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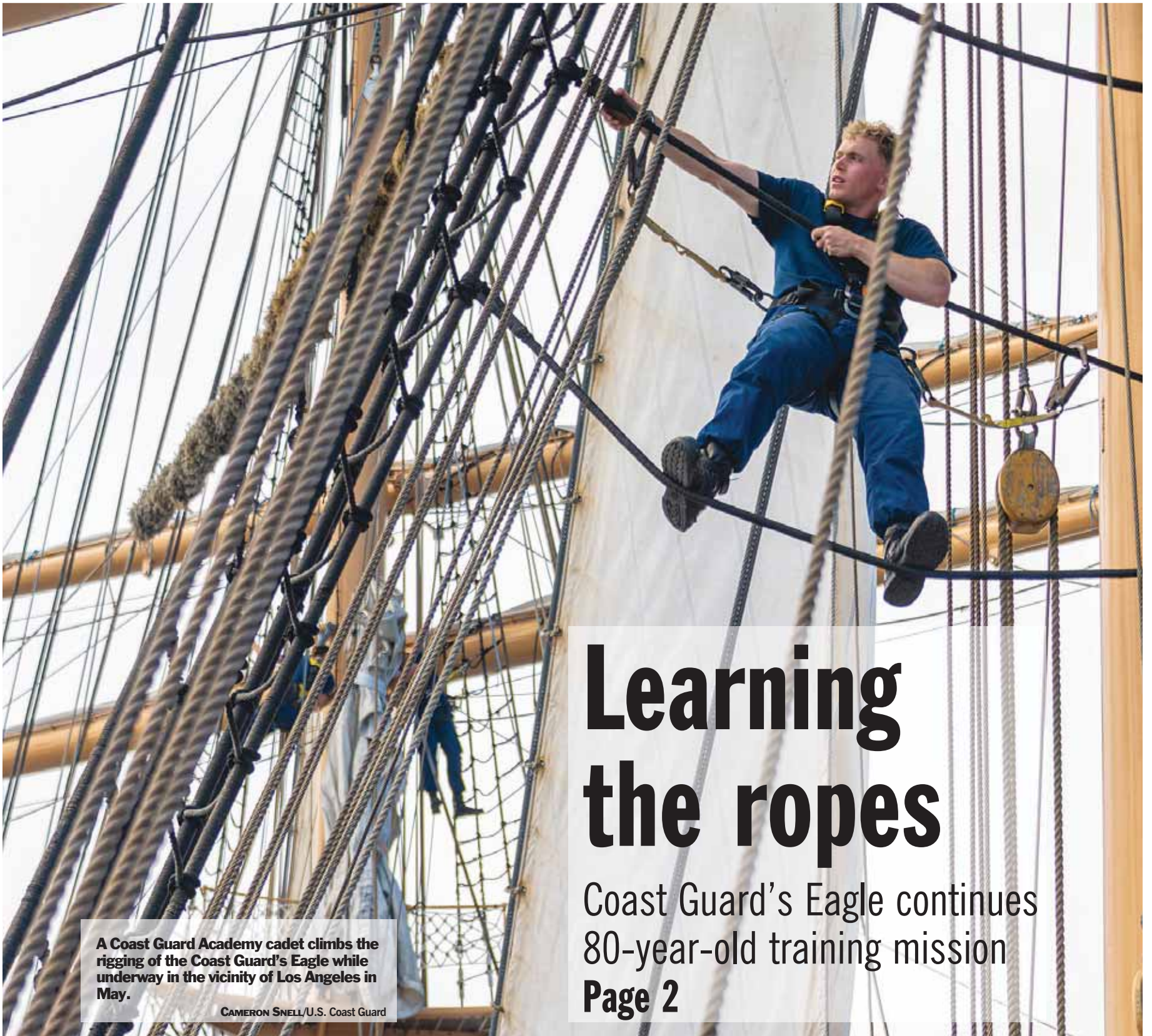
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A Coast Guard Academy cadet climbs the rigging of the Coast Guard's Eagle while underway in the vicinity of Los Angeles in May.

CAMERON SNELL/U.S. Coast Guard

Learning the ropes

Coast Guard's Eagle continues 80-year-old training mission
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COVER STORY

Eagle marks 80 years of training cadets

Coast Guard's tall ship originally taken from Nazis

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

For four generations of Coast Guard cadets, getting their “sea legs” and literally “learning the ropes” has come aboard the Coast Guard sailing ship Eagle.

Cadets graduate to serve on ice-breakers and fast cutters, fly helicopters and four-engine Hercules transports, lead search-and-rescue operations, and interdict drug shipments.

Since 1946, nearly all start their careers aboard the Eagle.

The steel-hulled barque — the name for three-masted sailing ships — has an unusual history as a former Nazi training ship, which the U.S. took as a war prize after World War II.

Next year, the Eagle will celebrate 80 years as part of the Coast Guard. Its alumni rank from ensigns to admirals.

“About 600 cadets each year spend time on the Eagle, so if you multiply that by 80 years, you are talking about thousands of Coast Guard officers who began their careers here,” said Capt. Kristopher Ensley, the Eagle’s commander.

Ensley, 50, said he was once a 17-year-old cadet who “didn’t know starboard from port.”

By the end of his training on the Eagle, he’d mastered steering, tacking, ropes and unfurling the canvas — all the timeless basics of sailing ships.

“I became a little bit salty,” Ensley said.

The Eagle allows cadets to tie their careers to the traditions of the seagoing force, its captain said.

“Everything is out in the open air,” Ensley said. “The bridge, the decks — you get wet, you get cold, you get tired, you get hungry. That’s part of helping build the Coast Guard leaders we need who are able to withstand those rigors.”

During a five-month voyage this year, Eagle sailed from New London, Conn., to Vancouver Island in Canada. It made port calls in Costa Rica, Mexico, California, Oregon and Washington



MICHAEL BRODEY/U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard barque Eagle sails in Los Angeles harbor.

state, and it twice passed through the Panama Canal.

The Eagle made stops at Los Angeles Fleet Week and the Portland Rose Festival, and it tied up at the Seattle waterfront near Pike Place Market. Overall, more than 41,000 people climbed aboard to learn about sailing and the Coast Guard.

Cadet Jonathan Hurley, 21, of Seattle, plans on making the Coast Guard a career — hopefully on icebreakers. But he started out on the Eagle, like his fellow future officers.

“Not everybody in the Coast Guard gets to go on the Eagle, but everyone who goes to the Coast Guard Academy does,” Hurley said.

The ship is the second-oldest among those operated by the Defense Department or Department of Homeland Security. The only ship older is the USS Constitution, “Old Ironsides,” the frigate commissioned in 1797 that remains on the Navy’s active-ship registry at the Charlestown Navy Yard near Boston.

Unlike the Constitution, the Eagle did not begin life in a New England shipyard. It’s a war prize, taken from Germany at the end of World War II as partial reparations for the costs of the conflict inflicted by the Axis powers on the Allies.

For the first 10 years of its life, the Eagle was the Horst Wessel, a training ship for German navy cadets named

as war prizes from the Axis powers, Germany, Italy and Japan.

The United States received the Horst Wessel as one of its prizes.

A decision on what to do with it came at an opportune time. The Coast Guard had lost its prior sail-powered training ship in a storm, then used a sailing ship on loan from the government-in-exile of Nazi-occupied Denmark. With the war over, the Danes asked for the ship’s return.

On May 15, 1946, the ship was officially rechristened as the Coast Guard barque Eagle.

Because Navy, Coast Guard and merchant marine sailors were in short supply in Europe as American troops and equipment were returned to the United States, the War Department approved a plan to use some of the German crew, along with Americans, to sail the ship to the Coast Guard Academy at New London.

The trip almost ended in disaster: The ship skirted a powerful hurricane off the coast of North America before reaching safety.

After an overhaul and a coat of white paint, the Eagle has been an American sailing icon and training ground for future leaders for eight decades.

The ship’s second core mission is public port visits, used to inform Americans and others about the Coast Guard mission — and perhaps spur recruitment of future cadets.

Inside the ship are historical artifacts from its days before the Allies captured it. A large HORST WESSEL nameplate in Gothic script that once adorned the ship is atop an interior stairway.

A metal map shows the course of the trip to bring the ship from Germany to New London, and it bears the names of the German sailors, who were interned as prisoners of war upon their arrival. The captain’s quarters have the 1930s dark wood paneling of the original construction.

The Eagle has sailed to Germany, now a longtime U.S. ally in NATO, even returning to the shipyard where it was built.

After the current U.S. government shutdown ends, the Coast Guard will announce the 2026 itinerary of the Eagle in its 80th year of service.



GARY WARNER/Stars and Stripes

Inside the ship are historical artifacts from its early days.

after a brownshirt “stormtrooper” killed in 1930 in his Berlin apartment by a member of the German communist Red Front Fighters League.

When the barque was commissioned in 1936 as a training ship at the Blohm-+Voss shipyard in Hamburg, it was named for Wessel. Adolf Hitler attended the ceremony and walked the ship’s deck.

The Horst Wessel bore Nazi symbols, including a golden eagle figurehead that once held a swastika.

After the war, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, France and other Allied nations took several ships

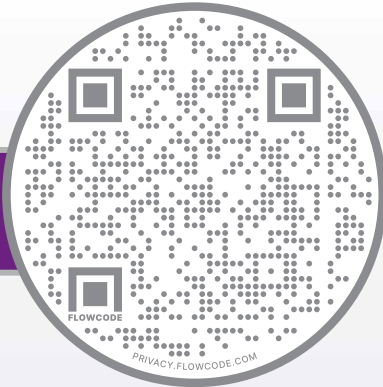


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MILITARY



MICHAEL SANCHEZ/X

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford leaves the Mediterranean Sea through the Strait of Gibraltar on Nov. 4.

Navy shifting to the Caribbean Sea

Ford's move makes Latin America firepower nexus

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Ford Carrier Strike Group's departure this week from the Mediterranean Sea will leave Europe and the Middle East without an aircraft carrier presence while concentrating naval firepower in Latin America.

Although it's unclear when the strike group will arrive in the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility, the surge of naval forces there would put nearly 20% of the service's deployed warships in the region, according to Stars and Stripes' analysis of data from the USNI News fleet tracker.

Photographs posted to X by ship-spotters based in Gibraltar show the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and the destroyer USS Bainbridge transiting the Strait of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean on Nov. 4. The ships presumably will join remaining strike group members, the destroyers USS Winston S. Churchill and USS Mahan in the Atlantic.

A U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet spokesperson said the command couldn't discuss current operations out of concern for operational security.

Last month, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the carrier strike group to SOUTHCOM to bolster U.S. efforts there to disrupt drug trafficking



ANDREW EGGERT/U.S. Navy

U.S. Marines conduct maintenance on AV-8B Harriers on the flight deck of the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima on Oct. 3.

and degrade and dismantle transnational criminal organizations.

The command's area of responsibility includes waters adjacent to Central and South America, and the land mass of Latin America south of Mexico.

It appears that besides stopping drug trafficking, the U.S. also aims to get Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro to step down, said James Holmes, chair of the maritime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

"The first we can do at sea, in theory at least, without a carrier group," Holmes said "But I have a hard time seeing sea power accomplish the second, carrier group or not."

Ford would bring at least 4,500 more sailors and nine aircraft squadrons to the U.S. presence in the area.

That level of firepower seems like overkill for the current mission in the Caribbean, said Bryan Clark, a retired Navy officer and director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

But the addition would be an efficient way to sustain strikes against targets ashore, Clark said, noting that the U.S. doesn't have any land bases in Central or South America.

And fighter jets flying out of Puerto Rico would require air tankers to conduct missions over South America, he said.

In addition to the three ships that make up the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group, the destroyers USS Gravelly, USS Stockdale and USS Jason Dunham, the cruiser Lake Erie and the littoral combat ship USS Wichita, the U.S. presence in Latin America

includes Navy P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, MQ-9 Reaper drones, an F-35 fighter squadron and more than 6,000 sailors and Marines.

Meanwhile, the reduced Navy presence in Europe and the Middle East isn't of great concern in the current threat environment, said Bradley Martin, a retired Navy surface warfare officer and director of the Rand Corp. National Security Supply Chain Institute.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023, the Navy has kept a nearly constant presence in Europe and the Middle East.

Last month, the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz left the Middle East after three months in the region.

There are five destroyers assigned to Naval Station Rota in Spain. One of them, USS Roosevelt, is stationed in the Mediterranean Sea, while two others, USS Forest Sherman and USS Mitscher, are in the Red Sea, according to the USNI News fleet tracker.

That muscle — along with other U.S. forces, such as Air Force squadrons stationed in Europe and the Middle East — should provide ample response should a hostile actor be tempted, Martin said.

He added that Nimitz, now on duty in the South China Sea, could be recalled to the Middle East.

Ford left its homeport in Norfolk, Va., in June for a routine deployment to NAVEUR-AF.

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MILITARY

Soldiers test ‘shoot-and-scoot’ mortar system

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Soldiers in Hawaii recently tested a “shoot-and-scoot” mobile mortar system as part of the Army’s Transformation in Contact initiative that aims to speedily field new technology, according to the manufacturer.

Over five days in October, soldiers at Schofield Barracks fired and evaluated the Scorpion Light 81 mm mobile mortar system, made by Global Military Products, based in Tampa, Fla.

The system was integrated with the “utility” variant of the Army’s new infantry squad vehicle, which vastly expands and speeds maneuverability for soldiers.

Each of the pairs of vehicles used in testing carried the system and 72 mortar rounds, the company said. The Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division began testing about 100 infantry squad vehicles last fall.

The vehicle, based on the Chevrolet Colorado ZR2 Bison, is small enough to be loaded into a Chinook or Stallion helicopter and light enough to be sling-loaded under a Black Hawk helicopter.

The Scorpion Light mortar system can fire eight rounds and completely relocate in under two minutes, according to the release.

The system possesses a baseplate that allows rapid placement and displacement on almost any surface, the release states.

“I was a former mortarman, and the technology hasn’t changed much since WWII,” James Knight, senior manager of defense systems and energetics at Global Military Products, said in an email.

“Vehicles are now able to carry the system, and no longer rely on a trailer to improve mobility, but the Scorpion Light offers significant advantages beyond that to enhance the mobility, lethality, operator safety and air trans-



Global Military Products

Soldiers from the 25th Infantry Division conduct simulated combat operations using the Scorpion Light 81 mm mobile mortar system at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, on Oct. 23.

portability of these assets,” he said.

“This ‘shoot and scoot’ capability is critical for survivability on a modern battlefield, allowing mortar teams to engage targets and reposition before an adversary can return effective counter-battery fire,” he said.

Knight described the system as “ideal” for light infantry and expeditionary

forces that would be at the forefront of combat deployments in the Pacific.

The system can receive and act on targeting data provided from remote sources, such as ground observers or aircraft.

The Scorpion combat simulation was part of the Army’s Transformation in Contact 2.0, which is an expansion of the initiative to integrate new technology by having soldiers test it in actual field conditions while it is still under development.

The system will be used this month in Hawaii during the 25th Infantry Division’s Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center combat training, Knight said.

During that training, mortar-equipped ISVs will be transported on C-17 aircraft to participate in combat drill scenarios, he said.

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Andre T.
BS, Management Information Systems
U.S. Army Veteran

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MILITARY

NATO eyes robots as first line of defense

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The first to fight on the ground in a Russian attack on NATO territory could be robots rather than infantrymen.

At U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters in Wiesbaden, top commanders have been testing out a new combat concept in which a network of early-alert sensors connects through an artificial intelligence-informed cloud system to initiate battle.

“It implies that you want to take people out of the battlefield area as much as you can, and that’s what we’re sort of really learning about,” Lt. Gen. Jez Bennett, NATO Land Command deputy commander, said Oct. 29. “Hence the idea of a sort of autonomous robotic force that takes that initial punch in the event that NATO is invaded.”

During two war games in October, commanders tested the approach.

Known as the Eastern Flank Deterrence Line, the concept is aimed at bringing ground combat techniques into the 21st century, commanders say.

In overlapping drills called Steadfast Duel and Avenger Triad, USAREUR-AF and NATO’s LANDCOM merged into one headquarters to test the defense line approach and see how ground forces would respond in the event of an attack.

Commanders said the drills marked a rare instance in which all 32 NATO member countries were gathered for

an Article 5 defense scenario, referring to the alliance’s policy that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Steadfast Duel is NATO’s largest computer-assisted command post exercise and is designed to enhance the alliance’s ability to carry out operations across a broad spectrum.

The drill incorporated USAREUR-AF staff and leaders from seven NATO corps to simulate the command of more than 100,000 troops in the field.

Much of the wargaming centered on enabling fast decision-making by commanders and the need to process large amounts of live data into digestible bits so that allied forces can stay ahead of the enemy.

The Eastern Flank Deterrence Line envisions that in a future fight, NATO will blunt any Russian offensive with an unmanned zone of operations.

In the unmanned zone, a robotic force would be put into action, keeping NATO’s human force in reserve to avoid the “level of concentrated Russian attacks that we have seen in Ukraine,” Bennett said.

The setup would preserve human combat power for counterattack and the “ability to think and act quickly to hold Russia’s own capabilities at risk in the event that it invades,” he added.

The defense line concept is already operational, but more work is needed to build it out, commanders said.

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TYNISHA DANIEL/U.S. Army

Drill sergeants greet candidates to the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy. The bush hat that once set female drill sergeants apart is being retired, so all the service’s drill sergeants will wear the campaign hat.

Army drill sergeants to don wide and flat campaign hat

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

The bush hat and its upturned brim that once set female Army drill sergeants apart is being retired as part of the Army’s move toward a unified look for those in the iconic role.

The change to the wide and flat male campaign hat goes into effect starting Jan. 2, 2026, and affects both active-duty and reserve female drill sergeants.

It was first publicized Oct. 26 in a Reddit post and was confirmed Oct. 28 by an Army spokesman.

The Army said the transition away from separate hats was in the works prior to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s Sept. 30 policy speech to military brass announcing gender-neutral physical fitness standards based on the male level.

The Army Uniform Board recommended the change, which was approved by the service’s chief of staff, according to the message posted on Reddit.

The change was made because vendors had trouble meeting the service’s quality standards, the Army said.

The decision to adopt the campaign hat follows surveys in 2023 and 2024 in which female drill sergeants stated they preferred the campaign hat for uniformity and because it looked more

professional, the Army said.

The female drill sergeant hat, introduced in 1972, was designed by Brig. Gen. Mildred Bailey and based on the Australian bush hat, according to the Army website.

It was originally beige but was changed to green in 1983.

The first female drill sergeants, six noncommissioned officers from the Women’s Army Corps, enrolled in the drill sergeant program at Fort Jackson, S.C., in February 1972 after receiving authorization from Army Chief of Staff William Westmoreland the previous year, the website said.

An Army statement put out in 2017 around the 45th anniversary of those events contained comments by female drill sergeants past and present.

“Those six women and that hat transformed the entire Army ... and my life,” said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jennifer Dehorty, who became a drill sergeant in 1984. “The esprit de corps that we learned from them was different. It was stronger.”

According to the Army website, the soon-to-be standard campaign hat was worn by soldiers from 1911 to 1942 and was brought back for male drill sergeants in 1964.

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Thank you for your service. It is our privilege to serve you.

A stylized signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JCA 12".

Juan C. Andrade
President & CEO, USAA

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