



The Knox County Joint Veterans Council Honor Guard is looking for **volunteers!!!**

The Knox County Joint Veterans Council is located at the Knox County Veterans Service Office located at 105 E Chestnut St. Mount Vernon, Ohio. The post conducts regular meetings on the third Thursday of each month. The meeting time is 7:00 P.M. **Contact Hugh Lamb @**

[740-358-7823](tel:740-358-7823) if you are interested in volunteering.



They stand guard silently, vigilantly through whatever Mother Nature dares throw at them. They do so with great pride to honor one of their own. For them, honoring a fallen brother-in-arms is compensation enough.

For the families of the deceased veteran, they are the ever-watchful sentinels, and their selfless act is a much-appreciated tribute.

Marine Corps' new amphibious vehicles will soon deploy to the Pacific

The Marine Corps will deploy its new amphibious vehicle within a few months, after nearly a year and a half of restrictions on the operation of the platform. In October 2022, an amphibious combat vehicle rolled over in the water during training, prompting the Corps to halt most operations of the vehicle in the surf — the second time that year that the service restricted the use of the vehicle after a mishap in rough waters. The Marine Corps attributed the mishaps to training shortfalls and is recertifying vehicle operators and maintainers, focusing the new training on how the amphibious combat vehicle differs from its predecessor, the amphibious assault vehicle. With these new training procedures in hand, the Corps plans to deploy amphibious combat vehicles with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit in or around March, Assistant Commandant Gen. Christopher Mahoney said Thursday at a Hudson Institute event in Washing

The eight-wheeled amphibious combat vehicles can emerge from a ship, transit the waves and then roll onto shore, allowing the military's amphibious force to conduct amphibious operations. But the vehicle has faced challenges, not only on the water but also on land, including a December 2023 rollover that killed a Marine aboard a California Marine base. Even the operators who had gotten recertified weren't yet authorized to transit the surf zone with embarked troops or when the average height of the tallest waves are at 4 feet or higher, Marine spokesman Capt. Ryan Bruce said in December 2023. Marine Corps Times on Thursday asked the Corps when it would officially lift those restrictions but didn't immediately receive a response.

The California-based 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit will deploy on the Navy's Boxer Amphibious Ready Group in phases, with the amphibious transport dock Somerset heading to the Pacific in the coming days to begin a six-month scheduled deployment, Shon Brodie, the director of the Maritime Expeditionary Warfare Division at the Corps' Capability Development Directorate, told Defense News on Friday.

The amphibious assault ship Boxer and the dock landing ship Harpers Ferry will deploy about two months later, in or around March, due to ship readiness and maintenance challenges. Corps and fleet leaders recognized the importance of having Marine forces afloat in the Pacific between Taiwan's January election and its May inauguration, Brodie said. Since the entire amphibious ready group would not be ready to go, they elected to send the Somerset early to allow for some presence in the region. Mahoney said the vehicles likely will deploy with the other two ships, allowing for more time to wrap up testing and training.

The Marine Corps previously had been tight-lipped about when it would lift the restrictions on the operation of the vehicle. Bruce said via email back in December 2023, "Our Marines are training and experimenting with the platform as we speak, but the service is not going to rush into announcing capabilities on upcoming deployments until we are certain we have done our homework." In announcing that the vehicles soon would deploy with the Marine expeditionary unit, Mahoney acknowledged that Marines still have some more homework to do first. "We have a very detailed checklist sort of criteria to get that platform back to unprotected waters," said Mahoney, who also is the acting commandant while Commandant Gen. Eric Smith recovers from his October 2023 cardiac arrest. "We're working on that. There are a couple more things to go, but I'm confident that we will get the training, get the procedures and the methods to the level that we need to be confident in rough sea states."



FREE NATIONAL PARK PASS FOR VETERANS

U.S. military Service members, Veterans and Gold Star Families are eligible to receive free lifetime access to more than 2,000 Federal recreation areas, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests. The free Military Pass is a way to thank America's Veterans, Gold Star Families, and current military and their dependents for their support of our country and to encourage them to explore recreational opportunities on their public lands and waters. The Interagency Military Pass covers entrance fees and standard amenity fees (day use fees) at national parks and other public lands. It does not cover expanded amenity or user fees for activities such as camping, transportation, special recreation permits, reservation fees or special tours.

For purposes of this program, a veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the U.S. armed forces, including the National Guard and Reserve.

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Are you a Gold Star Family member or a Veteran?



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Talks to begin on the future of U.S. troop presence in Iraq

Nearly 21 years after the U.S. first invaded Iraq, a decade after American troops returned to beat back ISIS, and seven years after U.S. and Iraqi forces ended the ISIS caliphate, the governments of the United States and Iraq are sitting down to discuss if, when and how the remaining 2,500 U.S. troops will officially leave the country once again.

The so-called Iraq Higher Military Commission convened for the first time Thursday to chart a path forward for U.S. troops there, according to a statement issued by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

The commission will “discuss how the Coalition’s mission to defeat ISIS will transition on a timeline that considers three key factors: the threat from ISIS, operational and environmental requirements, and the Iraqi security forces’ capability levels,” Austin said. Still, the U.S. and Iraq appeared to begin the talks on different pages Thursday.

A senior U.S. defense official told reporters that the commission’s intention is not to negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

But Iraq’s foreign ministry said in a statement that the country expects to create “a specific and clear timetable that specifies the duration of the presence of the international coalition’s advisors in Iraq, begins the deliberate gradual reduction of its advisors on Iraqi soil [and] end the military mission of the coalition against ISIS,” among other goals.

The senior U.S. defense official did not address these apparent differences between the two countries during a briefing with reporters Thursday.

The commission kicks off under the specter of not only dozens of attacks on bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq since October, but as Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to fire on commercial ships in the Red Sea in response to Israel’s war on Gaza, amid Pentagon concerns about Middle East stability and the potential for bad actors to exacerbate the conflicts.

At the same time, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani called the U.S. presence in Iraq “destabilizing,” and said in an interview this month that the presence created targets for Iran-backed militias wishing to push the U.S. out.

The recent attacks in Iraq have delayed the commission, the senior U.S. defense official told reporters, as it was originally slated to start late last year, following its announcement in August.

Officials on Thursday could not provide a timeline either for the commission’s work or for any eventual reconfiguring of the U.S. mission in Iraq.

But no one should expect those negotiations to move quickly, according to Jonathan Lord, director of the Middle East security program at the Center for a New American Security. “There’s an old trope that we Iraq analyst hands have, you know: When an Iraqi politician wants to be seen doing something on a difficult issue without actually doing anything? Yeah, they suggest we form a committee,” Lord told Military Times.

Under pressure from Iran-aligned members of his government who want the U.S. out, Sudani appears to be taking a strong public stand with his words, but in a way that doesn’t require any sort of immediate action, Lord added.



Pictures of the Month



The USS Gerald R. Ford arrives in Norfolk, Va., Jan. 18, 2024, following an eight-month deployment.



Soldiers conduct an M1A3 Abrams live-fire exercise at Camp Herkus, Lithuania, Jan. 14, 2024