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Still supreme?

If US demands Europe take a larger role in NATO, the next Supreme Allied Commander Europe might not be American
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Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth walks with Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, at USEUCOM, Stuttgart, Germany, on Feb. 11.

ALEXANDER KUBITZA/Defense Department

COVER STORY

Change at top possible as NATO evolves

Tradition has kept American atop command structure

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Seventy-five years after Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed NATO's top military commander, the desk he used still sits in the office of a U.S. Army four-star general doing the same job.

In between Eisenhower and the current boss, Gen. Christopher Cavoli, it's always been an American at the desk, holding the lofty title of Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

With Cavoli's three-year tour expected to end this summer, one question up for debate

ANALYSIS

is whether the time has come for a European general to step into the role.

The decision will largely depend on the outlook of President Donald Trump, who has demanded that Europeans shoulder a larger share of the security burden on the Continent.

A move to Europeanize the top NATO command post could be one way for Trump to signal he wants the United States to play a smaller role.

The long-standing tradition of an American SACEUR isn't a NATO mandate but more of a "gentlemen's agreement" that also entails the alliance's civilian leader be a European, according to Jorge Benitez, a NATO historian with the Atlantic Council think tank.

The original reason for an American SACEUR is that it was seen as the more important role at the time, he said.

"The military commander of the alliance had more authority and was seen (as) more necessary because of the imminent Soviet threat at the heart of Europe," Benitez said Wednesday.

Having an American in command also was intended as an inducement to "break our historic isolationism," he said.

Practical reasons for having an American in charge remain. Chief among them, the U.S. nuclear arsenal



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, the supreme NATO commander and also leader of U.S. European Command, rides in an M5 Stuart during the Tanks in Town celebration in Mons, Belgium, in September.

serves as the ultimate deterrent for the alliance.

But in recent weeks, tensions between the U.S. and Europe have escalated. Germany's expected next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has called for major defense spending increases, a return of the draft and European "independence from" the United States.

Merz also has suggested that the United Kingdom and France assume a leadership role in Europe when it comes to providing nuclear weapons protection.

Earlier this month French President Emmanuel Macron said he was ready to begin discussions with his European counterparts about providing a nuclear deterrent for Europe.

If such moves are a prelude to a European SACEUR, the alliance would suffer, some security analysts say.

"I think turning this over to Europeans would seriously damage NA-

TO deterrence and weaken the alliance," said a NATO scholar, who requested anonymity because of the sensitive nature of his job. "One of America's major strengths, which no European country can replicate, is our ability to herd the cats that are the various defense establishments across the Continent."

While a European country could fill the slot, it would lack the credibility and authority that an American four-star officer brings to the table, he said.

"Putting a European into the role would also signal yet another step by America away from NATO," the scholar said. "This would weaken European security — and by extension, American security — while rewarding and strengthening (Russian President Vladimir) Putin in exchange for nothing."

Still, some in the global security establishment have advocated for a



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Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower listens to soldiers participating in Operation Jupiter, a three-day war game led by France near Koblenz, Germany, in 1951.

change over the decades. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, during the height of the Cold War in 1984, voiced support for a European SACEUR.

"Everyone has been afraid to take the initiative in changing the present arrangement, lest doing so unravel the whole enterprise," Kissinger wrote then in a Time magazine essay. "But since drift will surely lead to unraveling — if more imperceptibly — statesmanship impels a new approach."

Kelly Grieco, an expert on U.S. alliances, echoed Kissinger's view in a 2022 essay for the Atlantic Council, saying that China's rise requires a reassessment of the division of military labor in Europe.

"In a new transatlantic bargain, European states should assume greater responsibility for their own security and defense, but the United States must also become more willing to share leadership, starting with the appointment of a European Supreme Allied Commander Europe," Grieco wrote.

But if a change in NATO military leadership comes, it's more likely to be at the insistence of Trump.

From a European perspective, an American SACEUR is about ensuring a robust U.S. military commitment to the Continent, Benitez said.

"Now more than ever, this is a powerful reason to keep an American SACEUR," Benitez said.

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MILITARY

Security concerns raised over Syria

Analysts warn US withdrawal boosts ISIS escape risk

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

A withdrawal of American troops from Syria raises the risk of thousands of ISIS fighters escaping from sprawling prison camps guarded by Kurdish forces, analysts and former defense officials say as the White House reviews its security posture in the Middle East.

Since at least 2019, American troops leading Operation Inherent Resolve have trained members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces as security guards who oversee the “literal and figurative ‘ISIS army’ in detention,” as U.S. Central Command described it in January.

Besides the 9,000 fighters kept in 22 jails across Syria, the U.S. trains SDF guards to secure the displaced persons camp in Al-Hol and Roj, where ISIS is trying to recruit many of the more than 42,000 detainees who have lived for years in makeshift tents, often without adequate sanitation and limited access to water.

But security guard training has progressed slowly. The SDF is frequently pulled into skirmishes with Iranian-backed militia groups, local Arab tribes and Turkish fighters, according to reports from the Defense Department inspector general’s office.

Security concerns persist at the camps, including weapons smuggling. Seizing on the instability in the region, ISIS recently renewed its campaign to break fighters and their families out of the detention centers, the inspector general said.

President Donald Trump has vowed to keep the U.S. out of foreign entanglements, and following the ouster of the Assad regime, has repeatedly said the U.S. should not get involved in Syria.

NBC News reported last month that the Defense Department is developing plans to withdraw all U.S. troops from Syria, though the White House has not confirmed any decisions.



Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve

U.S.-trained prison guards in Syria stand in position with newly equipped riot gear in 2020. Islamic State fighters held in prison camps could find it easier to escape if American troops leave Syria, analysts and former defense officials say.

Few security analysts, if any, are calling for U.S. military involvement in Damascus and its new political order after a combined 53 years of rule by former President Bashar Assad and his father, Hafez Assad.

Some worry, however, that an end to the U.S. military presence in remote areas could make ISIS prison breaks and camp raids easier to pull off, potentially unleashing a new wave of fighters.

The U.S. troops help prevent ISIS from exploiting the power vacuum that has followed the Assad regime’s fall, said Amy Holmes, a research professor of international affairs at George Washington University who visits the detention centers regularly.

“If the U.S. were to withdraw, it would be a huge security risk for not just Syria but the entire region,” said Holmes, who added that ISIS has continued launching attacks and is believed to retain sleeper cells.

Quarterly IG reports detail the challenges faced by Operation Inherent Resolve personnel. The U.S.-led task force has often reported struggles in training SDF guards, citing regular bombardments from Turkey, a NATO ally that views the SDF as an offshoot

of a terrorist group.

Shortly after rebel forces took Damascus in December, Turkish forces increased their assaults on the SDF. The U.S., concerned about the stability of the camps, stepped in to broker a ceasefire deal, and has been calling for a path to de-escalation between the groups.

The SDF views U.S. forces in the region as a deterrent to Turkish attacks and in the past has asked for more U.S. personnel, the IG reports say.

However, Trump has long been reluctant to bulk up forces in the country. During his first term, in 2018, Trump proposed the removal of troops from Syria — immediately raising concerns about an ISIS resurgence and prompting the resignation of then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Trump eventually reconsidered — leaving a small contingent of troops in the country that defense experts say is critical to keeping Islamic State from reconstituting.

“I think it’s no surprise that the previous Trump administration had a real proclivity for getting out of these areas,” said retired Gen. Joseph Votel, former head of U.S. Central Command. “But the fact of the matter is our pres-

ence there solidifies the SDF, adds to the stability, and as a result, is preventing ISIS from coming back.”

The U.S. is also still moving forward with a two-part drawdown of troops from neighboring Iraq, with plans to remove some of the 2,500 service members stationed there by September, while maintaining relations with Iraqi leadership in the fight against ISIS.

The fall of the former Syrian regime has resulted in a tectonic geopolitical shift in the region. Although Assad’s ouster comes as a major blow to his allies in Iran and Russia, analysts say the U.S. may want to recalibrate its position in the coming months, especially when it comes to moving troops.

“Any entity, any government, including ours, that believes that security and stability in the Middle East is good for our national security should take a knee and reevaluate whatever plans existed before,” said Dana Stroul, director of research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Pentagon’s former top civilian official with responsibility for the Middle East.

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MILITARY



MARIAH GONZALEZ/U.S. Army

U.S. Army paratroopers train alongside Greek troops as part of the Legion Olympus exercise in Xanthi, Greece, on March 7. NATO continues to prepare for military exercises involving American troops.

US forces still train with allies

Reports said Americans would withdraw from NATO exercises

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — NATO continues to prepare for military exercises involving the United States this year and beyond, the alliance said in response to recent media reports that the U.S. was preparing to withdraw from such drills.

U.S. Army Col. Martin O'Donnell, spokesman for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, said NATO continues to “plan and execute exercises” with all 32 member states.

The exercises “increase our collective readiness to deter potential threats against the Euro-Atlantic, and defend its one billion inhabitants,” O'Donnell said in a statement Sunday.

The comments came following a report Friday by Sweden's Expressen newspaper that allies were notified the U.S. would no longer take part in the planning of NATO military exercises in Europe after 2025.

The newspaper, citing unnamed Swedish sources, said the move was related to the U.S. intention to focus more on military activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

While U.S. officials say planning for U.S. involvement in NATO exercises

continues, there has been more focus on having European allies play a bigger role.

“These exercises include U.S. forces, but also see more and more European forces training solely with other European forces like during last month's Steadfast Dart (exercise),” he said.

Questions about the future shape of NATO drills comes amid broader uncertainty about the role of the U.S. military in Europe.

Allies have speculated that President Donald Trump intends to make significant cuts to the size of the American force on the Continent.

While the Defense Department has said there are no immediate plans for a drawdown, questions have swirled in European defense circles about what the Pentagon's priorities — namely, border security and deterring China — will mean elsewhere.

In January, Italian media, citing diplomatic sources, reported that the U.S. plans to cut 20,000 troops in Europe.

Meanwhile, Britain's Telegraph newspaper, also citing unnamed officials, reported Friday that Trump is considering pulling some 35,000 troops out of Germany.

The uncertain situation has stoked fears among European leaders that the U.S. may no longer be committed to ensuring security in Europe, where the U.S. by its own design has played a leading military role since the end of World War II.

Germany's expected next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said last month that Europe must prepare to achieve security independence from the United States as quickly as possible.

Merz also has said Germany must consider nuclear weapons protection agreements with France and the United Kingdom should the U.S. pull back in Europe.

Meanwhile, a top Polish official on Friday said that Warsaw should consider acquiring a nuclear weapon of its own to ensure an independent deterrent against potential Russian aggression.

“We must be aware that Poland must reach for the most modern capabilities also related to nuclear weapons and modern unconventional weapons,” Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Friday.

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Digital defenders sharpen cyber skills in Thailand

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

NONG PHAI LOM, Thailand — Missile launches and small-arms fire are integral to Cobra Gold, the largest joint military exercise in mainland Asia, but a quieter form of warfare has steadily evolved during the annual event.

Teams from seven nations, including the U.S. and host country Thailand, convened far from simulated battlefields Tuesday to polish their digital defense skills by monitoring web traffic, satellite relays and data transfers for malware and other forms of cyberattacks.

The exercise, Cyber Ex, is in its seventh year at Cobra Gold and has progressively improved since its inception in 2019, according to Maj. Andrew Van Zandt, a cyberspecialist with the 252nd Cyberspace Operations Group, an Air National Guard unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

“I've worked with a few partner nations represented here one at a time, but the opportunity to work with seven other nations simultaneously in the service of improving cyberdefense is truly an opportunity that I cannot overstate,” he said Tuesday.

Cobra Gold, a multi-faceted exercise with approximately 30 countries represented, began Feb. 25 and concluded Friday.

The cyberwarfare scenario depicted a fictional conflict between several imaginary countries, with a complex series of events that coupled traditional warfare involving warships, aircraft and troops with a digital domain.

Van Zandt repeatedly emphasized that the exercise was exclusively focused on defensive techniques and the drill was not tailored to “any specific group, real world, fictional or otherwise.”

Instead, participants were practicing for the most common of digital threats, such as malware — software used to steal data or otherwise harm individuals or companies — and people who use basic scripts to exploit weaknesses in programs or computers, also known as a “script kiddie.”

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MILITARY

Study: New fitness test helps lower injury risk

ACFT is designed to better prepare troops for battle

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Army's latest fitness test could lead to an eventual reduction in injuries, according to a recent study that found soldiers become less prone to getting hurt as they gain experience with the program.

Researchers at the Rand Corp. examined data related to the administration of the test and found that the new one presented a similar or lower injury risk than the previous Army Physical Fitness Test.

The Army Combat Fitness Test, launched in 2022, was designed to better prepare troops for the rigors of combat. Another aim was to curb preventable injuries.

"More than half of soldiers experienced a new injury in 2021, so success in reducing the risk of injury could have a significant impact on both medical costs and lost workdays," the report released Monday said.

The current Army fitness test is



JAMARIES CASADO/U.S. Army

A soldier does hand release push-ups during the Army Combat Fitness Test in Vicenza, Italy.

substantially different from its predecessor and revolves around six training events intended to better measure a wider range of physical capabilities, including muscular strength, agility, aerobic endurance and reaction time.

The six events are deadlift, standing power throw, hand release pushup, sprint-drag-carry, planks and the 2-mile run.

"Learning to train for and take new physical fitness assessments should be expected to carry some degree of injury risk that can attenuate over time," the report said. "We observed a decline in injury incidence associated with a soldier gaining experience with the test."

The study found that soldiers who failed the test were about 20% more

likely to have an injury in the 180-day window following it.

Better performance on the test also was associated with reduced risk of injury in that 180-day window, Rand said.

Data showed an increase in "overuse injuries" prior to the test date, as soldiers likely intensified their preparations. However, there was no change in the rate of acute trauma injuries leading up to the test, the report said.

"A brief spike in injuries occurred on the date of the test and for several days following the test date, which are likely injuries associated with the ACFT itself," the report said.

The study noted that men and women were prone to different types of injuries, with women more likely to have lower-extremity injuries, while men's injuries tended to be in the upper extremities.

Given the short amount of time the test has been in effect, Rand recommended that the Army do a better job of collecting cause-of-injury data and incorporate physical fitness assessments into injury surveillance programs.

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Soldiers, former soldier accused of selling secrets to China

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two soldiers stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington and a former soldier in Oregon have been accused in separate indictments of sharing classified military information with China, according to the Justice Department.

First Lt. Li Tian, a health services administrator serving in Washington, is accused of conspiring with Ruoyu Duan, a former soldier based in Oregon, to gather information secretly about the Army's operations, including technical manuals, from November 2021 to December 2024.

Tian was tasked with obtaining instructions and manuals for Bradley and Stryker armored vehicles used by the Army and selling them to Duan,

who was paid by unknown people in China, according to the Justice Department.

Duan served in the Army from 2013 to 2017 and routinely made payments to other security clearance holders and active-duty service members, according to the indictment, though only two soldiers were named in indictments released last week.

A second indictment accuses Sgt. Jian Zhao, a battery supply sergeant assigned to the 17th Field Artillery Brigade in Washington, of obtaining and selling about 20 government hard drives, some marked "SECRET" and "TOP SECRET," to buyers in China.

Zhao received at least \$15,000 in payments from August to December 2024.

"These arrests underscore the persistent and increasing foreign intelli-

gence threat facing our Army and nation," Brig. Gen. Rhett Cox, the commanding general of Army Counterintelligence Command, said in a statement.

Tian and Duan are charged in Oregon with conspiring to commit bribery and theft of government property.

Zhao is charged in Washington with bribery, theft of government property and conspiring to obtain and transmit national defense information to an individual not authorized to receive it.

In messages with a contact in China, Zhao sought buyers for sensitive information on military exercises between the U.S. and another country, an Army exercise in the Indo-Pacific region, the operation of strategic rockets and missiles and the HIMARS multiple-rocket launcher, according to court documents.

Zhao set a starting price of \$3,000 to \$4,000 for "anything that touches HIMARS," a weapon system that Ukraine has deployed in its war with Russia.

He haggled over the price of a HIMARS-related document, calling it "very sensitive" and "super difficult to get."

Zhao ultimately settled on a price of \$6,500 for two documents, according to court documents. Zhao also offered to send an encryption-capable military computer to his Chinese contact in exchange for \$1,800.

The Justice Department said the documents that Zhao sent contained sensitive information related to U.S. military readiness in the event of an armed conflict with China.

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MILITARY

Naval Base Kitsap swapping old for new

Plan would send Nimitz to Virginia, bring Kennedy to Washington

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

BREMERTON, Wash. — Naval Base Kitsap would swap the Navy's oldest aircraft carrier for its newest under a plan released this month.

"The Navy proposes to replace an older Nimitz-class aircraft carrier at NBK-Bremerton with the next-generation Ford-class aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy," according to a statement from U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

The USS Nimitz, commissioned in 1975 just days after the fall of Saigon ended the Vietnam War, is slated to move from the naval base at Bremerton, which is west of Seattle on Puget Sound, to Naval Station Norfolk, Va., by April 2026.

The Navy on Friday also released a draft environmental impact assessment calling for public comment on the plan to bring the USS John F. Kennedy to Kitsap after it is commissioned later this year. The Navy said electrical and other facilities upgrades at Kitsap would be necessary before moving the new carrier to Bremerton.

"USS John F. Kennedy would arrive no earlier than fiscal year 2029," according to the Fleet Forces Command statement.

The John F. Kennedy would join the USS Ronald Reagan at Kitsap.

Nimitz to retire

When the Nimitz arrives at Norfolk, it will begin an estimated 12-month "Ship's Terminal Offload Plan," or STOP, according to Naval Sea Systems Command.

"The ship will no longer operate as an active part of the fleet," said Jamie K. Koehler, a command spokeswoman.

But there will be one more deployment before the Nimitz relinquishes its place in the fleet.

In November 2024, the Nimitz was approved as seaworthy and combat-



CHAD HUGHES/U.S. Navy

A sailor directs an F/A-18F Super Hornet from Strike Fighter Squadron 22 on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz in the Pacific Ocean, in October. The Nimitz, commissioned in 1975, is slated to move from Naval Base Kitsap, Wash., to Naval Station Norfolk, Va., by April 2026.

ready following a Navy review in San Diego. That allowed the aircraft carrier to surpass its official 50-year service life for a final deployment.

The Navy won't say which theater of operations that the Nimitz will serve its final mission.

For now, the nuclear-powered carrier is at its homeport on Puget Sound where it returned Feb. 19.

Congress was notified this month the carrier was moving to Norfolk, the U.S. Naval Institute News reported.

Naval Sea Systems Command said the Nimitz would be in Norfolk until the spring of 2027 to offload equipment and materials that can be repurposed.

The ship will then move to HII-Newport News Shipbuilding to begin the estimated 30-month process of removing nuclear fuel and deactivating the carrier.

The company will do the work, though final details of the timeline and completion are still under discussion, according to Naval Sea Systems Command.

The Nimitz, which was named for Adm. Chester Nimitz, has a crew of more than 3,200 and another 2,500 or more when carrying its air wing.

Navy's newest carrier

The Navy plans to maintain its congressionally mandated 11 aircraft carriers in the fleet by commissioning the USS John F. Kennedy to replace the Nimitz. The Kennedy is the second of the new \$12.9 billion Gerald R. Ford-class carriers.

The proposal to homeport the Kennedy at Kitsap would see the carrier move within the next five years.

The carrier will have extensive sea trials after commissioning before mov-

ing to Kitsap if the facility upgrades and environmental safeguards are made in the next several years.

In addition to the Ford and Kennedy, four more Ford-class carriers have been authorized, with each to take the place of an aging Nimitz-class carrier.

The Reagan, the ninth of 10 Nimitz-class carriers, will remain homeported at Kitsap.

Later this month, the ship is going into a 17-month maintenance period at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard at Kitsap. The work includes technological upgrades, hull preservation, and a review of steering and powerplant components, according to Navy plans.

If the work is finished on schedule, the Reagan will be available for deployment by August 2026.

MILITARY

Ski-bird medevacs Deep Freeze contractor

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

An LC-130 Hercules “ski-bird” recently flew a heart attack victim from Antarctica to New Zealand for medical treatment, Pacific Air Forces announced.

A civilian logistics specialist suffered a myocardial infarction Feb. 13 while participating in Operation Deep Freeze, the command said.

PACAF did not identify the unit involved, but the New York Air National Guard’s 109th Air Wing flies LC-130s — ski-equipped versions of Lockheed Martin’s long-serving cargo planes — between Christchurch, New Zealand, and McMurdo Station and other locations in Antarctica for the mission.

The heart-attack victim is an experienced logistics specialist and 20-mission contractor of Operation Deep Freeze, the PACAF news release said.

First responders arrived almost immediately after the victim collapsed in a galley, according to the release.

“After 40 minutes of intense efforts, the patient stabilized and was provided aero-medical evacuation via a LC-130 to Christchurch, New Zealand, for elevated cardiac care shortly thereafter,” the release states.

“The patient was discharged a week later and is now recovering at home.”

The partnership between the National Science Foundation and the military was key to ensuring rapid medical care and evacuation of the patient, Maj. Thomas Powell, McMurdo Station flight surgeon, said in the release.



RJ STRATCHKO/U.S. Navy

A ski-equipped LC-130 Hercules from 139th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron taxis at Williams Field, a compacted snow ice runway at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. Last month, a Hercules ski-bird transported a civilian who suffered a heart attack from Antarctica to New Zealand for medical treatment.

“This was a win through teamwork and rapid emergency response with a very experienced team, both military and civilian, who worked to ensure the situation was handled well,” he said.

Four hundred airmen were slated to join the Department of Defense’s annual mission in support of the foundation’s Antarctic program from October through February, according to the airlift wing in October.

PACAF commander Gen. Kevin Schneider and his senior enlisted ad-

viser, Chief Master Sgt. Katie McCool, recently toured units with Joint Task Force-Support Forces Antarctica on the frozen continent and in Christchurch, according to a PACAF news release. It did not specify the date of Schneider and McCool’s visit.

The task force coordinates strategic airlift, tactical deep field support, aero-medical evacuation, search and rescue, sealift, bulk fuel supply, port cargo handling and transportation.

“Whether it’s on the ground in Ant-

arctica or in a high stakes combat scenario, we’re building relationships that ensure we’re prepared for anything,” Schneider said in the release.

The partnership ensures that both the U.S. and New Zealand forces are prepared for a wide range of contingencies, from humanitarian aid to responding to military threats, according to the release.

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3 soldiers, 4 horses injured during training for cemetery

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Three soldiers and four horses at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., were injured March 3 during a training exercise, the Army confirmed.

The training accident involved and horses of the Caisson Detachment of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as “The Old Guard.” Three horses unseated their riders but did not escape the base, Army spokesman Lt. Col. Patrick Husted said.

“The three soldiers who were unseated received non-life-threatening

injuries which required treatment at a local hospital. One soldier underwent surgery and remained at the hospital overnight, while two were released upon completion of treatment,” Husted added.

Four horses also suffered non-life-threatening injuries and have been examined and treated by onsite veterinarians.

One modified caisson wagon was damaged, Husted added.

The caisson platoon of the 3rd Infantry Regiment has carried the caskets of deceased service members to gravesites at Arlington National Cem-

etry, Va., since 1948.

The caisson — a ceremonial wagon that bears the casket — is drawn by four specially trained horses. The processions are considered an integral part of traditional full-honor military funerals at Arlington.

But unsanitary living conditions, malnourishment and a lack of open space for the herd led to the suspension of horse-drawn funerals conducted by the 3rd Infantry Regiment Caisson Platoon in May 2023. The horses were infested with parasites, crowded into small fields filled with manure and construction debris, and suffering from

malnutrition from low-quality feed. Two horses died.

Language in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2025 instructs the Army secretary to complete renovations of historic stables that had fallen into disrepair.

The Army also must ensure equine handlers are trained and certified to manage the herd and take other steps to establish safeguards for the horses’ welfare before caisson services can return.

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MILITARY

Benning back; Fort Moore no more

Georgia post's name is changed to that of hero from World War I

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Fort Moore, the Army base in Georgia that is home to infantry and armor training, will once again be called Fort Benning but without ties to the Confederacy, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth wrote in a memorandum announced March 3.

“I direct the U.S. Army to change the name of Fort Moore, Ga., to Fort Benning, Ga., in honor of Cpl. Fred G. Benning, who served with extraordinary heroism during World War I,” Hegseth wrote.

The Army base, founded in 1918, was named for Henry Benning, a local resident who worked as a lawyer and a judge before joining the Confederate army and rising to general. A slave owner, Benning never served in the U.S. Army and worked, even after the Civil War, to promote racial segregation and white supremacy, according to historians.

The base was renamed in 2023 for Army Lt. Gen. Hal and his wife Julie Moore after Congress mandated the Pentagon rid its installations of names and items honoring those who served the Confederacy.

Congress created the Naming Commission in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act — the annual must-pass bill that sets Congress’ policy and spending priorities for the Pentagon —

charging the panel with identifying all items in the Defense Department inventory associated with the Confederacy.

In a 2022 report, the panel that oversaw the name-changing process included several Bennings who were nominated for consideration for the post’s name. Only one appeared to have ties to the Army — Cpl. Fred G. Benning.

Born in Norfolk, Neb., Benning enlisted in the Army in April 1917. He served in the Machine-Gun Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division of the American Expeditionary Forces in France during World War I.

Benning was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross — the Army’s second-highest award for battlefield valor — for heroic actions on Oct. 9, 1918, as an 18-year-old fighting in France. After the enemy killed his platoon commander and disabled two senior non-commissioned officers, Benning took command of the surviving 20 men of his company and courageously led them through heavy fire to their assigned objective in support of the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

After returning home, Benning was elected mayor of Neligh, Neb., Hegseth wrote. Benning died in May 1974.

“As we rename Fort Benning, I further direct the Army to honor the legacy of Lt. Gen. Harold ‘Hal’ Moore’s



COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

A comparison of previous entrance signs for Fort Moore and the old entrance sign for Fort Benning.

storied military service and Julia ‘Julie’ Moore’s family and casualty notification advocacy in a manner that celebrates their significant contributions to the local community and the Army,” Hegseth said.

The defense secretary last month made good on President Donald Trump’s campaign promise to restore the name Fort Bragg to Fort Liberty by issuing an order to rename the North Carolina base for a different Bragg — World War II Silver Star recipient Pfc. Roland L. Bragg, instead of its longtime namesake, Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg.

Under current law, Hegseth cannot name Defense Department assets or properties for individuals tied to the Confederacy.

The children of Hal and Julie Moore, for whom Fort Moore was renamed in 2023, urged Hegseth to consider their parents’ legacy before removing their name from the post.

“Hal and Julie Moore still represent the values and culture and competencies that Secretary of Defense [Hegseth] is saying he wants in our force and in the [Defense] Department,” said Dave Moore, Hal and Julie’s youngest child who retired from the Army as colonel in 2011 after serving tours in Panama, Iraq and Afghanistan. “The combination of Hal and Julie Moore as namesake gives the Department of Defense the opportunity to embrace honor, integrity, competency, selfless service, and gives the Department of Defense the opportunity to reinforce their support for Army families and Army spouses.

“I think it’s a win for the Department

of Defense if they do nothing.”

Hal Moore was a revered warrior who served in the Korean War and earned the Distinguished Service Cross in Vietnam for lifesaving heroics during the war’s first major battle before rising to a three-star general.

His wife, Julie, meanwhile held their family together through more than two dozen moves and served as an activist for Army families. The daughter of an Army officer, she was a lifelong volunteer for the American Red Cross, and she is also credited with revamping the Pentagon’s casualty notification process to ensure such news was delivered by uniformed Army officers, after she witnessed families being notified of Vietnam casualties by telegrams delivered by taxi drivers in Columbus, Ga. Both Moores are buried on the Georgia Army post.

Hegseth has said the Army bases should be reverted to Fort Benning and Fort Bragg because they tie generations of soldiers together.

“It’s about the connection to the community, to those who served, and we’re not, as the president has said and I’ve said as well, we’re not done there. There are other bases that have been renamed that erodes that very same legacy,” Hegseth said last month in Germany. “There’s a reason I said Bragg and Benning when I walked into the Pentagon on day one. But it’s not just Bragg and Benning. There are a lot of other service members who have connections, and we’re going to do our best to restore it.”

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