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ITALY EDITION

AUGUST 20, 2026

Canine care and more

Veterinary Readiness Activity known for helping ailing animals but unit also guards food safety **Page 3**

Instructors assigned to Veterinary Readiness Activity, Rheinland-Pfalz, use a Trauma F/X K9 Diesel Advanced Canine Medical Trainer to practice canine casualty care with soldiers assigned to 131st Military Police Combined Working Dog Detachment at Grafenwoehr, Germany, last year.

KEVIN STERLING PAYNE/U.S. Army

Military families seek new homes after Naples quake **Page 5**



Creator of fake Roman ruins near Vicenza sentenced **Page 6**



Tunnel trail's use as dumping ground spurs cleanup **Page 14**

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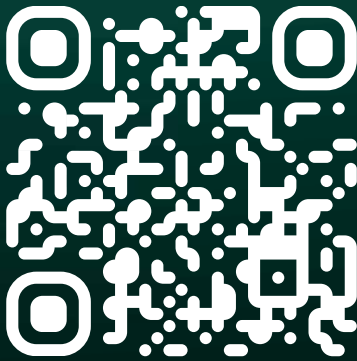
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COVER STORY

Army unit watches over animals, people

Veterinary Readiness Activity sends teams across Europe to care for working dogs, provide training, inspect food

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Hours after arriving in Italy to take command of an Army veterinary mission here, Lt. Col. Mariama Massaquoi-Gartmann wasn't thinking about inprocessing or ceremonies. She was trying to save her own family dog.

Jasmine, a nearly 11-year-old poodle-Doberman mix described as "still a pup at heart," was not in good shape when the family got off the plane. She was drooling, vomiting and unable to keep anything down.

"We had no idea what to do," said Massaquoi-Gartmann, a doctor specializing in family medicine.

But the soldiers at Veterinary Readiness Activity, Italy did. They quickly diagnosed the dog's condition as a twisted stomach and rushed her to treatment at an outside clinic, kicking off efforts to save the good girl the family called Jazzy.

She underwent surgery and returned home after about a week of recuperating. During that process, though, she had a heart attack that required her to go on medication. In late July, the heart trouble struck again, only this time it proved fatal.

Massaquoi-Gartmann highlighted the rapid intervention during a July 17 ceremony in which outgoing commander Col. Jeremy Trescott handed her the colors of the group of colleagues who had given her family more time with Jazzy.

The unit, which has no true equal in the other services, distributes its soldiers in small teams to care for working dogs or perform food quality inspections for Army, Navy and Air Force bases in Italy, Turkey, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The soldiers also deploy to provide veterinary, food safety and public health support in Europe and elsewhere. For example, teams travel to Africa to inspect the facilities producing or warehousing food for U.S. troops taking part in exercises on the continent.

Their efforts in Jazzy's case and thousands of others demonstrated why caring for family pets is an important part of readiness, officials say.

"From Day One, literally stepping out of the airplane, I knew I'm working with an exceptional unit," Massaquoi-Gartmann said at the event.

Since 1980, the Army has been responsible for the veterinary mission across all the services, though the Army Veterinary Corps was founded in 1916 and traces its history to the Revolutionary War era, when soldiers relied on horses and pack animals.

Though members of the unit headquartered in Italy inspect supplier facilities and virtually all food products that pass through commissaries, exchanges and food courts in their coverage area, some say it's still a little-known part of their mission.

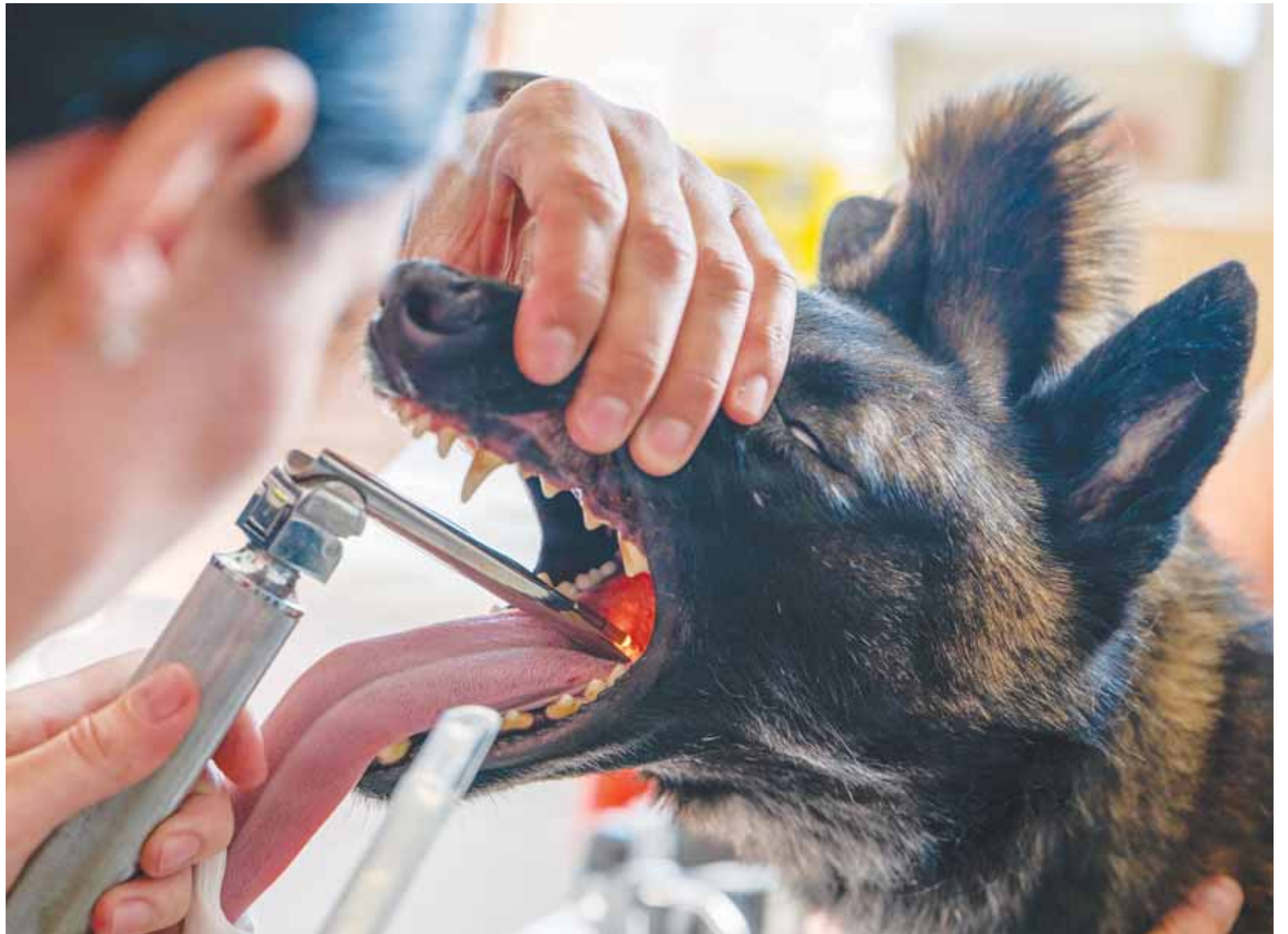
But that part of their job is vital to ensuring quality of life and keeping the U.S. military in the region ready to fight, they say.

"The Army marches on its stomach, but it can't march on the toilet," Chief Warrant Officer 3 William Uhila said, riffing on a proverb often credited to Napoleon Bonaparte.

A more widely known part of their mission, the one Massaquoi-Gartmann experienced firsthand, involves caring for the pets that military families often lean on for comfort during times of transition.

In fact, one of the unit's key accomplishments that Trescott shepherded was its response to the evacuation of family pets from the Middle East after the outbreak of the U.S. war with Iran, known as Operation Epic Fury.

"Or as we like to say, Operation Epic Fury," Col. Anastasia McKay, head of Public Health Command Europe, said at the cere-



KACIE RAMOS/U.S. Air Force

U.S. Army Capt. Javier Pino places an oral catheter during a dental procedure on Eva, a military working dog, at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, on July 14. Veterinary Readiness Activity, Italy, is a small, widely dispersed Army command that provides veterinary care at Navy, Air Force and Army bases from Turkey to the United Kingdom, a mission the Army has been uniquely entrusted with for nearly 50 years.



MICHELLE THUM/Public Health Command Europe

Veterinarians from Veterinary Readiness Activity, Rheinland Pfalz, helped a training exercise focused on helicopter medical evacuation for the 525th Military Police Detachment in Wiesbaden, Germany, in November.

"You feel like you have a purpose because every single day, you're going to work and you know that you are improving somebody's life."

Sgt. Kelsea Trecek

noncommissioned officer at the veterinary treatment center on Caserma Ederle, Italy

mony.

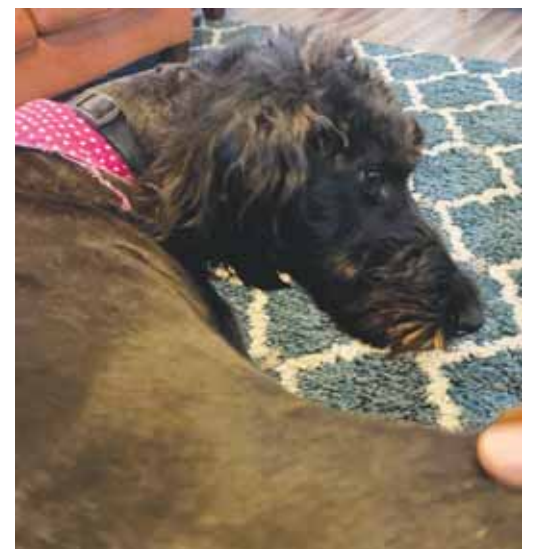
As thousands of military personnel and family members were evacuated from Bahrain in the face of Iranian missile and drone strikes in the early days of the war, the veterinary readiness unit assigned teams to help process evacuees' pets through military bases in Europe.

That effort was felt on the receiving end in Europe, where bases put out calls for donated pet crates as families arrived from Bahrain

with animals in tow.

McKay said the unit also developed updated screening protocols that the Defense Health Agency plans to adopt worldwide.

While the evacuation validated its capabilities, McKay said, outside of that event the unit handled some 22,000 visits or encounters with family pets during Trescott's two-year tenure, which she said also saw dramatic improvements in the soldiers' training numbers.



MARIAMA MASSAQUOI-GARTMANN

Army Lt. Col. Mariama Massaquoi-Gartmann's dog, Jasmine, died in July while recuperating from surgery to repair a twisted stomach. The condition was diagnosed by Massaquoi-Gartmann's new command, the Vicenza, Italy-based Veterinary Readiness Activity, Italy, hours after the family arrived in Italy in June.

Massaquoi-Gartmann is looking to keep that momentum going by aiming to collaborate with the other services' medical personnel for training and skills development.

Because the unit is small and its members are spread out — sometimes they're about the only Army personnel on a base — it can be challenging to find opportunities to grow their soldiering or leadership skills. But the job has strong rewards.

"You feel like you have a purpose because every single day, you're going to work and you know that you are improving somebody's life," said Sgt. Kelsea Trecek.

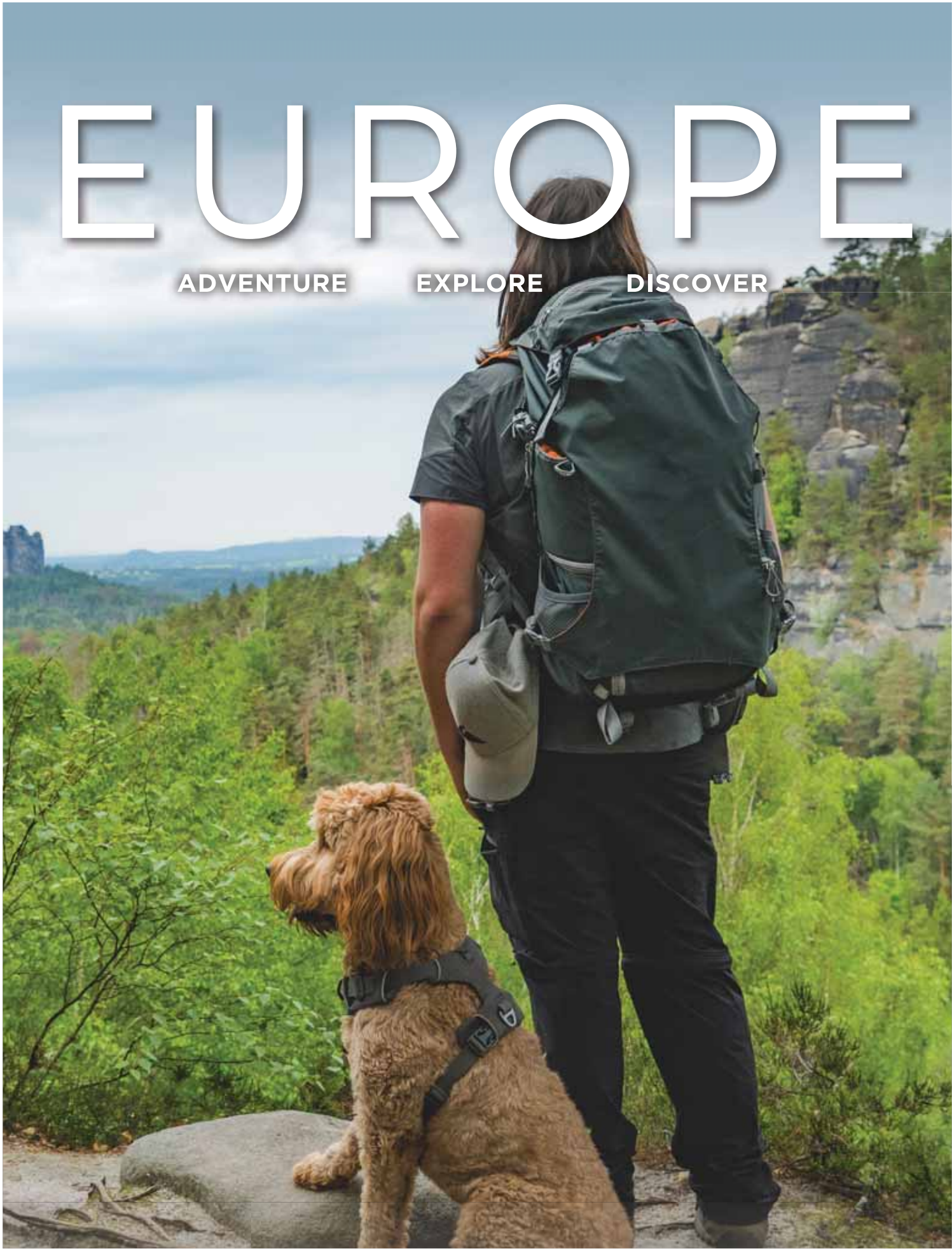
As a noncommissioned officer at the veterinary treatment center on Caserma Ederle, she goes into work knowing she'll help "make an animal breathe easier, make it easier on the pet parents," she said.

"That feels like a successful day to me," she added.

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MILITARY

Military families in Naples look for new homes

Service members, DOD civilians remain displaced by quake

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Some U.S. military personnel and Defense Department civilians uprooted by a damaging earthquake won't be returning to their homes anytime soon.

Naval Support Activity Naples said in a statement that as of Aug. 12, 19 service members and DOD civilians remain displaced by the magnitude 4.7 quake that struck the Naples region in the evening hours of July 31.

In all, 27 people affiliated with the base were affected by the earthquake, but eight were able to remain in their homes, according to the base.

"The safety and well-being of our service members, civilian employees and families remain our highest priority as NSA Naples continues to provide support," the base said.

That effort includes helping affected people with housing services, legal assistance and temporary lodging, among other resources, according to the statement.

It wasn't clear Aug. 12 how many service members and civilians displaced by the earthquake already had received structural assessments indicating they may need to permanently relocate.

But getting that documentation has proved challenging for at least one quake-affected military family whose apartment building in the Naples commune of Pozzuoli ultimately was deemed uninhabitable.

Hundreds of U.S. military personnel live in Pozzuoli, which is in the volcanically active Campi Flegrei area, the quake's epicenter.

"That piece of paper is what helps us do anything," said Deana Bieker, a military spouse whose husband is an active-duty sailor.

An official declaration of uninhabitability is required to break the lease on their apartment so they can find another home, receive emergency housing allowance and file insurance claims, she said.

The couple's landlord, who is on vacation, was unresponsive to requests to help in facilitating the inspection or addressing other related needs, Bieker said. They finally got the declaration on their own from the fire department, she added.

Bieker and her husband haven't been back to their penthouse apartment since the day after the earthquake when, during a brief visit, they quickly gathered passports and other important documents, clothing and necessities, she said.

Video of their home taken during that visit shows large cracks in walls; furniture, lamps and artwork in disarray; and floors covered with broken dishes, glasses, wine bottles and other fragile items.

The pair were not home during the quake but returned soon after to find their neigh-



PHOTOS BY ALESSANDRO GAROFALO, LaPresse/AP

A view of the damage caused by a magnitude 4.7 earthquake that struck Pozzuoli, near Naples, Italy, on July 31. Nineteen service members and DOD civilians assigned to Naval Support Activity Naples remain displaced by the quake.



A view of the damage caused by the earthquake that struck Pozzuoli.

bors outside and pieces of stucco, bricks and other debris strewn around the apartment building. They stayed at a hotel that night, she said.

Since then, the couple have learned that the building is in danger of collapsing. It's uncertain if they will be able to retrieve furniture and other items left behind, Bieker said.

They are among the more than 2,300 Pozzuoli residents displaced by the earthquake, which struck at 7:46 p.m.

It was the largest seismic event to shake the region in about four decades and sent cliffside rocks and debris tumbling while building facades crumbled.

"You're trying not to get depressed. You're

trying to stay upbeat," Bieker said. "It has been frustrating."

It's unknown where the homes of other affected service members and civilians are located. Some military community members impacted by the earthquake have posted to private Facebook pages that they are looking for new homes.

The initial quake was followed by a series of aftershocks, including a magnitude 3.8 tremor a little more than two hours later.

The tremors have continued, including one of magnitude 3 on Aug. 10, the Italian newspaper *Il Mattino* reported.

In 2024, the Navy began requiring some service members and DOD civilians to sign a letter saying they understand the danger of living in areas of Naples deemed high-risk during a volcanic eruption or earthquake.

Those areas include Pozzuoli and the districts of Posillipo, Chiaia and Vomero, which are popular with the military community for their sea views and proximity to restaurants, bars and shopping.

The document offers personnel the opportunity to become better-informed and more prepared before signing a lease, the base said earlier this month.

"Eligibility for assistance is determined in accordance with defined procedures, not by signing the acknowledgment," the base said.

Flight operations at Sigonella continuing despite eruption

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Operations were continuing at a key Navy hub on the island of Sicily as one of Italy's most active volcanoes spewed ash into the air, forcing the closure of at least one nearby civilian airport.

Flight and other operations at Naval Air Station Sigonella continued with minimal disruption following Mount Etna's eruption, which began earlier this month, the base said in a statement Aug. 12.

NAS Sigonella was adhering to all applicable air zone regulations and safety restrictions and coordinating with Italian aviation authorities and other agencies "to ensure daily flight operations are fully aligned with safety parameters," the base said.

Personnel were using sweeper trucks to clear ash deposits from base runways, hangars and flight lines.

Fire and emergency services personnel were on standby and monitoring conditions, while the base's public works department was watching for infrastructure requiring maintenance, according to the statement.

On Aug. 12, officials suspended flights in the city of Catania, the Italian news agency ANSA reported. The airport is about 11 miles northeast of NAS Sigonella.

Around 700 flights at the airport were disrupted Aug. 8-11, including about 400 departing flights that were canceled. Another 52 were canceled Aug. 12, according to ANSA.

On Aug. 11, the base told community members to expect travel delays and warned driv-



SIMONE GENOVESE/AP

Lava flows down Mount Etna near Catania, Italy, early Aug. 11.

ers to reduce their speed on roads that could be slick with ash. It also advised against wip-

ing ash from car windshields or windows with a dry cloth or shirt, saying doing so could scratch the glass. Instead, windshields and wipers should be rinsed with water, the base said in a Facebook post.

The base also advised against strenuous outdoor activities, such as running, and suggested that people wear a mask or place a wet cloth over their nose and mouth when outdoors, among other health precautions.

Operations at Sigonella include Navy P-8 Poseidon patrol and reconnaissance aircraft, an MQ-4C Triton drone detachment and a Space Force contingent.

The base is the Navy's second-largest security command, behind only Naval Support Activity Bahrain in the Middle East, according to the service.

AROUND ITALY

Creator of Roman amphitheater hoax sentenced

Italian man built ‘ruins,’ billed them as real thing and charged visitors 40 euros to see them

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — An Italian man who built an artificial ancient Roman amphitheater, billed it as the real thing and charged visitors 40 euros to see it is behind bars after losing a prolonged legal battle.

The Berico Maritime Amphitheater covers nearly 54,000 square feet of formerly wooded land in Arcugnano, a hilly community south of Vicenza that is among the popular areas for U.S. military personnel to live with their families.

But the claim of owner Franco Malosso that the structure dates to 393, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great, was more than a little stretch of the truth.

He also said the site had ties to both Julius Caesar and the fictional Shakespeare character Juliet Capulet and held neolithic, Greek and Roman remains.

The country’s top court rejected Malosso’s final appeal and upheld convictions by two lower courts on charges of illegal construction, forgery of artworks and creation of unauthorized artifacts, Italian media reported last month.

The 69-year-old Malosso, who dubbed himself Franco Alessandro Molosso Maltarel von Rosenfranz, is now reportedly serving a prison term of two years and four months in Liguria, near the border with France.

A self-styled philanthropist, entrepreneur, orchestra conductor and historian, Malosso claimed that a 2005 landslide unearthed what he had touted as among the oldest and largest amphitheaters in the world, according to Italian media.

Somehow, he managed to convince local officials to include it in a European Union-funded tourism guide and app for the Vicenza area.

But the “ruins” were in fact built from artificially aged modern materials like fiberglass, concrete and plaster, investigators found after local authorities became suspicious about a decade ago.

The semicircular structure of tiered stone seats was built into an excavated hillside on protected land without the proper planning or permits, authorities said. In addition, it’s technically a theater, whereas an amphitheater is round or oval.

City officials tipped off Vicenza prosecutors to the hoax in 2016, Italian media reports.



CHAD GARLAND/Stars and Stripes

The Berico Maritime Amphitheater, the counterfeit ruins made to resemble a semicircular Roman theater, are shown here on Aug. 12. The faux historic site covers nearly 54,000 square feet of formerly wooded land on a hillside in Arcugnano, a community just south of Vicenza that is among the popular areas for U.S. military personnel to live with their families. The hill on which the tiered steps, columns and statues were built of artificially aged modern materials also overlooks a U.S. military ammunition storage facility tucked into a corner of the valley below.

Part of Malosso’s defense was that the forgery couldn’t have deceived anyone because it was so ham-fisted. Italy’s Supreme Court of Cassation rejected that argument, Vicenza Today reported.

A column in Italy’s *Il Foglio Quotidiano* said that if Malosso had erected the site legally and not tried to con anyone into believing it was ancient, he could have been hailed for his

fake ruins, which the newspaper likened to Las Vegas attractions.

Instead, the ruse made Arcugnano “the laughingstock of Italy,” former Mayor Paolo Pellizair told *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

The phony archaeological site is still standing but has been under seal for years, the paper reported. The top court ruled that it would have to be demolished and restored to

its original state.

The city council will have to evaluate how to deal with it, Mayor Simone Cuomo said, adding that the illegal construction does not create a positive image for the community.

“We’re not happy to accept this legacy from the past,” Cuomo said. “We’ll do everything we can to ensure it doesn’t jeopardize the future.”

WWII hand grenade found near memorial to Rangers founder at Italian lake

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Reminders of World War II are ever-present at a memorial to U.S. soldiers in the resort town on the northern end of Italy’s largest lake, but a recent bomb scare in Nago-Torbole showed another way the war’s impact lingers.

A beachgoer brought ashore a hand grenade from Lake Garda on July 31 and left it there, prompting authorities to cordon off and evacuate the immediate vicinity, according to Italian media reports.

Carabinieri, local police and firefighters from Trento and nearby Riva del Garda responded to the area near the former Colonia Pavese hotel on Torbole’s Piazza Santa Maria al Lago, Italy’s RaiNews reported.

The cordon was set up just steps from a

pair of war memorials that pay tribute to American soldiers killed in the area in 1945, during the final days of the war.

Mayor Gianni Morandi told the *Il Dolomiti* online news site that he believed the unexploded ordnance dated to World War II.

Bomb disposal specialists removed the ordnance and detonated it in a safe area, Italian news service ANSA reported.

For nearly two decades, the area where the bomb was found has served as the finish line for the Darby 40-miler, an annual march in honor of then-Col. William O. Darby, founding commander of the Army Rangers.

Darby was killed in the town along with Sgt. Maj. John “Tim” Evans by a German artillery shell on April 30, 1945. Some two dozen soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division



A.M. LAVEY/U.S. Army

A paratrooper runs along Lake Garda in Torbole, Italy. A swimmer found a World War II-era hand grenade in the lake and brought it ashore in Torbole last month, prompting a bomb scare near the square where the annual race finishes.

also died that day when their amphibious vehicle sank in the lake.

Over the past 17 years, the annual march honoring Darby has drawn Rangers, 10th Mountain Division soldiers, veterans and

others to Torbole each spring.

The town is about 60 miles northwest of Vicenza, where thousands of troops are based at the installations of U.S. Army Garrison Italy.



PASTA SAUCES OF ITALY

By TAMALA MALERK
Stars and Stripes

EVER WONDERED WHERE YOUR FAVORITE PASTA SAUCE ORIGINATED? HERE ARE DESCRIPTIONS OF POPULAR ITALIAN SAUCES AND WHERE THEY CAME FROM.

CARBONARA | ROME

Carbonara consists of three basic ingredients: egg, “guanciale” (a cured pork product) and pecorino cheese. It originated in the Rome region sometime in the 1940s or 1950s, and it is believed that there are no written records of it before World War II.

BOLOGNESE | BOLOGNA

Known as Ragù alla Bolognese in Italian, this sauce typically consists of ground meat, onion, garlic, tomato sauce, carrots, stock and a variety of seasonings. It comes from Bologna. This sauce dates back to the 1700s and can be customized to taste as long as there is a base of tomato sauce and ground meat.

PESTO GENOVESE | GENOA

Another delicious sauce that is made of a few simple ingredients: garlic, pine nuts, basil, olive oil and cheese (typically a pecorino or Parmigiano Reggiano). This is the OG of pesto sauces. The modern version originated in Genoa in the mid-1800s; however, some similar sauces date it back to ancient times.

CACIO E PEPE | ROME

The ingredients of this sauce are entirely listed in the name: “cacio” (cheese from sheep’s milk) and “pepe” (black pepper). Water is also used to help create the saucy consistency. Like carbonara, it also originated in Rome; however, this sauce dates all the way back to ancient Roman times.



AMATRICIANA | AMATRICE

This sauce, which originated in the city of Amatrice sometime in the 1600s, is very similar to carbonara and also consists of three ingredients: pecorino, guanciale and tomato sauce. It became so popular that it was served at the Pope’s court in the 1800s.

PUTTANESCA | NAPLES

Ironically, this sauce is called puttanesca everywhere but its city of origin, Naples, where it is called aulive e chiapparielle. Origin stories vary; however, it seems to date back to the mid-20th century. It consists of cooked tomatoes, capers, oregano, olives and parsley. Some variations of the sauce also add anchovies, but not in Naples.

AGLIO E OLIO | NAPLES

Another sauce where the ingredients are in the name: “Aglìo,” meaning garlic and “olio,” meaning oil. You can vary up your version with seasonings and cheese, but the purest form is just the two ingredients and was known in Naples’ cooking as “cucina povera,” or poor cooking. It can be traced back to Neapolitan sailors of the 1700s.

ALLA NORMA | CATANIA, SICILY

This sauce, made from tomato sauce, eggplant, olive oil, spices, cheese and garlic, has musical origins dating back to 19th-century Sicily. Many believe that this sauce mixed with pasta was created for the opening night of the opera, “Norma.”

GRISCIA | GRISCIANO

Griscia, more commonly spelled “Gricia” in the modern era, comes from the small village of Grisciano (although today, it may be more associated with Rome). This sauce consists of three ingredients: Pecorino Romano, black pepper and guanciale. Today, there is one place to get Griscia in Grisciano: La Vecchia Ruota.

SALSA AL LIMONE | CAMPANIA

This is a tangy sauce that promises a little something different for dinner. Celebrating the coastal location of Campania, this zesty citrus sauce is made from lemon, herbs, garlic and oil. You can swap out the lemon for a blood orange if you really want to change things up.

AL TARTUFO | UMBRIA AND PIEDMONT

This is one of the more decadent sauces of Italy; however, its elegance derives partly from its simplicity. Originating from the areas of Umbria and Piedmont, its ingredients include butter, Parmigiano-Reggiano and freshly shaved truffle.

BESCIAMELLA | TUSCANY

The people of Tuscany created their own version of Bechamel sauce known as Besciamella. This is a rich sauce consisting of butter, flour and milk.

AL BURRO E SALVIA | EMILIA-ROMAGNA

This sauce originated in the Emilia-Romagna area of Italy, yet no one can say when butter and

sage were first combined as a sauce because of its simplistic nature. It is commonly used with pasta and gnocchi dishes.

PESTO TRAPANESE | TRAPANI, SICILY

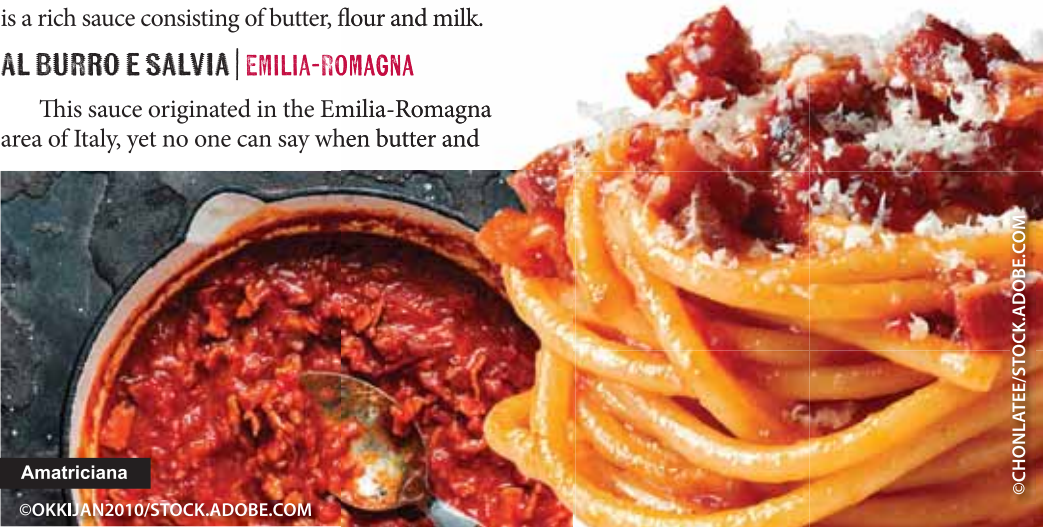
Here is a Sicilian take on pesto: almonds (instead of pine nuts), tomatoes (instead of basil), Pecorino, red garlic and olive oil. This embraces the Genovese origins, whose sailors brought their sauce to Sicily, but adds a coastal cultural flair to the sauce.

ALLO SCOGLIO | SOUTHERN ITALY AND/OR SICILY

Allo Scoglio means from the rocks or reefs and is a perfect name for this seafood sauce that originates in the southern Italy area. Sometimes it is referred to as “frutti de mare,” which means fruits of the sea. Ingredients include squid, mussels, clams, shrimp (prawns), tomato sauce, garlic, olive oil and herbs.

MARINARA | NAPLES

One of the oldest sauces on this list, marinara is named for the mariners (marinaio in Italian) who first brought tomatoes from the Americas in the 1600s. At its core are tomatoes, olive oil, garlic and herbs.



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BY KATIE WELLS, *Stars and Stripes*

A pistachio cornetto, tender homemade pasta or creamy, crunchy cannoli, these are some of the delicacies anyone with gluten sensitivities or celiac disease dreams of eating when visiting Italy, but many know all too well that heart-sinking feeling of not wanting to risk it. No worries. Rome is a very gluten-free-friendly place and the quality is bellissimo!

When in Rome, I never felt like I was struggling to find options or a place to eat. I often found something tasty even at places that didn't advertise being gluten free (GF). Best of all, Rome takes cross-contamination very seriously and if you are eating GF, many restaurants will have an AiC certified stamp on their menu that stands for "Associazione Italiana Celiachia," or the Italian Celiac Association who has rigorous requirements. Some restaurants will also stick a little flag in the food to signify it is gluten free.

All the pasta, breads and pastries I feasted upon were truly handmade and not pre-packaged; I wasn't missing out on a truly authentic Italian dining experience. Here are some of the highlights of my GF trip to Rome.

Right by the stunning Trevi Fountain is Pizza in Trevi. This AiC-certified restaurant produces gluten-free items in a separate facility to avoid any gluten contamination. The GF pizza is made with organic brown rice flour, organic buckwheat flour, extra virgin olive oil and sourdough



starter. The pasta is completely organic with a simple list of ingredients: organic rice flour, organic buckwheat flour, organic quinoa flour and organic corn flour. I appreciated seeing a list of ingredients on the shop's website.

I heard this pizza place was amazing, but I thought the GF crust might be, well, nothing special. I've learned from experience, especially in the States, that a "fresh" GF crust is often the same frozen brand I would buy from the grocery store. However, at Pizza in Trevi, I was happy to find out that the restaurant really cared about their GF options and, like with the regular pizza they are known for, they use a gluten-free sourdough starter. My sister-in-law and I shared the Capricious Pizza. This was our first meal after landing and the warm crispy crust, prosciutto, mushrooms, melty cheese and olives were a perfect welcome for our first time in Italy.

Another culinary highlight in Rome was dining at Pantha Rei. I joined my husband and his family for our sit-down meal at a well-dressed table on the cobblestones just outside of the restaurant. We listened to the sounds of Rome accompanied by a violinist playing nearby. What I loved about this place is that I felt spoiled for choice. Pantha Rei offers nearly 90% of their menu gluten free. They are also recognized by the AiC and retain the integrity of Roman trattoria cuisine by using homemade, seasonal and fresh ingredients in their dishes.

For an "antipasti," or starter, I tried the



Photo by Katie Wells



Photo by Katie Wells

"suppli," a fried rice ball with tomatoes, ground meat, and gooey cheese. Then, my spouse and I split the "raviolo ripieno di ricatta e spinaci," a delicious GF ravioli with ricotta and spinach. I was also on a mission to try a true Italian meatball while in Italy, but you know... breadcrumbs. At Pantha Rei, however, I ordered "polpette al sugo con pecorino," which is meatballs with tomato sauce and cheese, and it did not disappoint. Sadly, I had no room for dessert, but the classic tiramisu with coffee looked amazing. Many of the dishes offered at this restaurant also have a lactose free and vegan variation.

For breakfast, Riccardo Taliani Banqueting was one of my favorite spots on the trip. The inside was small; however, each visit we managed to find seating on the patio. It opened early and the service was quick, which was beneficial since we booked a lot of morning tours while in Rome. There were a few options for GF pastries like croissants and cannoli; however, my eyes lit up when I saw a cake/muffin hybrid filled with a generous swirl of chocolate cream and topped with crushed pistachio nuts. I can't remember what it was called. If you go, you will know it when you see it. Despite the sugar rush, paired with a double cappuccino, it was perfect and so delectable. If I could have it instead of a birthday cake each year, I would.

Ironically, visiting Rome – a place that is so well known for gluten-based foods – was very accommodating for a GF diner. Don't be afraid to simply ask if there are options wherever you choose to dine; restaurants don't always advertise their gluten-free modifications. I even found a tasty GF lemon cookie at an airport coffee shop on the way home.

Here are a few other gluten-free places worth a try:



©SBPHOTOS/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Napoleoni Gluten Free Roma:

A three-generation family-owned "pasticceria artigianale," which is an artisanal pastry shop that is now 100% gluten free with every Italian cookie, cake, cannoli or tart you can dream of, and they have a savory menu as well. They even have a GF laboratory for production and new creations.



La Soffitta Renovatio:

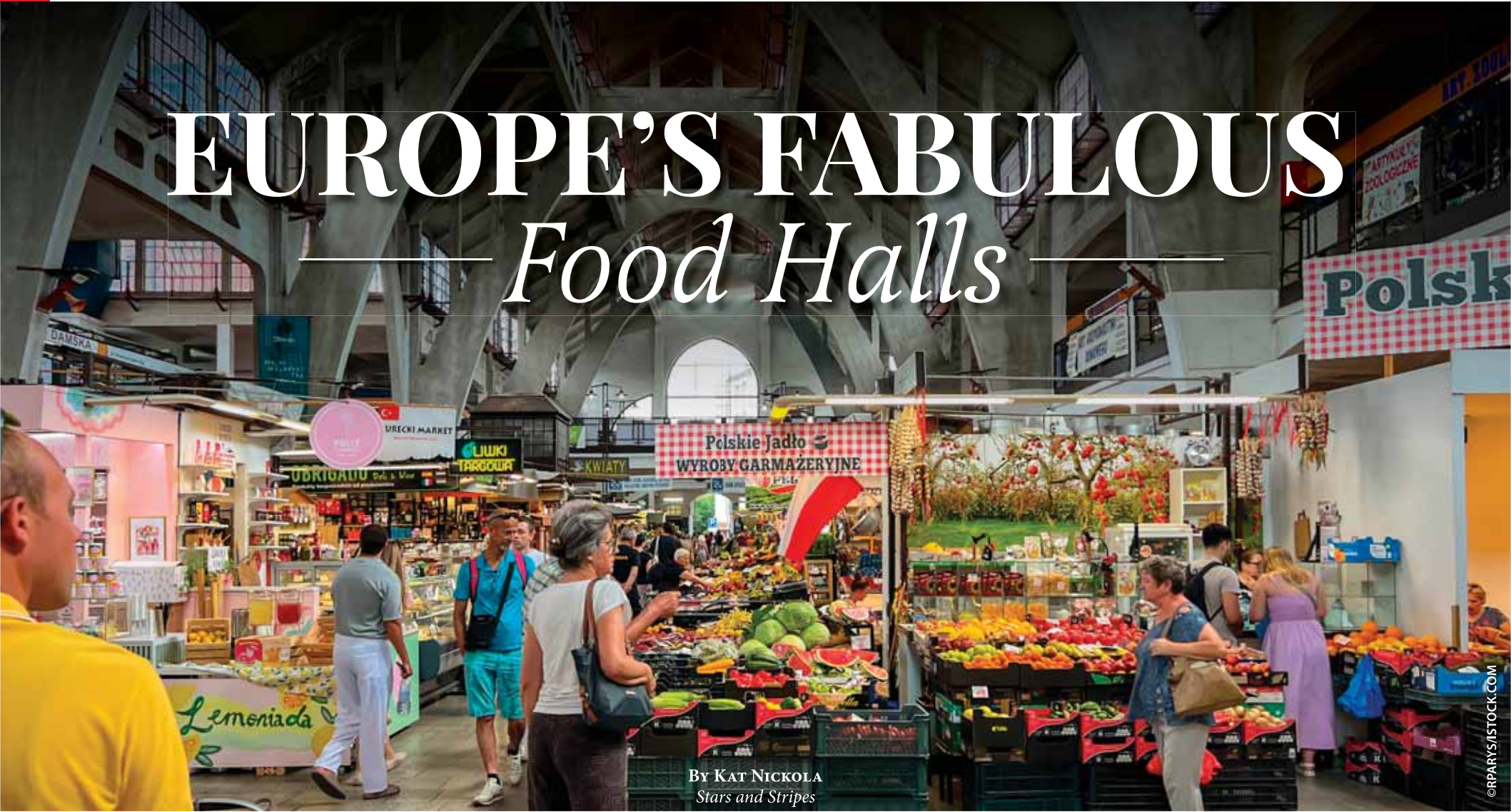
This restaurant just outside Vatican City, offers plenty of gluten-free options like calizoni, pizza and pasta. They are said to be pizza masters, blending over 100 years of Roman and Abruzzo cuisine tradition.



©FAHRWASSER/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Mama Eat:

This restaurant offers gluten-free and lactose-free options of their homestyle cooking. Mamma Marcella and her two brothers founded the restaurant when she was diagnosed with celiac disease. The menu features her recipes based on the fundamentals of Neopolitan staples. Each of their restaurants have two kitchens so that guests can have gluten-free, lactose-free or both options safely for their meal. They are 100% gluten free and offer pizza, pasta and even beer. If you are travelling across Italy, Mama Eat is now located in Naples, Pompeii, Florence and Milan as well.



It's 10 p.m. and my family wanders inside a large steel and glass structure, perusing the options amidst noisy bustling and delicious smells. My son meanders while he munches on a few croquettes. I help my daughter choose an adorable pizzetta with fresh mozzarella and basil while my husband is a few feet away eyeing the pintxos.

We are at the Mercado de San Miguel in Madrid, Spain. It's a great place to taste new fare without committing to an entire meal, and the food choices make it a place everyone can agree on. Visiting indoor markets, and especially European food halls, is a staple for our vacations. Not only is it fun to explore

the variety, but they are great for both foodies, ordinary eaters and families with varied diets.

Covered markets are often located in historic places where their structures replaced older outdoor farmer's markets. Many were built in the 1800s when industrialization brought higher numbers of people into cities and controlling the hygiene of food sold on the streets was a concern. During this heyday of market hall culture, many were built in steel and glass, a new popular architecture of the time. However, popularity waned following World War II and the advent of grocery stores, supermarkets and fast food. Nonetheless, some market halls

remained and saw revitalization beginning in the 1970s with a renewed interest in locally sourced ingredients and cuisine.

Today, when traveling, a visit to these markets can make for a really fun dining experience. An independent vendor runs each stall, so you may get a fresh fruit stand beside a minced pie vendor across from a stall selling garden plants. Every market hall is different, too. Many combine a food hall with a shopping market, some only sell food and have stools and tables for seating, while others have different morning and evening vendors.

Here are some historic food hall markets worth a visit:

El Mercado de San Miguel
Madrid, Spain

This 100-year-old steel and glass structure is open late into the evening with vendors offering high-quality tapas, local meats and cheeses, and a few places to grab a drink.

The Covered Market Oxford
Oxford, England

Built in 1770 and one of the oldest markets in England, this place has it all: products from independent local and international traders, and food from all over the world.

Marché des Enfants Rouges
Paris, France

Built in 1615 and the oldest market on this list, this place has a relaxed vibe and is full of fresh produce and a handful of eclectic prepared food stalls.

Sant'Ambrogio Market
Florence, Italy

With both an indoor and outdoor section, this market has fresh produce, meats, cheeses and flowers in addition to bakeries and a small restaurant.

De Hallen
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

While the market here is new, it occupies a historic tram depot from 1902. Inside, head to De Foodhallen for lots of international food stalls and cafeteria-style seating.

English Market
Cork City, Ireland

Popular with locals and tourists, this historic multi-level market is known for its artisanal food and soaring wooden arches.

Markthalle Neun
Berlin, Germany

Of Berlin's original 14 market halls built in the 1890s, only three remain and IX (nine, or "neun" in German) is the best for a grazing lunch and weekly events.

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MILITARY

Air Force, Navy vets see higher rates of ALS

Study find disease is less frequent among those who served in Army, Marine Corps

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

Male veterans who served in the Air Force, Coast Guard and Navy have higher rates of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis — a fatal nerve disease also known as Lou Gehrig's disease — compared to those who served in the Army and Marine Corps, according to a new study.

The study examined medical records of nearly 10 million veterans enrolled with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Differences among branches were most evident for men younger than 61 and were less evident among men older than 75," according to the study.

ALS is a degenerative disease that causes paralysis and has no known cure. The average lifespan after diagnosis is two to five years.

The findings were published earlier this month in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

ALS diagnoses were highest among male veterans 61 and younger who had served in the Air Force, Coast Guard and Navy, compared to veteran populations in the Army and Marine Corps, according to the study.

The VA recognizes ALS as a medical condition connected to military service and provides a 100% disability rating for veterans who served longer than 90 days and were diagnosed with ALS.

"Military service is a known risk factor for the development of ALS, but little is known about what factors may contribute to that risk," said Marc G. Weisskopf, a researcher with Harvard University and one of the study's authors.

Prior VA-sponsored studies have shown that U.S. veterans are 1.5 times more likely to get ALS compared with people who never served in the military.

"I live with ALS every day, and I've seen too many fellow veterans face this same disease without answers," said Air Force veteran Jessy Ybarra of California, who testified last year in support of legislation to advance ALS research into understanding the higher rate



MARIA UMANZOR GUZMAN/U.S. Air Force

F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft assigned to the 480th Fighter Squadron fly over Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany. A recent study found that male veterans who served in the Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard have higher rates of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis compared to those who served in the Army and Marine Corps.

of ALS in the military population.

Ybarra, a former munitions systems specialist, was diagnosed with ALS at age 53 after seeking medical help for fatigue and weakness in one arm.

The Veterans With ALS Reporting Act has not been heard by the full House Veterans' Affairs Committee where it was referred in April.

Potential risks from military service could include exposures to heavy metals, pesticides and exhaust fumes; the effects of blasts and explosions; and traumatic brain injuries, according to the National Institutes of Health.

For this study, researchers reviewed the medical records of more than 9 million men and 780,000 women who received care at VA hospitals and clinics between 2000 and 2024.

Approximately 14,400 had an ALS diagnosis, according to the study.

Scientists looked at the incidence of ALS by service branch, rank, gender and age group for the study titled "Association of Military Branch and Rank With Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Incidence Among United States Veterans."

But they could not fully analyze the prevalence

of the disease in female veterans, because of the lower number of women with military service and a diagnosis of ALS, a rare disease, according to MedLink Neurology.

The medical records of Army veterans represented the largest group examined in the study.

"It is imperative to identify relevant exposures to reduce harm to service members and, potentially, civilians with similar exposures," according to the study.

When compared to Army veterans, Air Force veterans had a 29% higher rate of ALS, Navy veterans had a 15% higher rate and Coast Guard veterans had a 26% higher rate, according to the study. Marine veterans had a 22% lower rate than Army veterans.

Both male and female officers across all branches showed higher rates of ALS than enlisted personnel.

"Officers tend to experience more psychosocial stress, with pilots experiencing high G-forces, noise and vibration as well as circadian disruption, while enlisted personnel usually experience more extreme physical exercise, heavy weapons use and handling of fuels and solvents," Weisskopf said.



ALS Association

Air Force veteran Jessy Ybarra, left, is shown with House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., last year.

New military spouse commission is accepting comments

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A new presidential commission created to review and improve the experiences of military spouses has opened an online form to submit comments.

The President's Military Spouse Commission was established by executive order Aug. 3 "to strengthen readiness by improving the quality of life for military spouses and families," according to the White House.

The submission form on the White House website allows for comments within about 700 words.

Jennifer Hegseth, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's wife, is chairwoman of the commission, and its members are the spouses of service secretaries, the joint chiefs of staff and each service's senior enlisted leader. The spouse of the homeland security secretary is also included because the Coast Guard falls within that department.

Desiree Thompson Sayle, a former deputy assistant to President Donald Trump, will serve as the commission's executive director.

The membership does not include any spouses of the junior enlisted ranks, which make up about 42% of the active-duty force, according to Defense Department statistics. However, Jennifer Hegseth said she has already begun meeting with spouses as she



THE WHITE HOUSE

President Donald Trump, senior Defense Department leaders and members of the President's Military Spouse Commission pose for a photo at the White House on Aug. 3.

has traveled with her husband over the last year.

"It's the same from Kentucky to Singapore — it's housing, it's health care, it's employment, it's child care, it's education," she said in the Oval Office when Trump signed the order.

Blue Star Families, the Military Family Advisory Network and the National Military

Family Association, all nonprofits that research and advocate for quality-of-life improvements for military families, have thrown support behind the initiative.

Shannon Razsadin, CEO of Military Family Advisory Network, said she looks forward to sharing the organization's research and the perspectives of families across ranks, services, locations and stages of military life.

"Military families understand their lives and their needs better than anyone," she said in a statement. "When we listen to families, believe what they tell us, and pair their experiences with rigorous, evidence-based research, we can build solutions that strengthen families and the force."

Blue Star Families said that strengthening families will strengthen the military.

"Our research continues to highlight why this work matters. According to the 2025 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, while 69% of active-duty family respondents say military service has added value to their lives, only 32% would recommend military service to someone they care about," the organization said in a statement.

Pete Hegseth and Trump acknowledged the challenges facing military families are "generational" issues and, for at least the past 30 years, presidents have made similar efforts to improve the quality of life for spouses.

For more than 15 years, military spouse unemployment has sat around 20%, well above the general U.S. unemployment rate of about 4.2%.

In his first term, Trump aimed to improve federal employment opportunities for military spouses, though in his second term, he slashed federal employment positions and instituted a hiring freeze.

MILITARY

‘America’s finest people are right here’

Ukraine pays tribute to Americans who died fighting against Russia

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

KYIV, Ukraine — The former U.S. soldier believed to be the first fallen American fighter buried in Ukraine rests in the Alley of Heroes at the historic Lukianivske Cemetery, flanked by Ukrainian and American flags.

A placard written in Ukrainian marks his grave: Christopher James Campbell, Dec. 18, 1995-April 6, 2023.

A veteran of the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division who had deployed to the Middle East, Campbell arrived in Ukraine shortly after Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022. He initially worked as a military instructor and eventually enlisted in the International Legion, a formation of foreign volunteers.

“He was kind of an idealist; he just really believed in the mission,” said Alex Peterson, a fellow former American soldier who recruited Campbell to train Ukrainian troops. “He always kept saying, ‘It’s the right thing to do.’”

Campbell repeated those words before deploying to Bakhmut, a city in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region that saw some of the war’s heaviest combat. A few days later, he was killed in an assault by the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group, according to Peterson.

His portrait in the cemetery is draped in a rushnyk, a traditional Ukrainian cloth used to mark life’s most significant moments, from birth to death. This one is for the grave; another was meant for his wedding to his Ukrainian fiancée, Ivanna Sanina-Wininger.

Before he died, Campbell told her that if the worst happened, he wanted to be buried in Ukraine. It was his home now, he said, and he wanted visitors to his grave to see an American flag flying there as a reminder that Americans supported Ukraine.

“This for me was the most American thing,” Sanina-Wininger said. “You fight for freedom and show it even after your death.”

Every Sunday, her family visits Campbell’s gravesite to tidy it, replace or water the flowers and pay their respects. Her father, Oles Sanin, replaces the American flag every six months so it doesn’t fade.

“You have to do something to preserve and build upon what he fought for. That’s important,” said Sanin, a prominent filmmaker in Ukraine. “Graves are necessary for the living as a conscience.”

Numerous efforts are underway in Ukraine to recognize and commemorate foreign combatants, many of whom are Americans.

Kyiv observed U.S. Memorial Day this year with a ceremony at St. Sophia Cathedral, where both countries’ national anthems were sung and the estimated 118 Americans who died fighting for Ukraine were remembered.

The National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War opened an exhibition last year to tell some of their stories.

Many of their personal belongings — medals, flags and photos — were provided by the R.T. Weatherman Foundation. The U.S. non-profit helps wounded foreigners fighting in Ukraine, returns the remains of deceased soldiers to their home countries and tracks those missing in action.

The “For Freedom” exhibition, initiated by the foundation and featuring fighters from several countries, was supposed to be on display for six months but proved so popular that the museum has extended it at least through the end of this year, said museum spokeswoman Lyudmyla Melnyk.

“It’s very important to us,” she said. “We also feel that the public still wants to see it. We see the interest.”

Nearly 120,000 people last year visited the exhibition, located at the entrance to the mu-



PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes
Oles Sanin visits Christopher James Campbell’s grave at Lukianivske Cemetery in Kyiv, where he replaces the U.S. flag every six months. Sanin said it was important to preserve the memory of Campbell, who died fighting with Ukraine’s International Legion in 2023.



Family of Campbell’s former fiancée tend to his grave. Campbell, a veteran of the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, is believed to be the first fallen American fighter buried in Ukraine.



A memorial sign for former U.S. Marine Collin Teem is displayed at a memorial in Kyiv’s Independence Square. Teem was killed in action in Ukraine in May 2024.

seum beneath the towering Mother Ukraine monument, a Soviet-era landmark overlooking Kyiv. More than 60,000 visitors have passed through so far this year, according to Melnyk.

Among them are other foreign service members or their relatives, who often ask that they or their loved ones be included. The display is fixed, but the museum accepts their donated items and records their stories.

“As long as the museum exists, we’ll keep

these items here on our premises,” Melnyk said. “And of course we’ll use them for various exhibitions, not only in Ukraine but also abroad.”

At Ukraine’s new National Military Memorial Cemetery, modeled after Arlington National Cemetery in the U.S., foreign fighters are given the same ceremonial burial with full military honors as Ukrainian service members.

“What matters is not a person’s citizenship but their contribution to the defense of Ukraine,” said Lesya Kachor, a cemetery spokeswoman. “If a person stood up to defend our country and took direct part in combat operations, they may be honored at the National Military Memorial Cemetery alongside other defenders.”

Since opening last August, the cemetery has held burials for fighters who were born in the U.S., Brazil, Poland, Portugal, Hungary, Russia and other countries, she said.

In 2025, the war museum estimated through open sources that around 120,000 foreigners had fought or were fighting in Ukraine’s military. But exact figures are difficult to determine.

David Malet, an associate professor at American University who researches foreign fighters, said Americans appear to have served in greater numbers than any other



Visitors read about former U.S. Special Forces soldier Nicholas Maimer at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War in Kyiv. Maimer died in an artillery barrage in Bakhmut in 2023.

“What matters is not a person’s citizenship but their contribution to the defense of Ukraine.”

Lesya Kachor

National Military Memorial Cemetery

foreign nationality.

Many countries that have fought wars with foreign manpower have tried to downplay it, Malet said. Israel, for example, took decades before fully recognizing and memorializing the contributions of thousands of foreign volunteers who fought in its 1948 war of independence.

But Ukraine has been different. Facing a much larger enemy, it issued a call for foreign volunteers in the opening days of the war and continues to celebrate them, promoting their service on official social media accounts.

“That’s something that I think is fairly unique in the modern era,” Malet said.

He expects that public recognition to carry over into postwar remembrance and memorialization, especially as Ukraine seeks greater integration with the West through membership in the European Union and NATO.

“Ukraine’s leadership is really trying to keep the world invested by showing that there is this ongoing contribution,” he said. “I think they would want to keep the narrative going that Ukraine is so closely tied to the rest of the world that people were willing to sacrifice for it.”

A precursor to that may be the overflowing flag memorial on Maidan, or Independence Square, in central Kyiv, where patches of ground are dedicated to the fallen members of specific military units and nationalities.

A spot teeming with American flags and photos of Americans who died fighting for Ukraine has become a draw for those who fought alongside them in the International Legion.

David, a 60-year-old Russian-born Israeli citizen, walks through it three or four times a week. He treads a well-worn path: first the French, then the 2nd International Legion, then the Belarusians and finally — his favorite, he said — the patch with the Americans.

He lights some candles for them, or if driving by on the way to work, he salutes them. He was joined on a recent evening visit by a former comrade, a Georgian-Ukrainian named Vakhtang. They declined to provide their last names.

Vakhtang, 48, said he had fond memories of serving with Americans and had been surprised to meet so many who cared about a war so far from home.

Both said they were proud and honored to have gone into battle with them.

“I think America’s finest people are right here,” David said. “On this little peak.”

TRAVEL

Deuces wild

Italy WWI tunnel trail’s use as dumping ground has noses wrinkling

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Hikers traversing dozens of tunnels the Italian army cut into Mount Pasubio during World War I have been leaving traces, even dropping whole loads, according to Italian media.

Tourists flocking to the Road of 52 Tunnels, as it’s known in English, are leaving behind feces, tissues and the resulting odors, said Renato Leonardi, the longtime manager of an alpine lodge at the end of the trail, speaking to the online news outlet Il Dolomiti.

A feat of military engineering, the route and its tunnels, known in Italian as Strada delle 52 Gallerie, were carved into the southern slope of the Pasubio massif in the Venetian Prealps in less than a year in 1917. The goal: create a supply line protected from Austro-Hungarian artillery fire.

In recent years, the scenic views of the Little Dolomites and sheer cliffs of the trail have drawn 1,000 to 1,500 visitors a day on peak-season weekends, according to media reports.

One YouTuber complained on a Facebook group about recently encountering the “smell of death” at the entrances to at least three tunnels as he and some friends hiked up to the lodge for dinner.

“As we walked through them, we noticed several mounds of rocks on the sides (not even inside the niches, but directly in the tunnel) covering fresh feces with the classic white handkerchief,” wrote Umberto Uderzo, whose YouTube channel features videos of his hikes and climbs. “In some places, they were almost equidistant, as if the artists had even agreed upon a plan.”

Uderzo suggested that while he understands how the urge can strike at inopportune moments, it would be more appropriate to go elsewhere out of respect for those who built the tunnels.

To help with the problem, Leonardi allows visitors to freely use the restroom at his business, the Rifugio Generale Achille Papa, named after an Italian war hero slain during WWI.

The establishment features a bar and accommodations for trekkers at over 6,300 feet near the Porte del Pasubio mountain pass.

News of the gross grottos comes amid a severe lack of rain in the region, which has reportedly forced some lodges like his to limit services. Leonardi’s lodge announced this month that because of the water shortage it would be closed to new bookings for overnight stays and its restaurant would only serve guests, though the bar on the ground



ROBERT WORMLEY/U.S. Army

Clouds fill the valley below Mount Pasubio along the Strada delle 52 Gallerie, a World War I mule trail near Vicenza, Italy. Reports of human waste, foul odors and litter have prompted the town of Valli del Pasubio to plan a September cleanup of the 4-mile trail.

“As we walked through them, we noticed several mounds of rocks on the sides (not even inside the niches, but directly in the tunnel) covering fresh feces with the classic white handkerchief.”

Umberto Uderzo

floor would remain open.

Located about an hour’s drive northwest of Vicenza, a hub of U.S. Army activity in northern Italy, the route has been the site of at least one “staff ride,” an excursion in which soldiers learn about warfare by visiting the terrain of historic battles.

Nearly two dozen soldiers hiked the path “to learn more about the area declared to be sacred soil because of the cruel battles” that occurred there, according to a caption on photos the Vicenza-based U.S. Army Garrison Italy posted on Flickr in 2018.

They observed trenches, shelters, tunnels and other passages, the caption said, noting that the surface of the plateau atop the Pasubio massif is still pocked with bomb craters about a century after the war’s end.

Soldiers from the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) joined with members of the Vicenza Alpini Group for an annual cleanup of the tunnels and route, another set of garrison photos on Flickr show.

Though Leonardi suggested the No. 2’s left behind are a byproduct of an increase in foot traffic up the mountain, he thinks it begins



ANNA CICCOTTI/U.S. Army

Surrounding mountains of the Little Dolomites are framed by a rock opening along the Strada delle 52 Gallerie on Mount Pasubio.



ANNA CICCOTTI/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers gather at a sign marking the Strada delle 52 Gallerie trailhead.

downhill, where another bar with restrooms near a parking lot at the start of the trail is not always open.

“There are no other restrooms or other facilities, but people need them, and so despite the sacredness and historical value of the trail, they use them wherever they can,” Leonardi said, according to a machine translation.

But while Leonardi advocated for adding portable toilets at the trailhead, Gianvalerio Piva, mayor of nearby Valli del Pasubio, told

the outlet that these would not be the solution.

The community and the alpine club conduct regular cleanups, including one a month before the trail opened for the season, Piva said. The town is now organizing another cleanup in September.

But the community cannot install bathrooms on the mountains or put out waste bins, he said.

“Those who ascend must carry their waste back down,” he told Il Dolomiti.

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