

STARS AND STRIPES®

Volume 17 Edition 39 ©SS 2025 **U.S. EDITION** *stripes.com* **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2025**



Without warning

Without warning, Fort Hood officials chose not to alert public as predator attacked female soldiers in their barracks

ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

COVER STORY

No warning as predator stalked base

Army chose not to tell public as female soldiers were attacked

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Mayra Diaz was a 17-year-old high school senior working toward enlisting in the Army when she heard the news that Spc. Vanessa Guillen, another young Hispanic woman with dreams of the military, was killed at Fort Hood in April 2020.

As Guillen's case ignited a criminal investigation and justice reforms at the base and across the military, Diaz watched from California. She hesitated to enlist.

"I remember my mom crying to me and telling me not to leave," Diaz said. "In the end, I knew that it was what was best for me career-wise and spiritually and emotionally, just to get away from home. So, I made the decision to join the military despite what happened to [Guillen], knowing that it could happen to me."

Diaz reassured her mother that nothing like what happened to Guillen would happen to her.

But it did.

Diaz arrived at Fort Hood in February 2022. Another female soldier living near her on the east end of the Army post in central Texas was held at knife-point in a barracks room and sexually assaulted the following month. Diaz never heard about it, or a similar attack that had occurred the previous year.

Even after a man forced his way into Diaz's room with a gun in the middle of night July 15, 2022, raped her and nearly strangled her to death, there would be no public alert or warning from Army officials at the base.

Only after another female soldier, who was being held at gunpoint in her barracks room in October 2022, escaped naked and screaming for help did Fort Hood soldiers and the public learn Sgt. Greville Clarke had spent 18 months preying on the women living and working around him at the base.

A review of the Army Criminal Investigation Division's investigative reports into Clarke's crimes show in-



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

Sgt. Greville Clarke enters the Lawrence H. Williams Judicial Center at Fort Hood, Texas, on Dec. 10, 2024, for a hearing.

"I would have put a reward out there," Zeliff said. "Maybe somebody knows who this guy is, or maybe somebody suspects who it is."

David Zeliff
retired CID agent

vestigators noted a pattern of similarities in attacks against female soldiers in the barracks just days after friends found Diaz in her room. The reports also showed CID did not investigate the first attack in 2021, instead left it to the military police force, which closed the investigation after two months because DNA evidence collected from the scene was inconclusive.

The investigations began at Fort Hood during a period of upheaval for the Army. After Guillen's disappearance and death at the hands of another soldier in 2020, service officials ordered an independent review of the base that exposed practices among military police, criminal investigators

and leaders created a permissive environment for sexual assault to occur. It also found the base did not do enough to prevent crime from occurring.

Many of the reforms that stemmed from the Fort Hood report relating to CID, the military justice system and policies on treatment of victims of sexual violence were begun in late 2021 and some are still in the process of being fully implemented. For CID, those reforms included increasing the number of civilian agents that work for the crime division, and more training opportunities. Agents have better access to investigative tools for digital forensics and shorter turnaround times from the evidence lab and from leaders on approval for investigation strategies such as consented monitoring of conversations.

CID also has a mandate to prevent crime, and the review of Fort Hood called on better relationships between investigators, base leaders and the surrounding civilian community to do so.

Lane Allen, the special agent who took charge of the Fort Hood CID office this year, confirmed the division weighed the idea with base leaders of a public announcement during the search for Clarke. Instead, they chose to alert soldiers living in the area through sergeants overseeing the af-

fected barracks and soldiers.

"There was a deliberate decision made to notify ... the military chains of command for those barracks," Allen said. "The thought was that it would get out quicker."

Officials also did not want to cause undue alarm in the public or compromise the investigation to get the suspect into custody, he said.

A warning and a call

Chris Swecker, a retired assistant director of the FBI who led the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee, said officials should err on the side of putting the word out when balancing the need to protect an investigation with the safety of soldiers.

"That's not negotiable," he said.

David Zeliff, a retired CID agent, agreed some form of an alert, even something generic, could have protected soldiers and helped investigators.

"I would have put a reward out there," Zeliff said. "Maybe somebody knows who this guy is, or maybe somebody suspects who it is. Or maybe you've got more victims who are just reluctant to come forward, but when they see that there's two other incidents that have taken place, it might give them the courage to come forward."

Swecker said it wasn't necessary that agents believe there was a serial predator to warn the public.

"I think the first time around [in March 2021], everyone in that barracks area should have been alerted to this case and given enough details to know how to protect themselves," he said. "If someone's knocking on their door, and they don't know who they are, they hear noises, whatever, report the suspicious activity. It is what law enforcement would do in the civilian sector."

Clarke, who faced a court-martial in April and is now serving a life sentence for his crimes, diligently covered his tracks and was not caught because of an investigative breakthrough. After he lost control of the woman who he held hostage Oct. 2, 2022, and she fled, he also ran from the third-floor room. As other soldiers chased Clarke, he dropped his cellphone featuring a photo of his motorcycle on the lock screen,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

COVER STORY

FROM PAGE 2

according to evidence presented in court.

That night, he confessed to attacking four women who were alone in their barracks rooms. On the night that he came for Diaz, he admitted he had first tried a different room but left when he saw there were two women inside.

During Clarke's first attack, he used a window to break into a woman's barracks room. She was alone and had fallen asleep on FaceTime with her girlfriend — something prosecutors said in court that she did often because she was afraid to be at Fort Hood after Guillen's death.

Clarke brought a knife and a note pretyped on his phone that read, "You're being robbed. Don't make a sound."

He tied her hands and feet before the soldier's girlfriend woke up on the other end of the call and began screaming. The man abandoned his plan. He used a blanket to clean his prints, untied the soldier and ran. She immediately called 911.

The police on scene called CID, but the agent on duty that night declined to investigate, Allen said. This meant CID agents were unaware of the crime until Clarke confessed to it.

If similar circumstances were to arise at Fort Hood now, the interaction between police and investigators would be handled differently because of the reforms within the agency, which only handles felony-level investigations, Allen said.

"It's a different culture now," he said.

Agents now must go to the scene when they get a call from military police, look at the situation themselves and then make that determination. Had that been the requirement in 2021, Allen said he believes CID agents would have taken over the case.

Chain of command

In the month following the attack on Diaz, she got permission to return home and recover. When she came back to Fort Hood, she had friends in her unit who had been briefed on the attack or had even been questioned about it. But beyond that, she thought it was weird that it wasn't broadly known what had happened to her.

"Things like that, especially at Fort Hood would definitely not go un-talked about. I remember asking my attorney about it, and she explained to me the reasoning on why CID had decided not to go to the media," she said. "They



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

A barracks building at Fort Hood, Texas, where Sgt. Greville Clarke on Oct. 2, 2022, attacked a female soldier in her room. He was caught that day and confessed to breaking into the rooms of three other women.

don't want it out in public, because when this person gets caught, the details of the story matter. Only I and the person that did this to me knew what had happened."

Diaz also felt safer knowing some of the actions that CID took such as installing security cameras around the barracks. If she was attacked again, at least there would be video evidence, she said.

The investigative report showed CID agents also asked the 36th Engineer Brigade — the unit responsible for the barracks buildings — whether they had reports of similar incidents. Investigators examined key card access logs and who had access to making new keys because in one of Clarke's attacks, he used a key to gain entry to the room.

Agents on Aug. 22, 2022, canvassed the female soldiers of the barracks buildings in question and learned two other women had heard knocks on their doors in the middle of the night in the months prior.

Meanwhile, in response to the attacks, Fort Hood leaders sought to improve security for soldiers living in the barracks. The base received \$13 million in 2023 to install new key swipe lock systems in three barracks buildings and closed-circuit security cameras in 21 barracks buildings, according to the Directorate of Public Works.

Diaz tried moving back into the barracks, and CID agreed to increase patrols in the area because she felt unsafe. After a month, she couldn't take living in fear any longer, so she moved into family housing.

"Before he was caught, I felt like there was always somebody watching

me and just laughing at me. Like, 'I did this to you, and I'm still not caught.' I felt like I was being taunted," she said. "When he was caught, I felt like that kind of went away, but the sense of me being safe didn't. I felt like I was still unsafe."

'Shouldn't have happened'

It wasn't until Clarke was caught that Diaz understood the scope of his crimes. She had locked her keys in her car that morning during a gate guard shift and returned to get the spare key from her room, which was in the same building where the final attack occurred.

She arrived to see people running all over the place and couldn't tell whether they were running away from danger or toward it. Diaz rushed into her room and called a friend to walk back to her car with her. Given the scene outside, she didn't want to be alone.

Soon, police and ambulance vehicles arrived, and she was told to stay put because a man with a gun was running around post. Then she was told a woman had run screaming for help.

"What if it's the same person that did this to me?" Diaz asked her friend. He thought it was unlikely.

"Maybe I'm just crazy," she told him.

The next day, her attorney called to tell her that the man caught during that incident was her attacker.

A wave of anger flooded Diaz when she learned there were more women involved.

"What made me more upset was the incident after me. I feel like it shouldn't have happened to her. It should not have happened to me, let alone anybody else. I felt partly responsible,

because I couldn't remember," she said. "I still to this day can't remember a lot of what happened to me. If I was able to remember more of what happened, she wouldn't have been a victim — a survivor, I should say."

Leaving that guilt behind has been part of Diaz's recovery process. She stopped blaming herself and realized none of what happened to her was her fault. It's part of why she's chosen to share her story with her name.

When it comes to whether CID should have alerted the public, she can't find a right answer.

"I feel like either way that something would have been wrong. They could've warned the public, and they would've never caught him. Or they don't warn the public, then somebody else gets hurt. Warning the public and him never getting caught outweighs somebody else getting hurt. But at the same time, it's like then I'd still be here in fear, wondering who did this to me," she said.

Diaz learned she was pregnant in 2023, and her soon-to-be husband left the Army to get a better-paying job. Being at Fort Hood without him, especially with a child, was the final straw. She decided she could not continue the career she had wanted so badly.

Now a mother of two, she's carefully planning her next steps. She sees room for accountability for the Army to do more to keep soldiers safe and is planning her next steps to advocate for that.

Diaz said she wants the next teenager with dreams of an Army career to feel safe and to be safe.

MILITARY

Genetic study might help mental health

Soldiers who rated highly on test also had rare gene linked to resilience

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A breakthrough gene study by Army researchers could lead to better stress management and faster recovery from psychological trauma for Special Forces soldiers.

The findings stem from analysis done by the Army's Research Institute of Environmental Medicine during the training of candidates for the elite units.

Test subjects who scored highly on a self-evaluation to assess resilience were statistically more likely to have a rare gene variation that controls the brain's ability to regulate serotonin, according to the study.

The results could be used in future research aimed at helping the service predict the career success of those who join Special Forces, the Army's Medical Research and Development Command said in a statement Aug. 25.

In addition, the discovery holds promise for helping those soldiers handle the toll on their mental health, the statement said.

Serotonin carries messages between nerve cells in the brain and throughout the body. Scientists have linked low serotonin levels to depression, anxiety, mania and other health conditions, according to the Cleveland Clinic website.

The findings were published this spring in the international journal *Anxiety, Stress and Coping* and were highlighted in the Army statement Monday and in a statement Tuesday from military health insurer Tricare.

Researchers in 2013 began following 73 Special Forces candidates as they progressed through three weeks of a Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape course, a grueling program that's required training for special operators.

The 56 enlisted and 17 officer volunteers, all of them men, were enrolled in



PHOTOS BY K. KASSENS/U.S. Army

Army Special Forces candidates carry buckets of sand during testing at Camp Mackall, N.C., last year. Trainees who scored highly on a self-evaluation to assess resilience were statistically more likely to have a rare gene variation that controls the brain's ability to regulate serotonin, Army researchers found.



An Army Special Forces candidate negotiates an obstacle at Camp Mackall.

three separate classes at the survival school at Camp Mackall, N.C. They ranged in age from 22 to 44, with an average age of 26.8, according to the report on the study.

The "school is really an optimal place to study the effects of acute stress," Harris Lieberman, the study's principal investigator, said in the Army statement. "In the final phase of the training, students are held in a mock prisoner-of-war camp, in which they

are exposed to, and must try to resist, the stressors of captivity."

Saliva samples to measure cortisol, a hormone that rises in response to stress, were taken at the beginning and at the end of the training, during the captivity phase.

Researchers also collected blood samples from each of the volunteers to look for genes that are commonly associated with the body's response to stress, according to the Army state-

ment.

Volunteers' cortisol levels were on average nearly 10 times higher than baseline levels, Lieberman said. But despite showing evidence of physical stress, a number of them had more positive responses at the end of the course to questions such as "I am able to adapt when changes occur" and "I am not easily discouraged by failure," the statement said.

The genomic data for those survey respondents correlated strongly with the presence of a somewhat rare variant of the gene that regulates serotonin in the brain called SNP rs4251417.

Lieberman said that 15% of volunteers who carried the variant had a statistically significant greater positive change in their resilience scores, suggesting an association between the gene and resilience in people exposed to high stress.

The frequency of the variant in the general population is only 9%, researchers noted.

The study is part of ongoing research by the institute's military nutrition division, which has been collecting data on Special Forces trainees for more than a decade, the Army statement said.

Results are considered preliminary but align with several other studies, suggesting "some interesting possibilities for future research in support of" Special Forces, Lieberman said.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com
@stripesktown

MILITARY

Anti-drone team told to find solutions fast

Hegseth prioritizes ‘speed over process’ as US aims to keep pace with adversaries

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military is stepping up the urgency in figuring out how it will counter the rapidly growing threat from small drones, which have become a centerpiece of modern warfare.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directed the Army secretary to establish Joint Interagency Task Force 401, focused on delivering counter-drone technology to soldiers on the battlefield.

Although the U.S. has kept pace with adversaries when it comes to conventional warfare technology, dealing with small unmanned aircraft requires a new approach that prioritizes “speed over process,” Hegseth wrote in his order.

It dissolves an office established under former President Joe Biden to handle the issue and replaces it with a group that will have greater authority, according to a Pentagon statement.

“There’s no doubt that the threats we face today from hostile drones grow by the day,” Hegseth said in a recent video announcing the task force.

Counter-drone technology has become crucial to President Donald Trump’s defense strategy, with mass production of the aircraft by Iran and Russia allowing them to wreak havoc in Ukraine and attack American interests in the Middle East.

In addition, U.S. military bases in England and Germany have reported unauthorized drone flyovers.

The U.S. relies on a mix of sanctions, interdictions and emerging defense technologies to blunt the problem, but analysts say the military must move faster to stay ahead of the threat.

At the same time, Hegseth is pushing the Pentagon to ramp up its own supply of the aircraft.

In July, speaking over the buzz of a small drone and Metallica’s “Enter Sandman,” he touted new policies meant to boost American drone manufacturing.



OWEN GRIFFITH/U.S. Army

Soldiers assigned to the 89th Military Police Brigade receive training on using a Dronebuster from Jake Myers in El Centro, Calif., in May. The Defense Department is establishing an interagency task force in an effort to counter small drones.

“There’s no doubt that the threats we face today from hostile drones grow by the day.”

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth

He also posted a video on X with the message “Unleashing U.S. Military Drone Dominance.”

Part of the push involves moving one-way attack drones into the same purchasing category as grenades and bullets, instead of classifying them as helicopters and planes.

The creation of Task Force 401 is meant to go hand in hand with those production strategies.

“We’re moving fast — cutting through bureaucracy, consolidating resources, and empowering this task force with the utmost authority to outpace our adversaries,” Hegseth said.



LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers set up the Pulsar counter-drone radar and jammer at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, in June.

korte.lara@stripes.com
@lara_korte

MILITARY

Army captain sold stolen items on Facebook

Officer in Georgia pleaded guilty after stealing more than \$150K in equipment and a Bobcat

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

An Army officer in Georgia has pleaded guilty to unlawfully selling heavy-duty equipment he stole from an Army base outside Savannah, the Justice Department said.

Federal authorities say 32-year-old Capt. Jacob Suenkel, who was serving on active duty at Fort Stewart, stole over \$150,000 worth of generators, welders, commercial grade hand tools, a tractor and other items from various Army units and sold them to unsuspecting buyers through social media.

In one incident, according to court documents, Suenkel drove on base hauling a trailer on his pickup truck, loaded up a Bobcat skid steer loader from the public works department and

took it to a storage lot. He sold the loader on Facebook Marketplace for approximately \$22,000.

"Jacob Suenkel violated the trust of his employer and unsuspecting buyers, and is being held accountable for his theft," Margaret Heap, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, said in a statement announcing the guilty plea.

As part of the plea deal, Suenkel agreed to an initial payment of \$50,000 to go toward restitution, which has yet to be determined. He also agreed to an other-than-honorable discharge, which will result in a loss of veterans' benefits.

The maximum penalty is 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine in addition to paying restitution to victims of the sales. The government will recom-



CHRISTIAN CARRILLO/U.S. Army

A U.S. military employee uses a Bobcat skid steer at the Vaziani Training Area near Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2023. Army Capt. Jacob Suenkel, 32, pleaded guilty in federal court to selling a Bobcat, a tractor and other equipment he stole from units at Fort Stewart, Ga.

mend that Suenkel be sentenced to the low end of the advisory guidelines

determined by the court, according to the plea agreement.

Air Force command clears M18 pistols' return to duty

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Air Force Global Strike Command is returning the M18 pistol to duty after pausing use of the firearm for more than a month following the shooting death of a security forces airman, service officials announced.

Gen. Thomas Bussiere, who leads Global Strike Command, signed off on the return to duty for most of the command's Sig Sauer-made sidearms after a weeklong inspection of all its 7,970 M18s, the command said in a statement. The general determined the vast majority of the guns were safe to return to duty.

"It is paramount that our airmen trust their weapon systems," Bussiere said in a prepared statement. "This thorough inspection ensures the M18s in our inventory are in optimal working order, providing our [security forces] defenders with safe, reliable and effective systems to accomplish their mission."

Bussiere ordered the pause in use of the M18s after 21-year-old Airman Brayden Lovan, a security forces specialist at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo., was fatally shot by another air-

man on July 20. Investigators were initially concerned an M18 had discharged without its trigger being pulled — a rare occurrence known as an "uncommanded discharge."

Such discharges had been reported previously by Sig Sauer-made pistols similar to the M18, which is a compact version of the New Hampshire-based firearm maker's P320 model. Sig has faced more than a dozen lawsuits in recent years from law enforcement officers and civilians who have claimed their P320s have fired without a trigger pull, in some cases causing injuries.

Sig Sauer has long argued that none of its weapons are capable of firing on their own, but the company said it would support the military investigations into the M18's safety. Sig has supplied the military with M18s and their full-size version M17s since winning a contract in 2017 to replace the decades-old M9 pistol built by Beretta.

Air Force investigators appear to have ruled out an "uncommanded discharge" in Lovan's death. On Aug. 8, the service announced an airman had been arrested in the case and charged with making false statements, obstructing justice and involuntary manslaughter.

ter.

The Air Force has yet to name the airman accused in Lovan's death because of the ongoing investigation, a service spokesman said.

Officials also said a thorough review of M18 discharges across Global Strike Command showed none had occurred without a trigger pull.

The inspection of Global Strike Command's M18s, which later expanded to all of the Air Force's about 125,000 M18 pistols, did find issues with some of its sidearms, service officials said.

Inspections found problems with 191 of the command's M18s, most of which were problems with "component wear," according to the Air Force. Most of the issues were related to wear on the M18s safety levers, on their striker assemblies and on their sears. Striker assemblies are the spring-loaded mechanisms that impact a cartridge's primer to fire the weapon, and sears hold back the striker until the trigger is pulled.

"Weapons exhibiting these discrepancies were immediately tagged and are undergoing necessary repairs," the service said.

The command is adding "enhanced

inspection procedures" for its M18 inventory, which will include new inspection criteria of those parts of the M18 found to wear the fastest, said Lt. Col. George Hern, Air Force Global Strike Command's security forces commander.

"By incorporating these added measures, we assess that any issues found with the safety lever, striker assembly and sear will be identified during semi-annual and annual inspections," he said. "As we execute M18 inspections in the future, we will be taking a particular interest in these components to ensure these methods address the issues we found and make adjustments as needed."

The command is also enlisting the top officers and enlisted leaders in its security forces squadrons to brief airmen on the findings of the M18 inspections, introduce them to the new enhanced inspections and reinforce basic weapons safety including muzzle discipline, according to the Air Force.

"When we see a potential issue, we have a responsibility to our airmen and the American public to evaluate, find any discrepancies and act on them," Bussiere said.

MILITARY

Second B-21 expected to fly by year's end

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The second of the Air Force's newest long-range stealth bombers is expected to take flight by the end of the year.

Another B-21 Raider likely will be in the air soon, Lt. Gen. Andrew Gebara said Aug. 27 during an online discussion hosted by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a think tank based in Washington, D.C.

The service flew its first B-21 in November 2023. The aircraft is in its final test flights.

But Gebara cautioned that the Air Force wasn't going to give the aircraft's developer, Northrop Grumman, "an artificial date that they have to make."

"That's really been the secret sauce to the B-21 right now, is no undue pressures," said Gebara, deputy chief of staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration. "Let them do what they're doing, and they'll get us the world's best aircraft here very soon."

Realizing that goal is eased by \$4.5 billion in additional funding for the program under the recently passed reconciliation bill, helping the Air



JUAN FEMATH/U.S. Air Force

A B-21 Raider conducts flight testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., in September 2024. The Air Force flew its first B-21 in November 2023.

Force and Northrop Grumman build the aircraft to scale, he said.

The domestic policy bill gave the Pentagon \$150 billion on top of its annual budget and was signed into law by President Donald Trump on July 4.

In July, Northrop Grumman said it was in talks with the Air Force "regarding the potential for an accelerated production ramp on the program," according to a transcript of a July 22 earnings call with investors.

The Air Force is expected to buy about 100 of the bombers, which can fly intercontinentally and drop conven-

tional and thermonuclear weapons, at a cost of nearly \$700 million each. The service's 2026 budget calls for \$10.3 billion to fund the B-21.

The sixth-generation aircraft is the result of a program aimed at producing a more technologically advanced strategic bomber to eventually replace the aging B-52 Stratofortress and the B-1.

The B-21 is the Pentagon's second stealth bomber in history after the B-2 Spirit, which entered service in the late 1990s.

On a separate topic during the Mitchell Institute event, Gebara de-

clined to comment on recent reports that the U.S. had moved nuclear weapons to the U.K. But later, he said the B61-12 nuclear gravity bomb is "fully deployed throughout Europe."

"NATO is a nuclear alliance," Gebara said. "The United States is a huge part of that nuclear deterrence. We provide that extended deterrence in the form of these weapons at certain locations around Europe."

In July, open-source intelligence analysts said an Air Force C-17A Globemaster III aircraft appeared to have delivered nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath.

That report followed one in January 2024 by the BBC identifying a Defense Department contract announcement for the U.S. air base related to an "upcoming nuclear mission."

Nuclear bombs were removed from Lakenheath in 2008. Since then, no nuclear weapons have been deployed to the U.K. in more than 15 years, the BBC reported.

bath.alison@stripes.com
@alisonbath_

Army missiles destroy targets in first test in Europe

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

USTKA, Poland — With the Baltic Sea as their backdrop, American and Polish troops fired a new long-range missile from Apache helicopters in a first-of-its-kind European demonstration aimed squarely at deterring Russia.

Soldiers from U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade on Aug. 27 launched two Spike Non-Line of Sight missiles from AH-64E Apache helicopters at the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka. The Israeli-made missiles traveled 16 miles out to sea to destroy a pair of floating targets in pinpoint strikes that were broadcast for brass from both nations.

Apache pilots can fire the weapon without seeing their target — even from behind mountains — and without exposing themselves to the enemy, said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Weisskopf, the brigade standardization officer.



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

An Army AH-64E Apache from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade fires a Spike Non-Line of Sight missile from the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka.

Produced by the Haifa-based Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, the Spike missile can destroy armor, air defense artillery, naval flotillas and even troop formations up to 30 miles away, or about four times the distance of the current Hellfire missile, said Weisskopf, who is also an Apache pilot.

The demonstration in Ustka came as Russia gears up for its major Zapad military exercise with Belarus.

"This shows the Russians, 'Hey, we watch what you're doing, and we're here to deter any future aggression,' "

V Corps commander Lt. Gen. Charles Costanza said prior to the exercise.

The missile launches were part of the third Polish Apache Initiative, a series of semiannual summits and exercises where U.S. Army aviators share their knowledge of tactics and maintenance, as well as train with Polish air force members.

Col. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, chief of combat aviation for the helicopter branch of the Polish military, called the event very important for the development of the Polish air force. He

credited V Corps with helping the Poles build a "new strength."

Last year Poland purchased 96 Apaches, which will begin arriving in 2028. Warsaw has also been procuring upgrades to its existing tanks, jets and artillery systems. It is unclear if or when the Polish air force will obtain its own Spike NLOS missiles.

The missiles can lock on before or after being fired and can be guided into a target using a camera, screen and what looks like a gaming controller.

Guests at the launches watched on a giant screen as the munition traveled to the targets, which were white boxes marked with X's.

The pilots simulated their GPS systems being jammed by an adversary, which forced them to rely on the missile's internal navigation and then manual control. Applause erupted as the feeds showed the missiles heading for the center of the X's.

burke.matt@stripes.com
@MatthewMBurke1

MILITARY

Army sees a craving for convenience

Leaders ask units to find more dining options for soldiers

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

FORT HOOD, Texas — Army leaders know dining facilities on bases must do more to attract young soldiers and have released a menu of ways to offer meals with a side of convenience that soldiers are craving.

The order released by Forces Command last month calls on commanders to examine the entire ecosystem of food on bases and try new strategies offered while also easing the burden placed on Army cooks.

“This strategy goes beyond food — it’s about fueling the force, building morale, and reinforcing the Army’s promise to care for its people. By aligning feeding operations with soldier needs and operational demands, FORSCOM is setting a new standard for modern, resilient, and soldier-focused food service delivery,” according to a FORSCOM summary of the order.

Many of the recommendations in the order stem from changes that have found success at Fort Hood, which used a combination of predictable dining schedules and meals, and quick, conveniently located services to increase diners. Officials then consolidated resources so the added work didn’t overburden cooks.

“Our goal is to create consistent,



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

Pvt. Darrell McKenzie cuts chicken tenders for hot meals available in warmers at the Phantom Fresh grab-and-go dining facility at Fort Hood, Texas.

accessible and appealing dining options that meet the needs of every soldier, whether on the go or if they have time for a sit-down meal,” said Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy McKinney, III Corps chief culinary manager at the central Texas Army base. “By expanding these choices, we’re not just improving the quality of life — we’re empowering our ... culinary specialists to showcase their skills in a more flexible, innovative environment that reflect the modern Army dining experience.”

Fort Hood soldiers can use meal entitlements in traditional dining facilities, they can visit a food truck, a grab-

and-go kiosk or they can preorder and pick up several days’ worth of meals at once. The base focused these options in places where soldiers can easily get to them on their own or using the post’s shuttle bus.

III Corps, the largest command at Fort Hood, calls its soldiers “Phantom Warriors” and many of the new dining facilities carry the theme of that name.

Cooks have a centralized facility, the Phantom Hub, where premade meals are cooked and packaged and rations are prepared and sent to soldiers training in field.

For the past several years, the Army has sought ways to bring soldiers back into service-run dining facilities after declining numbers. Officials have grappled with the changing dining preferences of soldiers as well as a reduction in the number of cooks the Army enlists into the force.

The order is just one front to combat the issue. Earlier this year, Army Materiel Command tested a program to allow soldiers to spend their meal entitlement money on specific meals at on-post restaurants. No decision has been made on how and when the pilot program could return.

The service is also reviewing policy changes needed to allow soldiers to use that money in the commissary. Most barracks have a small kitchen, and this would allow soldiers to buy their own

ingredients and cook at home. Another front aims to put a private business within a dining facility but a contract award has not been announced.

In traditional facilities where soldiers grab a tray and pick a meal line, TVs hang on the walls where soldiers dine with flowers on each table and décor that McKinney said she hopes makes soldiers feel like they’ve left work and can relax.

Specialized lines for burritos, pasta, pizza and stir-fry bowls allow cooks to take ownership and perfect the meals that they cook, she said. Right now, it takes about 30 soldiers to run the facility, but she is working toward staggered shifts to better manage people’s schedules.

With the Phantom Fresh grab-and-go kiosk, McKinney focused on predictability in options and speed of service. It opens at 7:30 a.m. and doesn’t close between meals. Instead, the small space shifts from a breakfast yogurt parfait bar to a self-serve salad bar and a made-to-order sandwich line at lunch. Throughout the day, premade hot meals and premade sandwiches and salads, as well as fresh fruit, snacks and bottled drinks are available until closing at 3 p.m.

For those soldiers who still can’t or don’t want to use these options, they can preorder about three days’ worth of meals at a time and pick them up twice a week. The program started in July 2024 and now serves about 300 soldiers twice a week, McKinney said.

To allow soldiers to pay for multiple meals at once, the dining facility uses paper forms to update the computer system. Facilities are funded, in part, based on the number of meals served and current computer programs don’t offer a way to sell multiple meals at once.

All this work during the past year has been done within the existing facilities instead of asking the Army for an influx of cash or resources, said Chontrelle Sturdivant, Fort Hood’s installation food program manager.

“We repurpose what we already have,” she said. “We refreshed, changed the setting and added variety.”

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Brian Bowers, U.S. Edition Editor
Scott Foley, Revenue Director

CONTACT US

633 3rd Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20001

Editorial: (202) 886-0005

Advertising: (202) 886-0014

Additional contact information: [strips.com](https://www.strips.com)

This publication is a compilation of stories from Stars and Stripes, the editorially independent newspaper authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military community.

The contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and

are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, including the Defense Department or the military services. The Guam Edition of Stars and Stripes is published jointly by Stars and Stripes and this newspaper.

The appearance of advertising in this publication, including inserts or supplements, does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised.

Products or services advertised in this publication shall be made available for purchase, use, or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation, or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user, or patron.

© Stars and Stripes, 2025

thayer.rose@stripe.com
@Rose_Lori

Rent your furniture. Own your future.

Furnish 3 rooms just \$129/month



CORT[®]

Like your favorite ride share or streaming service, CORT lets you access the furniture you need without owning anything you don't. Allow CORT Furniture Rental to design your space, deliver, set up, and then pick up your furniture at the end of your lease—all starting at \$129/month. We're experts at making military moves easier and helping you travel lighter. Get all the details at cort.com/stripes



SERVICE CONNECTED Veteran's Health ID Cards are your passport to Commissary Savings!



SAVE an average of **25%** every time you shop!

Easy steps to shop with us!

- 1 CHECK YOUR VHIC:** Look at your Veteran Health Identification Card. It should indicate one of the following:
 - Service Connected
 - Medal of Honor
 - Purple Heart
 - Former Prisoner of War (POW)
- 2 UPDATE YOUR CARD:** If any condition is not met, contact VA Healthcare at 877-222-8387 to request an updated card.
- 3 GATE ENTRY:** Check the entry requirements with your local installation to ensure a seamless gate entry experience.

Important: Make sure the expiration date is current

Learn more at corp.commissaries.com/extended-eligibility

