

# Drone lab

Bayonet Innovation Team in Vicenza prepares for future battlefields

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Chief Warrant Officer 2 Justin Love holds a drone under development by the 173rd Airborne Brigade's Bayonet Innovation.  
Alison Bath/Stars and Stripes

Eyes peeled for Russians in Adriatic  
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Entertainment director sets stage in Vicenza  
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Naples cafe scores big with bagels  
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## MILITARY



COLLIN MACKALL/U.S. ARMY

A U.S. soldier prepares an M67 grenade for a Skydio X10 drone at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, in June. The 173rd Airborne Brigade's Bayonet Innovation Team is developing a variety of drone warfare capabilities for soldiers in the Vicenza, Italy-based unit as well as across the service.

# Innovation team sets course for tech future

## Vicenza troops draw inspiration from Ukrainian battlefields

BY ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade stationed in Italy are taking insights gleaned from their Ukrainian counterparts fighting Russia to shape the Army's future battlefield capabilities.

That observational and advisory role is directly informing how the 173rd's Bayonet Innovation Team devises high-tech solutions intended to make missions successful and reduce soldiers' risks, said 1st Lt. Vincent Gasparri, the team's director.

The war in Ukraine has given the Army the clearest picture yet of the "tactical opportunities and problems that we would face in the next conflict," Gasparri said.

Using and defending against drones and robots, artificial intelligence and electromagnetic warfare are among the team's top objectives, he said.

"Our primary charge is to solve innovation and modernization problems for the brigade," Gasparri said.

The group's work is informed by observation of the Russia-Ukraine war and the brigade's participation in initiatives to arm and train Ukrainian forces.

Those connections and the resulting relationships have been "key in our development and our understanding of what's effective," Gasparri said.

Much of the innovation team's work focuses on experimenting with and configuring drones and robots, as well as developing the support system needed to train the soldiers who will use them.

The 173rd Airborne is the Army's contingency response force in Europe. Based in Italy and Germany, it provides rapid forces for U.S. European



1st Lt. Kadin Peterman, a robotics engineer with the 173rd Airborne Brigade's Bayonet Innovation Team at U.S. Army Garrison Italy, holds an unmanned ground vehicle, or ground robot, at the team's lab in Vicenza last month.

Command, U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Central Command, according to the Army.

Stood up about two years ago, Bayonet is one of several unit-based Army initiatives designed to rapidly develop and advance technology to support evolving battlefield needs, according to the service.

It is aligned with the Army Transformation Initiative, an effort launched in May that is part of a plan to ready soldiers for future battles where drones, robots and other emerging technology are anticipated to rule.

The initiative builds on the revised Army fighting concept known as Transformation in Contact, an effort to rapidly deliver large amounts of new technology to soldiers so they can

experiment and innovate, according to the service.

In May, Bayonet established a facility with the capability to produce 200 to 300 aerial drones a month, chiefly for use in military exercises. The team produced 40 systems over three days.

A group of about 11 soldiers builds the simple, quadcopter drones — inspired by similar one-way attack models employed by Ukraine — using an assembly-line method and a 3D printer in a small lab at U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza.

The drones are powered by a lithium polymer battery and cost roughly \$1,000 to \$1,500 to design, build and operate, Gasparri said.

They can carry an explosive payload capable of destroying a tank, he

said, adding that the technology is a "considerable advancement."

The unit also has been prototyping similar systems in Germany since November 2024, the Army said.

In addition, Bayonet is researching and experimenting with counter-drone systems that can detect and defeat an adversary's unmanned aerial vehicles as well as ground robots.

For 1st Lt. Kadin Peterman, Bayonet's experimentation with the robots has a deep, personal connection. He previously led a platoon of sappers, or combat engineers, and said the robots can remove some of the danger inherent in that job.

"We can send explosives up to the breach without sending a person and still conduct our engineer task," Pe-



BRITTANY CONLEY/U.S. ARMY

Sgt. Andy Ortiz of the 173rd Airborne Brigade operates a first-person view drone at Norio Training Area, Ga., in August.

terman said, adding that making sure troops "stay alive as long as possible" keeps him invested in the work.

Gasparri said other areas of study and experimentation for Bayonet include leveraging AI on the battlefield to quickly offer up-to-date analysis.

For example, future battle formations could be supported by as many as 300 drones taking videos analyzed by AI and verified by just a handful of soldiers, reducing time and manpower while increasing efficiency, he said.

The team also is experimenting with using multiple drones, called wolf packs, for defending against and destroying an enemy's air-to-air missile system.

That work will bolster the brigade's ability to deploy anywhere, control the airspace and protect its formation with portable systems that can be thrown out of planes, dropped out of helicopters or put on a soldier to protect them, Gasparri said.

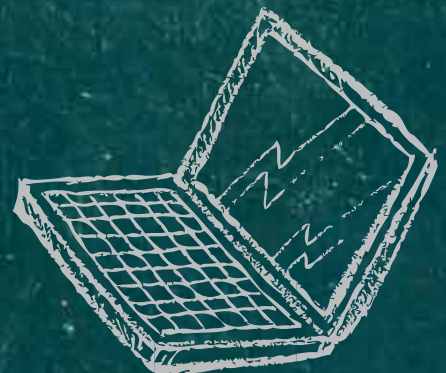
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## MILITARY

# US, NATO forces keep watch in Adriatic

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

ABOARD THE TCG ANADOLU — NATO allies taking part in a recent exercise are staying wary in case recent Russian incursions in the bloc's skies are followed by Kremlin shadowing at sea.

"In the strategic context, we're monitoring very closely with the (Russian) activities over the last few weeks to see if there is any additional activity," Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Andrew Priddy said Sept. 22, the third day of exercise Neptune Strike.

No indications of Russian activity had been seen by that point, but naval forces had their eye out for "any sign of Russian interaction, Russian observance, any Russian response to the activity that we're conducting," Priddy said.

The chief of staff for Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO, Priddy joined Turkish and Italian military officials on the amphibious assault ship Anadolu as it sailed in the Adriatic Sea off the coast of Italy near the city of Brindisi.

The third iteration of Neptune Strike this year started Sept. 22 with the Anadolu Expeditionary Strike Group and Italian amphibious forces operating in the southern Adriatic along with the command-and-control ship USS Mount Whitney and the destroyer USS Roosevelt.

Two Turkish frigates and a submarine and the Italian amphibious assault ship ITS San Giorgio were among the vessels nearby.

Meanwhile, the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford was in the North Sea alongside ships and personnel from Finland, Norway, and the U.K., among other countries.

The exercise includes more than 10,000 military personnel from 13 allied nations operating in the Mediterranean, Adriatic, Baltic and North seas, NATO said in a recent statement.

Priddy's comments come as NATO grappled with recent incursions by Russian drones in Poland and Romania as well as a breach of Estonian airspace by Moscow's fighter jets. Those incidents have raised concerns about protecting NATO's eastern flank.

The violation of Polish airspace prompted NATO to create a new mission called Eastern Sentry in an effort to shore up defenses there.

Russia regularly keeps tabs on U.S. and NATO military exercises. American and allied forces do the same when it comes to similar activities involving Russia.

But with last year's overthrow of Syrian strongman Bashar Assad, a longtime Kremlin stalwart in the Middle East, Russian military access to a strategic port in the country has been crippled.

"The loss of the base in Tartus has kind of significantly hampered the Russians' ability to operate in the Mediterranean," Priddy said.

Turkish assistance to Syrian rebels was crucial in bringing about the ouster of Assad, whose fam-



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

**The destroyer USS Roosevelt, far left, the command-and-control ship USS Mount Whitney, center, and the Turkish frigate TCG Gokceada operate near the Turkish amphibious assault ship TCG Anadolu in the Adriatic Sea on Sept. 24 as part of NATO exercise Neptune Strike.**

ily had held power i for more than half a century.

Last month, the NATO ally played a leadership role in Neptune Strike. A prominent part of that presence in the drill was the Anadolu, Turkey's largest warship.

The exercise offered Turkey an opportunity to demonstrate its amphibious capabilities and commitment to ensuring allies' security, said Rear Adm. Mevlut Savas Bilican, commander of the Anadolu Expeditionary Strike Group.

"We believe that we are making a huge contribution to NATO's posture in terms of (the) current security setup," Bilican said, adding that 1,000 Turkish personnel are taking part in the exercise.

The NATO statement said Neptune Strike was designed to demonstrate the alliance's ability to integrate sophisticated maritime strike capabilities and work effectively together.

The emphasis on amphibious operations allowed allies to rehearse the capability and improve their ability to work together, Priddy said.

"There are significant choke points in the southern flank of NATO and the ability to have sea control from the land or to help dominate from the land into the sea, is an extremely important role of amphibious forces," he said.



**Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Andrew Priddy, center, speaks with Turkish military officials on Sept. 24, while touring the amphibious assault ship TCG Anadolu in the Adriatic Sea during NATO's Neptune Strike exercise.**

## Top Navy officer in Mideast nominated for 4-star role in Europe

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy admiral who has led the fleet in the Middle East as the U.S. defended against Houthi attacks in the Red Sea is slated to be the service's highest-ranking officer in Europe and Africa.

The Senate last month confirmed Vice Adm. George Wikoff for promotion to admiral and assignment as commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Force Command Naples, according to information at senate.gov.

Wikoff currently oversees U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet, headquartered in Manama, Bahrain. He assumed the role in February 2024.

He is on course to assume NAVEUR-AF command from Adm. Stuart Munsch, who has held the posi-

tion since June 2022.

Meanwhile, Rear Adm. Curt Renshaw will take over Wikoff's role as commander of NAVCENT/U.S. 5th Fleet.

He was nominated for the post in mid-June and confirmed by the Senate later that month.

Currently director of operations for U.S. Central Command out of MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, Renshaw will return to Bahrain, having previously served as deputy commander for NAVCENT.

As commander of NAVEUR-AF, Wikoff would oversee an area of responsibility grappling with Russian actions ranging from the ongoing war in Ukraine to expansion of operations in the High North and Arctic, an area the U.S. considers vital to national security.

In his current role, Wikoff also

has led the multinational partnership Combined Maritime Forces, a drone and artificial intelligence task force and a Coast Guard unit focused on seizing illegal drugs and weapons, primarily smuggled out of Iran.

Before taking command of NAVCENT/5th Fleet, the New Jersey native was acting commander of Naval Air Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

In a career that spans more than three decades, Wikoff also has served in fighter squadrons VF-102 and VF-154 aboard the aircraft carriers USS America and USS Kitty Hawk, respectively, according to his service biography.

Munsch's next assignment is unknown. He was honored by Norway for his work in strengthening defense in the High North and Arctic.

*Stars and Stripes* reporter Lara Korte contributed to this report.



NAOMI JOHNSON/U.S. Navy

**Vice Adm. George Wikoff was nominated to be the choice to be the new commander of Naval Forces Europe-Africa.**

## MILITARY

# One less star for USAF leader in Europe

## After re-designation, next commander will be of lower rank than counterparts

By JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

For the first time in decades, the next commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa will wear fewer stars on his shoulders than his U.S. military counterparts in the theater.

President Donald Trump has nominated Lt. Gen. Jason T. Hinds to lead the command nearly three months after Gen. James Hecker, the previous commander, retired following 36 years of service.

If Congress approves his nomination, Hinds is not up for a fourth star, according to the Air Force, as the billet has been re-designated a three-star command position.

"In alignment with the Department of War directive to reduce general and flag officer positions, the nominee for (USAFE-AFAPRICA) commander is at the lieutenant general grade," an Air Force official said in a statement.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in May ordered the military's active components to reduce the number of four-star generals and admirals by at least 20% and the National Guard to slash general officers by a minimum of 20%.

An F-22 pilot and former F-22 fighter squadron commander, Hinds already is in place. He served as the deputy commander under

Hecker beginning in September 2024 and took over as the interim commander when Hecker retired, according to the Air Force.

Hinds is also in line to serve as the head of NATO's Allied Air Command and director of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre at Ramstein Air Base, according to the Air Force.

As USAFE-AFAPRICA commander, Hinds will oversee some 35,000 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian employees, spanning 104 nations and eight wings.

He'll succeed a long line of four-star generals, some of whom later served as the Air Force chief of staff, such as Gen. Mark Welsh III from 2012 to 2016; Gen. John Jumper, 2001 to 2005; and Gen. Michael Ryan, 1997 to 2001.

It's not the first time the rank structure has been targeted in Europe. In 2013, the Pentagon initially called for making the command a three-star position but later reversed that.

The other top U.S. military command positions in Europe remain four-star billets for now. That includes the U.S. European Command led by Air Force Gen. Alexis G. Grynke, who has a dual-hatted role as NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe. For the Army, Gen. Chris Donahue leads U.S. Army Europe and Africa and NATO Allied Land Command.

Vice Adm. George Wikoff, meanwhile,



HEATHER COZAD STALEY/U.S. Air Force

**U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Jason Hinds, U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa deputy commander, talks with German air force Brig. Gen. Gero von Fritschen in Picauville, France, in June.**

has been nominated for a fourth star and is the choice to be the new commander of Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Force Command Naples.

The Air Force has also made similar moves

at lower levels.

Col. Beau Diers took command of the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano Air Base, Italy, in July. That command had been held by a brigadier general for more than two decades.

## NATO seeking to spur sea change in anti-sub warfare

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — An undersea test launch of an aerial drone from a U.S. vessel off the coast of Portugal is part of a NATO exercise aimed at revolutionizing anti-submarine warfare.

The fast-attack submarine USS New Mexico deployed the drone system Sept. 16 during REPMUS/Dynamic Messenger 25.

During the nearly two-week event, participants experimented and trained with more than 250 underwater, surface and aerial drone systems.

For example, New Mexico and the Portuguese submarine NRP Tridente trained and experimented alongside a Portuguese frigate and patrol boat, also on Sept. 16.

The exercise included the first-ever shift of operational control of a U.S. submarine to NATO's submarine command, Capt. Ben Selph, commander of the Navy's Task Force 69 based in Naples, said in a statement.

The Navy and NATO are working quickly to integrate drones with submarines to transform anti-submarine warfare.

Drones can help improve a submarine's ability to detect, identify and, potentially, engage with an adversary's underwater vessel.

Aerial drones can help a submarine stay submerged while conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, among other activities.

Those abilities could offer strategic advantages throughout the theater, particularly in the High North and Arctic,

where Russia has a sizable submarine presence.

REPMUS stands for robotic experimentation and prototyping with maritime unmanned systems. That exercise is combined with Dynamic Messenger, part of the alliance's continuous operational experimentation initiative, NATO said.

The exercise is a "demonstration of how the alliance can integrate submarines and unmanned platforms to achieve operational advantage," Rear Adm. Bret Grabbe, NATO submarines commander, said in a statement.

It includes more than 2,000 personnel from 22 countries including Canada, Denmark, Finland and Italy, along with 17 warships and two submarines.

Led by Allied Maritime Command, Dynamic Messenger consists of a series of experiments and demonstrations "aimed at accelerating new military technology," NATO said.

REPMUS is a Portuguese-led exercise that focuses on maritime unmanned systems experimentation and capability development, among other objectives.

"To place these systems in the hands of our operators, who provide integral feedback to industry and our respective navies ... further enables the spiral development and eventual fielding of cutting-edge technology for the Alliance," Cmdr. Arlo Abrahamson, a spokesman for MARCOM, said in a recent statement.



NATO MARITIME COMMAND/Facebook

**The submarine USS New Mexico sails with the Portuguese frigate Francisco de Almeida during a recent U.S.-Portuguese anti-submarine warfare exercise off the coast of Portugal. The submarine test-launched an aerial drone system during the exercise on Sept. 16.**

## MILITARY

# Motorcycle accidents prove costly to military

## 750 troops killed in bike crashes over past decade

BY GARY WARNER  
Stars and Stripes

A video shows a lone Harley-Davidson motorcycle rumbling up a sunny quay and pulling to a stop. The rider removes his helmet and speaks to the camera.

"Greetings from Naval Base Coronado, I'm your air boss," says Vice Adm. Daniel Cheever, commander of Naval Air Forces and Naval Air Forces, Pacific Fleet. "As a fellow longtime rider, I wanted to thank you for your service and ask you to ride safe, to preserve your life and our readiness."

After noting that 74% of motorcycle accidents are at least partially the rider's fault, the three-star Harley rider makes his central point.

"Navy motorcycle fatalities are currently projected to be the highest since 2008," Cheever says in the video posted June 4. By that time, the Navy had already surpassed the 28 off-duty motorcycle crash fatalities recorded in all of 2024. "It's unacceptable to lose one of you, let alone dozens, which we have this year. Let's reverse the trend as we serve, excel and make a difference. Fly Navy, ride safe."

From June to the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, 10 more sailors and Marines died in crashes, ranging from a 37-year-old Navy lieutenant in Portsmouth, R.I., to a 20-year-old Marine corporal in Nago, Japan. In all, 30 sailors and 15 Marines died in motorcycle accidents in 2025.

The U.S. military's death toll from motorcycle crashes in 2025 was 84, including 28 in the Army and 11 in the Air Force.

In 2023, motorcycle riders accounted for 15% of all traffic fatalities nationwide, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In the U.S. military that year, the most recent year with comparable statistics, about half of all traffic fatalities



HUNTER KIRKLAND/U.S. Air Force

**Motorcyclists conduct checks on their bikes before setting out for a Motorcycle Mentorship Ride at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in August.**

involved motorcycles, according to the Pentagon.

The appearance of a flag officer in a video about off-duty motorcycle riding safety underscores the high cost in lives and dollars caused by crashes.

The loss of life is the highest price of motorcycle crashes — more than 750 service members have died in motorcycle crashes in the past decade, the Pentagon says — which is why the military's central message continues to focus on reducing deaths. But those who survive can face injuries serious enough to end their military careers.

An Army study showed that for every motorcycle death, there are five motorcycle-related hospitalizations and 22 outpatient visits. Hospital stays average 20 days. Each accident costs

the Army an average of \$100,000 in medical treatment and lost duty work time.

Injuries to scores of military motorcycle riders each year range from traumatic brain injuries and broken limbs to eye damage and "road rash," in which skin peels away as a fallen rider skids across coarse pavement.

Michael Reed, chief of research for the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., said one of the best ways to improve the safety is simply to provide riders with the facts about the dangers.

"Information is power," Reed said in a statement. "It gets the information out on what is hurting and killing our soldiers in the realm of motorcycle mishaps."

Crashes were usually caused by swerving between lanes, oversteering, loss of traction on wet or loose surfaces, driving while fatigued, not wearing helmets and other safety equipment, wearing low-visibility clothing and the failure of poorly maintained motorcycle parts, according to Pentagon studies.

About one-third of fatal accidents involve the consumption of alcohol, about the same as civilian statistics, the Army said.

The one key area where military motorcycle riders differed was speed. About half of all fatal accidents involving service members occur at excessive speeds, compared with a third of accidents for civilian riders.

And demographics play a role: 8%

of Americans ride motorcycles, but military ridership is 16%, the Pentagon estimates.

Also, men under 29 are most likely to be involved in a motorcycle crash, according to the National Safety Council. The U.S. military is more than 80% male with a median age of 26, according to the Pentagon.

A Navy Safety Command report showed that crashes in July had a high proportion of young, lower-ranking sailors — 48% of crashes involved riders 25 and under, and 71% involved ranks E-5 or below.

Younger service members are drawn to high-speed "sports motorcycles" made by manufacturers such as Kawasaki and Suzuki that accelerate rapidly and can top out at speeds of 200 mph.

The cost of owning even those superbikes is significantly lower than that of other motor vehicles; prices for a superbike can be as low as \$25,000, half of the average of \$46,000 for a new car or \$65,000 for a new full-size pickup truck, according to car website Clark.com.

And those are the motorcycles involved in the majority of fatal crashes recorded by the military. The Air Force reported that all five of its fatal crashes from Oct. 1 of last year through the end of April 2025 involved sports motorcycles.

Since the record 118 deaths in 2008, the Defense Department has instituted mandatory safety training and defensive riding courses. Older service members have been asked to mentor younger riders.

Beginning this month, all military personnel who ride motorcycles must register with their command and certify that they have passed safety and driver awareness classes and possess the proper headgear, clothing, and equipment for riding.

The Pentagon has also appealed to the motorcyclist's sense of duty and patriotism, telling service members that avoiding accidents keeps them ready to deploy at any time, anywhere.

"Ride right — Stay in the fight," one poster said.

## New MRE lineup to feature range of new ways to get caffeine, protein

By Matthew M. Burke  
Stars and Stripes

The pork sausage patty is out and buffalo chicken is in, as the Pentagon is set to dish up revamped field rations with more protein-filled snacks and caffeine starting next year.

Unpopular prepackaged items in Meals, Ready to Eat will be axed in 2026, the Defense Department said in a statement Monday. That includes beef taco filling and a second meat patty, the jalapeno pepper jack.

Replacing those three things will be buffalo chicken, Cuban-style beef picadillo with vegetables and a Thai-style red curry with chicken and rice, the statement said.

More snack fare packed with protein is also on the way in the form of new s'mores recovery bars and freeze-dried chocolate peanut butter bites.

Developers in the Army's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Mass., worked to reduce weight and volume while maintaining the same number of calories and nutritional value.

The updated MREs will include new caffeinated options like beverages, gum and jelly beans, as well as energy chews and gels.

"What we've noticed is caffeine is one of

the least consumed items in the MRE," Julie Edwards, a senior technologist in the Combat Feeding Division, said in the statement.

"Previous generations were big coffee drinkers, but the newer generation of soldiers are not."

Troops will also receive a larger, more resilient towelette, the statement said.

The Pentagon annually assesses and changes the lineup of MREs, which are handed out to troops in the field. The changes were the result of service member feedback.

The process of changing a meal item takes about four years, said Edwards, who is also a registered dietitian. Before hitting the field for evaluation, all new items must still be edible after six months at 100 degrees Fahrenheit and three years at 80 degrees.

Researchers meet with service members to find out what they like, and then focus groups led by behavioral psychologists follow up on the initial feedback.

Decisions are then made by service leaders on the Joint Services Operational Rations Forum.

The Feeding Division is already working on offerings for 2027. Plant-based animal crackers,



Tyler Bolken/U.S. Air Force

**Buffalo chicken, Cuban-style beef picadillo with vegetables and a Thai-style red curry with chicken and rice are some of the introductions coming to the Meal, Ready to Eat field rations for 2026, according to a Pentagon statement.**

a new recovery bar, a protein bar and fruit-flavored cereal are among the possibilities, the statement said.

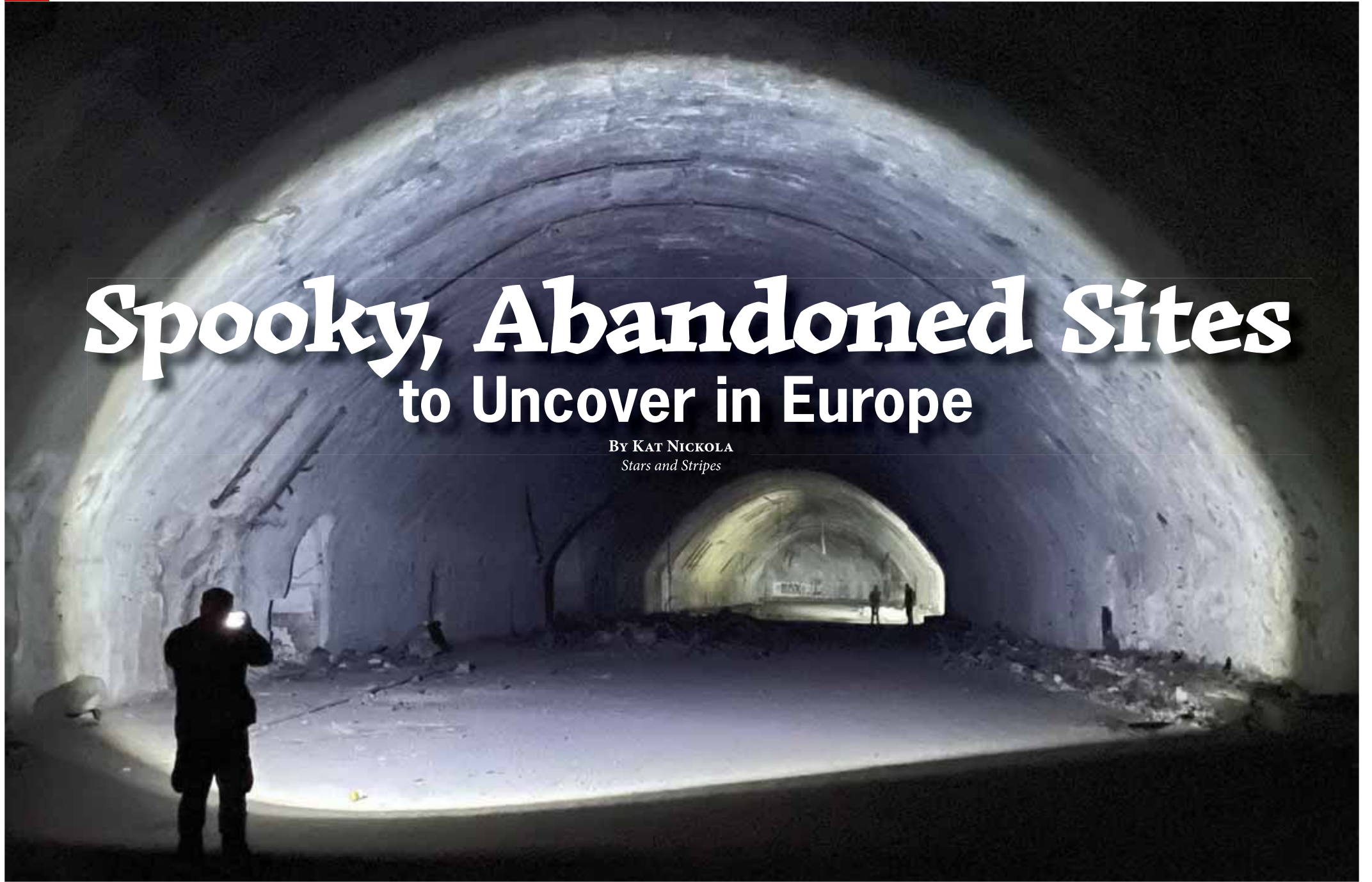
Also in 2027, plant-based entrees will also replace the four vegetarian meals currently available.

"Any new item that we get that can help bring variety and increase acceptability is important," Edwards said. "We know that eating an MRE isn't everyone's No. 1 thing. But we want to make it safe to eat — that's our No. 1 priority — and then to make it taste good as well."

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# Spooky, Abandoned Sites to Uncover in Europe

BY KAT NICKOLA  
Stars and Stripes



Sometimes a crumbling structure from a forgotten time has more allure than a polished tourist site. Try out some urbex (urban exploration) by visiting one of these abandoned locations that are just derelict enough to give off that post-apocalyptic vibe.

## An Italian ghost town

Monterano is a cliff-top village ruin in Italy that survived the Bronze Age, the Etruscans and the Romans before falling to French forces in 1799. You can still explore the town, its ancient aqueduct and the old castle.

## Empty, graffiti-covered streets in Belgium

Nearly all residents left Doel, Belgium when eviction notices announced the town's demolition in the 1970s as part of the nearby Antwerp harbor expansion. Protests prevented its destruction, so you can now wander the empty streets and admire the graffiti art.

## An underground air base in Croatia

Originally built to house the communist Yugoslavia's long-range radar, Željava Aerodrome became a massive underground air base able to withstand nuclear bombardment. Bring a high-powered flashlight to explore the old hangars and remnant twisted metal from its destruction, and if you are lucky the local police will let you speed down the runway.



## Ireland's most haunted castle

Boasting a long list of eerie stories and claiming to be the world's most haunted castle, the well-preserved medieval Leap Castle has a bloody and violent history. If you are brave enough, contact Sean at leapcastle.net for a visit.

## France's derelict human zoo

The Jardin D'agronomie Tropicale still houses the relics of a bizarre colonial exhibition from 1907. Built to showcase plants from French colonies, it soon came to house people in a human zoo on display in fenced recreated "native villages". You can still see the remnants of this all-to-recent injustice in its collapsing state.

## Steampunk land in Germany

A former industrial site has become a public space pulled straight from the world of steampunk at the Landschaftspark in northern Duisburg. The steel walkways are surrounded by pipes and metal structures, the playground slides go through former ore bunkers and a viewing tower sits atop an old blast furnace.

## Haunted halls in England

The ghost of Lord Lovell may still be wandering the roofless rooms of Minster Lovell Hall. It was originally built by one of the richest men in the 1430s and changed hands many times over the Middle Ages. You can still visit the ruins of the manor house, tower and dovecote.

## Slovenia's WW1 tunnels and trenches

The Soča River valley saw some of the bloodiest WW1 battles along what was known as the Isonzo Front. There are empty tunnels built by Russian POWs along the hairpin turns of the Vršič Pass and an abandoned trench system and ruined battery near Kal-Koritnica.

## Germany's ghost train station

Affectionately dubbed a ghost train station, Geisterbahnhof Olympiapark, resides at the end of a defunct rail line that was built for the 1972 Olympic games. It was abandoned in 1988, but with rumors of a revitalization floating around, you should visit now to see the station in all its post-apocalyptic glory.

## An abandoned Spanish village

Esco village was (mostly) abandoned in the 1960s when a new dam flooded the occupants' former farmland. Set in a scenic arid valley, the crumbling walls still house a few people who graze sheep in the hills above. The road into town is blocked to vehicles, but you can still walk in and explore.

## A failed French dam

Only five years after its construction, the Malpasset dam showed signs of leaking which were ignored by authorities. It broke on December 2, 1959, and swept away two towns before flooding Fréjus. You can still see the wrecked dam and chunks in the river, which nature is slowly eroding away.

## The ghostly battery still defending Spain

This J-4 coastal defense battery is perched above the Atlantic coast just north of the Portugal border. Built by Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War, it still houses rusting artillery guns amongst the windowless buildings and underground tunnels.



## The flying saucer of Bulgaria

Perched atop a mountain pass like an alien spaceship, the disc-shaped Buzludzha Monument, a tribute to communism, was abandoned in 1989. You can hike up to admire the lofty aspirations and walk around the exterior of this odd structure.

## Romania's unconsecrated monastery

Completed in 1790, the neglected Chianjna Monastery was bombed by the Turks before it could be consecrated. But the solid structure remained. Believed to be cursed, it later housed dying plague victims and is said to be haunted.

Map of abandoned sites across Europe



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# Venturing up Mount Etna



By **Kat Nickola**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Visiting Mount Etna is a must-do experience while stationed in Sicily and makes for a fun day trip.

You can drive up the mountain as far as the **Funivia dell'Etna** (Etna cable car). There are plenty of paid parking in lots near this tourist zone; payment is in cash at a small building near the cable car entry. There is also a tourist shopping center, a selection of restaurants, and guide services if you'd like to take a unique excursion or tour. A few hotels

also offer comfortable overnight stays on the volcano.

Easily walkable from the Funivia dell'Etna are some interesting, short hikes. A moderately easy walk takes you around the rim of the **Silvestri Craters** that formed in 1892. A second, steeper hike traverses some of the large craters and volcanic landscape created during a 2001 eruption above La Capannina.

To get higher on the volcano, book cable car tickets ahead of time on [www.funiviaetna.com](http://www.funiviaetna.com). The standard **Tour 2.500 m** includes the cable car to the

upper station. At this spot there is a small souvenir shop and bar. You can explore the area on foot, but it is not permitted to hike higher without a guide. To get higher without hiking, book the **Tour 3.000 m** which includes cable car tickets, plus a ride on a 4x4 bus (or snow cat in winter) to the **Pian del Lago** area where there is a short informational tour. There is also some free time to explore and take photos of Etna's smoking summit which is still 400 meters above you.



KAT NICKOLA/Stars and Stripes

Dogs are permitted up Mount Etna on the cable car and 4x4 tour. They must be leashed and muzzled. In addition, bring dog boots since the volcanic rocks are extremely sharp.

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# Alba's Famous White Truffle Fair

By **Karen Bradbury**  
*Contributing Writer*

Truffles, those fabulous fungi that add just the right umami notes to all kinds of savory dishes. As autumn is the season in which they are harvested, it's also the perfect time of year to get your hands on some.

Truffles grow over much of southern Europe, in countries like Italy, France, Croatia and Spain.

The truffle is impossible to cultivate and instead it must be searched out in the natural spaces where it thrives.

Truffles are usually found around the roots of certain types of trees such as oaks, hazel and beech and demand a particular type of soil. As they grow underground, truffle hunters get help from animals that can sniff them out.

Female pigs are excellent at this task, namely because there is a chemical in truffles that smells like an attractive hormone found in male pigs. But their hooves and snouts cause a lot of damage when they try to unearth this snack that they find incredibly tasty. Therefore, most truffle hunting companions are dogs, who have no desire to eat the mushrooms. Italy's most popular truffle-sniffing breed is the Lagotto Romagnolo. However, given the right training, even mixed breeds of humble origin can do the job just as well.

To discover more delicious ways Tuber magnatum Pico (white truffle)

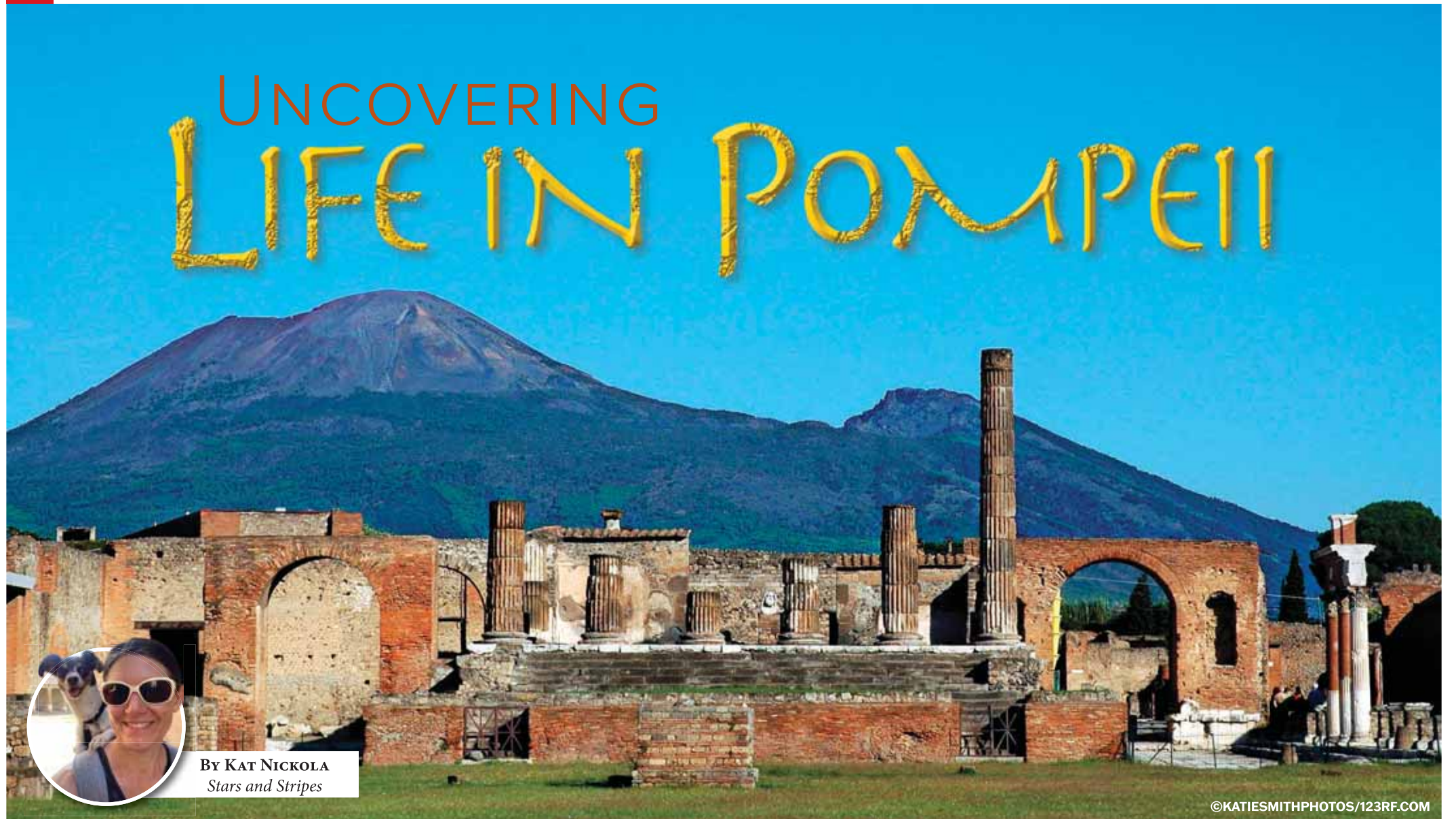


can be used, make your way to Italy's famed **Fiera Internazionale Tartufo Bianco d'Alba**, the International Alba White Truffle Fair. Alba is a city in the region of Piedmont that is known far and wide for the truffles growing in the nearby Langhe Hills, considered among the world's best.

The annual truffle fair is a collection of many different events. An exhibition in the town's historical center gives you the chance to learn about truffles before visiting the market where prize truffle specimens are sold, some of which go for thousands of euros. Those hoping to raise future gourmets can introduce their children to haute cuisine at a special pavilion for kids and families. There are also cooking demonstrations starring top chefs, taste workshops, and exclusive dinners with the chance to sample food pairings and fine wines from the region.

This year, the fair takes place on Saturdays and Sundays from Oct. 11 through Dec. 8, 2025. Visit [www.fieradeltartufo.org](http://www.fieradeltartufo.org) for tickets and details.





By KAT NICKOLA  
Stars and Stripes

©KATIESMITHPHOTOS/123RF.COM

“**M**om! It’s a hippocampus.” My 11-year-old son is pointing at a faded fresco of a wild creature with a horse head and snake tail. “Just like Rainbow in Percy Jackson.”

I stare at the wall inside what had been a home in ancient Pompeii. “Oh, yes!” I’ve finally made the connection. He is obsessed with author Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series, and if I recall correctly, they ride these creatures in the sea at some point.



It isn’t the first time he taps into his knowledge of ancient gods. We spot other frescoes in the many excavated houses; we examine floor mosaics and marvel at the remains of a temple.

Slim Jim, my dog, is getting restless in his carrier on my back. We head outside of the villa where he can walk around on his leash. On the main street, the decumanus maximus, we spot a fountain and refill our water bottles. It is a hot summer day, so we stay hydrated and take lots of snack breaks in the shade.

**A Self-Guided Tour**

Visiting Pompeii is a long hoped-for trip with my son. Riordan’s books opened him up to a world of Greek and Roman mythology and made reading less of a struggle. Being able to walk in the footsteps of that ancient period becomes a confirmation of his personal accomplishment.

We are staying at the Hotel Villa dei Misteri, which has a great pool to cool off in after a day of travel and dusty exploration of ruins. It is within walking distance to the archaeological park’s western entry gate at the ancient Porta Marina, meaning we can conveniently enter without needing to worry about transportation. I booked our dated “Ingresso Mattina Plus” tickets ahead of time via a link to TicketOne from the official website at pompeisites.org so we don’t have to wait in line or

to keep up with a tour. People under 18 are free but still need a ticket.

Exploring the site on our own feels exciting. We use the basic park map and spot enough signs to find our way around and understand whether we are in a home, a business or a religious center. However, the details are lacking. For us, the discovery is part of the adventure. My son watched numerous documentaries and read significantly about Pompeii before coming, so he loves playing archaeologist and finding curious little nooks.

He grabs my phone and starts narrating a tour video. “So, this is the bakery. Here is the grindstone...” Slim Jim and I follow along immersing ourselves into the daily lives of the ancient Romans. Having the dog along gives us an extra-casual feeling and we don’t worry about seeing it all. We admire the rutted streets, take pictures on the crosswalks and pretend to sell food at the vendor stalls.

**Visiting inside the museum**

After exploring the length of the decumanus maximus, we find ourselves at the other end of the park and pop into the amphitheater to briefly play gladiator. It’s hot so we stop in the shade of a big pine tree for a break before heading inside the cooler Palæstra Grande where artifacts like gold jewelry, tiny glass jars and charred loaves of bread pique our interest.

Slim Jim must ride in dog his carrier when inside the museum. Only pups 10kg or smaller may enter the Pompeii archaeological park. They must be kept on a leash the entire time and carried when taken inside a building. There are stray dogs and cats that call the park home; we just steered clear of their space.

After the museum, we walk to the northern part of the park where the larger villas have been uncovered. Inside, colorful frescos and floor mosaics speak to the opulence of the time. In the Macellum, we happen upon one of Pompeii’s famous body casts; it feels a little disturbing, so we do not pursue finding more.



PHOTOS BY KAT NICKOLA/STARS AND STRIPES

**An All-Day Adventure**

Pompeii is a massive archaeological park, and we stay all day. There are plenty of places to refill a water bottle, but food is scarce outside of the extremely crowded food court. I am glad to have packed a picnic lunch and snacks.

In the House of the Faun, we admire the famous floor mosaic of Alexander the Great and the small statue in the garden that the home is named for. Late in the day, we continue to walk northward out of the city through the Porta Ercolano. This shady road leads past intricate tombs to two massive villas included in our ‘plus’ ticket.

We finish the day at the Villa dei

Misteri, where some of the most impressive painted rooms really give us insight into what these folks enjoyed.

“Mom, look, there’s a satyr like Grover,” my son says. The interpretation board in Room 5 tells us that the large paintings are from around 70 B.C. only about 150 years prior to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. When the volcano erupted in 79 B.C., Pompeii and the nearby village of Herculaneum were buried under pyroclastic flows and ashfall that both destroyed everything and preserved a glimpse into life in a Roman town.

Ironically, there is no better way to uncover a glimpse into the lives of ancient Pompeians than to walk their abandoned streets and roam their undisturbed ruins.



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## MILITARY

# Navy enlists 3K sailors more than last year

Service focused on on-the-ground recruiters more

BY ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy this year emphasized on-the-ground recruiters as it pushed changes that led to an increase of more than 3,000 sailors compared with last year and a second year in a row of meeting the goal for new recruits, the service's top recruiting officer said.

"We've listened to those line recruiters and done the things that they indicated were the most important to them, and that has changed the game on the inspiration, the drive and the willingness to go the extra mile to get the job done," Rear Adm. James Waters, commander of Navy Recruiting Command, said discussing the success of fiscal year 2025, which ended Sept. 30.

The Navy in June said it had met its 2025 recruiting goal three months early, with 40,600 future sailors enlisted. By the close of the fiscal year, it had brought that final number to 44,096 — a figure the Navy hasn't seen since the early 2000s, Waters said.

The Navy missed its recruiting goal in 2023, as did the Army and Air Force, and took steps to reimagine how it brings in new sailors.

Changes included modernizing marketing campaigns, streamlining administrative processes, tripling its medical waiver review staff, expanding age eligibility and opening a preparatory course to improve test scores for.

Waters did not explain if one change was more fruitful than another but noted that removing processing barriers allowed recruiters to spend



THADDEUS BERRY/U.S. Navy

**Rear Adm. James Waters, Commander, Navy Recruiting Command, rings a bell on Oct. 1, celebrating Recruiting Nation's achievement of recruiting 44,096 future Sailors in Fiscal Year 2025.**

more time out meeting people. The Military Entrance Processing Station timeline dropped from more than 30 days to fewer than three days, an area in which recruiters specifically called for improvement, he said.

"The competitiveness of the

economy will always play a factor, and it's really about how easy or hard it is to connect a recruiter with a young person," Waters said. "That dramatic change is by recognizing and adapting to the environment that exists."

The prep course, which helps

potential recruits meet standards to attend boot camp, helped 66% of the 1,511 people who attended meet the test scores required to enlist.

The Navy already has reached 25% of its 2026 goal in the delayed entry pool, which is on par with the start of

2025, Navy Recruiting Command said. Waters did not mention if the service has reached a point where it could revisit some of the loosened standards for enlistment, such as a decision in 2022 to raise the maximum age of enlistment to 41 years old.

## Senate confirms special operations veteran as Navy undersecretary

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed Hung Cao, a special operations veteran and former Republican congressional candidate, to serve as undersecretary of the Navy.

Cao was confirmed as the service's second-ranking civilian leader in a 52-45 vote on Oct. 1, reflecting the reservations many Democrats had about his nomination. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska also voted against Cao's confirmation.

As a Senate candidate in Virginia last year, Cao extensively criticized the Defense Department's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and attacked a now-defunct Navy recruiting program that featured a drag-performing officer.

"When you're using a drag queen to recruit for the Navy, that's not the people we want," Cao said. "What we need is alpha males and alpha females who are going to rip out their own guts, eat them and ask for seconds. Those are young men and women that are going to win wars."

He has also criticized the Pentagon's former coronavirus vaccination mandate and advocated for strengthening the U.S.-Mexico border, saying a migrant flow of "13,000 convicted murders and 16,000 convicted rapists" was a threat to democracy.

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed concerns in June about Cao's record



FRED GRAY/U.S. Navy

**Cmdr. Hung Cao, commanding officer of the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center, explains the importance of compression chambers to Rep. Gwen Graham, D-Fla., in November 2015.**

of controversial statements, including Cao's "disparaging certain Navy personnel, sharply criticizing U.S. allies and advocating for the release of convicted Jan. 6 individuals."

Republicans said Cao was highly qualified to serve as Navy undersecretary,

citing his distinguished service as a special operations officer for explosive ordnance and disposal and diving.

"Capt. Cao has a drive for public service that comes from his experience of living the American dream," said Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla.

Cao immigrated to the U.S. as a Vietnamese refugee in 1975 and spent part of his childhood in West Africa. He told senators during his confirmation hearing in June that his interactions with Marines during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 inspired him to join

the military.

"The Marines brought us into the embassy and stood watch over us in case they had to do a new evacuation and the look in their eyes that night that said, 'Nothing's going to hurt you, not tonight, not on my watch' — I wanted to be like those heroes," he said.

Cao graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served in the Navy for 25 years, deploying with special operations forces to defuse bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia and working on the Navy budget process. He retired at the rank of captain.

In 2022, Cao ran unsuccessfully for Virginia's 10th Congressional District and in 2024 lost the Senate election to Tim Kaine, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Seapower subcommittee. As Navy undersecretary, Cao is expected to play a key role in the daily management of the Navy and Marine Corps and help the Navy address its persistent problems with building and repairing an aging ship fleet.

He told senators he will focus on reversing years of neglect and mismanagement in the production and maintenance of vessels as well as restoring what he called "the warrior spirit that my generation relied on as the core of our ethos."

"I will deliver to the combatant commanders the most lethal Navy and Marine Corps the world has ever seen," he said.

MILITARY

# Vicenza theater gets new entertainment director

By ANN PINSON  
Stars and Stripes

What started as a role in a school production of “The Hunchback of Notre Dame” has grown into a globetrotting career for Naythen B. Rinehart.

Rinehart recently moved from Kaiserslautern, Germany, to Italy to take over as the new entertainment director for the Soldiers’ Theatre in Vicenza, succeeding longtime director Jerry Brees, who retired earlier this year.

Previously Rinehart worked at KMC Onstage in Kaiserslautern, where he oversaw operations at U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz’s community theater, KMC Onstage. In addition to management and administrative activities, he directed many shows — including “9 to 5: The Musical,” “Newsies Jr.” and “The SpongeBob Musical” — built sets, taught workshops and classes.

“Theater is an art form that allows for self-expression, learning life skills and building a community,” Rinehart said. “I did some theater when I was younger, but it wasn’t until I asked my high school theater teacher if she needed some more boys in the ensemble for ‘The Hunchback of Notre Dame’ that I was hooked, and eventually went to college to earn my BFA in musical theater performance.”

Before moving to Germany in 2019, Rinehart was an actor, director, stage manager and technician for various performing arts companies in North Carolina. He recently earned a master of science for performing arts leadership and management through Shenandoah University while simultaneously helping run operations at KMC Onstage on Kleber Kaserne.

Rinehart took over at Soldiers’ Theatre from Brees, who had been entertainment director at the theater since 2008 and was involved in more than 100 theater productions there.

“Bringing quality music and theater to military communities has been my passion for over 40 years,” Brees said in a March press release. “Soldiers’ Theatre has brought such joy and fulfillment to my life.”

Soldier’s Theatre is an Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation facility on Caserma Ederle that provides performing arts opportunities for the community. It is staffed by civilians with performances by local volunteers.

Marissa Blake, a volunteer and actor-choreographer for Soldiers’ Theatre since 2018, said she enjoyed working with Brees.



ZADE VADNAIS/Stars and Stripes

Naythen B. Rinehart, shown here at KMC Onstage in Kaiserslautern, Germany, in August, has moved to Vicenza, Italy, to work at Soldiers’ Theatre.

“I deeply appreciated his mentorship, leadership and the trust he had for me as a choreographer and the confidence he instilled in me as an actor,” she said. “He made a lasting impact for me and for many others at Soldiers’ Theatre.”

Rinehart said he has big shoes to fill and that the Vicenza community has been very welcoming after his September arrival.

“Luckily, I have an amazing colleague, Barry

Robinson, who has been working at Soldiers’ Theatre since 1996 (best known for his sound design skills and founder of the Music Cafes) and knows all the ins-and-out of the facility and the USAG Italy community,” Rinehart said. “This has created such an inspiring environment and I cannot wait to implement new programming for productions and theater arts education.”

### Upcoming productions

- Vicenza’s Got Talent!: Oct. 17-19
- “Almost, Maine” (rights pending): Dec. 5-7 and 12-14
- “9 to 5: The Musical”: March 13-15 and 20-22
- “Footloose: Youth Edition”: May 8-10 and 15-17

# Unique Star Wars card surfaces at Army post exchange

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
Stars and Stripes

Maj. Korey Watkins didn’t expect a trip to the post exchange for a meal to end with one of the rarest treasures in the world of Stars Wars trading cards. Watkins, a U.S. Army Reserve behavioral health officer stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, was on his drill weekend at Fort Sill, Okla., this month when he stopped by the GameStop inside the exchange.

On a shelf, pushed into a corner, he noticed the store’s last box of Star Wars cards.

“Down in the corner was a dented blaster of 2025 Topps Chrome Star Wars,” he wrote in a Facebook post to the Star Wars Card Collectors group. “Someone clearly decided to kick it into the corner instead of picking it up.”

He bought the box and set it aside until after his meal. When he finally opened the pack, the entire exchange heard his reaction: Inside was a one-of-one Luke Skywalker card autographed by Mark Hamill, who played the char-

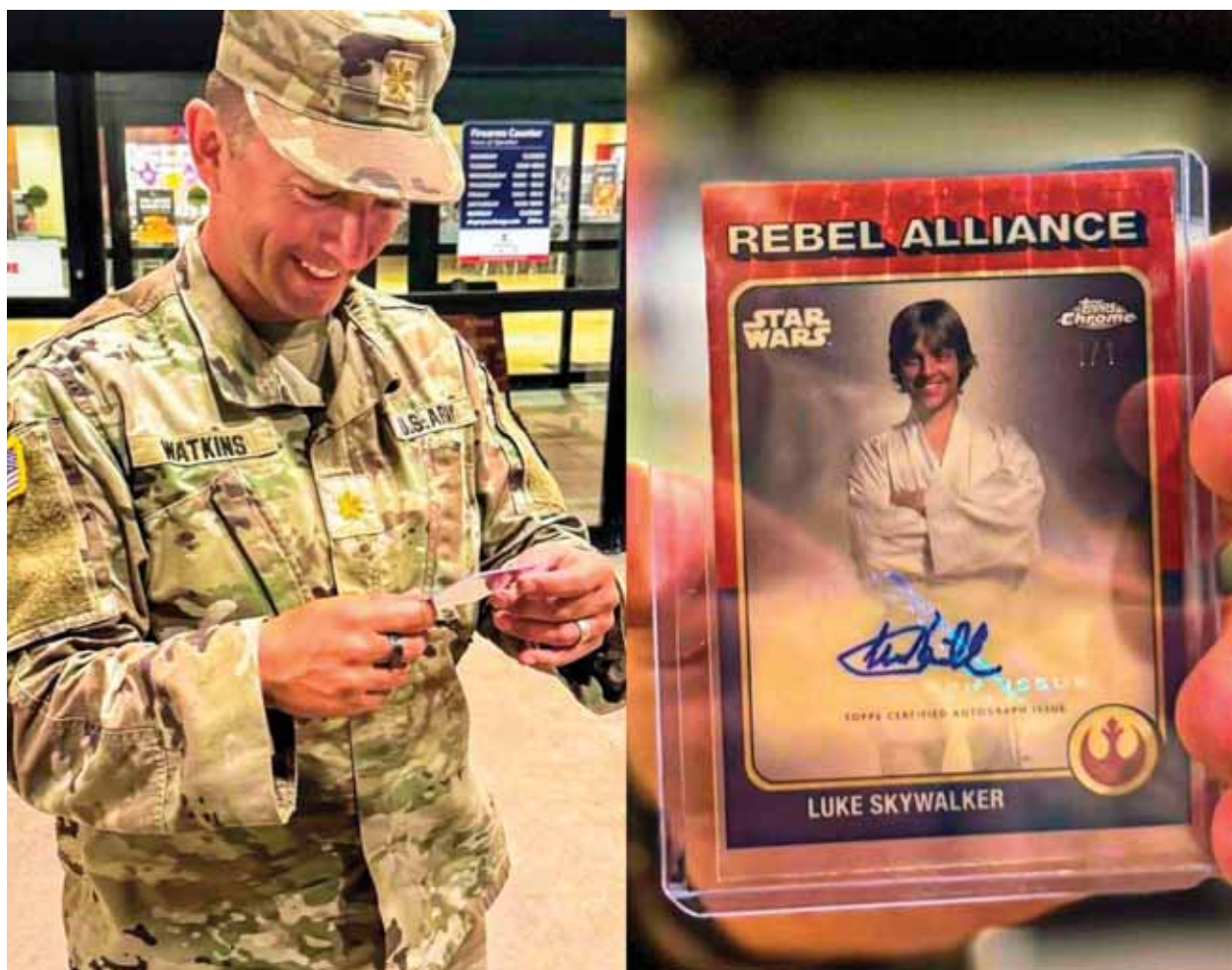
acter in seven “Star Wars” films.

Such cards are highly coveted by collectors and can sell for hundreds or even thousands of dollars. A 1977 Topps Luke Skywalker trading card held the previous record for the highest sale price of any Star Wars card after it sold for \$78,000. That record was broken Aug. 5 by a one-of-one 2021 Star Wars Galaxy Superfractor card that sold for \$100,000, according to a Topps Instagram post made that day.

Topps confirmed the rarity of Watkins’ card on its social media accounts, amplifying his story to a broader audience of fans.

The discovery carries an added resonance. Hamill is the son of a Navy Exchange officer and graduated in 1969 from Nile C. Kinnick High School, which moved in 1971 from Yokohama to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

As a teenager, he performed in school plays at Kinnick, years before returning to visit as a Hollywood star during the Japanese release of the first “Star Wars” film.



Topps

Maj. Korey Watkins, a U.S. Army Reserve behavioral health officer, recently scored a one-of-a-kind Star Wars trading card at the post exchange on Fort Sill, Okla.

## LEISURE

# Naples cafe offers variety and bagels

Run by husband and wife, eatery has something for everyone

By Alison Bath  
Stars and Stripes

When Antonello Femiano and Valentina Pizzano would eat out, it was hard to find the fresh, light fare the couple craved among the standard Naples offerings of hearty but heavy pizza, pasta and panini.

"It was hard to find a good salad," Femiano said.

That desire inspired Hoop Bagel & Salad, a modern but comfortable cafe featuring fresh juices, salads, bagel sandwiches and other food typically not found in nearby trattorias.

Located in the city's Vomero neighborhood, the eatery features a casual, cozy dining area decorated in a bohemian, industrial motif with wood, galvanized metal and laminate-topped tables. The restaurant also has a location in the city's Centro Storico, or historic district.

The Vomero restaurant was bustling during lunch with full tables and the kitchen churning out an array of salads, sandwiches and soups to please meat eaters and vegetarians/vegans alike.

During our visit, my dining companion and I started our meal with Hoop's homemade falafel, chickpea balls served with yogurt mayonnaise for dipping.

Made with Femiano's own recipe, the falafel arrived warm with a deep-brown, crispy crust. The tender interior revealed visible flecks of herbs and a tasty but not overpowering flavor.

The tangy yogurt mayonnaise dip offered a nice accompaniment, but I preferred to enjoy the flavor of the falafel on its own.

We easily polished off the six pieces just moments before our salad and bagel sandwich were ready for pick-up at the cafe counter.

As a vegetarian, I was intrigued by Hoop's large selection of no-meat sandwiches served on plain, sesame, multigrain or poppyseed bagels.

Offerings range from a vegan burger served with hummus, lettuce, tomato and vegan mayo to the restaurant's namesake, Hoop, which features hummus, grilled pumpkin, mushrooms, lettuce and tomato.

There also are offerings for meat eaters, including a smash burger and other sandwiches with tuna, salmon, prosciutto, cream cheese and assorted toppings.

I settled for the Vurger, a plant-based burger with caramelized onion, grilled pumpkin, tomatoes, lamb's lettuce and vegan mayo.

The burger arrived on my choice of a toasted sesame bagel wrapped in paper for mess-free, easy eating. The patty was nicely cooked and well accented with the flavorful toppings.

It's hard to find bagels in Naples, let alone good ones, but Hoop's, with their crispy exteriors and tender but chewy interiors, are a standout.

The bagels aren't made by Hoop but purchased from a vendor that Femiano wouldn't reveal, saying it was a secret. They're available to take home starting at 2 euros each.

My mealtime companion settled on the ratatouille salad featuring couscous, diced vegetables, tomatoes, cheese, almonds and basil. Other salads include grains, such as rice and farro, accompanied by tuna, turkey, cheese and grilled or fresh vegetables and salad greens.

The ratatouille arrived at room temperature with diced zucchini, tomatoes, chewy pasta grains and a flavorful basil dressing. Overall, the dish was satisfactory, but I would like to try other offerings on my next visit.

We finished our meal with one of Hoop's desserts made by Pizzano, settling on her version of the famed Sacher torte. The dessert featured a thin chocolate sponge, topped first with a layer



Photos by Alison Bath/Stars and Stripes

The interior of Hoop Bagel & Salad is decorated in a bohemian, industrial vibe with wood, galvanized steel and laminate-topped tables.



The Vurger bagel sandwich features a plant-based burger patty and vegan mayo. It is among a variety of vegetarian, vegan and meat sandwich offerings at the cafe.



Patrons can start their meal with a variety of appetizers, including falafel. Made from scratch, the falafel is served with a tangy yogurt mayonnaise dip.



Those with a sweet tooth can indulge in desserts made by one of the owners. The eatery offered its version of the Sacher torte, a thin chocolate sponge topped with layers of apricot jam and creamy dark chocolate mousse.

of apricot jam and then a thick layer of rich, dark chocolate mousse.

It was delicious, hitting all the right notes of a chocolatey, decadent dessert.

In all, Hoop Bagel & Salad answers the call for those seeking fresh, innovative food in a comfy atmosphere.

## Hoop Bagel & Salad

**Address:** Via Solimena 102/104, Naples (Vomero); Via Ferdinando del Carretto 10/12, Naples (Centro Storico)

**Hours:** 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. and 7-11 p.m., Monday-Saturday; 7-11 p.m., Sunday

**Prices:** 4-6 euros, appetizers; 2-12 euros, bagels and bagel sandwiches; 7.50-9 euros, salads; 5-7 euros, desserts; 2.50-5.50 euros, juices, soda, tea and coffee; 4.50-7 euros, beer; and 5-8.50 euros, wine by the glass and cocktails.

**Information:** [www.hoopbagelesalad.it](http://www.hoopbagelesalad.it); @hoopbagelesalad on Instagram



Husband-and-wife team Antonello Femiano and Valentina Pizzano opened Hoop Bagel & Salad nine years ago as an alternative to traditional Italian cuisine.

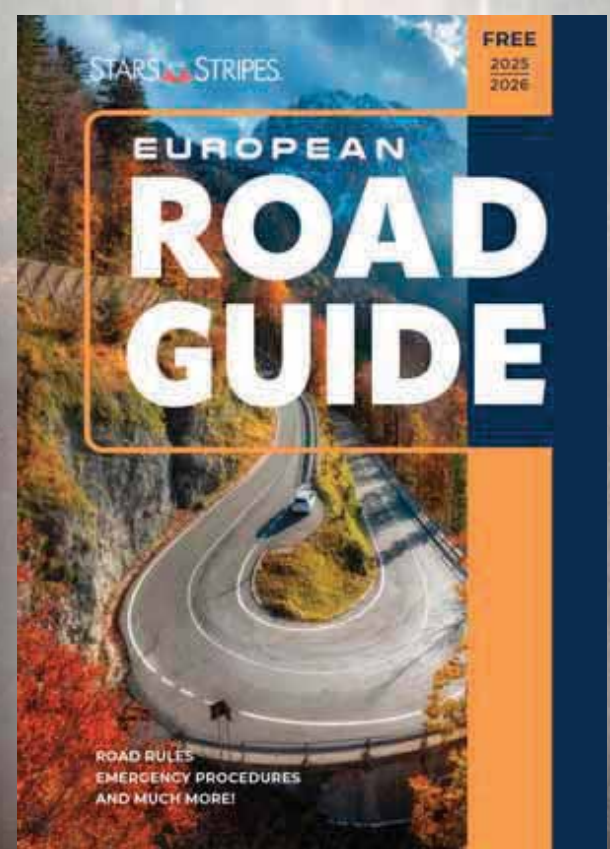


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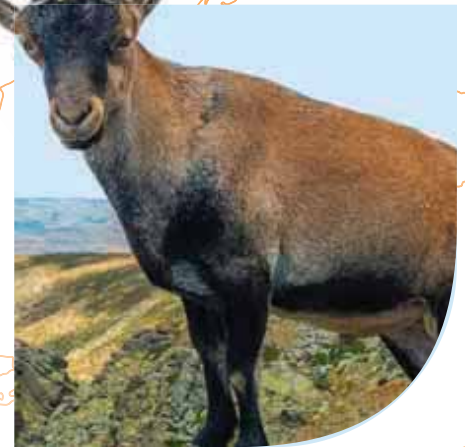


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