

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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ITALY EDITION

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## Vicenza victorious

Soccer fever grips  
Northern Italy Page 3



Cheering fans stream through the historic center of Vicenza, Italy, to celebrate the L.R. Vicenza soccer team's promotion to Serie B, the second-highest tier of Italy's professional soccer pyramid, on March 29.

CHAD GARLAND/Stars and Stripes

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COVER STORY



PHOTOS BY CHAD GARLAND/Stars and Stripes

L.R. Vicenza players celebrate in a double-decker bus during a parade down Corso Andrea Palladio toward Piazza dei Sognori in the historic center of Vicenza, Italy, to celebrate the soccer team's promotion to Serie B of the Italian professional soccer pyramid on March 29.

# 'Crazy, crazy' soccer celebration

## Raucous parade through Vicenza a sign of things to come for fans

By CHAD GARLAND  
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — A raucous parade through the city's historic center late last month is a sign of things to come for local soccer fans, after L.R. Vicenza's promotion to Serie B, the second-highest tier of Italy's professional soccer pyramid.

Next season likely will bring more thrilling matches and bigger crowds, say some soccer fans at U.S. Army bases in the area.

"It's going to bring more fans to the stadium and it's going to make the traffic and everything harder," said Sgt. Arthur de Assis, 35, who grew up playing soccer in Brazil and coached teams in New York City before joining the Army.

At the March 29 parade, songs and chants echoed down Corso Andrea Palladio as thousands of fans streamed into the pedestrian zone and toward Piazza dei Signori to celebrate the club's Serie C title. Red-and-white-striped police tape that cordoned off the piazza matched the colors of scarves, flags and banners the fans waved triumphantly.

The procession from Romeo Menti Stadium followed Vicenza's afternoon match against rival Brescia, where red smoke had clouded the stadium and occasional fireworks explosions punctuated fans' cheers.

The match itself was relaxed, but the after-party "was pretty, pretty crazy," said Devin Koren, 42, a Vicenza native who works at the U.S. Army postal service center on Caserma Ederle on the city's east side.

The game, which ended in a 1-1 tie, drew more than 11,500 attendees, including nearly 8,000 season ticket holders, according to *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

After the match, the Vicenza team accepted the league trophy and showed it around the



A trio of fans for the professional soccer team in Vicenza, decked out in the team's colors, wave flags as they participate in a parade through the historic center of the city on March 29.

stadium before heading outside to board a roofless double-decker bus for the trip downtown, thronged by cheering fans, Koren said.

While Capt. Jess Sant, 39, couldn't attend the March 29 events, he's been to several games since arriving at Caserma Del Din earlier this year, including a match against Milan's Inter U-23 earlier in March, at which Vicenza secured their promotion to Serie B.

"It was a wild atmosphere. Probably one of the best atmospheres that I've seen," said Sant, a native of Sayville, N.Y., on Long Island, who's attended games in South America and England.

Sant usually watches from the Curva Sud, the area of the stadium behind the goal, that's packed with Vicenza's diehard fan clubs, he said.

"It'll be fun next year," he said. "There'll definitely be some more exciting games. For

me it's going to be better quality football."

He said he'd tell other soldiers to "just get the experience, especially next year," but recommends watching from the family section.

Sant's officially a fan of West Ham United in England, the result of an ultimatum issued by his father-in-law, who lives near London's East End.

"He gave me two options: I could either support West Ham, or I could [expletive] off," Sant said.

But "it's not really a conflict of interest" to cheer for Vicenza, he said, because they're in different leagues in different countries.

Though it's a game of heated rivalries, being a fan has given Sant a chance to build long-term friendships with fellow fans and even passing camaraderie with foes.

Once, on a military base in Qatar, he heard



Fans at Romeo Menti Stadium in Vicenza cheer on the L.R. Vicenza soccer team on March 29 during a match with Brescia.

a sailor's East End accent and asked if he rooted for West Ham. He did not — he supported a local rival — but that didn't stop them from hanging out.

While Sant did not grow up playing soccer, de Assis grew up playing "basically my whole life" and says it's also been a way for him to connect with others while serving in the Army. For example, he played with community members outside Fort Carson, Colo., and Polish civilians while deployed there.

"You can see people that would never talk with each other in the real world, soccer will bring these people together," he said. "I think that's what's awesome about soccer."

Sunday's event drew fans of teams outside Italy that are "twinned" with Vicenza, such as the one in Metz, France, said Koren, who runs a club for about 120 local fans of Vicenza in an area south of the city.

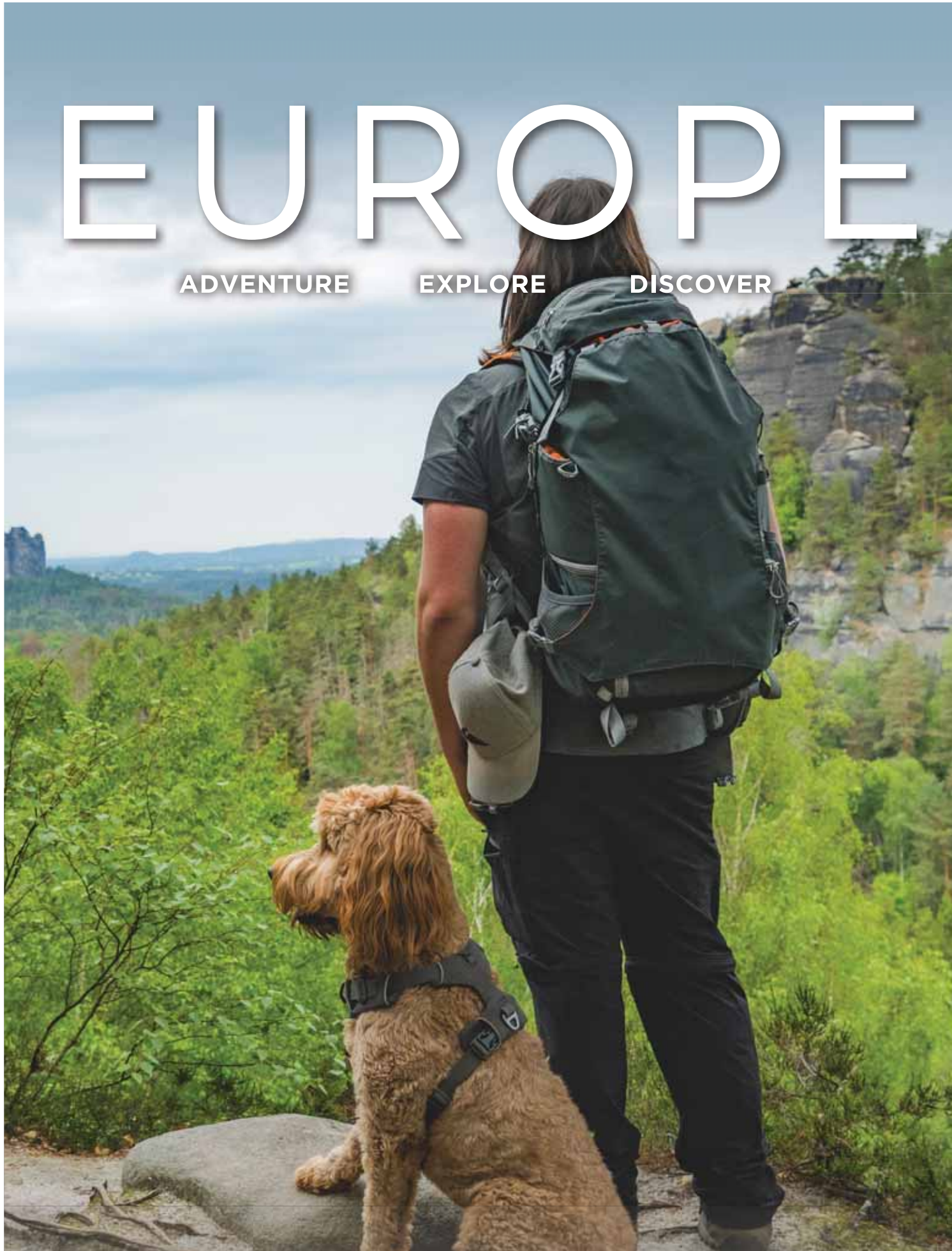
Sant has a theory about why the sport draws people together:

"At the end of the day, for a lot of football fans ... we say football is religion."

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MILITARY

# Guidelines for travel in Europe updated

## Navy bases in Italy say DOD members need to use resident passport control line

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — Navy bases in Italy are advising U.S. military personnel and their families to follow updated rules when entering or leaving European Union countries to avoid drawing unwanted scrutiny from immigration officials when traveling.

All Defense Department members must use the resident passport control line when entering or leaving Italy or other EU countries, according to updated travel guidance recently issued by Naval Support Activity Naples and Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily.

Failure to do so could result in registration in the European Union Entry/Exit System, which may incorrectly flag DOD personnel for overstaying their allowed time in Italy the next time they travel outside the country and attempt to re-enter, the bases said.

Effective since October, EES is an automated identification check system that digitally records the entry and exit of most non-EU nationals to Schengen countries. It eventually will replace passport stamping.

The system collects personal information, such as a person's name and birthdate, 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.

Participating countries include Germany, Spain and Italy, where large numbers of DOD personnel live and work. The system also includes Switzerland and Norway, among other Schengen countries.

Schengen countries allow U.S. citizens to visit for up to 90 days within a 180-day period for tourism or other purposes without a visa, according to the State Department.

But military dependents, DOD civilians and contractors and their families typically stay in those countries much longer, sometimes requiring an official or no-fee U.S. passport and



GERMAN FEDERAL POLICE/European Commission

Navy bases in Italy are advising U.S. military personnel and their families to follow updated rules when entering or leaving European Union countries to avoid drawing unwanted scrutiny from immigration officials when traveling.

special visas or permits issued by the country where they live.

For example, under NATO's Status of Forces Agreement, Defense Department dependents, civilians and contractors must have a sojourner's permit to reside and work in Italy. The requirement does not apply to active-duty or reserve service members.

The updated travel guidelines also require military dependents, civilians and contractors to use their digital Italian sojourner's permit or no-fee or official passport with visa when en-

tering or exiting Italy or other EU countries.

Active-duty service members must use NATO orders and military identification cards in the same instances, the advisories state.

A tourist passport must be used when entering or leaving non-EU countries. People traveling to and from the U.S. are required to use their no-fee, official or tourist passport and military ID, the bases said.

The U.S. Embassy in Rome is establishing a way to remove erroneous entries into EES

and is working to identify how military installations will process and transmit removal requests to the embassy.

Information about the process will be disseminated when available, the bases said.

People will know they are being registered into EES if passport control officers take their photo or scan their fingerprints.

The process includes asking travelers how long they plan to stay in a country, how much cash they are carrying and other questions, according to the guidance.

# SEAL speedboat crews at risk of injuries, inspector general says

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

Sailors who man speedboats used in Navy SEAL operations are in danger of traumatic brain injuries from repeatedly slamming into waves because the vessels don't have systems that alleviate shock, according to a Pentagon watchdog agency.

The boats also lack a monitoring system to measure craft and crew shock and whole-body vibration, among other deficiencies, the Defense Department inspector general said in a March 30 report.

As a result, crew members are at serious risk for lower back and neck injuries as well as chronic pain and head injuries, the report stated. It also noted that service members are exposed to blast forces when firing heavy weapons.

"Repetitive impacts significantly degrade immediate performance and can result in long-lasting medical problems," the IG said. Traumatic brain injuries also "may result in a degradation of the health of the force and its long-term sustainability," the report added.

The IG report cited a U.S. Special Operations Command directive that said traumatic brain injuries can result from acute or repetitive blast exposure and acceleration and deceleration forces.

The potential for injuries can be heightened by body armor, helmets and night vision goggles, and a boat console design that forces



DUSTIN KELLING/U.S. NAVY / Naval Special Warfare Group FOUR

Combatant Craft Assault boats break formation during training in April 2024.

vessel operators to stand in a slouched forward position to reach controls, the IG found.

At issue are combatant craft assault boats that travel at speeds of up to nearly 70 miles per hour. The vessels are crewed by a contingent of about 800 active-duty personnel and as many as 125 reservist special warfare

combatant craft crewmen.

Those sailors are trained in maritime direct-action operations and special reconnaissance as well as insertion and extraction of special operations units, according to a report last year from the Military Health System's Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence.

The boats' hulls and equipment are designed to withstand a gravitational force, or G-force, of up to 6 with the vessel's suspension seats able to mitigate G-force impacts as high as 5, according to the Military Health System report issued in February 2025.

But "slamming induced impacts to high-speed boats can exceed 20 G-force," it stated.

A G-force of 1 is defined as the acceleration of an object due to the force of gravity on Earth. Decreased brain oxygenation can occur with exposure to G-forces as low as 3 to 4, according to the MHS.

The MHS report cited a September 2022 internet-based study of retired special warfare combatant craft crewmen that showed 33% had experienced a temporary loss of consciousness due to wave-slamming.

Also, 70% of respondents said on-the-job injuries, including those to their back and neck, had impaired their job performance, according to the MHS report.

The Defense Department IG wants Naval Special Warfare Command to review and validate five potential solutions, including installing head and neck support devices and adjustable seating as identified in a January 2024 Naval Special Warfare Group 4 report.

The Navy also should develop an action plan to implement those solutions or identify alternatives, the agency said. The command agreed with the recommendations but did not offer comment.

## MILITARY

# DOD: Military suicides decreased in 2024

Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, reserves saw decreases, National Guard rate increased

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

The suicide rate among active-duty troops decreased in 2024 from the previous year, according to an annual report released recently by the Pentagon.

However, the active component rate has increased since 2011.

"It remains to be seen whether the short-term decreases observed in 2024 in the active component will signal a change in long-term trends," the 78-page report says.

For years, the Pentagon has struggled to bring down the number of suicides in the ranks. The Defense Department began collecting and reporting quarterly surveillance data on service member suicides in 2018 to help guide prevention efforts.

Overall, there were 471 reported suicides across the total force in 2024, the most recent year the statistics have been recorded, compared with 531 in 2023.

The Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and reserves all saw decreases, but the National Guard rate increased by about 13%, according to the report.

The rate is calculated based on an active-duty force of about 1.33 million troops and about 770,000 reserve and National Guard personnel combined.

The Defense Department in recent years has aimed to improve mental health care access for troops, amid increases in suicide rates and an outcry from members of Congress and others.

In 2022, then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved the establishment of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, which made 127 recommendations of near- and long-term solutions to address suicides in the ranks. The Pentagon selected 83 of the recommendations from the committee.

The independent panel recommended the

department implement a series of gun safety measures to reduce suicides in the force, including waiting periods for the purchase of firearms and ammunition by service members on military property.

The panel said the department should also raise the minimum age to 25 for service members to buy guns and ammunition and should require anyone living in military housing to register privately owned firearms.

In addition, the panel said the department should restrict the possession and storage of privately owned firearms in military barracks and dormitories.

Austin released a memo in September 2023 outlining more than 100 recommendations to be implemented by 2030 to address the suicide crisis in the military.

Some of the recommendations included expanding telehealth services, increasing appointment availability by revising the mental health staff model, launching a compre-

hensive public education campaign on firearm safety and updating the amount of suicide prevention training.

The department chose not to implement the firearm changes at the time.

Consistent with previous years, firearms were the leading method of death by suicide across the force; most firearm deaths occurred with a personally owned firearm, according to the report.

The Pentagon is developing a secure storage voucher program to be piloted at select locations and creating a multimedia education campaign on secure firearm storage, the report states. It did not provide further details.

As of November, the Pentagon has implemented 27 of 83 recommendations, according to the report.

The 2024 suicide report also included data about military family suicides. The number of suicides reported was the same as 2023.

## Pentagon, Boeing to boost Patriot missile production

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Defense Department and Boeing have agreed to sharply increase production of a key component used in the Patriot air defense system.

The agreement will triple output of seekers that allow Patriot missiles known as Patriot Advanced Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement to track and destroy incoming threats, according to statements released recently by Boeing and the Pentagon.

The production push comes as demand for air and missile defense systems surges globally amid ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The Patriot system is widely used by Ukraine to defend against Russian missile and air attacks, and there has been heavy demand for the system amid conflict with Iran.

Some analysts have warned that missile stockpiles may be depleted faster than they can be replaced, though the Pentagon says the military has the resources to meet operational requirements.

Earlier this year, Pentagon officials said that they are aiming to more than triple an-

nual production of PAC-3 Patriot interceptors, from roughly 600 per year to as many as 2,000.

Each missile costs at least \$4 million to build, according to a 2025 briefing from the Congressional Research Service.

Lockheed Martin, the prime PAC-3 contractor, has said it plans to significantly increase its own production capacity to help meet that goal.

The Boeing agreement, which boosts output of a key guidance component, is intended to support that broader expansion.

The seven-year framework is designed to provide long-term stability across the supply chain and allow industry to invest in facilities and workforce, according to the Pentagon's statement.

Boeing said its seekers enable interceptors "to identify, track and defeat advanced threats ranging from hostile aircraft and hypersonics to ballistic and cruise missiles."

The company has already invested more than \$200 million since 2024 to expand production capacity in Huntsville, Ala., including a facility expansion, and said that the agreement will support additional investments.



RUSSELL SHIRLEY-JONES/U.S. Army

Soldiers from the 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade conduct a full Patriot missile system setup during field operations in Texas in September.

## Navy taps robotics, AI firm for \$71M in ship maintenance

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A U.S. company has secured a contract worth up to \$71 million to use robotics and artificial intelligence to support Navy ship maintenance, as the service continues to invest in advanced technologies.

The Navy and the General Services Administration awarded the contract to Pittsburgh-based Gecko Robotics, which will use wall-climbing robots, drones and sensors to scan and monitor warships for structural issues, the company said in a news release.

The contract calls for work over five years on 18 vessels in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, including guided-missile destroyers and littoral combat ships.

Gecko said its technology uses AI to create detailed digital models and identify structural issues, including those not visible to the naked eye.

"The previous way of doing this is putting a ship into dry dock, building scaffolding all around the ships and then gathering information, you know, point by point; gathering very little information," company cofounder Jake Loosarian told CNBC. "We gather millions more information and data sets, and we do so



Gecko Robotics

Pittsburgh-based Gecko Robotics will use artificial intelligence to create detailed digital models and identify structural issues in Navy warships, including those not visible to the naked eye.

in about three to four months, faster than has ever been done before."

The company did not respond to a Stars and Stripes request for additional comment.

The contract reflects the service's broader push to incorporate a variety of robotics and AI into shipbuilding and maintenance operations.

In December, Navy Secretary John Phelan announced a \$448 million investment in the Shipbuilding Operations System, an initiative that uses AI to aggregate data, streamline engineering and identify delays early in the construction process.

Initial tests showed that planning submarine construction schedules was reduced from 160 hours of manual work to less than 10 minutes, the Navy said in a Dec. 9 news release.

Other countries are investing heavily in similar technologies.

In South Korea, companies including Samsung Heavy Industries, Hanwha Ocean and HD Hyundai are expanding the use of robotics and AI in shipbuilding. HD Hyundai plans to deploy about 200 robots in its shipyards, according to a January report by The Chosun Daily.

Japan is also expected to announce a \$100 million investment in AI technology, some of which could support U.S. shipbuilding efforts, Maritime Executive reported.

## MILITARY

# Navy expands free Wi-Fi access for sailors in Italy

BY ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

Sailors living in the barracks at Navy bases in Italy and Greece now get free, high-speed internet as part of a broader, servicewide quality of life initiative.

Free Wi-Fi is a fundamental step in improving sailors' well-being by giving them the connectivity they need for personal and professional growth, Vice Adm. Scott Gray, commander of Navy Instal-

lations Command, said in a recent statement.

Under the program, sailors living in unaccompanied housing at Naval Support Activity Naples, Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily and Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete are eligible for free, filtered Wi-Fi, the Navy said in the statement.

They also can get subsidized speed upgrades without long-term contracts or termination fees, the Navy said.

For example, residents of barracks at Naval

Support Activity Naples can get free internet service with a download speed of 30 megabits per second. Content such as pornography and gambling sites are filtered out.

The upload speed for the free service is 5 megabits per second, according to information online from the Navy Morale, Welfare and Recreation website.

Residents can upgrade the service for speeds as high as 20 to 40 megabits per second without filters for the monthly cost of \$33 and \$60,

respectively.

Higher-speed subsidized rates will be available as buildings receive fiber upgrades, according to MWR.

So far, the free Wi-Fi service is offered in nearly 87% of the Navy's 952 unaccompanied housing buildings, the Navy said.

About 71% of residents in eligible buildings were registered for the service as of February, according to the statement.

# Troops allowed to keep personal firearms on bases in US

BY GARY WARNER  
Stars and Stripes

U.S. military personnel would be allowed to keep off-duty personal firearms on base under a memorandum released April 2 by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth.

The directive would modify a long-standing Pentagon policy that limits the possession and carrying of firearms on military installations.

Currently, service members must register with base authorities to store a personal firearm at on-base housing. If they live in a barracks, they must register the firearm and keep it in their unit's armory.

Hegseth's memo directs commanders of state-side bases to allow service members to request permission to carry their personal firearms and calls for a "presumption of approval" of requests.

In a video message announcing the policy, Hegseth said the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment should apply to all Americans, including military personnel.

"Uniformed service members are trained at the highest and unwavering standards," Hegseth

said in the video. "These warfighters — entrusted with the safety of our nation — are no less entitled to exercise their God-given right to keep and bear arms than any other American."

The new policy would apply only to firearms possessed in a nonofficial duty capacity.

Hegseth said the change is in line with a 2016 congressionally approved revision of firearms standards that allowed installation commanders to approve personnel to carry firearms if they were shown to be necessary for personal protection.

Current rules make it difficult for service members to have personal firearms on base, even when allowed under state laws where installations are located. Commanders could approve requests, but approvals were uncommon and restrictive.

Hegseth pointed to incidents of on-base shootings, including at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M.; Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla.; and Fort Stewart, Ga., where service members with personal firearms might have been able to end violent situations.

The new policy would not allow for concealed carry inside installation buildings.



THOMAS DOW/U.S. Air Force

U.S. military personnel would be allowed to keep off-duty personal firearms on base under a Pentagon memorandum. Currently, service members must register with base authorities to store a personal firearm at on-base housing. If they live in a barracks, they must register the firearm and keep it in their unit's armory.

# Army shelves 'Valkyrie' laser system, joins effort by Navy

BY GARY WARNER  
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army has shelved its "Valkyrie" laser anti-missile system, shifting instead to the newer Joint Laser Weapon System, to be built with the Navy as part of the Pentagon's Golden Dome missile defense strategy, according to a congressional report.

The Indirect Fire Protection Capability-High Energy Laser system, or IFPC-HEL, nicknamed "Valkyrie," is designed to deliver 300 kilowatts of energy that developers had hoped could knock cruise missiles and drones out of the sky.

A March 9 report by the Congressional Research Service said the Army's decision to move on from the Valkyrie system reflects technical challenges researchers have encountered with a continuous-wave beam capable of tracking and holding a fast, hardened cruise missile target long enough to destroy its warhead or scramble its inertial guidance system. The newer Joint Laser Weapon System "represents the next step in the evolution of counter-cruise missile laser weapons," the CRS report states.

President Donald Trump announced the Golden Dome anti-missile "shield" last year. Congressional estimates put the initial cost of the system at \$185 billion, with an operational target of about 2035. If the entire system, including space-based interceptors, were built, the cost would be over \$1 trillion over several decades, according to Aviation Week magazine.

The "Valkyrie" program has been reduced to a single prototype for testing only, according to the CRS report. The prototype isn't expected to be fully delivered to the Army until September. At that point, the prototype will be used to "inform the Joint Laser Warfighting System" rather than move into operational production, the CRS report said.

The Army awarded Lockheed Martin \$220.8 million to develop four "Valkyrie" prototypes, according to the report.

The decision on "Valkyrie" comes after the Army's earlier decision not to field the Directed Energy Maneuver-Short Range Air Defense system. The experimental program would have mounted a 50-kilowatt power laser weapon on a Stryker armored combat vehicle.

Though laser weapons remain a major priority in U.S. weapons development, the current technology is likely insufficient to reliably defend against attacks by numerous cruise missiles, the CRS report said.

Russia and China have developed hypersonic cruise missiles capable of traveling more than five times the speed of sound, according to the Army. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency reported in 2025 that cruise missiles launched from Russian aircraft or Chinese ships and submarines represent a significant risk to American personnel, ships and installations around the globe.

The report notes that cruise missiles travel at high speed with hardened warheads and guidance systems that can make them more difficult to target long enough with beamed weapons to destroy or disorient the missile.

"Valkyrie" isn't the Pentagon's sole anti-cruise missile defense program, the report said.

The Navy is working on countermeasure programs, such as the High Energy Laser Counter-Anti-Ship Cruise Missile program. The program would use more powerful lasers to defend against potential hypersonic threats.

The Army is working toward fielding the Enduring High Energy Laser system, which could be the first Army program of directed energy weapons.

The EHEL system has been designed with feedback from troops who used energy weapons. They found shortcomings in handling weather variations, maintaining charging power, cooling and parts maintenance. The EHEL is being designed for durable operational use by soldiers and is not planned to go through an extensive prototyping period.

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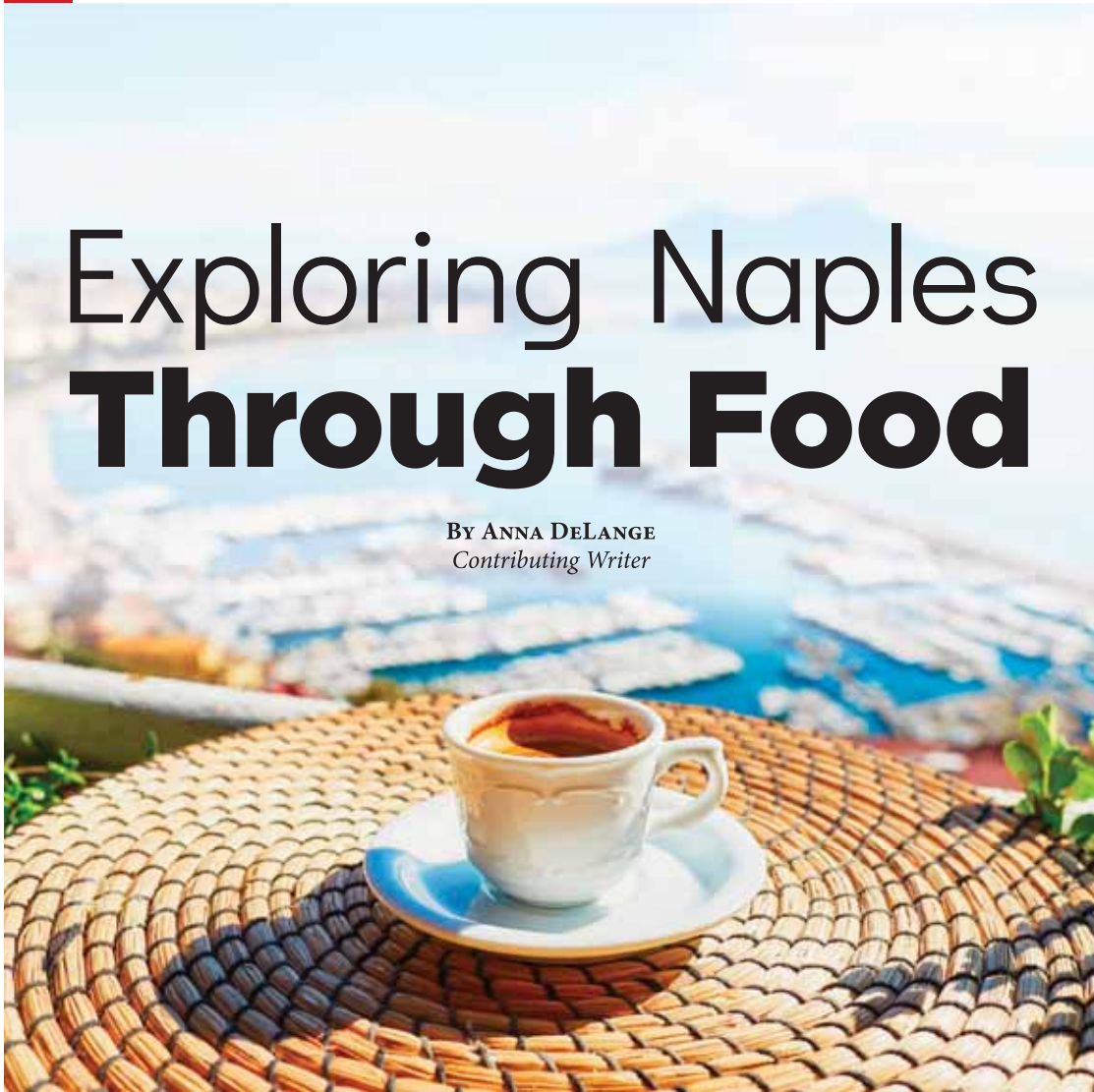
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# Exploring Naples Through Food

BY ANNA DELANGE  
Contributing Writer



Walking around the streets of Naples, you'll hear bustling chatter across the cobbled streets and your nose will lead you to some amazing street food that you will immediately want to try. Whether you are vacationing, stopping by or living in Naples, here are a few suggestions on the local specialties you should try for yourself.

Live like a Neapolitan and make sure to try out a pizza a portafoglio, which loosely translates to "wallet pizza" due to its appearance. This is the ultimate takeaway dish, ready for you to eat and roam the streets. The pizza is small and wrapped in oven paper then folded on its side. Since it is a petite pizza, it is made with the intention of being a snack, so you can continue your day without ruining your appetite.

If you have had enough pizza, but still want a savory snack, try the typical sandwich of Napoli. The pagnottiello is traditionally made with cheese, pancetta and salami.

Perhaps you are in the mood for some fried foods instead; if so, do not skip out on the cuoppo. This is a paper cone filled with a fried assortment of finger foods. The classic cuoppo typically consists of a potato croquette, salted zeppoline (fried dough), fried zucchini flowers, mini arancinis and fried polenta. Since Naples is a seaside town there is also a seafood cuoppo available from vendors. A seafood cuoppo will have small fried fish and squid rings as well as fried vegetables. You definitely cannot go wrong with either cuoppo.

Maybe you are taking a midafternoon break while enjoying a classic aperitif at a cafe. You may just be served a plate full of little treats. One of these

small items is likely the Neapolitan taralli. The taralli resembles a tiny bagel and is easily flavored with spices. They are perfect accouterments to an aperitivo because they are small, crunchy and so addictive.

Naples is not just home to savory goodness; there are also some amazing sweet pastries. High on the list of local favorites is the lobster-tail pastry which originates in the Campania region. It is referred to here as the sfogliatella. There are two types of sfogliatella: riccia and frolla. They are both filled with semolina, ricotta, sugar and eggs. The difference is in the pastry. Riccia is a puff pastry—laminated with butter resulting in flaky layers. The Frolla variety is made with short crust pastry making it look more like a biscuit. Legends say the sfogliatella riccia was created in a monastery in Naples.

Another Naples staple you must try at least once is babà. Every pastry shop will have their own version of the babà, but a classic is the simple rum-soaked cake. You may find it filled with whipped cream, pistachio cream or even chocolate.

One of my favorite things about traveling is finding local specialties and having the opportunity to taste items in their home of origin. In Naples, this is both delicious and easy.



PIZZA A PORTAFOGLIO



PAGNOTTIELLO



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# Beaches of Eastern Sicily

By ANNA DELANGE  
Contributing Writer

FONTANE BIANCHE

Sicily is full of charming coastal towns and on top of the beautiful architecture you will find a variety of beaches around the island. There are beautiful stretches of white sand, large rocky coasts and small pebble beaches. The differing materials that make up the shoreline also create exquisite views and varying shades of blue water in the Ionian Sea.

Being stationed at NAS Sigonella is a unique opportunity for you to experience the lovely variety of Mediterranean beaches. You can try a relaxing "lido:" a paid beach area (sand, pebble or deck) with loungers and amenities, or you can trek your own beach supplies to set up at a free "spiagge:" an open natural (sand or pebble) beach.

## Catania Area

Catania is full of sandy beaches you can choose from. From free spiagge to paid lidos, the Playa di Catania is a massive sandy beach 18km long south of the city. For something more natural, try the Oasi del Simeto, a stretch of sand inside the Simeto River Reserve south of the Catania beach. If you'd rather be near the amenities downtown, try the Spiaggia San Giovanni Licuti, a waterfront area of black volcanic boulders and wooden platforms to the water.

In the north of Catania, Aci Castello or Aci Trezzo are home to rockier shorelines with decked lidos providing water access and natural pebbly beaches. This also means beautiful clear water and fish to see while snorkeling.

The Taormina area typically has pebble beaches, like the public Spiaggia di Isola Bella or the paid lidos north of the town. My personal recommendation is to head there outside of tourist season to beat the crowds. This is a small town that tourists love to flock to.



SPIAGGIA DI ISOLA BELLA



OASI DEL SIMETO



SPIAGGIA SAN GIOVANNI LICUTI



ACI CASTELLO

## Syracuse Area

One of the most beautiful beaches in Sicily is Fontane Bianche. Fontane is an easy drive from NAS Sigonella, just past Siracusa. It has both paid lidos and free spiagge areas. The spiagge definitely fill up so get there early to claim a spot for the day.

There are a couple of other lidos in the Siracusa area. I have been to Lido Sayonara and loved it. Even mid-season it was still a relaxing time, and the beaches were well taken care of. The water itself is shallow for a good portion, making it great for families to take their children too. You can also easily swim to the right for deeper waters.

Head out and experience these amazing beaches while you have the opportunity. Just note that summer tourism is huge in Sicily. Unfortunately, that means that some paid lidos will only be open from June to September, but the free spiagge are accessible year-round. You are bound to find your own favorite beach on this not-so-little island of paradise. Buona Estate!



LIDO SAYONARA



# A Newcomer's Guide to Grocery Shopping in Italy

BY KIMBERLY KEPHART  
Contributing Writer

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**W**elcome to Italy, where the supermarkets or *supermercato*s are as full of life and color as the bustling piazzas and serene landscapes. For those who have just moved to Europe, navigating an Italian supermarket can be a delightful part of your cultural immersion. Let's take a stroll down the aisles and discover what makes shopping in Italy a unique experience.

## Fresh Finds

The produce section is a testament to Italy's rich agricultural heritage, boasting a rainbow of fresh fruits and vegetables. Here, the concept of 'kilometer zero' reigns supreme, with an emphasis on locally sourced, seasonal produce. Do not miss regional specialties like Roman artichokes, Sicilian oranges or San Marzano tomatoes.

Also, remember that many supermarkets require you to weigh and label your produce before checkout. Grab a bag and a plastic glove, select your fruits and veggies, place them in the bag, then head to the weigh station where the associate will weigh items and tag them for you. At more traditional markets, you will weigh them yourself and apply the barcode sticker.

## Deli Delights

No visit to an Italian supermarket is complete without a stop at the deli counter. It is a paradise of cured meats like prosciutto di Parma, salami and an array of cheeses from creamy burrata to sharp pecorino. It is a cheese lover's paradise here in Italy. While it is fun to shop at larger chains, don't forget to stop by your local *Negozi di formaggi* (cheese shop) or *Salumeria* (meat shop). These are the best stores as you'll have the opportunity to try locally made cheese and meats. Use Google Translate to break bread with



your shop owner, I promise they will be helpful and happy to assist you.

Another moment to prepare for is the possibility of finding horse meat at the grocery store. While this may be a cultural shock to some, it is deeply rooted in parts of Italy's culture. Horse meat, or *cavallo* is used in a variety of recipes: as a stew called *pastissada* (typical of Verona), served as steaks, as carpaccio or made into bresaola.

## Pantry Staples

The pantry aisles are a treasure trove of Italian culinary essentials. Stock up on various pasta shapes, artisanal sauces, extra virgin olive oil, sardines, spices and aged balsamic vinegar. These staples are the backbone of Italian cuisine and will elevate your home cooking. I was shocked to find several aisles devoted to these staples. I counted three whole aisles for pasta and two for sauces at my local market.

Another item that may interest you is called Pocket Coffee. This is a unique item known for combining the rich taste of chocolate with the bold flavor of espresso. Pocket Coffee consists of an individually wrapped piece of dark chocolate filled with liquid espresso, making it a popular treat for those needing a quick boost.

Italy has an abundance of packaged sweet treats, as well. You will find items like *cornetto* which is a croissant with different fillings like chocolate, pistachio and creme.



## Beverages and Wines

Italian supermarkets offer an impressive selection of wines and beverages. There are aisles full of wine sorted by various regions. From robust reds to sparkling proseccos, the wine aisles are a journey through Italy's vineyards.

Pay special attention, because at some supermarkets you can pour your own wine. This is called *vino sfuso*, or "loose wine." Simply put, it is bulk wine. Supermarkets often highlight a local producer, and you can simply bring your own bottles to fill, or they will supply the bottles for you at a low rate. There are even whole shops dedicated to *vino sfuso*.

## Checkout and Etiquette

It almost seems like it is every man for himself at the checkout counters. You will often need to bag your own groceries. Sometimes everything is happening at an alarmingly fast rate. Take a few deep breaths and just do what you can. It is also common to bring your own reusable bags as a nod to sustainability.

Patience is key in Italian supermarkets, where the pace is leisurely (except at checkout) and social interactions are savored. Embrace the Italian supermarket as more than just a place to shop; view it as a vibrant part of your European adventure. Buon shopping!



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## MILITARY

# IG: Army struggles to maintain Bradleys

## Soldiers in Europe confronted with systemic problems

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army is struggling to ensure that Bradley Fighting Vehicles used by troops in Europe are mission-ready, according to a recent Pentagon watchdog report that found a brigade's worth of the vehicles initially reported as fit to fight were unusable.

The Defense Department Inspector General said last month that deployed units are confronted with systemic problems when it comes to keeping their armored vehicles in working order in connection with persistent shortages of mechanics and an intense operational tempo.

The IG audit examined a fleet of Bradleys used during the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's 2023 deployment in support of efforts aimed at deterring Russian aggression on NATO's eastern flank.

"The Army did not effectively manage the repairs of the BFVs," the report, dated March 16, said. Moreover, when the brigade ended its deployment it "improperly reported the condition of the BFVs turned in as fully mission capable."

The Pentagon watchdog audit found that 96 of 117 Bradleys (about 82%) were initially reported by the unit as fully mission-ready. However, a subsequent joint inspection determined all 117 vehicles were unfit for use and riddled with mechanical issues, the report said.

One Bradley alone had 36 different faults, rendering it inoperable despite being listed as fully mission capable, the IG said. As a result, the Army had to pull 97 replacement Bradleys from its prepositioned stocks warehoused in Germany to equip the next incoming unit's 2024 rotation.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa maintains numerous locations where key pieces of equipment, such as Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Abrams tanks, are stored for use by in-



DELIAN COTTLE/U.S. Army

An M2A3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle prepares an assault during training at Hohenfels, Germany, in May.

coming units. The idea behind the program is to ensure that forces, either arriving for planned drills or in a crisis, can quickly fall in on combat-ready gear.

The IG said that subsequent Army efforts to repair the 117 Bradleys lagged. As of July 2025, only 51 of the 117 vehicles had been repaired to the Army's maintenance standard, the report said.

Among the initial challenges was a lack of sufficient mechanics within the deployed brigade, which commanders said could increase repair times by 50%. Troops were also spread across multiple locations during the deployment, complicating maintenance work, the report said.

The commander of the brigade told the IG

that during their deployment, most of the Bradleys were able "to run, shoot, and communicate" and were therefore deemed mission capable. However, that outlook "provided a false readiness level" and "gave the impression that the BFVs would not need extensive repairs," the report said.

Meanwhile, Army sustainment units based in Europe also lacked the capacity to absorb the workload after the brigade returned to the United States, the IG said. Maintenance teams were stretched thin by competing demands that included ongoing efforts related to supporting and equipping Ukraine in its war with Russia.

The IG called upon USAREUR-AF to conduct a theaterwide study to determine what

Bradley Fighting Vehicle repair capabilities are needed to meet mission requirements and develop a program to address any gaps.

USAREUR-AF, in a response to the IG, said units often have insufficient time between training events and their deployment dates for maintenance and that "severely limits their ability to fully reconstitute combat power," the report said, adding the situation causes "a persistent readiness challenge."

USAREUR-AF said it has implemented several initiatives to address the problems, such as establishing a forward-stationed maintenance augmentation team that can surge support when needed.

The command also said it would comply with the IG's request for a formal study.

# Pentagon: New Air Force tanker hasn't reached full operational standards

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Air Force's KC-46A Pegasus tanker has not reached full operational standards despite being deployed in restricted service, a key Pentagon report said.

The Pentagon's Director, Operational Test and Evaluation annual report on March 24 said two components of the refueling system have yet to pass tests meant to remove limitations on its use.

The issues are with the Remote Vision System and the Boom Telescope Actuator.

In-flight refueling system operators use the Remote Vision System to connect with a plane needing fuel. Unlike other refueling aircraft, the KC-46A uses a tail-mounted camera that feeds an image to the refueler, with software that creates a depth perception image that gives a daylight, night and infrared image. The boom operator sees this image on a 3D display and uses the Boom Telescope Actuator to extend and retract the refueling boom to the receiving plane.

"The KC-46A has not been able to meet several suitability metrics in past years, and this trend has continued through FY25," the report said. "The operational availability and mission capable rates are still well below

their threshold requirements."

The Air Force said the tanker has already been deployed by Air Mobility Command in some situations but passing full operational testing certifications would allow for a less restrictive use of the KC-46A.

The first 183 KC-46A to be built are to begin replacing the aging fleet of more than 400 legacy KC-135 and KC-10 Extender refueling aircraft.

The KC-46A is a military tanker based on an extended-range variant of the Boeing 767 commercial airliner, with military upgrades for carrying fuel, defensive countermeasures, communications, rescue, medical transport and cargo roles.

The Air Force expects the KC-46A Pegasus to support combat and rescue missions, including delivering cargo to service members in the field and evacuating wounded personnel.

With corrections to the flaws noted in the report, the Pentagon expressed optimism that the KC-46A would rapidly reach full operational standards.

"Most flight testing has already been completed, but final testing depends on finishing the remaining fixes," the report said. "The aircraft can be deployed today, but with lim-



U.S. Air Force

A KC-46A Pegasus refuels an F-22 Raptor, and an F-16 awaits a turn over the Mojave Desert near Edwards Air Force Base in California on March 3.

its."

The KC-46A is capable of refueling 26 of 27 aircraft variants, according to the report — but with restrictions on "certain environmental conditions and aircraft configurations."

The report did not identify the 27th aircraft type that can't currently be used with the KC-46A, but the report said the Air Force will "resume testing" on the variant's use of the KC-46A in the near future.

## MILITARY

# Pentagon seeks to boost spouse employment

Leaders urged to be more flexible in hiring practices, especially for those overseas

By CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Pentagon wants leaders in the armed services to do more to combat persistently high military spouse unemployment, which sits at 20% — five times the national average.

To address the disparity, the armed forces are directing senior leaders to maximize the use of hiring flexibilities for military spouses, Anthony Tata, defense undersecretary for personnel and readiness, said in a statement April 8 on X.

That includes waiving rules that may create challenges for those seeking work overseas.

“Hiring military spouses is smart business and the right thing to do for our warriors & their families,” Tata said. “This immediate change will make it easier for talented military spouses to secure opportunities in the Department.”

Among the obstacles, he said, was that the Department of Defense Education Activity could not extend job offers to military spouses with teaching licenses until 30 days before their permanent change of station move.

That creates “economic insecurity for our military families and unnecessary vacancies in our schools,” Tata said.

Under changes introduced recently, military spouses now can apply and be hired upon receiving official change of station orders, he said.

In a memorandum accompanying the social media post, Tata said DOD must eliminate unnecessary barriers to military spouses joining the civilian workforce.

A yearlong Stars and Stripes investigation published in 2023 found that an overseas assignment meant living on the edge of poverty for thousands of U.S. military families.

The reason for that hardship after being sent to Europe was rooted in a loss of income resulting from U.S. and NATO country prohibitions that keep military spouses from working overseas.

Since then, the U.S. has reached agree-



JAMES MITCHELL/U.S. Navy

Staff members of the Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka Child and Youth Program host a job fair for dependents in Japan last May.

ments with some European countries, such as Italy, to allow military spouses to work remotely for their American employers.

Still, obstacles remain for many overseas spouses.

Tata's post urged the use of alternative work sites for spouses accompanying military members on orders outside a job's primary duty location.

In addition, he called on DOD hiring managers to consider military spouses before all other candidates who are ineligible for hiring preferences.

Tata also directed agencies to develop lists of qualified military spouses, including by using continuous job announcements not tied

to particular vacancies so that human resources teams can fill résumé banks of military spouses they can quickly hire when vacancies open.

The moves come after aggressive attempts by President Donald Trump's administration to shrink the federal workforce by implementing hiring freezes and offering incentives for resignations and early retirement.

Just over a year ago, after instituting a hiring freeze, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced plans to reduce and restructure the department's civilian labor force to make it “lean, mean and prepared to win.”

As a result, the DOD saw an exodus of about 10% of its civilian employees last year,

shedding about 81,000 of them, the Daily Wire reported in February, citing Pentagon data.

But the restructuring and unfilled vacancies were causing low morale and lost capability, while overseas civilians trying to rotate back stateside faced the prospect of demotions and pay cuts, DefenseOne reported.

A recent search of the government hiring website USA Jobs turned up over 2,300 postings for which military spouses were eligible, with a total of just over 8,000 open to the public.

The unemployment rate in March was at 4.3%, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported April 3, with the jobless rate for women at 4%, compared with 3.8% for men.

## Automatic registration for draft to be implemented by December

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Automatic registration of men potentially eligible for the military draft will take effect by December, according to the government agency that maintains a database of who could be called up to serve in a crisis.

A proposed rule for the Selective Service System was submitted to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs on March 30 as part of the process of implementing the change.

Most males between the ages of 18 and 25 are required to register with the Selective Service in the event that Congress and the president authorize conscription in response to a national emergency.

The new rule, mandated by defense policy legislation passed by Congress last year, will register men automatically rather than require them to register themselves within 30 days of their 18th birthday. Late registration is allowed until a man reaches his 26th birthday.

Failure to register is considered a crime and can lead to disqualification from student loans, most federal jobs and U.S. citizenship for immigrants.

Lawmakers who championed automatic registration said it will cut government red tape and allow the agency, which spends millions of dollars reminding eligible men that registration is required by law, to save taxpayer money.

The Selective Service System said the change will result in a “streamlined registration process and corresponding workforce realignment,” allowing the agency to transfer responsibility from individual men by pulling data from existing databases.

Registration rates for the draft have declined in recent years but remain high, according to the agency's most recent report to Congress. In 2024, 81% of eligible men registered — a slight decrease from the 84% of men who registered in 2023.

The strong compliance rate is driven by laws in 46 states and territories that automatically register men for the Selective Service when they obtain a driver's license, learner's permit or state identification card, according to the agency.

Women remain ineligible for the draft despite repeated legislative efforts to expand the registration requirement. In 2020, a commission appointed by Congress said including women, who became eligible for



Stars and Stripes

Automatic registration of men potentially eligible for the military draft will take effect by December, according to the government agency that maintains a database of who could be called up to serve in a crisis.

all combat jobs in 2016, would be a “necessary and fair step.”

Lawmakers have been able to attach provisions adding women to the draft to various versions of annual defense policy bills in recent years, but the measures have all been scrapped before being put to a final

vote.

The U.S. last activated the draft in 1973, near the end of the Vietnam War, and has since relied on an all-volunteer force. Former President Jimmy Carter reinstated the Selective Service registration requirement for men in 1980.

DINING

# Exotic food with long tradition near Aviano

Allo Storione impressive even by Italian standards

By KENT HARRIS  
Stars and Stripes

Italians are known for many things. Fashion sense. Fine wines. A long history dating back to ancient times.

But perhaps more than anything else, Italians take pride in their food.

My wife's Italian hairdresser once told her that the country's inhabitants "suffer" when they travel abroad as they often have to settle for lesser fare at the table.

So restaurants in Italy have a high standard to maintain.

That makes family-run Allo Storione restaurant in Ghirano, about 17 miles from Aviano Air Base, even more impressive.

It is currently run by father-son chefs Giacomo and Pietro Buzzi, and the restaurant was founded in 1950 by Giacomo's mother, Maria.

Storione translates into sturgeon in English. That particular fish is still served at the restaurant, but usually only in June. Sturgeon are rare in the country today due to environmental changes and overfishing.

During a recent visit, the menu featured locally produced products or specialty items from farther away, such as prosciutto from San Daniele and ham from Spain. Baccala (dried cod) with polenta — a dish famous in Vicenza — is another frequent option.

Several other courses are a bit more exotic to many American palates. Recent offerings included an appetizer featuring chicken livers, first courses of gnocchi with a sauce made of chopped chicken organs and spaghetti topped with a pigeon sauce. A second course dish was snails with celery.

We tried a few of these. My daughter likes spaghetti but was hesitant about the pigeon sauce. She later asked if it had any feathers. It didn't. It was well cooked and — unsurprisingly — tasted pretty similar to chicken. My son, who is generally open to eating just about anything, had the gnocchi and gave it a thumbs-up.

A second course called "rabbit stew" didn't strike me as much of a stew. The meat was perfectly cooked and seasoned. But it was a bit difficult navigating the small bones. The waitress offered us a "tasting" portion of pheasant with polenta. It was excellent and would be my choice on another visit.

Diners shouldn't expect an inexpensive meal. Allo Storione uses high-quality ingredients and meals can be pricey. But for those looking for a change of pace from the restaurants near base, Ghirano is only about a 30-minute drive away.

**If you go**

**Allo Storione**

**Address:** Piazza Mazzini 11, Ghirano, Italy

**Hours:** Lunch from noon to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays-Fridays and Sunday. Dinner from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Closed Mondays.

**Menu:** Traditional Italian fare based on availability of fresh ingredients. Appetizers, first courses, second courses and desserts all prepared on site. Changing menu posted manually outside will otherwise be recited by staff. Some English spoken.

**Information:** Online: [ristoranteallostorione.com](http://ristoranteallostorione.com). Phone: 0434-626028 (reservations recommended).



A first course of spaghetti with pigeon sauce was one of a handful of options during a recent visit to Allo Storione in Ghirano, Italy.



An appetizer featuring Italian ham from San Daniele and pickled artichokes was one of a handful of options during a recent visit.



An appetizer featuring polenta and asparagus was another option.



Diners sit near a fire at one end of the large dining room at Allo Storione.



This first-course option is gnocchi topped with a sauce of chicken organs.



Allo Storione has been operated by the same family since it opened in 1950.



This second-course dish is called a rabbit stew but it is closer to leg of rabbit, with some other rabbit parts and a slice of grilled polenta.



Freshly baked cake is dotted with chocolate chips and served with a dollop of cream and sliced strawberries is a dessert option.



This small sample of a second-course option at Allo Storione featured pheasant and polenta.

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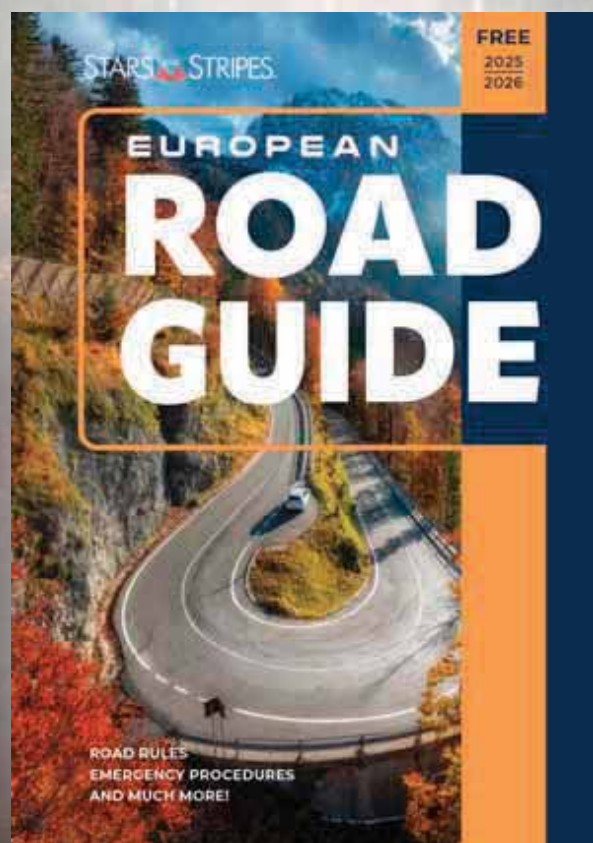


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