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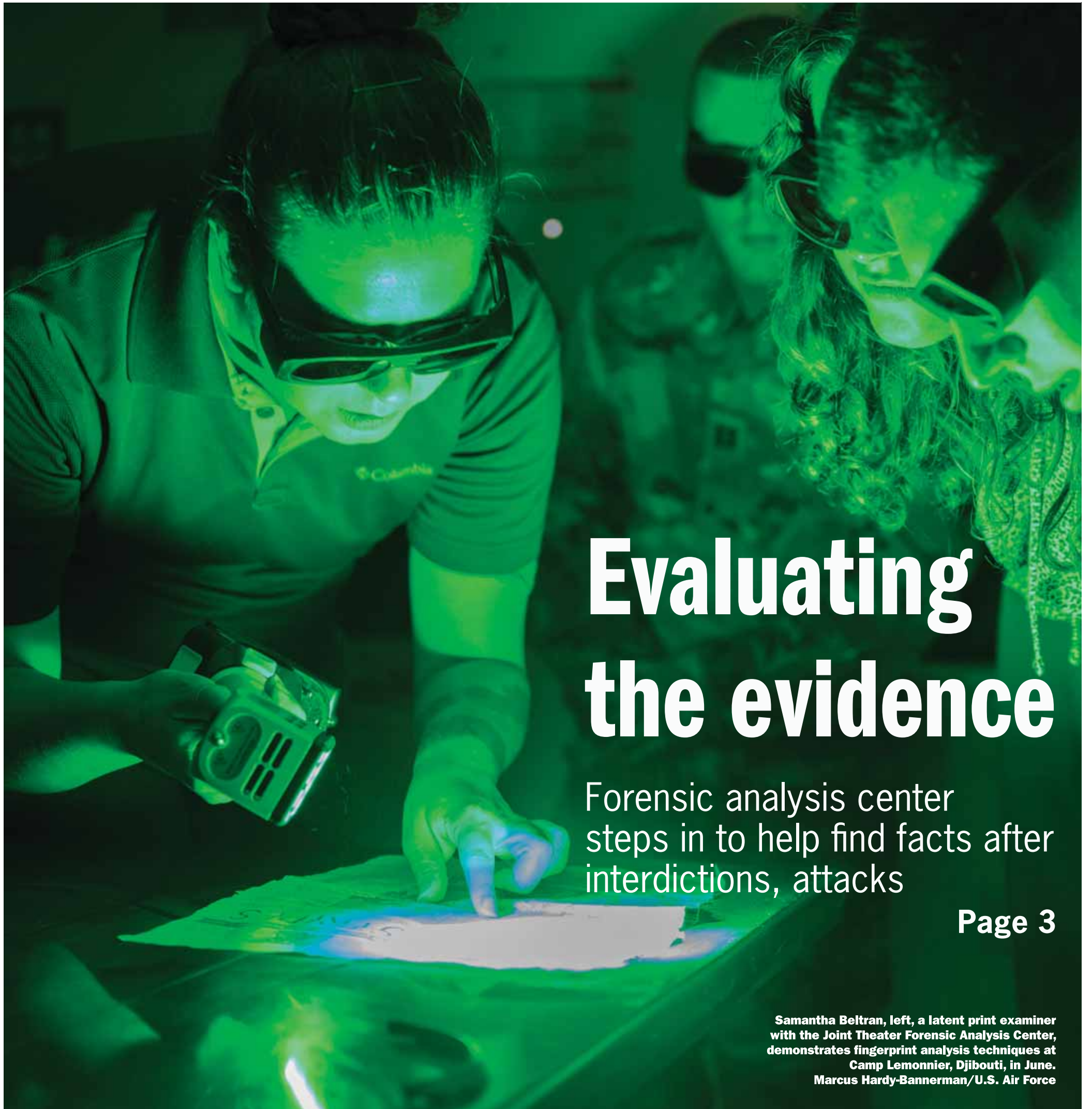
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ITALY EDITION

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Evaluating the evidence

Forensic analysis center steps in to help find facts after interdictions, attacks

Page 3

Samantha Beltran, left, a latent print examiner with the Joint Theater Forensic Analysis Center, demonstrates fingerprint analysis techniques at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, in June. Marcus Hardy-Bannerman/U.S. Air Force

Purple Heart recipient now in Call of Duty
Page 6



Italy permit rule change could have wide reach
Page 5



Eagle marks 80 years of training
Page 7



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COVER STORY

Army team gathers evidence in key cases

Forensics unit helped secure conviction after death of SEALs

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A little-known Army forensics team is taking satisfaction in helping convict a Pakistani man, who recently was sentenced to decades in prison for his role in an arms smuggling operation tied to a deadly Navy SEAL raid off Somalia last year.

The successful prosecution of Muhammad Pahlawan brings fulfillment and validation of the team's efforts, said Lt. Col. Kyle Thomason, the provost marshal for U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa at U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza.

"It really helps kind of build me up and (lets me) know that what I'm doing is worthwhile," said Thomason, whose work involves law enforcement, security and policing.

SETAF-AF oversees the U.S. Army Joint Theater Forensic Analysis Center operating at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, Somalia's northern neighbor.

The group of 14 scientists, experts and supervisory personnel in Djibouti is tasked with supporting Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or special operations personnel as well as other U.S. agencies in Africa.

The behind-the-scenes effort is designed to "stay ahead of the enemy and their tactics and techniques that they use to get us," said Greg Sanson, SETAF forensics tech representative.

The center's scientists have expertise in DNA, fingerprints, firearms, chemistry and other scientific disciplines used in forensics. They use their knowledge and skills to gather and analyze evidence recovered from interdictions, terrorist activity, attacks on U.S. forces and other situations.

Those resources were brought to bear in the case of Pahlawan, who was sentenced Oct. 16 to 40 years in prison on various charges related to transportation of Iranian weapons to Houthi militants in Yemen, according to court records.

Pahlawan was the captain of a small unflagged boat, or dhow, boarded by Navy forces in January 2024 that was carrying a warhead as well as parts for ballistic missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles.

During the mission, Chief Petty Officer Christopher Chambers lost his grip while trying to board the vessel and fell into the sea. Petty Officer 1st Class Nathan Gage Ingram jumped into the water in an attempt to save him. But weighed down by equipment, the two Navy SEALs drowned.

In the aftermath, the forensic analysis center's team was called in to identify, secure and process evidence on the boat, ultimately confirming the type of weaponry stashed aboard and establishing its ties to Iran and the Houthis, Thomason said.

That work demonstrates their ability to operate in challenging environments, such as at sea. The forensic center's team includes military and civilian personnel and contractors operating under the Army's Criminal Investigation Division.

It predominantly is staffed by the



PHOTOS BY MARCUS HARDY-BANNERMAN/U.S. AIR FORCE

Omar Ezzeddine, Joint Theater Forensic Analysis Center Army CID FXD firearms and toolmarks examiner, demonstrates forensic analysis techniques at Camp Lemonnier.



Members of the Japanese Self-Defense Force participate in a forensics demonstration at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, in June.

Army CID's Forensic Exploitation Department, which is based in the state of Georgia. It supports annual engagements with partner nations and deploys scientists and experts on six-month rotations, according to the Army.

The internationally accredited lab uses state-of-the-art equipment and forensic science to discover the who, what and where of what is happening on the African continent.

It also works to determine where adversaries are getting their equipment and training, and uses biometrics to determine the names and locations of culprits, Sanson said.

For example, fingerprints recovered

from an interdiction of a ship can be used to identify people involved in drug or weapons trafficking.

Recovered pieces of an explosive can be used to identify the radio frequencies used by a terrorist group or narrow down the location of a drone operator.

"It's important for us to know what frequencies (adversaries are) using because then we're able to jam or to work within those frequencies and make sure that we protect our force in that way," Sanson said.

Information gleaned from evaluations is then reported to U.S. intelligence for use in supporting commands, he said.



DALE BARNES/U.S. ARMY

Analysts from the Joint Theater Forensic Analysis Center use chemicals to retrieve serial numbers removed from equipment in Bizerte, Tunisia, in April.

Some service members may not know that data and information is gathered by a "group of civilians that are living in an austere location working day in and day out to make their lives safer and better," Sanson said.

As of early October, the Djibouti facility had been assigned about 208 cases this year. In 2024 and 2023, it received 323 and 292 cases, respectively, the Army said.

That pace doesn't include other activities, such as the training of partner nations' police, military forces or other agencies in forensic sciences and site exploitation for evidence.

For Djibouti lab manager Michelle Boyer, the work to protect U.S. forces

has a personal connection stemming from the deadliest terrorist attack on the United States in the country's history.

Her father, who served in the Navy for nearly 30 years, was in the Pentagon when it was hit by a hijacked passenger airliner on Sept. 11, 2001. He was not injured in the attack.

That pivotal moment was at the forefront of her decision to work in Djibouti and help "prevent something of that magnitude from ever happening again," Boyer said.

"That is really what gets me motivated," said Boyer, who is on her sixth rotation at the forensic center in Djibouti.

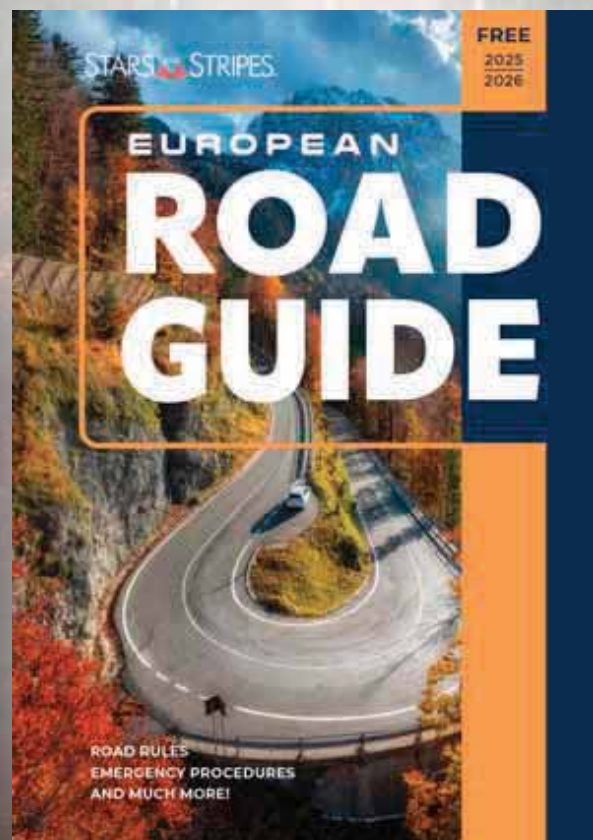


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MILITARY

Italy permit change could have wide reach

Changes to Italian immigration rules affect all holders of paper permits, first-time applicants

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Recent changes to Italian immigration rules could bring greater scrutiny for dependents of U.S. forces in Italy, as well as Defense Department civilian employees and contractors in the country.

Italy recently changed how those Americans apply for and receive a sojourner's permit, the document that allows them to live and work there.

The impact of the modifications is significant, as they affect all holders of paper permits and first-time applicants, the Navy said in a newsletter sent to commands at U.S. Naval Support Activity Naples.

They also may affect permit holders' ability to travel in and out of the Schengen Zone, the newsletter said.

Under NATO's Status of Forces Agreement, DOD military dependents, civilians and contractors must have a sojourner's permit to reside and work in Italy.

They are required to have the paper permit in their possession when traveling and present it when asked by police, immigration officials or other authorities.

Active-duty or reserve service members are not required to have sojourner's permits as part of the SOFA.

Those required to have the permit could be stopped and questioned while traveling to any of the 29 countries participating in the EU's Entry/Exit System implemented earlier this month, the Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central legal services office said in the newsletter.

Those countries include Germany, Italy and Spain, where large numbers of DOD personnel live and work.

People with a valid mission visa in their official passport may continue to travel freely within the Schengen area, the legal services office said.

EES is an automated identification check system that digitally records most non-EU nationals' entry to and exit from Schengen countries. It eventually will replace passport stamping.

The system collects personal information, such as a person's name and birth date, from travelers staying in a country 90 days or fewer. A facial photo and fingerprints also are collected and are among data stored for about three years, according to the EU.

Officials aren't certain how the changes to Italy's sojourner process, which now requires an electronic permit instead of a paper document, would impact current holders or applicants as-



DIANA QUINLAN/U.S. NAVY

A boy paints an Italian and an American flag on a school building in Catania, Sicily, in September 2024.

signed to U.S. bases under SOFA, the Navy said.

An application fee and appointment at an Italian immigration office also are part of the revisions, the service noted.

U.S. officials are seeking "to better understand the new policies, the impact to our military community, and a way forward," the legal services office said in the newsletter.

The office still is accepting applications for

sojourner's permits but cannot submit them to immigration offices until it receives guidance on how to proceed, the Navy said.

Aviano Air Base also is working to ensure that affected personnel and families were aware of the changes and make the transition as smooth as possible, 31st Fighter Wing spokesman Capt. Steve Garrett said.

Sojourner's permit processing had been

paused to finalize procedures for U.S. personnel under the new digital system, he added.

It wasn't clear as of how officials at U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza were informing their community of the changes.

As of June, there were more than 15,400 U.S. active-duty and reserve service members and DOD civilian workers assigned to Italy, according to a Pentagon workforce report.

DODEA restoring books at 5 schools involved in lawsuit

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Students at five Defense Department schools will soon see a boost in book titles and curriculum materials available to them, in accordance with a recent court ruling in a case brought by military families.

A letter earlier this week to families at Aviano Middle High School in Italy said a team at the Department of Defense Education Activity headquarters is "working to restore access to all print and digital materials" at the locations, which also include the United States and Japan.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles' decision on Oct. 21 to grant a preliminary injunction directed DODEA to restore the materials that schools had removed in compliance with executive orders.

The five schools attended by the 12 student plaintiffs in the lawsuit are Crossroads Elementary School in Quantico, Va.; Barsanti Elementary School at Fort Campbell, Ky.; Aviano; and Sollars Elementary and Edgren Middle High schools in Misawa, Japan.

Nearly 600 books and a spate of course items have been removed since January in line with a series of executive orders issued earlier this year by

President Donald Trump and his administration.

In response, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on behalf of six military families seeking to stop DODEA from removing the materials, which deal with topics such as race, gender and identity. DODEA operates 161 schools worldwide.

The letter from Aviano was shared with Stars and Stripes by the ACLU, which received word that the government was working to comply with Giles' court order.

"This includes restoring books, curricular materials, e-books/digital materials, and materials related to heritage months," ACLU spokesman Sam LaFrance said in a statement.

On Friday, DODEA confirmed that it "is immediately restoring all library books and curricular materials" removed since Jan. 19 at the five schools identified in the litigation.

DODEA has not said whether its lawyers will appeal Giles' ruling.

"DODEA remains committed to providing a high-quality, standards-based education for all military-connected students and will continue to follow established procedures as the legal process moves forward," agency spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said.



JASMINE VU

Books removed for a compliance review are stacked on a table in the library of Ramstein High School in Germany in February 2025. Books, curricular materials and items related to heritage months that were removed for review are being restored at five Defense Department schools attended by students involved in a lawsuit challenging the executive orders requiring the items to be made unavailable.

MILITARY

Purple Heart recipient found in Call of Duty

Army veteran with prosthetic arm appears as bonus game character

By ALEXANDER BANERJEE
Stars and Stripes

Danielle Green wears many hats: Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient, mother, public speaker for Wounded Warrior Project — and, now, video game character.

Green is featured in a downloadable in-game pack for the upcoming game *Call of Duty: Black Ops 7*. Purchases of the pack support the Call of Duty Endowment, a nonprofit that helps provide veterans with high-quality jobs.

The character, 50/50, already existed but was adjusted to match Green as much as possible — being outfitted with signature details inspired by Green and with an arm that is virtually identical to a real prosthetic arm Green received from one of the world's leading prosthetics makers, Open Bionics.

Already a well-known figure in certain circles, Green made her character debut at C.O.D.E. Bowl VI, the sixth iteration of the nonprofit's annual gaming tournament between military branches' esports teams.

Green was a military police officer based out of Fort Lewis (now Joint Base Lewis-McChord) in Washington when she deployed to Iraq in early 2004, tasked with training police officers in Baghdad. She was on the rooftop of a police station in the city's center when it came under fire by insurgents, and she was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

"I just remember just being in shock," Green said. "And then I remember being angry because I didn't want to die at 27 years old."

After waking up in a hospital bed, Green realized her arm was gone. She said she felt grief for her arm and military career, which at that point was only 15 months old, as well as gratitude that she was alive.

She also learned her platoon sergeant and leader had returned to the rooftop, under heavy fire and against orders, to retrieve her arm — and though it was too damaged to be salvaged, they found her rings, which was "significant" because she had gotten married only weeks before the attack.

Those rings are featured in her game character, among other personal details such as the date of her injury, purple coloring representing her Purple Heart, and a patch representing her player number (12) from her days playing basketball for Notre Dame.

Aside from being an uplifting figure for one of the endowment's in-game packs — which often depict inspiring veterans — the endowment's mission on veteran employment resonates with Green.

"Like I just went from this soldier, you know, highly trained soldier," Green said of her transition to civilian life. "I'm strong, I'm winning in life. And now I'm in the unemployment line."

Green also endured stigma as a female veteran missing a limb and credited her husband with helping her adjust.

"At the time, I didn't have this cosmetic arm, I had an arm with a hook," she said. "There was some shame that came with that."

The CEO of Open Bionics, Samantha Payne, reached out to Green directly in April to ask if she would participate in the company's partnership with the Call of Duty Endowment. Green received the arm that same month.

Payne had for years quietly followed Green, finding her inspiring, Payne told *Stars and Stripes*, adding that the other inspiring figures she keeps an eye on are also veterans.

Because Open Bionics' prosthetics are designed in close collaboration with patients, Green is not just an inspiring person, but "a really good representation of the type of people that we've



PHOTOS BY CALL OF DUTY ENDOWMENT

Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient Danielle Green speaks during C.O.D.E. Bowl VI, the sixth iteration of the Call of Duty Endowment's annual military gaming tournament, in late September.



A promotional graphic shows purchasable in-game content that was announced at C.O.D.E. Bowl VI and to be featured in *Call of Duty: Black Ops 7*.

been working with in the co-design of the product," Payne said.

Many of the veterans Open Bionics works with have active lifestyles and need something durable, Payne explained. "Danielle is like a super busy person, super active, very fit," and therefore a good representation of who the new arm is

designed for.

Green's new arm, the Hero RGD (pronounced "Rugged"), is the result of years of development and constant feedback Open Bionics received from veterans, and is designed with veterans in mind.

The feedback came not only from U.S. veter-



A closeup of Greene's arm from Open Bionics, which was customized for her.

ans, but Ukrainian ones. Payne said the startup has for years partnered with a Ukrainian nonprofit to assist wounded Ukrainian service members returning from the front lines.

Open Bionics works with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which covers Hero RGD, Payne said. The VA has fitted the arm to veterans directly, but veterans can also get fitted through Open Bionics and seek coverage from the VA, according to Payne.

Payne co-founded Open Bionics with the conviction that 3D printing would allow advanced prosthetics to be sold at a much lower price.

It was the first company to bring a 3D-printed medical device to market, Payne said, adding that it faced skepticism in its early days from experts concerned it was not sufficiently vetted.

But those concerns have diminished with time, and the company's products have even gone viral — such as when an influencer recorded how her prosthetic hand can move even when detached.

"I just think it's so cool that [Green] inspired the character in the game," Payne said. "And then we've been able to make the game version in real life for her. It's such a nice blend of science fiction and science fact."

MILITARY

Training ship Eagle marks 80 years as part of Coast Guard

Cadets over years 'learned the ropes' on former Nazi ship

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

For four generations of Coast Guard cadets, getting their "sea legs" and literally "learning the ropes" has come aboard the Coast Guard sailing ship Eagle.

Cadets graduate to serve on icebreakers and fast cutters, fly helicopters and four-engine Hercules transports, lead search-and-rescue operations, and interdict drug shipments.

Since 1946, nearly all start their careers aboard the Eagle.

The steel-hulled barque — the name for three-masted sailing ships — has an unusual history as a former Nazi training ship, which the U.S. took as a war prize after World War II.

Next year, the Eagle will celebrate 80 years as part of the Coast Guard. Its alumni rank from ensigns to admirals.

"About 600 cadets each year spend time on the Eagle, so if you multiply that by 80 years, you are talking about thousands of Coast Guard officers who began their careers here," said Capt. Kristopher Ensley, the Eagle's commander.

Ensley, 50, said he was once a 17-year-old cadet who "didn't know starboard from port."

By the end of his training on the Eagle, he'd mastered steering, tacking, ropes and unfurling the canvas — all the timeless basics of sailing ships.

"I became a little bit salty," Ensley said.

The Eagle allows cadets to tie their careers to the traditions of the seagoing force, its captain said.

"Everything is out the open air," Ensley said.

"The bridge, the decks — you get wet, you get cold, you get tired, you get hungry. That's part of helping build the Coast Guard leaders we need who are able to withstand those rigors."

During a five-month voyage this year, Eagle sailed from New London to Vancouver Island in Canada. It made port calls in Costa Rica, Mexico, California, Oregon and Washington, and it twice passed through the Panama Canal.

The Eagle made stops at Los Angeles Fleet Week and the Portland Rose Festival, and it tied up at the Seattle waterfront near Pike Place Market. Overall, more 41,000 people climbed aboard to learn about sailing and the Coast Guard.

Cadet Jonathan Hurley, 21, of Seattle, plans on making the Coast Guard a career — hopefully on icebreakers. But he started out on the Eagle, like his fellow future officers.

"Not everybody in the Coast Guard gets to go



GARY WARNER/STARS AND STRIPES

Inside the ship are historical artifacts from its days before Allies captured it.

on the Eagle, but everyone who goes to the Coast Guard Academy does," Hurley said.

The ship is the second-oldest among those operated by the Defense Department or Department of Homeland Security. The only ship older is the USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides," the frigate commissioned in 1797 that remains on the Navy's active-ship registry at the Charlestown Navy Yard near Boston.

Unlike the Constitution, the Eagle did not begin life in a New England shipyard. It's a war prize, taken from Germany at the end of World War II as partial reparations for the costs of the conflict inflicted by the Axis powers on the Allies.

For the first 10 years of its life, the Eagle was the Horst Wessel, a training ship for German navy cadets named after a brownshirt "stormtrooper" killed in 1930 in his Berlin apartment by a member of the German communist Red Front Fighters League.

When the barque was commissioned in 1936 as a training ship at the Blohm+Voss shipyard in Hamburg, it was named for Wessel. Adolf Hitler attended the ceremony and walked the ship's deck.

The Horst Wessel bore Nazi symbols, including a golden eagle figurehead that once held a swastika.

After the war, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, France and other Allied nations took several ships as war prizes from the Axis powers, Germany, Italy and Japan.

The United States received the Horst Wessel as one of its prizes.

A decision on what to do with it came at an opportune time. The Coast Guard had lost its prior sail-powered training ship in a storm, then used a sailing ship on loan from the government-in-exile of Nazi-occupied Denmark. With the war over, the Danes asked for the ship's return.

On May 15, 1946, the ship was officially rechristened as the Coast Guard barque Eagle.

Because Navy, Coast Guard and merchant marine sailors were in short supply in Europe as American troops and equipment were returned to



MICHAEL BRODEY/U.S. COAST GUARD

The U.S. Coast Guard barque Eagle in Los Angeles harbor earlier this year.

the United States, the War Department approved a plan to use some of the German crew, along with Americans, to sail the ship to the Coast Guard Academy at New London, Conn.

The trip almost ended in disaster: The ship skirted a powerful hurricane off the coast of North America before reaching safety.

After an overhaul and a coat of white paint, the Eagle has been an American sailing icon and training ground for future leaders for eight decades.

The ship's second core mission is public port visits, used to inform Americans and others about the Coast Guard mission — and perhaps spur recruitment of future cadets.

Inside the ship are historical artifacts from its

days before the Allies captured it. A large HORST WESSEL nameplate in Gothic script that once adorned the ship is atop an interior stairway.

A metal map shows the course of the trip to bring the ship from Germany to New London, and it bears the names of the German sailors, who were interned as prisoners of war upon their arrival.

The captain's quarters have the 1930s dark wood paneling of the original construction.

The Eagle has sailed to Germany, now a longtime U.S. ally in NATO, even returning to the shipyard where it was built.

After the current U.S. government shutdown ends, the Coast Guard will announce the 2026 itinerary of the Eagle in its 80th year of service.



MATTHEW WEST/U.S. COAST GUARD

Crew members aboard the Eagle climb the rigging while underway in the Caribbean last year.

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BigFree

A gluten-free haven in Vicenza, Italy

BY KATIE WELLS
Stars and Stripes



Dear celiac and gluten-sensitive community,

There is a gluten-free (GF) haven just outside of Caserma Ederle military base in Vicenza, Italy. It's not until you find a plentiful GF section, or a rare all-gluten-free restaurant, that you realize how much mental weight it takes searching for items, reading labels and scanning ingredient lists for gluten to ensure a food is safe. Before every trip, I try to minimize this extra mental load by pinning local GF spots on my Google map. And, occasionally, I come across gluten-free gold!

In Vicenza, BigFree is an entire grocery store dedicated to celiac-safe food. My friend, whom is not GF, graciously fanned my excitement and accompanied me on this pit stop as we visited Vicenza.

The store was even better than I expected, carrying copious amounts of gluten-free brands. The majority were different Italian brands, but there were some from other regions as well. I found some unique Schär products from Germany that I hadn't tried, yet, like apricot pastries. I also stumbled upon almond flour and quinoa flour tortillas from the American brand Old El Paso. These were magical in that they don't crack during enchilada night.

On a trip to Rome, my family and I took a cooking class where we made from scratch the most beautiful ravioli I'd ever tasted in my life, sauteed in a simple sage butter rather than tossed in marinara. The class felt like a ritual of passing down a sacred family recipe; however, it was not offered in a GF version. I wanted to find a great GF flour for when I attempted our instructor's recipe later, and while King Arthur's GF all-purpose flour is my usual staple in the pasta machine, it simply didn't hold up for this ravioli. So, in Vicenza, when I walked down an entire aisle at BigFree dedicated to GF flour, I scoured specifically for pasta flour and couldn't control the "Eep!" that left my mouth upon seeing not just one, but a few options. I wish I could have bought them all to experiment with.

I've also been on a pursuit to make a decent homemade GF cinnamon bun at home. This is very tricky, because what makes a perfectly fluffy, pull-apart cinnamon bun is bread flour. The few brands I've tried resulted in a cakier, sometimes scone-like texture. At BigFree, I happily grabbed some GF bread flour options to try, praying to the gluten-free gods that the two flour bags, multiple pastas, tortillas, bagel crisps and other snacks would miraculously fit into my suitcase.

The store had all the cookies, chips, baking mixes, sauces, pasta shapes (including stars) and so much more than I could imagine. They even had a refrigerated section with pizzas, Italian desserts and baked goods. At the counter was a little cafe with a fresh pastry case and a small offering of hot food. I couldn't pass up on a GF vanilla and pistachio cannoli for a road trip snack. Next to that were a couple of shelves full of GF beer.

The owner of BigFree has a background as a pharmacist, and as a family member of someone affected by celiac disease, created a place where the ingredients were healthy and nourishing and where people could feel free to shop for all their favorite foods without worrying about the label. I couldn't help but wish something like this existed in every city. All of this to say, if you have celiac disease or are gluten-free, this grocery store is a paradise.

Sincerely,

A fellow gluten sufferer.



CHECK OUT THIS GUIDE TO BAKING FLOURS ACROSS EUROPE



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BY KAT NIKOLA
Stars and Stripes

No matter what the season, you will find Europe teaming with outdoor enthusiasts. Here are six options that will take you beyond the hiking trail and into the world of extreme sports. When trying a new sport, going on a guided tour can help alleviate any safety concerns and give you a solid introduction to the gear and techniques.



Ski Touring the Haute Route

If your idea of perfection is fresh powder and miles of empty backcountry, then ski touring might be your next adventure. Using specially designed skis and bindings to allow for both slogging uphill and bombing downhill, ski touring often avoids using (and paying for) ski resorts. The Haute Route between Mont Blanc in France and the Matterhorn in Switzerland has become the iconic alpine ski touring trek. It is 180 km of glacial terrain and incredible peaks which typically takes seven days, with overnight stays in mountain huts along the way.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Take three days to loop around the less-touristed high peaks of Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy.



Kitesurfing in Tarifa

The southernmost point of Spain has wind blowing across the Strait of Gibraltar from two directions, making it windy 340 days of the year. These ideal kitesurfing conditions have made Tarifa one of the world's top kitesurfing destinations. In fact, most kitesurfing schools offer money-back wind guarantees. Kitesurfing involves strapping your feet to a kiteboard and wearing a harness attached by flying lines to a parachute-like power kite. With the aid of the ever-blowing wind, you can then freeride directly from the beaches around scenic Tarifa.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Try smooth-water kitesurfing at the Lagoon of Marsala in Sicily, Italy before heading to the south side of the island for waves and big air.



Mountaineering up the Matterhorn

Combining ice climbing skills, rock climbing know-how and difficult hiking, mountaineering is a sport that requires specialized equipment and intimate knowledge of the mountains. For many mountaineers, ascending the Matterhorn is a transformative achievement. It is considered the most difficult of the classic alpine peaks with all four routes being extremely rocky and covered in snow or ice year-round. At 4,478 meters, this iconic pyramid-shaped summit is a beast and best done with a mountain guide.

HONORABLE MENTION:

While scaling the tallest mountain in the U.K. is not a technical route, the extreme weather and optional Càrn Mòr Dearg Arête make Ben Nevis a great climb.



Whitewater rafting the Sjoa River

Tackle the wilds of Norway from a raft! The Sjoa River is the outlet for meltwater from Jotunheim National Park. Named for the mythical land of the giants, this harsh and mountainous area in central Norway has narrow canyons and miles of glacially-fed whitewater. Rapids range from mild class II to difficult class IV. Attack the rapids past jagged cliffs, murky forests and ethereal waterfalls on a guided trip. Numerous outfitters in the Sjoa area provide all the equipment necessary, including helmets and wetsuits.

HONORABLE MENTION:

For a much warmer adventure, take a rafting trip down the blue-green waters of the Soča River in Bovec, Slovenia.



Rock Climbing in the Dolomites

Strap on your harness, clip on the cams and get ready to belay your partner up some of the best rock climbing in the world. The limestone Dolomites are a classic rock-climbing destination, with hundreds of "trad" routes, a speckling of bolted sport lines and lots of multi-pitch options. Plus, you can't beat the views of alpine meadows and craggy peaks. While there are some big wall options, most of the climbing is ideal for day trips from the bucolic Italian villages east of Bolzano.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Try the thousands of bolted sport routes in the limestone cliffs of the Frankenjura upland of Germany.



Paragliding in Interlaken

Take to the skies between snow-capped alpine peaks into one of the most scenic of Switzerland's valleys. Paragliding is initially done in tandem with an instructor, whose harness is attached behind yours. The wing above is similar to a parachute but more maneuverable, allowing you to catch thermals to loftier heights. Launching is often done by running down a sloping hill until the canopy opens. A flight from the popular launch in Beatenburg offers stunning views of Jungfrau, Eiger, and Mönch peaks.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Head to the birthplace of paragliding in Anney, France where thermals over the lake and surrounding mountains make for ideal conditions.

TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE | stripesurope.com



Christmas in CANDELARA, ITALY

BY KATIE WELLS
Stars and Stripes

THE CANDLE FESTIVAL IN CANDELARA

Imagine you are in a cozy town square. All the bright overhead lights and streetlamps are turned off and all around you is the soft amber glow of a candlelight procession. This is the Candele a Candelara, or Candle Festival in Candelara, Italy, and it is truly one of a kind.

Located near the temperate Adriatic coast, the village of Candelara in the Pesaro province is approximately one hour north of Ancona. During the festival, at 5:30 p.m. as the sun sinks below the horizon and again at 6:30 p.m., all electric lighting in the town center is turned off. A hush falls over the crowd, and the darkness is set ablaze by a procession of thousands of candles. There is something quite enamoring about the romance and enchantment of it all.

THE CHRISTMAS MARKET IN CANDELARA

In addition to the candlelight procession, Candele a Candelara features a Christmas market complete with elaborate Nativity scenes, a snow-laden alley, street artists and delicious regional

delicacies like tortellini in brodo (meat-filled pasta in a savory broth) or Pangiallo Romano (a traditional sweet bread). Stroll past the village's medieval walls to admire the Advent themes: shepherds, angels, Bethlehem and the prophets, curated by the Mengaroni Art Institute. There are live candle-making



demonstrations using only beeswax and a method that stays true to how they were crafted in the Middle Ages. The Morelli Brothers, local metalwork artists, demonstrate how to create wrought iron sculptures of the Nativity scene.

As part of the festival, to get around the market and to see more sites within Candelara, you can hop aboard the Candle Train. Beyond the market, it stops at Bellavista, the Villa Berloni, Pieve di Santo Stefano and the PAC Museum.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

In 2025, the festival and market occur on Saturdays and Sundays from Nov. 22 to Dec. 14. While the candle procession is only in the evenings, visitors can enjoy the market and other festivities from 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. If you are travelling to the festival by car, it is recommended to park in Pesaro near one of Candelara's free shuttle stops. There is an entry fee to the festival and market: until 1 p.m. admission is €3 and after 1 p.m. it is €6, while children under 10 are free. For more information, visit www.candelara.it.

SICILY AT CHRISTMAS

BY TAMALA MALERK
Stars and Stripes

Across Sicily, Dec. 8 is celebrated as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and marks the beginning of the Christmas season. It is when the lights begin to twinkle, markets begin to open and special events are scheduled. The holiday period ends, markets close and Nativity scenes are packed away on Jan. 6, the Epiphany holy day.

SYRACUSA

Saint Lucia is the patron saint of Syracuse. December 13th is the day of her martyrdom and is commemorated with a solemn procession and by eating Cuccia, a boiled wheat treat that can be sweet or savory.



CATANIA

Various Christmas markets dot the town of Catania from late November, with the largest at the Piazza dell'Università and the most opulent in the Palazzo Biscari. However, the grandest Christmas venture in Catania is Christmas Town where the Ciminiere di Catania is transformed into a town of Christmas movies, magic, ice skating, play areas, parades, shows, markets and talking reindeer.



MOUNT ETNA

Not far from Catania are the activities in the mountainous areas and villages of Etna. There are several markets to explore in Acireale, Viagrande, Zafferana, Pedara and Caltagirone where the artistic Nativity scenes and special lava stone jewelry are famous.



PALERMO

Palermo is home to some of the more popular Christmas markets in Sicily, especially those in Piazza Castelnovo, along Via Maqueda and at Villa Filippina. Make sure to catch a special Christmas-themed performance at the Teatro Massimo and consider a visit to the Palermo Cathedral while it is decked out in holiday greenery.



ORTIGIA

The Christmas markets of Ortigia will delight anyone looking for local, unique treasures. Ortigia is the oldest city in Syracuse, and history surrounds you as you shop for Italian leather goods and jewelry, Sicilian ceramics and citrus marmalades.



TAORMINA

Tradition is a hallmark in Taormina. Witness the annual lighting of the Christmas bonfire in front of Duomo di Taormina. Against the flickers of flames, you will have fantastic views of Mt. Etna and the Ionian Sea. Make sure to catch a live Nativity performance known as the "Presepe Vivente" and the Carretti Siciliani, a parade featuring colorful and intricate carriages.



MILITARY

Army pushes for speedy drone innovation

Procurement process won't keep up with adversaries

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army has worked with drones for decades, but its adoption of the unmanned systems lags behind the innovations other armies have made on current battlefields such as eastern Ukraine, top generals warned.

"We're behind," admitted Army Lt. Gen. Charlie Costanza, the commander of the Army's Poland-based V Corps, to a crowd at the service's annual Association of the U.S. Army Conference in Washington. "I'll just be candid. ... We aren't moving fast enough. And it really took Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the way they're innovating and [the] Ukrainians are innovating to realize, 'Hey, we need to go fast!'"

From the Pacific to Poland, U.S. Army units have studied drone warfare innovations in recent conflicts, initially by Armenian and Azerbaijani forces during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 and further by Ukrainian forces and their Russian invaders since 2022. But Costanza — and more than a dozen other top Army officials — warned that the Army's clunky, outdated weapons procurement process, which can take years to produce new equipment, is not good enough to keep up with the blistering rate of technological advancement in current drone warfare.

Many of those innovations have come as soldiers find new ways to survive in an existential fight, like Ukraine has faced, officials said.

"War does that," Costanza said. "It forces you to be innovative and move quick. We are picking up on that, but we're not moving quite as fast as I think we need to."

Costanza, whose V Corps oversees U.S. Army forces operating in Europe and would become NATO's primary counterattack force if Europe was invaded, made the comments against the backdrop of the AUSA convention's trade room floor, where hundreds of companies displayed their latest drones and robotics capable of finding and attacking enemy positions, often enabled with artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities. The Army, meanwhile, is modernizing its procurement apparatus to work together with those companies to adopt their technology quickly — often bringing the companies along on field exercises to work hand-in-hand with soldiers to improve their products.

The Army has worked to outfit several of its brigades with small drones — some built in part by soldiers — to experiment with how to incorporate them into their formations to scout or attack enemy locations. Army officials envision a near-term future where every size unit, from squads to divisions, in every specialty — from front-line fighters in the infantry and armor fields to supply, intelligence and communications forces — is equipped with autonomous drones.

In Hawaii, the 25th Infantry Division's brigades have spent recent months converting from Infantry Brigade Combat Teams to the new Mobile Brigade Combat Team platform, which includes new electronic warfare capabilities, more drones and a new artillery battalion outfitted with the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or

HIMARS, that have proven critical to Ukraine's defenses.

The division has been sending teams of soldiers to Europe to study the latest advancements in Ukraine to adapt those tactics to their primary mission to prepare to fight a conflict in the Indo-Pacific Command theater, perhaps against a near-peer adversary such as China. Like Army units in Europe, the 25th ID has worked quickly this year to adopt the latest tech and let its soldiers find innovative ways to use it, said Maj. Gen. Jay Bartholomees, the Schofield Barracks-based division's commander.

Soldiers from the 25th ID have held more than 70 experiments aimed at integrating drones and other new capabilities into their formations in recent months. They've found successes in incorporating short- and medium-range drones into their smaller units, but Bartholomees agreed with Costanza that they lagged behind in other areas — including in the ability to use drones to find or strike targets at long-range distances beyond about 25 miles.

"That is where we're behind," Bartholomees said. "Now, the good news is I think we can catch up very rapidly by learning from ... what is happening in Ukraine, and the formations that we have built are ready for those capabilities to land."

Army leaders are also looking for another new capability to adopt across their forces, said Brig. Gen. Travis McIntosh, the 101st Airborne Division's deputy commander for support. McIntosh wants drones that understand what he calls "commander's intent." That is, drones that will seamlessly respond to what a commander orders them to do, just as good soldiers would.

Like the 25th Infantry Division, the 101st at Fort Campbell, Ky., has spent this year transforming its brigades into Mobile Brigade Combat Teams and adopting the Army's newest technology.

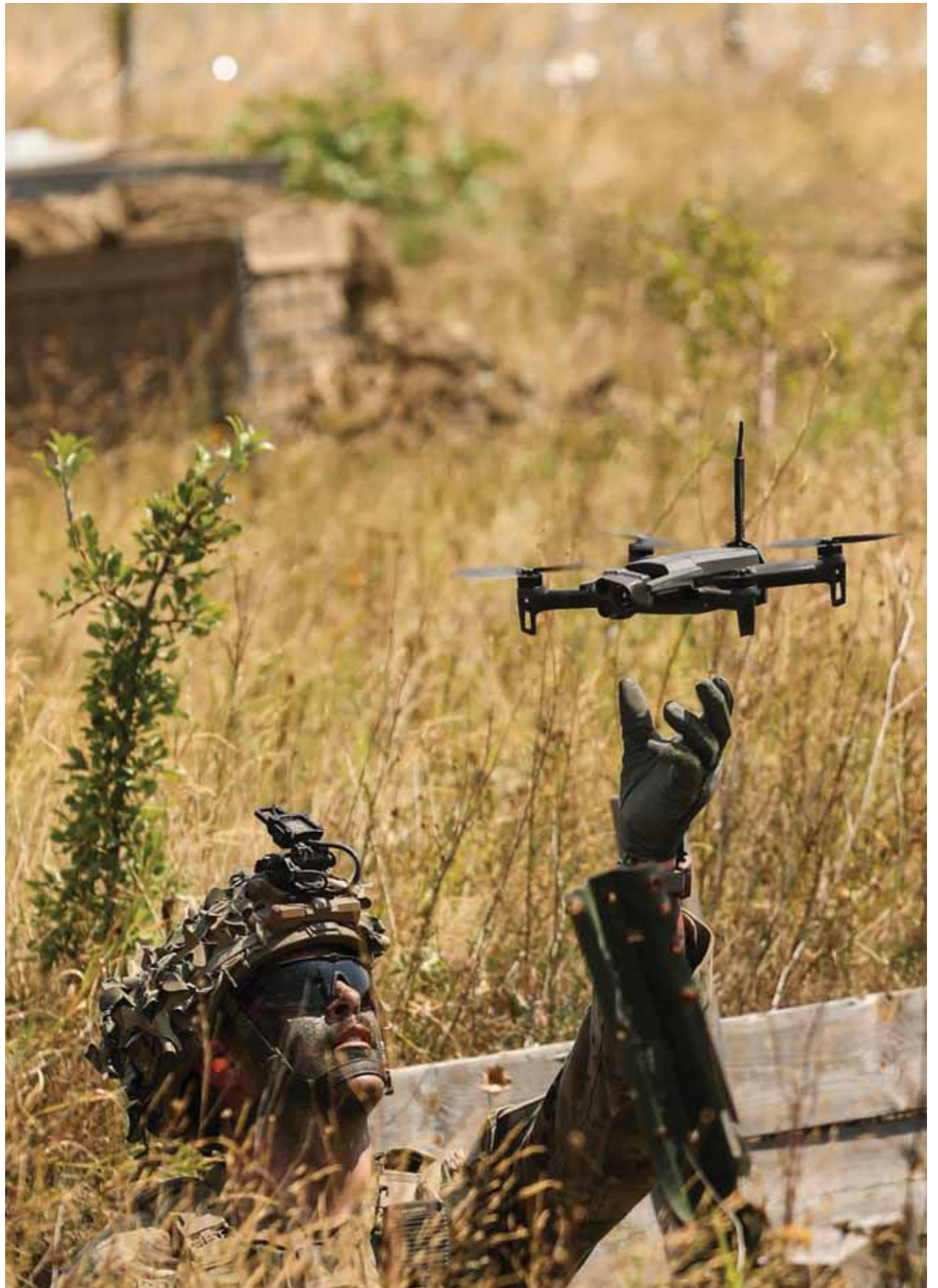
As part of those efforts, its soldiers built their own first-person-view drone systems called Attributable Battlefield Enablers — small, about \$750 battlefield drones that are flown by an operator wearing a headset and can conduct reconnaissance or drop small munitions. But the drones are limited by their software and the manpower required to operate them, McIntosh said.

The 101st-built drones need at least four soldiers to operate, he said. One soldier to fly the drone, another to provide security and two others to manage equipment and antennas.

"It's a four to one ratio, ladies and gentlemen, and that's the wrong math," McIntosh told an audience at AUSA, imploring the many technology companies in attendance to build him software that allows the drones to "fly by command, not by pilot."

The 101st general said he has already tested drones that can respond to his voice in training at Fort Campbell, where he told a three-drone team to fly 200 feet and follow his vehicle, but he wants manufacturers to "take it to the next level."

McIntosh said he needs drones that seamlessly respond to commands such as, "conduct reconnaissance west of my position for 2 kilometers, and report." And he wants those drones to be able to advise him if they detect the need for a "lethal response."



BREANNA BRADFORD/U.S. ARMY

A soldier retrieves a Parrot ANAFI USA drone during a live fire exercise at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, in August.



PARRIS KERSEY/U.S. ARMY

Brig. Gen. Travis McIntosh, the 101st Airborne Division's deputy commander for support, holds an Attributable Battlefield Enabler at Fort Campbell, Ky.

MILITARY

Army drill sergeants to don campaign hats

Change to wide, flat male hat goes into effect starting Jan. 2

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

The bush hat and its upturned brim that once set female Army drill sergeants apart is being retired as part of the Army's move toward a unified look for those in the iconic role.

The change to the wide and flat male campaign hat goes into effect starting Jan. 2, 2026, and affects both active-duty and reserve female drill sergeants.

It was first publicized Oct. 26 in a Reddit post and was confirmed Oct. 28 by an Army spokesman.

The Army said the transition away from separate hats was in the works prior to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's Sept. 30 policy speech to military brass announcing gender-neutral physical fitness standards based on the male level.

The Army Uniform Board recommended the change, which was approved by the service's chief of staff, according to the message posted on Reddit.

The change was made because vendors had trouble meeting the service's quality standards, the Army said.

The decision to adopt the campaign hat follows surveys in 2023 and 2024 in which female drill sergeants stated they preferred the campaign hat for uniformity and because it looked more professional, the Army said.

The female drill sergeant hat, introduced in 1972, was designed by Brig. Gen. Mildred Bailey and based on the Australian bush hat, according to the Army website.

It was originally beige but was changed to green in 1983.



TYNISHA DANIEL/U.S. ARMY

Drill sergeant leaders greet candidates to the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy. The bush hat that once set female drill sergeants apart is being retired, meaning all the service's drill sergeants will wear the campaign hat, seen on the soldier in the middle.

The first female drill sergeants, six noncommissioned officers from the Women's Army Corps, enrolled in the drill sergeant program at Fort Jackson, S.C., in February 1972 after receiving authorization from Army Chief of Staff William Westmoreland the previous year, the website said.

An Army statement put out in 2017 around the 45th anniversary of those events contained comments by female drill sergeants past and present.

"Those six women and that hat transformed the entire Army ... and my life," said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jennifer Dehorty, who

became a drill sergeant in 1984. "The esprit de corps that we learned from them was different. It was stronger."

According to the Army website, the soon-to-be standard campaign hat was worn by soldiers from 1911 to 1942 and was brought back for male drill sergeants in 1964.

NATO considers robots for its first line of defense

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The first to fight on the ground in a Russian attack on NATO territory could be robots rather than infantrymen.

At U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters in Wiesbaden, top commanders have been testing out a new combat concept in which a network of early-alert sensors connects through an artificial intelligence-informed cloud system to initiate battle.

"It implies that you want to take people out of the battlefield area as much as you can, and that's what we're sort of really learning about," Lt. Gen. Jez Bennett, NATO Land Command deputy commander, said Oct. 29. "Hence the idea of a sort of autonomous robotic force that takes that initial punch in the event that NATO is invaded."

During two war games this week, U.S. and NATO commanders tested out the approach, which was first unveiled by U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Gen. Christopher Donahue in July at a meeting of Army officials in Wiesbaden.

Known as the Eastern Flank Deterrence Line, the concept is aimed at bringing ground combat techniques into the 21st century, commanders say.

In overlapping drills called Steadfast Duel and Avenger Triad, USAREUR-AF and NATO's LANDCOM merged into one headquarters to test the defense line approach and see how ground forces would respond in the event of an attack.

Commanders said the drills marked a rare instance in which all 32 NATO member countries were gathered for an Article 5 defense scenario, referring to the alliance's policy that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Steadfast Duel is NATO's largest computer-assisted command post exercise and is designed to enhance the alliance's ability to carry out operations across a broad spectrum.



SAMUEL KIM/U.S. ARMY

NATO senior leaders discuss operational planning during exercise Steadfast Duel in Wiesbaden, Germany, on Oct. 27.

The drill incorporated USAREUR-AF staff and leaders from seven NATO corps to simulate the command of more than 100,000 NATO troops in the field.

Much of the wargaming centered on enabling fast decision-making by commanders and the need to process large amounts of live data into digestible bits so that allied forces can stay ahead of the enemy.

Avenger Triad focused on similar command

and control issues. The drills drew heavily from lessons of the Russia-Ukraine war, commanders said.

At times, the war in Ukraine has harkened to earlier conflicts, with trench warfare and massive casualty numbers on both sides. Allies want to avoid sending their own soldiers into the gauntlet in the manner Russia has deployed many of its forces.

The NATO approach "is not anymore like the

Second World War, with the Russians just pushing cannon fodder into the front," said Spanish Brig. Gen. Zacarias Hernandez Calvo, LANDCOM deputy chief of staff of plans. "This is not the way we want to fight."

Instead, the Eastern Flank Deterrence Line envisions that in a future fight, NATO will blunt any Russian offensive with an unmanned zone of operations.

"It really does learn the lessons from Ukraine, about a battlefield without people on it," Bennett said.

In the unmanned zone, a robotic force would be put into action, keeping NATO's human force in reserve to avoid the "level of concentrated Russian attacks that we have seen in Ukraine," Bennett said.

The setup would preserve human combat power for counterattack and the "ability to think and act quickly to hold Russia's own capabilities at risk in the event that it invades," he added.

The defense line concept is already operational, but more work is needed to build it out, commanders said. For example, robotic forces are still some way off in terms of the ability to field them at scale, Bennett said.

While the defense line system is now tailored to defending NATO's eastern front, the approach could be extended across Europe and beyond, military commanders say.

"With this successful command-and-control system established in Europe, it must be rapidly scaled and connected globally, ready to meet any threat," Donahue wrote in a July essay that alluded to the defense line concept.

Hernandez said command and control drills such as Steadfast Duel, which concluded Oct. 30, capitalize on a new streamlined approach encapsulated by the defense line concept.

"This is the way all the armies in NATO are going for the future," he said.

MILITARY

JAG officer in Italy guilty in spouse abuse case

BY KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The chief of administrative law for the Southern European Task Force pleaded guilty earlier this month to domestic abuse and was sentenced 200 days of confinement for threatening and assaulting his wife.

Maj. Joshua Goetting took a plea agreement Nov. 3 during a special court-martial at Caserma Ederle before military judge Col. Andrew Kazin.

In return, prosecutors agreed to drop 27 of the original 29 specifications of domestic abuse and several other lesser charges, as well as downgrade his trial from a general court-martial, allowing him the possibility of a lesser sentence.

Special courts-martial make up the second level of the military's three-tier trial system. They normally try cases of intermediate severity, whereas general courts-martial are used in cases involving the most severe violations.

Kazin's sentence of Goetting roughly split

the difference between the maximum 290 days the prosecution could recommend under the plea agreement and the 121 days the defense had proposed.

"For the past 15 years, Major Goetting has put on his camouflage uniform every day," prosecutor Maj. Sara Nicholson said during her closing statement. "But he was hiding something extra: his true personality."

Nicholson, Kazin and all but one of the soldiers conducting the trial were brought in from either Kaiserslautern, Germany, or the United States to avoid the appearance of partiality.

Several members of the current Judge Advocate General's office testified on Goetting's behalf during the sentencing phase.

They and other current and former JAG officers or people who had worked closely with him painted a picture of a highly competent and even-tempered officer who excelled at every stop during his 15-year career.

Prosecutors, however, said Goetting was a

different person around his wife. They tried to demonstrate that by playing two audio recordings made by Goetting's wife, Renee, on her cellphone. She had started to record the couple's arguments because she feared for her life, she testified.

In the first, the couple is heard arguing in the car on Oct. 5, 2024, on the way home from a spa. The argument started when Renee Goetting left a necklace in her husband's gym bag.

Joshua Goetting threatened to "knock (her) teeth out" and later muttered, "I ought to throw her down the f—— stairs."

The second recording, made on Feb. 23, 2025, on an upper floor of the couple's home while their two young children were playing downstairs, contains more arguing and what prosecutors said was the sound of Goetting slapping his wife across the face.

Renee Goetting, who moved back to her home state of Kansas, said she didn't want to report her husband's actions to the authorities, especially when he told her that due to his posi-

tion on base "no one would believe her."

She said she eventually decided the only way for her to be able to leave him with her children would be to report his actions. She did so on March 12.

Joshua Goetting initially denied the accusations while meeting with investigators, leading to one of the charges that were dropped.

Renee Goetting confirmed after the trial ended Monday night that she had multiple recordings from other arguments and incidents that presumably led to the other specifications of abuse. She testified that while attending a church service after being slapped by her husband, she had difficulty maintaining her composure.

"I thought I was going to die that day," she said.

Attorneys for Goetting acknowledged that he had made mistakes but argued that he should be allowed to return to society.

NATO burden shift should mean more European leadership

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The reduction of the Air Force's top command in Europe to a three-star headquarters could herald a shift of more leadership responsibility to European generals, says a new report that argues allies should get behind Pentagon plans for fewer U.S. four-stars.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's push to get other NATO countries to shoulder more of the security load should entail a demand that they also take on the burden of military command leadership, the European Council on Foreign Relations argued in its report issued Oct. 30.

Allies ought to propose a Europeanization of NATO's command structure, the report said. That means "appointing European four-star officers to lead the NATO air, land and maritime commands, with US three-stars serving as their deputies to ensure continued integration."

Traditionally, three U.S. four-star component commanders in Europe have had the dual responsibility of leading associated NATO commands.

On Oct. 31, though, U.S. Air Forces Europe and Africa installed Lt. Gen. Jason Hinds to lead associated American troops on the Continent while holding on to leadership of NATO's Allied Air Command headquarters at Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

USAFE-AFACRICA's transition to a three-star command coincided with the retirement of Gen. James Hecker.

If the Defense Department plans to

do the same with its Navy and Army commands in Europe, it could time such a move to the retirements of current leadership or their relocation to other military jobs.

While the Pentagon has not announced any intention of reducing U.S. Army Europe and Africa and U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa to three-star commands, it would be unusual to single out only one military component in Europe for that step down.

"Other positions will likely see similar downgrades in short order," the European Council on Foreign Relations report said.

In the case of the Army, Gen. Christopher Donahue has been in charge of USAREUR-AF for less than a year of what is often a three-year posting.

He could, however, be a candidate for other top Army jobs that would see him leave Europe earlier, opening the possibility for downgrading the Wiesbaden, Germany-based USAREUR-AF to a three-star headquarters.

Reducing U.S. components in Europe to three-star headquarters should eventually see those commanders reduced to deputy roles at their associated NATO headquarters, the report said.

Handing over more responsibility at the component levels should also be a precursor to eventually making NATO's top military job, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a European-led post, the report argued.

Since NATO's formation, that job has always been held by an American



MICHAEL ABRAMS/STARS AND STRIPES

U.S. Army Europe-Africa commander Gen. Christopher Donahue speaks at a ceremony at La Fiere, France, on June 5. The reduction of the Air Force's top command in Europe to a three-star headquarters could foreshadow downgrades at USAREUR-AF and U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa as part of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's plan for cutting back on four-stars in the military.

going back to the time of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

However, there has been debate in national security circles for years about whether the position should eventually be opened to other members.

President Donald Trump's administration had reportedly been considering such a move earlier this year but opted to put U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynke in the post in July to replace the outgoing Gen. Christopher Cavoli.

"The changing of other positions should follow through to 2029 — including, eventually, SACEUR," the report said. "Non-US general officers

currently lack experience in leading at many of NATO's highest echelons, but a European-led NATO means they need to acquire it one way or another."

While the United States has been in the lead of NATO since its founding, Hegseth has said he envisions European allies playing the larger role in the future.

At an October meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels, Hegseth said the most effective deterrent to Russian aggression is "a lethal, capable and European-led NATO."

Recommendations about a NATO command shakeup come as allies increase defense spending in Europe in

line with Trump's calls for members to spend 5% of gross domestic product on their militaries, up from the current 2% benchmark.

The push for allies in Europe and Canada to ramp up spending comes amid an ongoing Pentagon force posture review, which could lead to troop reductions in Europe as the U.S. focuses more deterring China in east Asia.

While it's not clear how extensive any potential cuts could be, the Defense Department last week announced that it was scaling back troop rotations into Romania.

Navy warns that online scammers may target its hotel guests

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy is warning people that they may be targeted by online scams when making reservations for the service's hotels if they do not use official phone numbers and websites.

Navy lodging reservations only should be booked through the toll-free number 1-877-628-9233 or by using local phone numbers listed by individual

property at www.dodlodging.net. U.S. Naval Support Activity Naples said in a post last month to its official Facebook page.

"Patrons should exercise caution when using phone numbers or websites found through online searches or social media, as fraudulent sites may attempt to collect personal or financial information," the base said in the post.

The Navy didn't say how it became aware of potential scams or how many

complaints it may have received. The service offers Navy Lodge and Navy Gateway Inns & Suites accommodations on-site at its bases worldwide.

It's not clear how many people may have been victimized by the scam, which has been reported to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Coleen San Nicolas-Perez, a spokeswoman for Navy Installations Command, said in an email.

She added the exact locations and

total amount of money lost to the scam also had not yet been determined but that there was no indication of widespread impact.

"Appropriate authorities are actively working with the Navy to track down the perpetrators of this fraud scheme," she said. "The investigation is focused on identifying the fake websites and phone numbers being used to defraud patrons."

Personnel and their families should

double-check reservation details directly through official Navy lodging channels and verify the legitimacy of any website or phone number used for booking the service's lodging, San Nicolas-Perez said.

People who believe they may have been targeted or affected by a scam should immediately report it to 1-877-628-9233 and notify their bank or other financial institution immediately, the Navy said.

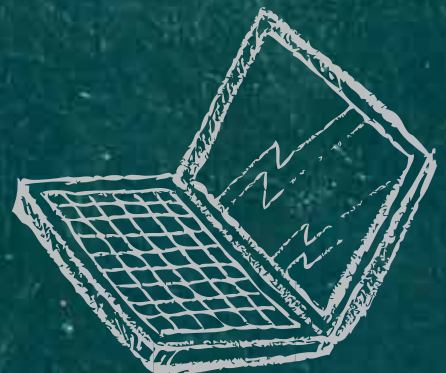
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