Volume 61, Number 11

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May 25, 2023

News Bytes

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Federal judge extends temporary halt on appointed judges in Mississippi capital

~ Click here ~

Coroner: Bodies recovered from Mississippi river confirmed as missing teens

~ Click here ~

Surfing alligator seen relaxing at Alabama beach amid the waves

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8 tips for parents and teens on social media use — from the U.S. surgeon general

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British Aviator earns
Wings of Gold

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Grilling Safety Tips

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MATSS-1 Marines partner with Northeast NJROTC cadets for Orienteering Course





Photos by MC2 Molly Crawford

Cadets from the Northeast High School NJROTC program participate in an orienteering class with Marines from Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One onboard NAS Meridian, May 19. Orienteering is a navigational sport using maps and compasses to move from point to point on unfamiliar terrain with speed.

Senior Chief Frocking



Photos by Penny Randall

Above: NAS Meridian Command Master Chief Craig Johnson places a cover on HTCS Shelia Harley -- as LSCS Jennifer Lassen and MACS Jeremy Kelley look on -- during a pinning ceremony at the Air Operations building onboard NAS Meridian, May 25. Below: ACCS Chase Mayer receives his pins from his family and ACCS Charles Camp during the ceremony. Harley and Mayer were selected for advancement to the rank of Senior Chief Petty Officer.



Vets will see a cost-of-living boost in benefit checks next year

By Leo Shane III

House lawmakers this week finalized plans to guarantee a cost-of-living boost in veterans benefits next year, sending legislation to the White House to be signed into law in coming days.

The move guarantees that veterans' support payments will keep pace with increases in Social Security checks and other federal stipends. It's a non-controversial annual procedure for Congress, but one that needs to be finished before the end of the year to ensure that veterans benefits keep pace with inflation costs.

Despite ongoing partisan fights on Capitol Hill over federal spending, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act was adopted by both chambers without any opposition.

The legislation promises that VA benefits — including disability compensation, clothing allowances, and survivors' support — will see a cost-of-living hike in 2024 equal to that of Social Security payouts. The Social Security hikes are automatic each year, set under federal law. But Congress must re-approve the veterans hikes each year.

In January, the Social Security costof-living increase (and the veterans benefits hike) was 8.7%, the highest in 40 years. That reflected higher than expected costs for things like housing costs, groceries and fuel purchases over the last year.

The Senior Citizens League, a non-partisan advocacy group focused on the rights of older Americans, has predicted the 2024 hike will be around 3.1%.

Lawmakers said they worked to finish the veterans cost-of-living guarantee earlier than usual this year to signal financial stability for veterans.

● Vets, page 2

British aviator earns 'Wings of Gold' in May pinning ceremony

There was a naval aviator designation ceremony May 19 on-board Naval Air Station Meridian.

One Royal navy aviator received his "Wings of Gold" during the ceremony. The naval aviator designation ceremony is not prescribed specifically by U.S. Navy regulations, but has emerged as an honored product of the rich heritage of naval tradition. It marks the culmination of nearly two years of specialized training, which has prepared these officers for the rigorous demands of aerial combat and carrier operations — earning each the title of "Naval Aviator" and the right to wear the coveted "Wings of Gold."



LT Ben Gallagher

Awards Quarters



Photo by MC2 Molly Crawford

Sailors pose for a group photo during an awards ceremony at the Air Operations building onboard NAS Meridian, May 18. Awardees include: (from left) MA1 Calvin Green, AC1 George Hill and MA3 Jalen Wilson.

NMCRS Awards Luncheon



Photo by Penny Randall

Volunteers with NAS Meridian's Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society were honored for their many hours of dedicated volunteer service during a luncheon, May 19. They included: Lisa Johnson, NAS Meridian's Chairman of Volunteers, 1000 hours of service; LCDR Kelly Ricketts, ABH1 Travis Bond, LN1 Christopher Salisburg, SSgt Christopher Jaeger and Sgt Donterrius Bell, all 100 hours. Not pictured are AZ1 Tina Marie Anthony and AZ1 Juliann Catignas, 100 hours; and AZ1 Adam Bissen, 300 hours. Thank you to Bill Whitmire and Theresa Front, who traveled to Meridian from Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society Gulfport Office to present the awards.

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY FRIDAY, MAY 26 10:00AM EAST MISSISSIPPI VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK 5955 M STREET, MERIDIAN, MS JOIN US FOR AN IN PERSON CEREMONY AS WE REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY.

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Navy secretary honors Marine guards who helped evacuate Sudan embassy

By Irene Loewenson Military Times

The Marine security guards who were stationed at the U.S. embassy in Sudan before deadly fighting prompted an evacuation received medals Friday from the top civilian in the Department of the Navy.

At Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro pinned medals to the chests of the 12 Marines who were involved in preparing for the April 23 evacuation, according to a Marine Corps news release the day of the ceremony.

"The example that you have set protecting the life of the ambassador and the lives of all the people who were at the embassy has been nothing short of extraordinary," Del Toro said, according to the release. "I wanted to make sure that before you left this building and head onto other assignments, that I came

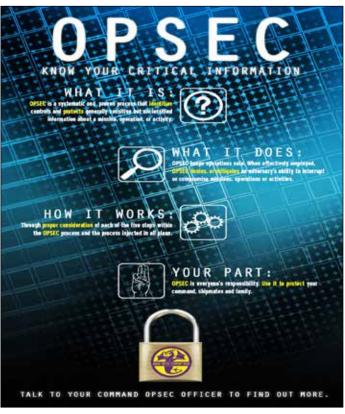
here today to look you in the eye and say, 'Thank

The Marines who still have time left to serve in the embassy security program have received new assignments and will begin traveling back overseas, according to the release.

The detachment commander, Staff Sgt. Derek Ferrari, received a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, awarded to service members who act "in a manner above that normally expected, and sufficient to distinguish the individual above those performing similar services," according to the awards manual.

Eleven Marines received Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, which recognizes merit that doesn't rise to the level of a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, according to the awards manual.

Read more, click here



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Local Happenings

MAY

29: Memorial Day Tribute at the Lauderdale County Court House, 500 Constitution Ave., Meridian, MS 39301 at 10 a.m. The keynote speaker is Col. Cynthia Smith, 186th Air Refueling Wing, Key Field.

JUNE -

1: Get the Scoop Education Expo from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at the EMEPA Meridian Office Auditorium, 2128 Highway 39 North. Enjoy free Mississippi State Bully ice cream while gaining valuable knowledge and resources on energy savings, electrical and weather safety, and high-speed fiber internet. Call 601-581-8623.

2: State Games of Mississippi Opening Ceremony from 5-9 p.m. at Meridian City Hall. Food and beverage booths open at 5 p.m.; Parade of Athletes begins at 7:30 p.m.; and the ceremonies conclude with fireworks at 8:30 p.m. Event free to the public; call 601-482-0205.

9: Blues Series- Mickey Rogers & Band from 6-9 p.m. at the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience. Spend your Friday night at Maxie's Juke Joint at The MAX with a performance by Mickey Rogers, a long-time bluesman and guitarist from Greenville, Mississippi. Cash bar Registration Required. Tickets are \$20; call 601-581-1550 ext 35.

19: Juneteenth & Al Wilson Day Celebration from noon-4 p.m. at the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience. Meridian Mayor Jimmie Smith proclaimed June 19 "Al Wilson Day" in 2022. This will be a celebration of this proclamation and Juneteenth. For information call, Laura Hester at 601-581-1550, ext 35.





U.S. looks to deter Russia in Black Sea region

The Black Sea is a crucial crossroads for the world and one that is critically challenged, said Mara Karlin, assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans and capabilities.

Karlin, who spoke at the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum in Bucharest, Romania, knows well how crucial the region is and spoke of how it fits into the U.S. National Defense Strategy.

"First and foremost, the Black Sea region is an area of critical geostrategic importance," Karlin said in her videotaped presentation. "It links Europe to the Middle East and beyond, and it is a key node for transit infrastructure and energy resources."

The Black Sea was a key part of the Silk Road before the birth of Christ. It linked the Roman Empire to Asia. The sea was a bridge for the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and it has been an avenue of trade, migration and war. "It is also a key front line for transatlantic security," she said. "Today, it is the site of the largest conflict in Europe since World War II."

Russia's invasion of neighboring Ukraine has far-reaching impacts for the Black Sea region, and the United States is working with allies and partners to counter Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression.

-- from Jim Garamone, DOD News

Read more, click here

Bee-hind the scenes: Protecting the environment, saving the bees

What do you do with 500,000 bees? After Kupono Solar Project personnel discovered a wild beehive on Feb. 13 while working on a berm at the construction site of the future solar panels at the West Loch Annex on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, they focused on relocating the bees to a local bee farm with a view toward protecting the environment.

"A decision was made to not exterminate the bees, which is a standard practice along many construction companies, but rather save the bees and relocate them," said Alex Volobuev, project manager for Ameresco, a solar project contractor working in partnership with the U.S. Navy.

Ameresco contacted a professional

beekeeper who came out the same day and brought a new beehive to provide a new home for the bees at a bee farm located on the North Shore of Oahu. The beekeeper was able to collect 97% of the bees, including the queen bee, estimating a total of 500,000 bees.

"We're technically just moving the bees from the pile of rocks or underneath the trailer to a bee box and taking them to a 'Bee'fugee," said Stanislav Abdullin, owner and beekeeper for HI Honey Farms. "That's what we call a separate location where we treat them and take care of them, making sure they don't have any disease so they don't contaminate the main apiary."

> -- From Anna Marie G. General, Commander, Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs

> > Read more, click here

USS Jack H. Lucas successfully completes acceptance trials

The future USS Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125) successfully completed acceptance trials, returning to Huntington Ingalls Industries' Ingalls Shipbuilding division May 18. DDG 125 is the first Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer built in the Flight III configuration.

During acceptance trials, the ship and its crew performed a series of demonstrations for review by the U.S. Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV). INSURV uses these demonstrations to validate Navy specifications

and requirements prior to delivery of the ship to the U.S. Navy.

"As the first Flight III ship, the future USS Jack H. Lucas will bring cutting edge capability to the Fleet" said Capt. Seth Miller, DDG 51 program manager, Program Executive Office (PEO) Ships. "This week's trials represent a significant milestone in demonstrating the ship's readiness for delivery and beginning test and evaluation efforts."

-- From Team Ships Public Affairs

Read more, click here

Sale... O

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 mili-

tary member is moving overseas. Great 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, ET

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.

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: 2 BD/1 1/2 BA 1100 square foot home in Dalewood with main lake access. Asking \$1300 a month. Email: rosscandeloproperties@gmail.com for information..

For Rent: Lake Cabin

near NAS Meridian. 1 BD/1 BA; \$700 month. Unfurnished.

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.

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

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

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

F-16 training, aircraft, to fill Ukraine's mid-term, long-term defense needs

By C. Todd Lopez

DoD News, Defense Media Activity

Last week in Japan during a meeting of G7 leaders, including those from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom, President Joe Biden said the U.S. will support an effort with partners and allies to train Ukrainian fighter pilots on the F-16 aircraft.

Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder explained in further detail that the training, and any eventual transfer of F-16 aircraft to Ukraine is meant to support mid- and long-term defense needs, rather than defense in the short term for an expected counter-offensive against Russian forces.

"F-16s for Ukraine is about the long-term commitment to Ukraine," Ryder said. "These F-16s will not be relevant to the upcoming counter offensive.

Right now, no number of F-16s, any indication of where those aircraft will come from, or when they will be delivered, has been revealed. What has been revealed, however, is that the U.S. will participate with partners and allies in training Ukrainian pilots on how to use the aircraft.

That training will take place outside of Ukraine at sites in Europe," Ryder said. "But in terms of ... when that training will begin, how those jets will be provided, who will provide them, we're continuing to work with our international partners on that front."

For some time, F-16s were not on the table for Ukraine. But recently, the U.S. agreed that partner nations can train Ukrainians on use of the aircraft. At the last Ukraine Defense Contact Group in April, Ryder said, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III received several requests from countries who wanted U.S. permission to train Ukrainians on the F-16.

'He subsequently took that matter, intro-

duced it into our national security council policy process as part of a conversation about how we support Ukraine in the mid- to long-term in terms of their defense needs, and there was unanimous agreement that this was something that we should and need to support," Ryder said.

The F-16 aircraft is an American weapon system, and in the same way that nations who want the F-16 must work with the U.S. to acquire it, foreign military sales agreements also mean that those who own the F-16 must seek permission from the U.S. before they transfer those aircraft to other nations.

Training on the F-16, Ryder said, might begin in the next few weeks or months, though he couldn't yet say exactly who would be doing the training, where — besides in Europe — that the training would happen, or where the aircraft required for training would come from. He did say the U.S. would be involved, however.

"As a U.S.-built platform, clearly exportability aspects, technology transfer aspects, are things that we'll be looking at as well — working with our allies and partners on that front," he said. "We'll have much more to follow in the days ahead.'

Since the very first meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in April 2022, the DOD has said the focus is not just on Ukraine's immediate defense needs — but its long-term defense needs. The F-16 training and any eventual transfer of aircraft to Ukraine, will be part of that long-term support plan.

"The fight right now is to ensure that they are able to successfully defend themselves while at the same time taking back sovereign territory," Ryder said. "But we look forward to a long-term relationship with Ukraine in terms of their security assistance needs, and again, with the idea here that they can secure their hard-won gains and deter future aggression by Russia."

Vets

"Our veterans put their lives on the line to defend our freedoms, and they deserve certainty when it comes to providing for their families,' said Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., who chairs the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and sponsored the Senate version of the legislation.

Similarly, the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee — Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill. - said before the House vote on Monday that

"veterans should not have to worry whether their earned benefits can cover their basic needs. They should not have to choose between gas to get to work or groceries for their family."

The White House has not expressed any concerns about this year's version of the legislation and has supported the move annually. Officials did not say when the measure may be signed into





Pain in the neck: Reflections on my husband's driving

"Gaeton, can I get you a cold soda?" my mother-in-law asked her husband, seated in the driver's seat next to her. My in-laws were Gaetano and Alice, of

Italian and Irish Catholic heritage, respectively. Both born and raised in northern New Jersey, they were real characters. From my vantage point in the backseat with my infant son, I observed their comical banter.

We were rolling down I-95 at a good clip, in the 1980s Lincoln

Molinari

COLUMN

Continental my father-in-law had recently inherited from his aunt, on our way to the beach.

Aunt Millie Medunio had been a feisty four-foot-ten Italian widow who lived in a brick bungalow, with a one-car garage outfitted with a tennis ball hanging from the ceiling. After Aunt Millie's daily routine — mass followed by lunch at Roy Rodgers where she'd pilfer stacks of napkins and bundles of condiment packets - she'd pull her Lincoln into her tiny garage until the tennis ball touched the windshield, which left just enough room to close the garage door.

Millie's late husband, Uncle Eddie, had set this up for her, "God bless him."

Gaetano ignored his wife, so she asked, "How bout some crackers?" She pulled a sleeve of crumbling Ritz from the enormous handbag at her feet, which also contained a two-liter bottle of ginger ale, plastic cups, and a few pieces of bruised fruit.

"Jesus Christ, Midge!" my father-inlaw bellowed using her nickname, indicating that she'd better not bother him while he was negotiating traffic. He was a nervous driver, alternating between jabbing the brake and gunning the gas. In the vastness of the Lincoln, motions were magnified, and I was soon queasy.

Mercifully, my son was asleep, oblivious to his grandfather's jerky driving. I on the other hand, was burping up bile.

To make matters worse, my fatherin-law searched AM radio stations for a traffic report. When he couldn't figure out how to get sound through the front speakers, he turned the rear volume up full blast. I sat between those rear speakers, covering the baby's ears and fighting my gag reflex. I was so relieved when we finally reached the beach, I couldn't see the trip for what it really was - a warning sign for my life to

I ignored another red flag during the years we were stationed in the English countryside, when my husband, Francis, drove our growing family around on the winding roads and roundabouts. Mysteriously, I'd developed neck pains and nausea. I blamed my second pregnancy, even though my symptoms generally appeared when Francis was

Years later, while stationed in Germany with our three kids, I ignored yet another warning sign. Within days of PCSing, our middle child threw up during a sightseeing drive. Over the course of the next three years of touring Europe in our minivan, our family became so accustomed to the kids vomiting during car trips, the minivan was supplied with "barf bags," "up-chuck buckets," and wet wipes for that inevitable pur-

By the time we left Europe, our children had vomited in over a dozen foreign countries, and I began wonder, "Does Francis drive like his father?"

I noticed his repeating pattern: Fran-

cis guns the gas until the vehicle he is driving is a few car lengths away from a stop sign or obstacle. Then, BAM! He hits the brake with a quick punch. The sudden deceleration pins the passenger's torso against the seatbelt, while catapulting her head forward, snapping it like a whip. Rather than easing his foot off the break, Francis jerks his foot upward, causing an equally violent reaction when the passenger's torso is thrown backward against the seat and her head ricochets violently against the headrest. On any given roadtrip, Francis' passenger may be thrown forward and backward multiple times, causing her stomach to twist, and her neck bones to heave like an old fashioned squeeze accordion.

Our three adult children no longer mince words. "Geeze, Dad! What's up with the gas-break driving!" I only wish I'd seen the warning signs earlier in our marriage. It may not have changed Francis' driving, but at least I would've known to always bring along ginger ale and crackers.

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



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