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ITALY EDITION

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Gazing into the future

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COVER STORY

Services eyeing 6th-generation fighters

Air Force, Navy asking for \$5.1B to develop aircraft that will follow F-35

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The armed forces of the United States have competed among themselves for generations, so it would be surprising if they weren't already heating up over the future sixth-generation fighter.

"Future" is the operative word: Even the most aggressive timelines predict a first flight unlikely before 2028, with an entry to service in the early 2030s. The project demands relatively small fiscal resources for now — just over \$5.1 billion of the \$1.5 trillion defense budget rolled out last month.

The bigger headlines went to Pentagon plans to triple spending on unmanned vehicles to as much as \$75 billion, as well as pay \$30 billion to replenish stocks of missiles and anti-missile missiles used in the joint U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran.

But the budget also included seed money for projects that exist only on paper, such as the Trump-class battleship — as well as competing plans from the Air Force and Navy for a stealth long-range fighter they hope to put into service by the 2030s.

Out front is the Air Force, which already has a number on its plane: F-47. The budget includes \$5 billion to accelerate the development of the Boeing "air dominance" fighter, which is expected to replace the service's F-22.

It also has perhaps the most important fan — President Donald Trump. The Pentagon numbered the plane after Trump, the 47th president. The fighter's name is still to be announced.

The Navy has its own sixth-generation fighter in development, the F/A-XX. Until recently, the future of a carrier-launched new jet was uncertain.

When announcing Boeing as the builder of choice for the F-47 in March 2025, Trump told the Pentagon to go "all-in" on the project. He also suggested that building two sixth-generation fighters was problematic.

"Awarding the F/A-XX contract as written is likely to delay the higher priority F-47 program, with low likelihood of improving the timeline to field a Navy sixth-generation fighter," the White House said in a July 2025 statement to Congress.

But last month, Adm. Daryl Caudle, the chief of naval operations, said the carrier-based sixth-generation fighter was on a faster track to development.

"The Navy will award a production contract for the F/A-XX sixth generation fighter in August," Caudle said.

The final decision comes down to two military industry heavyweights: Boeing and Northrop Grumman.

Boeing, builder of the Navy's F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler jets, has



U.S. Air Force

An artist rendering of the proposed F-47 sixth-generation fighter. The Air Force is planning to build a stealth long-range fighter it hopes to put into service by the 2030s.

pitched a carrier version of its F-47 design, saying that having one contractor on both projects will lead to cost savings and technology sharing.

Northrop Grumman, the other finalist, has a long reputation with the Navy as the builder of the former F-14 Tomcat. The company has pitched a "clean sheet" design that wouldn't share major elements with the F-47. Supporters flip Boeing's argument on its head, saying that Northrop Grumman will be able to concentrate on the project instead of splitting its energy and manufacturing capacity on building two sixth-generation jets simultaneously.

Lockheed Martin, the builder of both the F-22 and F-35, was eliminated from the competition last year.

How much money is available for the F/A-XX project is a question for the 2028 budget, when the contractor will be decided and design work is further down the road. Once into Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD), the cost of the F/A-XX and its piece of the budget will come into focus.

The F/A-XX is budgeted to get \$140 million in fiscal 2027 — \$68 million from the baseline

defense budget and \$72 million from reconciliation funding that would need to be passed in separate legislation by Congress.

The Marine Corps has its own ideas — and they may not square with its parent department, the Navy.

Lt. Gen. William Swan, the Marine Corps' deputy commandant for aviation, told reporters at a meeting in Quantico, Va., that its concept for a sixth-generation fighter jet that would enter service around 2041 is one that will likely "look like" but not necessarily be the same as the Navy's choice for the F/A-XX.

"We're fast following with the Air Force, right?" Swan said, according to Breaking Defense. "They got the F-47, the Navy's looking at F/A-XX, and they're just starting on that. So, we are going to watch."

In the meantime, the services can look at their respective pieces of the Pentagon's \$21.4 billion buy of fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II fighters in the 2027 budget.

The Air Force will buy 38 F-35As, which take off and land at bases.

The Navy will receive 37 F-35Cs, which can be carrier-launched or operate from

bases.

The Marines will receive 10 F-35Bs, which can take off and land vertically and operate from amphibious assault warships or unfinished airstrips on land.

The total buy of 85 F-35 Lightning II variants is up from 47 last year.

Mark Cancian, an analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said it is difficult to forecast the future for the sixth-generation fighters in a year when the Pentagon is asking for a record-shattering \$1.5 trillion in total spending.

Future administrations may be more financially constrained, have different priorities and also need to pay the bills for current conflicts like Operation Epic Fury against Iran.

Cancian said various priorities — such as the likelihood that the Marines would want a sixth-generation fighter with a vertical take-off and landing capability — could come up against a money crunch that might zero out one or more of the aircraft ideas.

"There's not much need to cut anything when talking about how to spend \$1.5 trillion," Cancian said.

Air Force approves production of T-7A Red Hawk jet trainer

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force said this month it has given the green light to start production of the new T-7A Red Hawk jet trainer.

Boeing will be paid \$219 million for the first 14 two-seat trainers that will be used to teach new Air Force pilots how to handle jet aircraft.

The contract also includes training, support equipment and spare parts. The Air Force plans to eventually buy 351 T-7A aircraft and 46 ground-based training simulators.

"The T-7A is a pivotal program for the future of our combat air forces," said William Bailey, who is performing the duties of the assistant secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics.

The Red Hawk will replace the Air Force Air Education and Training Command's T-38 Talon aircraft in 2027. The Talon, which first flew in 1959, is widely recognized as the



CHASE KOHLER/412th Test Wing

A T-7A Red Hawk in flight at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., last year.

world's first supersonic jet trainer.

The Red Hawk was designed using all-digital methods, which the Air Force said streamlined the development process and will help accelerate production.

"It signifies our confidence in the aircraft's design and our readiness to begin producing this game-changing capability," said Rodney

Stevens, program executive officer for Training and director of the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center's Training Directorate. "While there is still work to do, we have a strong partnership and a clear path forward to deliver the world's most advanced pilot training system."

The Red Hawk is just under 50 feet long,

with a wingspan of just more than 32 feet. It has a top speed of Mach 1.3 when using the afterburner and a service ceiling of 50,000 feet.

The trainer's tail is painted a distinctive red color — a salute to the Tuskegee Airmen, the military's first Black pilots, who served during World War II. American bomber crews nicknamed the planes of the Tuskegee Airmen the "Red Tails" because they had vertical stabilizers on their planes painted red.

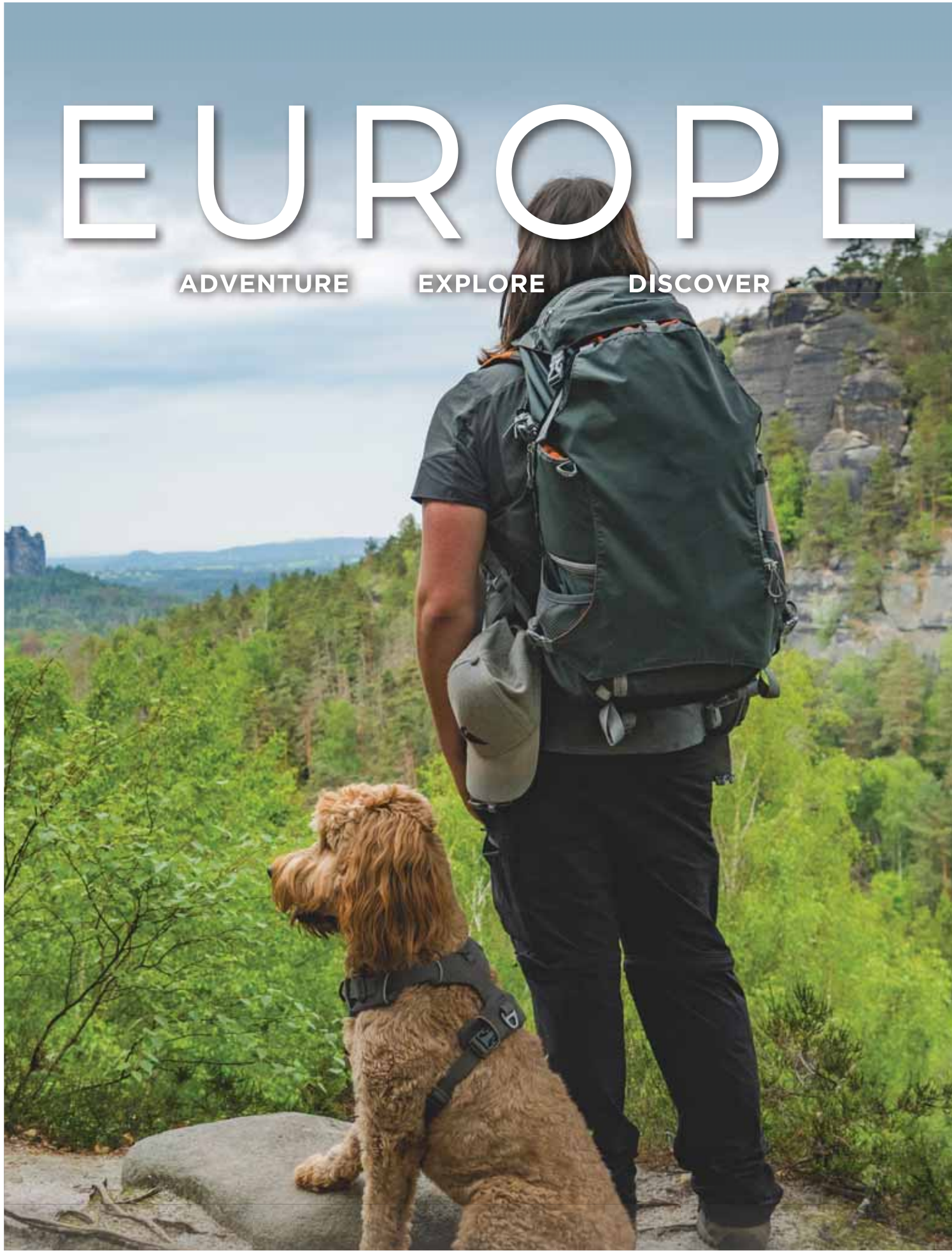
After initial test flying at Edwards Air Force Base in California, the first aircraft was sent Dec. 8, 2025, to the Air Education and Training Command at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas.

"Our mission is to train the next generation of combat aviators, and the T-7A Red Hawk is the tool we need to do it," said Brig. Gen. Matthew Leard, director of Plans, Programs, Requirements, and International Affairs for the Air Education and Training Command.

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MILITARY

March for Rangers founder may be on last legs

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAGO-TORBOLE, Italy — A yearly long-distance march honoring the Army Rangers' first commander may have seen its final steps taken on April 28, as the founder of the Col. Darby 40-miler says he's dropping his pack.

Since 2010, participants have hiked up the eastern shores of Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake, from Peschiera del Garda at its southern end to a memorial to U.S. soldiers in a piazza here at its northern tip, near where a German artillery shell killed then-Col. William O. Darby on April 30, 1945.

Darby, who was posthumously promoted to brigadier general, was serving with the 10th Mountain Division at the time of his death but is the founding commander of the Army's 1st Ranger Battalion, a predecessor to the modern elite special operations units. He was killed alongside Sgt. Maj. John "Tim" Evans.

The event honoring him was the brainchild of Rick Tscherne, known as "Ranger Rick," who said his long haul running the march is ending after 17 years because of a sharp drop in turnout and diminished presence from supporters at nearby U.S. Army bases.

In 2023, some 1,300 people marched, but this year fewer than half of the 330 registered participants showed up at the starting line, he said.

The 40-mile trek, which begins before 6 a.m., can take the whole day, but a trio of soldiers — part of a group of 11 from the Washington-based 75th Ranger Regiment's 2nd Battalion — hoofed it in under five hours this year to earn top finisher trophies.

Though soldiers from the Ranger regiment, 10th Mountain Division, and other units have traveled to the event for years, the military does not officially sanction or sponsor it.

Army representatives mulled taking it over a few years ago but ultimately passed, in part for cost reasons.

Though Tscherne said he runs it on a shoestring budget, others say it would be far more expensive to do officially, given liability issues and other concerns.

Tscherne attributed the high number of no-shows this year to a lack of day passes for paratroopers of the 173rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), headquartered about 90 miles away.

But officials there say that while passes may have been approved for similar events in the past, they are not an entitlement. Unit leaders approve them only as missions and readiness allow.

"Our paratroopers were not denied opportunity to participate," said Col. Mark E. Bush, commander of the brigade, which is a rapid response force that supports U.S. commands in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Some local soldiers still did take part or came to cheer on their colleagues, including at least five service members who traveled from a base near Pisa that bears Darby's name.

"It was an awesome experience," said Capt. Jesus "Jesse" De La Torre, provost marshal at Camp Darby, who did the march with four colleagues from the base and one from Vicenza. "I think it would be a great thing if it were to continue."

De La Torre, who finished in nine hours, was greeted near the finish line by Col.



PHOTOS BY CHAD GARLAND/Stars and Stripes
Col. Vaughn Strong, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Italy, stands among attendees at a memorial ceremony April 30 in Nago-Torbole. The annual event honors Col. William O. Darby, founding commander of the U.S. Army's 1st Ranger Battalion, and 26 other U.S. soldiers who died in Torbole on April 30, 1945, in the final days of World War II in Italy.



Strong speaks with Rick Tscherne, founder of the Col. Darby 40-Miler, near the ruck march's finish line in Nago-Torbole. Tscherne said time running the march is ending after 17 years.

Vaughn Strong, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza, who came to take part in events marking the 81st anniversary of

the deaths of Darby, Evans and a group of 25 other soldiers.

Strong, the garrison chaplain and a couple

of dozen others gathered after the march to view a documentary.

It portrayed successful Italian efforts to find an amphibious truck that sank to the bottom of the icy lake with two-dozen 10th Mountain Division soldiers and a driver from another unit aboard on the day Darby and Evans died. Their bodies were never recovered.

Speaking at ceremony at the memorial where stone obelisks commemorate the 27 soldiers' deaths, Strong said the garrison is "committed to returning each year to honor the legacy of those who sacrificed their lives here."

The march could continue to be part of the yearly memorial if private organizations or military groups step up, said Ben Appleby, president and one of the founders of a local historical research association called Benach, which produced the documentary and has long assisted with the march.

It doesn't need to be something as big as 1,300 people to keep going, said Appleby, who has seen it grow since he first marched alongside Tscherne in 2013, just the two of them.

"I don't intend to let it die," he said. "If it's not a big event, I will be doing it myself."

Italian city near US base puts foot down over dog whiz smell

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The smell of pooch potty in a city near a U.S. Army logistics hub south of Pisa has become so putrid that dog owners will be required to flush their pet's pee from public areas.

The mayor of Livorno, a coastal city outside Camp Darby in the Tuscany region, recently signed an ordinance requiring dog handlers to carry bottles or sprayers of water to rinse away their canine's piddle from pavement, street benches and the wheels of parked cars and scooters.

It also applies to private spaces near areas used by the public.

The measure aims to address the many complaints about odors and hygiene issues related to the dog urine befouling places where adults and children socialize, the city said in a statement that noted a significant and growing pet dog population.

The ordinance also strictly forbids handlers from letting their mutts relieve themselves near doorways, windows and entrances to homes, offices and shops in the city.

Existing city rules require dog walkers in public areas and green spaces to immediately

remove solid waste using appropriate equipment and to show the equipment to a public official upon request. Violators are subject to a fine.

But those rules do not address the issue of liquid waste.

The new ordinance will be in effect from May 20 to Oct. 31, the most critical period of the year from a climate perspective, as temperatures rise and rainfall declines, the statement said.

Violators face fines ranging from 25 to 500 euros, and offenders will be responsible for restoring the site.



PETER RAWLINS/Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan

MILITARY

Trump says US troop cuts in Italy probable

President also included Spain in his plan after claiming Europe not helping with Iran war

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Italy and Spain will likely face U.S. troop cuts in retaliation for not cooperating with the American military operation against Iran, President Donald Trump said on April 30.

Trump's comments came one day after he said he also was considering reductions in Germany following recent criticism from Chancellor Friedrich Merz over the Iran situation.

"Yeah, probably will," Trump told reporters at the White House when asked whether he planned to pull some service members out of Italy and Spain.

"Why shouldn't I? Italy has not been of any help. Spain has been horrible. Absolutely," Trump added.

The flurry of threats from Trump comes as the U.S. and Iran remain deadlocked on how to end the conflict, which started Feb. 28 with joint American and Israeli strikes against the Iranian leadership.

Negotiations following a ceasefire failed, and NATO member countries have varied in their willingness to help U.S. efforts in the mission, known as Operation Epic Fury.

It's unclear whether Trump intends to follow through on his various threats related to where U.S. forces are based in Europe.

In the case of Spain and Italy, Trump would have fewer options than he does with Germany, which has the largest U.S. military presence on the Continent, some 34,000 troops.

There are roughly 12,000 U.S. military personnel based in Italy, home to the Navy's European headquarters in Naples. Another hub is Vicenza, where the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade operates.

The brigade serves as the Army's con-



U.S. Army paratroopers attending Jumpschool personnel inspection training at Caserma Del Din, Vicenza, Italy, in January.

JOSKANNY LUIA/U.S. Army

tingency force in Europe and is designed to deploy quickly to crises in Europe and Africa.

The Army has been building up over the past few years in Vicenza, where an ongoing \$500 million housing project is slated to create more than 470 homes by 2028.

The Pentagon's other main location in Italy is an air base in Aviano, home to the 31st Fighter Wing and its two F-16 fighter squadrons, among other capabilities. The base airfield also is key to the 173rd's quick-response mission.

The country's defense minister, Guido Crosetto, told Italian news outlet Ansa that he didn't understand the basis for Trump's comments that Italy has been unhelpful.

Crosetto also said Italy is prepared to assist in a mission to protect commercial navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, something other allies in Europe have been discussing for weeks.

Any European mission to secure navigation, however, would come once hostilities have ended, allies have said.

Trump would have even fewer withdrawal options in Spain, home to about 3,000 service members. Most of the U.S. military presence is at the Navy base in Rota. The five destroyers there also are integral to NATO's missile defense architecture.

While Trump has called on European allies to help clear the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping chokepoint, the waterway remains largely closed.

The circumstances have led to a sharp increase in gas prices and could pose a threat to the global economy the longer the crisis drags on.

Spain has faced the toughest criticism from the Trump administration for its refusal to allow bases and airspace in the country to be used for any operations related to the Iran



KEYLY SANTIZO/U.S. Navy

The Family Housing Program at U.S. Army Garrison Vicenza, Italy, is the Army's largest housing investment program that will provide 478 units for soldiers.

conflict.

Spain also is the only ally that refused to go along with Trump's demand that all NATO members increase defense spending levels to 5% of gross domestic product.

Trump has frequently used the U.S. military presence in Europe as leverage when coming into conflict with allies on various issues, such as defense spending. For example, in his first term he threatened to pull 12,000 U.S. troops out of Germany.

For host nations, the U.S. military gives an economic jolt to local communities where troops are based. In return, the U.S. network of bases across the Continent offers the Pentagon an array of options when it comes to projecting power in Europe and beyond.

Several bases in Europe have played key roles in enabling U.S. forces to carry out operations against Iran, including military sites in Germany, the United Kingdom, Romania and Greece.

Giro d'Italia race brings cycling to Naples, Aviano

BY KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — Americans stationed in Naples and Aviano will get a chance to see some of the world's top cyclists this month as the Giro d'Italia passes through their military communities.

The race, commonly recognized as one of the three most prestigious in the world alongside the Tour de France and the Vuelta a España, started May 8 in Bulgaria.

The sixth stage of the event finishes in Naples on May 14. It's an 85-mile stretch that includes one major climb.

The race passes on the outskirts of Aviano during the second-to-last stage on May 30. Stage 20 starts at Gemona del Friuli and ends at the mountain hamlet of Piancavallo. The 120-mile stretch features multiple challenging climbs.

Traffic along what Americans commonly refer to as the Mountain Highway will be restricted that day. Officials generally close the road roughly two hours prior to the race and open it about an hour after riders pass.

Those wishing to be at the finish line in Piancavallo either must obtain one of the 780 passes for vehicles being issued May 8 on the Friuli-Venezia Giulia regional website or take a shuttle bus from one of four designated parking areas.

Shuttle service begins at 6 a.m. and ends about four hours later. It's also possible to watch the racers pass by at numerous loca-



CHRISTOPHER A. MADERO/U.S. Marine Corps

The 2026 Giro d'Italia kicked off its "Grande Partenza" in Bulgaria on May 8 with three stages there before transferring to Italy, where the route includes a stage arriving in Naples on May 14 and another in Aviano before heading north.

tions along the route.

The most notable rider in this year's race is Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard, who will be seeking victory in the only one of the three major races he has yet to win. His biggest rival, Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, isn't participating this year.

Four Americans are among the competitors listed on the race's official website.

Sepp Kuss, ranked No. 4 among Americans by ProCyclingStats, is No. 98 in the points list this year. He rides for Team Visma/Lease a Bike alongside Vingegaard.

Magnus Sheffield, the fifth-ranked American, is a member of the Netcompany/Ineos team. Both Larry Warbasse, who is 10th among Americans, and William Barta ride for Tudor Pro.

Andrew Hampsten, the 1988 champion, is the only American ever to win the race.

173rd Airborne Brigade soldier killed in car crash

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — A U.S. soldier serving with the 173rd Airborne Brigade was killed in an off-duty car crash in northern Italy this month.

Sgt. Markevian Slacks, 31, was a parachute rigger with the brigade and was stationed at Aviano Air Base. The crash occurred near the border with Austria on May 2, a military official said.

Slacks was a "valued member of our formation who will be sorely missed," Col. Mark Bush, 173rd Airborne Brigade commander, said in a post on the brigade's social media pages.

"We are deeply saddened," he said. "His loss will forever weigh heavily on the hearts of those fortunate enough to have experienced his comradery and selfless devotion to his team."

Hundreds of commenters responding to the command's Facebook and Instagram posts expressed their condolences or shared memories of Slacks.

"He was a stellar person," said the official Instagram account for U.S. Army Garrison Italy's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers. "We are going to miss you dearly."

Slacks was a native of Fitzgerald, Ga., and joined the Army in early 2021, at the age of 26, according to biographical information the



Slacks

military provided to Stars and Stripes.

After basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., he trained as parachute rigger at the Army's Quartermaster School on Fort Lee, Va.

After arriving in Aviano in November 2021, Slacks proved his skills as a parachute packer and airdrop specialist before taking on the role of in-process inspector, the individual who checks soldiers' gear at the holding area before they board an aircraft for airborne operations.

It is a "profound responsibility" that helps ensure the safety and readiness of all paratroopers of the Sky Soldier Brigade, said the Southern European Task Force, Africa, in an emailed statement.

Slacks' awards and decorations include a Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal with three oak leaf clusters and other awards.

He also earned the Expert Soldier Badge, Parachute Rigger Badge and Air Assault Badge.

Slacks was his company's representative to the BOSS program, which is aimed at giving service members things to do while off duty, officials said.

"He was not only an amazing soldier, but an amazing person," said commenter Kylee Faith Ward. "He had unwavering morals and genuinely cared about not only his work and the uniform, but about everyone he encountered."

The crash was under review, the command said in its Facebook and Instagram posts.

MILITARY

Pentagon picks 14 production priorities

'Critical' list includes a dozen 'legacy' munitions

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Department of Defense is pushing industry to ramp up production on 14 "critical" weapons — ranging from Patriot anti-missile interceptors to new low-cost cruise missiles, according to an internal memo.

The list includes radar-guided air-to-air AMRAAM missiles, air-dropped ship-killer LRASM missiles and two variants of Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The priority list was issued in April by the Munitions Acceleration Council (MAC), the Pentagon panel of senior leaders created in 2025 to prioritize weapons procurement and incorporate long-term defense industry commitments to cost and quality control.

Most of the weapons have been used in Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran. The need to replenish the thousands of missiles, bombs and other munitions used in the campaign is explicitly part of the reason for the list.

"These investments are vital to ensuring the department's ability to meet immediate and long-term munitions demands; replenish depleted stockpiles; support the operational needs of U.S. forces, allies and partners; reestablish deterrence; and meet long-term demand," according to one budget document.

The "critical" list includes a dozen "legacy" munitions and two "emerging" munitions to be fast-tracked to troops.

The Pentagon will offer multiyear procurement deals that could stretch as long as seven years, according to the MAC document released by the Pentagon.

In exchange for the longer-term commitment that the Pentagon says will ensure less volatility in production rates on weapons programs, contractors will have to agree to stricter timelines and cover unexpected costs if production targets aren't met.

"We're making them put skin in the game, and we expect them to meet the ramp rates that they agree to," said acting Pentagon comptroller Jay Hurst during a news briefing on April 21.

The more-than \$47 billion in spending includes \$19.5 billion for "procurement disconnects" — making up for incremental costs in current spending. The totals released for each purchase don't add up because of rounding, the MAC said.

The two "emerging" priorities are for a Low Cost Hypersonic Strike Weapon and increased production of the long-range Precision Strike Missile Increment 1.

"The inclusion of two emerging capabilities reflects the department's commitment to innovation and modernization," the MAC document said.

The memo lists \$326 million for the devel-



An F-16C Fighting Falcon assigned to the 85th Test Evaluation Squadron shoots an AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile missile over a test range near Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. JOSHUA HOSKINS/U.S. Air Force



The destroyer USS Delbert D. Black fires a Tomahawk Land Attack Missile in support of Operation Epic Fury in February. U.S. Navy

opment and procurement of the low-cost hypersonic strike weapon; \$156 million for the Navy to procure 353 missiles, and \$130 million for the Pentagon to test and develop the Blackbeard-Ground Launch low-cost hypersonic strike missile.

Another \$40 million would go toward the Army development of the Blackbeard and to gauge its capabilities in comparison to the PrSM deep strike missile.

The Marines would be allocated \$15 million

to procure 10 PrSM deep-strike missiles.

The "legacy weapons" in the MAC memo include munitions extensively used in the U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran and defending against counterattacks aimed at U.S. and allied forces.

"The focus on 12 legacy munitions ensures continued support for proven systems that are essential to current and future operations, such as precision-guided missiles, air and missile defense, and air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions," the document said.

They include:

Patriot Advanced Capability-3 anti-missile system: \$7 billion, with \$6.1 billion for the Army to procure 1,429 PAC-3s, and \$874 million for the Navy to procure 207. The Navy recently said it wants to use the Patriot system on its ships that have the AEGIS air defense system.

Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD): \$4.8 billion for the Army to procure of 373 THAAD interceptors "required to replenish interceptors expended in the last year" and "provides the required inventory for national defense."

Standard Missile-3 11A: \$2.4 billion for the Missile Defense Agency to procure up to 78 of the high-altitude interceptor missiles.

Standard Missile-6: \$2.2 billion that includes \$1.9 billion for the Navy to procure 224 missiles, and \$330 million for the Army to procure 56 missiles.

Tomahawk Land Attack Missile: \$1.8 billion for the Navy to acquire 685 new Block V Vertical Launch System Tomahawk cruise missiles.

Joint Advanced Tactical Missile: \$1.7 billion, including \$990 million for the Air Force and \$676 million for the Navy. The number of missiles is classified information, the Pentagon said.

Low-cost cruise missile development and procurement: \$1.6 billion that includes \$1.3 billion for 2,000 units to be integrated into existing and planned launchers. Another \$300 million is for the Air Force to procure up to 1,000 units of the Family of Affordable Mass Missiles production. The Air Force would also receive \$51 million to complete development of Family of Affordable Mass Missiles-Air Launcher.

Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile procurement: \$1.6 billion that includes \$952 million for the Air Force to procure 618 AMRAAMs, and \$637 million for the Navy to procure 388 of the missiles.

Maritime Strike Tomahawk: \$1.1 billion, including \$778 million for the Army to procure 110 missiles, and \$298 million for the Navy to procure 100 missiles and components.

Maximized JASSM-ER: \$1 billion for the Air Force to procure 330 missiles to complete the JASSM annual maximum purchase of 860 missiles and components.

Standard Missile-3 IB: \$896 million for the Missile Defense Agency to procure up to 52 SM-3 Block IB missiles and components.

Long Range Anti-Ship Missile procurement: \$473 million, including \$236 million for the Air Force to procure 45 missiles to complete the annual maximum buy of 318 missiles; and \$236 million for the Navy to procure 48 C-3 variants.

By highlighting a limited menu of highest priorities, the Pentagon is hoping to increase its stockpiles and rebuild depleted inventories.

"This ensures the U.S. maintains a credible deterrence posture by increasing munitions availability and readiness while supporting sustained operations for U.S. forces, allied nations, and partner countries in the face of evolving global threats," the memo says.

Navy installation in Naples confirms elevated radon readings

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy's largest installation in Italy validated test results showing potentially dangerous radon levels at base schools and elsewhere, an about-face from an earlier rejection of the findings as unreliable.

A Naval Support Activity Naples school reception area, locker room and teacher's offices are among areas with levels of the gas requiring action, the base said in a May 5 Facebook statement.

They are among 37 offices, workspaces and other locations around the base with excessive radon levels, according to the statement. Studies have linked the colorless, odorless gas to lung cancer.

Environmental Protection Agency guidelines say radon levels consistently at or above 4.0 picocuries per liter of air are hazardous. Levels found at the base range from 4.0 to 12.1

picocuries, data showed.

The base is taking "immediate steps to prioritize and address every one of these cases," NSA Naples commander Capt. John Randazzo said in the statement.

Among those cases is a locker room at the middle/high school with a radon level of 10.7 picocuries. Several areas at an offsite computer and telecommunications station, including a watch floor, showed levels ranging from 4.3 to 12.1, according to the data.

In explaining the switch in accepting the results, Randazzo said the base had conducted a comprehensive analysis of the data to address quality assurance concerns.

"That detailed analysis, which was not available at the time of the initial (quality assurance) concern, demonstrated the results are within the acceptable standards for accuracy and precision," Randazzo said in the statement.

It wasn't immediately clear what measures the base will take to mitigate radon in those and other areas or how it would fund its efforts. But the mitigation measures will be completed within two years, officials said.

Radon levels can be lowered by means ranging from temporary measures like increasing ventilation to adding a professionally installed depressurization system.

In February, Randazzo said the base was rejecting the results of a yearlong radon survey due to faulty blank control detectors. Those detectors indicated a problem with the entire testing process, Randazzo said.

The base did not release the results of the study conducted at nonresidential facilities from 2024-25, but said then that it hoped to complete retesting by 2027.

The announcement is the latest development in a yearslong effort to address radon issues at the base following a Defense Depart-

ment Inspector General investigation prompted by a whistleblower complaint.

NSA Naples didn't do timely radon testing at some homes, offices, medical facilities and child care centers as required by Navy policy, the IG report said in 2024.

Investigators also found that base officials hadn't notified military personnel and their families that NSA Naples had the Navy's highest rating for potentially excessive levels of radon, among other findings.

In response, the base launched a campaign using social media, newsletters and other platforms to raise awareness about radon risks. It also conducted the yearlong radon exposure test, which ended last fall.

Radon forms when radioactive metals break down naturally in rocks, soil and water. People are exposed to the gas when it seeps through cracks and gaps in buildings, according to the EPA.

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For centuries, Naples and Vesuvio (Mount Vesuvius), have had both a beautiful and fatal relationship. Neapolitans have planted vineyards on the fertile slopes, creating specialty wines. Artists like Andy Warhol have been inspired to create series of paintings. Eruptions have caused historical changes like the eruption that buried Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D., which allowed for an extensive archeological record of Roman life preserved in time.

When in Naples, I knew I had to hike this famed volcano. There are many tours to Vesuvio, and if you are military-affiliated, the simplest one would be through MWR. With limited time, I booked a tour through Viator—a half-day hike with a specialty Margherita pizza lunch and wine tasting. Unfortunately, my tour was cancelled the night before. Scrambling to find another one, I chose a simple half-day group hike, where the bus dropped us off at the beginning and picked us up at the end... or so I thought.

Our tour bus driver expertly navigated the skinny switchback up the volcano. I watched the city grow smaller and appreciated the scrub of evergreens and broom spreading over the mountain.

When we made it to the parking lot near the peak, we were given a time to meet back at the bus. Our driver drove away, and we were on our own to enjoy the sunny November day and hike to the top. I slowly hiked up the steep, rocky, elevated path, a faint scent of sulfur in the air, and wondered what it would be like to see this beautiful monster erupt. Yellow flowers dotted the rocky terrain on my left, and to the right was an expansive view of Naples and the bay.

Once at the top, the terrain leveled out. I took my time admiring the overlooks where I could

see into the craters of *Gran Cono*, or Great Cone. At one point, I saw a sort of decorated pillar, with charms and stickers from others who made it to the top. It turned out to be measuring equipment.

Embedded in a rock was a dedication to the Virgin Mary. I wondered if there might be more shrines along the path, perhaps one for San Gennaro, known as the protector against eruptions of Mount Vesuvius.

The trail led a good portion around the circumference of the volcano, and along the way, there were small gift shops selling hand-crafted lava rock items, postcards, drinks and small bites to eat. I purchased a postcard, a pair of earrings



made with the porous black stones and a special wine made with grapes grown in Vesuvius' soil.

After meandering back down, I sipped sparkling water and soaked in the warmth of the sun while waiting for the driver. The return bus ride was full of chatter when suddenly we pulled to the side of the road. Our driver stood up and said something like, "We have a special surprise for you all, just today." His buddy hopped on and ushered us all out of the bus and into his little shop perched on the cliffside.

In Naples, buffalo mozzarella is a specialty of the region, and in Italy it's nearly impossible not to try a sip of famous limoncello. At this little shop, the owner enthusiastically told us of his dream to create the perfect delicacy: "Buffalo Mozzarella Limoncello! The only place in the world where you can get one-of-a-kind *bellissimo* Buffalo Mozzarella Limoncello!" He let us sample the special liquor along with another of his inventions, buffalo mozzarella chocolate, and both were honestly delicious. I nabbed a small bottle and a couple of bars to take home to my spouse.

We piled back onto the bus thinking our next stop was the drop off point, then in the middle of the highway we pulled off to the side and my name, only my name, was called. After a few sce-



narios ran through my head, the driver explained that, since I was the only one going to a separate drop-off point, they had hired a car to take me there. I slid into the back of a sleek black cab, and we were off. Perhaps I should have paused a bit longer. You never know what you're going to get in Naples. At nearly every part of my stay, something I hadn't planned for occurred. Yet, it was one of my most memorable trips, and the pivots almost always enriched my experience.



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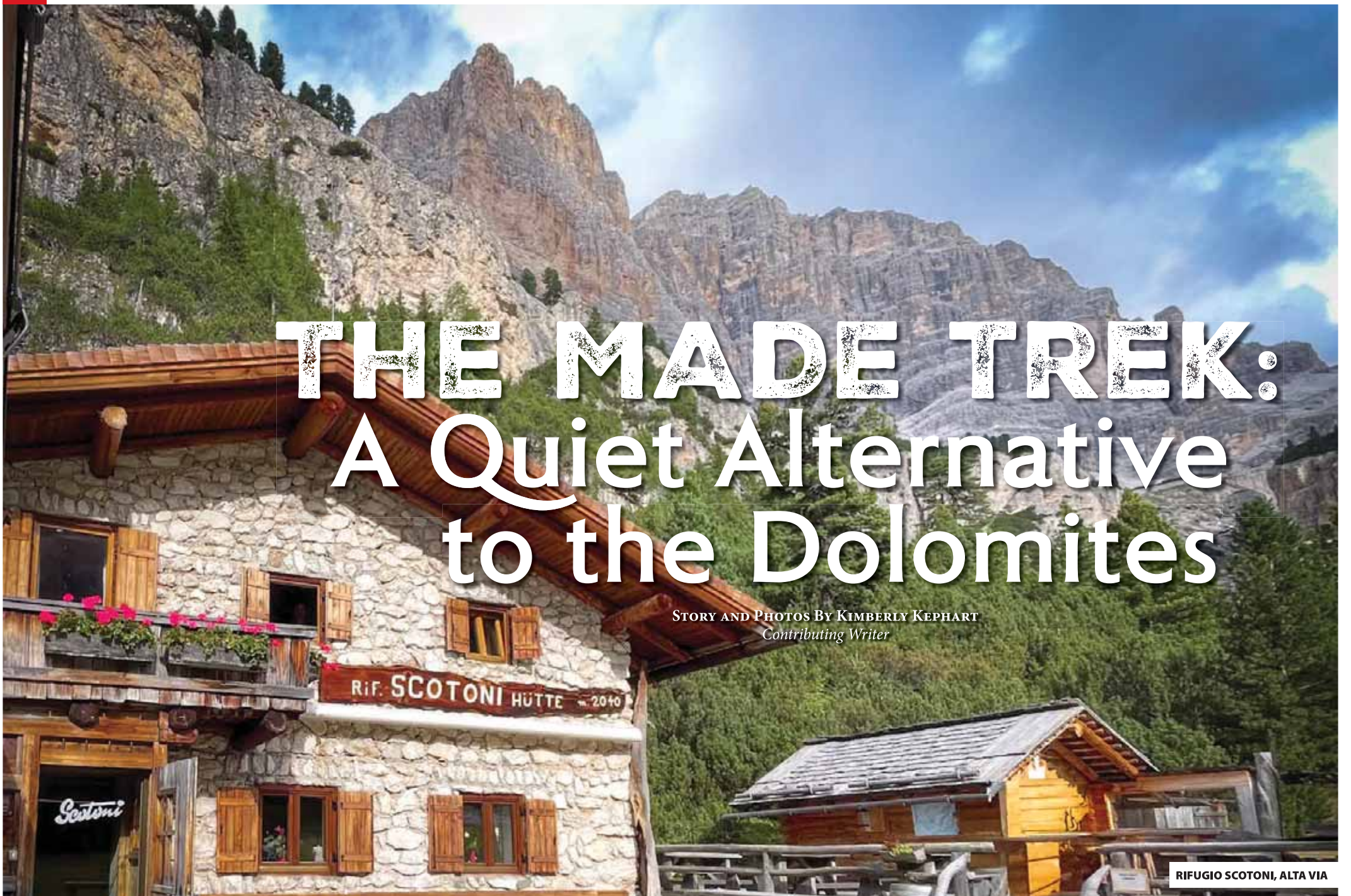
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THE MADE TREK: A Quiet Alternative to the Dolomites

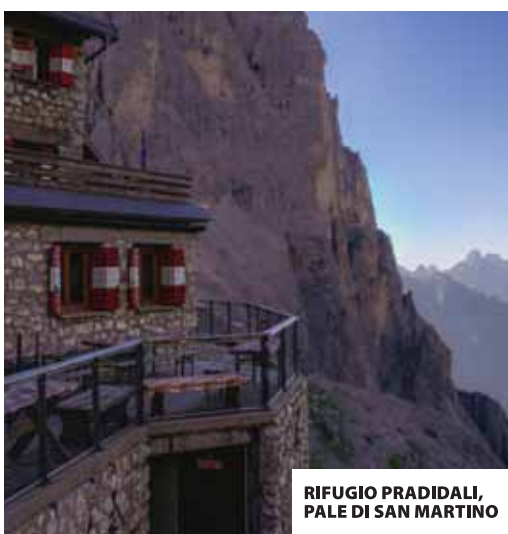
STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIMBERLY KEPHART
Contributing Writer

RIFUGIO SCOTONI, ALTA VIA

In Italy's northeastern Carnic Alps, a little-known hiking route follows paths shaped by World War I. Known as the MADE trek, this long-distance trail stretches 200 kilometers from Cima Sappada to Tarvisio, tracing landscapes once defined by Alpine warfare, subsistence farming and survival at altitude.

Unlike the crowded trails of the Dolomites, the MADE Trek offers a quieter way to experience Italy's mountains. Short for "Malga and Alm Desired Experience" the route emphasizes slow hiking and connection to local communities, linking malgas (seasonal shepherd huts) and alpine farms across the Italian Austrian border. For Americans stationed in Europe, the trail presents an accessible, historically rich alternative to more heavily trafficked alpine destinations.

The Carnic Alps were a key theater during World War I, when Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces fought across high mountain terrain under extreme conditions. Soldiers built trenches, cableways and lookout posts at elevation, many of which remain visible along the trail today. In some areas, memorials and stone ruins sit just off the hiking path, offering quiet reminders of the region's past.



RIFUGIO PRADIDALI, PALE DI SAN MARTINO

One lesser-known aspect of this history involves the Carnic Porters, local women who carried food, ammunition and supplies to frontline troops. Often traveling on foot through snow and avalanche terrain, they played a critical logistical role in sustaining military positions. Their story is now recognized as an important part of the region's wartime legacy.

Today, the MADE trek is promoted as a route that values heritage and sustainability as much as scenery. The name itself reflects this philosophy: *Malga* in Italian and *Alm* in German both refer to alpine dairy farms, underscoring the trail's connection to working mountain life. Hikers move through pastures where shepherds still graze livestock, stopping at *rifugio* (mountain huts) and agritourism businesses that remain central to local economies. This is where you can stop for world famous Montasio cheese and try a local delicacy called the Frico, a savory, cheesy pancake or pie made from melted cheese and often potatoes and onions.

The terrain itself is considered moderate by alpine standards. While the trail includes long days and elevation gain, it does not require technical climbing. Paths are well-marked, and stages can be shortened or combined depending on time and ability. This flexibility makes the route particularly appealing to those balancing limited leave time or weekend travel. I chose to do a three-day variation starting in Cima Sappada and ending at Rifugio Tolazzi.

For solo hikers, including women, the trail infrastructure and community presence contribute to a strong sense of safety. Encounters with shepherds, hut keepers and fellow hikers are common, and residents are accustomed to travelers passing



RIFUGIO MARIANELLA

through. The atmosphere is markedly different than in the Dolomites where crowds and pace can feel overwhelming. I can say that after hiking on the famous Dolomite Alta Via 1 and 2, this was the route I should have started with during my time here in Italy.

As overtourism continues to affect popular destinations across Europe, routes like the MADE Trek offer a different model for engaging with the landscape. Rather than chasing summits or social media landmarks the MADE Trek invited hikers to slow down and consider the layers of history beneath their feet.

In the Carnic Alps, this relaxed goal was attainable. From weathered wartime ruins to active mountain farms, the MADE Trek reflects a continuity between past and present that is increasingly rare in high-profile hiking regions. For Americans living in Europe and seeking meaningful ways to explore their host countries, it offers a chance to experience Italy's mountains beyond the usual postcard scenes, quietly, thoughtfully and on foot.



RIFUGIO LOCATELLI, TRE CIME DI LAVAREDO

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COUNTING DOWN EUROPE'S TOP 10 FOOD FIGHTS

BY TAMALA MALERK
Stars and Stripes

Find your rain poncho and take part in the most epic annual food fights in Europe. The fights in this list are ranked by extremeness, ingredients, messiness and overall sense of "hmm, perhaps I'd like to try this." Also, you can ponder with me why most of them take place in Spain.

10. RUZZOLA (PECORINO CHEESE ROLLING) IN CASTEL DI LAMA, ITALY

Coming in last place is this fight where, unfortunately, no food is actually hurled at other people, rather, it is thrown at specific targets or points. This competition dates back to the Middle Ages and, today, it is recognized by the Italian Sport Federation who hosts several tournaments across the country.



9. CHEESE ROLLING IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE, ENGLAND

Once again, no food is thrown at others in this food fight, but instead, it is rolled down a hill. However, the hill in England is so steep that many competitors struggle to stay on their feet and end up rolling down with the cheese, prompting a higher spot on the list.

8. LA BATALLA DE VINO (THE WINE BATTLE) IN HARO, SPAIN

The first of our Spanish fights to appear on this list occurs annually on June 29, Saint Peter's Day. Nearly 20,000 people gather in traditional white and red attire and douse each other with wine using jugs, bottles, cups and water pistols.



7. FESTA DES VERMAR (FESTIVAL OF GRAPES) IN MALLORCA, SPAIN

Rather than throwing the wine, this fight requires more targeted aiming with a grape fight every September. During the festival, you can also take part in a grape-stomping competition and wine tasting.

6. WORLD CUSTARD PIE CHAMPIONSHIP IN COXHEATH, ENGLAND

While jolly ole' England may not seem like the place for such an event to occur, since 1967, this village in Kent has been hosting a pie-flying competition annually. Teams of four gather in the streets and are awarded points for hitting members of opposing teams with these creamy desserts.

5. LA MERENGADA (THE MERINGUE WAR) IN VILANOVA I LA GELTRÚ, SPAIN

This annual event occurs the last Thursday before Lent and is probably the sweetest of the fights on the list. When the man-size meringue is lowered into the crowd, the *Batalla de Carmelos* (The Candy Fight) begins.



4. ALEVROMOUTZOUROMATA (FLOUR WAR) IN GALAXIDI, GREECE

What started as a "symbol of resistance to the Ottoman Empire," according to Fodor's has evolved into a food fight that attracts people from all over. The Flour War signifies the beginning of the Greek Orthodox Lent Period, ironically on Clean Monday. Food dye is added to the flour before the fight begins so competitors can know who their competition is.

3. ELS ENFARINATS (THE FLOURED ONES) IN IBI, SPAIN

This flour-related fight garnered a higher ranking than the Flour War in Greece on this list because it also includes the use of fireworks and eggs to stage a fake coup d'état to take over the town.

2. LA BATTAGLIA DELLE ARANCE (BATTLE OF THE ORANGES) IN IVREA, ITALY

This battle lasts a whopping three days, which earns it such a high spot on the list. This is a medieval reenactment of a rebellion against a tyrannical baron. Nine teams compete against each other to throw oranges at the "overlord's people" in carts.

1. LA TOMATINA IN BUÑOL, SPAIN

Often lauded as the number one food fight in the world, it is obvious why this ultimate food fight has earned such acclaim. It is the world's biggest food fight and is similar to the Battle of the Oranges: circular fruit is lobbed at participants. However, strict rules dictate that tomatoes must be squished before being thrown. The food fight has grown so famous that spin-off competitions occur in the U.S. and Colombia annually.



MILITARY

Top admiral leans into shore-side upgrades

Through 'Sailors First' effort, Caudle pushes work-life balance

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

HOUSTON — The Navy's top officer has a problem — and he's pretty happy about it.

The service is seeing record retention and recruiting levels for a second year in a row, a "dream problem" for a chief of naval operations, said Adm. Daryl Caudle, who stepped into the role in August after leading Fleet Forces Command.

Nearly all ships are filled at about 90% or higher and nearly as many sailors are matched to their specific job on the ship, leaving him the breathing room to tackle other challenges within the service, Caudle said during an interview April 15 as the Navy hosted its first Fleet Week in a Texas city.

Caudle has leaned into keeping and incentivizing the best, most technically skilled sailors to remain in the service and is making sure their experience with the military is "world-class."

Now eight months into the job, Caudle has prioritized work-life balance through a "Sailors First" initiative. It is focused on life challenges that can be exacerbated by the nature of military service, such as access to affordable child care, a variety of healthy meals, reliable internet access and smartphone-compatible administrative systems and housing that is not on the ship where a sailor is assigned to duty.

That work begins with bringing in clear-eyed new recruits who know what the Navy is about, he said. Recruiting is about 1 to 2 percentage points ahead of where it was this time last year, which saw the service enlist 44,096 future sailors — a number not seen since the early 2000s.

"Our process illuminates [Navy service]. They like going to sea. They like going to different countries. They like the combat arms part of the job. I think we have a very appealing mission set for people who want to do that for a living," Caudle said.

The fact that about 90% of all enlistees make it to their first afloat unit shows that recruiters are finding the right folks for the job and the service's prep course and initial trainings are effective, he said.

One of the first things Caudle focused on for those new, younger sailors is making sure they have a place to live off the ship when not underway. Dubbed "No Sailor Lives Afloat," the initiative has moved roughly 5,900 sailors into barracks instead of berthing, according to Navy Installation Command.

To do this, the service authorized more senior sailors to receive a housing allowance to live off base and free up space in the barracks, Caudle said.

The idea that the sailors deployed for more than 10 months now on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford — a post-Vietnam War record for a carrier — could come home and keep living on the ship "is just not right," he said. It is small and restrictive and does not give them the reprieve from work needed to disconnect, socialize and learn independence.

"I want them to grow up a bit and be on their own, and I think they have the opportunity to do that more if they're not on the ship," he said.

Meeting that goal in some locations has proved more difficult because of low supplies of affordable housing near the base, such as in San Diego and Rota, Spain, and also across Japan, Caudle said.

Once sailors are settled on a base, Caudle has reimagined galley facilities to be more like those feeding athletes on college campuses across the United States. Unlike the Army, which is outsourcing a similar effort through private contracts, the Navy is sending its cooks to the Culinary Institute of



PHOTOS BY JOHN BELLINO/U.S. NAVY

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle provides remarks at Houston's City Hall during Fleet Week Houston on April 15.



Caudle engages with sailors and Marines at Houston's City Hall.

America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

There, Navy cooks are training with professional chefs on a 35-day menu with different stations, said Rear Adm. John Hewitt, commander of Navy Region Southeast. The first transformed galley will open in his region next month at Naval Construction Battalion Center Gulfport, in Mississippi.

"I saw some pictures of them being trained by the chef and the dishes they are putting out, it was like we've never seen in our galleys before," said Hewitt, who oversees 18 bases. He answered questions during a tour of the littoral combat ship the USS St. Louis in Houston.

The move to fresh, made-to-order meals is answering a call from sailors for more healthy options and more variety, Hewitt said.

Another quick fix that began in 2024 was for all gyms to stay open 24/7. It's done,

Hewitt said.

"You have to register, but once you're registered, anytime, you can walk into any fitness center and gym. That's huge," he said. "That was a huge demand signal from the fleet, from our sailors, and they love it."

An ongoing initiative to get free wireless internet to all bases is at about 85%, and Caudle said he's now working toward smartphone-based applications for paperwork related to moving, pay and searching for a new assignment — not just a PDF that people fill out just as they would on paper.

"We're really trying to flush all that out and give people a good experience where they can do most transactions they need to be successful via their phone. It's just the way we do business today," Caudle said.

He did acknowledge that there are facilities on Navy bases that have fallen into disrepair because of an underinvestment on

"I want them to grow up a bit and be on their own, and I think they have the opportunity to do that more if they're not on the ship."

Adm. Daryl Caudle
chief of naval operations

infrastructure — something that plagued all the services.

For years, the Navy funded its facility needs at about 60% to 70%, leaving some of them "brittle." That includes hangars, roads, piers and service infrastructure for air, oil, water and power.

"You can do that for a short period of time and then prioritize and hide the fact that you're not getting all the resources you need to sustain your facilities, but eventually it catches up, and we're there," Caudle said.

"I don't want our sailors to be in a classroom with a bucket beside them because the roof leaks," he said. "I want them to feel like they're in a world-class environment."

Hewitt said turning the tide in the southeast region is going to take time and the order of repair prioritizes the requirements of the fleet.

"We have to be in sync with the fleet. You can think of wharfs, piers, dry docks, airfields, unaccompanied housing, all of those things are really, really high on the list," he said.

Though people get distracted and zero in on the technology and weapons it takes to win wars, Caudle said it is his job to watch out for the sailors behind each piece of equipment.

"It's important for us to remember that," he said. "You build a bunch of ships, but you don't have all the resources to man, train and equip all of that, you hollow yourself out."

SPORTS

Young athletes shine at track meet near Aviano

By KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

PORDENONE, Italy — It often takes athletes years of sweat and pain to achieve success in a given sport.

That's not always the case, though, as evidenced by a handful of precocious achievers on April 25 at a DODEA-Europe track meet in the largest city close to Aviano Air Base.

Sophomore Bryan Lewis hadn't competed in track in three years at Vicenza after moving from Texas.

"We weren't sure if he was going to be a sprinter or a high jumper," coach Anna Sansone said. "He cleared the bar and he became a high jumper."

Lewis became the first boy to clear 6 feet in DODEA-Europe this season, establishing a personal best.

He said he really only came out for the sport "to improve my basketball skills."

The 6-foot Lewis hasn't played for the Cougars but has participated in Italian leagues outside the base. He plans to try out for the defending Division II champs next year.

And he'll still compete in track, which he now enjoys.

"Probably not as much as basketball, though," said Lewis, who also finished second in the long jump.

Sigonella freshman Mozi Okechukwu appears to be following in the footsteps of Rickalia Goss, who graduated last year after four years of always contending for titles at the season-ending championships in Germany.

Okechukwu won all four events she entered, taking the 100 (12.83 seconds), 200 (26.98), 400 (1:03.58) and long jump (15 feet, 3 inches).

And she probably would have a bit better times if she had run through the finish line in each race instead of slowing down before it. A few older teammates let her know that.

Then there was Sigonella sophomore Kane DeFrees, who won both hurdles events and finished third in the high jump.

Aviano sophomore Oliver Ryan transferred to the school this year from Tbilisi, the capital of the European nation of Georgia. He won the 1,600 in 4:52.43 and then anchored his school's winning sprint medley relay team.

Underclassmen didn't hog all the spotlight, though.

Vicenza senior Dylan Horrigan won the long jump and triple jump. American Overseas School of Rome's Natalia DiMatteo won the shot put and high jump in her final meet hosted by Aviano. And numerous others won single events.

All coaches and athletes agreed on one thing, though. They didn't want the meet to be the highlight of the season.

That should come at the season-ending championships May 21-22 in Kaiserslautern, Germany, for those who qualify.



Vicenza sophomore Bryan Lewis became the first boy to clear 6 feet in the high jump this year in DODEA-Europe, establishing a personal best at a meet in Pordenone, Italy, on April 25.

PHOTOS BY KENT HARRIS/Stars and Stripes



Sigonella sophomore Kane DeFrees clears a hurdle on his way to winning the 110 hurdles.



Sigonella freshman Mozi Okechukwu, left, won all four events she entered, including the 100 meter run.

"We'll be using the next two weekends to try to get PRs (personal records) and then hopefully peak after that," longtime Naples coach Chip Noonan said.

Naples teams win big, but Sigonella sees some progress

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Naples swept to easy victories in recent DODEA-Europe girls and boys soccer action that left their Sigonella counterparts still seeking their first wins.

The Naples girls topped the Jaguars 6-1 with sophomore Amalia Selph putting three balls into the net. Madison Hoy scored Sigonella's goal on a penalty kick.

Sigonella's boys couldn't match a Naples team rebounding from a painful loss against American Overseas School of Rome. Naples handily won 5-0.

Despite the losses, players and coaches from both Sigonella teams said the games were some of their best yet.

Girls

The Sigonella girls aren't thinking of the season in terms of wins or losses, according to coach Shawn McCarthy. Rather, the team's focus is on successfully displaying skills and tactics they learn in practice.

"We did, so that's good," McCarthy said, calling the game a "loss on the weekend but a success for us going forward as a team."



Amalia Selph, left, gets set to kick the ball for Naples as Sigonella's Claire Martinsen approaches during a DODEA Division II girls soccer matchup.

After a tough first half that saw the Sigonella girls struggling to complete passes, the team was stronger in the second half with improved passing in the center, said Hoy, a 17-year-old senior who plays mid-center.

"I'm happy that we at least got one (goal) against Naples," she said.

The Naples girls also saw improvement with the game being the first time the team was able to maintain the pace it wanted, assistant coach Matteo Pugliese said.

"Our passing was really on point today and we were able to build more chances ... from the back all the way through to our strikers," Pugliese said.

Selph characterized the game as one of the team's "best" due to work on possession and passing during practices that "paid off." She credited strong freshman players who have been "helping our team play ... better as a team than we did last year."

Boys

The Naples boys got off to a slow start in the first half with the team underestimating the Jaguars and not playing to full potential, 17-year-old Joshua Banks said.

"We played very well in the back throughout the whole game," said Banks, a left winger. But in the second half the team played better offense "generating much more chances to score and that's exactly what we did."

Naples coach Chris Anderson said the team bounced back from a previous loss, hitting their stride in the second half. The Wildcats are looking for their third championship this year, but players need to stay healthy, he said.

"Our benches are a little bit light because we have a lot of people who are injured," Anderson said. "That's probably our greatest weakness at this point."

The loss to Naples did little to dampen Sigonella's pride in playing what coach Andy Reardon called the "best game we've had all season."

The team did a much better job of getting to the ball on defense, getting possession and moving the ball up and down the field, Reardon said.

Looking forward, the season is about the basics and "making sure we can manage the game at our pace," he said.

That sentiment was echoed by 17-year-old senior Bodhi McElree, who pointed to improvement in players keeping their heads up during the game and moving past struggles on and off the field.

"We showed more heart and passion (today) than we have in any other game," McElree said.

TRAVEL

Parks near Aviano offer triple play of leisure

Family-friendly green spaces abound in Pordone

By KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

As springtime weather begins to grace northern Italy, residents in the vicinity of Aviano Air Base might be looking for ways to explore the great outdoors.

For those who want to avoid a long drive or keep costs down, Pordenone offers multiple green spaces that are easy to overlook.

The largest and most popular is Parco San Valentino, a busy hub for locals.

On weekends, joggers and cyclists share the paths with families pushing strollers and dog walkers.

Next to a small lake, a cafe is open daily for lunch, with drinks and snacks available when the kitchen is closed.

Nearby, a playground can keep young children occupied, with a wooded area separating it from a large open field used for events and concerts.

During my recent excursion there, I saw several people taking a class on potting bonsai plants.

The park is just a few minutes' walk or bike from downtown, and judging from passersby is often part of longer walking or cycling circuits through the city.

Two other parks a bit farther away are nonetheless convenient places to seek leisure activities.

Martyrs of the Foibe Park, also known as Parco dei Laghetti di Rorai, is located in the suburb of Rorai Grande.

The park features four ponds, a handful of short paths, a small playground for the kids and a fenced area where dogs can roam off-leash.

Just minutes away, Lago della Burida is the largest body of water in greater Pordenone. While there's limited space for biking or walking, the site includes a small park with a picnic area and playground for younger children.

Swimming isn't allowed and there's no beach, but most days visitors can rent kayaks or other small watercraft.

Renting the various vessels requires joining a local club, with a 15-euro fee that includes an introductory lesson on how to properly use the equipment.

Those already proficient can rent equipment at a lower cost.

The club also hosts regattas and other events.

Those who go through the course might want to try to use their new skills at a place a bit farther away the next time they decide to take a longer car ride and open up their wallets.

On the QT

Hours: During daylight year-round.

Cost: Free admission. It costs 15 euros per person to rent a watercraft for the first time at Lago Burida.

Info: www.comune.pordenone.it



PHOTOS BY KENT HARRIS/Stars and Stripes

A cafe at Parco San Valentino in Pordenone, Italy, was a busy place on a recent weekend day. The park, located about 20 minutes from Aviano Air Base, can be a good place for people watching.



Americans stationed at Aviano Air Base can learn how to kayak by joining an Italian club at Lago della Burida in Porcia, Italy, a 20-minute drive from the base.



Those interested in getting out on the water instead of just looking at it can do so by joining an Italian club at Lago della Burida — just a short distance from downtown Pordenone.

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