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Troopers assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division Horse Cavalry Detachment conduct a charge during a change of command ceremony on Fort Hood, Texas, in June.

DAVID DUMAS/U.S. Army

Equine drawdown Army dropping 5 horse units **Page 2**

COVER STORY

Army ending 5 ceremonial horse units

Cuts will save \$2M annually and fund weapons, training

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The Army is putting to pasture five ceremonial horse units that bring the service's cavalry history from the Old West to life for communities across the country.

Service officials said the move will save \$2 million annually and the money will be pumped into weapons and training.

"We're doing this to align more resources with warfighting capability and readiness," said Steve Warren, an Army spokesman.

More than 230 horses, mules and donkeys assigned to Fort Irwin, Calif.; Fort Huachuca, Ariz.; Fort Riley, Kan.; Fort Sill, Okla.; and Fort Hood, Texas, will be put up for adoption and transferred out of the Army in the next year.

Only the Old Guard caisson units at the Military District of Washington and Joint Base San Antonio, Texas, will remain active. These units participate in funeral services for Medal of Honor recipients, prisoners of war and those killed in action and veterans ranked sergeant major or higher at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in Texas and Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Each base is responsible for coming up with its own plan to close the unit and move soldiers from their assignment with a horse unit, Warren said. It is possible the horses could remain in the area to provide pomp and circumstance to events but outside of the Army's budget.

"There may be workarounds. We don't know. This is early days," Warren said. "We're not going to assign soldiers to the horse detachment any longer. We're not going to keep horses at Fort Hood any longer."

The budget cuts are part of an ongoing initiative in the Pentagon to re-arrange funding to activities and costs that directly support warfighting. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

Members of the Military Funeral Honors-Caisson Platoon from Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston participate in a funeral procession at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, in 2023.

described cuts such as these as "refocusing and reinvesting existing funds into building the force that protects ... the American people."

It also follows a difficult period for the Old Guard stables in Virginia. It paused funeral honors for two years after the deaths of two horses in 2023 exposed unsanitary living conditions and a lack of open space for the herd to graze. The 3rd Infantry Regiment completely reformed its equine program and horse-drawn caissons returned to Arlington National Cemetery in May.

The Army's other ceremonial horse units typically bring alive the history of the cavalry during weekly public demonstrations and unit ceremonies as well as during parades, rodeos and events throughout local communities.

The Fort Sill Artillery Half Section carries the traditions of World War I, while the 1st Infantry Division Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard is reminiscent of Civil War-era soldiers. The three others all represent the Army of the late 1880s, using Colt revolvers and sabers of the era.

B Troop at Fort Huachuca is unique from the others in that it does not have any authorized personnel and instead relies on volunteers to fill its schedule of events for recruiting, community relations and Army ceremonies.

The 1st Cavalry Division Horse Cavalry Detachment at Fort Hood and

Fort Riley's mounted color guard have participated in presidential inauguration parades, while the Fort Hood detachment and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment Horse Detachment from Fort Irwin have walked the annual Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade in California.

Fort Riley's color guard participated in 143 events in 15 states and two countries in 2024, said Maj. Guster Cunningham, spokesman for the division. On average, about 30 soldiers are assigned to the unit at any given time, working alongside its 18 horses, two draft horses and four mules.

"We will work diligently to find suitable homes for our horses and will keep the community informed throughout this transition," Cunningham said. "This change does not impact the 1st Infantry Division's ('Big Red One') core priorities: building warfighting readiness, caring for soldiers, civilians and families, adapting our formations to win and developing inspirational leaders. We remain committed to strengthening partnerships and engaging with our surrounding communities."

The Fort Hood detachment, with roughly 40 soldiers, now owns 29 horses and four mules, according to the 1st Cavalry Division. At division ceremonies, the soldiers typically close the event with a cavalry charge, complete with the mule-drawn Studebaker wag-

on and Apache helicopters overhead.

Service officials said they aim for a seamless transition for the horses to responsible owners.

"The 1st Cavalry Division Horse Detachment has been a proud symbol of the division's heritage for over 53 years, playing a vital role in community relations and representing the division and the Army with distinction at national events, including the Army's 250th birthday parade. The 1st Cavalry Division remains committed to its mission of warfighting readiness and service to the nation while honoring the legacy of our horse detachment," the division said in a statement.

Other units affected by the change did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Each unit will have six months to create a plan to close the horse units and then each will spend the next six months executing the plan, Warren said. The horses will not be sold, he said.

"We're not trying to try to make money here. We're going to donate them, find adoption for them," Warren said. "Just like our military working dogs, they are part of the Army. They're part of the Army family. We're going to treat them with compassion."

thayer.rose@stripes.com
@Rose_Lori

MILITARY

Army might discharge soldiers who can't shave

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Soldiers who require prolonged shaving waivers, which disproportionately affect Black troops, could be removed from the Army under an updated policy, the service announced recently.

"This is about uniformity, discipline and standards. And this is about training," Army spokesman Steve Warren told reporters. "This standard applies equally to all soldiers, not just minorities."

More than 40,000 soldiers have temporary shaving waivers — nearly double the amount from five years ago, he said.

All soldiers must be clean-shaven on duty when in uniform or civilian clothes "with temporary exemptions for medical reasons and permanent exemptions for religious accommodations," the Army said in a statement.

"Soldiers who cannot comply with

grooming standards ... may be administratively separated," the service said.

The policy bars permanent shaving waivers and requires medical personnel to craft formal treatment plans for affected troops. Soldiers have been able to grow a beard through a waiver process for pseudofolliculitis barbae, which causes painful razor bumps and mostly affects Black men.

"One of the things that we've determined is that we need to train our soldiers better on how to take care of their shaving needs. For whatever reason, kids these days, they're struggling with, you know, proper shaving technique," Warren said. "Pseudofolliculitis barbae, a lot of that just has to do with your shaving technique is what we've determined. A vast majority of minority soldiers, African-American soldiers, are within the standards all the time."

The new policy requires exemptions for non-religious reasons to be support-



JONATHAN ALDERMAN/U.S. Army

Soldiers use the mirror of an Army Humvee for an early morning shave.

ed by a temporary medical profile and an exception-to-policy, or ETP, memo granted by a lieutenant colonel in the chain of command, the service said.

All religious accommodations under this directive will be reviewed in the next 90 days, Warren said.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll signed the policy July 7 and it went into effect the same day, said Lt. Col. Orlandon

Howard, an Army spokesman.

All military services have faced growing legal and internal pressure to relax grooming standards as debates on social media and in various other forums highlight the struggle to balance tradition and uniformity with individual rights. Military officials have argued facial hair could prevent a perfect seal of a gas mask.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on March 12 ordered a services-wide review of existing standards for physical fitness, body composition and grooming. The review of grooming standards will also include the wearing of beards, according to the memo.

The following day, the Marines enacted a policy that troops diagnosed with pseudofolliculitis barbae could be separated from the service if grooming exceptions are needed beyond a year.

adams.matthew@stripes.com
@MatthewAdams60

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MILITARY

7th Fleet pick dropped over drag shows

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon has pulled the nomination of Rear Adm. Michael “Buzz” Donnelly to lead the 7th Fleet following questions from a conservative news outlet about drag shows aboard an aircraft carrier nearly 10 years ago.

Donnelly was nominated June 18 by President Donald Trump for promotion to vice admiral and command of 7th Fleet, based at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, and the Navy’s largest overseas force.

However, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has rescinded Donnelly’s nomination, an unidentified Pentagon spokesperson said July 11 by email to Stars and Stripes. The spokesperson, who declined to identify themselves, would not comment on whether the decision to withdraw Donnelly’s nomination was related to drag shows.

“The Secretary is thankful for his continued service and wishes him luck in his next position,” the email states.

The Daily Wire, a news website co-founded by conservative commentator Ben Shapiro, first reported July 10 that Donnelly’s nomination was pulled after the Daily Wire asked about his role in allowing drag shows aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan.



CHARLES SCUDELLA III/U.S. Navy

Then-Petty Officer 3rd Class Joshua Kelley performs aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan in 2017.

Donnelly, currently the head of the Chief of Naval Operations’ air warfare division, was commander of the Ronald Reagan from 2016 to 2017. He also led Carrier Strike Group 5 and Task Force 70 at Yokosuka Naval Base from 2021 to 2023.

While Donnelly was skipper of the



JAMAL McNEILL/U.S. Navy

Michael “Buzz” Donnelly, at the time a Navy captain and commander of the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, watches flight operations in 2017.

Reagan, then-Petty Officer 3rd Class Joshua Kelley occasionally performed drag shows aboard the carrier under the stage name “Harpy Daniels.”

Kelley also managed to win second place and a \$1,000 Navy Exchange gift card in a lip-sync competition aboard the carrier, the Military Times reported in August 2018.

Kelley — now a petty officer first class with the guided-missile destroyer USS Bulkeley at Naval Station Rota, Spain — also served as one of five members of the Navy’s Digital Ambassador Pilot Program, a recruitment

effort between October 2022 and March 2024.

The conservative nonprofit America First Legal criticized Kelley’s role as a “digital ambassador” and alleged Kelley took part in inappropriate political activity, showed contempt toward superiors and misused a service member’s uniform.

America First Legal, in a June 2023 letter to then-Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro and other senior administrators, demanded an investigation into its allegations.

“In order to preserve the Navy’s reputation, swift action must be taken to restore good order and discipline and to prevent further partisan activity that implies Navy endorsement of particular candidates and causes,” Jacob Meckler, the group’s legal adviser, said in a news release at the time.

Based in Washington, D.C., the nonprofit was cofounded by Gene Hamilton, a former Trump administration official, and Stephen Miller, a senior Trump official during his first term now serving as homeland security adviser and deputy chief of staff for policy.

wilson.alex@stripes.com
@AlexMNWilson

Arrival of second Ford-class carrier pushed back to 2027

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A projected two-year delay in bringing the Navy’s newest aircraft carrier to the fleet will eventually leave the service with just 10 carriers for nearly a year, according to Navy budget documents.

The future USS John F. Kennedy was scheduled to join the fleet this month but now isn’t on track for delivery until March 2027, according to the Navy’s 2026 budget estimates.

It’s unclear how the delay could affect the service amid intensive operations in multiple theaters, including the Asia-Pacific, Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Middle East.

Two carriers, USS Nimitz and USS Carl Vinson, currently are in the Middle East, USNI News reported this month. A third, USS Gerald R. Ford, left for deployment in late June to the

U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, which includes the Eastern Mediterranean.

There are 11 active aircraft carriers in service, with Nimitz scheduled to be decommissioned in May 2026, USNI news reported in March.

Construction on Kennedy, the second ship of the Ford-class carriers, began in February 2011. The ship is designated CVN 79.

The delay is needed to finish advanced arresting gear certification and complete work on the advanced weapons elevator, the Navy said in a budget footnote.

Arresting gear rapidly decelerates an aircraft when it lands on an aircraft carrier. The elevators move large amounts of weapons to the hangar bay and flight deck to allow for faster rearming of aircraft.

Nimitz, which was commissioned in 1975, had its service life extended amid



FACEBOOK/HHI

The future John F. Kennedy at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia in 2022.

Ford-class carrier delays. It was scheduled to be deactivated this year.

Ford made its maiden deployment in 2022 after significant cost overruns, technical issues and other delays following its 2017 commissioning as the lead ship of its class.

Since then, the carrier completed a more than eight-month deployment that included the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Middle East in January 2024.

In April, Navy officials told members of a Senate subcommittee that the service and CVN 79 builder HII-Newport News Shipbuilding were “hyper-focused” on the fastest path to a combat-ready ship, crew and air wing. They also said construction on CVN 79 was about 95% complete.

But while initial design problems encountered during construction of Ford were resolved, “early class production-focused challenges and associated learning continue on CVN 79,” the service said in its congressional testimony.

bath.alison@stripes.com
@alisonbath_

FILLER_01

MILITARY

Retired generals blast plan to cut F-35s

Air Force plan to limit purchases is a 'costly and strategic blunder'

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Deep cuts to the Air Force's F-35 program and the elimination of the E-7 Wedgetail program would prove a "costly and strategic blunder" for the service, a retired three-star general said this month.

Retired Lt. Gen. David Deptula told reporters that the proposed cuts to the programs in the Air Force's fiscal 2026 budget proposal unveiled last month would leave the service with problematic capability gaps given an uncertain security environment around the world. The latest budget proposal, Deptula said, would cut some 340 aircraft from the service while purchasing only 76 new airframes, including only 24 F-35As — the most advanced fighter aircraft now flying.

"The Air Force today is the oldest, the smallest and the least ready it's ever been in its entire history," Deptula said during a news briefing organized by the Air and Space Forces Association. "And the current programming schedule, it has [the Air Force fleet] getting even smaller as we move into the next five years, and quite frankly, there's insufficient funding in the budget to stop that decline. That's why raising this to the attention of Congress and the American public is so important."

Deptula, who is the dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies and retired from the Air Force in 2010, helped organize a letter sent this month to congressional leaders warning of the dire consequences if the service's budget proposal was enacted. It was signed by 16 retired four-star generals.

"During a period of heightened tension throughout the world, we believe such reductions will severely and unnecessarily undermine our service members' ability to deter, and if necessary, prevail in future conflicts," the generals wrote in the July 7 letter organized by the Air and Space Forces Association.

The signees included six former Air



CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL/U.S. Air Force

An Air Force F-35A Lightning II approaches an Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker for midair refueling over Finland on June 26.

"If conflict does come, there will be no more decisive question than who controls the skies over the Pacific."

Letter from retired Air Force generals

Force chiefs of staff — Gens. Merrill McPeak, Ron Fogleman, Michael Ryan, John Jumper, Michael Moseley and Mark Welsh. Other signers included Gen. Joseph Ralston, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and NATO Supreme Allied Commander; Gen. Philip Breedlove, a former NATO Supreme Allied Commander and Air Force vice chief; Gen. Ralph Eberhart, who led U.S. Northern Command; Gen. Kevin Chilton, a former U.S. Strategic Command chief; Gen. Lori Robinson, a former NORTHCOM commander; Gen. John Loh, a former Air Force vice chief, and Gen. Herbert "Hawk" Carlisle, who led Air Combat

Command.

Air Force and Pentagon leaders have defended the proposed cuts as necessary to fund the next generation of weapons. The cuts to the F-35A Lightning II fighter program would shift \$3.5 billion in funds to develop the sixth-generation F-47 stealth fighter and boost funding for the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile and an extended-range version of the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, service officials said while rolling out the Air Force's proposed \$209.6 billion budget for 2026.

Service officials said cutting the E-7 Wedgetail program was needed due to cost overruns and uncertainty over its survivability in a combat zone. The Air Force had planned to buy 26 of the aircraft to replace older E-3 AWACs aircraft, but the service now wants to shift its surveillance emphasis to space-based satellites.

The group of retired generals warned that space-based satellites are not yet up to the task of taking over surveillance capabilities now conducted by manned aircraft.

The former top Air Force leaders said they recognized the long history of

F-35 issues from cost overruns to supply-chain problems, but Congress needs to look no further than recent attacks on Iran by Israeli F-35A pilots to see the aircraft is capable.

Breedlove, a fighter pilot who retired in 2016 after leading U.S. European Command and NATO forces for three years, said Israeli pilots used the F-35A — the same model the U.S. Air Force flies — to destroy Iran's advanced anti-aircraft systems provided by Russia, and give them full air superiority over the country. It allowed Israel — and later U.S. B-2 stealth bombers — to deliver unopposed strikes on military targets during the recent 12-day conflict between the two Middle East powers.

"You just need to look at what the Israelis just did in Iran as to how that works for us," Breedlove said, comparing the operation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine where it has never established air superiority. "We don't want to end up having to fight a war that is not enabled fully by our style of Western air power and air superiority."

The group suggested Congress purchase 75 F-35As in fiscal 2026, in part to deter China from attacking Taiwan, which its president, Xi Jinping, has vowed to return to Chinese control. Breedlove said Israel's use of the F-35s against Iran should give Xi pause in ordering such an invasion.

"Mr. Xi ... just watched the F-35 march into Iran, a long way from Israel, and establish air superiority over the enemy's battlefield ... the F-35 did that while fighting against some of the best Russian [air defense systems] outside of Russia," Breedlove said. "This is an inflection point for Xi — and others — that American air power ... can give him pause."

But scaling back the F-35 and the E-7 programs could change that calculus, the generals worried.

"If conflict does come, there will be no more decisive question than who controls the skies over the Pacific," they wrote. "The actions Congress takes this year — specifically through the acquisition of 75 F-35As and ensuring the operational deployment of the E-7 — could be critical in deterring and, if necessary, prevailing in near-term conflicts."

dickstein.corey@stripes.com



FILLER_02

FILLER_03

MILITARY

Hegseth orders more small, cheap drones

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon wants more small, cheap, easily replaced drones in the hands of troops as quickly as possible, and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said he is cutting red tape to make that happen.

Hegseth, dressed in a dark-colored suit, took to the Pentagon's parade field on July 10 to record a video announcing his policies on new small drones — officially, unmanned aerial systems — and promoting his memorandum on the matter as an American Flag-bearing drone was flown to him by a service member. Hegseth said the memo would build off a June 6 executive order issued by President Donald Trump meant to boost America's commercial drone manufacturing and integrate them into the nation's transportation and military sectors.

"This is the future," Hegseth said over the buzz of the small drone and the blasting of Metallica's 1991 hit song "Enter Sandman." "We're in the fight. We're in the fight to win it, and I'm never going to back down."

Hegseth's new policies aim to cut through bureaucratic policies that limited the military's ability to quickly purchase and field small drones with vast capabilities ranging from gathering intelligence to dropping small supplies to troops all the way to delivering lethal munitions on enemy positions.

"Lethality will not be hindered by self-imposed restrictions, especially when it comes to harnessing technologies we invented but were slow to pursue. Drone technology is advancing so rapidly, our major risk is risk-avoid-



COREY DICKSTEIN / Stars and Stripes

Army Sgt. Nicholas Murphy of the 3rd Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade tinkers with a hexacopter drone that he built, on July 26, just before a test flight at a Hinesville, Ga., airfield just outside Fort Stewart.

ance," Hegseth wrote. "The department's bureaucratic gloves are coming off."

The policy seeks to move small drones — especially lethal, one-way attack drones — into the same purchasing category as grenades and bullets, instead of classifying them more like helicopters and planes. It also lowers the decision-making authorities about purchasing drones from top Pentagon leaders to the first general, admiral or Senior Executive Service civilian in a unit's chain of command.

The memo outlines a threefold approach to incorporating more small drones into the arsenals of combat units — with an immediate focus on

providing them to units focused on operating in the Indo-Pacific region. Hegseth said the military would immediately begin purchasing hundreds of American-made small, cheap drones to provide a cash influx to industry. It would quickly get those capabilities to combat units to experiment with their capabilities, and it would mandate units incorporate the small, cheap drones into all their training iterations.

"Next year, I expect to see this capability integrated into all relevant combat training, including force-on-force drone wars," Hegseth wrote.

The new policies come as Pentagon officials have closely watched Ukrainian forces innovate on the battlefield

with small, lethal drones against Russian invading forces. The New York Times reported in March that drones account for about 70% of battlefield casualties in the war in Ukraine.

Last month, Ukraine launched a massive swarm of more than 100 small, cheap drones into Russian territory, striking more than 40 Russian bombers and destroying more than a dozen of them in a brazen and innovative attack on Moscow's air power.

Hegseth's memo implores American forces to find similar ways to advance drone warfare. He also calls for the military services to consider what expensive weapons systems could be replaced by cheap, disposable drones.

He gave the secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force 60 days to report to him any major weapons that could be "more cost effective or lethal" if replaced by small drones.

He also ordered the military to expand its use of 3D printing and other in-house drone building capabilities and stand up units to innovate drone warfare within the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps by Sept. 1.

"Our adversaries have a head start in small UAS, but we will perform a technological leapfrog and establish small UAS domain dominance by the end of 2027," Hegseth wrote in his memo. "We will accomplish this urgent goal by combining the nation's best qualities, including risk-taking. Senior officers must set the tone."

"Accelerating this critical battlefield technology requires a Department of War culture."

dickstein.corey@stripes.com

Air Force rules out eyelash extensions, short boots

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Airmen will be expected to have higher boots, officers must maintain one complete set of a camouflage uniform and eyelash extensions are no longer permitted, the Air Force announced in updated service dress and appearance standards.

"Combat boots must now be between 8-12 inches in height from the bottom of the heel tread to the top of the back of the boot, and soling material will not

exceed two inches in height," the Air Force said in a statement.

Eyelash extensions are prohibited, unless for medical reasons. If medical authorization is obtained, eyelashes must not exceed 12 millimeters in length, the service said. The Air Force first authorized eyelash extensions in 2021.

For Operational Camouflage Pattern uniforms, or OCPs, officers must maintain at least one complete set of either the non-fire-retardant OCPs or an

improved hot weather combat OCP uniform.

Airmen also received clarification on cuffs being rolled up.

"When sleeves are not rolled up, cuffs may remain visible, or members may fold their sleeves once or twice," the service said.

The various uniform and appearance changes will begin being enforced in the next few months. The changes do not apply to guardians as the Space Force is expected to unveil guidance in

the coming weeks.

This is the second announcement this year regarding dress and appearance.

In January, the Air Force announced it was doing away with duty-identifier patches and an array of nail polish colors, as well as men's hair not touching the ears and being clean shaven at the start of each duty day.

adams.matthew@stripes.com
@MatthewAdams60

BOOKS

'Fuji Fire' revives largely forgotten tragedy

1979 blaze killed
13 Marines, injured
more than 70 others

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A retired Marine's new book recounts the 1979 fire that killed 13 Marines and injured more than 70 others at a U.S. military training center near the base of Mount Fuji.

"Fuji Fire: Sifting Ashes of a Forgotten U.S. Marine Corps Tragedy" is the result of four years of research and more than 100 interviews conducted by retired Marine Capt. Chas Henry, a former broadcast journalist.

The blaze broke out on Oct. 19, 1979, at what is now known as Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji, during Typhoon Tip, the most powerful tropical cyclone on record. The storm struck much of Japan, including the area surrounding the 12,389-foot mountain southwest of Tokyo.

Camp Fuji holds an annual memorial ceremony at a stone monument honoring the Marines and sailors who died or were injured in the blaze.

Henry said the inspiration for the book came after he realized the fire



RON HATCHER/Stars and Stripes

Navy corpsmen carry a burn victim on a stretcher off a helicopter at Camp Fuji, Japan, to a waiting ambulance.

had largely faded from memory. In 2019, he posted about the incident on social media along with a photo of himself at Camp Fuji in 1978.

"I was taken aback that the fire was so little remembered," Henry said in a recent phone interview from Washing-

ton, D.C.

While stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, Henry began researching the blaze, which occurred shortly after his visit to Camp Fuji as part of the Hawaii-based 31st Marine Amphibious Unit.

"It was winter," he said. "The accommodations were sparse, but I remember the kerosene heaters kept them warm."

At the time, Camp Fuji stored about 5,000 gallons of fuel in rubber bladders situated on higher ground behind Quonset huts. Tip's 190-mph winds ruptured one of the bladders, sending fuel down the hillside. A kerosene heater reportedly ignited the stream of gasoline.

Dozens of Marines with severe burns were evacuated to hospitals in Gotemba and Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo. Many were later flown to an Army burn center in San Antonio.

Henry, a Gulf War veteran, said he tracked down individuals named in the official report on the fire and interviewed about 130 people for the book, which was published June 1 by Potomac Books.

He spoke with Marines who were

burned or escaped the blaze, as well as medical and air crews from Yokota, Camp Zama and Naval Air Facility Atsugi. He also interviewed caregivers from the Texas burn center.

Timothy Terrell, a Navy corpsman at Camp Fuji during the fire, said he was impressed by the depth of Henry's research.

"There were things I did not know about," he said. "Questions that I asked myself for years have been answered."

Former Marine Steve Neal, severely burned in the fire, also found the book revealing.

"I consider myself among the very fortunate and humbled by the many heartbreaking personal stories that I was unaware of," he said.

Henry returned to Camp Fuji in April 2023 while researching the book to find the facility had changed drastically from the spartan camp of the 1970s. The Marine Corps improved safety at Camp Fuji after the fire, but modern-day Marines don't learn much about it, he said.

"There are lessons to be learned with regard to safety, accountability and leadership," he said.

robson.seth@stripes.com
@SethRobson1



Aftermath of Civil War battles set new course for medicine

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

Most Civil War histories evoke the bravura of 19th century military skill, of masses of men moving across open fields to face other orderly masses of men and commence killing each other.

Few books focus solely on the gruesome aftermath of Civil War combat, beyond the unburied dead that carpeted the battlefields and the shrieks and moans of the wounded. Though the nation this year marked the battle's 162nd anniversary, it paid scant attention to the plight of tens of thousands of men left broken on its fields.

"Gettysburg Surgeons: Facing a Common Enemy in the Civil War's Deadliest Battle," explores the experience of army surgeons, Union and Confederate, in a complicated, textured new telling of the three-day fight

in south central Pennsylvania.

Its author, Barbara Franco, is a former executive director of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Gettysburg Seminary Ridge Museum, a landmark of the first day's fighting at Gettysburg and one of its largest field hospitals. Scores of buildings — colleges, schools, churches, barns, farmhouses — were pressed into service as places to gather and treat the 20,000 wounded during and after the battle.

Eventually, one organized hospital, Camp Letterman, replaced the haphazard field hospitals to care for the remaining, worst cases of battle casualties. The tent city lasted into early

November; some of its staff lingered on to hear President Abraham Lincoln's address at the battlefield cemetery's dedication that month.

Franco's 340-page volume, recently available from Stackpole Books, deserves a spot on any shelf dedicated to America's most dissected war. Franco does more than raise up the narrative of the beleaguered surgeons and assistant surgeons who probed and sawed their way through the conflict, she opens a perspective rarely seen in histories of the period.

Take for example her description of the fields north of Gettysburg following the battle's first day on July 1, 1863. A local woman, Harriet Bayley, ventured out into territory now under Confederate control, carrying a "market basket full of bread and butter and wine, old linen and bandages and pins."

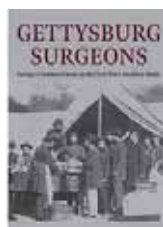
She found suffering Union soldiers still lying in the open, under a summer sun, where they'd spent the past 24 hours without food or water, much less medical care.

Surgeons, as the army physicians were called, of both sides cooperated to a degree, tending to the wounded of both sides and remaining with their patients even as their positions were overrun or their armies retreated.

After the war, these military medical professionals changed the course of medicine, from private practice to public health.

"They endorsed medical care based on science, clinical observations, and results, rather than unsubstantiated medical theories," Franco writes.

ditzler.joseph@stripes.com
@JosephDitzler



FILLER_04

VETERANS

Veterans face problems with on-base care

GAO: Difficulties with access, payments, records encountered

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Veterans seeking health care at military bases encounter delays at security gates, access problems with medical records, and slow-downs with billing and reimbursements.

A new report by the Government Accountability Office describes the common obstacles veterans encounter at clinics on military bases.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Defense Department share medical services at some installations with the goal of improving patient access to timely medical care.

The GAO submitted a report June 30 to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee that looked at "sharing agreements" between the VA and Defense Department for referring veterans and active-duty troops to facilities and services each department runs.

"While sharing agreements can improve access in many cases, that hasn't been true for all. Some issues include veterans' inability to access some military bases, incompatible electronic health records systems and differing billing practices," the report said.

The report found veterans can face barriers and have waits before they



Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center is one of many active-duty military facilities that sometimes serve veterans.

are allowed to enter medical clinics on military bases because of security protocols. While going through security checks is standard, the process slows down veterans with scheduled medical appointments. Veterans also have problems sharing their digital VA health charts with military doctors.

The Defense Department and VA have "incompatible" health records systems, and their billing processes differ, which slow the delivery of reimbursements, according to the report.

"For example, officials at one site told us that staff often have to document patients' medical records separately in the two departments' electronic medical records systems. This has increased the risk of errors and frustrations for staff," the report said.

There also were reported instances of payment delays for medical claims submitted by the Defense Department.

"One official told us that DOD limited the number of VA referrals accepted because it wasn't being reimbursed for the services provided," according to the report.

The Defense Department's national billing office found the VA owed more than \$87 million for medical services provided for fiscal years 2018 through 2022, according to the report. The VA paid a settlement of more than \$76 million on those claims in 2024.

The VA operates 170 medical centers, and 1,200 clinics. The Defense Department has nine medical centers, 36 hospitals, 525 clinics and 138 dental facilities worldwide.

Sharing agreements between the two departments enable veterans to access select medical services at facilities run by the Defense Department when the services are unavailable at

their VA facility or cannot be provided in a timely manner, according to the report.

"Some sharing agreements may also be set up to allow service members to access select medical care services at a VA facility," the report said.

The sharing agreements included 77 VA facilities, and 98 facilities run by the Defense Department, according to the report.

Under certain sharing agreements, staff might work at VA and Defense Department facilities.

"Officials at one site told us their cardio-thoracic surgery sharing agreement allowed DOD surgeons from the DOD facility to use the VA facility's operating room once a week to treat veterans," the report said.

Sharing agreements also deliver lower costs for medical services, the report said.

"These agreements enable expanded access to specialty care for both veterans and service members at a cost typically 20% lower than what the departments would pay for comparable care from civilian or community providers," the report said.

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

CONTACT US

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

Editorial: (202) 886-0005

Advertising: (202) 886-0014

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

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hersey.linda@strips.com



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