

## News Bytes

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## 2023 Navy Region Southeast top Air Traffic Controller, Technician announced

**By MC1 Jacob Sippel**  
Commander, Navy Region Southeast

Commander, Navy Region Southeast announced the nominations for Naval Air Traffic Controller of the Year and Naval Air Traffic Control Technician of the Year for 2023.

“Competition was tough with superb nominees from around the Region,” said Rear Adm. Ian Johnson, Commander, Navy Region Southeast. “I’m extremely proud of

all their hard work and outstanding contributions in support of Naval Aviation.”

Air Traffic Controller 2nd Class Michael Hobbs, from Naval Air Station Meridian, will represent the region for the 2023 Vice Admiral Robert B. Pirie Naval Air Traffic Controller of the Year Award, recognizing the outstanding contributions in operational readiness and safety of flight.

Petty Officer Hobbs’ efforts as an on-the-job training instructor culmi-



Hobbs

nated in over 526 hours on operating positions resulting in 46 qualifications and 16 supervisory designations. His tech-



Healey

nical expertise resulted in the safe completion of more than 234,842 flight operations conducted

at Navy McCain Field, Navy Outlying Field Joe Williams (NOLF), Meridian Regional Airport Key Field, and 11 additional Federal Aviation Authority and Regional airports. During his tenure at NAS Meridian, he has contributed to a combined 704,249 radar and tower flight operations. He has disseminated his level of knowledge and shared his expertise in 1,365 on-the-job training hours for Sailors under his tutelage.

● Region, page 2

## Naval Aviation Technical Training Center Meridian welcomes new site director

From Staff Reports

Naval Aviation Technical Training Center, Meridian recently welcomed their new site director, LT Constantine “Austin” Ramos.

Ramos is a native of the Philippines and graduated high school in 1999. After immigrating to the United States in 2001, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and completed boot camp in Great Lakes, Ill. He attended Aviation Machinist’s Mate “A” school in Pensacola, Fla. and graduated in 2002.

His various assignments in-



Ramos

clude: VS-41 “Shamrocks” in San Diego; VMFAT-101 “Sharpshooters” in Miramar, Calif.; Fleet Readiness Center Northwest

Whidbey Island, Wash., and the maiden deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78).

In 2011, he was advanced to Chief Petty Officer (CPO) and reported to VP-47 “Golden Swordsmen” where he was assigned as branch chief, maintenance control CPO and detachment leading CPO -- completing two deployments in the 4th, 5th and 6th Fleet area of responsibility.

In 2015, Ramos was commissioned to the rank of Ensign under the Limited Duty Officer program. His first officer tour was with HSC-25 “Island Knights”

in Guam where he served as the assistant maintenance officer, detachment maintenance officer and avionics division officer. He completed two 7th Fleet deployments aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6), USNS Wally Schirra (T-AKE-8) and USNS Charles Drew (T-AKE-10).

LT Ramos’ personal awards include the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (with two gold stars) and Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (with three gold stars) as well as multiple unit and service awards.

## Navy lifts ban on Sailors putting hands in pockets, rolls out various new uniform changes

**By Konstantin Toropin**  
Military.com

The Navy has lifted its ban on sailors keeping their hands in their pockets -- a policy rule that drew wide dislike and some internet mockery.

The change was announced Wednesday, along with a host of uniform changes that include the return of a beloved cover for female sailors and loosening of the rules around PT uniforms.

An administrative message said the decisions were the result of “sailor feedback, command-sponsored requests and direction from Navy leadership.”

Among the raft of uniform tweaks and changes were also authorizations for chaplains to wear their new warfare insignia and for the Navy’s forthcoming warrant officer drone pilots to wear their wings.

Still, the biggest change for all sailors is the Navy decision on the hands-in-pockets ban.

“Sailors are authorized to have hands in their pockets when doing so does not compromise safety nor prohibit the proper rendering of honors and courtesies,” the service memo said.

The rule was most fiercely policed in the Navy’s boot camp and training schools and led to a host of memes, social media posts, and complaints that often derided the rule and the chief petty officers seen as the enforcers of the policy.

However, the rule, and the complaints, were not unique to the Navy.

Meanwhile, female sailors are the recipients of many of the new changes rolled out Wednesday.

The Navy is bringing back the female combination cover, also known as “the bucket cover.” The head covering was first worn by women during World War II until its retirement in 2018.

● Uniform, page 2

## State of the Military Symposium



Photo by Penny Randall

**Tom Williams, president of the Defense Communities Development Council, welcomes nearly 100 guests to the 2024 State of the Military Symposium in Jackson, Feb. 21. Representatives from all 15 active duty and National Guard installations across the state attended -- along with representatives from economic development organizations, state and local legislatures. The purpose of the event, which included panels and speakers, is to foster engagement among the military and local communities. NAS Meridian Commanding Officer, CAPT Luke Davis spoke on encroachment solutions around the Navy base. Other topics included: a Military Spouse and Families Roundtable; Climate and Energy Resilience; Defense Community Support of Military Installations and the Mississippi Defense Industry, and Technology.**

## Five bases to test new privately run system for household goods shipments



Photo by Winifred Brown/Army

**A new process for managing service members' household goods will start soon. Shown here, movers load a service member's household goods into a moving truck at a residence in Pacific Grove, Calif.**

**By Karen Jowers**  
Military Times

A limited number of troops and their families are about to see the fruits of U.S. Transportation Command's efforts to improve how household goods are shipped during military moves.

Within a few weeks, officials will announce five locations where they will begin assigning some troops' household goods shipments to HomeSafe Alliance, the new contractor that will manage the flow of belongings around the world.

The new system is designed to improve troops' ability to communicate with their moving company, provide information about the location of their belongings throughout the transit, and improve the claims process. And the Defense Department promises more accountability if things go wrong during a move, like broken or lost items or missed pickup and delivery dates.

"Every single move is important to us. Every service member and family deserve a good quality move, a professional experience, and one that's free of stress," Andy Dawson, director of the of the Defense Personal Property Management Office at TRANSCOM, said during a call with reporters Tuesday. "We couldn't be more excited to move into the next phase and start executing shipments."

Last year, TRANSCOM officials delayed plans to phase in shipments under the new

contract while the Defense Department ensured its software works with the system used by HomeSafe.

"We weren't ready, so the best course of action was to do as we've done until we were ready to go," Dawson said. Technology tests in January showed the team has successfully addressed "the majority of challenges" and is ready to move forward with a "deliberate, conditions-based phase-in" of the program, Dawson said.

The first phase will be limited to local moves in those five areas, within a radius of about 50 miles. Examples of troops who can participate include those moving from off-base housing to on-base housing, or those who are moving off of a base as they retire.

The moves will likely represent less than 1% of the overall DOD move volume this year, Dawson said, as officials don't want to roll out a major change during peak moving season, which typically runs from May to September. Dawson declined to specify the numbers of moves HomeSafe will handle. Most shipments will be moved under the current system this year.

TRANSCOM plans to phase in more moves — focused on domestic shipping first — between September 2024 and peak moving season in 2025. Troops and their families shouldn't expect to see their belongings shipped internationally with HomeSafe until September 2025 at the earliest, Dawson said.

● **Household, page 4**

● **Region**

"Petty Officer Hobbs has been and will continue to be a dedicated and highly intelligent air traffic controller whose commitment and hard work have made a positive and long-lasting impact at this command," said Capt. Luke Davis, NAS Meridian's commanding officer.

"His extraordinary professional leadership skills were instrumental in NAS Meridian achieving numerous milestones, which clearly boosted operational effectiveness and mission readiness."

Electronics Technician 1st Class Ryan Healey, from Naval Air Station Whiting Field, will represent Southeast Region for the 2023 Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence Naval Air Traffic Control Technician of the Year Award, recognizing the outstanding contributions in operational effectiveness and mission readiness.

Healey was the Leading Petty Officer for Naval Air Station Whiting Field Ground Electronics Maintenance Division. He led 18 technicians, both active duty and civilian, in the maintenance and repair of all communications, radar, meteorological, and NAALS

equipment for all 14 airfields with zero equipment caused downtime. Thanks to him, Training Air Wing 5 completed over 1 million flight operations, executed 60% of Chief of Naval Air Training's syllabus, produced 100% of all Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard rotary-wing pilots, and accounted for 17% of all U.S. Navy hours flown worldwide.

All the Navy's initial pilot training takes place in Navy Region Southeast. Close to 1,000 aircraft operate at Naval Air Stations throughout the region, with 1,300 flight students taking to the skies from southeast airfields every year.

"Naval Air Stations play a pivotal role in naval operations, serving as crucial hubs for air support, logistics, and training," said Johnson. "Within Navy Region Southeast, Petty Officers Hobbs and Healey have made significant contributions to the excellence of Naval Aviation, demonstrating exceptional skill, leadership, and dedication, while ensuring the readiness and effectiveness of our naval forces. Best of luck to both as they represent Team Southeast in the forthcoming competition."




**CFS TRAINING**  
Provided by:  
FFSC - PFM  
NAS Meridian

**March 11 - 15, 2024**  
**Monday thru Thursday 0800 - 1600**  
**Friday 0800 - 1530**

**Requirements:**  
E5 or above with COC approval  
6yrs or more of service  
12 months or more remaining at current command  
Financially stable  
Committed to providing sound financial counseling to service members and their families  
Be available to assist other CFS's and/or commands, including other branches of the military



To register contact FFSC NAS Meridian at 601-679-2360/2508 or email: marie.s.brinston@navy.mil

● **Uniform**

Then-Navy Secretary Ray Maybus retired the cover in the interest of making Navy uniforms more unisex but, since then, its return has been consistently advocated for by female sailors.

The female combination cover can be worn by sailors of any rank with the service dress and dinner dress uniforms and by chief petty officers and officers while in service khaki and summer white uniforms.

The message, however, noted that "the bucket cover will not be available for personal purchase at Navy Exchange Uniform Centers and will need to be privately obtained if desired for wear."

Women are also now allowed to wear T-shirts "specifically designed for female bodies with Navy uniforms" -- as long as they still look like the regular service shirts in color, fabric and neck cut.

"The intent of this policy update is to address expressed dissatisfaction re-

garding the required wear of male or unisex T-shirts that are not designed to fit female bodies," the memo explained.

In addition, women can now wear false eyelashes or eyelash extensions that "project a natural appearance and are no longer than 14 millimeters in length as measured from the eyelid to the tip of the eyelash."

Finally, all sailors are now allowed to wear black or Navy blue leggings or tights with the service's PT shorts and wear "commercially procured coyote brown backpacks" while in the Navy Working Uniform.

The new policy also notes that the Navy is continuing its efforts to provide maternity uniforms through its pilot program.

It is gathering survey and fit data on the uniforms "that is crucial to planning, research and execution of uniform improvements and uniform and grooming policy updates."



**See, Something,  
Say Something...**

Onboard NAS Meridian contact  
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Command Investigator  
**601-679-2502**

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

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# Local Happenings

## FEBRUARY

**22-25: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)** Thursday-Saturday at 7 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Meridian Little Theatre. Three madcap men in tights weave their wicked way through all of Shakespeare's comedies, histories, and tragedies in one wild ride that will leave you breathless and helpless with laughter. Call 601-482-6371 or visit <http://www.meridianlittletheatre.com/>

## MARCH

**1: Full Moon on 5th!** from 6-9 p.m. on 5th Street between 22nd and 23rd Ave, downtown Meridian. String lights and two giant illuminated moons set the mood for a unique block party that you don't want to miss. This laid back event has great food, live music, and a revolving showcase of local art talent. Call 601.480.6100 or visit <https://www.acesmeridian.org/>

**8: Blues Series – Benstrings and Par from Ferfect** from 6-9 p.m. at Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience. Get ready for a soulful night at Maxie's Juke Joint Blues Series featuring the sensational Benstrings and Par from Ferfect. Call 601-581-1550, ext 35 or visit <https://www.msarts.org/events/blues-series-benstrings-and-par-from-ferferct/?occurrence=2024-03-08>

# Area Happenings

## FEBRUARY

**24-25: Mississippi Gem, Mineral, Fossil & Jewelry Show** starting Saturday at 9 a.m. until Sunday at 4 p.m. at the Mississippi Trade Mart, 1200 Mississippi St, Jackson. Visit <https://xpopress.com/show/profile/1395/mississippi-gem-mineral-fossil-jewelry-show>

## MARCH

**10: An Evening with John Cusack** from 6-9 p.m. at Jemison Concert Hall, 1200 10th Ave S, Birmingham, AL. Join us for a special screening of the film Love and Mercy starring John Cusack followed by a live Q&A with the actor himself! Visit <https://www.alyssstephens.org/events/john-cusack/>

**21-24: Louisiana Crawfish Festival 2024** in New Orleans. Shrimp boats and oyster luggers fishing at bayous are part of Louisiana's heritage. For information, visit <https://rove.me/to/new-orleans/louisiana-crawfish-festival>

## Navy expands enlisted billet-based advancement policy to new ratings

The Navy is expanding the Detailing Marketplace Assignment Policy, the enlisted career management tool for reducing manning gaps at sea, to sailors in the damage controlman and aviation boatswain's mate ratings.

The Detailing Marketplace Assignment Policy, known as DMAP, allows sailors in sea-intensive ratings E-6 and below who wrap up a four-year apprentice sea tour to receive certain benefits and promote if they sign on to another three-year sea tour.

Sailors must complete a Rating Knowledge Exam in March, which upon passage, allows them to compete for higher billets starting in June by applying for jobs in the MyNavy Assignment marketplace, or if their commanding of-

ficer taps them for an open billet.

"Once matched to a billet at the next higher rank, the Sailor must obligate service to complete the full tour at the new rank in the new billet via extension or reenlistment, as necessary, and may be frocked 30 days prior to transfer," the NAVADMIN said. "Sailors will be advanced by the gaining command upon arrival in the new billet and after completion of any required training."

Whereas other phases of DMAP focused on the promotion from E-4 to E-5, this latest rollout focuses on the promotion to E-5 and E-6 in those two ratings, said Rear Adm. James Waters III, director of the Military Personnel Plans and Policy Division.

-- By Diana Stancy

[Read more, click here](#)

## CENTCOM intercepts Iranian weapons shipment intended for Houthis

A U.S. Coast Guard cutter, forward deployed to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, seized advanced conventional weapons and other lethal aid originating in Iran and bound to Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen from a vessel in the Arabian Sea on Jan. 28.

The U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel-class fast-response cutter USCGC Clarence Sutphin Jr. (WPC 1147), assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, located the vessel and boarded it in the Arabian Sea. The boarding team discovered over

200 packages that contained medium-range ballistic missile components, explosives, unmanned underwater/surface vehicle (UUV/USV) components, military-grade communication and network equipment, anti-tank guided missile launcher assemblies, and other military components.

The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of such aid violates U.N. Security Council Resolution 2216 (as extended and renewed by resolutions 2675 and 2707).

-- From U.S. Central Command

[Read more, click here](#)

## NATO military spending has steadily increased

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said in a statement that NATO has projected 18 allies will spend at least 2% of their gross domestic product on defense this year, and those not spending at least 2% should have plans to swiftly meet that target.

"I welcome what [NATO] Secretary General Stoltenberg yesterday called an 'unprecedented rise' in defense spending across our European and Canadian allies, who have added more than \$600 billion for defense since the Defense Investment Pledge was made in 2014, including a real increase of 11% in defense spending in 2023 alone," Austin said in today's statement. "The secretary

general projects that in 2024, 18 allies will spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense — a major improvement over 2014, when only three hit that target. Any ally not spending at least 2% of GDP on defense this year should have plans to swiftly meet that target."

Austin said he was pleased by the progress the U.S. and allies made at today's meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels and underscored the importance of the alliance to U.S. security. "NATO is the strongest military alliance in history, and it is crucial for America's continued security," he said in the statement.

-- By David Vergun

[Read more, click here](#)

# Sale... Or

### BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

**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

**New! For Rent:** 3 BD/1.5 BA home 15 min-

utes from NAS at 4814 36th Ave. New refrigerator and 2-year old AC & furnace. Call Terrance at 469-318-9769.

**For Rent:** 3 BD/1.5 BA with another room used as a gym. All kitchen appliances included. Large backyard. Address 145 Skyland Drive, Meridian. About 25 minutes to Navy Base. \$900 per month, with \$900 deposit. Available Aug. 1. No pets. Call 601-490-0849.

**For Rent:** 3BD/2BD home near Causeyville Road. Furnished in quiet neighborhood. \$900 per month. 954-895-5485,

601-692-4048 or 606-571-0820.

**For Rent:** Water front home in Dalewood. Spacious two-story home facing the Lake; great for fishing and relaxing. Remodeled kitchen and new appliances. Rent is \$1,800; please call 813-406-9687.

**For Sale:** 3BD/2BA Home with 2,560 sq. ft. Sits on 1 & 1/2 lots on dead end with privacy woods on 3 sides. Asking \$180,000. Contact: lucindawnichols@gmail.com, call 601-527-7829 or 601-917-6145.

**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 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

**New! For Sale:** Husqvarna RZ 4623 Zero Turn Mower. 46 inch cut. \$900. Call 601-616-4242.

**Nanny or caregiver services.** Call Alice at

601-934-1866 or 601-679-8112. Has installation access; can take children to school and pick up and available days, nights and weekends.

**Event Space for Rent:** Deer Creek Banquet Hall. 6000 sq. ft. indoor with 1600 sq. ft. outdoor spaces for rent for gatherings and events. Call Reginald at 251-455-1559.

**To submit an item to the "Sale...Or" column, email adam.w.prince.civ@us.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](mailto:adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil)

# Inside the Navy's quest to fix its recruiting crisis

By Diana Stancy  
Military Times

Last year, the Navy hit a grim milestone for the first time in its history, one that leaders hoped they would never see.

It missed its recruiting targets by thousands of new sailors, as each military branch — with the exception of the Marine Corps — struggled to bring young Americans into the enlisted ranks.

Navy brass and other service leaders have attributed today's unprecedented recruiting crisis to a variety of factors, but one thing remains clear for sea service leaders: This cannot continue, and the Navy must chart a different course.

"I think we can absorb one year of missing mission," Vice Adm. Brendan McLane, commander of Naval Surface Forces, said at the Surface Navy Association's annual conference in January. "Two years — that's going to be a problem, that's going to have an effect."

Navy leaders insist a variety of measures are in place to fix the problem, but how they will play out this year remains to be seen.

At the end of fiscal 2023 in October, the Navy announced it had recruited 30,236 new active duty sailors, short of its 37,700 planned accessions for the year. The service also re-



US Navy photo

**The Navy is rolling out a bevy of reforms to remedy its recruiting shortfalls.**

cruited 1,948 Reserve enlisted personnel, missing its 3,000 goal.

The Navy also did not bring in enough new officers, recruiting only 2,080 new active duty officers rather than the 2,532 target, and 1,167 Reserve officers rather than the 1,940 target.

Even so, the Navy originally braced itself for a more dire outcome at the end of fiscal 2023. The service had ex-

pected to fall short by approximately 13,000 recruits at the start of fiscal 2023, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti said in September 2023.

Regardless of reasons, the recruiting crisis is exacerbating a shortage of sailors at sea, according to officials.

There are currently 22,000 gaps in at-sea billets for ranks E1 to E4 — a problem dating back to 2016, but one aggravated by the current recruiting environment, according to the Chief of Naval Personnel, Vice Adm. Richard Cheeseman.

Navy Personnel Command said most manning gaps are at the apprentice level, and units may request temporary personnel to join deployments to ensure full manning needs as a short-term fix.

Fewer recruits entering the fleet means there are fewer apprentices that can serve in sea-duty billets — which could pose problems down the line.

"We can absorb recruiting misses in the short term, but long term if the same trend continues, it would place additional stress on the force, which in turn would impact readiness and capabilities," Capt. Jodie Cornell, a spokesperson for Cheeseman, said in an email to Navy Times. "The Navy continues to monitor this issue, but to date has been able to take the right steps to ensure the Fleet is fully and properly manned."

[Read more, click here](#)

## ● Household

"The goal is to responsibly roll out the system as quickly as possible," Dawson said.

The shift to a central shipping contractor comes as the volume of military household goods shipments continues to fall in 2024.

The number of shipments logged in the first seven weeks of 2024 was 13% lower than the same period in 2023, Dawson said. TRANSCOM did not provide the total number of shipments handled so far this year by press time. Annually, the volume was 6% lower in 2023 than in 2022, Dawson said.

Why?

"I don't have specifics, but I'd say it's a combination of factors," Dawson said, citing recruiting challenges, a shrinking military workforce and operational needs overseas. Those issues, combined with service policies that can affect the number of moves in a year, are reducing the flow of household goods, he said.

The military logged nearly 303,000 shipments of household goods in 2022. However, shipments don't equal the number of moves because some service members send off multiple shipments over the course of a single permanent change of station.

Fewer orders can alleviate some of the pressure on the shipping industry to keep up, particularly during the

busy summer moving season.

For years, shortages of truck drivers and the workers who pack, load and unload people's personal belongings, as well as other supply chain issues, have further complicated military moves. In 2018, after a particularly brutal moving season for troops and their families, U.S. Transportation Command launched an effort to fix many of the long-standing problems that plague service members when their household goods are moved, from delays in pickups and deliveries, to lost and broken belongings, difficulties with filing claims and more.

That effort led TRANSCOM to award HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture of KBR Services and Tier One Relocation, a three-year, \$6.2 billion contract to manage hundreds of companies that ferry household goods around the globe. The contract's value could grow to about \$18 billion over a decade.

TRANSCOM began the shift away from its longtime piecemeal approach in January 2023, after protests of HomeSafe's win had subsided. That transition will run through Feb. 11, 2025, with an extra \$60 million tacked onto the contract.

TRANSCOM officials argue the new system will bring more accountability to companies involved in PCS moves. The contract essentially outsources the management of the household goods shipping process, which provides

door-to-door transportation and warehouse services for people's belongings as they transition to jobs at new bases.

HomeSafe has been compiling a network of companies to provide those services, which includes many of the 800-plus companies that currently handle shipping under the DOD-run program. TRANSCOM will continue to oversee the enterprise.

Dawson expects service members will encounter a more user-friendly process, starting with their request to ship goods in the MilMove system. That request will go to the local military shipping office for review and approval, before being passed to the HomeSafe Connect system.

HomeSafe will be the single point of contact, addressing communications problems troops have with the current system and letting troops know the location of their shipment throughout the process, Dawson said.

Service members can choose whether to have their household goods surveyed virtually or in person ahead of their departure; their inventory will be fully automated. Their belongings will be assigned bar codes that help facilitate claims in case of any loss or damage.

That electronic inventory will replace the pages-long paper inventories that chronicle each PCS, as well as stickers that military families currently collect on their household goods across many moves.

## Canine Academy: Puppy training tips for a rowdy dog

Our family's third Labrador Retriever, a goofy guy named Gilligan, turned one last week. Suddenly, everyone's a dog expert, hell-bent on enriching me with their wealth of canine knowledge. People must see me struggling with rambunctious Gillig, and want to assert dominance, nipping, bossing, and taking control.

Thankfully, no one has humped my leg yet.

Just last week, Gillig and I joined a new walking group outside the local recreation center. The congregating women noticed Gillig sniffing the bushes and raised their voices to an excited pitch. Gillig strained at his harness, wanting to flop his big paws onto the women's expensive coats, deposit yellow hairs all over their Lululemon pants, and lick them right in the mouth.

"Gilly! Back!" I repeatedly tried to make him sit.

"Isn't he sweet!" they squealed, while Gillig wriggled to break free.

"He's turning one, and he's a handful," I said, apologetically.

"Oh, but he's a puppy! You just need to be consistent," they advised.

I smiled and nodded my head with brows raised as if to say, "You're so wise," when my inner voice retorted, "Thanks for the expert advice, Captain Obvious."

"He'll go to Island Canine Academy for behavior training in a couple months," I explained. "Gilly's off to college!" I joked. "We've promised him a tiny lava lamp and a 'Lassie' poster for his crate at the Academy, isn't that right buddy?"

No one laughed.

A short lady with a red hat that made her look like a gnome told me about her Westie named Charlie. "I trained him using treats. You should try that," Gnome said. My inner voice dripped sarcasm, "Eureka, Einstein! Treats to train dogs? Who knew! Thank you from the bottom of my ignoramus heart!"

Our walking group leader arrived, and we began the planned four-mile trek. The gaggle of women naturally settled into packs of two or three, while Gillig tugged, stopped, sniffed, and yanked along with me.

I was between two packs when I heard, "Hey!" A thin woman wearing a hat with a humongous, mauve pom-pom trotted to catch up with me, blurting

breathlessly, "Get a gentle leader. It's the only thing that works for pulling dogs." I've been told by countless people that this or that collar/leash/harness is the only one that works. Prong, electric, slip, martingale, harness — everyone and their brother's cousin's mother-in-law, seemed to have an opinion for me. I tried to tell Pom-pom about my experiences with gentle leaders, but she just kept yammering.

POM-POM: "The gentle leader goes around the dog's—"

ME: "Yes, I know how it—"

POM-POM: "—snout, and it keeps them from—"

ME: "—works, because I used gentle leaders for our first—"

POM-POM: "—pulling. You need to get one, seriously."

ME: "—dog to stop his pulling."

Mercifully, Gillig dragged me toward a fat squirrel ahead, leaving Pom-pom behind. Another woman in an ice-blue beanie saw Gillig tugging me and chirped, "My sister has Golden Retrievers, and she swears, 'If you can teach dogs to retrieve balls, you can teach them anything.'" My inner voice couldn't stay silent any longer.

"You're sister says that teaching a RETRIEVER to RETRIEVE is the key to dog training? She's a real genius that one," I sassed Beanie.

Gilly stopped to sniff grass, and I heard Gnome call out, "Do you brush Gillig's teeth?"

"Well, yes, but he's afraid of the —" I began, but like Pom-pom, Gnome's questions were merely rhetorical.

GNOME: "We brush Charlie's teeth every night, before he—"

ME: "—brush, but he likes the Peanut Butter dog toothpaste, so I—"

GNOME: "—goes to bed and says his prayers, and—"

ME: "—have to use a cloth next time."

GNOME: "—the vet says Charlie's teeth are perfect."

My inner voice quipped, "Who died and made you Cesar Milan?"

As we approached the rec center at the end of our trek, Gillig stopped abruptly, circled three times, then crouched to make "a deposit" on the grass in front of the bank. The women walked on, without noticing that I'd fallen behind the pack.

"Forget behavior school, I'll train you myself," I announced to Gillig while he concentrated. "Don't worry," I assured him, "we'll still get you that lava lamp."

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.com](mailto:Lisa@MolinariWrites.com).

## COLUMN



Molinari



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