

# THE SKYLINE



Volume 60, Number 12

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June 9, 2022

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## NEWS BYTES

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Tropical Storm Alex heads toward Bermuda with high winds

~ Click ~

Avalanche sweep Oilers, advance to Stanley Cup Final

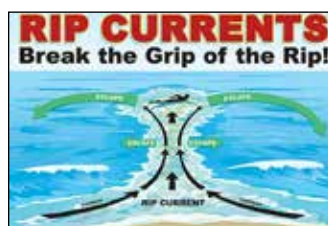
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Pressure growing to remove PFAS from fast food wrappers

~ Click ~

First remote air traffic control center in US to be in Alabama

## LOOK INSIDE



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Beware of Riptides

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# Remembering Battle of Midway



Photo by Penny Randall

Personnel from NAS Meridian, Naval Technical Training Center Meridian and Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One marked the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Midway, June 7 during morning colors with a wreath placing at the command flagpole. Midway as one of America's most historically significant naval victories, and with the U.S. Navy's determination, zeal, and valor during the multi-day engagement fought June 3-7, 1942, blunted the Imperial Japanese navy's striking force and its advance across the Pacific. Navy strategy in this conflict leveraged the power of our aircraft carriers, sustaining sea control and shifting the paradigm of maritime power projection to the carrier force. The Navy's remembrance of Midway illustrates how our battle achievements in innovation, intelligence and courage serve as a model and as inspiration as we face the challenges of the future.

[Read more, click here](#)

## NTTC Meridian set to change command June 10



Teague

From Staff Reports

Naval Technical Training Center onboard Naval Air Station Meridian will change command on June 10, during a ceremony at the Navy Reserve Center. Commander Karen J. Teague will relieve Commander Christy Sibley, who has served as commanding officer of the enlisted schoolhouse since April 2020.

Sibley led four officers, 60 enlisted, 23 civilian personnel and 30 contractors in executing a \$1.4 million annual operating budget and main-



Sibley

taining physical assets valued at \$74 million to become the premier schoolhouse in the Naval Education and Training Command. By continuing Recruit Training Command's "Sailorization" development process and providing the highest standards in academic excellence in five accredited "A" Schools, two "C" Schools and four joint services courses, she graduated and successfully delivered 6,100 trained and ready enlisted Sailors to fleet during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

● **NTTC, page 2**



Photo by Scott Garfield

Navy Aerial Advisor Capt. Brian Ferguson and Glen Powell on the set of Top Gun: Maverick by Paramount Pictures, Skydance and Jerry Bruckheimer Films.

## The TOPGUN Legacy: Making Mavericks with Capt. Brian Ferguson

From Lt. Bryce Baswell

Capt. Brian "Ferg" Ferguson has spent a significant portion of his career involved with air-to-air combat training exercises like the one described above. Ferguson attended the Adversary Instructor Course at the Navy Fighter Weapons School, also known as TOPGUN.

He also commanded the Fighting Saints of Fighter Squadron Composite Thirteen (VFC-13), based at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada, the same installation as TOPGUN. VFC-13 is one

of the Navy Reserve's adversary aircraft squadrons dedicated specifically to providing the highest quality adversary training for Navy fleet squadrons and other units, a Navy role provided only by the Navy Reserve. These and numerous other career experiences [see note below for more\*] helped make Ferguson an ideal candidate to serve as the Navy's technical advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick, Paramount Pictures' new sequel to its 1986 blockbuster-hit feature film, Top Gun. Ferguson described how he came by the job.

● **Maverick, page 2**



## Two aviators earn 'Wings of Gold' in June pinning ceremony

There was a naval aviator designation ceremony June 3 onboard Naval Air Station Meridian.

Two aviators received their "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."



LTJG Timothy Shelby



LTJG Jesse Wylie

**Practice HEAT SAFETY Wherever You Are**

Heat related deaths are preventable. Protect yourself and others from the impacts of heat waves.

**Job Sites**  
Stay hydrated and take breaks in the shade as often as possible.

**Indoors**  
Check up on the elderly, sick and those without AC.

**Vehicles**  
Never leave kids or pets unattended - LOOK before you LOCK

**Outdoors**  
Limit strenuous outdoor activities, find shade, and stay hydrated.

weather.gov/heat

### ● **Maverick**

The sun rises over Nevada. A rumble rolls across the desert, but it's not the sound of a rare rainstorm. It's two U.S. Navy F/A-18 Hornets engaged in a close-range combat training exercise. One is the haze-grey color of fleet squadrons. The other sports desert camo with a red star on its tail, one of the paint schemes used by the Navy Reserve's adversary aircraft squadrons to mimic those used by America's adversaries.

From a long way off, the jets seem serene, like birds of prey gliding the updrafts. But up close, it's a hell storm. The jets pump out swirling vortices of scorched gases. The sound can literally be felt, and the acrid smell of jet fuel permeates the air. The two aircraft maneuver furiously, both attempting to establish positional advantage against the other. Finally, one gets the upper hand. "Copy Kill"—a successful engagement.

Capt. Brian "Ferg" Ferguson has spent a significant portion of his career involved with air-to-air combat training exercises like the one described above. Ferguson attended the Adversary Instructor Course at the Navy Fighter Weapons School, also known as TOPGUN. He also commanded the Fighting Saints of Fighter Squadron Composite Thirteen (VFC-13), based at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada, the same installation as TOPGUN. VFC-13 is one of the Navy Reserve's adversary aircraft squadrons dedicated specifically to providing the highest quality adversary training for Navy fleet squadrons and other units, a Navy role provided only by the Navy Reserve. These and numerous other career experiences [see note below for more\*] helped make Ferguson an ideal candidate to serve as the Navy's technical advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick, Paramount Pictures' new sequel to its 1986 blockbuster-hit feature film, Top Gun. Ferguson described how he came by the job.

"Toward the end of my tour of duty as the Deputy Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve, the Chief of Staff for Commander, Naval Air Forces contacted me," said Ferguson. "He said he thought I might be the right person for the role of advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick. At first, I declined because I had been focused on so many other things professionally, and I knew there would be many

other people well-qualified for the job. However, the Chief of Staff kept ping-ponging me, and eventually my wife, Susan, was the one who changed my mind. She told me, "If they get it wrong and you had a chance to make it better that you didn't take, you'll be complaining about it for the rest of your life, and if they get it right, you'll regret that you weren't a part of it."

Ferguson served on active-duty orders for just over a year while filling the role of the Navy's technical advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick, during which he also performed the critical role of aerial coordinator for the Naval Aviators and aircraft involved in the film.

"I wore many hats," said Ferguson. "Primary was safety. The things we did in the jets were not necessarily any more risky, complicated, or difficult than any given fleet training mission or combat duty, but they were different and required a great deal of careful and deliberate risk management. It was clear to me that any benefits the Navy hoped to gain from the film showcasing our profession to the nation and the world would be more than erased by a mishap. I also coordinated the aerial sequences, knowing the capabilities and limitations of the F/A-18 and aircrew. Tom Cruise, Jerry Bruckheimer or Joseph Kosinski would want something, and perhaps it was not attainable safely within our comfort margins. I would work with them and the civilian aerial cinematographer to find a way to make it work safely and still be spectacular. I was also responsible for assisting with realism in the script, storyline, and uniform accuracy, minus a few scenes that were filmed prior to my arrival."

Although Ferguson stipulates that not every part of the film is 100% accurate to the realities of Naval Aviation, he says that overall, it provides an extremely realistic vision of what being a Naval Aviator is like.

"The film makes very limited use of CGI—it's almost all real-life Navy pilots in real Navy jets doing real maneuvers," Ferguson said. "We're taking the audience into the jets with us, onto the ship, and into combat. Various people who saw the film with me all said the exact same thing: "I felt like I was in the jet!"

Working on TOP GUN: Maverick was coming full circle for Ferguson. Like many others, he was inspired in a major way when he

### ● **NTTC**

Commander Teague, a native of Oakdale, California, graduated from the University of California, Davis in 2006 with a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Biology. She received her commission through the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps from the University of California at Berkeley in June 2006.

After completing flight school, she was designated a Naval Aviator in March 2008. In 2011, she transferred to the Human Resources (HR) community. She has earned a Master of Science in Operations Research at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, completed JPME Level I, and a Foundations of Executive Leadership certificate from Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

At sea, she served as the Line Division and Ground Safety Officer, while attached to Carrier Air Wing Seven (CVW-7) with Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron FIVE (HS-5), in Norfolk, Virginia. She deployed in 2009 and 2010 in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM while embarked on the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69).

Her shore tours include Military Support Branch Head, Southwest Regional Maintenance Center San Diego, California leading 326 officer and enlisted to expand operational capabilities through strategic manpower distribution within the NAVSEA enterprise and southwest region. She was assigned to the Enterprise Readiness Center within the Strategic Plans, Policy, and Logistics Directorate (TCJ5/4) as a business development analyst during her joint tour at the United States Transportation Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.

Then she was the Deputy Chief for Operations Research (OR) and Innovation for the Chief of Staff (TCCS) ending her joint duty as the Military Human Capital Strategy and OR Analyst in the Manpower and Personnel Directorate (TCJ1). Following her tour at Scott Air Force Base, she reported as the Commanding Officer of the Tampa Military Entrance Processing Station.

Her personal awards include two Defense Meritorious Service Medals, a Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and various unit and service medals and ribbons. Commander Teague holds a Senior Professional in Human Resources certification.

saw the original film, Top Gun, in theaters when it was first released in 1986, his senior year of high school. He attributes watching the film, as well as seeing the Navy's Blue Angels and other Navy aircraft at airshows, to his decision to enter Naval Aviation. Now, 36 years later, he's working on film projects that will help to inspire a new generation of Naval Aviators, including another Hollywood film named Devotion, the renowned story of Naval Aviators and brothers-in-arms Jesse Brown and Tom Hudner during the Korean War, scheduled to be released in the fall of 2022. Ferguson explained the lasting legacy that films about the Navy can have.

"I think that films can have a dramatic impact," Ferguson described. "For example, the original Top Gun film did three things. First, it helped boost Navy recruiting a tremendous amount. It allowed the Navy to enjoy a massive influx of applications from some of the best and brightest young men and women in America. Second, it helped remind the Naval Aviation community that we literally have the coolest job on the planet! Like every job, there are parts of it that are mundane, but the film celebrated the most thrilling parts of it and reminded people that when they look back on their time in the service, those are the parts they are going to remember, not the long hours or paperwork. Third, it helped connect much of the American public to the Navy in a way in which they hadn't been before—in a contemporary way that gives them some familiarity with what the Navy does today. I am confident that TOP GUN: Maverick will have the same effect, which is why the Navy and the Department of Defense supported the project at the highest levels."

Ferguson described more about the impact he thinks the new film will have.

"I am confident this film is going to help reenergize pride in the Naval Aviation community and the military at large. It can really pull people in and connect them to a Navy that they may not realize has been continuously involved in combat operations around the world for most of the last 30 years. This film will bring Naval Aviation to screens in front of hundreds of millions of people and allow them to experience how it looks from the cockpit, and more importantly, what it feels like to be an aviator in the U.S. Navy."

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

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## Local Happenings

### JUNE

**16: Third Thursday in Downtown** from 5-8 p.m. at Dumont Plaza. Live music, food trucks, beverages and art exhibitors. Call 601-693-2787; free to the public.

### JULY

**14-16: Distinguished Young Women of Mississippi** from 7-9 p.m. each night at The Evangel Temple. Reserved: Tickets are \$60 (3 nights); \$15-\$20 General Admission. Email Susan Keith at sedk@hotmail.com for more information.

**16: Red Hills Horse Show** at 10 a.m. at the Lauderdale County Agri-Center. Red Hills Horse Show Association returns to Lauderdale County Agri-Center for its 2022 season. Judges events start at 10 a.m.; Speed events begin at 2 p.m. Free/admission varies; call Sedera at 601-562-5715.

**21: Third Thursday in Downtown** from 5-8 p.m. at Dumont Plaza. Live Music, Food Trucks, Beverages and Art Exhibitors in Dumont Plaza, Downtown Meridian. Call 601-693-2787.

**23: Boz Scaggs** at 7:30 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. It's appropriate that Boz Scaggs' new album is Out of the Blues, since the blues is what first sparked his five-decade musical career. Tickets range from \$55 to \$125; call 601-696-2200.

**30: CowKids Youth Rodeo** All day event at the Lauderdale County Agri-Center. Cowkids Youth Rodeo, Inc. is a ministry based, non profit organization set out to provide youth with the best opportunity to transform into responsible adults through participating in the sport of rodeo, and all it has to offer at an affordable cost. fees vary; contact cowkidsyouthrodeo@gmail.com.

## U.S. Navy announces 28th RIMPAC Exercise

Twenty-six nations, 38 surface ships, four submarines, nine national land forces, more than 170 aircraft and approximately 25,000 personnel will participate in the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise scheduled June 29 to Aug. 4, in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California.

RIMPAC 2022 is the 28th exercise in the series that began in 1971.

As the world's largest international maritime exercise, RIMPAC provides a unique training opportunity designed to foster and sustain cooperative relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's interconnected oceans.

The theme of RIMPAC 2022 is "Capable, Adaptive, Partners." Participating nations and forces will exercise a wide range of capabilities and demonstrate the inherent flexibility of

maritime forces. These capabilities range from disaster relief and maritime security operations to sea control and complex warfighting.

The relevant, realistic training program includes amphibious operations, gunnery, missile, anti-submarine and air defense exercises, as well as counter-piracy operations, mine clearance operations, explosive ordnance disposal, and diving and salvage operations.

This year's exercise includes forces from Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

-- From Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet Public Affairs

[Read more, click here](#)

## SECNAV names SSBN 826 USS District of Columbia

Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced today that the first ship in the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) will be officially named USS District of Columbia (SSBN 826).

The decision to name SSBN 826 is to alleviate any name conflicts with the already-commissioned USS Columbia (SSN 771). §10 U.S.C. 8662(a) states that not more than one vessel of the Navy may have the same name.

The Columbia program was named in 2016 with the lead ship projected to enter service in 2027, consequently overlapping with the existing USS Columbia (SSN 771). SSBN 826 will be named after the nation's capital while SSN 771 is named after cities in South Carolina, Missouri, and Illinois named Columbia, following the naval tradition of SSNs being named after U.S. cities.

"The District of Columbia is rich with na-

val history. The Washington Navy Yard is our oldest shore facility. Marines like Montford Point Marine Herman Darden and Brigadier General Anthony Henderson and Sailors like Yeoman Charlotte Louise Berry Winters and Medal of Honor Recipient First Class Fireman John Rush were born and raised in D.C.," said Del Toro. "This is why I prefer to call D.C. not just our nation's capital, but instead, our naval capital. The naming of the USS District of Columbia honors this."

The future USS District of Columbia's (SSBN 826) keel laying ceremony will take place on June 4, 2022 at General Dynamics Electric Boat in Quonset Point, R.I. The ship's sponsors are District of Columbia Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton and District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser.

-- From Secretary of the Navy Public Affairs

[Read more, click here](#)

## Exercise Baltic Operations kicks off in the Baltic Sea

Fourteen NATO allies, two NATO partner nations, over 45 ships, more than 75 aircraft, and approximately 7,000 personnel kick off Baltic Operations (BALTOPS 22) from Stockholm today.

This premier maritime-focused annual exercise in the Baltic Region takes place June 5-17 and provides a unique training opportunity to strengthen combined response capabilities critical to preserving freedom of navigation and security in the Baltic Sea. This is the 51st iteration of the exercise series that began in 1972.

"In past iterations of BALTOPS we've talked about meeting the challenges of tomorrow," said Vice Adm. Gene Black, commander Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) and U.S. Sixth Fleet. "Those challenges are upon us - in the here and now. BALTOPS 22 highlights our past investments and shows our collective partnership and capabilities as we recognize the importance of 'freedom of the seas' and the vital role the Baltic plays in European prosperity."

-- From U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Naval Striking and Support Forces

[Read more, click here](#)



## Sale... Or

### BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

**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:** 1BD/1BA furnished apartment; 12 minutes from the base. Perfect for single Sailors. \$500 per month. Call 601-480-1601.

**For Rent:** 3BD/2BA home with 1 car garage, all new appliances and flooring. 13 miles from NAS. Rent \$1200, security deposit will be half of 1st month

rent. Move in ready June 1st. Call 757-589-2174.

**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:** 2BD/1.5BA single family home in Dalewood - fully renovated. Pets allowed. Pet deposit \$300. \$1,300 rent

per month. Call 973-876-5006.

**For Rent:** 2BA/1BA on the water at Dalewood \$600 per month. Call 601-683-6038.

**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! Service for Hire:** Dixie Perfect 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](mailto:adam.prince@navy.mil). Deadline is the Thursday prior to publication.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free for anyone who works at NAS Meridian. To include your announcement, email [adam.prince@navy.mil](mailto:adam.prince@navy.mil)



# US, allies fly fighter jets amid North Korea tensions

By Kim Tong-Hyung  
AP News

The flights came as U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman traveled to Seoul for discussions with South Korea and Japanese officials over the gathering North Korean threat and warned of a “swift and forceful” counterresponse if the North proceeds with a nuclear test explosion, which would be its first in nearly five years. If staged, the test could be another leap forward in North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s goal of building an arsenal that can viably threaten regional U.S. allies and the American homeland. That would escalate a pressure campaign aimed at forcing the United States to accept North Korea as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

While the Biden administration has vowed to push for additional international sanctions if North Korea conducts a nuclear test, prospects for robust punitive measures are unclear because of divisions between permanent United Nations Security Council members.

“Any nuclear test would be in complete violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions. There would be a swift and forceful response to such a test,” Sherman said after meeting with South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun-dong. “We continue to urge Pyongyang to cease its destabilizing and provocative activities and choose the path of diplomacy.”

Sherman and Cho are planning a three-way



South Korea Defense Ministry via AP

**In this photo provided by South Korea Defense Ministry, U.S. and South Korea Air Force fighter jets fly in formation during a joint drill on Tuesday, June 7, 2022. The South Korean and U.S. militaries flew 20 fighter jets over South Korea’s western sea Tuesday in a continued show of force as a senior U.S. official warned of a forceful response if North Korea goes ahead with its first nuclear test explosion in nearly five years.**

meeting with Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo on Wednesday over the North Korean nuclear issue.

Extending the countries’ joint displays of military might, four U.S. F-16 fighter jets flew

in formation with 16 South Korean planes — including F-35A stealth fighters — over waters off South Korea’s eastern coast, an exercise aimed at demonstrating an ability to quickly respond to North Korean provocations, South Korea’s Joint

Chiefs of Staff said. The United States and Japan conducted a separate drill involving six aircraft — four Japanese F-15 fighters and two American F-16s — above waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, Japan’s Defense Ministry said.

The flights came a day after U.S. and South Korean forces fired eight surface-to-surface missiles into South Korea’s eastern waters to match a weekend missile display by North Korea, which fired the same number of weapons from multiple locations Sunday in what was likely its biggest single-day testing event.

North Korea has conducted 18 rounds of missile launches in 2022 alone — including its first demonstrations of intercontinental ballistic missiles since 2017 — exploiting a favorable environment to push forward weapons development, with the Security Council effectively paralyzed over Russia’s war on Ukraine.

North Korea may soon up the ante as U.S. and South Korean officials say it is all but ready to conduct another detonation at its nuclear testing ground in the northeastern town of Punggye-ri. Its last such test and sixth overall was in September 2017, when it claimed to have detonated a thermonuclear bomb designed for its ICBMs. Meanwhile on Tuesday, U.S. special envoy for North Korea Sung Kim said Washington and its allies were increasingly concerned by not only the unprecedented number of ballistic missile launches but also because “senior North Korean officials have used rhetoric that could suggest the use of tactical nuclear weapons.” He did not elaborate.

[Read more, click here](#)



## Riptide Safety Tips

From NOAA

### How do I escape rip currents?

Stay afloat, yell for help, swim parallel to the shore. Do not exhaust yourself fighting the current. Warning sign on beach says Rip currents! Break the grip of the rip.

Beachgoers sometimes see scary looking warning signs telling them to watch out for rip currents. “Rip” in this case could stand for “rest in peace,” because these currents can be deadly. In the U.S., about 100 people drown in rip currents every year. Lifeguards in the U.S. rescue another 30,000 swimmers from rip currents each year.

We usually think of waves as washing stuff onto the beach—seaweed, shells and other ocean debris. But sometimes the waves hit the beach in a certain way to create a current that flows away from the beach.

This is a rip current. When waves travel from deep to shallow water, they break near the shoreline and generate currents that are influenced by the shape of the ocean floor, at times producing rip currents. Waves interacting with each other can also cause short-lived rip currents.

Rip currents may form around low spots in the ocean floor

near the shoreline or in breaks between sandbars. They may also form around human-made structures such as jetties and piers. They vary from 50 to 300 feet wide. (A 4-lane highway is about 50 feet wide.)

Limited as they are in size, you don’t want to get caught in a rip current while swimming. Rip currents typically flow at 1 to 2 feet per second. However, they have been known to flow as fast as 8 feet per second (about 5 miles per hour)—faster than an Olympic swimmer can sprint! They can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

Rip current speed is influenced by the size of the waves, but sometimes waves only two feet high can produce hazardous rips. Perhaps surprisingly, rip currents are strongest at low tide.

The shape of the ocean bottom sometimes changes during storms or when waves are particularly big. The ocean floor may suddenly have an ideal shape for creating unpredictable rip currents where there were none before.

Don’t confuse a rip current with an undertow. Rip currents are much more dangerous, because they flow on the surface of the water, can be very strong, and can extend some distance from the shore.

[Read more, click here](#)

## A pleasurable pain in the grass

Take three and a half acres of property, and subtract one 1,500 square-foot brick ranch with a detached garage, then carry the seven, and you know what you’re left with? A helluva lot of grass to cut.

That painful fact of life significantly impacted my childhood. My father was raised on a boardwalk at the Jersey Shore, but he fancied himself a wanna-be farmer.

So in 1977, he and my mother bought a house with lots of land.

Everyone knows that large developed parcels require maintenance, but my father had two workers at the ready: My older brother and me. In the summertime, while our friends were galivanting off to the community pool in flip flops and terry cloth, my brother and I were doing forced labor.

### COLUMN



Molinari

With over three acres of grass to cut, my father knew a riding mower wouldn’t cut it (literally and figuratively), especially if his teenage children were going to have any semblance of a social life left. So he bought a legit tractor — orange paint job, long steering column and gear shift, little wheels in the front, big wheels in the back — and outfitted it with a twin-bladed mower deck. Before I could drive a car, tractor operation and grass cutting were added to my arguably abusive list of chores, which also included weeding my father’s football-pitch-sized vegetable garden, trimming around trees with the push mower, and various scullery and janitorial duties inside the house.

Until he became a midshipman at the Naval Academy, my older brother shouldered most of the tractor operating while I was relegated to cutting around trees with the push mower. But when I was in 9th grade, my brother left for Annapolis, and my adolescent summers changed drastically.

As soon as the spring rains coaxed those green blades from the earth like a snake charmer, I was on the tractor for hours on end. Speaking of snakes, several chore-related horrors were imprinted on my psyche, which generally

involved inadvertently chopping things up in the whirring mower blades, including countless snakes, and once, a nest of bunnies.

There were other traumas associated with my grass-cutting duties, which were admittedly self-induced. Such as the time I got sleepy while mowing a particularly boring field, so I stopped, put my head on the steering wheel and snoozed. I was awakened by frantic shouting from a passerby on nearby Route 286. A driver saw me slumped over the tractor and was coming to rescue me from certain death by heat exhaustion. Thankfully cell phones hadn’t been invented yet and I was able to convince the Good Samaritan that I was alive and well before an ambulance was summoned.

Another summer day, I got lazy. To minimize my push-mowing responsibilities, I used the tractor to mow around the trees. I thought I was so clever, stooping low to avoid the branches, until a tree swing I’d tucked up into our apple tree fell as I was passing by and hooked itself over the steering wheel. I heard a “Crack!” before the swing broke loose. I knew I was in big trouble. Months of allowance was forfeited to replace that cracked steering column.

Somehow, I survived my teenage inden-

ture servitude and escaped to college, law school, and then military marriage. Free and on my own in the world, I found that I missed it. There was a certain pleasure in the mind-numbing repetition of cutting grass, the soothing vibrations of the motor, the yin and yang of battling and bonding with nature, the satisfaction of doing physical work.

Therefore, I found opportunities to fiddle with flora and fauna even when we lived on base. I started my first vegetable garden on Fort Ord. I planted flowers on either side of the stairwell stoop on Patch Barracks. I put plants in pots on our porch at NAS Mayport. I grew massive zucchinis behind Quarters C in Newport.

My Navy retiree husband cuts our lawn nowadays, and I look on from my vegetable garden with envy, because I know that, like many things in life, pain in the grass has its pleasures.

Lisa Smith Molinari’s self syndicated columns appear on her blog, [www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.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).

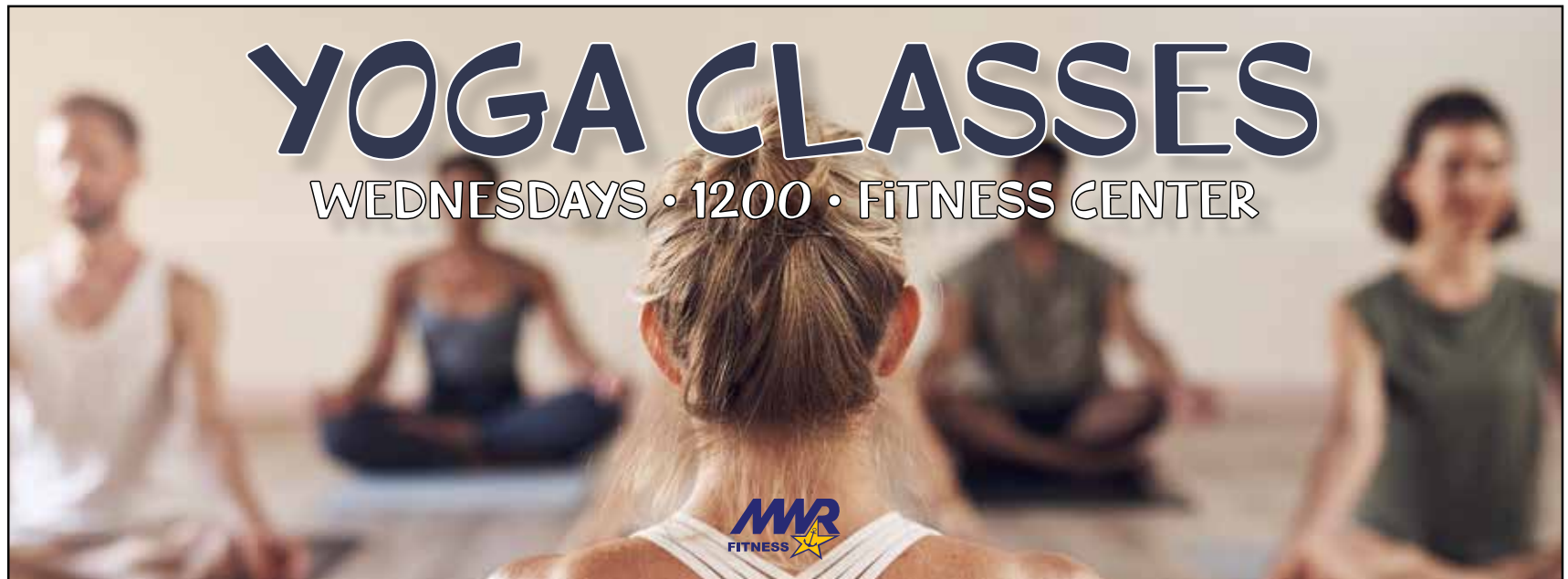




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