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Trump revives old names for Army posts

But bases won't
commemorate Confederates
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President Donald Trump gestures after speaking at Fort Bragg, N.C., on June 10, when he accounced several U.S. Army bases in the South will return to their former names.

ALEX BRANDON/AP

COVER STORY

Trump changes names of more Army posts

President revives names of bases that honored Confederates

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump promised on the campaign trail to bring back the name Fort Bragg to the Army base in North Carolina. In March, the base named Fort Liberty less than two years earlier was again Fort Bragg.

On June 10, Trump announced seven other southern Army installations would return to their old names that were changed in 2023 because they honored Confederate generals.

“We are going to be restoring the names to Fort Pickett, Fort Hood, Fort Gordon, Fort Rucker, Fort Polk, Fort A.P. Hill and Fort Robert E. Lee,” Trump told a crowd at Fort Bragg. “We won a lot of battles out of these forts. It’s no time to change.”

Trump has made no attempt to hide his disdain for the name changes to nine southern Army installations in 2023, which grew out of a years-long, multimillion-dollar effort that began in his first administration.

Some of Trump’s supporters long cheered his calls for Confederate names to remain on or return to Army posts, and some veterans who served at these installations have vowed to never recognize the official name changes that were conducted in ceremonies between March and October 2023, when Fort Pickett, Va., became Fort Barfoot; Fort Lee, Va., became Fort Gregg-Adams; Fort A.P. Hill, Va., became Fort Walker; Fort Hood, Texas, became Fort Cavazos; Fort Rucker, Ala., became Fort Novosel; Fort Polk, La., became Fort Johnson; Fort Bragg became Fort Liberty; Fort Benning, Ga., became Fort Moore, and Fort Gordon, Ga., became Fort Eisenhower.

Base names were changed 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 —



ALEX BRANDON/AP

President Donald Trump arrives to speak at Fort Bragg, N.C., on June 10.

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

Earlier in Trump’s second administration, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced the return of Fort Bragg and Fort Benning, which was restored in April.

But Bragg no longer refers to Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, for whom the base was named in 1918, but for Pfc. Roland L. Bragg. Benning now honors World War I veteran Cpl. Fred G. Benning.

Cynthia Smith, an Army spokeswoman, said in a statement that Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll will take immediate action to implement these redesignations.

“The Army will take all necessary actions to change the names of seven Army installations in honor of heroic soldiers who served in conflicts ranging from the Civil War to the Battle of Mogadishu,” Smith said. “Five of them received the Medal of Honor, three received the Distinguished Service Cross and one received the Silver Star.”

The Army continued the effort of finding new names without ties to the Confederacy.

Fort Pickett, formerly Fort Barfoot, will be named in honor of Distinguished Service Cross recipient 1st Lt.

Vernon W. Pickett for his actions during World War II. While pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire, Pickett crawled forward and destroyed two enemy positions with grenades. After being captured, he escaped from a transport train with fellow POWs and rejoined his unit before being killed in action.

Fort Hood, formerly Fort Cavazos, will be named in honor of Distinguished Service Cross recipient Col. Robert B. Hood for his actions during World War I. Amid intense shelling near Thiaucourt, France, then-Capt. Hood directed artillery fire under enfilading machine-gun fire. After his gun crew was lost to enemy fire, he rapidly reorganized and returned fire within minutes, restoring combat capability.

Fort Gordon, formerly Fort Eisenhower, will be named in honor of Medal of Honor recipient Master Sgt. Gary I. Gordon for his valor during the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia. Gordon volunteered to be inserted to defend wounded crew members at a helicopter crash site and held off an advancing enemy force, protecting the pilot after exhausting all his ammunition.

Fort Lee, formerly Fort Gregg-Adams, will be named in honor of Medal of Honor recipient Pvt. Fitz Lee for his heroism during the Spanish-American War. During a coastal assault in

Cuba, Lee voluntarily disembarked under direct enemy fire to rescue wounded comrades.

Fort Polk, formerly Fort Johnson, will be named in honor of Silver Star recipient Gen. James H. Polk for his gallantry in action as commanding officer of the 3rd Cavalry Group (Mechanized) during operations across Europe in World War II. Then-Col. Polk led reconnaissance and combat missions under fire, spearheading Third Army advances as part of Task Force Polk. He later served as commander in chief of U.S. Army Europe.

Fort Rucker, formerly Fort Novosel, will be named in honor of Distinguished Service Cross recipient Capt. Edward W. Rucker for extraordinary heroism in World War I. Flying deep behind enemy lines, then-1st Lt. Rucker and his fellow aviators engaged a numerically superior enemy force in a daring aerial battle over France, disrupting enemy movements and completing their mission against overwhelming odds.

Fort A.P. Hill, formerly Fort Walker, will be named in honor of Medal of Honor recipients Lt. Col. Edward Hill, 1st Sgt. Robert A. Pinn and Pvt. Bruce Anderson for extraordinary heroism during the Civil War. Then-Capt. Hill, Pinn and Anderson executed significant actions separately at Cold Harbor, Va., Chapin’s Farm, Va., and Fort Fisher, N.C., in support of the U.S. Army.

At Fort Bragg, Trump brought up the tug-of-war involving Fort Bragg with the crowd.

“Can you believe they changed that name in the last administration for a little bit,” the president asked the crowd at the base.

Some soldiers behind the stage responded with boos and gave the thumbs down.

Hegseth, after appearing in a congressional hearing earlier in the day, and Driscoll attended the event alongside service members, veterans and their families.

Driscoll, who spoke to the crowd earlier in the afternoon, called Trump “the greatest recruiter in our Army’s history.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.
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MILITARY

Imagery on US vehicle in Syria prompts probe

Photograph showed cross and Arabic word for ‘infidel’

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

A Defense Department investigation is underway into the appearance of an armored U.S. military vehicle in Syria that was inscribed with a cross and an Arabic word that can be considered offensive to Muslims.

The inquiry was launched after the digital news outlet Middle East Eye published the image showing the vehicle on patrol near the city of Hasakah, in the northeast part of the country. On the upper portion of the vehicle, the word “Kafir,” meaning “infidel,” is written in Arabic script next to a cross.

Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S. military coalition leading efforts in Syria and Iraq, is aware of reports of “unapproved symbols or languages,” a task force spokesperson said.

Officials have “initiated a formal inquiry and taken proactive measures to ensure that U.S. military equipment bears no markings that violate U.S. Department of Defense policy,” the spokesperson said.

The photo was taken in late May, according to Middle East Eye. It sparked criticism on social media from users who interpreted it as a show of defiance against Muslims.

Charles Lister, the director of the Middle East Institute’s Syria program, shared the photo on X and called it “idiotic.”

The word Kafir was originally applied to the populace of the Hindu Kush in northeastern Afghanistan before the region, formerly known as Kafiristan, was forcibly converted to Islam, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

The dictionary calls the word dated and adds that it is often considered offensive.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has previously received backlash for having the word tattooed on his arm.

The U.S. has maintained a constant military presence in Syria for more than a decade as part of its effort to defeat Islamic State. Last fall, the U.S. troop presence there reached a peak of more than 2,000.

The Defense Department is now pulling out troops from the country following the fall of Bashar Assad’s regime in December.

Pentagon officials plan to withdraw hundreds of service members and consolidate the U.S. bases in Syria in the coming months, eventually reducing the total force to fewer than 1,000 troops and one base.



Laurent Perpigna Iban, Middle East Eye, with permission

An American military armored vehicle displaying a cross and the word “Kafir,” Arabic for infidel, patrols near Hasakah, Syria, on May 31.

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MILITARY

'The bond between soldier and nation'

US Army marks its 250th birthday with DC-wide celebration

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Thousands of people flocked to the nation's capital June 14 for a city-wide celebration to honor the Army's 250th birthday.

"Two and a half centuries defending this nation. Two and a half centuries of service, sacrifice and strength. More importantly, two and a half centuries of unwavering commitment to a simple but profound promise: This we'll defend," said retired Master Sgt. Matthew Williams, a Medal of Honor recipient.

But the day is not just about celebrating the Army's birthday, he said.

"We reaffirm the bond between soldier and nation, history and future, between the people and those who defend them. Without the unwavering support of our nation, our army would not exist," Williams said.

Saturday's festival at the National Mall in Washington included more than three dozen interactive booths, as well as military equipment and robotics displays. The public also had the opportunity to interact with soldiers and Army astronauts, participate in fitness competitions and watch the Army cut its birthday cake.

"You want to hop on up there?," Army veteran Floyd Werner Jr. said to a young child he helped peer inside an AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter. Turning to an adult, Werner said: "This is what it is all about — teaching the new generation."

Bordering the grass at the National Mall were multiple historic military aircraft, such as the AH-1 Cobra and a UH-1 Iroquois utility helicopter. Werner, who is a volunteer pilot with the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, was part of the team that flew historic aircraft from Atlantic, Ga., to the nation's capital for the festival.

A retired chief warrant officer four from the Army's Air Cavalry Division, Werner flew the now-defunct aircraft in the service for more than 10 years in multiple overseas conflicts. The Army



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Members of the Army Drill Team from the service's Arlington, Va.-based 3rd Infantry Regiment perform on the National Mall in Washington on Sunday during a festival to mark the service's 250th birthday.

retired the Cobra helicopters in 1999. Three years prior, he said he was privileged with the opportunity to fly the last Army Cobra out of Bosnia, taking it to a royal military museum in Europe.

As hundreds of people poured into the National Mall area, Werner said the turnout was "impressive," bobbing his Army-issued black cavalry hat as he took in the attendees. He said he hopes the Cobra and other historic aircraft at the festival are "conversation starters."

"We hope that people understand that it's an honor and a privilege to serve the nation, and that those people will look back and ask their grandfather or their dad about their time in service," Werner said.

For some, those memories might be difficult to talk about, he said.

"But maybe it starts a conversation so the legacy won't be lost," Werner said.

Earlier in the morning, more than a dozen Army teams competed in a CrossFit-style competition, showcasing their strength, speed and stamina.

Sgt. Maj. JoAnn Naumann of the Army's Special Operations Command was mixed into the crowd cheering on troops participating in the fitness competition. The day's festivities, she said, are a great opportunity for young soldiers and the public to interact.



Brayden Forsythe, 10, of Haymarket, Va., checks out a Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle used by Army Rangers.

we do good teamwork and it is like a brother-and-sisterhood organization."

By midday, less than two hours after the festival opened to the public, dozens of attendees gathered around the Army's technology of the future — autonomous ground drones dubbed "robot dogs" and the new MV-75 Future Long Range Assault Aircraft, which is on track to be fielded to troops in 2030.

Throughout the event, uniformed soldiers roamed the grounds to interact with the public, cheering on live performances and watching demonstrations of new and old technology.

"The best thing about these events is getting the public to meet the actual men and women in uniform and speaking to them and seeing that they are just the kid next door that's serving his country. That is what the Army is — the American people serving in uniform to protect our country," said retired Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee, a Medal of Honor recipient.

Two weeks ago, the Army surpassed 61,000 recruits — meeting its active-duty enlistment goal for 2025. The Army achieved this goal four months before its deadline, marking the earliest the service has reached its annual enlistment target in more than a decade, service officials.

The next generation's time is now, said Plumlee and retired Sgt. Maj. Thomas Payne, also a Medal of Honor recipient.

"Seeing the next generation come from all walks of life, stepping up, and being willing to serve — it makes me proud," Payne said.



Brittney Flattum and her 1-year-old Ezra examine a machine gun Saturday.

"It is giving those soldiers that opportunity to show what they do, to show who they are, and to understand how much America supports the Army," said Naumann, who has been in the Army for 29 years. "How uplifting as a young soldier to see all of this."

Bringing the competition to life required weeks of long hours, according to Sgt. Quentin Johnson, a logistics manager who helped coordinate the fitness competition.

The point of the event was to show the public the level of teamwork that is required of its members, Johnson said. Similar fitness exercises are conducted regularly to teach soldiers how to keep mission-focused under pressure.

"When you are down range, you have got to operate as a team. This represented that, but with a fun twist to it," he said.

Johnson added he hoped the public saw what the past 14 years in the Army have been like for him: "We have fun,

MILITARY

Final salute

Active-duty Marines honor Korean War vet days before his death

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

A Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War who said he had joined the military at 15 spent some of the final hours of his life with active-duty Marines at a birthday bash for the service in his native Tennessee.

William Marvin Parks, 94, was a guest of honor at a June 3 celebration in Murfreesboro marking the Marine Corps' 250th birthday. He mingled with troops and posed for photos.

At the celebration held that evening, Parks gave the first piece of birthday cake to Lance Cpl. Culver Switzer, a rifleman with the Silent Drill Platoon from Marine Barracks Washington.

The gesture is part of a tradition that symbolizes the passing of wisdom and experience from the oldest Marine to the youngest.

On the morning of June 5, Parks died unexpectedly, leaving "a legacy of service, courage, and unbreakable Marine spirit," the service said in a recent Facebook post.

Parks participated in two of the most important battles of the Korean War: the amphibious landing at Incheon and the Battle of Chosin Reservoir.

More than a thousand American troops were killed in the latter, a two-week tactical withdrawal in late 1950 amid subzero temperatures. Thousands more were wounded or suffered frostbite.

During that battle, Parks volunteered to be the first to cross a makeshift bridge spanning a 1,000-foot drop. The bridge had been assembled from air-dropped sections, and Parks drove a bulldozer across it to prove it was safe.

"I was the guinea pig," he recalled in an interview broadcast last year by



BRYNN BOUCHARD/U.S. Marine Corps

Marine Corps veteran William Parks stands with the service's Silent Drill Platoon during a Marine Week celebration in Murfreesboro, Tenn., June 3. Parks died June 5 at age 94.



PARKS FAMILY VIA DIGNITY MEMORIAL

Parks, top row, second from right, poses with other Marines in an undated photo.

WTVG-TV, the ABC affiliate in Chattanooga, adding that he would never have traded the time he spent as a Marine despite the harsh conditions.

Parks was wounded during his service in Korea the following summer and returned to the U.S., leaving the Marine Corps as a sergeant in February 1952.

"He learned a lot working beside those Marines that he took with him the rest of his life," according to an obituary on the website of the Chattanooga Funeral Home-Valley View Chapel.

Parks was born in Chattanooga on Oct. 17, 1930. He told WTVG-TV that he had enlisted in the Marine Corps at 15.

"I was a big boy; I was tough. I had a few muscles," Parks said of his teenage self.

He married after leaving the military and had three children with his wife, Freida. He worked for much of his life as a union brick mason.

He also raised and trained champion show dogs and more recently resumed a passion for target shooting. He was an officer of the Chattanooga Rifle Club and looked forward to weekly pistol matches, attending one the day before he died, according to his obituary.

Parks also was active in the Marine Corps League, a veterans organization that promotes the service's values and supports charitable causes.

He is survived by his children Tim Parks, Alethea Parks Thompson and Bill Parks; his grandchildren Erika Thompson, Preston Thompson, Sydney Parks and Brantlee Parks; and a great-grandchild, Jasmine Thompson.

In the WTVG-TV interview, Parks was asked what being a Marine had meant to him.

"You're bonded, and there's nothing that you wouldn't do for them," he replied. "Once a Marine, always a Marine."

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Service & Sacrifice Truly Matters

MILITARY

DOD reviews sub deal with Australia, UK

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is reviewing a Biden-era deal to share nuclear-powered submarine technology with Australia and the United Kingdom and could scrap the deal if it doesn't align with President Donald Trump's agenda.

A 2021 pact by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States — known as AUKUS — was formed to build up Australia's maritime capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China. The agreement outlines the U.S. selling at least two Virginia-class submarines to Australia in the 2030s, with other submarines jointly built. The U.S. and Britain are also training Australian navy personnel, which began in 2023 as part of the agreement.

The review is being conducted to verify the pact meets Trump's "common sense, America first criteria," according to a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"As [Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth] has made clear, this means ensuring the highest readiness of our service members, that allies step up fully to do their part for collective defense, and that the defense industrial base is meeting our needs," the official said.

The review drew backlash from some lawmakers who have been



JAMES CAVILA/U.S. Navy

Sailors assigned to the submarine USS Minnesota conduct mooring operations at HMAS Stirling, Australia, in February.

staunch advocates of the trilateral agreement, including Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the top Democrat of the subcommittee on seapower.

"If this administration is serious about countering the threat from China — like it has said as recently as this morning — then it will work expeditiously with our partners in Australia and the U.K. to strengthen this agreement and ensure we are taking steps to further boost our submarine industrial base. Anything less would play directly into China's hand," Kaine said in a

June 11 statement.

Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee's seapower subpanel, pointed out the United Kingdom conducted its own review of AUKUS. He said the U.S. will likely reach the same conclusion as the U.K.: "AUKUS is overwhelmingly in the interest of all three nations and the entire Indo-Pacific."

"Abandoning AUKUS would cause lasting harm to our standing with close allies and rejoice in Beijing," Courtney said.

Australia's defense minister dis-

missed concerns that the deal was under review, The Associated Press reported. Richard Marles told local reporters that he had known about the review of the deal "for some time," saying it was a "very natural step for the incoming administration to take." He noted the U.K.'s government also reviewed AUKUS after it was elected, and his own government had looked at it as part of its own review of Australia's entire defense posture.

"I think an incoming government having a look at this is something that they have a perfect right to do, and we welcome it and we'll work with it," he said.

Hegseth and Marles met on the sidelines of a recent defense conference in Singapore. Afterward, Marles told reporters that he was optimistic and had come away with "a sense of confidence about the way in which AUKUS is proceeding," the AP reported.

Hegseth's address to the defense forum made multiple mentions of cooperation with Australia but no reference to AUKUS. Hegseth later mentioned the deal when he was taking questions, urging allies in the Indo-Pacific to increase their defense spending and underscored the need for a "strong, resolute and capable network of allies and partners" as the U.S. seeks to counter China.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Army rotates Colorado-based Stryker brigade to S. Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A Stryker brigade from Colorado arrived in South Korea late last month as the Army's latest rotational unit tasked with deterring regional threats for the next nine months.

Soldiers from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Carson landed at Osan Air Base on May 30 to replace troops from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division, according to an Eighth Army news release.

The outgoing Stryker team, out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., has served in South Korea since October. It officially transferred authority to the

incoming team in a ceremony at Camp Casey, about 15 miles from the border with North Korea.

"Our presence in Korea is a clear demonstration of U.S. resolve, and the Raider Brigade is honored to enhance our long-standing alliance," Col. Clint Tisserand of 4th ID said in the release. "This deployment is more than a rotation; it's a chance to sharpen our edge and uphold the commitment we share with [South Korea]."

During its rotation, the 7th ID soldiers took part in numerous joint drills with South Korean troops, including the 10-day Freedom Shield exercise on air, land, sea and cyberspace.

Roughly 3,500 soldiers and 1,500 pre-positioned vehicles comprise the



ONIEL McDONALD/U.S. Army

Soldiers from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division arrive at Osan Air Base, South Korea, on May 30.

rotational force, which supports the 2nd Infantry Division headquartered at Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S.

military installation overseas.

The Army began rotating units into South Korea in 2013 to bolster the country's defenses against the North, while also offering U.S.-based soldiers the opportunity to train in unfamiliar terrain. The rotations are also viewed as a deterrent to China's growing military influence in the region.

Initially composed of armored brigade combat teams with heavy equipment like M1A2 Abrams tanks, the rotational force shifted in 2022 to lighter, more mobile Stryker brigades equipped with eight-wheeled combat vehicles.

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MILITARY

Ranger gets Soldier's Medal for saving hiker

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. — Army Staff Sgt. Callum Wilkie had just met Chris Zwierzynski as they were separately traveling up the Old Chute Route to the summit of Mount Hood, the 11,249-foot dormant volcano east of Portland, Ore.

Moments later, Wilkie saw Zwierzynski stumble and plummet more than 500 feet down the ice- and rock-strewn face of the mountain.

“Just one bad step, and he fell right past me,” Wilkie said earlier this month.



Zwierzynski

Zwierzynski said he recalled little from the potentially fatal fall.

“I hit my head, I had eight broken ribs, a shattered left foot, head injuries, some internal injuries,” he said.

Wilkie, the senior medic for the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, made the treacherous climb down to where Zwierzynski lay unconscious.

“No bullets or bomb fragments like in combat, but a lot of damage,” Wilkie said.

The two men were reunited June 9 at a ceremony at Lewis-McChord, where Wilkie received the Soldier's Medal for his seven-hour effort to save Zwierzynski's life in July 2024. It's the Army's highest award for valor and bravery in a non-combat situation.

Lt. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, I Corps commander, pinned the medal



U.S. Army photos

Army Lt. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, I Corps commander, left, exchanges a salute with Staff Sgt. Callum Wilkie after pinning a Soldier's Medal on Wilkie's uniform this month at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

on Wilkie's uniform, saluted, then shook his hand.

“Staff Sgt. Wilkie upheld the prestige, honor and highest values of this Ranger regiment,” McFarlane said. “Over seven hours, at great personal risk, he demonstrated heroism. He lived the Ranger creed that Rangers lead the way.”

Wilkie and a fellow Army medic were on leave and decided to hike Mount Hood. A native of Twain Harte, Calif., near Yosemite National Park, Wilkie was on familiar ground, having hiked to the Mount Hood summit at least three times.

The Army said Wilkie has climbed 46 of Washington's 100 highest peaks. In the summer, he'll lead 60 Rangers

on a search-and-rescue training hike up Mount Rainier, the 14,411-foot inactive volcano that seems to loom over Lewis-McChord, just 31 miles to the southeast.

Zwierzynski, 56, who works for a trucking company in Scottsdale, Ariz., was building his experience. On his 50th birthday, he had made a pact with himself to hike to the highest point in all 50 states.

About 10,000 hikers each year attempt to climb to the top of Mount Hood, according to the Oregonian newspaper. Mount Hood is a climb that requires ice axes, ropes and crampons — the steel spikes attached to the bottom of boots for traction on ice.

Zwierzynski was hiking with three friends, but the group had separated as the challenges of the top part of the trail slowed progress. Wilkie said he and his friend saw Zwierzynski climbing closer to the rock face of the mountain and encouraged him to take a safer route.

“We were just talking with him, trying to get him to move to our safe route, and just trying to ensure that he buddied up because he was by himself,” Wilkie said. “He's about maybe an additional 15 to 20 feet ahead of us when he took a bad step and started to fall.”

Zwierzynski said he recalls just snippets of the beginning and end of the incident.

“I can remember as I started to

slide, someone yelled out to me ‘use your ax’ to arrest my fall,” he said. “I don't know if I did — I blacked out.”

Wilkie's background as a medic took over.

“He was asking if they can cut my clothes to inspect my injuries,” Zwierzynski said. “I gave him my wife's name and phone number. I couldn't tell my name. Fast forward six hours later, I remember hearing the helicopter.”

Wilkie said he triaged the injuries, paying special attention to Zwierzynski's broken left foot, which had no pulse.

“He knew that he had to keep it straight or by the time I got to a hospital, they would have to amputate,” Zwierzynski said. “He did that for six hours. If he hadn't, I wouldn't be standing here on two feet today.”

Wilkie said when Zwierzynski's fall stopped, he was concerned it was fatal.

“I had a good friend in climbing, another Ranger, die in a climbing accident in May last year,” Wilkie said.

After hitting an SOS beacon that sent out an emergency call monitored by local search-and-rescue officers, Wilkie made his way down the mountain-side.

When he reached Zwierzynski, Wilkie said his training as a Ranger medic — including his deployment to Afghanistan — “kicked in on the side of that mountain.”

“A big focus here is just to master the fundamentals,” he said. “I'm not carrying my gigantic aid bag on my back, like when I am on duty, but we practice how to improvise.”

With the help of other climbers and park rangers, Wilkie was able to stabilize Zwierzynski until an Oregon National Guard medical evacuation helicopter arrived and took him to a hospital in Portland.

Zwierzynski said thanks to Wilkie's swift action, he has been able to recover enough from the fall to restart his attempts to reach state high points. He plans to return to Mount Hood and try again.

Wilkie said he'd like to join him when that time comes.

“If he ever wants to climb Mount Hood, and I'm free, I'll absolutely go and do it with him,” Wilkie said.

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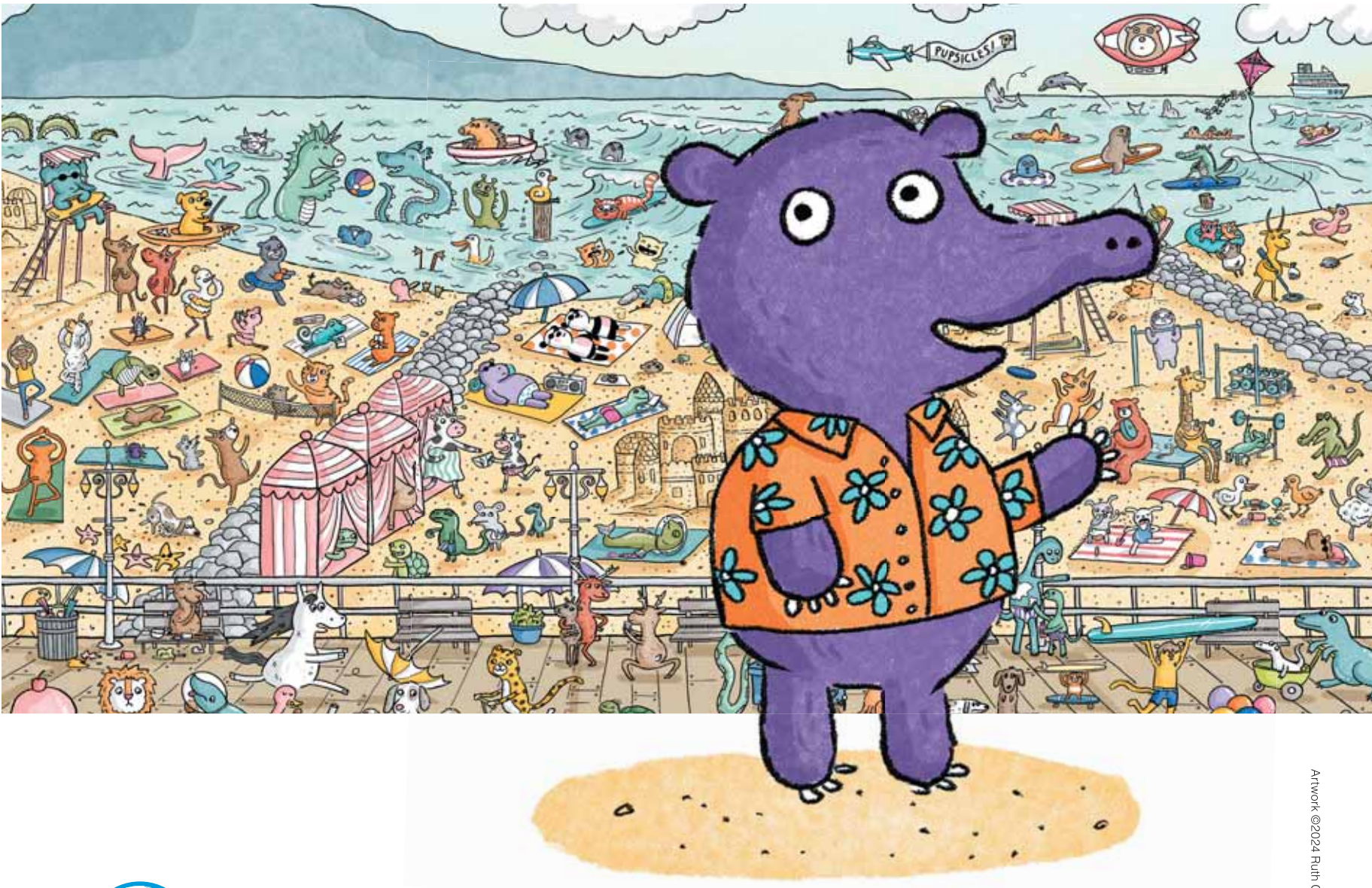
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