

THE SKYLINE



On Base

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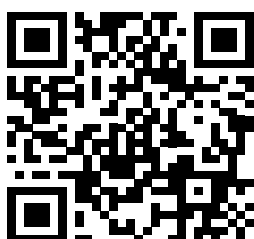
Goodbye Summer Party August 3 • 1700 Aquatic Center

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VT-7 Welcomes New Commanding Officer

From Staff Reports

The "Eagles" of Training Squadron 7 (VT-7) onboard Naval Air Station Meridian held a change of command ceremony at which CDR Bradley Thompson was relieved by CDR Austin Ordway, July 12. CDR Thompson retired from the U.S. Navy after 20 years of service.

Thompson served as the commanding officer of the squadron from April 2023 to July 2024. Under Thompson's leadership, VT-7 accrued nearly 19,500 flight hours, encompassing nearly 17,700 sorties, and designated 87 Naval aviators consisting of both U.S. and international Navy and Marine Corps pilots. All of these metrics were the highest of any U.S. Navy



CDR Thompson

T-45C Goshawk squadron during this time period. These accomplishments were achieved from local flight operations in Meridian, as well as six carrier qualification detachments, five weapons detachments, and two additional training



Photo by MC2 Molly Tice

CDR Austin Ordway receives his command pin from his wife during Training Squadron 7's Change of Command Ceremony, July 12.

detachments, ranging from locations in San Diego and El Centro, California; Jacksonville and Key West, Florida.

CDR Ordway graduated from Jacksonville University earning a Bachelor of Science in Aviation Management
●VT-7, page 2

NAS Meridian Named CNIC Training Excellence Winner

From Staff Reports

Naval Air Station Meridian is the FY23 Commander, Naval Installations Command (CNIC) Installation Training and Operational Excellence Award Winner for Small Installations, as recently announced by the CNIC Commanding Officer, Vice Admiral Scott Gray.

This award recognizes the installation that has made significant accomplishments to integrated training through exercise design, development and execution that provides enhanced readiness and operational capabilities. NAS Meridian was nominated by Navy Region Southeast due to its key initiatives, innovative training solutions and achievements, and

improvements that contributed to installation excellence in the area of integrated training and the Final Evaluation Problem (FEP) assessment.

This award is a credit to the Installation Training Team, made up of subject matter experts from Emergency Management, Security, Fire, Air Operations and Public Works Departments, with the assistance of other command personnel, leadership and tenant commands, who through their determination to provide the best training possible, developed outstanding training events during the FY23 training cycle, that enhanced the command's ability to maintain its operations at a high level of performance.

CAPTAIN'S VIRTUAL SUGGESTION BOX

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NAVAL AIR STATION MERIDIAN, VA

Unveiled: Minted USMC Coins for 250th Anniversary

By Shaemus Sawyer
Marine Corps Base Quantico

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, VA -- The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation and the U.S. Mint unveiled a trio of commemorative coin designs honoring the 250 years of Marine Corps service and sacrifice during a minting ceremony July 17, 2024, at the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

The last coin minted in honor of the Marine Corps was for the Corps' 230th anniversary in 2005, and the generated funds enabled the construction

of the NMMC, where the 250th commemorative coins were officially revealed.

"This is a way for everyone in America to recognize the importance of 250 years of what the Marine Corps means to this country," said retired U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. James W. Lukeman, the president and CEO of the MCHF.

The images on the coins, he said, cover 250 years of "every Marine is a rifleman." The gold coin depicts the Marine Corps Color Guard while the flag
●Marine, page 2



Photo by Lance Cpl. Joaquin Dela Torre

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Gregg Olson, director of Marine Corps Staff, left, and retired U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. James Lukeman, president and CEO of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation, unveil the new trio of commemorative coins dedicated to the 250-year anniversary of the U.S. Marine Corps at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, Virginia, July 17, 2024. The coins are a testament to the courage, sacrifice and dedication of all Marines, ensuring that their stories will be remembered and celebrated. Command Ceremony, July 12.

ASF Graduation



Photo by Evelyn Adams

Three Sailors and two Marines graduated from the Auxiliary Security Force Academy (ASF) onboard NAS Meridian, July 17. The academy is a 3-week course that provides certifications for military members to conduct security force operations as watch standers. They learned how to properly operate weapons, control and detain a multitude of suspects through use of force, including OC spray which they were exposed to themselves, how to search and clear buildings and spaces which may contain threats, and the proper way to stand watch at an entry control point. ASF members are valuable to NAS Meridian's Naval Security Forces on the installation and are called upon to assist when needed.

Reenlistment



Photo by MC2 Tice

Congratulations to AE3 David Gaitan and his family on his reenlistment in the U.S. Navy for 4 years.



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

Onboard NAS Meridian contact
Detective Paul Stowe
Command Investigator
601-679-2502

●VT-7, page 2 and Flight Operations. He was commissioned through the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps Program and reported to NAS Pensacola for flight training in June 2002. He earned his Naval Aviator Wings in November 2008 and then reported to the VFA-122 "Flying Eagles" for initial fleet training in the F/A-18E/F. CDR Ordway began his operational flying in December 2008 with the "Kestrels" of VFA-137. While a "Kestrel" he made two combat deployments aboard USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), participating in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn. CDR Ordway


reported to the VT-7 "Eagles" in November 2012 as a flight instructor for his production tour. In June of 2015, he was awarded Training Wing One Instructor Pilot of the Year. He returned to the fleet as the Strike Operations Officer of Carrier Strike Group Twelve (CSG-12) in January 2017. Following a successful second-sea tour, he reported to the VFA-81 "Sunliners" for his Department Head tour, where the squadron was awarded the Battle-E in 2019. While with the Liners, he completed two deployments aboard USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) in support of Dynamic Force Employment and Operation Freedom's Sentinel, serving as both operations officer and maintenance officer.



Photo by MC2 Molly Tice

CDR Bradley Thompson and his wife are piped ashore following his change of command and retirement ceremony, July 12.

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Local Happenings

JULY

26: Songwriter's Night at Mia's Café - 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. Enjoy live music from a variety of different songwriters at 2100 Front St, Meridian, MS 39301.

19: Pine Region Songwriter Festival - 10 a.m. - Midnight. The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience teams up with the Mississippi Songwriters Alliance to bring you the Pine Region Songwriter Festival, featuring a full schedule of performances, workshops, and more! Schedule of events: Workshop 10 a.m.-noon: What's in a song? A Look Inside the Songwriter's Toolbox. Presented by Tricia Walker. This workshop will address "writing with the whole brain," covering the primary tools of lyric and melody and their use in building a balanced, well-crafted song. Finale 6:30-9 p.m.: MSA Songwriter Festival Grand Finale. Performers include Tricia Walker, Eden Brent, Emily White, and Alanna Mosley. Location: 2155 Front Street | Meridian, MS 39301.

AUGUST

3: Earth's Bounty - 8 a.m. - noon in Downtown Meridian. This seasonal festival features the freshest farmer's market produce, locally made products, plants, and more kids' activities, live music, and special demonstrations throughout the season. Earth's Bounty is held the first Saturday of each month.

Area Happenings

AUGUST

21 - Chris Stapleton - 7 p.m. - Located in Birmingham, AL. at the BJCC. Concert features special guests Grace Potter and Allen Stone
[Click here for tickets, entries, & info.](#)

SEPTEMBER:

7: Childish Gambino - 8 p.m. - Located in New Orleans, LA at the Smoothie King Center. Concert features special guest WILLOW. [Click here for tickets, entries, & info.](#)

12 - Hardy - 6:15 p.m. - Located in Starkville, MS at the Dudy Noble Field. Concert features special guests Randy Houser, Travis Denning, & Ella Langley. [Click here for tickets, entries, & info.](#)

Dredging Underway at Honolulu Harbor



Photo by Cortland Henderson

Maintenance dredging began July 22 at the Honolulu Harbor, located on the southern coast of the island of O'ahu, by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Honolulu District. Healy Tibbitts Builders, Inc. is the contractor.

Maintenance dredging is currently underway at the Honolulu Harbor, located on the southern coast of the island of O'ahu, by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Honolulu District.

This is the third maintenance dredging project that the Corps has undertaken this year in Hawai'i.

Honolulu Harbor is the principal

seaport of the State of Hawai'i. Hawai'i receives more than 98% of all goods through its harbors. Much of the containerized items are first shipped into Honolulu Harbor, then separated and trans-shipped to the neighbor islands.

-Cortland Henderson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Honolulu District

[Read more, click here](#)

Huntsville Center Completes Demolition on Old Elementary School Building



Photo By Lillian Putnam

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville conducted a demolition for the old Southeast Region Britain School building, Fort Stewart, Georgia, April 30, 2024,

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville is completing the demolition of the Southeast Region Britain School located on Fort Stewart's installation.

"The demolition aims to pave the

way for new infrastructure in the area, enhancing resources and services for Soldiers and their families," Jake Gassaway, Facilities Reduction Program project manager, said.

-Lillian Putnam, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville

[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

For Rent: 2 BD/1 BA home located in Dalewood community on the water. \$900 a month. Call 601-

683-6038.

For Sale/Rent: 3BD/2BA located in Dogwood Hills 15 minutes from base. Includes 2 car garage, new appliances, washer/dryer, gas fireplace and surround sound system. Roof < 4yrs; central unit < 6yrs. Buy for \$180,000 or rent for \$1,800 a month. Call 601-934-1455

For Rent: Available July 1, 2024. 3 BD/2 BA, only 5 mins from main gate of NAS Meridian. Nice size private yard / gas and water provided. Pets permitted with deposit. Contact 601-480-1324.

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 Rent: Fully furnished home in Dalewood. \$1,500 a month; \$50 application fee; \$900 Dalewood membership fee. Trailer, washer and dryer included. Call Jim 601-480-4865

For Rent: 4 BD/2.5 BA home 3632 sq ft, just over 6 acres with workshop attached to 2-car carport. Owners will consider a lease of 12-36 months, and

rent is negotiable the longer the term. Call (601) 517-1707 or (601) 517-1707.

For Rent: 3BD /2BA home near North Hills. Spacious yard, concrete patio for gatherings, home gym and covered car garage. Rent \$1,100 per month. Call Jeremy at 601-410-8555.

For Rent: 3 BD/1.5 BA home 15 minutes from NAS at 4814 36th Ave. New refrigerator and 2-year old AC & furnace. Call Terrance at 469-318-9769.

MISCELLANEOUS

For Sale: Double wall Frigidaire oven \$500; Bosch dishwasher \$500. Both three years old. 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.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free!

Submission deadline is the Wednesday prior to production. Email information to nasmeridianpao@gmail.com

From Recruit to Recruiter: Staff Sgt. Alyson Silidker

By Airman 1st Class Madi Collier
17th Training Wing

GOODFELLOW AIR FORCE BASE, Texas – Recruiters are more than just a gateway between civilian and military life; they are the driving force behind many individuals' dreams of serving their country. These dedicated professionals provide crucial information about career opportunities, benefits, and training programs, guiding recruits to find their place within the Air Force. Their role begins even before the enlistment process; it starts the moment someone steps into their office. For many, recruiters offer the first glimpse into military life. Staff Sgt. Alyson Silidker, 344th Recruiting Squadron enlisted accessions recruiter, began her journey 12 years ago when she graduated from a boarding school in Oregon. Silidker, originally from New Hope, Pennsylvania, didn't have a plan after graduation. She knew she was ready to start her adult life but didn't know where the starting line was. She went home to reconnect with friends and family but didn't feel connected with their ideas for their lives—she wanted something more.

"The Air Force provided me the opportunity to reach a level that I didn't think I could," Silidker explained. "I wanted to make something of myself, to have a family, to travel. Joining the Air Force was my way of leveling up and setting myself up for success."

Her career began as a services specialist at Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, then at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming. However, her time at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, truly shaped her career. There, she discovered her passion for supporting young Airmen.

At Langley, Silidker served as a First Term Enlisted Center instructor, playing

a pivotal role in the in-processing of Airmen at their first duty station. She took the textbook knowledge Airmen received during Basic Military Training and Technical Training and helped them apply these skills to real-life situations, teaching them how to transition from the training environment.

"It was incredible to meet all these new Airmen and let them know that I could help set them on a successful career path," Silidker said with a smile. "My favorite part was sitting down with them, offering a new perspective or motivation to succeed, regardless of their background." Reflecting on her career, Silidker fondly recalls her time spent working with and caring for her Airmen. She dedicated herself to improving and updating Airmen development programs, ensuring they had the necessary resources to thrive. By sharing her knowledge and experiences, she ensured they had access to the benefits the Air Force offers. This experience was the catalyst that pushed her towards recruiting.

She wanted to be on the front lines of engaging with potential recruits and making sure they were pursuing a path that was beneficial for them based on their goals and aspirations.

"I wanted to take a step back and make sure all of the Airmen coming in wanted to be here and that they were set up for success in their career," Silidker explained.

The Air Force has supported Silidker through the hardships of being a single parent, a global pandemic, and everything in between. Serving provides her with a sense of personal stability, financially and mentally. Though it comes with its own obstacles, such as being separated from family and missing milestones, she knows that the life she's working towards and her sacrifices have their own rewards. She can



Photo by Airman 1st Class Madi Collier
U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Alyson Silidker, 344th Recruiting Squadron enlisted accessions recruiter, scrolls through recruit files at her desk at the San Angelo Air Force Recruiting office in San Angelo, Texas, July 3. Silidker wants to continue to work with and influence junior enlisted going forward in her career.

provide for her son while instilling a sense of accomplishment in herself. For Silidker, the end goal of making what she does a career, retiring and knowing she provided a life for herself and her son makes the challenges worth it.

"In the end, it pays off. Everything moves so fast, but I don't regret it for a second," she said with a smile. "I do miss my family, but no matter where you go, that'll happen. I know that I'm doing something with a purpose."

Outside the recruiting office, Silidker goes home to her family, her boyfriend and their sons. They enjoy traveling and experiencing new things like go-kart racing

in San Antonio and are always looking for new activities in or around San Angelo.

The Air Force has allowed her and her family to thrive and pursue her personal and professional goals, something she strived for even at a young age. As a recruiter, she can offer those same opportunities to individuals looking for the same sense of stability and belonging she sought at 19, which led her to join 12 years ago.

"It is my goal to ensure that everyone that walks into my office is well informed and provided with the necessary tools to become a successful member of our Air Force," Silidker stated.

Military Medical Innovation Event To Showcase Latest in Research, Medical Technology

From Defense Health Agency

Medical innovations are transforming the way health care is delivered in the Military Health System. The Defense Health Agency and the National Museum of Health and Medicine are pleased to announce the "Military Medical Innovation: The Future is Here" program scheduled for July 27, 2024. The family-friendly event starts at 10 a.m. and runs until noon. The event is free and open to the public.

"The Military Medical Innovation program is a great opportunity for families to learn about the nation's investment in research and development of new technologies to improve the care and welfare of service members and their families," said Andrea Schierkolk, the museum's public programs manager.

Attendees can expect displays of fascinating technology used by MHS providers to care for service members, retirees, and their families. This year's station presenters include:

- DHA Legacy Evolutionary Analytics Program Management Office
- DHA Medical Simulation and Training Program Management Office
- DHA Web & Mobile Technology Program Management Office
- Walter Reed National Military Medical Center
- Walter Reed Army Institute of Research
- Uniformed Services University
- 711th Human Performance Wing Air Force Research Laboratory

With improving technology in simulation systems, training models such as manikins can have different training tasks based on their environment and the type of medical care needed to treat the simulated injury. For instance, a manikin can simulate combat casualty care on a battlefield or surgical conditions in a hospital operating room.

"The Medical Simulation and Training

program human and K9 manikins were equally captivating to both skilled medical personnel and fascinated children during last year's event," said Jude Tomasello, the MST program manager. "In 2024, we will offer exciting hands-on opportunities for participants to safely administer care and treat wounds on these manikins."

In a different kind of simulation, participants can test out a virtual reality gaming application used to raise awareness about post-traumatic stress disorder and be subjected to simulated physical PTSD symptoms in a virtual environment. Visitors can experience a fraction of what those with PTSD deal with in their daily lives. The goal of the application is to drive discussion about PTSD, and empathy toward those with PTSD.

"Virtual reality has the unique ability to bend and shape reality to meet our needs or to make our imagination come to life. This aspect makes virtual reality especially potent when applied to PTSD because you can safely put a person in a completely customized scenario that will help them in their treatment plan with their providers with little to no risk to the patient or provider," said Braden Catlett, an information technology specialist in the web and mobile technology program office.

In addition to the medical simulation and virtual reality stations, eventgoers can see bots in action to learn how robotic process automation is transforming health care in military medical hospitals and clinics and on the battlefield.

Visitors also get to learn about innovative prosthetics developed to aid service members with extremity trauma and amputations, as well as developments in vaccines and other clinical research activities.

The Uniformed Services University facility dog, Sgt. Grover, and his handler Paula Bellini will welcome visitors and teach attendees about the differences



Photo by Ian Herbst
Presenters from the Defense Health Agency's Medical Simulation and Training Program Management Office show visitors how practitioners can use advanced human and canine simulation systems to hone their skill sets and gain confidence at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Silver Spring, Maryland during the July 29, 2023.

between service, facility, therapy, and medical alert animals and the benefits they provide for stress relief, community building, and education on working animals.

"Innovation is the spark that ignites progress, challenging us to question the status quo and pursue ideas that reshape our world," said Sven Garber, IT Specialist in the web and mobile technology program office. "NMHM's Health Innovation Month is a catalyst for this transformative spirit, and this event is a highlight, offering a well-rounded educational experience for all ages and backgrounds. The presenters

are pioneers in their fields, sharing their expertise and passion for innovation through cutting-edge research and real-world applications."

For specific details about the event, visit [medicalmuseum.health.mil/index.cfm?p=visit.events.2024.medical_innovation](https://www.medicalmuseum.health.mil/index.cfm?p=visit.events.2024.medical_innovation).

The museum's public programs provide forums for informal learning that connect the mission of the Department of Defense museum with the public. For more information about upcoming events, call (301) 319-3300 or visit <https://www.medicalmuseum.health.mil>.



Prepare for a summer filled with adventure, but acknowledge the potential for misadventure as well. A memorable experience can be overshadowed by a trip to the hospital – or worse. Understand and manage the risks associated with summer activities to minimize the chance of a good time turning bad.

The 101 Critical Days of Summer is the period between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend when off-duty accidents tend to increase across the Navy and Marine Corps. As Sailors and Marines engage in outdoor pursuits and leisure activities, it remains imperative to manage risks proactively. This strategy involves identifying potential hazards, implementing strategies to mitigate harm and making informed decisions.

Complacency often underlies off-duty mishaps during the summer months. Maintain situational awareness with these safety tips in mind.

Self-assess and self-correct – Recreational mishaps are preventable. Regularly evaluate how you spend your time during off-duty hours this summer. Assess risks, adhere to established procedures, comply with relevant laws and know your limits.

Educate others – Ensure everyone participating in the activity is familiar with the day's plan, proper equipment operation and emergency procedures. Sharing best practices with others helps reinforce proper procedures in your memory and ensures all participants can effectively address emergency situations.

The best prevention is preparation – Prioritize hydration, ensure communication devices are fully charged, carry spare gear, apply sunscreen, dress appropriately and engage in proper warm-up routines. Anticipating potential challenges and being adequately prepared can mitigate risks.

Motorcycle safety is deadly serious – About 1 in 10 Sailors and Marines own a motorcycle. Riders suffer higher rates of serious injuries and fatalities than other motorists. Complete recommended safety courses, wear appropriate protective gear, and adhere to safety regulations to minimize the likelihood of severe injury or fatality.

Simply drive – Operating a vehicle requires your full attention. Drive defensively, minimize distractions, maintain safe distances, and adhere to traffic laws.

Prioritize arriving safely over arriving quickly, and never drive under the influence of alcohol or while fatigued.

Suspect and inspect – As you unpack your summertime gear, conduct a thorough inspection to identify potential hazards before use. Stored items such as your grill, motorcycle, or sports equipment may have sustained damage. Check the fit of all wearable gear and replace or repair any damaged items to safeguard against potential risks.

Refresh your safety mindset – Has anything changed since last summer? Stay abreast of any changes in laws, regulations, or resources pertinent to your summer activities. Review your regular route, reread the owner's manuals, or take a refresher course to remain informed and prepared.

The sobering statistics from previous summers underscore the importance of these precautions. By prioritizing safety, Sailors and Marines can mitigate personal harm and safeguard their well-being and that of their loved ones. Take a moment to reflect on these considerations throughout the summer – your vigilance could save lives.



For more information, click the logo above and review the powerpoint presentation of the summer safety tips.

Navy Ensign Continues Female Trailblazer Legacy

By Shannon Collins
Defense Media Activity

SAN DIEGO – Leading the chant, “For those who can’t,” a former Navy diver smiles while joining her sisters in arms in the impromptu rugby scrum during the Armed Services Women’s Rugby Championship at Nobel Field here July 13.

From being a trailblazer female Navy diver to captaining her team on the Navy women’s rugby team, Ensign Megan Neyen said she loves being a source of positivity and inspiration for others.

Call to service

Raised in a family steeped in military tradition, Neyen, stationed Naval Base Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, said she joined to serve her country. Her mother, Mary Pinson, served 10 years in the Marines from 1985 to 1995. Her father, Terry Norris, served four years in the Marines. Her older brother served in the Marines and younger brother serves in the Army. Her uncles also serve in the military. “I look up to all of them,” she said. “I really wanted to serve my country. We did the Navy SEAL training in high school, and I loved it. I loved how physically exhausting and mentally challenging it was. I really wanted to be a part of women serving as divers. It was me being able to show women in the workforce, leading.”

She completed the Navy Dive School at the Center for Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Diving, Panama City, Florida, in 2021. She said she’s proud to follow her mom’s trailblazing footsteps.

Her mom, Pinson, worked on avionics and then calibration on rotary aircraft. Pinson got emotional as she spoke about how proud she is of Neyen.

“There’s been something about her ever since she was a little baby,” she said, tears running down her face. “We were at the zoo one time, and I was just watching her and the way she was, the youngest of four siblings at that time, but she was the leader of the four. She’s an amazing young lady.”

Neyen graduated from Officer Candidate School at Officer Training Command Newport, Rhode Island, Sept. 29, and became a surface warfare officer.

She encourages more women to push boundaries and not be afraid to enlist into the career fields they are eligible for.

“We’re powerful. We’re way more powerful in units

than alone,” she said. “If you can come in and find your person, just find someone who can also build you up, we can be unstoppable. We need more women in the Navy, Army, Marines and Air Force. We can lead. We’re great leaders.”

Rugby

During middle school, a physical education teacher encouraged Neyen to try out for rugby. She said she immediately fell in love with the sport after her first practice. She said she made the U20 level and competed at that level in high school and college.

After competing on the USA women’s rugby team, she earned a spot on the women’s national team. She will be competing in her first World Cup next year.

“I feel like my hard work has finally paid off,” she said. “I feel like I’m at that peak in my life where I commissioned. I went into special warfare. I made the USA team.”

She said she doesn’t take anything for granted.

“I’m beyond grateful but I’ve worked hard. I put in the blood, the sweat. I’ve had so many tears,” she said. “I created this, with the help of my team, with everyone.”

Her mom said she’s proud to watch her daughter lead both on and off the pitch.

“Whatever she puts her mind to, she excels,” she said proudly. “I love watching her leading on the pitch.”

She said she was especially proud when Neyen was hand-selected for the first CISM International Military Sports Council women’s rugby competition in the Netherlands with Ireland, the Netherlands and France. Women from the Air Force, Marines, Navy, Army and Coast Guard were hand-selected to represent the U.S. Armed Forces Sports team.

“Keep an eye on her,” she said. “She’s a trailblazer. She has a huge heart. She’s an amazing young woman.”

Warrior spirit

Neyen’s father grew up on a Navajo reservation and credits their family heritage for her warrior spirit.

“Megan’s the last of our family that can be registered in the tribe,” he said. “From the code talkers in World War II, the Navajo tribe, actually most Native American tribes, have always fought and become deeply involved with the United States and that continues with Megan.”

He said rugby goes back to over 100 years; the Navy goes back to 1775. “But the Native Americans, we’ve been here for a little bit longer,” he said with a smile.



Photo by EJ Hersom

Navy Ensign Megan Neyen breaks a tackle during the 2024 Armed Forces Women’s Rugby Championships in San Diego, California, July 12.

Neyen said she didn’t find out she was Navajo until she was 21.

“When I met my great grandma, who lived on the reservation, done everything and fought for her life, I’m like, ‘that’s where I get it from,’” she said with a smile. She said it gives her that extra sense of pride to represent the U.S. at the World Cup and to wear the uniform.

Positivity

No matter how steep the competition gets, Neyen remains positive.

“She is the most positive person, and she’ll overcome all odds to do the right thing at all times,” her dad said. “She has the best mindset of anyone I know – be positive, never negative, that’s her motto. She’ll be having a horrible day, but she’ll come up with something positive to say; she’s infectious. She always has that positive vibe.”

Neyen said she’s been through many injuries and built herself up.

“One thing that stayed with me is perpetual optimism. It’s a force multiplier,” she said. “I will live that way until I die. Your positivity and your attitude can carry you so far in life. Never let anyone take that from you no matter how hard people try to beat you down. Keep that positivity. You are the master of your own fate.”

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