

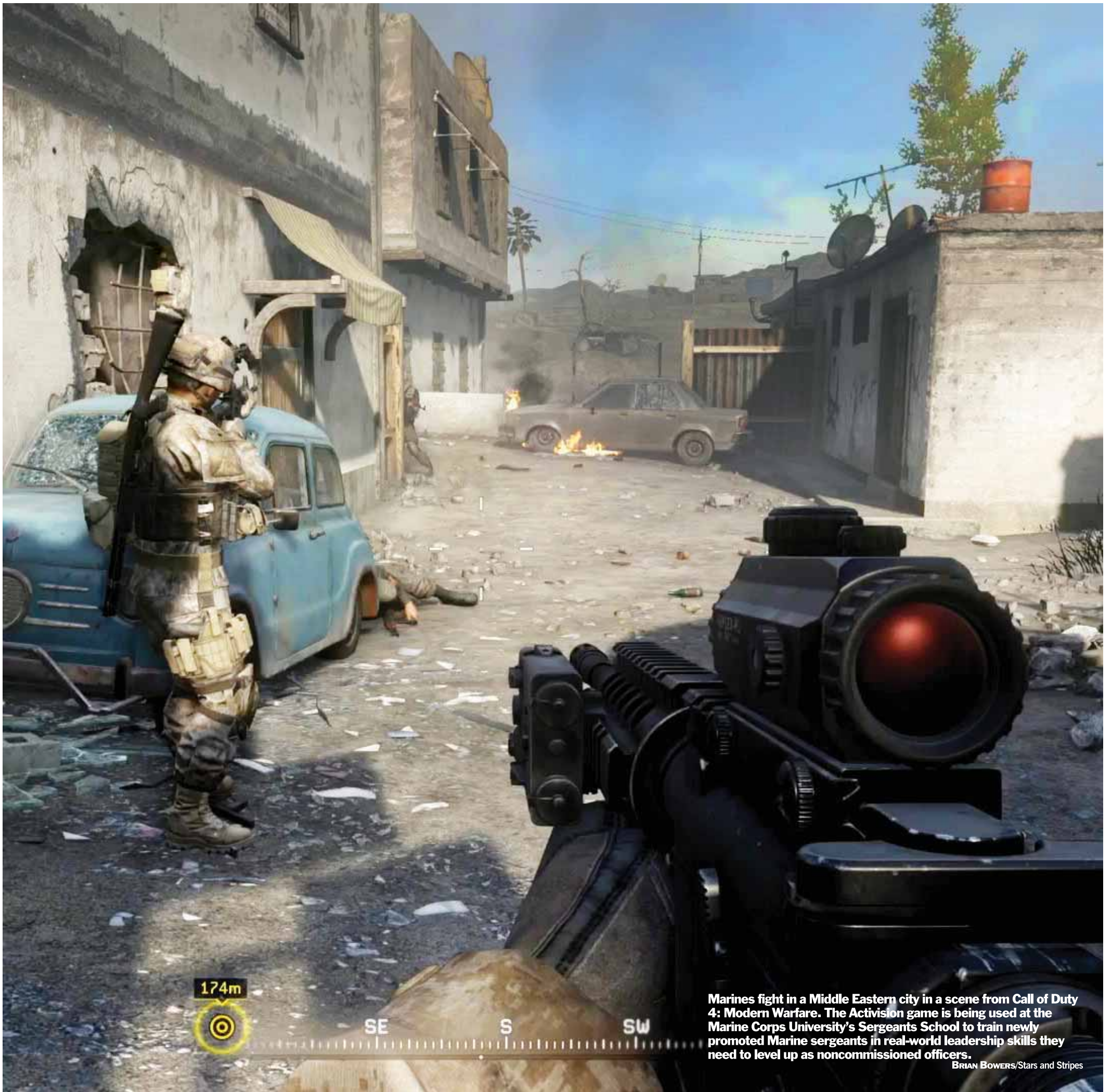
# STARS AND STRIPES®

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Volume 1 Edition 19 ©SS 2026

ITALY EDITION

JUNE 11, 2026



Marines fight in a Middle Eastern city in a scene from Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. The Activision game is being used at the Marine Corps University's Sergeants School to train newly promoted Marine sergeants in real-world leadership skills they need to level up as noncommissioned officers.

BRIAN BOWERS/Stars and Stripes

## New kind of Duty

Marines turn to vintage video game in NCO school **Page 3**

New food station at Sigonella offers more options **Page 5**



Soldiers aim to be all-ears to assess drone threats **Page 6**



Naples' Thai e Vai offers 'street food' with dine-in twist **Page 13**



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COVER STORY

# Marine training now includes classic COD

## Sergeants School turns to modified 2007 game

BY CHAD GARLAND  
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps hopes that a modified version of the nearly two-decade-old hit video game Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare can help newly promoted sergeants level up as leaders.

A group of researchers from Virginia Tech and the University of Memphis developed a training adaptation of the genre-defining game to help teach students in the Sergeants School at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Va. The effort, funded by the Office of Naval Research, is known as Research into Competency Acquisition with Novel E-gaming.

The fourth installment of the Call of Duty franchise, a top seller after its release in November 2007, was the first to bring the series out of World War II and into the modern era, though much about modern warfare has changed since, with the advent and growing use of drone technology and artificial intelligence.

In the game's modified version, which was introduced to the first cohort of Marine students in January, players participate in over a dozen scenarios tailored to help them hone skills in leadership, critical thinking, decision-making and communication in real time, Virginia Tech said in a recent statement.

"The actual skills translate directly into making good decisions under high stress," said Brig. Gen. Matthew Tracy, commanding general of Marine Corps Education Command and president of Marine Corps University, according to the statement.

Sergeants School is designed to prepare newly promoted sergeants to take on more significant leadership roles as noncommissioned officers, according to a description on the Marine Corps University's website.

The curriculum emphasizes Marine Corps doctrine, tactical decision-making and maneuver warfare concepts. Course instruction is typically delivered through guided discussions, case studies, practical applications and other exercises.

Traditional modes of instruction provide students with the necessary knowledge, but the video game lets them develop that knowledge into skills "through practice, reflection and refinement," said Lt. Cmdr. Mike Natali, a program manager with the Office of Naval Research.

The students see "how their thoughts, decisions, and interactions with teammates affect performance and mission success in real-time vice theoretical talking points," Natali said in the Virginia Tech statement.

Having the chance to work with the military on something with a real-world impact "instead of something sequestered away in the ivory tower" was a plus for Louis Hickman, assistant professor of industrial-organizational psychology at Virginia Tech, who leads the research project.

"This is one of the few things in the course that allows for active practice and a more engaging experience," Hickman said.

The similarity of the game's setting to the real world was also part of the reason the researchers chose Call of Duty 4 over something like Halo, which is set on other planets centuries in the future, Hickman told Stars and Stripes last month.

Before he had two jobs and a family, he was an avid player of first-person shooters and even played the first installment of the Call of Duty franchise competitively in his younger days, he said.

Hickman's gaming skills also showed in the team's weekly testing of the game and associated software.

"When Louis is there, it's like having Rambo on your team," said Ryan P. McMahan, director of the Blacksburg, Va.-based university's Center for Human-Computer Interaction, as quoted in the university's state-



BRIAN BOWERS/Stars and Stripes

Marines prepare to enter a room in a Middle Eastern city in a scene from Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. The Activision game is being used at the Marine Corps University's Sergeants School to train newly promoted Marine sergeants in real-world leadership skills they need to level up as noncommissioned officers.



Office of Naval Research

Louis Hickman, assistant professor of industrial-organizational psychology at Virginia Tech, shows Marine Corps University students how to maneuver in the custom gaming module that leverages a modified version of the 2007 game Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare.



BRIAN BOWERS/Stars and Stripes

Players shoot it out aboard a cargo ship in Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare.

ment. The team needed to ensure the software could collect data and function perfectly before being deployed because it could not be updated later, which was a unique constraint on their work, said Brandon Booth, a third

member of the team and an assistant professor in the University of Memphis Department of Computer Science.

The researchers used existing modification tools to create a custom campaign through 14 levels, some of which have several variants.

**"They thought it was so valuable that their units would benefit from it as well."**

Louis Hickman  
assistant professor of industrial-organizational psychology at Virginia Tech

Fire teams of five Marine players battle together through these levels against much larger numbers of opposing forces than the "drip feed" of enemies they would see in the game's original single-player campaign mode.

"Sometimes they're encountering up to 20 opposing forces at a time," Hickman said, an intensity of combat that "requires coordinating in terms of where you're looking and covering, as well as when you're reloading, just like you might encounter in the real world."

Before each scenario, the fire team gets a briefing and the team leader develops a plan. During the gameplay, researchers gather data from players' voice chats, video of the gameplay, and information about their in-game movements, shooting, kills, and deaths.

Afterward, the team does what the Marines call a "hot wash," facilitated by a large language model, a type of artificial intelligence that helps them discuss what went well, what didn't, and what to do differently the next time, Hickman said.

In a later phase of the project, researchers plan to feed the player data into the large language model to help it improve the after-action review and better aid Marines in developing lessons learned, Hickman said.

Ultimately, the skills the young sergeants practice in the game, and the lessons they learn from it, are tested and evaluated in realistic scenarios over several days during the school's culminating field exercise.

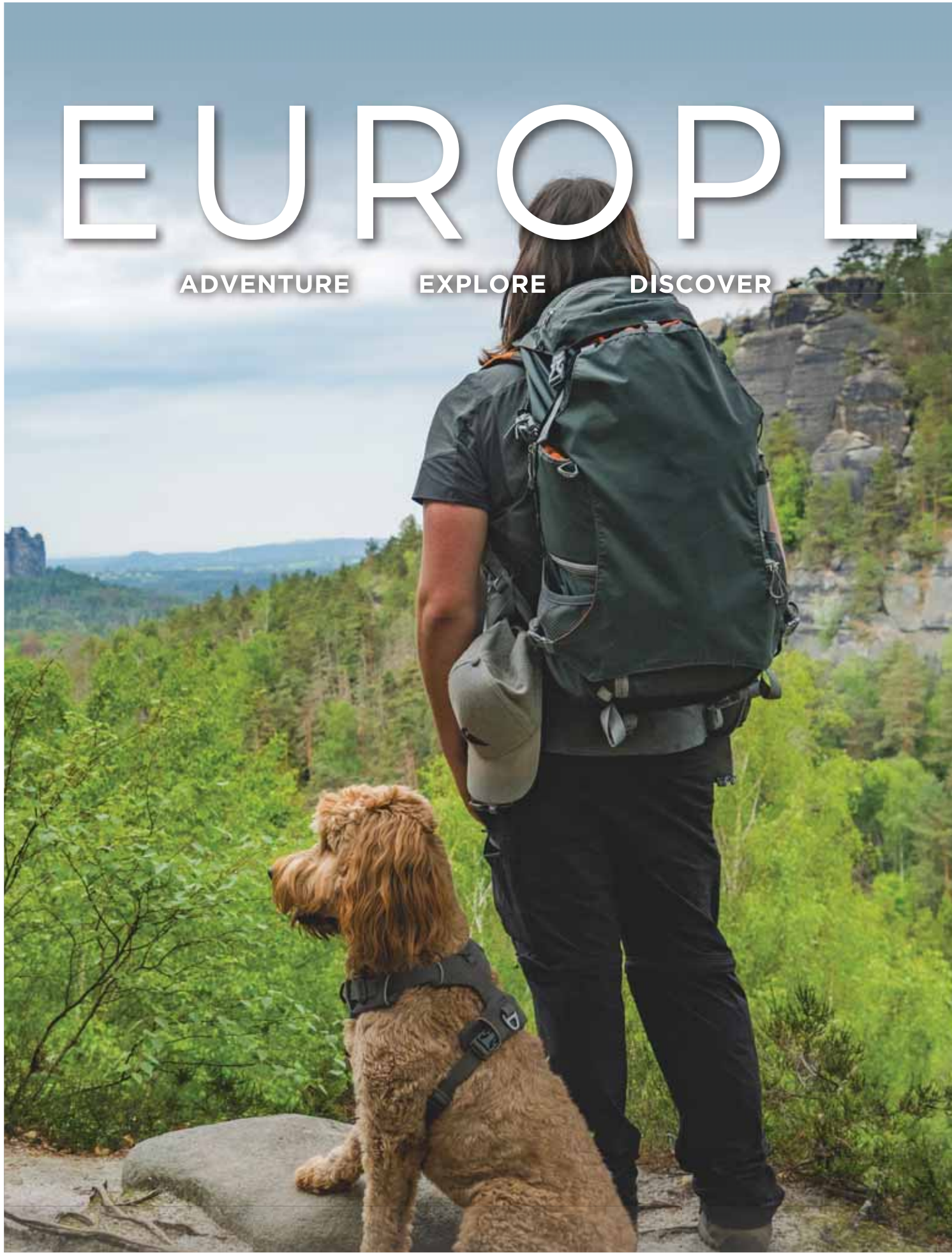
While Marine Corps University plans to deploy the software at a Sergeants School on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms in California, Hickman said students were already asking to take it back to their units.

"They thought it was so valuable that their units would benefit from it as well," he said in the university statement.

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MILITARY

# New food station, more options at Sigonella

Junior sailors no longer will have to miss meals because of schedules

By ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Navy junior sailors working in Sicily no longer will have to miss meals because of their work schedules thanks to a food service innovation designed to keep them fueled throughout the day.

A Grab n' Go food station recently opened at Naval Air Station Sigonella, offering hot and cold meals for sailors whose work commitments may not allow them to eat during regular galley hours, the base said in a statement.

The program targets junior sailors, specifically those ranked petty officer 3 and below who are receiving free Navy meals, known as rations-in-kind, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 LaToya Farrish, food service officer for NAS Sigonella's galley.

Rations-in-kind are offered to service members in lieu of basic subsistence allowance and are designed to make it so that they receive meals without the need to pay for them, according to the Navy.

The idea behind the food station at Sigonella is to offer flexible, expanded dining options to provide service members with the nutrition needed to accomplish the daily mission, Farrish said.

"We're just trying to ensure that they are getting a well-balanced meal and not just a granola bar or a bottle of water," she said.

To that end, the station offers a variety of items, such as breakfast burritos and sandwiches, chicken fingers, burgers, salads, fresh sliced fruit as well as other sides and entrees designed for convenient consumption, Farrish said.

Condiments, salad dressings, utensils, hot food containers and to-go boxes and bags for carrying meals also are available.

The Navy is working to improve quality of life for sailors in a variety of areas, including housing, food service, recreation, grocery shopping, child care and schools for children.

For example, most Navy bases now offer free high-speed internet in barracks, and sailors who previously were assigned to live on their ships now have the option to live off ship when not at sea.

More recently, Navy Installations Command began piloting food service improve-



Photos by U.S. Navy

The new Grab n' Go food station at Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily, provides a range of hot and cold entrees. Offerings include breakfast burritos, sandwiches, chicken fingers, salads, and more, catering specifically to junior sailors who may miss regular dining hours at the galley due to their work schedules.

ment programs at Naval Base Kitsap in Washington state and Naval Construction Battalion Center Gulfport in Mississippi that offer more diverse food and greater flexibility in how sailors use their meal entitlements.

For example, sailors at Kitsap will be able to use their meal entitlements not only at galleys but also at some on-base restaurants starting this month, while sailors in Gulfport are experiencing "rotating ethnic food stations" at the galley and an updated, more modern interior, the Navy said in a May 27 statement.

Farrish said the Grab n' Go was inspired by a Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central challenge for galleys to improve the dining

experience for junior sailors.

The food station at NAS Sigonella is the first of its kind in EURAFCENT and is in the base's galley, known as Ristorante Bella Etna, on the installation's operational site. It is open from 8:30 to 11 a.m. and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

Officials are working to move the food station to a location that is more convenient for sailors than going into a galley area, but no timeline has been set.

Although sailors using the food station won't get the "full-blown experience that they would have if they dined in, (they will get) something ... to take back to their workstation and still meet the requirements to have a good meal," Farrish said.



The Grab & Go station is the first of its kind in the Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central area of operations.

## 'Jack Ryan: Ghost War' films scenes at RAF Mildenhall

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
Stars and Stripes

RAF Mildenhall and some of its airmen appear on screen in "Jack Ryan: Ghost War," the latest installment in the long-running franchise created by author Tom Clancy.

The film was released on May 20, and its storyline includes the Air Force base in the United Kingdom. As such, about 50 U.S. airmen at the installation teamed up with filmmakers there to lend authenticity to the story, the Air Force confirmed.

Support for the production was coordinated by the Department of the Air Force Entertainment Liaison Office, which worked with the airmen to advise filmmakers on scenes involving the Air Force, Lt. Col. Gina McKeen, the office's director, said in an email.

"They were open to our inputs, asked lots of questions about how to ensure the Air Force aspects were presented correctly on screen, and were very supportive of the military folks involved," McKeen said of the film's crew.

The airmen gave advice on uniform and appearance standards, military protocols and customs and courtesies. They also provided

background information on how the Air Force counters terrorism and the role of U.S. intelligence capabilities in global defense, McKeen said.

Some of that expertise made it directly into the film. Mildenhall Honor Guard members supported a scene depicting a solemn ramp ceremony on the flightline, while several other airmen appeared as extras. Airmen also served as extras in two additional scenes filmed at the base, according to McKeen.

The airmen extras volunteered and were hired by the production at the standard day rate, McKeen said, adding that each completed an Air Force off-duty employment form before participating.

Filming at Mildenhall took place in April 2025.

Located in Suffolk in eastern England, the base is one of the key hubs for U.S. air operations in Europe. It is home to the 100th Air Refueling Wing, the only permanently based U.S. air refueling wing in the European theater, which refuels U.S. and allied aircraft midair, extending their range.

"By partnering with productions like this,



JONNY COURNOYER/Prime Video

Along with its marquee stars, RAF Mildenhall and some airmen based at the installation in the U.K. appear on screen in "Jack Ryan: Ghost War," the latest installment in the franchise created by author Tom Clancy. The movie is available on Amazon Prime Video.

allowing them to film on our bases and with real Airmen, we are helping showcase to global viewing audiences the professionalism and capabilities of the USAF while adding

realism and accuracy to the story," McKeen said.

"Jack Ryan: Ghost War" is on Amazon Prime Video.

## MILITARY

# Detect, track, defeat

## Flytrap trains troops to fight underneath a swarm of drones

By SHATYRA COX  
*Stars and Stripes*

The whir of drones in Lithuanian skies over several recent weeks wasn't just noise for a contingent of U.S. soldiers.

During the recent Project Flytrap 5.0 exercise at Pabrade Training Area, a sprawling military training site near the border with Belarus, troops found themselves increasingly listening for threats overhead as large numbers of drones filled the airspace during training operations.

The exercise reflects a growing reality in modern warfare: on battlefields crowded with an ever-increasing variety of reconnaissance and attack drones, soldiers have a bigger expanse to monitor.

"It increases the real effect," said Sgt. 1st Class Tyler Harrington, a platoon sergeant with Eagle Troop, 2nd Cavalry Regiment. "No longer am I just scanning to my 12 o'clock and around me at ground level. Now we have to scan up and out as well."

Harrington said troops are increasingly learning to distinguish drones by sound before they come into view.

"Some one-way attack drones have a higher buzz sound; they sound faster and more rapid versus your enemy reconnaissance assets. They're flying at a higher level," he explained.

Harrington said the exercise incorporated large numbers of drones simultaneously during some scenarios, forcing troops to react to a host of aerial threats while ground forces maneuvered below.

Project Flytrap 5.0, which started April 30 and ended May 19, was part of Saber Strike 26, a wider multinational exercise across the Baltic region.

The exercise brought together U.S., British and allied forces to evaluate new drone and counterdrone systems under realistic battlefield conditions.



MAX ELLIOTT/U.S. Army  
Army Sgt. Todd Kelly, a squadron master trainer assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, launches a one-way attack drone during Project Flytrap 5.0 at Pabrade Training Area, Lithuania, on May 15.



JOSEPH HONCE/U.S. Army  
Army Sgt. Oscar Servin, a tactical unmanned aircraft system specialist, assigned to 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, readies a Hornet, one-way strike drone, for launch in preparation for Project Flytrap at Pabrade Training Area.

During some scenarios, U.S. troops faced off against British paratroopers in simulated combat involving dozens of drones in the air at once. Soldiers tested systems designed to detect, jam and shoot down hostile drones while also maneuvering their own unmanned aircraft overhead.

The exercise comes as militaries around the world race to adapt to the rapid spread of low-cost drones, which have transformed battlefields in conflicts ranging from Ukraine to the Middle East.

Commercially available systems and relatively cheap one-way attack drones have in-

creasingly been used for reconnaissance, strikes and overwhelming air defenses.

Project Flytrap is part of the Army's effort to adapt more quickly to those rapidly evolving threats by testing new drone and counterdrone systems directly in the field.

"What we've done here is simple in concept but powerful in execution: put new tools directly into the hands of soldiers, stress them under realistic conditions, gather feedback and improve them quickly," said Lt. Col. Jason Kruck, commander of 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

Troops operated through rain, wind and long hours in the field while testing systems designed to detect, track and defeat hostile drones.

The equipment included drone-jamming systems, acoustic sensors that identify drones by sound and unmanned ground vehicles, officials said.

Kruck said the exercise focused in part on whether systems that perform well during short demonstrations remain reliable during prolonged operations.

Identifying failures during testing can be as valuable as confirming successes because immediate feedback allows soldiers and industry partners to refine systems before wider fielding, Kruck said.

"Modern battle evolves quickly," Kruck said. "Our responsibility ... is ensuring our soldiers and formations can learn, adapt and integrate new capabilities faster than the emerging threats that we see today."

## Navy picks 7 firms to show unmanned vessel prototypes

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Seven companies have been chosen to submit design prototypes for a Medium Unmanned Surface Vessel, the Navy said.

Birdon, Galliano Marine Services, Huntington Ingalls Industries, Leidos, PacMar Technologies, Saronic Technologies and Sea Machines are the seven designers invited to submit their MUSV prototypes for at-sea testing that begins in June and concludes in October.

Each design that meets the Navy's specifications and passes at-sea testing will receive \$15 million. The prototypes will also be eligible for production.

The Navy has said it has no minimum or maximum limit on how many designs it could select. The seven designs were chosen from about two dozen submissions.

The Navy's criteria call for a vessel with a range of at least 2,500 nautical miles and a speed of 25 knots. It must be able to operate in sea state 4, defined by the World Meteor-

ological Organization as moderately rough seas with wave heights of up to 8 feet.

The vessel must be able to operate autonomously while carrying up to 25 metric tons of weapons or other cargo in at least two 40-foot-long shipping containers.

The Navy plans to procure 36 Medium Unmanned Surface Vessels in Fiscal Year 2026, using \$5 billion from the 2026 Reconciliation Act set aside for marketplace contracting, in which companies would bear the cost of prototyping.

The Navy said it hopes to have vessels available for leasing or procurement in Fiscal Year 2027.

The MUSV marketplace competition was created to offer new opportunities for smaller, non-traditional shipyards to build portions of the Navy's future fleet.

"This initiative represents a strategic shift in naval acquisition, designed to rapidly field unmanned technologies by leveraging mature, existing commercial solutions," the Navy said in a statement.



Huntington Ingalls Industries  
An artist rendering of Romulus, a Medium Unmanned Surface Vessel, designed by Huntington Ingalls Industries. HII is among seven companies chosen by the Navy to submit MUSV prototypes.

MILITARY

# Nimitz becomes longest-serving carrier

Commissioned in 1975, ship passes Enterprise, the first nuclear flattop

BY GARY WARNER  
Stars and Stripes

Somewhere between Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro on May 10, the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz became the longest-serving flattop in Navy history, the service said.

Nimitz recently celebrated 51 years since its May 3, 1975, commissioning. The ship is in the final stages of its homeport move from Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., to Naval Station Norfolk, in Virginia.

During the long circumnavigation of South America, it has held joint exercises with several militaries, including Chile and Argentina. In Brazil, a “big top” reception was held on the ship’s flight deck in the waters off Rio.

“Fifty-one years in, Nimitz’s legacy isn’t something we merely remember — it’s something we carry forward through war-fighting readiness, operational excellence, and exceeding expectations in our current mission of partnership-building throughout the Americas,” said Rear Adm. Cassidy “Dudley” Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11, which includes Nimitz.

A second milestone was passed a week later.

“USS Nimitz (CVN 68) has been in active service longer than USS Enterprise (CVN 65),” said a statement from the Naval Heritage and History Command.

The retired USS Enterprise — the world’s first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier — was commissioned on Nov. 26, 1961, and deactivated on Dec. 1, 2012, ending its status as an operational carrier in the U.S. Navy.

That is 51 years and five days after it was



GARY WARNER/Stars and Stripes

The crew of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz “man the rails” for arrival at Bremerton on Naval Base Kitsap, Wash., in December.

commissioned. In its final years it passed legendary carriers such as USS Kitty Hawk, USS Midway, USS Forrestal, USS Saratoga in terms of service time.

No carrier had ever served half a century before Enterprise passed the mark in 2011. On May 10, Nimitz set the new mark of 51 years and six days of operational service.

Enterprise was finally officially decommissioned — after five years spent defueling the

nuclear reactors and deactivating the propulsion system — on Feb. 3, 2017, 55 years and 68 days after commissioning.

Under the Navy’s current timetable, Nimitz is scheduled to begin its retirement in March, timed to coincide with the commissioning of the new carrier USS John F. Kennedy into the fleet.

Nimitz may only briefly hold the title of longest-serving aircraft carrier in Navy histo-

ry, which Enterprise held between the retirement of Midway in 1992 and Nimitz passing its mark last month.

Nimitz was the first of 10 Nimitz-class carriers commissioned between 1975 and 1995. Navy plans currently call for the second-oldest carrier — USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, commissioned in 1977 — to serve into the 2030s, when it could challenge Nimitz for the title of the Navy’s longest-serving carrier in history.

## Delivery of 4th Ford-class carrier delayed by 2 years

BY GARY WARNER  
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has revised the projected delivery date of the aircraft carrier USS Doris Miller to 2034 — two years later than previously expected.

The new date for delivery of the fourth Gerald R. Ford-class carrier — numbered CVN-81 — was listed in the Navy’s Fiscal Year 2027 Shipbuilding and Conversion Justification Book.

“The CVN-81 delivery date shifted from February 2032 to February 2034 due to shipbuilder construction footprint constraints limiting their ability to build CVN-81 ship modules,” the shipbuilding report says.

The shortage of physical space in the shipyard, slowing construction, has already had a domino effect on the Navy’s carrier replacement plans.

All carriers must be built at HII Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia, the only facility in the U.S. that can build nuclear-powered aircraft carriers.

The USS George H.W. Bush was the last Nimitz-class carrier built. It was laid down in September 2003 and launched in October 2006 and received by the Navy at its commissioning in January 2009. The total time from keel laying to commissioning was five years and eight months.

Work then shifted to the new Gerald R. Ford class aircraft carriers. Work began on the initial ship, the USS Gerald R. Ford, in

November 2009. The ship was launched in November 2013 and delivered at commissioning in July 2017. The total time from keel laying to commissioning was 7 years and eight months.

The second ship, the USS John F. Kennedy, was under construction in July 2015 and launched in October 2019. It’s expected to be commissioned in March 2027. If that deadline is met, the time from keel laying to commissioning would be 11 years and eight months.

Delays in shipyard work have pushed the expected delivery of the third ship, the USS Enterprise (CVN-80), an additional eight months compared to the estimate in the Navy’s 2026 shipbuilding plan. The ship’s keel was laid in April 2022.

“The CVN-80 delivery date shifted from July 2030 to March 2031 due to delay in critical path construction required for launch of the ship,” the Navy report says.

The dates would put the keel-to-commissioning time of the Enterprise at an estimated 8 years, 11 months.

HII confirmed on May 11 that the lack of a construction schedule for the Doris Miller was being impacted by delays caused by the construction of the new USS Enterprise. Capacity constraints have hindered work in the dry dock, but the company hopes to host the keel-laying this year.

“We are holding ourselves accountable to complete these important national security assets as quickly as possible by addressing production and supply base challenges impacting aircraft carrier programs,” said HII spokesman Danny Hernandez



HANNAH DONAHUE/U.S. Navy

The USS Doris Miller will be the fourth aircraft carrier in the class named for the USS Gerald R. Ford, above.

HII was continuing to expand and update its facilities at Newport News and using new technologies and a wider distribution of the workload to reclaim space in the shipyard.

The shipyard and the Navy have said delays in the carrier construction and other shipbuilding activity in recent years was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain delays and the recruiting and retention of qualified workers.

The Navy is currently operating 11 aircraft carriers, the minimum number allowed under a congressional mandate.

The Pentagon planned to build 10 new Gerald R. Ford-class carriers to replace the old USS Enterprise (commissioned in 1961) and the 10 Nimitz-class carriers commissioned between 1975 and 2009.

The Navy had announced that the USS Nimitz would retire in 2025, only to roll that date back twice. It is now scheduled for de-

commissioning in March 2027. That is the same month its replacement, the USS John F. Kennedy, is scheduled to be commissioned.

Next up for retirement would be the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, commissioned in October 1977. The Navy had announced the carrier would retire in 2026, but has pushed the date into the early 2030s, when its replacement, the new Enterprise, would join the fleet.

The Doris Miller would replace the USS Carl Vinson, commissioned March 13, 1982.

The Navy announced in January 2025 that the next two Ford-class carriers would be named the USS William J. Clinton and the USS George W. Bush. They are expected to replace the USS Theodore Roosevelt (commissioned in 1986) and the USS Abraham Lincoln (commissioned in 1989). No timelines for the construction of the carriers have been released.

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**S**icily has so many must-see cities on one beautiful island. One of them, and a personal favorite, is the city of Syracuse, especially its historic old town. The original part of Syracuse is on a small island called Ortigia (often spelled Ortygia in English) and connected to the rest of the city by bridges.

This little destination is filled with beautiful baroque architecture and so much history that it is a UNESCO site. The island has a lot of Greek history as well as Roman, Arab and Norman influence that is reflected in the mythology and legends that are set in this area. Regardless of its small size, Ortigia is a city that is not to be missed, whether you are on vacation or stationed at NAS Sigonella.

Wandering the island and trying new restaurants is always a fun escape. Walking into Ortigia leads you straight to one of the most important ancient Greek monuments located in Sicily, the Temple of Apollo. Something I have yet to get over while living in Europe is randomly stumbling upon ancient ruins—I am still amazed when a piece of history is right in front of me.

Another main sight that should be on everyone's list when visiting Ortigia is the Duomo (Cathedral) of Syracuse. The cathedral has a fascinating history. Originally, it was a Greek temple dedicated to Athena. Later the temple was walled in and converted into a church. The cathedral also has Arabic, Norman and Baroque architecture from additions during their various rules, as well as damage reconstruction over time.



SYRACUSE DUOMO

There are an abundance of roundabouts in Italy and the one on this small island is a site to behold. The Ortigia roundabout houses the beautiful Fountain of Diana, built in 1906. The fountain is said to tell a love story about how the nymph Arethusa sought help from Diana through the waters that led to Ortigia.

There is another famous fountain associated with the myth named the Fountain of Arethusa. This is not a traditional fountain but more of a natural spring. The Fountain of Arethusa is actually one of only two existing wild springs in Europe where papyrus grows naturally and dates back thousands of years.

Due to the location of the island, there is also an old fortress, Castello Maniace, which was later turned into a castle and is open to the public. Tickets include an audio guide. It costs six euros for adults, while those under 18 enjoy free admission. Nearby, you can take a break from seeing the historical sites at the small spiaggia Cala Rossa where you can soak up the sun and leave with some beautiful sea glass.

Next up are the Catacombs of San Giovanni; they are not actually on the island of Ortigia, but this Syracuse highlight has beautiful ruins and an amazing system of tunnels and tombs. I highly suggest visiting them while in the area.

From NAS Sigonella, it is about an hour's drive south to Ortigia, mostly spent on the freeway. My suggestion if you are driving is to park in the city of Syracuse where there are a lot of options available. This also helps you avoid the ZTL restrictions in Ortigia. If you are not interested in driving and don't want to worry about parking, you



FOUNTAIN OF ARETHUSA



FOUNTAIN OF ATHENA

can always take a train down to Syracuse and walk 15 minutes to the bridge into Ortigia. You can hop a train from either the Catania or Lentini station. If you don't live close to those stations, the trip may take a bit longer, but the route is scenic and enjoyable. A final option to get to this spot of beautiful history is to take an MWR tour, usually offered monthly from NAS Sigonella.

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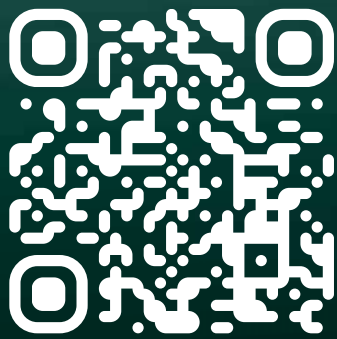
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# Cicchetti and Ombre: Understanding Venice's Casual Food Culture

BY KIMBERLY KEPHART  
Contributing Writer



Venice is one of my favorite cities in the world, and one habit I've picked up over time is stopping into a bar for cicchetti before navigating the city by foot. It's a straightforward way to take in Venetian culture by food.

Cicchetti can resemble tapas, though locals will quickly tell you not to call them that. The distinction matters. Cicchetti are part of a daily routine, eaten quickly and casually, often while standing at the bar. It's in these spaces—crowded, noisy and unapologetically local, that Venice reveals itself beyond the postcard version most people expect.

## What are Cicchetti?

Cicchetti are small savory snacks served at Venice's traditional wine bars known as *bàcari*. They are displayed on the counter or behind glass and ordered individually rather than as part of a formal meal.

Offerings vary by bar and season, but cicchetti often include a mix of simple, familiar preparations.

Some of my favorites include:

- Baccalà mantecato, a whipped salted cod spread served on bread.
- Polpette, small fried meatballs, sometimes made with meat, fish or vegetables.
- Sarde in saor, sweet-and-sour sardines marinated with onions vinegar and raisins (yes, raisins.)
- Crostini topped with seasonal vegetables, cured meat or seafood.

They are meant to be eaten quickly, often standing at the bar and paired with a class of wine, which I happen to love. There are also tours based around the art of cicchetti..

## The Meaning of an Ombra

An "ombra" is a small glass of wine, traditionally local and inexpensive. The term translates to "shadow" a reference to historical wine sellers who once moved their stands throughout the day to remain out of the sun. You'll often see demijohns lined up on the back of the counter that have various types of locally produced wine.

Today, having an ombra, Aperol or Cynar Spritz is routine. Drinks are poured without ceremony, and prices are typically modest (my favorite part) often around two euros, making it an easy addition to a brief stop at a *bàcario*.

The culture surrounding a *bàcario* emphasizes speed and informality. Patrons usually stand at the bar, order one or two cicchetti and an ombra, then move on within a short period of time. I personally love this. Seating, if available, may come at a higher cost.

## A Cicchetti Crawl

A cicchetti crawl refers to visiting several *bàcari* in one outing: stopping briefly at each for a small bite and a glass of wine. Rather than committing to a single location, participants move through a neighborhood sampling what each bar offers.

Some of Venice's best-known *bàcari*, including long standing favorites near the Rialto area, are frequently crowded but don't let this intimidate you! Busier establishments tend to operate efficiently and follow a predictable rhythm that can make ordering easier for first timers in Venice.

Here are some of my recommendations while in Venice that are first-time and solo-traveler friendly.

- Bar All'Arco Calle dell'Oggetto, 436 San Polo. Known for its location near the Rialto market and its steady stream of locals and repeat visitors, Bar All'Arco is often crowded but highly efficient. Customers order quickly, eat standing at the bar, and move on.
- Cantina Do Mori Calle Do Mori, 429 San Polo. One of Venice's oldest *bacari*, Cantina Do Mori has long been a gathering place for locals stopping in for cicchetti and wine. Its narrow interior reinforces the quick, informal pace typical of *bàcari* culture.
- Al Merca Campo Bella Vienna, 213 San Polo. A small, casual spot tucked just off the Rialto market area, Al Merca is known for simple cicchetti and a relaxed but social atmosphere, with many patrons spilling into the campo outside.

- Cantina Aziende Agricole Calle Priuli dei Cavalletti, Castello. Less polished and more utilitarian in feel, this *bacaro* attracts a regular local crowd and reflects the everyday nature of cicchetti culture beyond Venice's most photographed streets.

Cicchetti and ombre offer a practical alternative to traditional dining in Venice. The experience is flexible, affordable and grounded in everyday life, providing insight into how Venetians actually eat and drink. For those spending time in Venice, this is one of the best ways to engage with the city beyond the familiar images.



TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE | stripesurope.com



# Exploring the Five Villages of the Cinque Terre With Kids

BY CARRIE FARRELL  
Stars and Stripes

© PIOTR KRZESLAK / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

I had heard that traveling in the Cinque Terre with children was difficult, but I would not be deterred. Our family explored this beautiful part of Italy with a 10-month old child in tow and I highly recommend it.

Built around the 11th century, the five villages of the Cinque Terre were, at one time, only accessible by boat or footpath. Hiking between them is still the best way to discover the lemon trees, olive groves and multicolored houses, but using a combination of hiking and quick train rides is most realistic for families with young kids. Plan ahead if you would like to hike. Most trails require the Cinque Terre Card trekking pass as the region sits within a protected National Park and UNESCO Heritage zone.

From north to south, here is what you can expect for families in each village.



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## Monterosso al Mare

This is the biggest of the five villages and the only one with sandy beaches. Monterosso is spread out between the “new town” and the “old town.” The new town boasts a beachfront promenade lined with modern hotels, restaurants and bars, while the old town includes restaurants, churches and shops nestled in stone alleyways. The paths through Monterosso are stroller-friendly with numerous gelato stands and a beachside playground, making it a great spot for families to create a homebase.



© PATRYK KOSMIDER / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## Vernazza

From Monterosso, choose between a two-hour hike or a 10-minute train ride to Vernazza, a narrow, one-street town with a church built on the water. The remains of a castle and old wall that once protected against pirates and a small harbor lined with colorful fishing boats make this town a place you must-see. The train trip from Monterosso was easy with my family and made the village a great lunch stop.



© IRINA SCHMIDT / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## Corniglia

Southeast of Vernazza is Corniglia. From the train station, it takes 365 steps up the cliff, or a long walk on a steep winding road to reach the town center. There is a green park bus you can take to and from the train station; however, the schedules vary and may test your patience. My family embraced the vertical challenge, and everyone was happy to be rewarded with a gelato after the climb.



© PIXELLEBE / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## Manarola

Another one-street town, Manarola is the smallest of the five villages. It has a small harbor and rocky beach where you can take a swim. The village is along the train line from the other villages, but the two-kilometer hike from Corniglia is most popular. From the trail you can snag one of the most famous Cinque Terre photos of the village overhanging the sea.



© FABER171 / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## Riomaggiore

This town is tucked into the rugged cliffs with colorful homes cascading to the port. It has one main street, a harbor, a rocky beach, a castle, a church and a dozen restaurants. It also has good train connections and is the closest village to the larger city of La Spezia. We visited the village as a fun and easy afternoon excursion as a quick train ride from Monterosso.



## Cinque Terre Access Cards

When traveling to the Cinque Terre it is best to leave your vehicle behind as the roads are difficult to navigate and parking is extremely limited. It is also quite fun for families to take the trains or hike between villages. Luckily, there are two types of access cards that the Cinque Terre National Park offers visitors to make both experiences easy. Cards can be purchased at park information booths in the railway stations, or online at [parconazionale5terre.it](http://parconazionale5terre.it).

**Trekking Card:** This card grants access to the park's paid hiking trails, including the

famous Sentiero Azzurro (Blue Path) which connects the villages of Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and Riomaggiore. It also includes unlimited use of the ATC buses within and between villages, restroom entry, Wi-Fi hotspots and entrance to sites along the route.

**Treno Card:** This pass includes all the benefits of the Trekking Card plus unlimited second-class train travel on regional trains between Levanto and La Spezia, including along the line that goes through the Cinque Terre villages.

## MILITARY

# House tries to stall Trump-class warship

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

Concerns over the technical feasibility of the proposed Trump-class battleship are prompting lawmakers to put the brakes on construction of the warship as part of the Navy's planned "Golden Fleet."

The House Armed Services Committee's draft defense policy bill authorizes \$1 billion in advance procurement funding for the battleship but bars construction until the Navy can prove it has the technology to build it.

A provision in the bill directs the Navy secretary to certify to Congress that the battleship's planned weapons systems are at a "sufficiently mature technology readiness level" before signing a construction contract.

The committee is scheduled to debate and amend the annual must-pass legislation, which sets spending levels and policy priorities for the Pentagon, this month.

The added hurdle on the construction of the Trump-class battleship, envisioned as a nuclear-powered guided-missile warship, comes after lawmakers raised questions about its complexity, timeline and cost.

Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the committee's seapower and projection forces subpanel, said last month that he was alarmed by the speed with which the Navy was moving forward with the battleship.

"We're going from basically a poster board in December to \$1 billion requested this year, \$17 billion the following year," he said. "Before you start cutting steel, you've got to make sure your design piece is done, or pretty darn close to done."

Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee's defense subpanel, echoed those worries at a recent hearing, telling Navy officials



ALEX BRANDON/AP

President Donald Trump arrives at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Fla., for a news conference to announce plans for the Trump-class warship, on Dec. 22.

they're racing ahead without a design and with multiple unproven technologies.

"I am profoundly concerned that this is a \$50 billion boondoggle, where the delivery timeline is a political timeline, not a practical timeline," he said.

President Donald Trump announced plans for the Trump-class warship in late December, saying it will revive the American shipbuilding industry, "inspire fear" in adversaries and anchor a new Navy Golden Fleet of surface combatants, auxiliary ships and unmanned vessels.

"They'll be the fastest, the biggest, and by

far 100 times more powerful than any battleship ever built," Trump said alongside renderings of the proposed ship.

The first three Trump-class battleships are expected to cost \$43.5 billion, with the lead ship projected to exceed \$17 billion. The Navy plans to award the contract for the lead ship, the USS Defiant, in 2028 for delivery in 2036.

As envisioned, the battleship will be armed with hypersonic missiles and an electromagnetic rail gun — two weapons that the Navy has yet to field. It will also carry conventional 5-inch guns and a range of lasers and smaller guns.

Navy leaders have defended the ship in recent congressional hearings, arguing the service needs a larger ship to accommodate more capability.

"We need significant payload volume for all future fights," Adm. Daryl Caudle, the chief of naval operations, told the House Appropriations Committee's defense subpanel. "We need that payload volume to scale not only with the munitions we're going to have today but future munitions we don't know."

But some lawmakers remain unconvinced.

They say the costly battleship contradicts prevailing naval doctrine, which favors a dispersed fleet of manned and unmanned platforms over hulking surface combatants that are vulnerable to attack.

Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican chairman of the defense appropriations subcommittee, pointed to Ukraine's use of drones and missiles to destroy or damage major Russian warships in the Black Sea.

Iran, too, has been able to use small boats and drones to threaten billion-dollar U.S. destroyers in the Strait of Hormuz, he said. He questioned if the Navy was adapting as quickly to the modern battlefield.

"At the most basic level, what is the Department of the Navy doing to ensure that U.S. sailors and Marines benefit from every possible advantage of modern military technology?" McConnell asked Navy officials at a recent hearing.

Coons posited that the current battle space will render the Trump-class battleship program obsolete.

"We should instead be putting those funds in rapidly characterizing, acquiring and deploying critically needed drones that will allow us — below and on the surface and above the sea — to be the dominant force we need to be going ahead," he said.

## Study: Navy could increase its firepower with missiles

BY ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy's ability to help defeat Chinese forces in a potential confrontation over Taiwan could improve if hundreds of missile launchers were added to dozens of existing and retired vessels, according to a recent study.

That unique remedy could offer the Navy a worthwhile patch for bolstering ship and missile launcher numbers while the service works to increase the size of its fleet and strengthen lethality over the coming years, the Congressional Budget Office said in a report published May 20.

China's naval power is steadily increasing and Beijing has indicated it is amassing the military power needed to invade and occupy Taiwan, which relies on U.S. military support and security commitments.

"To do that, the Navy needs to increase the fleet's ability to sink more enemy ships at long ranges and destroy more targets on land, either by adding ships that carry offensive weapons or by putting more offensive weapons on existing ships," the CBO said in the report titled "Increasing the Size and Missile Capability of the Navy's Fleet Within the Next Five Years."

The report proposed three ways to grow the number of missile-carrying Navy ships by as many as 69 vessels and add as many as 640 missile launchers to the service's inventory.

Those options include arming existing ships, such as amphibious and logistics vessels, that don't normally carry missiles. Under such a proposal, the Navy would also reactivate other ships, such as littoral combat ships, and arm them.

Other alternatives studied in the report include buying used merchant ships or used surface drones and equipping them with missile launchers.

Costs for each of the three options range

from \$1.5 billion to \$4.3 billion over the next five years, according to the report.

"Other options, such as building more ships, even in foreign shipyards, would probably not bring additional capability to the fleet within five years," the CBO said.

The CBO did not make a recommendation, but the Navy could choose to use any, all or none of the options.

The Navy is working to bolster its capabilities, with a renewed focus on shipbuilding and harnessing emerging technologies.

That effort includes the initiative called "Golden Fleet," which aims to preserve the Navy's existing platforms while rapidly expanding its force of surface combatants, auxiliary ships and unmanned vessels.

But it will be years in the making. For example, the fleet will slightly decline in size before adding about eight vessels by 2031. The Navy won't reach its projected battle force size of 398 ships until 2056, according to its shipbuilding plan released last month.

The Navy currently has 291 ships, including aircraft carriers, submarines, cruisers, destroyers and littoral combat ships, among others, according to the CBO report.

Meanwhile, the service also is working to spread sensors and firepower across a larger number of ships and other platforms while ensuring they can still operate together as a coordinated force.

That work comes as the U.S. prepares for a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the coming years.

Previously, officials expected a potential Chinese offensive against the self-ruled island as soon as next year, but a recent U.S. intelligence report indicates that is unlikely, saying there is no clear timeline for when Beijing would attempt to reunify Taiwan with China.

"China, despite its threat to use force to compel unification if necessary and to coun-



RAYMOND DIAZ III/U.S. Navy

A U.S. Navy ship fires a missile in this undated photo.

ter what it sees as a U.S. attempt to use Taiwan to undermine China's rise, prefers to achieve unification without the use of force, if possible," the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community states.

It adds that "China publicly insists that unification with Taiwan is required to achieve its goal of 'national rejuvenation' by 2049 — the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China."

According to the CBO, 107 Navy ships currently do not have the ability to launch missiles.

One option to increase naval strength would equip 43 of those ships, such as expeditionary fast transport vessels and oilers, with missile launch systems. That would result in 640 more missile launchers and add 69 more missile-carrying ships to the fleet, the CBO said.

Some of those vessels, including reactivated littoral combat ships, would be able to fire Tomahawk cruise missiles, Standard Missile-6 or similar weapons. Others would fire Naval Strike Missiles, which have a shorter range, the report states.

Navy ships and submarines currently carry a total of 9,100 vertical launching system cells, or tubes, for firing offensive and defensive missiles, according to the CBO.

"In certain wartime scenarios, having more ships that are able to bring anti-ship capa-

bility to the fight could complicate an adversary's military operations and ability to target all potential threats," the CBO said.

But the report recognized that using amphibious and logistics vessels to carry missiles was inconsistent with their missions to carry and deploy Marines or deliver food, fuel, ammunition and other supplies to ships.

Unless amphibious and logistics ships equipped with missiles came upon a target opportunity or were used as a last resort, it was unlikely they would be employed "in a wartime situation in which their anti-ship weapons would be deliberately brought to bear," the CBO said.

Importantly, the report did not evaluate the Navy's ability to arm more missile launchers. The service's missile inventory data was not publicly available, according to the report.

Even if the Navy's missile inventory is insufficient to fill all the missile launchers referred to in the report within five years, they would still offer value in combat, the CBO said.

For example, adversaries would not know whether a given ship was carrying weapons, the report states.

"Even a ship equipped with empty missile launchers could still complicate an enemy's ability to locate, identify, and target every missile-carrying ship or vessel," the CBO said.

DINING

# Thai e Vai offers ‘street food’ with dine-in twist

Asian-inspired quality alternative to Naples’ pasta, pizza mainstays

By ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

Nestled on an unassuming alley-like street, just yards from one of the noisiest and busiest thoroughfares in Naples’ Vomero neighborhood, it may be easy to miss Thai e Vai.

Don’t make that mistake. Instead, venture off the path for the “street food”-inspired eatery’s curated menu of Thai dishes that are a worthy alternative to Naples’ mainstays of pizza and pasta.

Diners can order online for delivery or pick-up, or at the kitchen window for takeout. Food also can be eaten in a self-service dining room across the way from Thai e Vai’s kitchen.

I was disappointed — but not surprised — to see just two savory vegetarian/vegan options on the restaurant’s small menu.

Most Naples restaurants offer few dishes suitable for vegetarians, and even fewer for vegans. In my experience, substitutions aren’t usually allowed.

But when asked, the chef at Thai e Vai was happy to substitute tofu for meat or shellfish in many of the restaurant’s noodle, rice and curry dishes. (However, vegetarians and vegans should note that some menu items include oyster sauce.)

With that knowledge, I chose Thai fried rolls for an appetizer.

My dining companion, a cheerful meat eater, opted for chicken satay.

We also ordered red curry and vegetables with rice, substituting meat for tofu, and vegetable pad thai, the only vegetarian main dish listed on the menu.

After ordering and receiving a pager to notify us when our meal was ready, we headed for the restaurant’s dining room across the street.

The dining area is a recent addition to the restaurant, which previously had focused on offering fresh, tasty Thai cuisine for eating at home or elsewhere.

In addition to tables and counter seating, the area includes a small selection of rice noodles, curry sauces and other Asian items that can be purchased.

Soon after gathering wooden forks, spoons and chopsticks, our pager buzzed.

My dining companion retrieved a tray loaded with appetizers and entrees in paper cartons and bowls.

The fried rolls arrived piping hot with a side of sweet chili sauce for dipping. I found the crisp crunch and combination of rice noodles, carrots and onion satisfying.

The chicken satay was marinated in yellow curry, coconut milk and soy sauce, and came with peanut sauce for dipping. My dining companion said the breast meat was tender and fla-



The dining room at Thai e Vai is decorated in a brightly-colored Asian motif. Dining is self-service with food served in environmentally-friendly paper containers with wooden utensils.

PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

vorful.

We next tucked into the red curry that included bite-size chunks of tofu and thinly sliced red peppers, bamboo and basil. The creamy sauce was flavorful with just the right amount of heat balanced by an ample portion of rice.

For me, it was a standout, and I would order it again.

But the pad thai didn’t pass muster. The generous portion of tofu, noodles, carrots, broccoli and bean sprouts lacked the umami flavor punch characteristic of the dish and needed more sauce.

Still, the vegetables were crisp, and the chopped peanuts and lime wedge complemented the entree.

We didn’t have room for dessert, but Thai e Vai offers banana in coconut milk with sugar and a sesame topping that looked worthy of a try. Fresh fruit also is available.

With limited Thai options in Naples, Thai e Vai does a fine job of scratching that itch for fast, tasty Asian food, whether dining in or at home. I’ll be back.



Pad thai is one of the few vegetarian dishes on the menu at Thai e Vai.



The menu has limited vegetarian options, but the staff gladly will substitute tofu or other ingredients, such as in this red curry dish.



Thai e Vai offers a curated menu of appetizers, such as chicken satay, middle left, and main dishes, including red curry and pad thai.



The kitchen of Thai e Vai is located on a quiet alleyway in the Vomero neighborhood of Naples, Italy. Diners order their food at the kitchen window and can take it away or enjoy their meal in a comfortable dining room across the alleyway. Online ordering and delivery also are offered.

Thai e Vai

Address: Viale Privato Albino Albini 13, Naples, Italy. Thai e Vai also has another location in Naples’ historical district at Via Duomo 195, open for lunch and dinner, Monday through Saturday. It is closed on Sunday.

Hours: 7:30-11 p.m., Sunday-Thursday; 7:30-

11:30 p.m., Friday-Saturday

Prices: 6-8 euros, appetizers; 11-12.50 euros for noodle, rice, curry and meat dishes; 1.50-3.50 euros for water, soft drinks and juices; and 5 euros for Thai beer.

Information: +39 081 1820 7339, www.thaievai.com

## MILITARY

# Medal of Honor recipient may become saint

## Chaplain's capture and death during Korean War built lasting reputation

BY LARA KORTE  
Stars and Stripes

The last time Paul Roach and Mike Dowe had seen the Rev. Emil Kapaun, he was being taken away by prison guards during the Korean War — sick, shivering and near death.

More than 70 years later, in 2021, the two former Korean War prisoners traveled to Kansas to finally view the remains of their friend, the beloved Army chaplain, after the military identified Kapaun among unknown soldiers buried in Hawaii, finding remains long thought to be lost forever.

Kapaun would be welcomed home to Wichita by a crowd of more than 6,000 people and finally given a proper burial. But before the congregation paid its respects, the two aging veterans, who had been imprisoned alongside Kapaun, gathered for a private viewing beside the chaplain's flag-draped casket.

As soon as Kapaun's remains were uncovered, Roach and Dowe recognized their friend immediately.

"That's his smile!" Roach said, recalled the Rev. Matthew Pawlikowski, a retired Army chaplain who accompanied the men to the viewing. "Even in death, he was bringing joy to people."

Kapaun's capture and death at the hands of Chinese forces during the Korean War earned him the Medal of Honor and a lasting reputation among generations of soldiers and chaplains.

He's the namesake of a number of sites on overseas U.S. military installations, including the chapel at Camp Humphreys in South Korea and Kapaun Air Station in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Now, 75 years after his death, Kapaun is being considered for an even rarer distinction — sainthood.

In recent years, the Catholic Church has begun investigating claims of miracles tied to Kapaun — part of the Vatican's formal process for determining sainthood — including medically unexpected recoveries that many Catholics attribute to his intercession.

Last year, shortly before his death, the late Pope Francis named him "venerable."

Pending further investigation by the Vatican, he could become the first U.S. military service member declared a saint by the Catholic Church.

Kapaun knew he wanted to be a priest from an early age.

Born to Czech immigrant farmers in Pilsen, Kan., he used to stack cardboard boxes in the living room and pretend to celebrate Mass, according to family stories.

After seminary, Kapaun began serving the Czech community in his hometown. But after his younger brother Eugene returned from World War II in 1944 — having taken part in the Normandy invasion — Kapaun began reconsidering where he could do the most good.

Later that same year, Kapaun joined the Army Chaplain Corps, serving in India and Burma during the war. After returning home and completing a master's degree on the G.I.



RAYMOND PIPER/Soldiers Magazine

Army chaplain Emil Kapaun, right, and Capt. Jerome A. Dolan carry an exhausted soldier during the Korean War. Kapaun was known for repeatedly risking his life to rescue wounded troops.



21st Theater Sustainment Command

The Rev. Emil Kapaun celebrates Mass beside a Jeep during the Korean War.

Bill, he reenlisted.

"I think he felt he could do more for the soldiers than he could for the parish," said his nephew, Ray Kapaun.

In early 1950, his unit deployed to Japan as part of the postwar occupation force. Within six months, North Korean forces invaded South Korea.

Weeks later, Kapaun's unit — the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division — became part of the first U.S. forces sent into the Korean War. In letters home, he wrote optimistically that the fighting might end by Christmas.

Instead, Kapaun and thousands of other American soldiers were captured before Thanksgiving.

Kapaun might have been a man of God, but fellow soldiers said he carried no holier-than-thou attitude. Dowe, a young lieutenant when he was imprisoned alongside Kapaun, later wrote extensively about the chaplain's ser-vice.

"Outwardly he was all GI, tough of body, rough of speech sometimes, full of the wry humor of the combat soldier," Dowe wrote in a 1954 article for the Saturday Evening Post.

Kapaun often risked his life to retrieve wounded troops and administer last rites. He would sometimes drop into foxholes to comfort nervous riflemen, offering a fresh peach and a joke before moving to the next soldier.

He carried the tools for the sacraments with him across the battlefields of Korea, often celebrating Mass on makeshift altars of ammunition boxes or the hoods of Jeeps.

Once, while rushing to rescue a wounded soldier, he came under such heavy fire that his smoke pipe was shot out of his mouth. For his bravery in action, he received the Bronze Star Medal.

It was this devotion to the wounded, Dowe wrote, that would ultimately cost him his freedom and later his life.

In November 1950, during a battle near Unsan after Chinese forces entered the war, Kapaun worked to retrieve wounded troops and anoint the dying. At one point, he was offered a chance to escape but refused, opting instead to stay behind with the injured soldiers.

Shortly thereafter, he was captured and forced to march for dozens of miles with other American forces to a prison camp at Pyok-tong. It was here that Dowe met Kapaun, who was moving up and down the line encouraging soldiers to help carry the wounded lest they be shot for falling behind.

Pawlikowski, the retired chaplain who now serves as a civilian at West Point, has spent much of his career sharing Kapaun's story. What stands out to him most, he said, is that Kapaun never seemed larger than life — just deeply committed to helping others.

"Service is another word for love," Pawlikowski said. "I tell people that there's nothing he did in his story that you couldn't do. It's just that he did it."

Kapaun spent the next seven months in Prison Camp No. 5 tending to fellow detainees — skirting rules and defying prison guards even as his own physical condition deteriorated.

He would often sneak off to scrounge for additional food to supplement the meager rations of millet or cracked corn given to prisoners, saying a prayer to St. Dismas, the Good Thief, as he stuffed grain into his pockets.

Prohibited from tending to the wounded in the sick house, he'd sneak past guards to visit them, washing their old bandages, picking lice from their bodies and holding them in his arms when they became overcome with delirium. He said prayers for them, joked with them, and urged them not to lose hope.

Dowe later wrote that another prison camp known as Death Valley had similar conditions but a death rate 10 times higher — a difference he attributed to Kapaun's tireless work and positivity.

"The main thing he did for them was to put into their hearts the will to live," Dowe said. "For when you are wounded and sick and

starving, it's easy to give up quietly and die."

Despite threats and communist indoctrination attempts, Kapaun continued ministering to the soldiers, quietly and calmly pushing back against anti-religious propaganda.

But Kapaun's health was failing. On Easter Sunday 1951, he gathered soldiers in a burned-out churchyard to listen to the Easter readings in defiance of prison rules. The following week, he began limping on a swollen and discolored leg from what was likely a blood clot.

The next Sunday, as he led the men in prayer, his voice faltered and he fainted, Dowe recalled. Though his leg improved, he was soon struck by dysentery that left him delirious with fever.

He later began to improve, eating and joking with the others. But the Chinese guards did not intend for him to live, Dowe wrote. As they came to take him to the sick house, the men protested, knowing he would be left to die in freezing filth.

But Kapaun himself did not object.

"Tell them back home that I died a happy death," he said, per Dowe's account.

He died a few days later, on May 23, 1951, at the age of 35.

For years, the location of Kapaun's remains was disputed. Many former POWs believed he had been buried in a mass grave, while others swore he was buried alone. Later, his family learned he had been moved to Hawaii as part of Operation Glory, the effort to repatriate Americans who died in the Korean War.

Once thought to be lost forever in a rural part of North Korea, Kapaun had actually rested among fellow unknown service members at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu since 1954.

For decades, Catholics, chaplains and soldiers shared Kapaun's story as an example of sacrifice and service to others. Then, in the early 2000s, reports of medically unexpected recoveries began drawing the attention of the Catholic Church.

Supporters of Kapaun's sainthood campaign point to at least three cases in the Wichita area between 2006 and 2011 involving people who recovered after prayers to the late chaplain.

The Rev. Eric Weldon, a priest in the Diocese of Wichita, was serving at St. Patrick's Church in 2006 when he learned that one of his parishioners, a 12-year-old girl named Avery Gerleman, was gravely ill.

Gerleman, who had an autoimmune disorder, had been in a coma for weeks. Multiple organs, including her lungs and kidneys, were failing. Weldon, a former Army Reserve lieutenant who had attended Kapaun Mt. Carmel High School in Wichita, asked his congregation to pray to Kapaun on All Saints' Day.

"I just straight up said, 'Avery Gerleman, in our parish, she's in the hospital and she's going to die,'" Weldon recalled. "So we're going to ask for Father Kapaun's intercession."

Days later, Gerleman began emerging from the coma. Within weeks, her kidneys and lungs recovered. Later, doctors reportedly told Vatican investigators they were unable to find a sufficient medical explanation for her recovery.

"It was very emotional," Weldon said.

The Catholic Church is currently examining Kapaun's life as part of the process to potentially declare him a saint. The Diocese of Wichita says it has already sent more than 8,000 pages of research to the Vatican.

In addition to Gerleman's case, supporters point to the recoveries of Chase Kear, a college student who survived a severe head injury after a 2008 pole-vaulting accident; and Nick Dellasega, who collapsed during a 5K race in 2011 and appeared to die before ultimately surviving.

Last year, the Vatican gave Kapaun the title "venerable," the second step toward sainthood. If the Church verifies one miracle, he'll be eligible to receive the title "blessed." A second verified miracle would be required for sainthood.

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