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Military spouse Casey Showalter grooms Deen, a 4-year old Labrador, at Fort Meade, Md.

ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

## Taking care of business

Army program enriches communities while employing spouses **Page 2**



## COVER STORY

# Program helps take care of businesses

## Army provides help to spouses who operate from home

By **ROSE L. THAYER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Lakesha Finley-Flowers had made 18 moves as an Army spouse, adapting and switching her job with each one, until move No. 19.

When she arrived at Fort Polk, La., from Detroit, Finley-Flowers brought along her business, Candles by Lakesha. After settling into on-base housing, she learned about the Army's Home-Based Business program, which approves residents running a business from their homes and provides support and connections within the community.

Within two weeks, she had the green light and converted her dining room into a workspace to craft scented wickless candles adorned with flower petals and unique designs.

"I love the shock and awe when someone turns the lid on my candle, and they're like, 'Oh my God. I wasn't expecting that,'" she said.

Her business has helped her feel more connected to her new community, and it took away the stress of finding new employment with the move — something she's been dealing with for much of the past 33 years since she met her husband, Lt. Col. Gary Flowers, while they were soldiers based at Fort Lewis, Wash.

He's eyeing retirement in a few years, and she's ready to take her business into the spotlight.

"I have so many plans for my business," she said. "I already have a five-year goal-post planned and am waiting for it to happen."

There are 28 businesses approved to operate at Fort Polk, and anywhere between 550 and 650 across the Army, according to the Army's Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division, which oversees the program.

When military spouses — or service members — establish themselves as independent business owners, it alleviates the challenges of finding a job with every move and expands community access to goods and services on base, said Matt Margotta, chief of In-



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

**Army Staff Sgt. Mason Showalter feeds a treat to Deen, a 4-year-old Labrador, as his wife, Casey, finishes grooming the dog recently at Fort Meade, Md. The Showalters' own dog, Azurite, waits for a treat of his own.**



ROSE THAYER/Stars and Stripes

**Lakesha Finley-Flowers, an Army veteran and spouse, runs a business from her home at Fort Polk, La.**

stallation and Management Command's installation mission support office.



ROSE THAYER/Stars and Stripes

**Finley-Flowers' business is called Candles by Lakesha.**

"They move from location to location, and some of our locations are in fairly remote and austere areas where you don't have robust communities. Employment opportunities may be limited," he said. "As they move ...

they can keep that same business throughout their Army lives."

The program experienced an overhaul roughly five years ago that allowed it to expand. Previously, installations denied many businesses because of a policy barring direct competition with something already available through MWR and also Army and Air Force Exchange Service operations.

"The Army said no more. The volume of home-based businesses, that really wasn't in competition," Margotta said.

Garrison commands are now encouraged to try to say yes to a business idea. Margotta could only find four instances where a prospective business was told no, including a plan to sell firearms and another for a tattoo parlor. The private landlord for the base, if there is one, also is involved in the approval process.

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## COVER STORY

## FROM PAGE 2

Casey Showalter, an Army spouse at Fort Meade, Md., experienced some pushback in her goal of launching an in-home pet grooming business. After about a year of back and forth, her business That's So Fetch began taking clients in August. She had to take on a part-time job to get through the process, which also delayed her start.

The application felt like a test case for such an operation, and Showalter said both she and the housing office learned a lot in the process. At one point Corvias, the company that manages housing at Fort Meade, told Showalter the nearby county's animal control would need to approve her home for animals. After waiting months for the appointment, she learned that the county did not have jurisdiction, so Corvias said it was no longer necessary.

Corvias manages homes at seven Army installations and said it works closely with each garrison commander to meet the requirements, regulations and laws for that location. More than 80 businesses are approved in Corvias homes, "creating a more dynamic and economically vibrant community," Kolby Stobbe, the company's senior vice president for property operations, said in a statement.

"I want it to be so much easier for whoever else wants to start up," Showalter said.

The idea of pet grooming came from Showalter's love of animals and her realization that the two Army bases where they previously had lived did not have the service available within the gates. She got licensed through another Army benefit, the My Career Advancement Account scholarship program.

"It's just something I have a passion for," Showalter said. "I'm very creative, and I love animals, so I put my passions together."

Customers have said they love the convenience of staying on post and that Showalter only takes care of one pet at a time.

"A lot of people have very stressed out, anxiety-based dogs, and it really helps them not being in a facility with a ton of other dogs or a ton of other people," she said.

Master Sgt. Gilbert Romero also found the approval process to be long — he waited more than three months for approval at Fort Irwin in California to continue operating his business, Tactical Etchings, which specializes in lasering, engraving and etching onto



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

**Casey Showalter gives Deen, a 4-year-old labrador, a bath in Fort Meade, Md. Showalter was recently approved to operate a dog grooming business from her house at Fort Meade.**



GILBERT ROMERO

**Engraved gifts from Master Sgt. Gilbert Romero's business Tactical Etchings (shown above and at left), which he operates from his home at Fort Irwin, Calif.**

wood, acrylic and different metals. He had previously established the business living outside of base housing as a recruiter in Los Angeles.

"That's where I got introduced to creating plaques and stuff like that for top recruiters, top companies. It just created this idea," he said.

So, Romero bought his own laser machine and now fills orders to personalize all sorts of items outside of the standard awards, including whiteboard erasers for teachers, and travel cups and mugs.

A recent update to Army policy on

the program put into place a 60-day window to approve requests, though the average is about 34 days, Margotta said. Before the process was streamlined, applications would bounce for months between offices, or the onus would be on the resident to go to each office individually.

Once Romero was approved, he joined the Army's largest concentration of more than 100 registered businesses — likely due to Fort Irwin's isolation in the Mojave Desert.

Aside from on-post customers, the company does a fair amount of ship-

ping for orders placed online. It's a family affair to fill these orders with his wife and children chipping in to finalize products and box and label items.

"We've shipped to 15 different military installations, and we've even shipped to other countries," he said. "We get most of our clients from referrals, which is a good thing."

It is not just approval to operate that comes from the program. Finley-Flowers said the benefits for the program "are countless."

Notably, whenever MWR at Fort Polk hosts events on post that have vendor space, she can book it and get her deposit reimbursed or set up a kiosk in the entryway of the Exchange. She also receives information from MWR about opportunities for vendor space in the civilian community.

These events have also created connections between the businesses on post, and Finley-Flowers has collaborated to sell gift sets, such as candles and flowers on Valentine's Day.

"We are like a small town," she said. "I love it here."



## MILITARY

# Bike accidents prove costly to military

## 750 troops killed in motorcycle crashes over past decade

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A video shows a lone Harley-Davidson motorcycle rumbling up a sunny quay and pulling to a stop. The rider removes his helmet and speaks to the camera.

“Greetings from Naval Base Coronado, I’m your air boss,” says Vice Adm. Daniel Cheever, commander of Naval Air Forces and Naval Air Forces, Pacific Fleet. “As a fellow longtime rider, I wanted to thank you for your service and ask you to ride safe, to preserve your life and our readiness.”

After noting that 74% of motorcycle accidents are at least partially the rider’s fault, the three-star Harley rider makes his central point.

“Navy motorcycle fatalities are currently projected to be the highest since 2008,” Cheever says in the video posted June 4. By that time, the Navy had already surpassed the 28 off-duty motorcycle crash fatalities recorded in all of 2024. “It’s unacceptable to lose one of you, let alone dozens, which we have this year. Let’s reverse the trend as we serve, excel and make a difference. Fly Navy, ride safe.”

From June to the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, 10 more sailors and Marines died in crashes, ranging from a 37-year-old Navy lieutenant in Portsmouth, R.I., to a 20-year-old Marine corporal on Okinawa. In all, 30 sailors and 15 Marines died in motorcycle accidents in 2025.

The U.S. military’s death toll from motorcycle crashes in 2025 was 84, including 28 in the Army and 11 in the Air Force.

In 2023, motorcycle riders accounted for 15% of all traffic fatalities nationwide, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In the U.S. military that year, the most recent year with comparable statistics, about half of all traffic fatalities involved motorcycles, according to the Pentagon.

The appearance of a flag officer in a video about off-duty motorcycle riding safety underscores the high cost in



HUNTER KIRKLAND/U.S. Air Force

**Motorcyclists conduct checks before a Motorcycle Mentorship Ride at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo., in August.**

lives and dollars caused by crashes.

The loss of life is the highest price of motorcycle crashes — more than 750 service members have died in motorcycle crashes in the past decade, the Pentagon says — which is why the military’s central message continues to focus on reducing deaths. But those who survive can face injuries serious enough to end their military careers.

An Army study showed that for every motorcycle death, there are five motorcycle-related hospitalizations and 22 outpatient visits. Hospital stays average 20 days. Each accident costs the Army an average of \$100,000 in medical treatment and lost work time.

Injuries to scores of military motorcycle riders each year range from traumatic brain injuries and broken limbs to eye damage and “road rash,” in which skin peels away as a fallen rider skids across coarse pavement.

Michael Reed, chief of research for the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., said one of the best ways to improve safety is simply to provide riders with the facts.

“Information is power,” Reed said in a statement. “It gets the information out on what is hurting and killing our soldiers.”

Crashes were usually caused by swerving between lanes, oversteering, loss of traction on wet or loose surfac-

es, driving while fatigued, not wearing helmets and other safety equipment, wearing low-visibility clothing and the failure of poorly maintained parts, according to Pentagon studies.

About one-third of fatal accidents involve the consumption of alcohol, about the same as civilian statistics.

The one key area where military motorcycle riders differed was speed. About half of all fatal accidents involving service members occur at excessive speeds, compared with a third of accidents for civilian riders.

And demographics play a role: 8% of Americans ride motorcycles, but military ridership is 16%, the Pentagon estimates.

Also, men under 29 are most likely to be involved in a motorcycle crash, according to the National Safety Council. The U.S. military is more than 80% male with a median age of 26, according to the Pentagon.

A Navy Safety Command report showed that crashes in July had a high proportion of young, lower-ranking sailors — 48% of crashes involved riders 25 and under, and 71% involved ranks E-5 or below.

Younger service members are drawn to “sports motorcycles” made by manufacturers such as Kawasaki and Suzuki that accelerate rapidly and can top out at speeds of 200 mph.

The cost of owning even those superbikes is significantly lower than that of other motor vehicles; prices for a superbike can be as low as \$25,000, half of the average of \$46,000 for a new car, according to car website Clark.com.

And those are the motorcycles involved in the majority of fatal crashes recorded by the military. The Air Force reported that all five of its fatal crashes from Oct. 1 of last year through the end of April 2025 involved sports motorcycles.

Since the record 118 deaths in 2008, the Defense Department has instituted mandatory safety training and defensive riding courses. Older service members have been asked to mentor younger riders.

Beginning in October, all military personnel who ride motorcycles must register with their command and certify that they have passed safety and driver awareness classes and possess the proper headgear, clothing and equipment for riding.

The Pentagon has also appealed to the motorcyclist’s sense of duty and patriotism, telling service members that avoiding accidents keeps them ready to deploy at any time, anywhere.

“Ride right — Stay in the fight,” one poster said.



## MILITARY

# Navy enlists 3K sailors more than last year

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy this year emphasized on-the-ground recruiters as it pushed changes that led to an increase of more than 3,000 sailors compared with last year and a second year in a row of meeting the goal for new recruits, the service's top recruiting officer said.

"We've listened to those line recruiters and done the things that they indicated were the most important to them, and that has changed the game on the inspiration, the drive and the willingness to go the extra mile to get the job done," Rear Adm. James Waters, commander of Navy Recruiting Command, said late last month dis-

cussing the success of fiscal year 2025, which ended Sept. 30.

The Navy in June said it had met its 2025 recruiting goal three months early, with 40,600 future sailors enlisted. By the close of the fiscal year, it had brought that final number to 44,096 — a figure the Navy hasn't seen since the early 2000s, Waters said.

The Navy missed its recruiting goal in 2023, as did the Army and Air Force, and took steps to reimagine how it brings in new sailors. Changes included modernizing marketing campaigns, streamlining administrative processes, tripling its medical waiver review staff, expanding age eligibility and opening a preparatory course to

improve test scores for entry.

Waters did not explain if one change was more fruitful than another but noted that removing processing barriers allowed recruiters to spend more time out meeting people. The Military Entrance Processing Station timeline dropped from more than 30 days to fewer than three days, an area in which recruiters specifically called for improvement, he said.

"The competitiveness of the economy will always play a factor, and it's really about how easy or hard it is to connect a recruiter with a young person," Waters said. "That dramatic change is by recognizing and adapting to the environment that exists."

The prep course, which helps potential recruits meet standards to attend boot camp, helped 66% of the 1,511 people who attended meet the test scores required to enlist.

The Navy already has reached 25% of its 2026 goal in the delayed entry pool, which is on par with the start of 2025, Navy Recruiting Command said. Waters did not mention if the service has reached a point where it could revisit some of the loosened standards for enlistment, such as a decision in 2022 to raise the maximum age of enlistment to 41 years old.

thayer.rose@stripes.com  
@Rose\_Lori

## Senate confirms special operations veteran as Navy undersecretary

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed Hung Cao, a special operations veteran and former Republican congressional candidate, to serve as undersecretary of the Navy.

Cao was confirmed as the service's second-ranking civilian leader in a 52-45 vote on Oct. 1, reflecting the reservations many Democrats had about his nomination. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska also voted against Cao's confirmation.

As a Senate candidate in Virginia last year, Cao extensively criticized the Defense Department's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and attacked a now-defunct Navy recruiting program that featured a drag-performing officer.

"When you're using a drag queen to recruit for the Navy, that's not the people we want," Cao said. "What we need is alpha males and alpha females who are going to rip out their own guts, eat them and ask for seconds. Those are young men and women that are going to win wars."

He has also criticized the Pentagon's former coronavirus vaccination man-

date and advocated for strengthening the U.S.-Mexico border, saying a migrant flow of "13,000 convicted murderers and 16,000 convicted rapists" was a threat to democracy.

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed concerns in June about Cao's record of controversial statements, including Cao's "disparaging certain Navy personnel, sharply criticizing U.S. allies and advocating for the release of convicted Jan. 6 individuals."

Republicans said Cao was highly qualified to serve as Navy undersecretary, citing his distinguished service as a special operations officer for explosive ordnance and disposal and diving.

"Capt. Cao has a drive for public service that comes from his experience of living the American dream," said Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla.

Cao immigrated to the U.S. as a Vietnamese refugee in 1975 and spent part of his childhood in West Africa. He told senators during his confirmation hearing in June that his interactions with Marines during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 inspired him to join the military.



FRED GRAY IV/U.S. Navy

**Then-Cmdr. Hung Cao, commanding officer of the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center, explains the importance of compression chambers. The Senate recently confirmed Cao as undersecretary of the Navy.**

"The Marines brought us into the embassy and stood watch over us in case they had to do a new evacuation and the look in their eyes that night that said, 'Nothing's going to hurt you, not tonight, not on my watch' — I wanted to be like those heroes," he said.

Cao graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served in the Navy for 25 years, deploying with special operations forces to defuse bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia and working on the Navy budget process. He retired at the rank of captain.

In 2022, Cao ran unsuccessfully for Virginia's 10th Congressional District and in 2024 lost the Senate election to Tim Kaine, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Seapower subcommittee. As Navy undersecre-

tary, Cao is expected to play a key role in the daily management of the Navy and Marine Corps and help the Navy address its persistent problems with building and repairing an aging ship fleet.

He told senators he will focus on reversing years of neglect and mismanagement in the production and maintenance of vessels as well as restoring what he called "the warrior spirit that my generation relied on as the core of our ethos."

"I will deliver to the combatant commanders the most lethal Navy and Marine Corps the world has ever seen," he said.

shkolnikova.svetlana@stripes.com  
@svetashko











## MILITARY

# Marines retire AAV after five decades

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The burly, tracked vehicles that shuttled Marine grunts from ships to shore for more than five decades were retired from the service last month, making way for the Corps' next-generation amphibious vehicle.

The Marines' Assault Amphibious Vehicle was decommissioned from service during an official ceremony at the Corps' Assault Amphibian School at Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Sept. 26, service officials said. Officially named the Assault Amphibious Vehicle Personnel-7, or AAV-P7, the armored vehicle was used by Marines in conflicts from 1983's Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada through Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom during the Global War on Terror.

Marine Col. Lynn Berendsen, who commands the Assault Amphibian School, noted the AAV had adopted several uses since the Corps first ac-

quired it in 1972. AAVs had been used for their primary ship-to-shore mission, as armored personnel carriers in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, as supply-movers in support of humanitarian operations, and even simply as boats.

"Its legacy is not only in its capabilities but also in the countless Marines who operated it and relied on it to accomplish their missions," Berendsen said. "The AAV gave Marines both mobility and armored protection, allowing them to close with the enemy and seize objectives at speed. In the desert, just as in the Pacific beaches decades earlier, [the AAV] showed it was more than a connector — it was a fighting vehicle at the heart of the Marine Air Ground Task Force."

The AAV replaced the Marines' World War II-era Landing Vehicle-Tracked, which was the first Marine vehicle that could move troops from a ship to shore and into an inland fight.



RICARDO DELCASTILLO/U.S. Marine Corps

**Marines with Assault Amphibian School, Training Command, conduct a pass and review during the Assault Amphibious Vehicle Sundown Ceremony at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Sept. 26.**

Over the decades, the AAV underwent several upgrades to improve its maneuverability, firepower and protection for Marines.

But in 2018, service officials decided it needed to be replaced by a more modern vehicle.

Since then, the Marine Corps has been working to replace the AAV with the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, or ACV, which officials have billed as a faster, better armored amphibious vehicle that is also more suited to expeditionary and large-scale combat oper-

ations.

The ACV is an eight-wheeled, amphibious assault vehicle with a blast-resistant hull built by BAE Systems. The ACV can hold 16 Marines — including three crew members — and travel about 65 mph on a paved road and more than 6 knots on open water, according to BAE.

The Corps has said it intends to buy more than 600 ACVs for its assault amphibian battalions.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com

## Air Force families sue housing company at MacDill

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Water pooled near the dryer and in ceiling light fixtures before a bedroom wall cracked apart inside Air Force Tech. Sgt. Dillon Mullins' rented home on MacDill Air Force Base, the special operations airman contended in a new lawsuit.

Extensive mold was growing inside that wall in his child's bedroom, Mullins and his wife discovered after it cracked. But The Michaels Organization, which has owned and operated the privatized military housing on the Florida base since 2021, only covered it with a tarp and some tape that failed to hold because of the high humidity, the Mullinses allege in the lawsuit they filed with dozens of other service members and their families who have lived in Michaels-owned MacDill housing in recent years.

Michaels is accused of breach of contract, gross negligence, inflicting

emotional distress and medical harm, deception and fraud, including concealing poor conditions of homes, in the lawsuit filed by 170 service members and family members in federal court in Tampa, Fla., near MacDill.

They are seeking an unspecified amount of money for damages for losses of property and time during their tenure living on MacDill, other mental and physical injuries suffered while living in Michaels-run housing, and other costs and expenses incurred while dealing with housing issues, according to the lawsuit.

The troops and their families are represented by lawyers from the McKee Law Group, Just Well Law and Cooper & Kirk, who filed the suit together.

"Families have the right to expect that landlords will provide safe and habitable homes — especially on American military installations," Kristina Baehr of Just Well Law said. "Our

service members cannot be mission-ready if they are sick, taking care of sick families and forced to cope with appalling housing conditions."

The lawsuit is the latest among dozens filed in recent years by American troops against the companies that own and run housing on U.S. military installations under a public-private partnership law passed in 1996. Troops have accused Michaels and other corporations of making billions of dollars in profits under those agreements while providing inadequate and unsafe family housing at dozens of bases.

Service members have reported similar problems with mold and pests in military-run barracks and housing on installations around the world.

At MacDill, tenants reported leaking roofs and windows, clogged drains, flooded laundry rooms, broken vent fans, mold-covered walls and fixtures. In many cases, they charged, they were misled about the histories of their

units with inaccurate or incomplete seven-year maintenance records, which the Pentagon requires that its privatized housing contractors provide.

A spokesperson for Michaels said the company had yet to receive the lawsuit and declined to comment.

"Our priority has always been and continues to be the well-being of our Harbor Bay [housing on MacDill Air Force Base] residents, staff and community," the spokesperson said.

Other MacDill tenants reported conditions including fatigue, respiratory issues, allergies, migraines, skin conditions, anxiety and emotional distress, according to the lawsuit.

Tenants involved in the lawsuit charged that they repeatedly attempted to get Michaels employees to intervene in mold and moisture problems, but officials often took weeks or more to respond to such complaints, compounding the mold growth or other problems.



## MILITARY

# One less star for USAF leader in Europe

After re-designation, next commander will be of lower rank than counterparts in theater

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

For the first time in decades, the next commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa will wear fewer stars on his shoulders than his U.S. military counterparts in the theater.

President Donald Trump has nominated Lt. Gen. Jason T. Hinds to lead the command nearly three months after Gen. James Hecker, the previous commander, retired following 36 years of service.

If Congress approves his nomination, Hinds is not up for a fourth star, according to the Air Force, as the billet has been re-designated a three-star command position.

"In alignment with the Department of War directive to reduce general and flag officer positions, the nominee for (USAFE-AFAFRICA) commander is at the lieutenant general grade," an Air Force official said in a statement.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in



HEATHER COZAD STALEY/U.S. Air Force

**U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Jason T. Hinds, U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa deputy commander, talks with German air force Brig. Gen. Gero von Fritschen in Picauville, France, in June.**

May ordered the military's active components to reduce the number of four-star generals and admirals by at least 20% and the National Guard to slash general officers by a minimum of 20%.

An F-22 pilot and former F-22 fighter squadron commander, Hinds al-

ready is in place. He served as the deputy commander under Hecker beginning in September 2024 and took over as the interim commander when Hecker retired, according to the Air Force.

Hinds is also in line to serve as the head of NATO's Allied Air Command and director of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre at Ramstein Air Base, according to the Air Force.

As USAFE-AFAFRICA commander, Hinds will oversee some 35,000 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian employees, spanning 104 nations and eight wings.

He'll succeed a long line of four-star generals, some of whom later served as the Air Force chief of staff, such as Gen. Mark Welsh III from 2012 to 2016; Gen. John Jumper, 2001 to 2005; and Gen. Michael Ryan, 1997 to 2001.

It's not the first time the rank structure has been targeted in Europe. In 2013, the Pentagon initially called for making the command a three-star

position but later reversed that.

The other top U.S. military command positions in Europe remain four-star billets for now. That includes the U.S. European Command led by Air Force Gen. Alexis G. Grynke, who has a dual-hatted role as NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe. For the Army, Gen. Chris Donahue leads U.S. Army Europe and Africa and NATO Allied Land Command.

Vice Adm. George Wikoff, meanwhile, has been nominated for a fourth star and is the choice to be the new commander of Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Force Command Naples.

The Air Force has also made similar moves at lower levels. Col. Beau Diers took command of the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano Air Base, Italy, in July. That command had been held by a brigadier general for more than two decades.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com  
@stripesktown

## 4-star command merges recruiting, training, future tech

BY ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

AUSTIN, Texas — The Army has formally combined two four-star commands under one leader who will oversee everything from soldier recruitment and training doctrine to the modernization of equipment and preparation for future combat.

The Army Transformation and Training Command, led by newly promoted Gen. David Hodne, brings together Training and Doctrine Command and Army Futures Command. The two outgoing Army commands' flags were cased in an Oct. 2 ceremony at the University of Texas at Austin, and the new flag of what is referred to as the T2C was revealed. The new unit patch prominently features a sword.

"For the first time in modern history, the Army unified the functions of force design, force development and force generation," Hodne said during his remarks. "Technology alone never transformed war. The tank, the airplane, the drone, none changed battle-

fields by themselves. It required new tactics, new concepts, and new organizations to integrate them into coherent warfighting systems."

Within the new command that will establish its headquarters in the Futures Command's space in Austin, three three-star-led subordinate units will spearhead the main initiatives from different locations, said Maj. Gen. John Cushing, chief of staff of T2C. The roots of these three units are the Futures and Concepts Center that will remain at Fort Eustis, Va.; Recruiting Command located at Fort Knox, Ky.; and the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

However, the new command has a year to put all these moving pieces into place, he added.

"What we're trying to do is rebalance where do people sit in terms of the capabilities that they're going to provide," Cushing said. "We've got enough room in Austin, and the area has been certainly gracious to welcome us in and give us opportunities to be able to

put people in the right places."

The Army announced the consolidation as one of several in May intended to meet Pentagon requirements to reduce the number of general officers in the military and remove redundancies.

Gen. Randy George, the Army's chief of staff, said the merger integrates how the Army trains, fights and modernizes.

"Transformation is not just about product innovation, it's about process innovation," he said during remarks broadcast from the Pentagon to the ceremony through a video livestream.

George was unable to travel to the ceremony because of a lapse in federal funding that has caused the government to shut down. The shutdown has also resulted in the furlough of non-essential government civilians, which make up about 90% of Army Futures Command personnel.



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

**Gen. David Hodne, right, and Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Harris, command team for Army Transformation and Training Command, uncasing the flag of the new command during an activation ceremony Oct. 2.**

Thayer.rose@stripes.com  
@Rose\_Lori



## MILITARY

# Army targets recruits with specialized skills

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Army is adding more job fields to a program aimed at giving new recruits with unique skills a jump start into their careers.

The Army this month said it will now include 17 new military occupational specialties in its Civilian Acquired Skills Program.

The initiative enables soldiers with relevant civilian skills to bypass some initial training and start their military careers at an advanced level.

"The Army gets skilled specialists into the force faster and at a lower cost, while the Soldier receives a significant head start in their military career," Brig. Gen. Gregory Johnson, director of military personnel management, said in a statement.

The most recent Army job specialties added are wide-ranging and include everything from Patriot missile system repairers to Abrams tank maintainers and respiratory specialists.

To qualify, applicants must have verified civilian training, certifications and relevant experience.

The program opens the door to receiving a higher rank or accelerated promotion upon enlistment, the Army said.

Over the last several years, the Army has expanded the program from a handful of job specialties to about 60 now.

The revised Army's CASP program is open to applicants entering active duty, the reserves and National Guard.

The latest update authorizes the following 17 new MOSs:

- 68V — Respiratory Specialist
- 91A — M1 Abrams Tank System Maintainer
- 91J — Quartermaster & Chemical Equipment Repairer
- 91M — Bradley Fighting Vehicle System Maintainer
- 91P — Self-Propelled Artillery Systems Mechanic
- 91S — Stryker Systems Maintainer
- 92A — Automated Logistical Specialist
- 92F — Petroleum Supply Specialist
- 92W — Water Treatment Specialist
- 92Y — Unit Supply Specialist
- 94E — Radio Equipment Repairer
- 94F — Computer/Detection Systems Repairer
- 94P — Multiple Launch Rocket System Repairer
- 94R — Avionics and Survivability Equipment Repairer
- 94S — Patriot System Repairer
- 94T — Short Range Air Defense System Repairer
- 94Y — Automatic Test Systems Operator/Maintainer

vandiver.john@stripes.com  
@john\_vandiver

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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: [stripes.com](https://www.stripes.com)

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TOPPS

**Maj. Korey Watkins, a behavioral health officer with the U.S. Army Reserve, recently scored a one-of-a-kind Star Wars trading card at the post exchange on Fort Sill, Okla.**

## Special Star Wars card turns up at post exchange

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Maj. Korey Watkins didn't expect a trip to the post exchange for a meal to end with one of the rarest treasures in the world of Stars Wars trading cards.

Watkins, a U.S. Army Reserve behavioral health officer stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, was on his drill weekend at Fort Sill, Okla., last month when he stopped by the GameStop inside the exchange.

On a shelf, pushed into a corner, he noticed the store's last box of Star Wars cards.

"Down in the corner was a dented blaster of 2025 Topps Chrome Star Wars," he wrote Sunday in a Facebook post to the Star Wars Card Collectors group. "Someone clearly decided to kick it into the corner instead of picking it up."

He bought the box and set it aside until after his meal. When he finally opened the pack, the entire exchange heard his reaction: Inside was a one-of-one Luke Skywalker card autographed by Mark Hamill, who played the character in seven "Star Wars" films.

Such cards are highly coveted by

collectors and can sell for hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

A 1977 Topps Luke Skywalker trading card held the previous record for the highest sale price of any Star Wars card after it sold for \$78,000.

That record was broken Aug. 5 by a one-of-one 2021 Star Wars Galaxy Superfractor card that sold for \$100,000, according to a Topps Instagram post made that day.

Topps confirmed the rarity of Watkins' card on its social media accounts, amplifying his story to a broader audience of fans.

The discovery carries an added resonance.

Hamill is the son of a Navy Exchange officer and graduated in 1969 from Nile C. Kinnick High School, which moved in 1971 from Yokohama to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

As a teenager, he performed in school plays at Kinnick, years before returning to visit as a Hollywood star during the Japanese release of the first "Star Wars" film.

stillwagner.jeremy@stripes.com  
@JeremyS\_Stripes



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