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FREE

COWBOY MILITARY CARTOONIST HAS HAD QUITE A RIDE

PAGES 4-5



Photo and cartoons courtesy of Daryl Talbot

Military medical team supports Guam's fight against COVID-19

JOINT REGION MARIANAS

A SAN – In response to the Government of Guam's continuing efforts to address the recent growth in the number of COVID-19 cases throughout the island, 22 military medical professionals integrated with Guam Memorial Hospital staff to supplement COVID-19 medical care and response.

Elements of the joint service team, consisting of Army and Air Force medical professionals, arrived on Guam starting Sept. 2 and began preparations for assisting local medical professionals in the fight against COVID-19.

"We have been working closely with the Government of Guam since COVID's arrival on Guam in March, and we are proud to be able to provide additional medical assistance to the community in which we live and work," said Rear Adm. John Menoni, Commander, Joint Region Marianas. "In the spirit of collaboration, JRM and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have executed a Defense Support for Civil Authorities agreement with GovGuam, and through this avenue, we are able to augment the island's available healthcare staff with a specialized medical team for COVID-19 patients."

SEE COVID-19 ON PAGE 6

Grocery shopping amidst the pandemic: A mundane, yet unusual ordeal

BY JIN CHUNG, STRIPES GUAM

It's no secret that COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our daily lives. Since the beginning of lockdown began months ago, my peers and I have had to adjust to a new normal. This includes firing up a

computer at home in the morning instead of packing a backpack, ordering unhealthy amounts of takeout and subconsciously memorizing Zoom meeting codes for online classes—just to name a few. Amongst the



many ways our lives have changed, grocery shopping is the one seemingly mundane activity which has captivated me.

Before the pandemic, Prior to our current situation, grocery shopping was always quite

calming to me. The well-organized produce, varieties of meat and spices available all in one place has made me reflect on the progress of mankind one too many times, yet it also humbles me. It is a reminder that no

SEE UNUSUAL ON PAGE 2

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UNUSUAL: Great unknowns ahead

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

matter what we achieve, we still need sustenance.

During the quarantine, my family and I try to control how often we leave the house. I know that it's safer to stay inside, but I am grateful for the weekly grocery runs which are also an opportunity for some fresh air and a change of scenery.

A novel atmosphere

Grocery shopping is the perfect time to contextualize just how absurd our current situation is. I vividly remember the streets of Tumon being filled with tourists and commuters, the roads lined with vehicles, and smiles around every turn of a supermarket aisle. Today, grocery shopping is a relatively short and lifeless process, everyone stands 6 feet away per regulation, and conversations are nonexistent.

As for my family, we follow the guidelines stringently, almost to an extreme and a point of redundancy. Before leaving the house, we each get two surgical masks on, and, depending on the situation, we also sport surgical gloves. Though breathing behind two surgical masks is a hassle in Guam's humid climate, it is never unbearable. At times I feel like a contemporary plague doctor, with all of the protection and none of the expertise. Despite all this, having to wear face masks and seeing

everyone else follow pandemic safety protocol is somewhat of a relief.

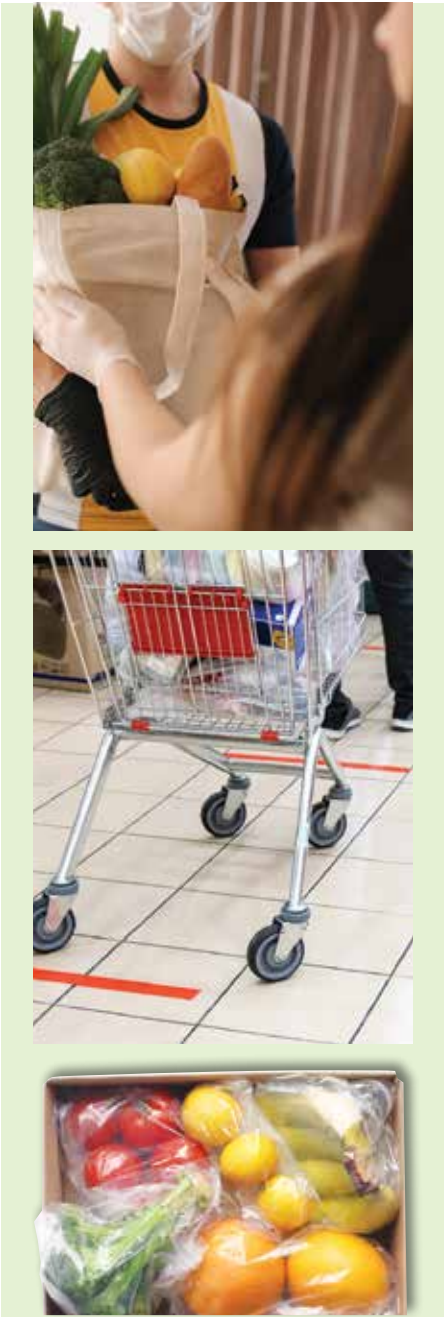
The return journey

The true absurdity begins after we load up on what we need for the week. The goods are brought home and my family performs one of the strangest rituals I have seen in recent memory. The groceries go through a 70% rubbing alcohol misting — just the packaging, not the actual contents. Rubbing alcohol is now an essential item on our weekly shopping list.

For me, grocery shopping encapsulates my thoughts on the pandemic itself. It's definitely completely shifted the way we live our lives, making daily tasks inconvenient in many ways, yet all the precautions we take are a necessary sacrifice for the safety of ourselves and others. In this generation, convenience is paramount, but now, we must consider the safety of others before our own convenience.

Though for some spraying their food item packaging with alcohol to prevent COVID-19 infection might be extreme (and, to a certain extent, I am inclined to agree), I still encourage others to follow safety precautions and avoid diving into unfounded paranoia. Mankind has always had a collective fear of the unknown, therefore now, more than ever, we must prepare for the great unknowns ahead. These are interesting times we live in and for those, interesting preventative measures are also required.

Jin Chung is a 10th-grader at St. John's School in Tamuning. His hobbies include badminton, chess, and audio. Chung was raised on Guam and his favorite location on the island is Tarzan Falls. If you have a story or photos to share, let us know at guam@stripes.com.



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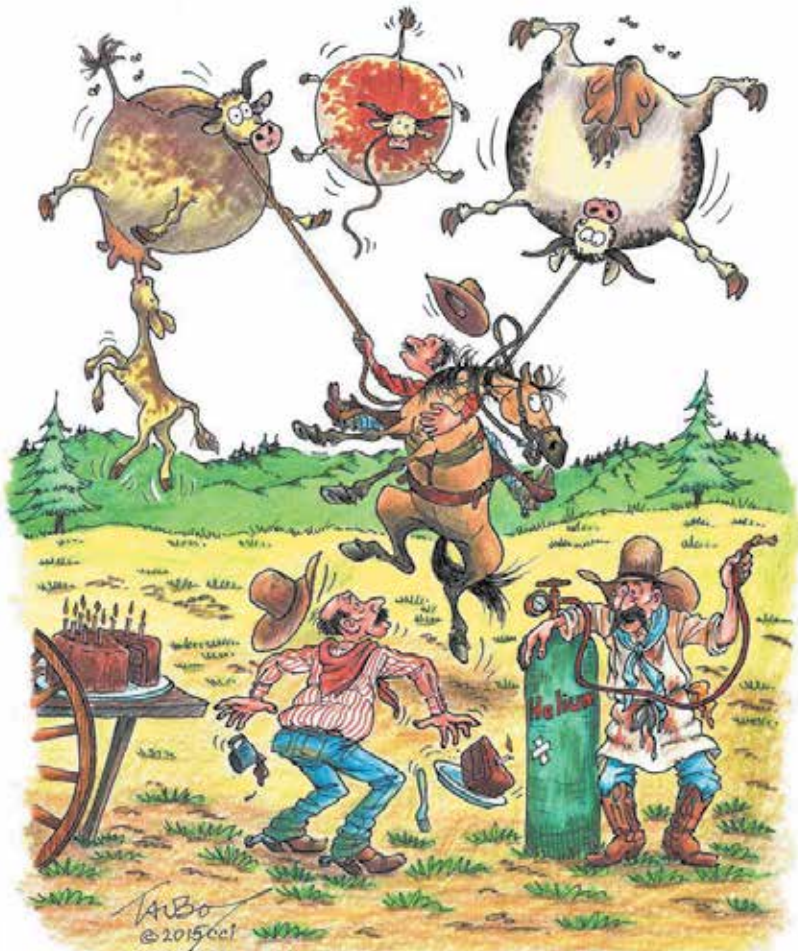
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COWBOY MILITARY HAS HAD QU

STRIPES GUAM



Daryl Talbot has been making people think, laugh and cry with his cartoon for decades. He's a cowboy at heart who also knows a thing or two about the military. In fact, he's served in all four branches of the military. His work will now start appearing in Stars and Stripes community papers and websites. Stripes Guam recently sat down with Talbot over email to breakdown his interesting career.

Q All right, first all, you spent 22 years in the military, serving in the Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force Reserve, Army Reserve and Oklahoma Air National Guard. How did you accomplish that?

A Yes, I served in four branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, five if you count the Oklahoma Air National Guard as a separate branch. It was not planned. If I had planned it, I would have orchestrated it better. My life was planned like a recon patrol with me at point. Move forward and be ready to react to whatever happens.

I was an Air Force Brat. Only a kid growing up with a parent in the military knows the kind of life we have. I started first grade in a suburb of Los Angeles, California and graduated from high school in 1963 in Springfield, Va., and attended school in several states in between. It makes a person rather flexible in decision-making and free to think outside the box, important for a cartoonist. I always wanted to be a cartoonist and artist, maybe join the Army as an illustrator, but my parents had other plans. Go to college. Try it for two weeks and if you don't like it you can quit.

Well, after two weeks in a small junior college in a very small town in southern Oklahoma, my home state, I knew it wasn't for me, but I don't like being a quitter. Craving mail of any kind in this little school, in this little town, I mailed out cards for information on the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Wow! I got lots of mail. But, the Marine Corps recruiter visited me on campus. He traveled all the way from Oklahoma City to this little town and junior college. Well, it just wouldn't be polite not to join. So, when the semester ended I flew, my first time to fly, all the way to San Diego and the United States Marine Corps.

It was a lot different than being an Air Force Brat. I did my four years and avoided going to Vietnam three times. I

attended Oklahoma State University. I was married. When I graduated, I worked for a company in Dallas, Texas with opportunities for advancement when I received my Aviation Navigator training. I was physically fit, but failed the eye exam. But they suggested joining the Navy with the Direct Procurement Program Officer Program. They calculated my years of experience in my specialty field and enlist me at the equivalent of a petty officer level and then I could apply for Officer Candidate School. I tried that. In 1973 when I joined the Navy they had an overage of junior officers and shut down OCS. for a period. Disappointed, I served my four years and returned to civilian life.

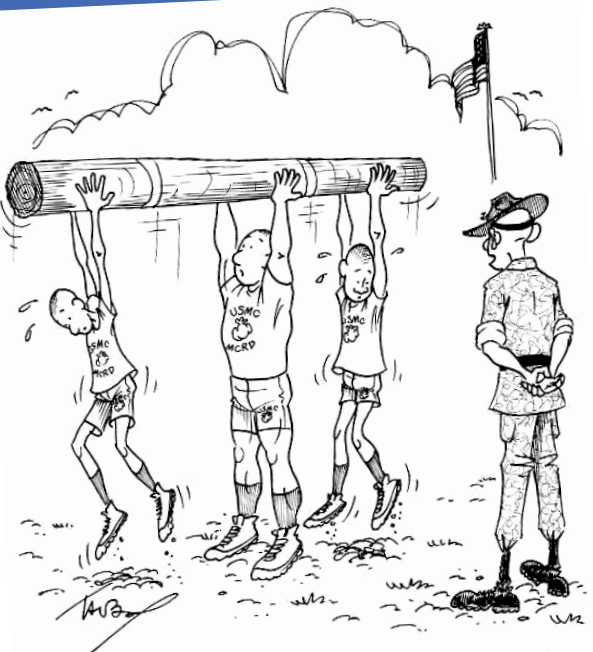
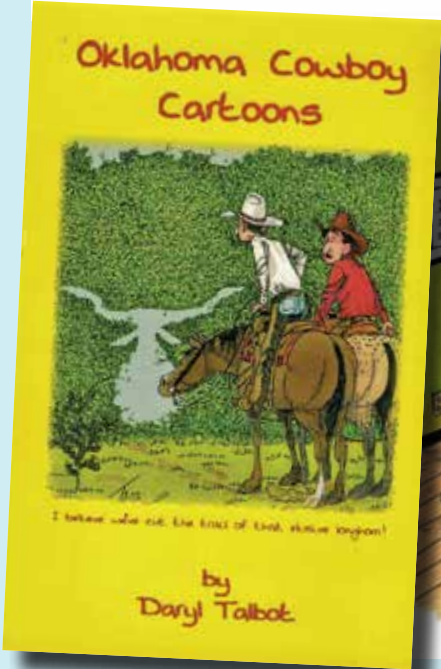
Then after four years of work in the Texas Education Service Center and Lone Star Steel training department, I began receiving letters requesting I return to the Navy. They kept coming in the mail. They finally offered me Navy Reserve service with free medical after age 60. That

was my drawing card. I checked with Navy Reserves and Air Force Reserves, but the Navy was the best offer. So, I took the civilian job and my life dried up. Well, moving back to Oklahoma was the best choice. The U.S. Army Reserve 95th Division in Oklahoma was doing what I liked doing.

To advance in rank to Platoon Leader, I had to place among all officers when I got back to Oklahoma. I needed to go to Infantry. Help. I wrote a letter to the Marine Corps and they fer back to the Air Force Reserve

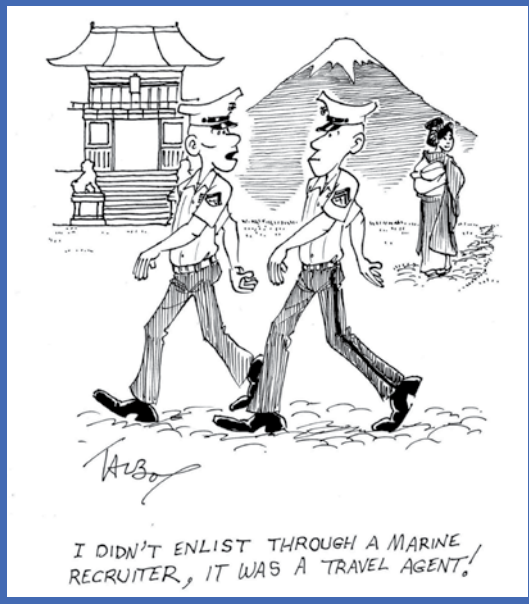


Photos and cartoons courtesy of Daryl Talbot



RY CARTOONIST UTE A RIDE

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My request was granted. The local Air Force Reserve Unit didn't have any opening, so, I tried the Oklahoma Air National Guard. Bingo! They needed people. That was my fifth and last branch. I retired with 22 years. Actually, I transferred to the Retired Reserves. You accumulate points, but you don't have drills. Basically you are available for recall if needed. I was never needed.

Q You are proud of your military service, but also proud to be a cowboy, eh?

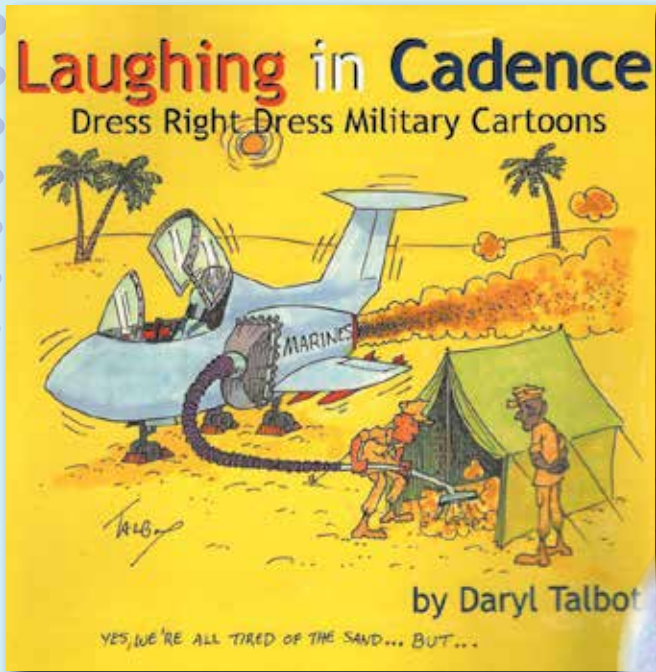
A Why do I include Cowboy in my work description? Being from Oklahoma, where was born, I came from pioneer stock. One grandmother came to Oklahoma when it was Indian Territory in a covered wagon and my other grandmother was of Choctaw ancestry, farm and ranch people. Also, I grew up with cowboy heroes. Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and John Wayne in the movies and later on television. My friends and I played cowboys with our cap guns and stick horses.

Q How did you get started drawing cartoons?

A Starting at an early age, about 3 years old. I was always drawing horses, cowboys and soldiers. I used to draw my own comic books. I would write my own stories and draw each page to make a comic book. It made me popular in school, especially with the girls. I cartooned for horse magazines starting back when I was in the Marines and continued to the present. While I was in college I started cartooning for military magazines, especially Leatherneck Magazine, which I still do today.

Q Tell us about your themes for your military cartoons and what you are trying to tell your audience.

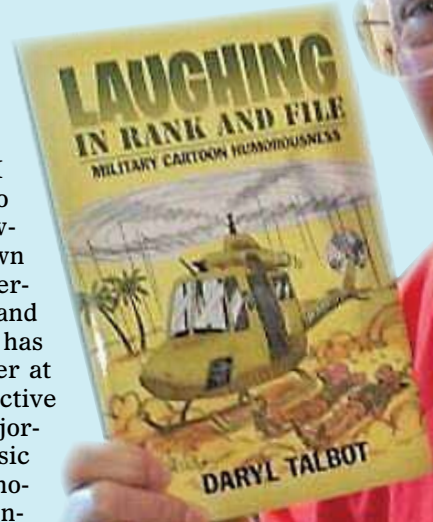
A Drawing military cartoons I try to share some of my experiences and those of my veteran friends. I try to avoid



tragic subjects. There can be humor even in tragic situations, but they're not for general sharing. I leave that invasion to the news media. However, I have been known to be critical about certain military policies and procedures and it has gotten me in hot water at times when I was in active service. I find the majority of my humor in basic training. Recruit ignorance can be very entertaining.

Q What are you most proud of?

A I believe my greatest pride is being a member of a very special and exclusive family of brothers, the United States of America Veterans.



"I find the majority of my humor in basic training. Recruit ignorance can be very entertaining."

– Daryl Talbot



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Lower Sigua Falls

Every Saturday, Guam Boonie Stompers offers public hikes to a variety of destinations such as beaches, snorkeling sites, waterfalls, mountains, caves, latte sites, and World War II sites. We meet at 9:00 AM in the Center Court of Chamorro Village in Hagatna. The cost is \$5.00 for hikers over 17. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. Hikers should provide their own transportation. Guam's trails are not developed. Weather conditions can make the hikes more difficult than described. No reservations required.

For more information:
www.facebook.com/
GuamBoonieStompersInc
or call 787-4238.

Oct. 17
Lower Sigua and Tank Farm

Difficult
5 hours for 5 miles

We hike down open ridgeline to the abandoned Sherman tanks and landing craft at Tank Farm. We make the tricky crossing of two small streams to reach Guam's iconic waterfall and best swim hole to enjoy jumping and swimming.

Bring: 4 quarts water, hiking shoes, swimsuit, gloves, sun screen, lunch, snacks, and camera.

Special conditions: A long hike with little shade, muddy slopes, a tricky stream crossing, and a steep climb up and down assisted by ropes.

Oct. 24
Upper Lonfit Valley

Difficult
5 hours for 4 miles

We hike to Upper Lonfit Falls, then continue to the upper reaches of the Lonfit River past an endless series of waterfalls and cascades, including swimming, jumping, a flume canyon, and a rope swing.

Bring: 3 quarts water, get wet shoes, gloves, sun screen, insect repellent, lunch and snacks, and a camera.

Special conditions: extensive walking in water, slippery rocks, steep slopes, mud, sword grass, mosquitoes, relentlessly uphill and slippery trail.

Stomp Tips:

- 1) Alcohol and hiking do not mix.
- 2) Do not bring beverages with caffeine on hikes.
- 3) Bring plenty of water with you on hikes.
- 4) When hiking, lots of little snacks are better than one big meal.
- 5) Always carry a well stocked personal first aid kit.
- 6) Carry a couple of extra shoelaces in your first aid kit. They have many uses.
- 7) Always bring a small flashlight in case you get lost, or delayed. Save your phone battery for calls.
- 8) Do not hike alone and let someone know where you are going and your return time.

Complete 10 Boonie Stomps to earn a Boonie Stomp T-Shirt!



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Stripes Sports Trivia

Some already argue Mike Trout is the best player in MLB history. The Angels outfielder has finished top 2 in AL MVP voting in 7 of his first 8 seasons. Quite the start for the 25th pick in the 2009 draft. 25th!!! Your team likely passed on him for someone that's not as good, but there was one player no one passed on because he went No. 1 overall. Who was he?

Answer

Stephen Strasburg

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

		4		5	3		2	9
7					9			
				1		3		
1	2	5		9				6
		6						7
		8			1			
			3	2			4	
3				6	4		1	

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answers to Previous Sudoku:

5	2	3	4	1	8	7	6	9
4	7	9	3	5	6	8	2	1
8	1	6	9	7	2	5	4	3
1	4	2	8	3	5	6	9	7
7	3	8	6	2	9	1	5	4
9	6	5	7	4	1	3	8	2
2	8	1	5	9	7	4	3	6
3	5	7	2	6	4	9	1	8
6	9	4	1	8	3	2	7	5

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Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Alligator's abode
- 6 Lift with effort
- 10 Eden dweller
- 14 Dot on a computer screen
- 15 Storybook monster
- 16 Sonny who sang
- 17 Circus site
- 18 Three-fingered saluters
- 20 Full, as a voice
- 22 Morsel
- 23 Felt topper
- 25 Hair raiser?
- 26 It may be furrowed
- 29 Bye lines?
- 31 Religious offshoot
- 34 Overhaul
- 36 Galley gear
- 38 Halloween cry
- 39 Go through again
- 41 Halftime speech
- 43 Mess up
- 44 Like a certain McCoy
- 46 Fire worshiper
- 47 Wind indicator
- 49 Treat a wound
- 51 PGA part, briefly
- 52 Friendly greetings
- 54 UN member
- 56 Lathe, e.g.
- 59 Crichton creature
- 63 Waterproof cloth
- 65 Safari sighting
- 66 Feel the ____
- 67 Put up drapes
- 68 Brilliant success
- 69 Draft, maybe
- 70 Like Santa's cheeks
- 71 Manner

DOWN

- 1 Practice in the ring
- 2 Undercover device
- 3 Sends packing
- 4 Combat ships
- 5 747, e.g.
- 6 Rub elbows (with)
- 7 Braggart's vacation?
- 8 One way to cook
- 9 SAT or GMAT
- 10 Igloos and yurts
- 11 Stringed instrument
- 12 Part of ABM
- 13 Lion's share
- 19 Pack item, slangily
- 21 Took as one's own
- 24 Resting on
- 26 French cheeses
- 27 Nostalgic style
- 28 Pad the bill
- 30 Becomes involved
- 32 "Unforgettable" singers

Answers to Previous Crossword:

P	O	R	T	S	C	A	M	A	S	S	E	T
U	T	A	H	T	A	C	O	S	H	E	A	R
P	I	N	E	C	O	N	E	S	H	O	R	S
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A	S	T	E	R	S	E	A	N	S	T	E	W

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‘We’re not taking a knee’

Training under pandemic conditions could
better prepare soldiers for the big fight

Page 2



Soldiers wear face coverings as training at the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin in California continues during the coronavirus pandemic.

COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

COVER STORY

Army's training doesn't stop amid pandemic

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — Army Sgt. Jason Cho was more concerned about the sweltering heat in the Mojave Desert than the coronavirus, which has forced major changes to his Army National Training Center rotation.

Army and NTC leaders said they have worked hard to ensure that soldiers such as Cho would be able to train at Fort Irwin with as little virus-related distraction as possible. They even found a silver lining — some of the changes forced by the pandemic could better prepare the Army to fight a near-peer adversary, like Russia or China, several top leaders said.

As a combat medic with the 1st Infantry Division's headquarters element, Cho was tasked with monitoring the condition of soldiers throughout the September training exercise, including checking for coronavirus symptoms. But nearly two weeks into the rotation, Cho said his main challenge was soldiers' overheating, as temperatures eclipsed 100 degrees.

"The extreme heat, sleeping outside, the winds ... Dealing with those heat injuries has been keeping us pretty busy," said Cho, wearing an Army green face covering — a requirement for the nearly 5,000 soldiers participating in the September NTC rotation.

The pandemic has made a complicated task — moving thousands of troops and hundreds of vehicles around the country to a single training post in the middle of the desert — even more difficult. The worry of spreading the coronavirus, as it swept across American states in the spring, forced Army officials to shut down NTC and its two sister combat training centers in Louisiana and Germany in mid-March.

At Fort Irwin, before reopening the post in July after missing two rotations, officials had to answer a challenging question: How do you move 5,000 soldiers on and off the installation without spreading the virus between those rotational forces and the post's own population of troops, family members and civilian workers?

The answer, according to Brig. Gen. David Lesperance, the senior commander for Fort Irwin and NTC, was to make some policy changes, restrict access

to the post's training areas, and rethink how soldiers flow on and off for training.

Instead of holding thousands of incoming and outgoing soldiers in one location as NTC rotational units have done for years, smaller groups of soldiers now enter and exit NTC's 775,000-acre training area — known as "the Box" — from separate locations, Lesperance said.

Soldiers entering training no longer stage together outside the Box for several days. Instead, they gear up as soon as their vehicles and supplies arrive, enter the training range and begin to operate in a much more expeditionary fashion, he said. It is the way top Army leaders envision deploying forces into remote locations if a large-scale war were to break out against a force with similar firepower.

The Army must train

Gen. Joseph Martin, the Army's vice chief of staff, and Army Undersecretary James McPherson visited NTC last month to see firsthand what training at the critical post looked like during a pandemic. They came to observe the 1st Infantry Division headquarters rotation, an unusual training scenario built around the division headquarters instead of a brigade combat team, as the majority of combat training center rotations have been.

The operational pause at the outset of the pandemic caused training issues for the Army, leaving some units at lower combat readiness levels than leaders would prefer. It was critical that the Army reopen training centers quickly and safely so soldiers and their units could get the warfighting repetitions they required to be prepared to fight, Martin said.

"That's what our country expects of us, regardless of circumstances," said Martin, who visited NTC for the first time since leaving the installation as its top commander in 2016. "America cannot afford for us to



COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers with the Army's 1st Infantry Division train during a rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., on Sept. 19.

do that. They expect us to operate regardless of how degraded the environment may be."

Russia, China and other adversaries watch the U.S. military closely, including whether its soldiers are conducting the kind of training they can only accomplish at NTC.

"That's not lost on either of our near-peer competitors, [who say], 'Wow. The U.S. Army's back to doing that large-scale training again,'" said McPherson, who was visiting Fort Irwin for the first time.

Calling it a "huge black eye," McPherson highlighted the U.S. military's most high-profile pandemic-related incident — the coronavirus outbreak aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier, which began in March. The incident sidelined the ship for two months as more than 1,000 sailors contracted the virus, and one died from complications. That episode, which triggered the removal of senior officials from the ship's captain to the Navy secretary, resulted in McPherson briefly serving as acting Navy secretary before he returned to his job as Army undersecretary.

"We, the Army, have now responded with a large NTC training evolution," McPherson

said Sept. 20 after leaving Fort Irwin. "That's sending a message to [adversaries] as well: The Army's training, and we're not taking a knee ... even in a worldwide pandemic. We're training to defeat you. That's the message we're sending."

Since returning soldiers to the Box at NTC, the Army has completed three rotations, including a National Guard brigade rotation that saw troops come to Fort Irwin from 27 states.

Soldiers have tested positive for the virus during training rotations, but they have not sparked any significant outbreak, said Lesperance, the post's top commander. There have been no indications that rotational soldiers have infected any troops stationed at Fort Irwin, he said.

Those who have tested positive — the Army declined to disclose how many cases it has seen among either soldiers stationed at Fort Irwin or among its rotating training forces, citing Pentagon policy — have been immediately removed from the Box and quarantined. An Army spokesman described "a few" such cases during the September rotation for the 1st Infantry Division.

"All the safety protocols that we planned for, and that we've

executed, have worked," Lesperance said. "I feel very confident that we'll be able to continue to train as our Army requires us to do."

A leadership crucible

The training scenario for the September rotation included elements the Army would face in a full-spectrum fight in several domains — land, air, space and cyberspace. Fort Irwin's dedicated opposing force, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, challenged the soldiers on the ground from the 1st Infantry Division headquarters and other units subordinate to the division based at Fort Riley, Kan. The regiment used technology and tactics meant to resemble current capabilities of near-peer rivals, which 11th ACR soldiers have mastered through repeated fights with rotational units. The opposing force simulated direct artillery and helicopter strikes, ground attacks and even chemical attacks to test the capabilities of the 1st Infantry Division soldiers on the ground.

Like other NTC rotations, the training included live-fire tests, allowing commanders to coordinate operations from their mobile command centers set up — and repeatedly moved — across the desert training grounds. All the while, NTC-based observer-coach-trainers — soldiers tasked with teaching and guiding the deployed soldiers — critiqued their choices and execution.

Army leaders bill NTC as a leadership crucible, designed to test decision-makers' abilities to

“We, the Army, have now responded with a large NTC training evolution. ... The Army's training, and we're not taking a knee ... even in a worldwide pandemic. We're training to defeat you. That's the message we're sending.”

James McPherson
Army undersecretary

SEE PAGE 3

MILITARY



COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

A soldier with the Army's 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment enters an armored vehicle at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., on Sept. 20.

FROM PAGE 2

coordinate a fight or respond to aggression under harsh, unforgiving conditions. It is not unusual for rotational forces to take a beating from the opposition force, but it helps them learn from their mistakes when lives are not at risk.

"This is how we learn in these [combat training center] rotations," the Army vice chief said. "They reveal things that if you had otherwise not done them, you would learn them in the wrong place — when you're at risk of being struck by the enemy."

That was a lesson Capt. Sean McQuade and other soldiers learned quickly during the training. McQuade, an intelligence officer on the 1st Infantry Division headquarters staff, said his unit experienced a mass casualty in a simulated gas attack just one day before the visit by Martin and McPherson.

McQuade managed to survive the attack, getting his gas mask on and sealed in time, he said. The rotation taught him to stick with the fundamental aspects of warfighting that he has been taught since he was a second lieutenant more than five years ago.

"You're in an uncomfortable environment with the desert ... but ultimately your training kicks in, you survive the [gas] attack and you continue to the next day. In my case, that is giving an update on the enemy situation, and life goes on," he said. "Sure it's uncomfortable [at NTC], not as sanitary as Fort Riley would be back at home, but, ultimately, it's really setting the conditions for us to be ready for when we deploy, be it to Poland, somewhere else in Europe or another operational environment."

Another lesson the soldiers quickly learned was that they cannot rely on their key communications gear to function properly in a harsh environment. Often that meant using old-fashioned analog methods of tracking the battle picture.

"You have to go back to ... get out your map, plot these [locations,]" McQuade said. "We have to continue the mission because you can bet that in a peer-on-peer fight, we're going to have degraded communications."

A 'brilliant' solution

McQuade, on his first rotation to NTC, said it was "a little exciting" to be among the Army's first units training during the pandemic.

There were, of course, the annoyances: the face masks, the temperature checks each time soldiers entered the division's main command center and the constant reminders to avoid being in groups. But he was also intrigued by the real-world impact the pandemic was having on the deployment.

"It really is interesting to see when we go out into the field, what's going to happen," he said. "What if that unknown comes into play, that unknown factor [of the pandemic] that's going to make this scenario different than others?"

McQuade said he believed he was safe from the virus, and the training rotation felt much like other training exercises he has taken part in for years.

That was the idea, Martin and other Army leaders said. By taking measures to curb the chances of an outbreak, soldiers can focus on the training, on learning how to fight against a near-peer competitor, Martin said.

"It forces us to go through a higher level of thinking than we ever did before, and it was born because we had to create a pandemic-mitigating environment" to separate two units entering and exiting NTC, Martin said. "And I think it's brilliant."

The general said the Army likely has not yet realized the impact that the more expeditionary approach to training could have on the service, but it is clear that soldiers need to prepare to fight in exactly that manner.

"Those are the type of environments we're going to go into," Martin said. "It's a wickedly complex problem, but we have had two brigades that have done it so far ... and the rest of the Army is learning from this today."

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Captain with family ties to Guam takes over Task Force 75

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A grandson of two veterans who helped liberate Guam in World War II took command of Task Force 75 on the island during another in a series of down-sized, coronavirus pandemic changes of command.

Capt. Gareth Healy took over as commodore of the task force Oct. 2 from outgoing Capt. Eric Correll. The ceremony was "attended virtually by most" in keeping with coronavirus prevention measures, according to a Navy statement.

Headquartered at Naval Base Guam, Task Force 75 is the 7th Fleet's primary expeditionary forces command, "responsible for the planning and execution of maritime security operations, explosive ordnance disposal, diving, engineering and construction, and underwater construction," according to the statement.

The Navy tradition of change-of-command ceremonies has morphed this year from the all-hands events of pre-pandemic times. Last month, the USS Ronald Reagan turned over its commanders over the ship's public address system.

Calling in via webcam aboard the command vessel USS Blue Ridge at Yokosuka, 7th Fleet commander Vice Adm. Bill Merz presided over the Task Force 75 ceremony. He told Healy it was a "great time to come to the region" because "there's so much energy going on with our warfighting concepts," according to the statement.

"This is the most complex region in the world for a lot of reasons," Merz said, according to the statement. "There are 35 maritime nations out here that depend on everything we do."

The task force, established in 2014, is made up of more than 1,000 sailors in Seabee units, riverine squadrons, expeditionary intelligence forces and explosive ordnance technician teams across the

Pacific, the Navy said in 2015.

During World War II, about 59,000 Marines and Army infantry landed on Guam to retake the island from Japanese occupiers in July and August 1944. The Coast Guard and Navy were there, too, along with Healy's grandfathers, he said during the ceremony.

"I take command on Guam under the heavenly eyes of two grandfathers involved in the liberation of the island in 1944," Healy said, according to the statement. "One of whom brought a very similar capability to what we use here today as part of 41st Special Construction Battalion."

Under Correll's leadership, the task force's expeditionary forces conducted operations in more than 25 countries, responded to typhoons Mangkut and Yutu, expanded expeditionary mine counter-measure capabilities and re-postured Seabees — the Navy's construction battalions — opening multiple new locations and closing less-effective sites throughout the 7th Fleet, according to the Navy.

The task force also supported operations on Guam when the USS Theodore Roosevelt in March diverted there to disembark, test and isolate its 5,000 crew members after a coronavirus outbreak on the ship, according to the statement.

Healy comes to the task force from U.S. Special Operations Command in Washington, D.C., where he served in the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate. A native of New Orleans, he is a 1997 graduate of Tulane University. His career specialty is explosive ordnance disposal, according to the task force.

Correll will next serve as commanding officer of Naval Surface Warfare Center, Indian Head Division and the deputy executive manager for the Defense Department's EOD Technology.

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U.S. Navy

Capt. Gareth Healy, left, took command of Task Force 75 from Capt. Eric Correll, right, during a ceremony at Naval Base Guam, on Oct. 2.

MILITARY

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Esper: Navy needs to have more than 500 ships by 2045

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The Navy wants to double its number of submarines as part of a plan to build more than 500 ships by 2045 to maintain a competitive edge against China and Russia, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said.

“We believe that this is the vision for the future that will ensure that we maintain the greatest Navy in the world,” he said during an Oct. 6 speech at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a think tank specializing in U.S. defense policy, force planning and budgets.

Esper provided an overview of “Battle Force 2045,” though the Pentagon has yet to share the Navy’s 30-year shipbuilding plan or its naval force study with Congress.

The defense secretary directed a future naval force study earlier this year to determine how the U.S. Navy can maintain its edge against the navies of other military powers.

Esper said the need to modernize the Navy is in part due to China’s own naval modernization and shipbuilding efforts. The Pentagon’s China report released Sept. 1 determined the country aims to have a “world-class” military on par with the United States by 2049. It already has the largest navy in the world at 350

ships. The United States now has 296 deployable battle force ships, according to the Navy.

Esper said during his speech that the Pentagon has found a “credible path” to get to 355 ships within the next 15 years, which had been the Navy’s previous shipbuilding goal. However, he did not offer specifics, other than to say they were included as part of the funding and reform efforts being created for the Battle Force 2045 plan.

The first priority of that plan is to have a large number of attack submarines, with a target of 70 to 80 submarines overall. This will require the Navy to build at least three next-generation Virginia-class submarines every year “as soon as possible,” Esper said. The Navy now has more than 40 operational attack submarines, according to Pentagon documents.

“If we do nothing else, we should invest in attack submarines, because of the lethality they can deliver under the sea and survivability that they have. A clear overmatch that we have when it comes to the undersea domain and submarines in particular,” Esper said.

Large nuclear-powered aircraft carriers also will be part of the future Navy, still considered the force’s “most visible deterrent,” he said. The Navy is also looking at “light carriers,” such as the USS America amphibious assault ship that can go to sea



OSWALD FELIX JR./U.S. Navy

The USS Ronald Reagan carrier strike group and the America amphibious ready group steam in formation last month. The Navy wants to expand the fleet to 500 ships by 2045 and rely more on vessels like the USS America.

with vertical takeoff and landing aircraft including the F-35B fighters and the MV-22 Osprey. These light carriers would free up the bigger carriers for more of the “critical high-end fight,” Esper said.

While there is more studying to be done on the appropriate mix of carriers, Esper said defense officials believe they will need at least eight to 11 aircraft carriers for high-end conflicts and up to six light carriers. The Navy has 11 operational aircraft carriers now and one operational America-class amphibious assault ship with another under construction, according to the service.

Unmanned naval vessels have been discussed in a number of congressional hearings about the future of the Navy and they are included in the Battle Force 2045 plan. Esper said the future force will have between 140 and 240 unmanned and “optionally manned” surface and subsurface vessels that can perform

a variety of missions including surveillance, mine-laying and missile strikes.

Continuing with the future of unmanned capabilities in the Navy, defense officials also want a variety of unmanned ship-based aircraft, including fighters and refuelers, Esper said.

The defense secretary also said he supports incorporating into the Battle Force 2045 plan the Marine Corps’ Force Design 2030 that focuses more on a joint naval force that eliminates Marine elements such as tank and artillery units. While it is still being studied, the Pentagon foresees needing more amphibious warfare ships within a range of 50 to 60 ships, Esper said.

With the goal to reach more than 500 manned and unmanned ships by 2045, the plan needs all the funding it can find. Funding from Defense Department reform efforts, such as combatant command reviews, will be put toward this ambitious plan, according to Esper. This money

will increase the shipbuilding account by 13% within the Navy’s overall budget number, which matches the amount put toward new ships during former President Ronald Reagan’s military buildup in the 1980s, he said. Esper did not provide dollar amounts.

Congressional help will also be necessary to make the plan work. Esper said he wants lawmakers to stop using continuing resolutions to fund the defense budget and allow the military to divest from legacy systems so that the funds can be put toward “higher priorities.” He also said he will request that the Navy have the authority to put any end-of-year budget savings toward shipbuilding instead of losing the money when it is not spent.

“The combination of these funds, reforms and authorities will help ensure that Battle Force 2045 is adequately resourced,” Esper said.

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Marines may waive fitness tests for those at risk of virus

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps commanders may issue waivers for Marines, or even whole units, for semi-annual combat fitness tests if the testing sites cannot accommodate safety measures to protect against the coronavirus, a spokesman for III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa said.

The Corps is putting mitigating steps in place, such as screening Marines and taking their temperatures before the tests, disinfecting equipment and mandating face masks, 1st Lt. Pawel Puczek said in an email to Stars and Stripes. He said Marines who are at a higher risk of contracting the coronavirus or share quarters with someone who is at a higher risk may apply for waivers.

In April, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger ordered a halt to all fitness testing due to the coronavirus. Last month, the Corps announced it will

resume its physical fitness and combat fitness tests despite the ongoing pandemic.

Marines will have until the end of December to complete both tests, according to a Sept. 21 memo.

Individual waivers will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, Puczek said.

“The health and safety of our Marines is always a top priority,” he said. “Commands across III MEF have demonstrated their dedication to keeping Marines and families safe from COVID-19 through diligent planning and implementation of safety protocols.”

The allowance for commanders to issue both combat fitness test and physical fitness test waivers will extend across the Marine Corps, according to a Marine administrative order.

Social distancing may prove difficult during the combat fitness test, in which one event requires Marines to drag and carry each other to simulate maneuver under fire, according to the official Ma-

rine Corps website.

The Air Force in September postponed its physical fitness assessments until January 2021. Body composition measurements — waist, height and weight — are postponed until further notice, according to last month’s announcement.

All airmen will receive maximum points for the so-called “abdominal circumference” component as part of their official score, including those with exemptions to that waist measurement, the statement said.

“We know people are staying fit regardless, but we want to give our Airmen enough time to prepare,” Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. said in the statement.

The Navy also postponed sailors’ physical fitness tests until further notice in an administrative message in July.

“Although the Navy PFA Cycle 2, 2020 has been excused, Sailors are reminded to make good choices for a healthy diet and

are to continue a level of fitness to maintain Navy physical fitness standards,” the message said.

Earlier this month, the Army adopted its long-planned, six-event physical fitness test as its official evaluation, but with fitness testing suspended amid the coronavirus pandemic, service leaders said soldiers’ scores will not count for some time, according to a June statement by Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston.

Once restrictions are lifted, according to Grinston, the Army will use information it gathers from soldiers taking the Army Combat Fitness Test to make any adjustments to the test. The scores will not be used to assess soldiers in any official manner, including on annual evaluations.

The Army plans to reexamine its schedule for reimposing its requirement that soldiers must pass physical fitness tests to remain in the service, Grinston said.

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MILITARY

'Battle Born' 'Terminal Lance' author Uriarte returns with graphic novel featuring 'indomitable' Marine hero

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Maximilian Uriarte has spent the past 10 years bringing the realities of Marine Corps service to life.

In 2010, he debuted the comic strip "Terminal Lance," which became a cultural phenomenon, illuminating the humor and daily absurdities of the grunt existence. He became a New York Times bestselling author in 2016 with the release of "The White Donkey: Terminal Lance," a graphic novel examining the realities of war and its effects on the psyche.

Now, the 33-year-old is back with another graphic novel, "Battle Born: Lapis Lazuli," and a new archetype that mines the "indomitable" Marine hero.

"Battle Born" follows the exploits of the sensitive-yet-Herculean, African-American squad leader Sergeant King, as he deftly attempts to win hearts and minds in the mountains of Afghanistan while combating the Taliban and the conflict mineral trade. This mysterious new character without a first name also faces issues like racism and sexism within his squad.

Unlike Uriarte's past works, King's anguish manifests itself not in jokes, nervous banter between Marines or the outpouring of emotion, but in blank stares, long silences, a clenched jaw and brute violence. King is roughly based on Robert E. Howard's "Conan the Barbarian," Uriarte said by phone Sept. 15 from his home in Santa Monica, Calif.

"I wanted to create a kind of modern mythical hero like Conan in a contemporary realist setting," he wrote in the book's afterword. "Sergeant King became that character."

The novel is a departure from Uriarte's previous works, which are mostly black and white. Each of its 352-pages pop with rich, vibrant color. There are some sections where mountain landscapes or facial expressions tell the story with no dialogue.

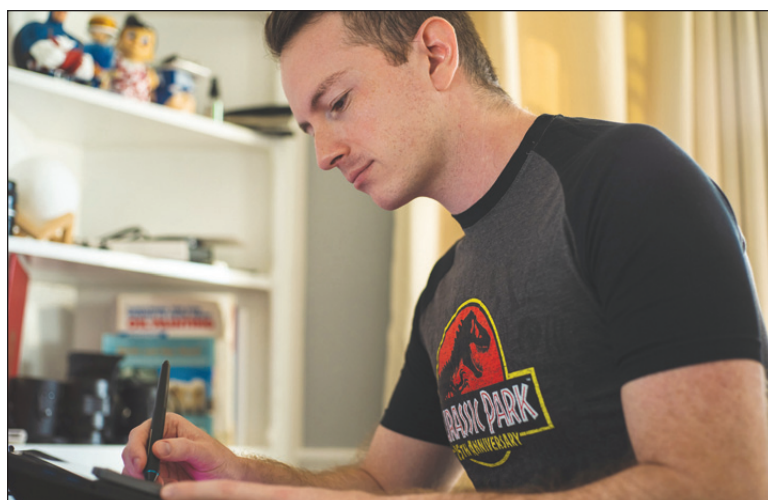
"I really wanted this to be like a purely visual experience," Uriarte said during the phone interview. "I didn't want this to feel like reading a book. I wanted it to feel like you are watching a movie."

Terminal Lance

Uriarte's previous works closely mirrored his own journey, he told Stars and Stripes in 2016. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2006 at age 19 to gain "worldly experience," which he hoped would inform "better art."

He said he soon began to see flaws in the Corps and in his naive way of thinking. There was very little romanticism to be found sleeping in the mud.

Uriarte put pen to paper and began to satirize the absurdities he was seeing, from green officers to forced motivation, the invasion of political correctness



Rachael Uriarte

Maximilian Uriarte, author of the popular "Terminal Lance" comic and the new graphic novel "Battle Born: Lapis Lazuli," works in September from his home in Santa Monica, Calif.

or grooming standards. "Terminal Lance" was born.

He did tours in Iraq in 2007 and 2009. He got out in 2010 and signed a contract with Marine

Corps Times. Since then, the paper has run hundreds of Uriarte's "Terminal Lance" comic strips.

Uriarte does not have an active

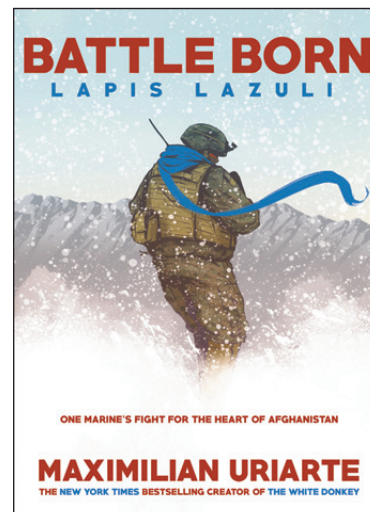
contract with the paper and is the strip's sole owner, he said. The strip also appears on the TerminalLance.com website and its social media platforms.

In 2016, Uriarte self-published "Terminal Lance: The White Donkey." The book sold out of 3,000 copies on Amazon.com after only 36 hours, which led to a publishing deal with Little, Brown and Co.

Lapis lazuli

Uriarte came up with the idea for "Battle Born" in 2014 while working on "The White Donkey," the afterword states. He felt artistically compelled to set the book in the mountains, so he began researching Afghanistan's tragic history, looking for potential story angles.

He came across a New York Times article about how the Taliban had taken over large swaths of Afghanistan's Badakhshan province and were



Photos left and above by Little, Brown and Co.

"Battle Born: Lapis Lazuli" is the new graphic novel by former Marine and "Terminal Lance" scribe Maximilian Uriarte.

funding operations through the sale of the blue, semi-precious gemstone, lapis lazuli, which is found at Sar-i-sang, deep in the mountains.

"People know [the Taliban] make their money from opium and drugs and other illegal activities, but this was kind of a new thing," Uriarte said by phone. "It was gemstones and they had kind of taken over the whole area ... I got really intrigued by it."

Uriarte began writing the script in earnest in 2018, he said.

"Battle Born" sees King and a diverse platoon dropped into the mountains outside Sar-i-sang, where they build a combat outpost and begin operations to deter Taliban mining and restore order. Their culture and ideals run headlong into that of the remote local population.

King becomes close with the family of a local village elder, who is then punished by the Taliban. He enacts vengeance while ultimately facing a dilemma over doing the right thing or following the rules.

Uriarte once again captures the feel and banter of a Marine unit and addresses true-to-life social issues through characters like the naive 1st Lt. Roberts, a gay female Marine named Chavez and a Confederate-flag-loving racist named Forrest.

"You're black now," King tells Chavez after explaining that she'll have to work twice as hard to earn the men's respect.

At one point, after the Taliban infiltrate the outpost, King rips the jaw off a Taliban fighter in hand-to-hand combat.

The book was released July 28 and has received positive reviews thus far. Hollywood took notice and "Battle Born" is already in development for a film, Uriarte said.

"The experience of writing the book through the eyes of King had a profound impact on me," he wrote in the afterword. "Rest assured, Sergeant King will return."

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MILITARY

New Army field manual focuses on holistic health

Guide gives official approval to naps

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army released its new field manual and has officially embraced an afternoon snooze for tired soldiers unable to maintain full nights of sleep during training exercises or other operations.

Titled Holistic Health and Fitness, FM-22 outlines coming changes to how the Army intends to use more holistic health approaches to help improve a soldier's performance.

The update, released Oct. 1, is the first revamp of the service's health and fitness approach since 2012, and it intends to build more resilient, healthy soldiers by concentrating on their individual wellness instead of the service's decades-old focus on the health of whole units.

"We've made leaps and strides, by not looking at soldiers as carbon copies of one another, but as individuals. That's the point of Health and Holistic Fitness," said Maj. Gen. Lonnie Hibbard, the commander of the Army's Center for Initial Military Training, which spearheaded the service's health reform efforts outlined in the new field manual.

"[It] optimizes a soldier's readiness, reduces injury rates, improves rehabilitation after injury, and increases the overall effectiveness of the total Army," he said.

The decision to revamp how the Army approaches soldier wellness was driven by troubling statistics that show high rates of injuries and other health issues that have limited tens of thousands of soldiers from fully performing their jobs. Army statistics show more than 58,000 soldiers as of April were characterized as nondeployable, the equivalent of about 13 brigade combat teams.

Among those soldiers, about 15,000 were considered permanently nondeployable. The same data showed roughly 53% of American soldiers reported suffering a new injury in 2018. Of those injuries, some 71% were diagnosed as preventable musculoskeletal injuries from overuse, according to Army documents.

Holistic Health and Fitness, dubbed H2F by the Army, aims to fix some of those long-standing challenges by encouraging soldiers to adopt physical fitness routines tailored to improving their strength and their ability to recover quickly. Hibbard said

the system will go hand-in-hand with the Army's new fitness assessment, the six-event Army Combat Fitness Test that Oct. 1 replaced the decades-old Army Physical Fitness Test as the service's official fitness evaluation.

For example, the Army intends to move away from its hourlong early morning unit physical training sessions when everyone does the same routine to fitness training regimens tailored specifically to an individual.

"This will require physical training to occur throughout the duty day, not just during a one-hour period in the early morning," said Megan Reed, a spokeswoman for the Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va.

But the new field manual also makes clear to soldiers that other health aspects, such as nutrition, mental wellness and sleep are equally as important as physical fitness to their ability to perform their duties.

"To achieve optimal readiness, soldiers must have sleep and the more sleep obtained the better. Inadequate sleep weakens soldier performance and jeopardizes the mission," the field manual states. "... In short, sleep makes soldiers better at being soldiers."

The field manual calls for soldiers to get between seven and nine hours of sleep in every 24 hours, but it does not postulate on the minimum amount of sleep soldiers can rely on and maintain "military effectiveness." However, the manual does state soldiers do not acclimate to a lack of sleep, and, therefore, must make up for lost rest hours at some point.

"The notion that one can adapt to sleep loss is a myth," FM-22 reads. "Although soldiers generally benefit from training as they fight, this does not hold true for sleep loss. Soldiers cannot be trained to perform better on less sleep."

That is where officially authorized naps in some circumstances, officials said. Naps while in the field — on deployments or during long exercises at places like the Army's three combat



ALEXANDER BURNETT/U.S. Army

A paratrooper sleeps while waiting for a flight to Colombia in January at Fort Bragg, N.C. The Army's new field manual gives the OK for naps for soldiers unable to get a full night's sleep during training or other operations.

training centers — have long been customary for tired soldiers during periods of downtime. Now, commanders are authorized to allow soldiers to nap when their over-tiredness could become risky.

"When regular nighttime sleep is not possible due to mission requirements, soldiers can use short, infrequent naps to restore wakefulness and promote performance," according to the manual. "When routinely available sleep time is difficult to predict, soldiers might take the longest nap possible as frequently as time is available. During periods of restricted sleep (six hours of sleep or less per night), napping combined with appropriate doses of [about 200 mg of] caffeine may help to sustain cognitive performance and alertness."

The new guidance is meant for soldiers to catch up on needed sleep while "conducting training and operations," Reed said.

That means, soldiers should not expect to be authorized naps while on-duty to make up for sleep lost during a night of drinking or playing video games.

The directive is not the first time that military officials have acknowledged the need for troops to get more rest. The Navy in 2018 mandated sailors deployed on aircraft carriers

receive eight hours of sleep every 24 hours, after investigators found sleep deprivation was a major factor in the separate, deadly crashes in 2017 of the destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain.

To ensure soldiers' wellness, the Army plans to build new teams of soldiers and civilians focused on elements of holistic health and fitness into its brigades and similarly sized units. The 25-37 person teams, called H2F performance teams, will include dietitians, athletic trainers, occupational and physical therapists, cognitive performance experts and other health- and fitness-focused experts, Reed said.

The Army has already begun moving uniformed military personnel into some of its brigades. Reed said the Army will first build the performance teams in 28 active-duty brigades. It intends to incorporate the teams into all of the service's 110 active-duty, brigade-sized elements by October 2026, she said.

The new field manual also calls for the Army to build soldier health and fitness facilities for those 110 brigades at installations across the globe. The facilities, called Soldier Performance Readiness Centers, are envisioned as a one-stop shop for soldiers to conduct physical

training and other health-related activities.

Brigades at Fort Bliss, Texas, and Fort Drum, N.Y., already have similar facilities, Reed said. However, they do not incorporate all the aspects of new facilities that the Army aims to build for all 110 of its brigades between 2023 and 2026, she said. The Army has yet to determine how much the new facilities will cost, Reed said.

The Army envisions building a 40,000-square-foot Soldier Performance Readiness Center for each of its brigades. The facilities are to include indoor and outdoor training areas, dedicated ACFT testing space with the equipment necessary to train for and conduct testing, a track, climbing pods, and strength-training equipment, according to the field manual. The facilities would also include classroom and counseling spaces where soldiers would engage with the new performance teams, the manual states.

Reed said the shift to the individualized, holistic health approach will take some time, but the Army's top leaders believe it is a necessary "culture shift" for soldiers.

"We are confident that once H2F performance teams and [Soldier Performance Readiness Centers] are fielded and integrated, leaders will recognize the benefits of improved soldier readiness, lower numbers and severity of injuries, and an overall reduction in soldier nonavailability rates," she said.

‘When regular nighttime sleep is not possible due to mission requirements, soldiers can use short, infrequent naps to restore wakefulness and promote performance.’

Holistic Health and Fitness manual

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PACIFIC

‘Cultural shift’

At Noble Fury exercise, Okinawa Marines take island and turn outward to support Navy control of the seas

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

IE SHIMA, Okinawa — Sgt. Cal Cushing-Hurley and his squad from the Camp Lejeune, N.C.-based 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, could hardly contain their enthusiasm for their first Pacific exercise — a simulated airfield seizure on a tiny island off Okinawa’s northwest coast.

They were among the first wave of about 100 Marines to land at the airfield aboard MV-22 Ospreys during drills dubbed Noble Fury.

“I’m excited to put all of our practice into action,” Cushing-Hurley, 24, of Marshfield, Mass., said before the mission. “It’s always good to get live reps in and reinforce everything you’ve trained for.”

Noble Fury was a first-time joint training exercise between Marines and sailors of the III Marine Expeditionary Force and the Navy’s 7th Fleet, according to a statement from III MEF. It is designed to improve III MEF and 7th Fleet’s working relationship through “simultaneous, distributed events.”

Primary activities included a command post exercise and field training drills like the Oct. 7 airfield seizure. The exercise took place on Okinawa and other Japanese islands, including Iwo Jima, known in Japan as Iwo To, the statement said. It concluded Oct. 15.

During the airfield seizure, Marines wore masks as a precaution against the coronavirus but were unable to maintain a minimum distance of six feet. They took off their masks once they hit the island.

First Battalion, which deployed to Okinawa in August, came to rehearse its ability to take and hold key maritime terrain from an equally matched, or “peer” enemy, and establish an expeditionary advanced base, Marine planners from the battalion and 3rd Marine Division said.

However, in a “cultural shift” for the Corps, the Marines would then face outward and support the Navy in control of the seas, Col. Jason Perry, assistant commander of the 3rd Marine Division, said at Camp Schwab. The tactic comes directly from commandant Gen. David Berger’s planning guidance.

“As a Marine, I’ve always kind of viewed our role as: We’re on ships; we’re looking at the shore;



Forward air-controller Capt. David Kee stands by as Marines pour out of an MV-22 Osprey to seize the airfield at Ie Shima, Okinawa, on Wednesday during the Noble Fury exercise.



A Marine scans for enemy troops after taking over the airfield at Ie Shima, Okinawa, during Noble Fury drills.

we get on our [amphibious assault vehicles] and boats and helicopters, and then we land; we go ashore; the Navy supports that and then we fight ashore,” Perry said.

“I think the difference now is that not only do we do that ... once we are ashore, we are now in support of the Navy. We now turn our focus from just doing the land portion of that fight to looking out into the airspace and into the maritime space and supporting those fleet operations.”

‘The next fight’

Noble Fury is also designed to reinforce the concept of distributed command and control centers, said 1st Battalion commander Lt. Col. Gabe Diana. This means having multiple command posts dispersed throughout the region, so adversaries have no chance of disrupting operations by targeting any one center.

“We’ve really worked the last 12 months to build competency in expeditionary — offense and

defensive — operations, a focus on [amphibious] operations, so this provides us an opportunity to come out here and really practice our trade in very complex terrain,” he said. “It’s a well-disciplined, well trained force.”

The core group of leaders in 1st Battalion are combat veterans with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, Diana said. Division spokesman Maj. Kurt Stahl said training prepared them to fight the next war against a peer adversary.

Marines in the field echoed the thought.

“In the future, this is something we might be tasked to do so we need to be able to conduct it and it needs to be passed on to the next generation of Marine so we do well,” said Cpl. Daniel Steele, 28, of Middlebury, Vt.

A key part of the exercise involved inserting a Marine M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, from 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines’ Romeo Battery to Ie under the cover of darkness Wednesday night for a fire mission.

Cushing-Hurley said he was “absolutely confident” in his squad’s ability to accomplish their part of the mission, providing security for the HIMARS, without issues.

“It’s my first time bringing HIMARS to conduct [airfield seizure] operations so I’m looking forward to that and seeing the integration between the [Marine Air-Ground Task Force] and the battalions as a whole,” he said.

Machine-gun squad leader Cpl. Nikolas Werosta, 23, from Medford, N.J., couldn’t wait to get on the Ospreys and get airborne.

“For me, it’s just about getting experience under my belt so when I get newer guys when we get back to [Camp Lejeune], to just be able to teach them, help them out,” he said.

Blackout conditions

The day started early at Camp Schwab for Cushing-Hurley and the Marines of 2nd Platoon. They arrived at the Central Training Area and took positions in the woods around Landing Zone Phoenix, concealing themselves by slathering camouflage paint across their faces.

A few hours later a pair of MV-22 Ospreys arrived to ferry them to their destination.

The scenario was simple: The platoon would take and hold Ie’s long runway and airfield. It would then push out and defend against enemy counterattacks, sending security patrols spiderwebbing across the island’s grassy fields and jungle patches.

Lastly, the platoon would support deployment of the HIMARS system and depart the island the next day.

When the time came, the Marines poured off the Ospreys and immediately hit the deck, covering all angles of the runway, rifles pointed outward in all directions. Once they had established a perimeter, they moved out into tall grass surrounding the airfield.

Forward air controllers set up communications gear in the grass and talked to incoming helicopters as the first wave pushed out into the island’s interior. Two more waves arrived behind them.

Marine AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters buzzed overhead, making simulated strafing runs along the coast and at sea. Werosta set up his machine-guns

Sometime in the evening darkness, an Air Force MC-130J Super Hercules, from 1st Special Operations Squadron at Kadena Air Base, approached the island, Marine officials said. It landed on the Ie runway, which was still controlled by 1st Battalion.

Marines of Romeo Battery rolled off their HIMARS using night vision optics. They simulated firing its complement of rockets, in what is called a rapid infiltration mission, to support the Navy, and then they were gone, back aboard the MC-130J, before the simulated enemy even knew they were there.

“It’s very quick,” said HIMARS battery commander Capt. Ralph Biddle, a 31-year-old from Philadelphia. “A good crew can get on and off in well under a half-hour.”

The Marines judged the exercise a success.

“Noble Fury improves the MEF’s ability to establish expeditionary fires bases and forward arming and refueling points throughout the Indo-Pacific at any time and place, further enabling the Navy and the larger joint force in times of conflict,” III Marine Expeditionary Force commander Lt. Gen. H. Stacy Clardy III said in the Marine statement. “We must be ready to rapidly deploy in support of—and stand with—our allies and partners throughout the region.”

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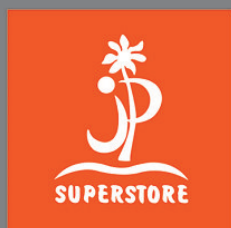
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