

Troops at U.S. Nuclear Missile Base Took LSD



Airmen of the 790th Missile Security Forces Squadron demonstrate how they would regain control of a captured missile silo.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- One airman said he felt paranoia. Another marveled at the vibrant colors. A third admitted, "I absolutely just loved altering my mind." Meet service members entrusted with guarding nuclear missiles that are among the most powerful in America's arsenal.

Air Force records obtained by the Associated Press show they bought, distributed and used the hallucinogen LSD and other mind-altering illegal drugs as part of a ring that operated undetected for months on a highly secure military base in Wyoming. After investigators closed in, one airman deserted to Mexico.

"Although this sounds like something from a movie, it isn't," explained Capt. Charles Grimsley, the lead prosecutor

of one of several courts martial.

A slipup on social media by one airman enabled investigators to crack the drug ring at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in March 2016, details of which are reported here for the first time.

Fourteen airmen were disciplined. Six of them were convicted in courts martial of LSD use or distribution or both.

None of the airmen was accused of using drugs on duty. Yet it's another blow to the reputation of the Air Force's nuclear missile corps, which is capable of unleashing hell in the form of Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs. The corps has struggled at times with misbehavior, mismanagement and low morale.

Although seen by some as a backwater of the U.S. military, the missile

force has returned to the spotlight as President Donald Trump has called for strengthening U.S. nuclear firepower and exchanged threats last year with North Korea. The administration's nuclear strategy calls for hundreds of billions of dollars in new spending in coming decades.

The service members accused of involvement in the LSD ring were from the 90th Missile Wing, which operates one-third of the 400 Minuteman 3 missiles that stand "on alert" 24/7 in several underground silos scattered across the northern Great Plains.

Documents obtained by the AP over the past two years through the Freedom of Information Act tell a sordid tale of off-duty use of LSD, cocaine and other drugs in 2015 and 2016 by airmen who were supposed to be held to strict behavioral standards because of their role in securing the weapons.

"It's another black eye for the Air Force -- for the ICBM force in particular," elaborates Stephen Schwartz, an independent consultant and nuclear expert.

Airman 1st Class Tommy N. Ashworth was among those who used LSD supplied by colleagues with connections to civilian drug dealers.

"I felt paranoia, panic" for hours after taking a hit of acid, Ashworth said under oath at his court martial. He confessed to using LSD three times while off duty. The first time, in the summer of 2015, shook him up. "I didn't know if I was going to die that night or not," he said as a witness at another airman's drug trial. Recalling another episode with LSD, he said it felt "almost as if I was going to have like a heart attack or a heat stroke."

At Least 15 People Wounded: Men Walk Into Restaurant in Canada, Set Off Bomb



A still from CCTV footage shows the suspects of the explosion at Bombay Bhel restaurant in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada May 24, 2018 in this picture obtained from social media on May 25, 2018.

TORONTO (Reuters) -- Two unidentified men walked into a restaurant on Thursday in the Canadian city of Mississauga and set off a bomb, wounding more than a dozen people, local police said.

The blast went off in the Bombay Bhel restaurant at about 10:30 p.m. local time. Fifteen people were taken to hospital, three of them with critical injuries, the Peel Regional Paramedic Service said in a Tweet.

The two male suspects fled after detonating their improvised explosive device, Peel Regional Police said in a Tweet. No one has claimed responsibility, and the motive for the attack was not known.

Police posted a photograph on Twitter showing two people with dark zip-up hoodies walking into an establishment. One appeared to be carrying an object.

Peel Police said one suspect was in his mid-20s, stocky, and wore dark blue jeans and a dark zip-up hoodie pulled over his head, with black cloth

covering his face. The second was thin, and wore faded blue jeans, a gray t-shirt and a dark zip-up hoodie over his head, also with his face covered.

Roads in the area were closed and a large police presence was at the scene, with heavily armed tactical officers arriving as part of the large emergency response, local media reported.

The attack in Mississauga comes a month after a driver plowed his white Ryder rental van into a lunch-hour crowd in Toronto, killing 10 people and injuring 15.

Mississauga is Canada's sixth-largest city, with a population of 700,000 people, situated on Lake Ontario about 20 miles (32 km) west of Toronto. Bombay Bhel is an Indian restaurant chain in the metro area of Mississauga.

India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said in a tweet that she was in constant touch with the Consul General in Toronto and the Indian High Commissioner in Canada and that the missions would work round the clock.



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) -- The EU and NATO urged Russia Friday to take responsibility for the 2014 downing of flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine after their investigators concluded that a missile which destroyed the plane came from a Russian military brigade. "The European Union calls on the Russian Federation to accept its responsibility and to fully cooperate with all efforts to establish accountability," the EU's foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said in a statement. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in a separate statement that after the Netherlands and Australia said Friday they held Moscow liable, "I call on Russia to accept responsibility." The United States also joined the calls for Russia to account. "It is time for Russia to acknowledge its role in the shooting down of MH-17 and to cease its callous disinformation campaign," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in a statement that blamed Russian aggression in Ukraine for more than 10,300 deaths. Russia's defense ministry said it had nothing to do with the downing that left all 298 people on board - two thirds of whom were Dutch - killed. The Russian military denied that any Russian missile complex had ever crossed the border between Russia and Ukraine. TASS news agency reported.

PARIS (AFP) -- Ten families from Europe, Kenya, and Fiji have filed suit against the European Union over global warming threats to their homes and livelihoods, their lawyers said Thursday. The 30-odd plaintiffs before the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg insist the bloc must do more to limit climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions, and point to drought, glacier melt, sea level rise and flooding that will worsen as temperatures rise.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) -- Taiwan on Friday scrambled fighter jets to shadow Chinese bombers conducting a drill around the self-ruled island which is also reeling from Burkina Faso's move to cut diplomatic ties with Taipei. Taiwan's air force said in a statement that it scrambled aircraft to monitor two Chinese H-6 bombers flying over the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan and the Miyako Strait, near Japan's Okinawa Island. Relations have deteriorated between Beijing and Taipei since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power two years ago as her government refuses to acknowledge that Taiwan is part of "one China". Tsai's tenure has seen the loss of three allies to China, with the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Sao Tome and Principe all switching allegiance since 2016. On Thursday, Burkina Faso cuts ties with Taiwan, becoming the second country to break off diplomatic relations in one month in favor of China. Earlier this month, the Dominican Republic announced it had severed ties with Taiwan and switched its allegiance to Beijing. President Tsai reacted angrily to the move, which has left her government with only 18 diplomatic allies around the world.

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) -- Nigerian soldiers and self-defense forces have raped women who were rescued from the Boko Haram extremist group, Amnesty International alleged in a new report Thursday that Nigeria's military swiftly dismissed as "false." The report alleges that thousands of women and girls were separated from their families in camps in northeastern Nigeria and abused. Some were raped in exchange for food and others were beaten and called "Boko Haram wives," the report says. The report is the latest allegation of human rights abuses by Nigeria's security forces as they try to combat the Takfiri extremist group that has displaced millions of people over the years and killed or abducted tens of thousands. The Amnesty International report, based on more than 250 interviews as recently as April, says the alleged abuses occurred as Nigeria's military pushed to reclaim territory from Boko Haram starting in 2015. Thousands of civilians freed during the operations were ordered into displacement camps where thousands of people died between late 2015 and late 2016 from lack of food, water and health care, the human rights group says. That situation improved once aid groups began raising the alarm.

MBANDAKA, DR Congo (AFP) -- Fifty people died in a boat accident on a river in remote northwestern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), officials said Friday. The accident happened on the Momboyo river Wednesday night, Richard Mboyo Iluka, vice governor of Tshuapa province, told AFP, saying: "We found 49 bodies on Wednesday and another one this morning."

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China has found no clues to explain what happened to an American citizen suffering from a U.S. consulate who reported suffering from "abnormal" sounds and pressure leading to a mild brain injury, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Thursday. The U.S. embassy, which issued a health alert on Wednesday to Americans living in China, said it could not link the case to health problems suffered by U.S. government staff in Cuba dating back to late 2016. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said China has always safeguarded the security of foreign organizations and personnel of foreign countries, including the United States, according to the Vienna convention. In Washington on Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States was concerned about the "serious medical incident" and raised it with China's visiting State Councillor Wang Yi.

German Rightist Wants Fasting Muslims to Be Banned



In this April 23, 2016 file photo leader of nationalist AfD party Alexander Gauland speaks to followers of the party in Stralsund, Germany.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- A lawmaker from the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) called Thursday for Muslim doctors, nurses, pilots, bus and train drivers to be banned from working during Ramadan if they are fasting.

Germany is home to some four million Muslims - including Turks who have lived here for decades as well as migrants and asylum seekers who arrived in the past few years, many fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

AfD politician Martin Sichert said employers who were not able to give fasting Muslims a night or early shift should be able to make them use some

of their annual leave during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Sichert's comments came after Inger Stojberg, Denmark's Integration Minister, caused furor Monday by urging practicing Muslims to take vacation during Ramadan to avoid a negative impact on society.

Her letter was met with widespread criticism, including from within her own Liberal Party.

U.S. Prison Feeding Port to Muslim Inmates

In the United States, a federal judge granted a restraining order Thursday forcing prison guards in Alaska to stop giving Muslim inmates pork as they break their fasts during Ramadan,

rights campaigners said.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) filed a lawsuit on Tuesday claiming Anchorage Correctional Complex had violated constitutional prohibitions against "cruel and unusual punishment."

"CAIR has reported an unprecedented spike in bigotry targeting American Muslims and members of other minority groups since the election of Donald Trump as president," the Washington-based organization said in a statement.

Muslims are currently marking the holy month of Ramadan, fasting from dawn until sunset, which means going without food for around 18 hours in Anchorage.

Inmates observing the festival are given rations equating to 1,100 calories a day at most, according to the complaint, far short of the recommended daily amount of around 2,500 calories for men.

The packages contain food made of pork, which is forbidden in Islam, rendering the actual nutritional value of the meals even more inadequate.

CAIR said the treatment contravened the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act and violated First and 14th Amendment rights to equal protection and free exercise of religion.

The suit seeks a "balanced nutritional diet" for inmates, as well as policy changes and compensatory and punitive damages.

Maduro Sworn In, Vows 'Revolutionary Changes'

CARACAS (Dispatches) -- Nicolas Maduro has been sworn in for a second six-year term as Venezuela's president after winning a re-election which prompted the U.S. to impose new sanctions on the country.

Maduro, who won Sunday's presidential vote, on Thursday swore "to respect and enforce the constitution and lead all revolutionary changes" that should lead Venezuela to "the peace, prosperity and happiness of our people."

During his inauguration ceremony before the Constituent Assembly, the president of the crisis-ridden country admitted that a fresh take on Venezuela's problems was needed.

"We need a profound rectification, we have to do things anew and better, we are not doing things well and we

have to change this country," Maduro said.

He admitted that tighter sanctions imposed by Washington after his re-election will bring more difficulties to the oil producer but vowed to defeat them.

"I cannot deceive anyone, they are going to create serious difficulties for us, painful difficulties, that we will face gradually -- we will defeat them," he said.

The U.S. announced new sanctions against Caracas after dismissing the presidential election as a "sham."

Washington has already imposed sanctions against Venezuela and blamed Maduro's government for the country's acute economic crisis.

Maduro, however, accuses the U.S. of being behind the crisis, saying Washington is plotting to topple his

government. He also accuses the opposition which boycotted Sunday's election of colluding with the U.S.

The president-elect said the oil-rich country would increase its output by a million barrels per day to spur economic activity.

Venezuela, which has a quintuple-digit annual inflation rate, suffers from severe food and medicine shortages, the return of once-controlled diseases, and mass emigration.

During Thursday's ceremony, Maduro also announced the release of an unspecified number of opposition prisoners. He vowed to enter into "a process of dialog and peace" with the entire opposition so that Venezuela could set aside political disputes.

Maduro's second term will formally begin on January 10, 2019.

Rise of Populists in Italy Alarms Europe



Italian Prime Minister-designate Giuseppe Conte speaks during a news conference in Rome on May 23.

ROME (Dispatches) -- With political novice Giuseppe Conte set to become Italy's next prime minister, reaction at home focuses on his balancing act to hold power, while allies and the European Union fear a collision course with the new anti-establishment government.

Conte, a relatively unknown lawyer picked as a compromise candidate, is charged with enacting a controversial populist, anti-migrant platform of the top two parties from the March 4 elections -- the 5-Star Movement and the nationalist League.

Their victory as the top vote-getters comes amid the populist wave that resulted in Britain's Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president, both in 2016. Italy's election was marked by vulgar and bitter attacks against the political establishment, migrants and the European Union.

"Conte steps into an enormously difficult position," said Javier Noriega, chief economist with Hildebrandt and Ferrar. More high-profile choices for prime minister may have been skipped over either because they were opposed by the coalition or because they recognized the extreme challenges Italy faces, he said.

Italy is about to become the first European Union country headed by a populist government, sparking jitters across the continent. The headline in The Times of London on Thursday said: "Alarm in Europe as Italy's populists rise to power." The Sun called Conte an "Unknown leader of bizarre Italian coalition."

In Italy, reaction focused on how little is known about Conte or the disparate coalition he will head. The Italian center-right daily Il Foglio was harsh, proclaiming, "The Third Republic is Born as the World Laughs." Il Fatto Quotidiano showed Conte on a tightrope under the headline, "The Acrobat."

A day meeting with Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Conte's nomination was questioned amid allegations he lied about his academic credentials, but the parties backing him denied Conte lied and still backed him.

Verzichelli said one of Conte's biggest challenges will be balancing the interests of the two parties that back him. They both have populist elements but are not natural allies. The 5-Star Movement is Internet-savvy and anti-elite, while the League is right-wing and nationalistic -- and Conte is not a member of either party.