

Changing of the guard

Virginia class becomes
backbone of the US sub fleet

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The Virginia-class attack submarine USS Texas departs Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Virginia.
Branden Bourque/U.S. Navy

American-style
burgers, more
in Naples pub
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Warning issued
over protein
bars in Italy NEX
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Netflix series
takes look at
Marine force
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COVER STORY

Virginia class new backbone of sub fleet

Boats are bigger, stronger, faster, quieter than older Los Angeles class

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Navy officially has a new “backbone” of its submarine fleet that is bigger, faster, quieter, and has more endurance and firepower than the Vietnam War-era design it passed by in sheer numbers this past summer.

Admirals, U.S. senators and other VIPs gathered April 5 at Naval Submarine Base Groton, Conn. Sailors in dress blue uniform were given the traditional command: “Man our ship and bring her to life.” They ran up the gangplank to formally commission the new Virginia-class attack submarine USS Iowa.

On July 25, a smaller gathering at Naval Base Kitsap, in Washington state, marked the decommissioning of the USS Helena, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine.

“For nearly 40 years she has operated in the silent, unseen depths — a critical spearhead in our nation’s defense,” said Cmdr. Kyle Jones, commander of the boat.

The ceremonies represented a tipping point for the Navy.

The Iowa is the 24th Virginia-class sub to enter Navy service. The Helena’s exit leaves the Navy with 23 Los Angeles-class submarines that entered service from 1976 to 1996. The Navy also has three 1990s-era Seawolf-class attack submarines.

Navy promotional materials in recent decades have touted nuclear-powered attack submarines as “the backbone” of the undersea fleet.

Bryan Clark, a former Navy submariner who’s now a senior fellow at Hudson Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank, said having the number of Virginia boats surpass Los Angeles boats is good news for modernizing U.S. national defense.

“The Virginia class is the jack-of-all-trades for the Navy,” Clark said. “It’s simply more sophisticated than the Los Angeles class.”

Until this year, the most numerous attack submarine in the U.S. Navy was a design that started construction in 1972 — the year the keel was laid for USS Los Angeles.

The 7,800-ton Virginia class is designed to remain submerged for up to three months, moving through the water at 25 knots with four torpedo tubes and 12 vertical-launching Tomahawk cruise missile tubes.

Clark said the Virginia class not only outperforms the Los Angeles class but should also best the Russian Akula class and Chinese Shang-class in the competition for dominance of nuclear hunter-killer submarines. He added that it has better “acoustic silencing” of noise as it prowls the seas and a more sophisticated sonar array.

“It’s the quietest submarine we’ve ever had,” Clark said.

The majority of Virginia-class submarines were initially assigned to homeports where they could shadow Russia’s more advanced submarines, particularly in the Arctic regions. But the recent assignment of the USS Minnesota to Guam and the arrival in Hawaii of more Virginia-class subs, such as the USS Montana, shows the Navy is starting to spread out its most modern submarine. The Virginia-class is now operating in the south and central Indo-Pacific region, where China is the major “peer adversary.”

So far, the strategic Achilles’ heel of the Virginia class has been its slow pace of construction.

The Navy currently has 50 attack submarines at a point when the Pentagon had hoped to have 66 arrayed around the world.

Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington, D.C., said that the reason the Virginia class is the most numerous Navy attack submarine today is



GENERAL DYNAMICS ELECTRIC BOAT/U.S. Navy

The North Dakota, a Virginia-class attack submarine, rolls out of the indoor factory at General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn.



Justin Yarborough/U.S. Navy

Sailors operate the helm console in the control room aboard the USS New Jersey as the submarine transits the Atlantic Ocean.

largely due to the speed with which the Los Angeles-class subs have been retired. The Virginia program, meanwhile, has had production delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and industrial reductions after the Cold War.

“We’re at the bottom of the bathtub, with the lowest production rate for submarines since the 1990s,” Cancian said.

When approved by Congress in 1999, the Navy’s plans for the Virginia-class subs called for building two to three each year with a price of about \$2.8 billion each, the service wrote. Production would end in 2043, with the last boats leaving service in the 2070s.

The two shipyards building submarines — General Dynamics Electric Boat, in Groton, Conn., and HII-Newport News Shipbuilding, in

Virginia, have turned out an average of 1.2 boats per year.

A 2024 Navy analysis showed that the Virginia program suffered from \$17 billion in cost overruns and delays, and production was two to three years behind schedule.

Costs for each Virginia-class submarine continue to rise. The newer Block IV models, which include an extended weapons bay, cost \$4 billion each, according to the U.S. Naval Sea Systems Command.

While the transition from the Biden to the Trump administration has brought significant changes to many policies and programs, the Virginia-class submarine program has drawn both bipartisan support and criticism.

Democrats and Republicans have decried the



General Dynamics Electric Boat/U.S. Navy

The Virginia-class attack submarine Mississippi conducts trials in the Atlantic Ocean.

slow production cycles for submarines — a problem plaguing almost every Navy ship construction program, from Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers to Constellation-class frigates.

Navy and political leaders have pointed to submarine construction as the nation’s No. 1 naval priority.

Lloyd Austin, the defense secretary under President Joe Biden, called the Virginia-class “the apex predator” of the world’s oceans during congressional testimony last year.

In 2017, President Donald Trump gushed about the Virginia-class attack and new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines.

“The most powerful machines ever built, and nobody knows where they are,” Trump said.

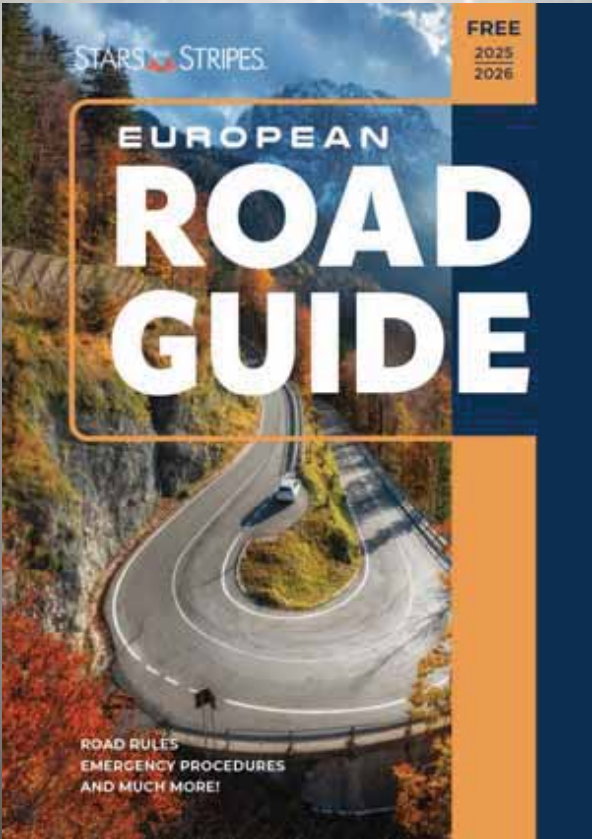


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MILITARY

Black Hawk flies as drone in first test

US soldier flies helicopter from tablet in training

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

It took less than an hour for an enlisted Army National Guard soldier with no past aviation experience to train to fly a Black Hawk helicopter during a training exercise this summer, according to utility chopper's manufacturer.

But the sergeant first class was not in the cockpit. Instead, he flew the aircraft remotely using a tablet in the U.S. Army and Black Hawk-maker Sikorsky's first real-world, soldier-run test of its optionally piloted Black Hawk helicopter, the company announced in a news release this month.

The training occurred in August as part of the National Guard's Northern Strike exercise in Michigan, during which some 7,500 Guard forces from 36 states trained for two weeks with the latest military tech including drones and electronic warfare capabilities, according to the National Guard.

During that exercise, the non-commissioned officer — who was not named publicly — flew the optionally manned Black Hawk, or OPV Black Hawk, from the deck of a Coast Guard vessel on Lake Huron, according to Sikorsky.

Using the tablet, the soldier instructed the helicopter to perform "racetrack patterns" over the lake while soldiers inside the OPV Black Hawk performed resupply parachute drops some 70 miles away.

It marked the first time Sikorsky's OPV Black Hawk conducted a mission entirely planned and controlled by soldiers.

Sikorsky — which is owned by weapons giant Lockheed Martin — has spent most of the past decade developing the optionally piloted Black Hawk program with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA.

The advanced, semi-autonomous helicopter is meant to give the Army options to fly it with an in-cockpit pilot



Sikorsky

A National Guard soldier uses a tablet to command the Sikorsky OPV Black Hawk to autonomously transport a 2,900-pound water buffalo sling load for the first time during the Northern Strike exercise in Michigan in August.

when the mission calls for it or to fly it remotely in situations that could prove especially dangerous — like when enemy contact is likely, officials have said.

"An optionally piloted Black Hawk aircraft can reduce pilot workload in a challenging environment or complete a resupply mission without humans on board," Rich Benton, Sikorsky's vice president and general manager, said in a statement. "In contested logistics situations, a Black Hawk operating as a large drone offers commanders greater resilience and flexibility to get resources to the point of need."

Sikorsky's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters have been an Army staple

since the 1970s.

The helicopters shuttle troops and supplies around battlefields and military posts across the globe and conduct the Army's air medevac mission. The service expects Black Hawks to fly into the 2070s.

But as the Army faces potential conflict with a near-peer power like China or Russia, service leaders want to be able to conduct operations with as few American forces on the front lines as possible.

Sikorsky — like other big and small defense manufacturers — has spent recent years focused on building unmanned systems loaded with

autonomous and artificial intelligence capabilities, like its MATRIX autonomy system on the unpiloted Black Hawk.

Sikorsky first flew the OPV Black Hawk in 2022. The company is also working on a fully unmanned version of the Black Hawk, which it has nicknamed the U-Hawk, according to the company.

During Northern Strike, the optionally manned Black Hawk hit a series of additional firsts after the parachute drop planned by soldiers on the Coast Guard boat.

On another mission, the OPV Black Hawk completed its "first ever autonomous hookup of an external

load while airborne," according to Sikorsky. The helicopter hovered over a group of soldiers who attached a 2,900-pound water buffalo tank to be sling loaded elsewhere.

In a third exercise at Northern Strike, the optionally manned Black Hawk completed six autonomous hovering hookups to transport High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, to other locations during the training, according to Sikorsky.

A soldier then operated the helicopter remotely to conduct a simulated medevac mission, another first, the company said.

Army wants faster drone production, anti-drone lasers

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army wants to speed up drone procurement while also developing laser weapons to shoot down enemy unmanned vehicles.

A "Request for Information" from the Army seeks ideas for using High-Energy Laser (HEL) weapons to bring down swarms of drones that could be used on future battlefields.

The request, the first step in gauging developer interest in developing the technologies, came as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Army Secretary Dan Driscoll urged a new acquisition system to speed weapons to soldiers.

Hegseth on Nov. 7 told an audience of senior executives from large defense industry and technology companies at National War College at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C., that they needed to focus on "speed and volume" or they "will fade away."

The Army plans to buy at least a million drones in the next two or three years, with millions more purchased each year in the near future, Driscoll

told Reuters from the Joint Center for Excellence for Guns and Ammunition at Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey.

"It is a big lift. But it is a lift we're very capable of doing," Driscoll said.

The Army is looking to accelerate its anti-drone abilities by calling on industry to submit concepts for high-energy laser weapons to shoot down enemy reconnaissance and attack drones on the battlefield.

Among the requirements are that the systems be transportable by C-17 Globemaster III cargo aircraft operated by the U.S. Air Force, be mountable on Joint Light Tactical Vehicles and be used to protect "semi-fixed" and maneuvering forces.

A formal "Request for Information" has been issued on the government's procurement website. Responses were due by Nov. 21, with possible product testing during two sessions at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah in December and January.

The Army's Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office said it is seeking up to 20 systems using

enduring high-energy lasers that could be adapted for a modular launcher defending American ground forces.

If the Army finds sufficient industry interest, it plans to award contracts as early as the end of 2026.

Though the request for information does not guarantee that the Army will move forward with projects, it underscores the service's sense of urgency regarding anti-drone equipment and tactics outlined in September by Driscoll.

"Are they getting the tools they need fast enough to dominate on the battlefield?" Driscoll said. "If the answer is anything less than an unequivocal 'yes,' then we have a moral duty to change."

Lasers and other energy weapons are being proposed to counter the cost of current ways that the U.S. targets the drones attacking ships, troops and command centers.

"We can no longer shoot \$4 million missiles to take down a \$400 drone — that simple math doesn't add up," Driscoll said.



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

A drone destroyed by a KORD Firefly directed energy system, right, is on display on the USA exhibition floor in Washington, on Oct. 15.

MILITARY



Amblin Entertainment

The series “Marines,” which takes a behind-the-scenes look at the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, premiered on Netflix on Nov. 10.

Netflix puts focus on Okinawa Marines

4-part series focusing on rapid-reaction force released on Corps’ birthday

BY BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

Netflix has unveiled another series about the Marine Corps, this time a four-part documentary about a rapid-response task force on Okinawa. “Marines” premiered Nov. 10 — the service’s 250th birthday — on the streaming service in the U.S. Its story focuses on the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Hansen.

A film crew embedded with the unit for three months in summer 2024 during its pre-deployment certification exercise and patrol, Marine entertainment and media liaison Maj. Hector

Alejandro said.

Filming locations included Okinawa, the South China Sea, and aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America and amphibious transport dock USS Green Bay.

“This was a great opportunity to show America what our Marines do every day,” 31st MEU commander Col. Chris Niedziocha said in a quote relayed by Alejandro. “The film crews had access to anything they wanted and saw just about everything we do during a patrol. I think it’s obvious from the series the incredible level of commitment our Marines have and

just how ready to fight we are and the vital role we play ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region.”

Netflix describes “Marines” as a “coming-of-age docuseries.”

Nine Marines and one U.S. Navy sailor, ranging from junior enlisted to senior leaders, are featured in the documentary, Alejandro said. They include machine gunners, scout snipers, F-35B Lightning II pilots and UH-1Y Venom helicopter pilots.

“This series is a chance for families, friends, and the American public to gain a much deeper understanding of the service and sacrifice involved in be-

ing part of America’s forward-deployed crisis response force,” he said.

“Marines” will be the second series aired this fall by Netflix about the sea service. The comedy-drama “Boots,” about a gay recruit, debuted Oct. 9. It’s based on Marine veteran Greg Cope White’s memoir, “The Pink Marine.”

“Marines” director Chelsea Yarnell has worked on Netflix documentaries “Cheer” and “America’s Sweethearts: Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders.”

Production company Amblin Entertainment, led by director Steven Spielberg, also produced the World War II-set series “Masters of the Air”

and “Band of Brothers.”

Journalist and documentarian Sebastian Junger, known for codirecting the 2010 Afghanistan War documentary “Restrepo,” serves as an executive producer on “Marines.”

The 31st is one of seven Marine Expeditionary Units, each consisting of about 2,200 Marines and sailors embarked aboard amphibious warships.

It features a combination of air, ground and support elements, and is designed to quickly respond in combat and non-combat crisis situations including humanitarian assistance and evacuation operations.

Protein bar with hemp found at Gaeta NEX, prompting warning

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A Navy detachment in Italy is warning sailors that eating a popular protein bar recently found at a Navy Exchange store could lead to a failed drug test and unwanted scrutiny.

Dave’s Killer Bread Amped-Up Organic Protein Bars contain hemp, a substance banned by the Navy, U.S. Naval Support Activity Naples detachment Gaeta said in a Facebook post earlier this month.

Service member use of hemp or cannabidiol products also is prohibited by the Army and Air Force.

The bars, which are made with hemp protein powder, recently were found for sale at the Navy Exchange and are commonly available at grocery stores in the U.S., the detachment said in the post, which included screenshots of the ingredient labels of three varieties of the bars.

The hemp plant is a cousin to marijuana. Hemp contains no more than 0.3% THC, the psychoactive ingredient

in marijuana that gives users a high, according to Scientific American.

Cannabidiol, or CBD, is derived from hemp or manufactured in a laboratory. CBD does not cause a high by itself.

Navy regulations prohibit “the use of hemp products, including CBD, regardless of THC concentration,” the detachment said. “Carefully check labels.”

It wasn’t clear what exchange store referenced in the detachment’s post potentially was involved.

“The product in question — Dave’s Killer Bread ‘Amped-Up Protein Bars’ (hemp seed ingredient) — is not currently available for sale at any Navy Exchange location worldwide, including retail stores, vending machines and micro markets,” Josie Anderson, a spokeswoman for Navy Exchange Service Command, said in a released statement.

She added that the exchange regularly reviews its product offerings to ensure compliance with Navy regulations and to support mission readiness

and the health and safety of sailors.

Exchange officials in Naples confirmed that the bars were never stocked at exchange locations on the installation, Lt. j.g. Valentine Mulango, a base spokesman, said in a statement.

“The post was made to amplify an earlier Navy-wide notice about the product,” Mulango said.

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service does not sell the bars, Chris Ward, a spokesman for the exchange, said in an email.

In its post, the detachment at Gaeta advised sailors who may have consumed the bars to notify their chain of command and keep purchase receipts in case of a positive drug test.

“During the investigation process this will be taken into account,” the detachment said.

Earlier this year, the Defense Department recalled the bars because hemp is listed as the first ingredient, the Defense Commissary Agency said in a Jan. 13 statement.

The agency noted that it had advertised the recall to its stores, which were

required to immediately remove the product from shelves.

The 2018 farm bill removed hemp from the federal Controlled Substances Act, clearing the way for its use in a variety of products for human use, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Those products are regulated by the FDA, but the agency does not determine or certify the THC concentration of hemp products, such as CBD, the Navy said in a July 2020 directive.

That means “sailors and Marines cannot rely on the packaging and labeling of hemp products in determining whether the product contains THC concentrations that could cause a positive urinalysis result,” the Navy said in the directive.

The directive banned the use of hemp by sailors and Marines with limited exceptions, such as cannabinoid formulations approved as drugs by the FDA and prescribed by DOD health care providers or civilian medical professionals treating service members by referral.

n Facts

Bar (54g/1.9oz)

240

Ingredients: organic hemp protein powder, organic rolled oats, organic brown rice syrup, water, organic peanut butter, organic semisweet chocolate (organic cane sugar, organic unsweetened chocolate, organic cocoa butter, organic soy lecithin, organic natural flavor), organic brown sugar (organic cane sugar, organic molasses), organic vegetable oil (organic sunflower and/or organic expeller pressed canola)

NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY NAPLES
DETACHMENT GAETA/Facebook
Dave’s Killer Bread Amped-Up Organic Protein Bars contain hemp, which is banned by Navy regulation.

MILITARY

Maintaining memories of the fallen

Pair part of effort to repair tributes to WWI soldiers

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAM
Stars and Stripes

CHAUMONT-DEVANT-DAMVILLERS, France — From a hilltop overlooking miles of farmland, American retiree Eric Mueller stood beside a stone monument and pointed to a spot in the valley below where the last U.S. soldier killed in World War I is thought to have fallen.

A former Michigan Air National Guard lieutenant, Mueller has traveled to northeastern France twice a year for nearly a decade, logging the GPS coordinates of trench lines, bunkers and other wartime sites for a digital mapping project. But while scouring old battlefields, he became troubled by something he never set out to find: monuments to American military units and soldiers weathered by age and suffering from neglect.

At the hilltop monument in the Meuse region, an inscription about the Army's 79th Infantry Division and Sgt. Henry Gunther, the aforementioned soldier, was barely legible and cracks ran through a panel embedded in the stone.

"It bothers me that their sacrifices were recognized by these monuments and then forgotten," Mueller said. "These guys deserve better."

So in 2019, he teamed up with Dutch historian and author Maarten Otte, whose research focuses on U.S. involvement in World War I. Since then, the two have taken it upon themselves to care for some of the more than 140 American memorials Otte says are scattered across the area north of Verdun, where the U.S.-led Meuse-Argonne Offensive occurred in late 1918.

Throughout western Europe, thousands of small, privately funded memorials stand at sites where Americans fought and died during the world wars. As the 107th anniversary of World War I's end was marked Nov. 11, maintaining many of them has never been more difficult.

One of the primary challenges is the disappearance or death of the organizations or people originally responsible for the monuments. In such cases, towns and various associations sometimes step in to help with maintenance.

But in sparsely populated areas of northeastern France — where American memorials stand among numerous French and other Allied monuments from both world wars, as well as older ones from the Franco-Prussian War — resources are limited.

Otte, who lives in the region, routinely checks on the condition of the monuments. When Mueller returns for his visits, the pair tend to those that need attention.

They replace worn-out American flags with ones Mueller brings from the U.S. and do light cleaning and restoration work. Occasionally, they hire professionals to remove heavy moss and lichen buildup.

"We always do this before November 11, when more Americans visit the area," Otte said, referring to what is observed as Armistice Day in Europe and Veterans Day in the United States.

Recently, he was scrubbing algae from a flagpole at a memorial in the Argonne Forest honoring troops of the U.S. Army's 77th Infantry Division.

"We want the memorials to look good so people can see they're cared for," Otte said.

Locations with less allure

While the Meuse-Argonne region welcomes a steady stream of visitors each year, it's hardly a tourist hot spot.

In Normandy, by contrast, World War II tourism helps sustain the regional economy, so officials make sure monuments and cemeteries are kept in pristine condition.

The Normandy American Cemetery alone welcomes more than a million visitors each year. The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, which holds the graves of more than 14,200 Americans and is the largest cemetery of its kind in Europe,

receives only about 15,000 annual visitors, staffers said.

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive, a 47-day campaign that helped bring World War I to an end, remains the largest and deadliest battle in U.S. military history.

When fighting finished, American units, veterans groups and families independently built hundreds of memorials on European soil to honor fallen soldiers and commemorate military milestones.

But as Gen. John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, toured the Continent in the early 1920s, he noticed that many of these tributes lacked coordination and upkeep. Concerned that they might deteriorate and reflect poorly on the United States, he urged the creation of a national body to oversee America's overseas commemorations.

Congress responded in 1923 by creating the American Battle Monuments Commission, appointing Pershing as its first chairman. But the agency's responsibility does not extend to most privately funded monuments.

Only about three dozen have been accepted into the commission's Private Memorials Program, through which the agency is paid to ensure that contractors maintain sites on behalf of the groups that own them.

And in northeastern France, the ABMC is struggling to find contractors to care for at least one of those sites, the 316th Infantry Regiment Memorial in Sivry-sur-Meuse, underscoring how difficult it can be to preserve even well-funded U.S. monuments at times.

Adam Leigland, who manages the Private Memorials Program, has received complaints about the site's condition and has been searching for a contractor for several months.

"If you were to go out there today, you'd be really displeased," he said.

Stirring hearts and minds

For Americans and Europeans today who have never experienced the realities of war firsthand, smaller monuments can be especially effective because they often convey more personal details, said Ann Rigney, a former professor of comparative literature at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

She specializes in cultural memory and the ways societies commemorate the past.

"Sometimes you need these very shocking small little details to bring home in a new way the awfulness of war ... rather than being something you ritualistically yawn at when November 11 comes around," Rigney said.

Another American who understands the impact of such monuments and shares the sense of urgency to preserve them is Lilian Pfluke, a retired U.S. Army major who formerly ran the Private Memorials Program.

During her decadelong tenure beginning in the 1990s, Pfluke often heard from people concerned about neglected American war monuments that fell outside the agency's authority.

The steady stream of complaints inspired her to establish the nonprofit American War Memorials Overseas in 2008.

The organization documents, promotes and helps preserve smaller, privately built military memorials honoring Americans around the world, often encouraging local groups to act and assist with fundraising. Its database now includes more than 4,600 sites.

"We don't have troops in France anymore," said Pfluke, who lives in Avignon. "Our monuments and cemeteries are our strategic presence here. They show what America has done, reflect our alliance with France and preserve the legacy of our cooperation during the world wars."

People like Mueller and Otte are not alone, Pfluke said. Others across Europe quietly do similar work, often if they live by a memorial or have personal or family ties to an area where one is located.

And with war once again raging in Europe, the need to maintain that legacy feels especially urgent today, she said.

"We need to keep those memories alive," she said. "We need to remember what this is all about."



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes
Eric Mueller, left, and Maarten Otte hoist an American flag back onto the Henry Gunther memorial in Chaumont-Devant-Damvillers, France, after repairing the flagpole, on Nov. 6.

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PHOTOS BY JILL LEVY



CATCH KRAMPUS THIS CHRISTMAS

Krampus has a reputation. Not only will he punish naughty children, but he may just haul them off in a sack to eat.



BY KAT NICKOLA
Stars and Stripes

The Krampus tradition comes from the mountainous Alps; its homeland straddling Germany, Italy, Austria and Slovenia. This hairy goat-man character is possibly a relic of the many pre-Christian alpine spirits called *Perchten* that are said to drive away the evil of winter. His story was incorporated into Christian belief as a devil who is bound by the church to do the necessary dirty work of punishing those who deserve it. In the 1600s, he became Saint Nicholas' helper in the Alps, and while Saint Nick brings gifts for good kids, Krampus takes care of the naughty ones.

In many places there is a traditional *Krampuslauf* (Krampus run). More like a parade than a race, these events feature hundreds of Krampus wandering through town, playing pranks, swatting bystanders and bringing fire. It is both fun and fearsome.

If you visit a small Christmas market in the mountains of Tyrol, whether in Austria or Italy, on Dec. 5, or *Krampusnacht* (Krampus night), you are likely to run into a Krampus gathering of some kind. Villages will often have a few of the goat-men accompany Saint Nick on his rounds in the early evening.



KRAMPUS GATHERINGS IN 2025

- Bad Gaisern, Austria.**
With over 800 Krampus, this is the big one! Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.
- Toblach, Italy.**
This is the oldest known gathering and invites 600 Krampus. Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.
- Seefeld, Austria.**
The largest gathering in north Tyrol. Dec. 6 at 7 p.m.
- Salzburg, Austria.**
Krampuslauf on Dec. 5 at 6:30 p.m. and a Perchten parade on Dec. 21 at 1 p.m.
- Munich, Germany.**
Roughly 300 Krampus invade the Marienplatz. Dec. 14 at 3 p.m.
- Kastelruth, Italy.**
Only occurring every other year, the parade ends with a massive party. Dec. 13 at 5 p.m.



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ONE-MONTH FREE TRIAL

ITALY'S ALPINI: GUARDIANS OF THE MOUNTAINS

BY KIMBERLY KEPHART
Contributing Writer

As I strolled through the charming streets of Bolzano, Italy, the crisp mountain air filled my lungs, and the distant sound of church bells echoed through the narrow alleys. Suddenly, my attention was drawn to a striking figure standing in the middle of the bustling street, directing traffic with an air of authority.

He wore a distinctive deep green felt cap adorned with a single elegant feather and decorated with an array of regimental pins that glinted in the sunlight, each telling a story of valor and tradition. I would later learn that this hat was the symbol of the Alpini, Italy's elite mountain troops.

The Alpini were established in 1872 to defend Italy's northern mountainous borders. Over the years, they have become renowned for their bravery, resilience and unique traditions. Nowadays they also come from Sicily, Calabria and Sardinia, whereas, the earliest recruitment areas were mainly the northern or central regions of Italy.

The Alpini played crucial roles in both World War I and World War II. During World War I,

they fought in the harsh conditions of the Alps against Austro-Hungarian forces. Their expertise in mountain warfare was instrumental in several key battles, including the very violent high mountain Battle of Mount Ortigara and the Battle of Caporetto.

The Alpini are now organized into two operational brigades under the Alpine Troops Headquarters. They continue to be a vital part of the Italian Army, participating in both military operations and humanitarian missions. The Alpini are often called upon for disaster relief efforts, such as during earthquakes and floods where their skills in navigating difficult terrain are invaluable.

While visiting or living in Italy, if you come across a person wearing a green hat with a feather, don't be afraid to ask questions and learn about who the Alpini are. I can almost guarantee that you'll have a great conversation, and you'll learn an important aspect Italian culture.



Capello Alpino

One of the most recognizable symbols of the Alpini is the *cappello*, a felt hat that displays a single feather on the side with a small felt tuft, a regimental symbol at the front and rank insignia, or *grado*, for officer and NCO soldiers.

The feather colors denote different rank groupings among the Alpini.

- Black feathers: Troops
- Brown feathers: NCOs and junior officers
- White feathers: Senior Officers and Generals

The small, oval felt tuft at the base of the feather is called a *nappina* and the color represents the soldier's battalion or unit.

On the front of the Cappello is the regimental symbol, or *fregio*, which is displayed as an eagle bearing a different coat of arms for each regiment.

Canti Alpini

Canti Alpini are traditional songs sung by the Alpini and are often sung during gatherings and ceremonies, fostering a strong sense of unity among the troops. Many songs have to do with war, sacrifice, nature, mountains, camaraderie and brotherhood. One such example is "Signore dele Cimme," which is a poignant prayer for a fallen comrade, traditionally sung at funerals. Another song is "J'Abruzzu," which expresses the beauty of the mountains and the bond the Alpini share in the rugged terrains of Italy.

Alpini songs are often performed by choirs, especially during reunions, parades and commemorative events. If you ever get the chance to hear one in person, it is stunning.



TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE | stripeseuropa.com



TOBY



LOLA



Photos Courtesy of Sigonella Animal Welfare Society

THE SIGONELLA ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY (SAWS) Saves the Strays

BY TAMALA MALERK
Stars and Stripes



The Sigonella Animal Welfare Society, Inc. (SAWS) formed around 1990. They are entirely volunteer-run and dedicated to helping the stray pets of the area find new, permanent and loving homes.

I had the pleasure of speaking with the current President of SAWS, Lucy Phillip, and she told me all about this fantastic organization.

“What made me work with rescue animals is the dire need that we have here in Sicily, and more precisely, the Sigonella area. I believe we can make a difference, one paw at a time.”

In March 2021, Phillip began working with SAWS to help save as many strays in the area as possible. She started volunteering as the Dog Specialist ,

then moved on to become Vice President before assuming the role of President. “I basically oversee that the organization continues to run, and that we continue to grow and save as many animals as possible.”

SAWS features adoptable cats and dogs on their website, www.pawsofsaws.org where those interested in adopting can fill out an inquiry form.

SAWS not only coordinates adoptions, but they also help American pet owners get their pets registered in the local system. Registration in the local Azienda Sanitaria Provinciale (ASP) is required by Italian law, which can be confusing and typically requires driving to the local Italian office. Instead, SAWS offers frequent registration events at their office near the NAS 1 Sigonella

gate, coordinated with an ASP official and making the process easy for newcomers.

In July 2025, Italy passed the Brambilla Law (Law No. 82/2025) which “recognizes animals as sentient legal subjects rather than mere property and significantly increases penalties for abuse, killing, abandonment, and illegal trafficking.” In short, animals have recently gained more agency and rights in Italy and offenders can face years in prison and hefty fines. Phillip emphasized the importance of the new law. “I think that the only way that we can make change or push for change is if we highlight the new law. And, in order for it to have the most impact, we need to understand and know the law. By sharing it and by letting people know what is in this law, I think we can push for change.”

As a fully volunteer-run organization, SAWS has opportunities for people stationed at Sigonella who are interested in helping local animals. Volunteers serve on their board, assist with events, hold specialist roles and foster animals while they await their new permanent home.

Find out about adoptable animals, volunteer positions and community events at www.pawsofsaws.org.



Christmas Alley in Naples

BY STACY ROMAN
Stars and Stripes

This time of year is a favorite for many. Seemingly overnight, giant decorated trees sprout up in city centers, the smell of cinnamon-glazed almonds wafts through the air and displays of the holy family are showcased in windows. Then, in the blink of an eye, it's gone.

In Naples, there is one spot that keeps the holiday season alive year-round. Deep in the heart of the city, on a pedestrian-only street, is Via San Gregorio Armeno. Dubbed “Christmas Alley,” this narrow, cobble-stoned street is filled with old storefronts and ornate windows that each display a *presepe*, or Nativity scene.

In a country where 78 percent

of the population identifies as Roman Catholic, setting up a detailed *presepe* is a highly coveted and revered part of the holiday season. They are designed to be miniature displays of the Nativity story that are expanded by families every year. As it grows, a once-small scene becomes a large exhibit of daily life during the moment of Jesus’ birth.

While there are plenty of pre-made sets, what makes each *presepe* unique is that your family can tailor the story to your liking. If you feel like adding a figure of King Charles or Christiano Ronaldo next to baby Jesus, you can. Some *presepe* are less literal and more symbolic, showing the Nativity

scene in unique settings or with modern touches.

Along Christmas Alley in Naples, many *presepe* shops have been passed down through generations spanning five centuries and still make the figurines by hand. During the holiday season, Via San Gregorio Armeno becomes one of the most popular destinations in Naples. Because of the crowds, the council will sometimes implement a one-way pedestrian walkway through the street. If crowds aren't your thing, however, don't worry; the shops are open all year.



MILITARY

Anti-sub exercise preps NATO for conflict

9 nations drill with advanced techniques and technology

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — NATO allies have been strengthening their anti-submarine capabilities in the Baltic Sea, a region whose infrastructure network makes it susceptible to Russian mischief threatening Europe's security.

The U.S., Sweden and Germany were among nine participants in Playbook Merlin, a five-day exercise that used advanced technology and techniques to prepare submarine crews and surface forces for the realities of undersea operations, NATO said in a statement on Nov. 11.

"Baltic nations bring an impressive amount of anti-submarine warfare capability to NATO as well as experienced leadership and maritime capacity," U.S. Rear Adm. Bret Grabbe, commander of NATO submarines, said in the statement.

The exercise demonstrates allied navies' teamwork "to safeguard sea lines of communication, protect critical infrastructure and hone skills in undersea warfare," the statement said.

In January, the alliance created a mission dubbed Baltic Sentry after a string of incidents in which undersea telecommunications cables were cut and energy pipeline flows were disrupted. The mission comprises mostly Baltic countries, such as Germany and Finland.

U.S. and European intelligence officials the same month said that the incidents likely were the result of maritime accidents rather than part of a broader campaign of Russian hybrid attacks on Europe, The Washington Post reported.

Still, there appears to have been no similar episodes since late January, and in September, Baltic Sentry broadened its scope to include air defense.

That action, which saw the U.S. contribute



NATO

Exercise Playbook Merlin 25 involves submarines from Germany and Sweden, a U.S. Navy maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft, and French, German, Dutch and Swedish surface ships and helicopters. The five-day NATO exercise is focused on anti-submarine warfare.

the destroyer USS Bulkeley and a Navy P-8 patrol and reconnaissance aircraft to the mission, followed repeated unidentified drone incursions into northern European countries.

Bulkeley left in early October, but Navy P-8 aircraft "still periodically support the Baltic Sentry mission," U.S. 6th Fleet said in a statement Thursday. The departure of the destroyer did not preclude future support by a Navy ship, the fleet

added.

On Nov. 12, a Navy P-8 was on patrol over the Barents Sea about 50 miles from the coast of northwestern Russia, the open-source intelligence analyst @OSINTdefender said in a post on X.

The aircraft's location was near one of Russia's largest and most significant bases for its ballistic missile submarines, about 15 miles from the Nor-

wegian border, according to the post.

This year's iteration of Playbook Merlin includes a U.S. P-8 and submarines from Sweden and Germany. Surface ships and helicopters from France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden also are participating, NATO said.

The exercise is led by NATO's Allied Maritime Command and hosted by Sweden. NATO did not identify other participants.

Air Force approves morale shirts, callsign name tags

BY ZADE VADNAIS
Stars and Stripes

As the Pentagon cracks down on personal appearance across the military, the Air Force is loosening uniform rules in a bid to boost morale.

As of Nov. 14, airmen may wear unit morale T-shirts on Fridays, and aircrew members are allowed to wear callsign name tags daily.

The changes are outlined in new interim guidance from the service's chief of staff, Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, that was issued in a memo Nov. 10.

They are among Wilsbach's first official acts since he took up the role Nov. 3. The memo was posted Wednesday on the unofficial Air Force amn/nco/snco Facebook page and verified by an Air Force spokesperson.

Airmen may now wear colored T-shirts with utility uniforms on Fridays, provided they are not deployed, participating in an exercise or assigned to a joint or Space Force unit, the memo said.

The shirt color must reflect the heraldry and heritage of the member's assigned unit. Wing commanders will maintain a list of approved colors and may authorize supporting units to wear their assigned unit's shirts.

The memo also authorizes pilots and other aircrew members to wear callsign name tags daily with flight duty and desert flight uniforms. Those name tags used to be typically reserved for wear on Fridays.

Under the new guidance, officer name tags may include a callsign or first name followed by last name. Enlisted aircrew members will have their rank, followed by their callsign and last name on their name tags.

Commanders are expected to ensure that name tags are in good taste and reflect military



JENNA BOND/U.S. Air Force

F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot Capt. Ryan Watkins climbs into the jet for takeoff at Bezmer Air Base, Bulgaria.

order, discipline and professionalism.

"Our uniform reflects years of Airmen bound by a proud heritage and united in shared purpose," Wilsbach wrote in the memo. "It connects us to those who came before and signals professionalism, discipline, and continued unity in today's force."

The changes stand in contrast to broader efforts by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who has made stricter grooming and uniform standards a priority across the services.

In a Sept. 30 address to senior military leaders, he emphasized the need for narrower guidelines, prompting the Air Force to adopt tighter facial hair regulations the following month.

Since Hegseth's appointment in January, the Air Force has also revised standards covering nail polish, eyelash length and boot height.

Wilsbach's memo notes that official guidance to implement the T-shirt and name tag changes is forthcoming.

Army: Quicker notifications needed when soldiers go missing

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Army wants its leaders to act more quickly when a soldier does not report for duty and cannot be found, according to a new directive from the service's top civilian.

Commanders must report a missing soldier to law enforcement within three hours and notify family members of the soldier's missing status within eight hours, according to an Oct. 28 memorandum issued by Army Secretary Dan Driscoll.

The memo was meant to provide a more specific course of action for leaders dealing with missing soldiers, according to the Army. Previous Army policy gave commanders a day or more before they had to act on a soldier's disappearance. Driscoll's directive instructs Army commanders to place missing soldiers in the duty status of "absent-unknown" within three hours of discovering they are missing "and make every effort to locate the soldier."

Commanders must also alert Army law enforcement officials to the missing soldier during that time frame. Law enforcement officials must then "create a blotter entry," issue a "Be-On-The-Lookout," or BOLO, order for the missing soldier and enter "all relevant information into the Missing Persons File of the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database," which provides information to law enforcement officials nationwide.

Local law enforcement officials must also be notified of the missing soldier's status during that three-hour period, Driscoll wrote.

If the soldier cannot be located in 48 hours, commanders are to determine "by a preponderance of evidence" if that soldier's absence is

voluntary or involuntary.

Those found to be missing intentionally will be reported as Absent Without Leave, or AWOL, and potentially face criminal charges.

Those found to be involuntarily absent, or if there is a lack of evidence to determine if they left intentionally, should be reported missing to law enforcement and their status declared "duty status-whereabouts unknown," or DUSTWUN.

Missing soldiers who have indicated the potential for self-harm are also to be reported missing to law enforcement, according to the memo.

Driscoll's order comes after the service has for years faced criticism that it has acted slowly to find missing soldiers.

It updates the missing soldier processes that were implemented after high-profile investigations into the disappearance and slaying of 20-year-old Spc. Vanessa Guillen at Fort Hood, Texas in 2020.

The Army launched an internal command investigation into Guillen's death and a separate probe into Fort Hood's command climate and culture after her death conducted by a panel of outside experts dubbed The Fort Hood Independent Review Committee.

After those investigations, the Army added the "absent-unknown" status to allow commanders to assess the situation without immediately labeling them AWOL, which carries a negative connotation and implies they are intentionally missing, Army leaders said at the time.

Driscoll wrote in his new memo that his new policy should provide a detailed explanation of how commanders and Army law enforcement should handle all missing soldiers.

"The Army will always place people first and will never leave a soldier behind," he wrote.

DINING

American-style burgers with a British vibe

Penny Black Pub brings classic meals to Naples

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Many international chefs have tried and failed to re-create the classic American cheeseburger.

It's deceptively difficult to get that satisfying combination of a juicy ground beef patty, cheddar cheese, fresh toppings and soft bun just right.

But The Penny Black Pub in Naples, Italy, manages not only to offer a fitting tribute to the quintessential America mainstay but also to throw in a distinctive dash of British-Italian flair.

Located in the city's Vomero neighborhood, the pub offers a varied menu of burgers, fries and other bar food. And the fact that it celebrates its 25th anniversary this month is a testament to its popularity with diners.

The name refers to the world's first adhesive postage stamp, the penny black, which was issued by the U.K. in 1840. Inside you'll find British pub-style decor featuring warm color tones, cozy lighting and tributes to The Beatles, Queen Elizabeth II and England's famed red telephone booths. A playlist of mostly '80s music complements the ambience.

On the recent Tuesday that I and a companion were there for dinner, the pub quickly filled up shortly after its 7 p.m. opening. Penny Black doesn't take reservations, so come early if you don't want to wait.

While mainly focused on burgers, the diverse menu has beef, chicken or pork options. The burgers feature American or Italian cheeses and an enticing assortment of toppings, such as pancetta, ham, chimichurri sauce and sauerkraut.

My dining companion opted for the Ndujotto, a single-patty beef burger with fried Asiago cheese, caramelized red Tropea onions and Nduja sauce made from spicy Calabrian peppers.

The ample burger arrived hot on a wooden platter, juicy and covered in melty cheese. It was tantalizingly delicious, with the patty and bun nicely crisped from the grill and the flavors melding together splendidly.

The only issue my companion had with her order was the beef quality, which she said could have been better.

I chose the plant-based smash burger with two meat-substitute patties, cheddar cheese, sweet potato fries and jalapeno slices. It's one of six vegetarian burger options on the menu.

The combination of nicely grilled patties and bun plus the heat from the peppers made the burger irresistible.

Sadly, I filled up on the fresh, hot french fries delivered to our table as an appetizer and couldn't finish the burger. But our server offered to wrap it up so I could take it home.

Other menu options included the Big Pennies and the Spaccanapoli, named for the famed street in Naples. The former includes two beef smash patties, cheddar cheese, bacon, sweet and sour gherkins, julienned salad and smoked bacon sauce. The latter features two beef patties, Italian pork roast, Caciocavallo cheese from Irpino and caramelized red onion.

If you're not in the mood for a burger, chicken fingers, a variety of fries, pork ribs and pulled pork and brisket sandwiches are among other menu offerings. For example, there's



ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The Penny Black Pub in Naples, Italy, offers a British pub-style vibe complete with odes to The Beatles, a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II and England's famed red telephone booths.



The Ndujotto burger at the Penny Black Pub in Naples includes a juicy ground beef patty, fried Asiago cheese, caramelized red onions and spicy Calabrese salsa on a soft bun.



Cheesecake topped with salted caramel is among the dessert offerings. Alternative accompaniments for the cheesecake include pistachios and berries.



Fried potatoes can be served plain or topped with either meatballs or sausage as well as bacon and cheese.

the Elton John, which features a pork sausage from Caserta, Caciocavallo cheese, grilled ham, honey and mustard dressing and basil leaves.

Despite our full stomachs, we couldn't resist trying Black Penny's cheesecake with salted caramel sauce for dessert.

The New York-style cheesecake was rich and creamy with a tasty cookie crust but lacked the characteristic

tangy flavor of cream cheese. However, with the drizzle of salted caramel, it was satisfying.

With a pleasing menu assortment, Penny Black offers a chance to partake of one of America's most popular exports in an atmosphere that will transport you out of Naples and into a British pub.

My advice: Come for the burgers, return for the vibe.

The Black Penny Pub

Address: Via Enrico Alvino 134b, Naples, Italy

Hours: 7 p.m.-12:30 a.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday; 7 p.m.-1 a.m., Friday and Saturday; closed on Monday.

Prices: 4.50-8 euros, appetizers and fries; 9-18 euros for burgers; 10-18 euros for ribs, platters and salads; 4-6.50 euros for desserts; 4-9 euros for beer, wine and cocktails; and 1-5 euros for water, soda and ginger beer. There also is a 15% surcharge added to the bill.

Information: thepennyblackpub.it; +39 081 014 5828

MILITARY

80 years ago, US planned invasion of Japan

Operation Downfall was set to launch in November 1945

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

There are no rows of white crosses along the Satsuma Peninsula or victory memorials dotting Kagoshima Bay. No markers at beaches on Kyushu bearing names of American car brands — Buick, Cadillac, Stutz, Zephyr. And no aging veterans gather with military and political leaders to recall the grinding battle that would have brought 100,000 troops ashore.

More than 14 U.S. Army and Marine divisions never landed on X-Day of Operation Downfall, the planned invasion of Japan to end World War II.

None of it happened because of two shattering flashes of light and heat: the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. More than 150,000 Japanese citizens died from the blast and radiation; some estimates say the toll is nearly twice that.

Japan announced its surrender on Aug. 15, 1945, and it was made official on Sept. 2, 1945, aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

The invasion scheduled for November 1945 — 80 years ago this month — became just old maps and battle plans to file away, relics of an extended war that never was.

How much longer and more deadly is still debated. The invasion would have meant millions more Americans serving in the war, marching afterward on Veterans Day. Thousands more would be mourned on Memorial Day.

"I think an invasion would have been incredibly bloody and awful," said historian Jonathan Parshall during a webinar in September hosted by the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. "American casualties would be horrific. Millions of Japanese civilians would have died. It would have been an absolute bloodbath."

Guadalcanal, North Africa, Italy, Tarawa, Saipan, D-Day, Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima and Okinawa were all preludes to final victory. Italy and Germany were defeated. But Japan still held a massive swath of Asia and the Pacific.

Until mid-1945, U.S. planners expected the war to continue well into 1946.

The Pentagon estimated it needed 900,000 replacement troops — 600,000 for the Army and Army Air Forces, 300,000 for the Navy and Marines.

Norman Polmar, co-author of "Code-Name Downfall," about the plans for the invasion, said American

military leaders had to deal with an enemy that increasingly used suicide as a strategy.

"Beginning with the American invasion to take back the Philippines in 1944, the Japanese employed a large number of kamikaze aircraft to sink ships and kill large numbers of Americans. The threat was unexpected and difficult to counter," he said.

As the invasion's time frame approached, American planners were factoring in higher casualty numbers.

"Kamikaze planes, kamikaze small craft, kamikaze submarines, even kamikaze civilians with explosives or just spears," Polmar said. "Kill as many Americans as possible, no matter the cost to them."

Downfall had two phases. Operation Olympic would launch from Okinawa to invade Kyushu in November 1945. Operation Coronet in March 1946 would invade the central island of Honshu and push across the Kanto Plain to capture Tokyo.

In the initial phase, 250,000 American troops supported by land and carrier-based aircraft would face 700,000 Japanese defenders on Kyushu. The U.S. Army's 25th and 33rd Divisions would land at Miyasaki; the 1st Cavalry and 43rd Divisions at Ariake Bay. The 2nd, 3rd and 5th Marine Divisions would target Kagoshima. The 18 landing beaches all were to be named after American car brands.

By Thanksgiving, 816,000 Americans would be on Kyushu.

Occupying the southern portion of the island would allow Americans to use captured airfields and build new ones. Round-the-clock bombing raids would use both heavy bombers against cities and factories, and tactical aircraft would harass rail lines, command posts and communications centers.

Japan was preparing desperate defenses under Operation Ketsugo, or "Final Battle." Troops would face fanatical resistance.

Japan planned to replicate Okinawa's "Operation Ten-Go" — Ten-Go meaning "heaven." The tactics called for suicide attacks. Japan's Army and Navy had as many as 10,000 aircraft ready by July 1945, most of which were used for one-way trips.

Suicide attacks would come by sea, too: Shinyo motorboats; Kaiten crewed torpedoes and 400 midget submarines; more than 1,000 Fukuryu — meaning "crouching dragon" — divers trained to swim at landing craft with contact



U.S. Navy

Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur, at left, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adm. William D. Leahy and Adm. Chester W. Nimitz (standing) discuss strategy against Japan during a July 1944 meeting in Honolulu.



Library of Congress Archives

This photograph discovered by Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum officials at the Library of Congress is believed to have been taken from the B-29 bomber Enola Gay after it dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, Aug. 6, 1945.

mines. Civilians were urged to become "100 million shields of the Emperor." Official propaganda urged the Japanese that death was preferable to defeat and capture.

The second phase of the invasion, Operation Coronet, would be launched on Y-Day in March. Eight Army divisions, including two armored, would land at Sagami Bay near Kamakura and push past Yokohama. Three Army and three Marine divisions — including the 1st, 4th and 6th — would land at the Boso Peninsula and move east toward Tokyo.

Planners expected to have 1.17 million American and allied troops on Honshu within 60 days. For the first time in the Pacific, the flat expanse of the Kanto Plain leading to Tokyo would allow for the use of armored divisions for the final drive on the imperial capital.

Even when told of the atomic

bomb that had been detonated in July at Alamogordo, N.M., many American planners did not expect the nuclear bomb would push Japan into surrender.

"In my opinion, there should not be the slightest thought of changing the Olympic Operation," Gen. Douglas MacArthur said.

After the bombs devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the invasion plans became moot. Emperor Hirohito spoke on the radio — his voice heard by citizens for the first time — to announce surrender.

Estimates of the cost in lives of invading Japan remain controversial. MacArthur thought American casualties would be about 23,000.

Maj. Gen. Charles Willoughby projected 200,000 casualties on Kyushu, and 510,000 more to capture the rest of Japan — 400,000 for Honshu alone.

Former President Herbert Hoover, asked by President Harry Truman to



Gerry J. Gilmore

The U.S. created so many Purple Heart Medals in anticipation of heavy casualties in Japan that the supply lasted for more than 50 years.

draft post-war plans, estimated up to 1 million Americans dead and wounded.

"Half a million American casualties is realistic," Polmar said. "Millions of Japanese, military and civilian, would die."

One grim calculation: The U.S. had built up a stockpile of nearly 500,000 Purple Hearts, the medal given to those wounded and the families of those killed. The post-World War II surplus meant there were enough in warehouses run by the Defense Supply Center to last through Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War and more minor conflicts. New medals weren't pressed until 1999, during U.S. operations in Kosovo.



U.S. Marine Corps

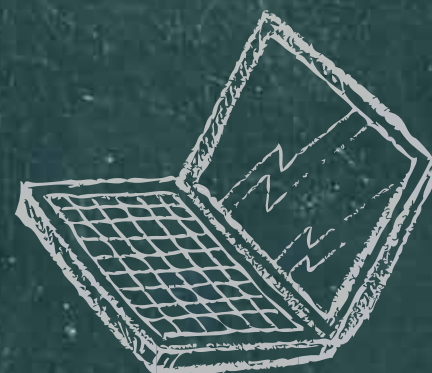
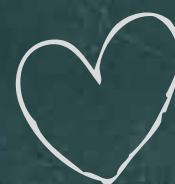
A U.S. Marine rifleman advances during the battle for Okinawa, April 1945.

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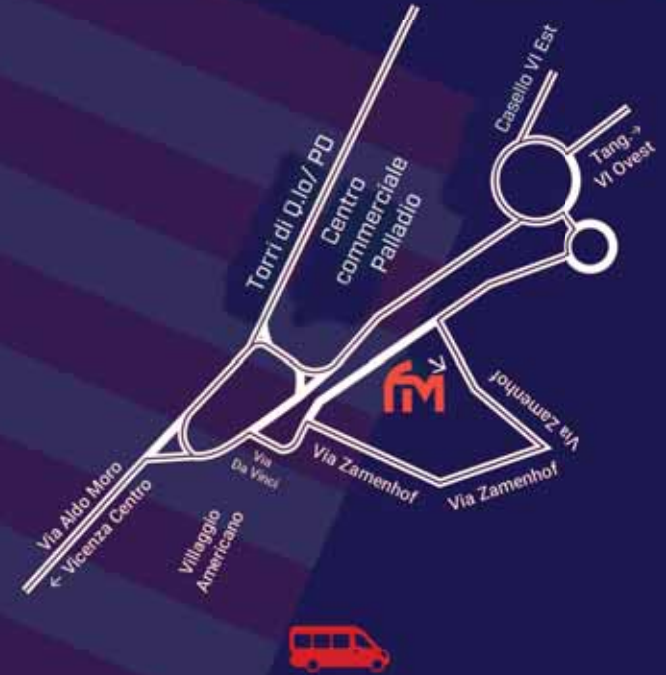
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