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**‘Underequipped
for the task
at hand’**

National security adviser
says US needs to stockpile
munitions **Page 2**

An employee at the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant in Scranton, Pa., handles an artillery shell in March.
HENRY VILLARAMA/Scranton Army Ammunition Plant

COVER STORY

US urged to stockpile munitions, invest

National security adviser says Ukraine has revealed gaps

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — National security adviser Jake Sullivan said the war in Ukraine has revealed the U.S. needs to stockpile more munitions and invest more in producing low-cost weapons.

“This challenge is not one that can be met in a single term in office. There is still so much work to do. This has to be a generational project,” Sullivan said during an event held by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

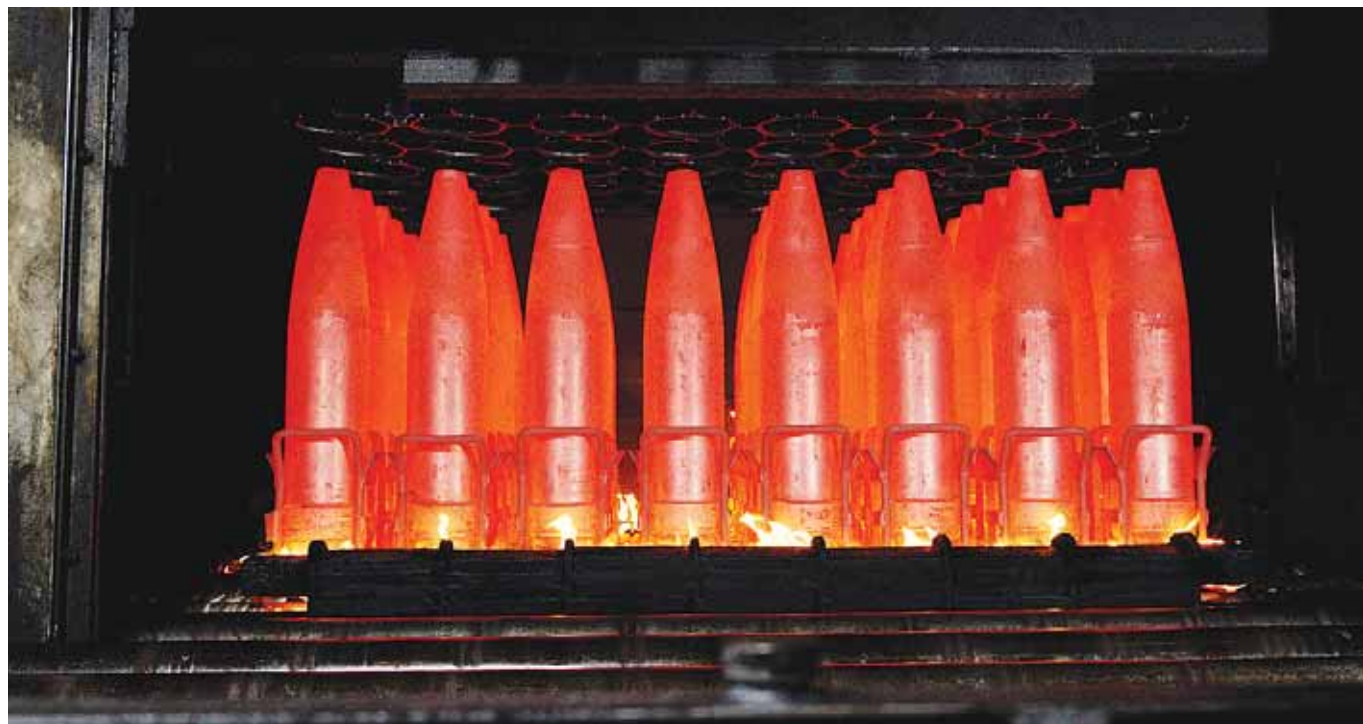
Since Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. has committed to providing the embattled country approximately \$61.4 billion in military aid to help Ukrainian forces fight off Russian invaders. The most recent aid package, totaling \$725 million, was announced this month. It included air-defense weapons, munitions for rocket systems and artillery, and anti-tank weapons.

Doing so means pulling weapons and munitions from U.S. shelves and stockpiles must be replenished each time military aid is provided to Ukraine.

“In a matter of eight weeks of war in 2022, Ukraine burned through a year’s worth of U.S. 155 mm artillery production,” said Sullivan, whose office holds daily meetings on Russia and Ukraine. “In those early months in the daily meetings, we reviewed Ukraine’s run rate in excruciating detail. We confronted a startling reality: the American ‘Arsenal of Democracy’ was fundamentally underequipped for the task at hand.”

At the time, the U.S. was producing 14,000 artillery rounds per month and could only immediately boost production by about 400 rounds — enough for Ukraine to defend itself for a few extra hours, he said.

To offset the munition shortage, Ukraine began using off-the-shelf technology and cheap, mass-produced



HENRY VILLARAMA/U.S. Army

Projectiles are manufactured at the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant in Scranton, Pa., on March 26.

platforms to build an army of drones. But the U.S. was also behind the curve in that technology.

“Our industrial capacity simply wasn’t there,” Sullivan said. “We had to dig ourselves out of a deep hole.”

Insufficient stockpiles were also highlighted by a Rand Corp. study released in November as one of the most urgent matters for NATO countries in a potential long-term war.

Russia’s war in Ukraine has demonstrated “a notable lag” in the buildup of production capacity in Europe and the United States, exposing vulnerabilities when it comes to replenishing munitions at the speed that they are expended, the report said.

Additionally, conflicts around the world — including the Israel-Hamas war and attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen on merchant shipping in the Middle East — are eating into U.S. inventory of high-end weapons, such as Patriot air-defense missiles.

Meanwhile, China put the U.S. on notice when it indicated its forces would be ready for conflict by 2027. In November, the commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command raised an alarm over the U.S. arsenal, saying war in Ukraine and in the Middle East is chipping away at weapons and muni-



DAVID RINCON/U.S. Army

A Patriot surface-to-air missile system fires during an exercise at McGregor Range, N.M., earlier this year.

tions also needed in the Pacific.

“Inherently, it imposes costs on the readiness of America to respond in the Indo-Pacific region, which is the most stressing theater for the quantity and quality of munitions because the [People’s Republic of China] is the most capable potential adversary in the world,” Adm. Sam Paparo said during an event at the Brookings Institution, another Washington think tank.

Sullivan highlighted three major efforts taken by President Joe Biden’s administration to build up the defense

industrial base: tearing down obstacles that prevent the U.S. from sharing defense technology with allies, working with commercial industry leaders to develop innovative weapons systems, and ramping up production of weapons and munitions.

In line with this, the U.S. is working with the Ukrainian defense industry, as well as commercial companies, to focus on developing low-cost drones to be used by the U.S. and its allies. The U.S. is also now building more tanks, armored vehicles, rockets, long-range rocket launcher systems and anti-tank missiles, Sullivan said.

“We have made progress over the last four years, but frankly, we need progress over the next 40,” he said.

By January, Sullivan estimated the U.S. defense industrial base will be producing 55,000 155 mm artillery rounds per month — a 400% increase. It is on track to reach 100,000 per month by 2026.

“I’m not here to report that the job is finished. I’m here to report the job has started, and now it needs to continue in a big and sustained and bipartisan way,” he said.

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MILITARY

Army secretary fires 4-star general

Investigation found Hamilton meddled in subordinate's promotion process

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army Secretary Christine Wormuth fired one of the service's top generals after an inspector general investigation concluded he improperly intervened in a subordinate's promotion, the service reported.

"Based on the findings of a Department of the Army inspector general investigation, the secretary of the Army has relieved Gen. Charles Hamilton of command," Army spokeswoman Cynthia Smith said in a statement. "The current acting commander of Army Materiel Command, Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan, will continue in this role pending the nomination of a permanent replacement to serve as the commander of Army Materiel Command."

Hamilton was one of 12 four-star generals in the Army.

According to officials and documents, Hamilton inappropriately tried to push an assessment board to approve a command assignment for a female lieutenant colonel, the Associated Press reported. He successfully persuaded the board to give the officer a second interview after a board initial-



EBEN BOOTHBY/U.S. Army

Then-Gen. Charles Hamilton, commander of Army Materiel Command, speaks during a symposium in Huntsville, Ala., in March 2023.

ly voted 5-0 not to recommend her for command.

Before the second interview took place, Hamilton contacted senior leaders who could have been on her second panel to discuss their voting parameters and the candidates. The second panel also deemed her not certified for command, according to the AP.

The Army Inspector General Office's investigation came after it received an anonymous complaint in December 2023 that Hamilton and the lieutenant colonel were having an "inappropriate, fraternizing, and likely sexual relationship," the investigation said.

Investigators subsequently found that though Hamilton and the lieutenant colonel had an "overly familiar relationship," there was no "definitive evidence" that the two had a sexual relationship.

At first, the matter was referred to the Defense Department Inspector General's Office, which closed the case in January after finding "insufficient evidence in the complaint to warrant further investigation."

But the day after a news report in March that Hamilton pressured Army officials to select the lieutenant colonel for command, the Defense Department

Inspector General's Office referred the matter to the Army Inspector General's Office for investigation.

Wormuth suspended Hamilton on March 22 and removed the lieutenant colonel's name from the command selection list, according to the investigation.

Hamilton, who is Black as is the female officer who sought a promotion, wrote a letter to Wormuth in August asking to be reinstated as commander of Army Materiel Command, and he laid out his case in the lieutenant colonel's promotion and his view on the Command Assessment Program.

In the letter, he implored Wormuth to investigate why CAP deems few minority officers as ready to command and the barriers that exist that make qualified Black officers unwilling to subject themselves to the process.

"Although the investigation found that the Command Assessment Program withstood an attempt to interfere with its process, Secretary Wormuth will be issuing a directive that formally establishes CAP as an enduring Army program in order to reinforce the integrity of CAP and increase transparency," Smith said.

The last Army four-star general fired for misconduct was Gen. Kevin Byrnes, who in 2005 as commander of the service's Training and Doctrine Command was dismissed over an extramarital affair.

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Army slashes payouts in credentialing program

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Army announced sharp cuts to a program that gives financial assistance to soldiers obtaining industry credentials while giving a boost to its tuition assistance initiative.

The new guidance includes an increase of \$500 and two semester hours for tuition assistance but halves the annual cap for the credentialing assistance program.

Launched in 2020, the credentialing program allows troops to pursue education in hundreds of fields ranging

from private pilot licenses for single-engine aircraft to security, personal training and technical trades.

The decrease in support for credentialing programs from a maximum cap of \$4,000 to \$2,000 annually was prompted by concerns that it was becoming financially unsustainable, the Army said in a statement.

"When you have a program in increase exponentially over a four-year period, you are eventually going to blow your budget to the point where it won't be available to anyone," Christine Traugott, a policy manager at the

Army's office for manpower and reserve affairs, said in the statement.

The cost of the credentialing program has nearly doubled every year, Traugott said.

The average cost of a credential is \$1,700 and soldiers take an average of 1.5 credentials a year, according to the Army.

Regarding tuition assistance, the annual cap goes from \$4,000 to \$4,500 and increases the annually allowed semester hours from 16 to 18.

Soldiers who took to social media to comment said the reduction could

make it more difficult to get some sought-after credits, such as those needed by mechanics seeking Automotive Service Excellence certificates.

Next year, the Army will formalize the changes with a new regulation, which will exclude commissioned officers from using credentialing assistance and require command approval for both tuition and credentialing assistance requests.

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MILITARY

Navy fixing moldy, pest-riddled barracks

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is overhauling moldy and pest-riddled substandard barracks as part of a long-term effort to improve sailor quality of life, the service said.

The sea service said it is focusing on renovating its squalid unaccompanied housing and stepping up maintenance and management of living conditions. The effort is meant to address issues identified by a 2023 Government Accountability Office report that found poor living conditions across Defense Department-owned housing.

The military services manage nearly 9,000 barracks facilities worldwide, and almost all barracks are government-owned, operated and maintained, the GAO said. In managing barracks, the services face challenges, including aging infrastructure and competition with other facilities for maintenance and construction funding. In recent years, there have been reports of barracks being abruptly closed after detection of problems such as mold, pests and broken air conditioning.

“Navy unaccompanied housing hasn’t consistently hit the mark in taking care of sailors’ needs, but we’re making significant strides toward improving barracks facilities and sailors’ overall residential experience,” said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, commander of Navy Installations Command, which oversees service housing across 70 installations.

The effort, dubbed the “Forge Com-



JESLIANNE TORRES/U.S. Marine Corps

Brig. Gen. Nick I. Brown and Navy Capt. Jeffrey Richer address barracks discrepancies during Operation Clean Sweep at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., in October.

munities of Excellence” initiative, is a three-tiered plan designed to improve barracks through targeted investments, renovations and construction.

The next step is to ensure consistent customer service by improving workforce training, optimization and re-sourcing. The final step is to provide sailors with a comfortable environment and high-quality services, such as Wi-Fi and better access to food.

“By focusing our efforts on three key areas of need, we can effectively and

efficiently improve facility condition and improve resident satisfaction,” Gray said.

Service members and lawmakers have raised the issue of substandard housing for years, launching complaints of mold, leaky roofs, poor plumbing, pest infestations and otherwise unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Congress mandated in 2020 that the services develop a uniform code of basic housing standards, plus plan, contract and conduct inspections in

family housing, report to lawmakers on the inspections, and develop a hazard assessment tool.

But the Navy did not embark on a focused quality of life and service initiative until 2022 following rashes of suicides among young, mostly single sailors.

The Navy has already invested \$59 million to replace furnishings at 63 buildings at 35 locations. In the past year, renovation projects were initiated for barracks at Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga.; Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy; Naval Base Kitsap, Wash.; Naval Base Ventura County, Calif.; and Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.

In 2023, the Navy introduced the unaccompanied housing Resident Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and QR maintenance codes to make it easier for residents to report maintenance requests and track their progress.

Additionally, in 2024, the service rolled out a free Wi-Fi pilot in 12 Hampton Roads, Va., barracks and expanded cooking capabilities throughout its unaccompanied housing by allowing sailors to use small cooking appliances in their barracks.

“It’s essential to readiness that sailors have a comfortable and safe place to lay their heads at the end of each hard day,” said Leslie Gould, director of Navy Installations Command’s fleet and family readiness programs.

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Physically fit sailors may be exempt from body standards

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

The Navy in 2025 aims to cut some sailors a break if they cannot meet body assessment standards but can score high enough in the service’s official physical exam.

The Navy recently announced updates to its Fitness Enhancement Program, giving sailors who come up short on the service’s body composition assessment standards an incentive for passing the fitness phase with a score of excellent-low or higher.

“We are modernizing our [body composition assessment] by recognizing our current policies and proce-

dures can be improved to better assess every single Sailor to determine a Sailor’s overall physical readiness,” the message states.

Sailors will be passed if they attain an excellent-low or higher and will not be required to do the body composition assessment phase, the age-adjusted standards or complete the Fitness Enhancement Program, according to the updated policy.

The exemption recognizes that some sailors who do not meet the body composition standard are still able to maintain operational readiness, the update said. The exemption also aligns with Department of Defense policy.

To be eligible for the exemption, the sailor must perform the maximum number of pushups, a timed forearm plank and a timed run or alternate cardio, on the official fitness test.

Sailors over their recommended weight limit are normally required to get their body fat approximated according to their height and weight during the official body composition assessment phase of the exam.

They are also required to report any potential medical issues prior to the body composition assessment, according to Navy guidelines.

The policy update is part of the service’s Culture of Excellence 2.0 initia-

tive.

Any exempted sailor would still be required to complete one of the Navy’s nutrition education options. Those programs include a Nutrition Self-Study Course, Mission Nutrition Course and a ShipShape Program, among others.

Sailors who fail one fitness test would be put on a command’s fitness enhancement program to help them improve. They would also be barred from advancement until they passed the next fitness exam.

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PACIFIC

Christmas comes early in Micronesia

Santa 41 drops off supplies, holiday cheer to islanders

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

EAURIPIK, Federated States of Micronesia — Inhabitants of this remote atoll rushed onto a beach as a U.S. Air Force plane prepared to drop crates filled with much-needed supplies and some Christmas cheer.

The C-130J Super Hercules from Yokota Air Base, Japan — call sign Santa 41 — looped above the island several times before dropping four crates, decorated with drawings and holiday greetings, from an altitude of about 300 feet.

Green parachutes drifted the payload gently into the water just off the coast of Eauripik, an atoll about 475 miles south of Guam.

Santa 41, part of Yokota's 36th Airlift Squadron, made a second drop to another island, Ifalik, shortly after. The five-hour sortie delivered eight bundles to the two atolls, both part of the Caroline chain in the Federated States of Micronesia.

After each drop, the loadmasters — Senior Airman Juan Lucero, of Wahiawa, Hawaii, and Staff Sgt. Dario Dominguez, of Ruidoso, N.M. — stood on the cargo ramp to wave at the islanders as the atolls disappeared on the horizon.

The sortie was just one of dozens, part of the Defense Department's longest-running humanitarian-aid mission, Operation Christmas Drop.

The bundles, each decorated by donors and volunteers, carried critical supplies such as food, water, diving and fishing gear, clothing and — in the spirit of Christmas — toys.

An annual event since 1952, Operation Christmas Drop has become a means of supplying the outlying islands and a way for airmen from the United States and partner nations to get real-world supply drop experience.

"It feels different from our usual work and training," Lucero, a loadmaster with the 36th Airlift Squadron, told Stars and Stripes after the mission.



PHOTOS BY ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

Senior Airman Juan Lucero, a loadmaster with the 36th Airlift Squadron at Yokota Air Base, Japan, watches Operation Christmas Drop bundles drift to islanders.



The commander of Santa 41, Air Force Capt. Alex Dillenbeck, confirms a successful Operation Christmas Drop.

"I get to see a result; I see the people and how much they appreciate what we do. It feels great."

While each island favors certain landing zones for the airdrops, those spots can change from year to year, adding another level of complexity for the operation's pilots.

Communication between the air-

craft, coordinators at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and individual islands is critical, said Santa 41's commander, Capt. Alex Dillenbeck.

"We have to identify where they want the bundles," Dillenbeck, of Memphis, Tenn., said from the cockpit. "They might use anything to signal it — rafts, tarps, life vests — and they

communicate with us with marine handheld radios."

All eight of Santa 41's bundles landed securely, he added.

For the aircraft's co-pilot and instructor, Maj. Zeb "Spades" Kimball, the sight of the appreciative islanders is what makes Operation Christmas Drop so special.

"It's been the same pretty much every time," Kimball, of Colorado Springs, Colo., said of his other sorties this week. "And that definitely doesn't get old — it kind of fills you up every single time."

This year's operation, which began Dec. 2 and concluded Dec. 16, delivered 220 bundles to 60 islands in Micronesia and Palau. Also participating this year were Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea.

The operation ultimately delivers around 82,000 pounds of supplies to over 42,000 islanders while covering approximately 1.8 million square miles of airspace, according to a news release from Yokota's 374th Airlift Wing.

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MILITARY

Navy trims recruit training by a week

Streamlining bootcamp will let service move its new sailors into fleet faster

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy will trim one week off its Basic Military Training program, shortening the bootcamp from 10 weeks to nine, beginning next month.

It is meant to streamline redundant curriculum, such as its warrior toughness program, firefighting, seamanship and watch standing.

“We did not cut anything out — sailors will still receive everything — but we reallocated the training. So, we give them the same training, but instead of reiterating that in a classroom, we intersperse it throughout bootcamp,” said Lt. Cmdr. Mack Jamieson, spokesman for Naval Service Training Command, based in Great Lakes, Ill.

The change comes on the heels of a bend in the curve in the sea service’s recruiting efforts. The Navy was on track to meet its 2024 recruiting goal of 40,000 fresh sailors, but the service was unable to push them all through

bootcamp before Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year. Instead, about 38,000 recruits went through the training in Great Lakes, the Navy’s only bootcamp, with the remaining slated to begin the program before the end of 2024.

The first class to go through the shortened bootcamp will arrive Jan. 6. They will graduate March 13.

In 2022, the Navy extended its bootcamp program from eight weeks to 10 weeks to ensure recruits were better prepared to enter the fleet. It was the first major change to the bootcamp structure in 20 years.

The two weeks were filled with training in life skills, such as organization, time management, self-awareness, goal setting and financial management. The two weeks also allowed additional time for more scenario-driven and hands-on training.

The recent change to the program will continue to incorporate the Navy’s “Sailor for Life” philosophy, which



STUART POSADA/U.S. Navy

Recruits stand in formation in July at Navy Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Ill. More than 40,000 recruits train annually at the Navy’s bootcamp.

aims to foster resilience, mental toughness, and leadership skills.

“Our focus is on delivering a streamlined yet robust training experience that equips our sailors with the essential skills they need to succeed in the fleet,” said Rear Adm. Craig Mattingly, commander of Naval Service Training

Command. “This change will help us achieve that, providing a rigorous curriculum that ensures readiness while enabling recruits to join the fleet faster.”

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Lawmakers want to let troops repair equipment

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Service members could gain the ability to repair and maintain their own equipment under a new bill that seeks to cut Pentagon spending on defense contractors.

The legislation would compel contractors to give the military “fair and reasonable” access to parts, tools and repair instructions so troops could make fixes without waiting on expensive and time-consuming repairs by contractors. Contractors often have “right-to-repair” restrictions in contracts with the Pentagon that require the use of their own materials and installers to patch up equipment.

Such requirements have forced the Navy to fly contractors to ships at sea to perform simple fixes and Marines to

send engines back to the U.S. instead of fixing them on-site, said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass.

“Pentagon contractors are taking advantage of our military, forcing them to pay excessive prices and wait weeks for basic equipment repairs,” Warren said. “Without the right to repair their own equipment, our service members in the field are at risk.”

Warren is sponsoring the legislation in the Senate while Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, D-Wash., is sponsoring a companion bill in the House.

Gluesenkamp Perez said the onerous repair conditions in place now have deprived service members of valuable experience fixing equipment and wasted time and money.

“Military technicians want to be working with their hands to fix things



PIERCE LUCK/U.S. Navy

Petty Officer 2nd Class Hezekiah Rasmussen, assigned to the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, welds metal during a repair last month.

— not getting stuck on the phone on hold with a manufacturer,” she said.

The legislation also directs the Defense Department to track and report instances when the military is forced to use a contractor to make repairs, in-

clude cost-cutting measures when purchasing weapons and submit to compliance reviews.

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MILITARY

Sexual violence at academies decreasing

Pentagon statistics show drop from historic high in 2022

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sexual assault among cadets and midshipmen at service academies is trending down for the first time 10 years, falling from a historic high set in 2022, according to a report by the Pentagon.

The initial data released in the Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence at the Military Academies shows an estimated 783 academy students experienced unwanted sexual contact in the 2023-24 school year compared with 1,136 in 2022. Among women, this represents a decrease in instances of sexual assault from 21.4% in 2022 to 13.3% in 2024. Among men across the same time frame, trends went from 4.4% to 3.6%.

While trending down from 2022, the rates are still some of the highest documented at the academies.

“We believe this data indicates that we are on the right track — that the recommendations and the reforms that are underway are having an impact,” said Beth Foster, executive director of the Pentagon’s Office of Force Resiliency, which oversees sexual assault



JOHN D. BELLINO/U.S. Navy

Sailors assigned to the amphibious transport dock USS Arlington form a teal ribbon on the flight deck in April for Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

and suicide prevention efforts. “But unless we continue to institutionalize that work, there is a possibility that these rates and this trend could go right back up again.”

Foster’s office was directed in 2023 by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to conduct site evaluations at the academies to determine the prevalence of sexual assault.

The force resiliency office defines sexual assault as unwanted sexual touching, attempted penetration and completed penetration where the victim could not or did not consent.

Foster’s staff spent one week at each academy, during which students attended a briefing on a sexual assault

survey. Of those who attended, 88% voluntarily completed the survey.

“We found that it was the overall climate and training environment across the service academies that was undermining their ability to prevent these harmful behaviors,” Foster said. “Sexual assault was ultimately a lagging indicator of what was a poor climate.”

Contributing to that climate was a lack of trust in the academies, according to Andra Tharp, senior prevention adviser for the Office of Force Resiliency and the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.

“The climate was really characterized by a sense of lack of trust, lack of

transparency and a lot of mixed messages. So, senior leaders may be sending one message, but the message that the cadets and midshipmen were getting about how to treat each other, how to hold each other accountable was not aligned with the message the senior leaders were trying to set,” she said.

The 2024 survey asked students whether they trusted the academy to protect their privacy and ensure their safety should they report a sexual assault incident. Women and men indicated having greater trust in the academy than they did in 2022, but women remain much less trusting than men, the survey found.

Foster described the initial data as “encouraging” and credited the downward trend to a series of changes that the Defense Department has implemented in recent years. The findings were a summary of the complete report, which will be made public in February.

The Pentagon nearly doubled its sexual assault prevention budget to more than \$1 billion in 2023 and 2024 — an effort to drive down rates of sexual assaults and harassment within its ranks and at its academies. Changes at military service academies include reducing class sizes and revamping officer training to focus on sexual assault prevention.

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Troops’ housing allowance to increase by about 5%

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Housing allowance rates for service members will increase by an average of 5.4% beginning Jan. 1, the Defense Department announced.

The increased monthly rates represent an estimated \$29.2 billion that will be paid to approximately 1 million service members. These amounts, paid monthly, will range from \$90 to \$202 per service member. The exact amount will vary by pay grade, family size and location of duty station.

“While average [basic allowance for housing] rates increased, different rental markets experienced different market trends, and the 2025 [basic

allowance for housing] rates reflect those geographic market condition differences,” according to the Defense Department’s announcement.

Basic allowance for housing, or BAH, provides service members with a comparable allowance based on civilian housing markets within the 50 U.S. states when they live off-base. The housing allowance is not intended to cover all housing costs for a service member. Actual out-of-pocket expenses might be higher or lower than the prescribed rate based on a service member’s choice of housing.

Allowances reflect the costs, including rent and utilities, associated with household rentals by location. Urban areas usually offer higher BAH

rates than rural areas due to the generally higher cost of housing.

Rental prices typically change between 2% and 5% from year to year, the Defense Department said. Thus, the housing allowance changes occur almost annually.

But a federal watchdog report in October found allowance boosts in recent years have been insufficient, as service members assigned to locations with high-priced housing markets have resorted to living in recreational vehicles, leaving families behind or working two jobs. The Government Accountability Office said the Pentagon needs to deepen its understanding of property markets in areas with housing shortages, such as Mountain Home, Idaho,

Key West, Fla., and Hawaii.

To ensure the housing allowance stays on par with local housing markets, the Defense Department collects rental housing cost data annually for 299 military housing areas across the country, including Alaska and Hawaii.

The rate-setting process considers data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, rental listing websites, and input from the services and local military installation housing offices.

Service members can calculate their housing allowance by using the Basic Allowance for Housing calculator at: www.travel.dod.mil/Allowances/Basic-Allowance-for-Housing/BAH-Rate-Lookup/.

MILITARY

US vets mark WWII Battle of the Bulge

Ceremonies mark 80th anniversary

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

BASTOGNE, Belgium — Some of the last living American veterans of World War II met recently with world leaders and many other admirers as they recounted how the Allies braved sub-freezing temperatures to blunt the final Nazi offensive, which began 80 years ago on Dec. 16.

The Battle of the Bulge ceremonies in Belgium and Luxembourg capped a series of major remembrances in Europe this year, including the 80th anniversary of D-Day in June and other liberation milestones.

The 17 veterans, who are either centenarians or in their late 90s now, were honored along with their fallen comrades in the bitterly fought Ardennes Campaign, where over 19,000 American troops lost their lives.

"I want people to remember not only what we went through but what it was all for," David Marshall, 100, said on the sidelines of celebrations in Bastogne.

Marshall recalled fighting in heavy snow and without warm clothing. The cold was as deadly as the Nazis, he said.

"I went into the war as a naive 20-year-old from New York," Marshall said. "After the Battle of the Bulge, I was a veteran soldier."

Named for the shape the German advance carved into Allied lines, the



World War II veteran Dennis Bolt throws nuts to a crowd as part of the annual Battle of the Bulge commemorations in Bastogne, Belgium. He is joined by Belgium's Queen Mathilde, left, and King Philippe, far right.

battle began Dec. 16, 1944, as Adolf Hitler launched a last-ditch counteroffensive in Western Europe.

Despite initial chaos, stiff resistance by American units and reinforcements led to an Allied victory by January 1945. The battle's human toll was staggering, with over 19,000 American deaths, 47,500 wounded and 23,000 missing or captured.

German forces suffered similar casualties and civilians in the Ardennes endured their own losses and hardships.

Bastogne, a strategic crossroads town and a symbol of Allied resistance during the battle, hosted the largest commemorations.

PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

A parade included over a dozen World War II veterans who were wheeled through the streets to applause and waving American flags. Active-duty American and Belgian soldiers also participated.

Joseph R. Picard, who fought as a 19-year-old with the 552nd Field Artillery Battalion, remembered the brutal conditions made worse by the loss of his best friend just weeks before the battle.

"The important thing is that we succeeded," Picard said. "You don't remember all the bad things; you remember the good things."

However, he lamented a lack of awareness about World War II among younger Americans.

"They don't know much about it," he said. "And you know what they say: If you don't keep the story alive, it's going to happen again. We don't want it to happen again."

Following the parade, the veterans joined government officials and the royal families of Belgium and Luxembourg in throwing nuts to crowds from a snowy balcony at Bastogne's town hall. The annual celebration recalls Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe's famous one-word reply to a German surrender demand: "Nuts!"

The Army's 101st Airborne Division defense of Bastogne while being surrounded became a defining moment of



Col. Patrick J. Hofmann, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, lays a wreath at a memorial to Gen. George Patton in Bastogne.

the battle. The unit's current soldiers were prominently featured in the commemoration.

Earlier this year, the 101st conducted air assault drills during D-Day commemorations, stepping beyond their usual ceremonial roles. With fewer living WWII veterans, the responsibility of keeping the memory of World War II alive is increasingly falling to current soldiers.

Another ceremony was held at the Luxembourg American Cemetery in Luxembourg City, where more than 5,000 U.S. service members are buried, including Gen. George S. Patton.

That ceremony was attended by a large bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers, many of whom it was noted have family connections to World War II. One of the U.S. veterans at the Luxembourg ceremony, John D. "Jack" Foy, assured the crowd that the sacrifices of the soldiers who died in the battle wouldn't be forgotten.

"I remember the bitter cold, the weight of my machine gun, and the faces of my brothers in arms — ordinary men who displayed extraordinary courage," said Foy, 99. "Together we fought for freedom, step by painful step."

"To those who come after us," he added, "may you always remember that the freedom you cherish came at a terrible cost."

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., was part of the delegation but suffered an injury in Luxembourg that required hip replacement surgery and transport to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

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