was in the first cohort of women to serve aboard submarines. After graduating from the University of Washington in 2010, she received her first set of orders to attend Nuclear Power School in Goose Creek, South Carolina, the first of many schools required for submarine officers.

The Nuclear Power School curriculum covered topics like math, physics, chemistry and nuclear reactor technology, and after completing Power School she attended Naval Prototype Training Unit and Submarine Officer Basic course. Then Cowan, along with the rest of her classmates, reported to submarines across the Navy as division officers.

Cowan's first boat was the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Maine (SSBN 741) (Blue). Over the course of three years, which included three-and-a-half strategic deterrence patrols, she served as the Main Propulsion Assistant, Damage Control Assistant and Tactical Systems Officer.

"I started in the engine room, which is where we build our foundation," said Cowan. "It teaches officers to trust their enlisted counterparts and also have ownership of and in a watch team."

[Read more, click here](#)



Meridian-Lauderdale County Public Library Presents  
**SANTA'S WORKSHOP**  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22  
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM  
Meet Santa & Mrs. Claus  
Enjoy crafts  
\*Angie's petting zoo & pony rides\*  
\*10:00 am - 1:00 pm\*  
Hourly door prizes  
Storytime with Mrs. Claus  
\*Vitalant Blood Drive\*  
\*11:00 am - 2:30 pm\*  
Family Fish Camp Food Truck  
SnoBiz



### Christmas Tree Safety

As you deck the halls this holiday season, be fire smart. A small fire that spreads to a Christmas tree can grow large very quickly.

- PICKING THE TREE**
  - Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.
- PLACING THE TREE**
  - Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 2" from the base of the trunk.
  - Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
  - Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
  - Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.
- LIGHTING THE TREE**
  - Use lights that are listed by a qualified testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use.
  - Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect.
  - Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
  - Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

**After Christmas**  
Get rid of the tree after Christmas or when it is dry. Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the home.  
Check with your local community to find a recycling program.  
Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

**FACTS**

- Almost one-third of home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems.
- Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious.
- A heat source too close to the tree causes more than one in every five of the fires.

Your Source for SAFETY Information  
NFPA Public Education Division • 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02269  
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### Winter Holiday Safety

Winter holidays are a time for families and friends to get together. But that also means a greater risk for fire. Following a few simple tips will ensure a happy and fire-safe holiday season.

- HOLIDAY DECORATING**
  - Be careful with holiday decorations. Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant.
  - Keep lit candles away from decorations and other things that can burn.
  - Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
  - Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect.
  - Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so the cords do not get damaged.
  - Keep decorations away from windows and doors.
- HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING**
  - Test your smoke alarms and tell guests about your home fire escape plan.
  - Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
  - Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.
  - Stay in the kitchen when cooking on the stovetop.
  - Ask smokers to smoke outside. Remind smokers to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.
  - Provide large, deep ashtrays for smokers. Wet cigarette butts with water before discarding.

**Before Heading Out or to Bed**  
Blow out lit candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

**FACTS**

- More than one-third of home decoration fires are started by candles.
- More than two of every five decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source.

NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION  
The leading information and knowledge resource on fire, electrical and related hazards.  
nfpa.org/education ©NFPA 2019

# Sale... Or

### BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

**New Price 21 foot - 2021 Jayco Travel Camper.** Like new; beige & walnut interior and mattress kept in original plastic. Selling to upgrade to larger size - Price is \$15,000 some accessories included. To view or request pics please contact: Gary 601-575-5062.

**2018 Mallard M185 Travel Trailer.** Sleeps 4 with 1 queen bed/2 bunks.

Easy to tow at 3,575 lbs; only selling because military member is moving overseas. Great living quarters with lake view. Hooked up and ready to live in, including cables, hoses, plus the \$500 towing kit. Asking \$17,000. Call 360-434-3035.

### AUTOMOBILES, ETC.

**2018 Subaru Outback 2.5 limited,** 12k miles; Subaru safety features and warranties included.

Asking \$29k. Call 601-480-5100.

**2017 Dodge Challenger,** grey with racing stripe. \$24k. Call 601-880-3237.

### HOMES/APARTMENTS

**For Rent:** Lake Cabin near NAS Meridian. 1 BD/1 BA; \$700 month. Unfurnished. More info and photos can be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/marketplace/item/851262408853834/>

**For Rent:** 3BD, 2BA

home with washer/dryer, wifi, lawn service and water included. \$1500/month. Call 601-917-8594.

**For Rent:** 3BD/2BA private gated home with 2-car garage in West Lauderdale; 15 minutes from the base. Call 601-737-4569 or 601-934-0739.

**For Rent:** 2BD/1.5BA Home at 3702 Rollins Dr, Lauderdale in Dalewood. 2136 sq ft on a .29 acres lot. Beautiful newly renovated single family home.

Call 973-876-5006.

**For Rent:** 2BD/1.5BA single family home in Dalewood - fully renovated. Fenced in back yard with boat slip & pier. Pets allowed. Pet deposit \$300. \$1,300 rent per month. Call 973-876-5006.

**For Sale By Owner:** 3BD/3BA brick home with sunroom, large fenced in yard. Convenient to shopping and base. \$139K. Call 601-513-3395 or 601-227-1870.

### MISCELLANEOUS

**Service for hire:** Dixie Lawn LLC, lawn care in Meridian. Call 850-376-4499. Military owned company.

To submit an item to the "Sale...Or" column, e-mail adam.prince@navy.mil. Deadline is the Wednesday prior to publication.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free for anyone who works at NAS Meridian. To include your announcement, email adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil



# World gets first look at newest bomber aircraft -- the B-21 Raider

By C. Todd Lopez

DoD News, Defense Media Activity

The Defense Department unveiled its newest bomber aircraft, the B-21 Raider, recently in Palmdale, California. As the first strategic bomber in more than three decades, the Air Force's B-21 will serve as the backbone of America's bomber force, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said.

The B-21 Raider is expected to serve within a larger family of systems for conventional long-range strike, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; electronic attack; communication; and other capabilities. It is nuclear capable and designed to accommodate manned or unmanned operations. Additionally, it will be able to employ a broad mix of stand-off and direct-attack munitions.

At the hangar of aircraft manufacturer Northrop Grumman, the B-21 was unveiled amidst dramatic music and lighting effects. The new bomber has a silhouette similar to that of the B-2 Spirit bomber.

"The B-21 looks imposing," Austin said. "But what's under the frame and the space-age coatings is even more impressive."

The range of the B-21, Austin said, is unmatched by any other bomber.

"It won't need to be based in-theater, it won't need logistical support to hold any target at risk," the secretary said.

Like the B-2 Spirit, the B-21 Raider is a stealth aircraft. It will be hard for adversaries to see that it's coming, Austin said.

"Fifty years of advances in low-observable technology have gone into this aircraft," he said. "Even the most sophisticated air-defense systems will struggle to detect a B-21 in the sky."

Austin also said the B-21 Raider is designed to be easily maintainable, which will help ensure that the aircraft is always ready to go when its needed.

"We don't really have a capability unless we can maintain it," he said. "The B-21 is carefully designed to be the most maintainable bomber ever built."

As a dual-capable penetrating strike stealth bomber, the B-21 Raider is capable of delivering both conventional



Air Force Photo

**The B-21 Raider was unveiled during a ceremony in Palmdale, Calif., Dec. 2. Designed to operate in tomorrow's high-end threat environment, the B-21 will play a critical role in ensuring America's enduring airpower capability.**

and nuclear munitions. It will be able to support joint and coalition forces across the full spectrum of operations, Austin said, and is also designed to be flexible enough to meet the evolving threat environment. "The Raider was built with open-system architecture, which makes it highly adaptable," Austin said. "As the United States continues to innovate, this bomber will be able to defend our country with new weapons that haven't even been invented yet. And the B-21 is multi-functional. It can handle anything from gathering intel, to battle management, to integrating with our allies and partners. And it will work seamlessly across domains, and theaters, and across the joint force."

The B-21 Raider was built by Northrop Grumman and was developed through deep partnership with stakeholders in the U.S. military, Austin said.

"The B-21 is the result of deep teamwork at this plant," he said. "Our Air Force pilots, maintainers and DOD civilians have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with their industry counterparts. In fact, they've been on the production line

here in Palmdale to assist. The B-21 is a testament to the best of America's vibrant and diverse industrial base. This sort of advance that makes us great, and this sort of advance doesn't just happen. It takes investment. It takes cooperation. And it takes partnership."

The secretary said he and the Defense Department are committed to continuing with that kind of cooperation with the defense industrial base to ensure that the best technology America can offer will be available to contribute to the nation's defense.

"The Department is going to continue to invest in tech," he said. "We're going to bring new companies into our supplier base, and we're going to keep honing our acquisitions process to get the right capabilities before we need them."

Development on the B-21 Raider began in 2015 when the Air Force awarded the engineering and manufacturing development contract. The Air Force expects to acquire a minimum of 100 of the aircraft.

The "B-21" designation, according to the Air Force, was chosen because the aircraft is the first new bomber of the 21st century, while the name "Raider" was chosen to represent the Doolittle Raiders, who flew a surprise attack during World War II.

"Eighty years ago, on a cold and rainy April morning, four months after Pearl Harbor, 16 U.S. Army bomber planes took off from an aircraft carrier in the Pacific," Austin explained. "Then-Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle embarked on a daring mission. At high cost, he and his team of aviators flew more than 650 miles to strike distant enemy targets. And the Doolittle Raiders, as they came to be known, showed the strength and the reach of American airpower."

Like the Doolittle Raiders defended America during WWII, the B-21 Raider is expected to do the same now and into the future, Austin said.

"This isn't just another airplane. It's not just another acquisition," Austin said. "It's the embodiment of America's determination to defend the republic that we love. It's a testament to our strategy of deterrence — with the capabilities to back it up, every time and everywhere. That's what America does."



## NO DRONE ZONE

**Drones or radio-controlled aircraft -- known to the military as Unmanned Aircraft Systems or UAS are prohibited to use onboard military installations including NAS Meridian no matter the size, purchase location or type of use - including for recreation.**

**NAS Meridian Instruction 3700.3 states: "The operation of a UAS of any size is strictly prohibited aboard NAS Meridian, whether the operator is located inside or outside of the installation. This prohibition includes the Balfour Beatty Communities housing area."**

## Holiday photo cards: Tradition or dysfunction?

Many of us might remember our mothers driving to stationary stores to peruse boxes of holiday cards, back before the tech revolution brought us digital cameras and printed photo cards. My Mom would select heavy stock Christmas cards printed with Currier and Ives snowy scenes, or cheery plaid bows tied on embossed gold french horns, or leaping white reindeer silhouettes, or sprigs of pine adhered with iridescent glitter mimicking snow.

She bought a dozen or two Christmas cards to give out to her family and dearest friends. Sitting in our sunroom with a cup of hot coffee playing a Johnny Mathis Christmas cassette on one of my brother's abandoned boom boxes, she wrote simple, yet personal notes to each recipient in her perfect first-grade teacher cursive, twinged with her Ken-

**COLUMN**



Molinari

tucky lilt. "Let's try camping again when the kids are out of school — what a hoot that was. If only Ron hadn't broken his toe. Much love and glad tidings to y'all!"

A generation later, my holiday card routine is entirely different. Every year, I reluctantly sit down at my laptop, and brace myself to endure the soul-crushing process.

First, I peruse several hundred digital photos stored on my phone from the previous year. None of them were printed or framed or placed lovingly in a photo album to be cherished. They exist only in a digital black hole. Every so often, I transfer my phone photos to an external hard drive with more storage than I can fathom. Practically speaking, no human will ever enjoy those photos again.

The task of finding a few acceptable photos to create our annual photo card is tedious and often takes me several sittings. Once I've identified the photos, I must then digitally upload them into an acceptable retail platform such as Shutterfly or VistaPrint to create our annual holiday cards. To make my job more complicated, the photo card companies offer hundreds and hundreds of templates to choose from, each with multiple options for color, size, number of photos,

text boxes, fonts, embossing, stock quality, gloss or matte finish, and envelope printing.

Once all the selections have been made and photo uploading begins, I enter a second round of mind-boggling frustration, involving spinning digital wheels, loading errors, pixel inadequacies, and other technical complexities that make me want to stick a fork in my eye.

Even after I've typed in the unpersonalized salutation "Merry Christmas from The Molinaris" and saved my draft, my task isn't complete. There's another difficult choice to be made — how many cards to order. Back in the day, my mother never bought more than a couple dozen, but today, holiday photo cards are typically ordered in pricey bulk quantities of 60 or 100 or more.

To be fair, photo cards are useful for military families, who acquire scores of fast friends and colleagues in all the different places they've lived and worked. People their families connected with, but can't practically visit. I have to admit, photo cards are a great way to reach across the divide with a picture of smiling faces. Yet, I worry that this trend is stripped of personal connection.

My finger trembles over my laptop touchpad as I debate whether to order 100 or 120 photo cards. At a buck a pop, it's a significant expense, and that doesn't even include postage. I know there won't be time to personalize all those cards. Once the boxes arrive, I'll barely have enough time to print out my seven-page address spreadsheet, stuff and address all the envelopes, peel and stick the stamps, and haul them off to the post office in a reusable shopping bag.

Unlike my nostalgic memories of mom with her hot coffee and Johnny Mathis inking Christmas greetings, my annual holiday card task is drenched in the nog of dysfunction, a sticky mix of reluctance, entrapment, panic, and guilt.

So why do I do it? If I skipped photo cards this year, would anyone really notice or care? Probably not, but like so many modern inconveniences in today's chaotic world, I do it because, well ... If I didn't, it just wouldn't be Christmas.

Lisa Smith Molinari's self syndicated columns appear on her blog, [www.themeatandpotatoesofflife.com](http://www.themeatandpotatoesofflife.com) and she recently co-authored *Stories Around the Table: Laughter, Wisdom, and Strength in Military Life* Follow Lisa@MolinariWrites.





# NAS Meridian, MS • Morale, Welfare and Recreation

## Facility Phone Numbers

Fitness Center	679-2379	Library	679-2326	MWR Admin.	679-2551
Liberty Center	679-3760	Rudders Pub & Grill	679-2780	MWR Jobs Line	679-2467
Tickets	679-3773	CDC/CDH	679-2652		
McCain Rec Center	679-2651	SAC	679-5252		
Equipment Rental	679-2609	School Liaison	679-2473		

# CAPTAIN'S CUP

## ★★★ BASKETBALL ★★★

**REGISTRATION:**  
Dec 5, 2022 - Dec 23, 2022

**LEAGUE PLAY:**  
Begins Jan 9, 2023  
(Mondays & Thursdays @ 1730)



**Register via IMLeagues**  
or Contact Kristen Tibbetts @ (601) 679-3384  
additional information





**SKET RANGE**  
CALL (601) 679-2526



## Wreaths & Wine

at Rudders Pub & Grill

Thursday, December 15 at 5pm

\$15 per person. Come make a wreath and enjoy a glass of wine. All participants must register at Community Recreation. Space is limited



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**TICKETS & TRAVEL**  
CALL (601) 679-2526



**MAKING CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS**

STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY

DECEMBER 14 • 1000




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**GINGERBREAD HOUSE SHOWDOWN**

DECEMBER 18 AT THE LIBERTY CENTER

MATERIALS TO BUILD YOUR OWN GINGERBREAD HOUSE WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THE LIBERTY CENTER. ALL GINGERBREAD HOUSES WILL BE JUDGED AT THE END OF THE NIGHT WITH A WINNER ANNOUNCED ON MONDAY.




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**HOLIDAY FAMILY MOVIE**

DECEMBER 18 • 1500 • McCain Rec Center

JOIN US FOR A SCREENING OF THE GRINCH!





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GET READY FOR THE NEW YEAR


STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY

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