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Chinese space advances worry Air Force officials

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — As lawmakers wrangle over the next step in an ongoing debate over creating a space corps, top Air Force officials told a Senate panel Tuesday that China's innovations in space are among their top worries.

The exchange, part of a congressional hearing with Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson and Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein, highlights the difficulties ahead for lawmakers to reach a consensus on tackling rising threats in space and whether standing up a new command is the answer.

The House's Space Corps proposal was met last year with fervent opposition from the Pentagon and its Senate colleagues, but that might have lifted some since President Donald Trump floated a similar idea last month.

"We are open to discussing ideas that people have in this realm," Wilson said in response to a question about Space Corps from Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H.

"I think the most important thing is not the organization, but what we actually do and that is to defend ourselves ... and make clear to any adversary that if they take us on in space, we will prevail."

The comments were part of a wide-ranging Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that hosted the Air Force officials to talk about budget priorities for 2019.

The hearing also touched on aviation mishaps, an ongoing audit and positive reports from transgender servicemembers, and could play into the development of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which directs policy and spending plans for the Defense

Department. The discussion of a space command has picked up in related hearings following Trump's comments lauding the effort.

Several times the discussion turned to Space Corps and U.S. defense in space, including an exchange with Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, in which she asked officials their top concerns, especially in the Pacific region.

"What concerns me the most is the innovation of China and their rapid growth in their military capabilities," Wilson said.

Goldfein took the comments a step further, saying China's space innovation was a top worry.

"Some of the work they are doing in space, it's very aggressive, and we built our space architecture in an era where space was a rather benign domain," he said. However, "we are very focused in taking some bold moves in this budget to increase our ability to defend what we have in space."

Goldfein added while Russia is also investing in the space domain, it doesn't have the same economic base as China that would allow gains as quickly.

Wilson emphasized the 2019 budget proposal includes significant funding and prioritization efforts to address those concerns.

"We are building a more lethal and more agile force, and I think this fiscal year (2019) budget has a significant commitment to being able to defend ourselves at orbit," she said.

A new National Space Strategy is also needed since the last one was published in 2011, said Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa.

"The threats have exponentially increased since then," she said.

Military sex assault reports jump in '17

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials say reports of sexual assault across the military jumped by nearly 10 percent in 2017, a year that saw a massive online nude photo-sharing scandal rock the services, triggering greater awareness of sexual harassment and other similar complaints.

The overall increase was fueled by a nearly 15 percent surge in sexual assault reports in the Marine Corps, according to officials familiar with the data. The Marines were at the center of last year's online investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and launched a large public campaign to raise awareness of inappropriate behavior and beef up enforcement of social media rules and conduct.

The Navy and the Air Force saw increases of more than 9 percent in reported sexual assaults, while Army reports went up 8 percent. Several U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details ahead of the public release of the Pentagon's annual report.

Overall, there were 6,769 reports of sexual assaults in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, compared with 6,172 in 2016. The roughly 10 percent increase is the largest the Pentagon has seen since 2015.

Last year, an anonymous survey done as part of the annual report showed some progress in fighting sexual assault as fewer than 15,000 servicemembers described themselves as victims of unwanted sexual contact. That was 4,000 fewer than in a 2014 survey and a dramatic decline from the 26,000 in the 2012 survey.

The surveys are conducted

every other year, so it's impossible to determine if this year's increase in reported assaults also corresponds with a decline in servicemembers anonymously reporting inappropriate conduct.

Defense officials have argued that an increase in reported assaults is a positive trend because it's a highly underreported crime, both in the military and across society as a whole.

Greater reporting, they argue, shows there is more confidence in the reporting system and greater comfort with the support for victims. It's unclear, however, if the increased reports in 2017 actually represent a growing problem or if victims are just more willing to come forward.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the depth of the problem, the Pentagon has used the anonymous surveys for several years to track sexual assaults, harassment and other similar issues.

According to several U.S. officials, the number of reported assaults in the Marine Corps increased from 870 in 2016, to 998 last year, while Navy reports went from 1,450 to 1,585.

The nude photo-sharing scandal came to light early last year, when nude photographs of female Marines, veterans from across the military, and other women were shared on the Facebook page "Marines United." Comments and posts under some photos were obscene and threatening.

After months of investigation, NCIS determined that the overwhelming majority of the photos were selfies or were posed for and then voluntarily shared, which is not illegal even under military code.

US bolsters air operations in Niger

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

AGADEZ, Niger — The runway under construction here, stretching more than a mile in the southern Sahara Desert, is both the Air Force's biggest troop labor building project ever and the newest sign of a growing American military campaign against extremists in West Africa.

At Air Base 201, U.S. airmen put down damp burlap sacks to keep fresh concrete from cracking under the blaze while they are building a home for MQ-9 Reaper drones.

The U.S. is bolstering air operations at a time when the costs of its Africa strategy have grown clearer. Five American servicemembers were killed in combat operations during the past year in Africa, the first such deaths in a generation.

It raises the question: Does the threat posed by any extremist group in Africa justify U.S. forces being thrust into harm's way?

As the Pentagon has dedicated more resources to counterterrorism efforts in Africa, there are conflicting views among security analysts about the broader threat and whether it's as significant as the U.S. military sees it.

"I think we can be smarter about what we are doing, and doubling down on a military investment isn't really a smart long-term strategy," said Steven Feldstein, a former State Department official for Africa and analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Is \$100 million for a drone base in Agadez the smartest way to approach the issue?"

U.S. military leaders acknowledge that none of the major extremist groups — al-Shabab in Somalia and a mix of Islamic State and al-Qaida affiliates elsewhere — constitute a major threat to the U.S. today. But commanders argue that they could if their activities go unchecked.

"If there isn't something done to assist the countries across the Sahel region, it is going to become a very real threat," said Col. Brad Moses, commander of the 3rd Special Operations Group, which handles missions in 11 West African countries. "Twenty years from now they will be an existential threat if we don't assist our partner forces now."

The rationale for the military's expanding mission in places such as Somalia and Niger and a \$110 million base in Agadez — that a threat to the homeland looms in the not-so-distant future — has generally been accepted in Washington.

'This is exactly the time and exactly the place to address these threats. If we don't deal with it here at a cost that is affordable, we will end up dealing with it somewhere else at a much higher cost.'

Maj. Gen. Marcus Hicks
U.S. Special Operations Command Africa

Terrorism's ebb, flow

Moses' assessment echoes what top military leaders have been saying since U.S. Africa Command was launched a decade ago. From Gen. William E. Ward, who stood up AFRICOM in 2007, to Gen. Thomas Waldhauser today, all have said the same thing — that extremists on the African continent aspire to attack America. When four soldiers were killed in an October ambush in Niger, lawmakers were surprised by the risk troops face, but not necessarily the underlying logic that drives the missions.

The data give a mixed picture about how terrorism is evolving in Africa.

In 2017, there was a nearly 50 percent decline in fatalities, with 10,376 deaths caused by Islamic militant groups in Africa compared with 18,728 in 2015, according to the U.S. government-affiliated African Center for Strategic Studies, or ACSS.

Much of the drop-off is attributed to few attacks by the Nigeria-based Boko Haram group, which a few years ago was the most lethal of all African terrorist groups. Boko Haram has expressed little interest and demonstrated no capability in operating outside the region.

However, Al-Qaida-aligned groups have proved resilient in West Africa. They caused 391 deaths last year, nearly double 2016's fatalities, according to ACSS. The increase is blamed on the emergence of a new jihadi umbrella group known as Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin, or JNIM.

In March, al-Qaida claimed responsibility for an attack on an Army base in Burkina Faso and the French Embassy there, which caught the attention of U.S. Special Operations Command Africa boss Maj. Gen. Marcus Hicks. The attacks marked a shift from mainly civilian-populated areas to hard targets.

"They (al-Qaida-linked groups) have been building capability and capacity since 2012," Hicks said during a recent stop in Niger to observe his command's Flintlock exercise, the largest special operations war game on the continent.

For Hicks, the military's investment now in places such as Niger equals preventive medicine.

"This is exactly the time and exactly the place to address these threats," Hicks said in an interview. "If we don't deal with it here at a cost that is affordable, we will end up dealing with it somewhere else at a much higher cost."

The risk of not acting

Feldstein said more skepticism is needed when considering aspirational rhetoric from extremists and what they are actually capable of achieving. But to argue against the idea that the militant groups in Africa could evolve into the al-Qaida of Osama bin Laden is to take on risk.

"If you are the person who basically says, 'I don't think this threat is that serious' and something happens, no matter how small, that can be used against you," Feldstein said. "It is always to your political advantage to be very serious about threats."

In Africa, the costs have been high for U.S. special operations forces. In May, SEAL Senior Chief Petty Officer Kyle Miliken was killed in combat in Somalia.

In Niger, Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black and Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, of the 3rd Special Forces Group, were killed in the October ambush along with attached soldiers Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson and Sgt. La David T. Johnson.

"It's a complex environment just like any other place we work in," said Capt. Neal, a Green Beret with the 3rd Special Forces Group who recently advised Nigerian troops during the Flintlock exercise and whose last name was withheld for security reasons.

He declined to comment on the ambush in Niger. But when asked whether it was worth taking on risks in countries like Niger where the threats to the U.S. are vague, he said it was.

"Anytime you can go there and improve someone's quality of life and security situation, it is worth it," he said.

Navy launches anti-sub drills with Thailand

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

The United States and Thai navies are drilling to counter enemy submarines in the latest sign of warming relations between the two allies.

The five-day Guardian Sea exercise, which began Wednesday, focuses on “anti-submarine warfare while also improving information sharing between the two navies,” the Navy said in a statement this week.

“Guardian Sea is an increasingly sophisticated and robust exercise that enables the U.S. Navy and Royal Thai Navy to continue working closely together and learning from each other,” Capt. Lex Walker, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 7, said in the statement.

U.S. assets involved in the drills include the guided missile destroyer USS Halsey, an unnamed Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine and a P-8 Poseidon aircraft.

The Royal Thai Navy, which sent only two ships to similar drills last year, has deployed its helicopter carrier, the HTMS Chakri Naruebet; a corvette, the HTMS Long Lom; two frigates, the HTMS Taksin and HTMS Naresuan; and an S-70B Seahawk helicopter. The larger exercise is the latest sign of improving relations between the countries after a 2014 military coup led to reduced U.S. participation in military events such as the annual Cobra Gold exercise in Thailand.

Daniel Kliman, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security think tank in Washington, said submarines are proliferating across Southeast Asia.

“For Thailand it gives them an opportunity to engage the world’s foremost Navy,” he said. “Thailand does not have a great submarine threat that they face but there is a submarine boom going on in Southeast Asia. There are many navies with submarines in the region, so for Thailand it makes sense they’d want to continue those anti-submarine warfare exercises.”

Marines, sailors near end of Eager Lion drills in Jordan

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

Marines and sailors will wrap up an 11-day training exercise with Jordan on Thursday that aims to improve military cooperation with an allied country bordering Syria and Iraq.

About 3,600 American personnel have been taking part in Eager Lion. The array of drills includes simulated chemical attacks, an amphibious assault and an embassy evacuation.

“The Jordanians have a lot of capabilities, so we learn as much from them as they learn from us,” said Col. Farrell Sullivan, commander of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, which has 1,200 Marines participating.

Launched in 2011, Eager Lion enables the U.S. and Jordan to display aircraft, ships,

firepower and the combined skills of 7,000 personnel in a show of power to adversaries, Marine Corps officials said.

Marines began the exercise with amphibious landings, while sailors conducted ship drills and pilots flew simulated combat missions.

Marines used urban and mountain combat tactics to get a feel for warfare in an austere desert environment, Sullivan said. The training complex in Amman has live-fire ranges, facilities for close-quarter fighting and large areas for longer-range patrols, he said.

“Often when you do training, you stay in a local area, so you don’t have a chance to use your legs,” Sullivan said.

Marines responded to simulated chemical, biological and nuclear attacks, he said, and they evacuated civilians from

a mock embassy during a five-day portion.

Jordan is wedged between Syria, Israel, Iraq and Saudi Arabia — countries largely adversarial to one another — leaving it vulnerable to regional threats and making U.S. support essential, according to a Congressional Research Service report in February.

Jordan provides access to the Middle East in the fight against extremist groups such as Islamic State, and it has taken in 600,000 Syrian refugees, said James Cook, national security affairs professor at the Naval War College.

“Multinational exercises like Eager Lion are an important, tangible way to demonstrate commitment and leadership in a strategically important region for U.S. national interests,” he said.

F-35B makes emergency landing in Japan

BY JAMES BOLINGER
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — A Marine Corps F-35B Lighting II stealth fighter made an emergency landing after experiencing a maintenance issue Tuesday in western Japan.

The pilot contacted the control tower at Tsuiki Air Base — a Japan Air Self-Defense Force facility in Fukuoka prefecture — shortly after 11 a.m. announcing the need for the landing, Jiji Press reported. The jet later taxied off the runway under its own power.

A statement issued Wednesday by the III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa said “the pilot received a cockpit indication and elected to land the aircraft at the nearest airport where a safe landing could be made with the most suitable weather conditions.”

The pilot took the appropriate action in accordance with standard operating procedures to safely land the aircraft at the closest airport, the statement added.

There were no injuries or property damage because of the landing, the Marines Corps said.

The incident did not affect base operations, according to a Kyushu Defense Bureau spokesman.

Maintenance teams were troubleshooting the aircraft Wednesday, and it was unclear how long it would remain at Tsuiki, the Marine statement said.

It was the second emergency landing made by a Marine Corps pilot at a Japanese facility in the past week and the fifth by a U.S. military aircraft in Japan this year.

A UH-1Y Venom helicopter from Marine Corps Air Station Futenma’s 1st Marine Aircraft

Wing made a precautionary landing at Kumamoto Airport on April 18 after a sensor alerted its pilot to an oil-cooling problem.

Three other incidents were reported in January, spurring the Japanese to take a more active role in ensuring U.S. military aircraft safety.

The F-35Bs were assigned to Marine Corps Iwakuni in January 2017. The short-takeoff, vertical-landing capable jets were embarked aboard the USS Wasp amphibious assault ship, which was on its maiden patrol of the Western Pacific this month. The patrol ended Saturday when the Wasp dropped off Marines at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa.

The Japan Air Self-Defense Force began deploying F-35As at Misawa Air Base in Aomori Prefecture in northern Japan in January.

GOP unsettled by narrow win in Ariz. voting

Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — It took a big money push from the Republican Party, tweets by the president and the support of the state's current and former governors, but the GOP held onto an Arizona U.S. House seat they would have never considered endangered in any other year.

Tuesday's narrow victory by Republican Debbie Lesko over a Democratic political newcomer sends a big message to Republicans nationwide: Even the reddest of districts in a red state can be in play this year.

Early returns show Lesko winning by about 5 percentage points in Arizona's 8th Congressional District where Donald Trump won by 21 percentage points.

"Debbie will do a Great Job!" President Trump tweeted Wednesday.

The former state senator defeated Hiral Tipirneni, a former emergency room physician who had hoped to replicate surprising Democratic wins in Pennsylvania, Alabama and other states in a year where opposition to Trump's policies have boosted the party's chances in Republican strongholds.

Republican political consultant Chuck Coughlin called Tuesday's special election margin "not good" for national Republicans looking at their chances in November.

Trump sends mixed signals on embattled VA nominee

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — His nomination in peril, Veterans Affairs nominee Ronny Jackson fought to convince lawmakers of his leadership abilities as more details of accusations against him emerged, ranging from repeated drunkenness to a toxic work environment as he served as a top White House doctor.

President Donald Trump sent mixed signals about his choice to lead the sprawling veterans' agency, suggesting during a White House news conference that Jackson may want to withdraw because of unfair scrutiny. But the president privately urged the 50-year-old Navy rear admiral to keep fighting to win Senate confirmation, and Jackson showed few signs of backing down.

A watchdog report requested in 2012 and reviewed by The Associated Press found that Jackson and a rival physician exhibited "unprofessional behaviors" as they engaged in a power struggle over the White House medical unit. The six-page report by the Navy's Medical Inspector General found a lack of trust in the leadership and low morale among staff members, who described the working environment as "being caught between parents going through a bitter divorce."

"There is a severe and pervasive lack of trust in the leadership that has deteriorated to the point that staff walk on 'eggshells,'" the assessment found.

The inspector general report reviewed by the AP included no references to improper prescribing of drugs or the use of alcohol, separate allegations revealed by a Senate committee.

Jackson declined to answer reporters' questions about those allegations and gave no indication he would withdraw. The White House disputed that he had improperly administered medication, saying the medical unit passed reg-

ular audits by the Controlled Substance Inventory Board.

The audit appeared to contradict public statements from Jackson, who denied the existence of any inspector general report detailing troubling behavior.

After the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee abruptly postponed his confirmation hearing, which had been set for Wednesday, Jackson visited lawmakers to assure them he was fit to lead the VA.

"I'm looking forward to getting it rescheduled and answering everybody's questions," he said in video captured by MSNBC, referring to his hearing.

During a White House news conference, Trump insisted he would stand behind Jackson, calling the White House doctor "one of the finest people that I have met." But he questioned why Jackson would want to put himself through the confirmation fight, which he characterized as unfair.

"I wouldn't do it," Trump said in the East Room, standing next to French President Emmanuel Macron.

"What does he need it for? What do you need this for? To be abused by a bunch of politicians that aren't thinking nicely about our country?" Trump asked.

Trump said Jackson, who has been a White House physician since 2006, would make a decision soon. Jackson met privately with Trump on Tuesday afternoon in the Oval Office and the president urged him to keep fighting to win confirmation, according to a White House official briefed on the meeting. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal discussions, said Jackson denied the allegations.

Trump tapped Jackson last month after firing former Obama administration official David Shulkin following an ethics scandal.

Sailor accused of stealing grenades from Navy ship

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A sailor was arrested in Illinois on Tuesday on charges he stole 20 hand grenades from a San Diego-based Navy destroyer, authorities said.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Aaron Booker, 31, of Waukegan, Ill., was taken into custody in Great Lakes by U.S. Navy criminal investigators and was expected to be returned to California. It was unclear whether he had an

attorney.

Booker stole the concussion grenades — each of which contained about a half-pound of TNT — while he was assigned to the Weapons Department aboard the USS Pinckney, prosecutors alleged. Booker's job was to check the temperature of the secured locker where the grenades were kept.

The grenades were discovered missing from their storage crates in February 2017. Booker left the ship about a week later

to drive to his new duty station in Great Lakes.

About two months later, a black military backpack containing 18 grenades was found leaning on a guardrail on the side of Interstate 15 in northwest Arizona, officials said. The words "GM2 BOOKER" were written on a tag inside the backpack, prosecutors said.

Booker, a gunner's mate second class, told investigators that he had driven that road but said the backpack had been sto-

len from him and denied taking the grenades, according to a criminal complaint. Authorities continue to search for the two missing grenades, which Booker indicated to investigators might have wound up in Mexico, the complaint said.

It was unclear why the grenades were stolen or what the thief intended to do with them.

If convicted of possessing stolen explosives, Booker could face up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Whale freed from line in Cape Cod Bay

MA PROVINCETOWN — Animal welfare officials in Massachusetts say a humpback whale previously entangled in Cape Cod Bay is now swimming free.

A Hyannis Whale Watcher Cruises vessel reported the entangled whale Sunday about 6 miles off Provincetown, prompting a response from a Center for Coastal Studies' Marine Animal Entanglement Response crew. The Cape Cod Times reported the crew worked to remove a line that went from the whale's mouth to the tail stock.

Man robs 7-Eleven with pair of scissors

NH MANCHESTER — Police in New Hampshire were searching for a man who they say robbed a 7-Eleven with scissors over the weekend.

WMUR-TV reported the robbery happened Saturday morning in Manchester.

Police said the suspect was with another man and a young girl. The suspect jumped on the counter, threatened a clerk with a pair of scissors and grabbed an undisclosed amount of money.

Authorities said the suspect fled with the other man and the girl.

Testicle Festival ends after 35 years

MT MISSOULA — The owner of the lodge that hosts the Testicle Festival decided to end the annual event in Clinton due to the multitude of incidents — including fatal crashes — that have been caused by festivalgoers throughout the years.

The Missoulian reported

Monday that Rock Creek Lodge owner Matt Powers has shuttered the event after 35 years. The event's featured activity is the consumption of animal testicles, usually battered and fried.

Two people were killed and seven others injured at last year's festival in a traffic incident in which a festivalgoer was accused of grabbing the wheel of a shuttle, causing it to flip.

Man shot at least 15 times is recovering

LA SHREVEPORT — Police said a man who was shot between 15 and 20 times in Louisiana is expected to survive.

Shreveport police told news outlets that officers found Jerrett Howard, 33, with several gunshot wounds in a neighborhood early Monday. Police believe he may have been shot with a handgun.

Cpl. Angie Willhite said witnesses told officers that a vehicle had pulled up to Howard. He and the driver talked briefly before the driver fired gunshots.

Willhite said Howard suffered gunshot wounds from his chest to his ankles. He was in good condition at a hospital.

Recyclables collected for fundraiser stolen

ME PARSONFIELD — Police in Maine said someone stole bottles and cans two brothers had collected for a cancer research fundraiser.

Katie Deshaies wrote in a Facebook post Monday that someone had stolen recyclables from her sons, Bryce and Riley, over the weekend. The Parsonfield boys collected bottles and cans for Q97.9's Cans for a Cure bottle drive for the past eight years.

The brothers collected nearly 200,000 bottles and cans worth

more than \$10,000 last year with the help of community members.

Man asking girls for underwear is charged

WA TUKWILA — The King County Sheriff's Office said a man who had left notes at bus stops seeking to buy girls' underwear showed up for a meeting with an undercover detective with a gun, machete, tarp, hatchet and duct tape.

Darren Frederick Jones, 42, a Boeing employee from Burien, was arrested last week for investigation of child sex-related crimes. Authorities said he thought he was meeting a 14-year-old girl, whom he had offered to pay for sex and modeling.

The investigation began when high school students reported notes they found at Tukwila and SeaTac bus stops offering cash for girls' underwear.

Shipwreck could be nearly 200 years old

OH TOLEDO — Shipwreck hunters say they may have found the remains of a schooner that went down in Lake Erie nearly two centuries ago.

The National Museum of the Great Lakes said divers are hoping to take a closer look this summer to determine if it's indeed a sailing ship called the Lake Serpent.

The museum said it would be one of the oldest shipwrecks ever discovered on Lake Erie.

Man selling Corvette pace car collection

IN FORT WAYNE — An Indiana man plans to sell his collection of Corvette Indy 500 pace cars.

Keith Busse, 74, is auctioning

off the 16 cars next month during Mecum Auctions' spring sale at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis, The Journal Gazette reported.

Busse said he expects the cars could go for as much as \$2 million. He said he'll give money from the auction to the Keith Busse Automotive and Classic Art Foundation to be donated to charitable causes.

USPS worker accused of hoarding mail

NY NEW YORK — A United States Postal Service worker who prosecutors allege hoarded more than 17,000 pieces of undelivered mail in New York City reportedly told investigators he was overwhelmed by the amount of mail he had to deliver.

Aleksey Germash was charged in Brooklyn last week with delaying or detaining mail.

Federal officials said they arrested the 16-year employee after receiving a tip about a car he owned that contained 20 full mail bags.

Exhibit will honor Kewpie doll creator

MO BRANSON — A Missouri museum is telling the story of the inventor of the wide-eyed iconic Kewpie doll in a new exhibit.

The Joplin Globe reported that the Rose O'Neill exhibit opened this month and remains on display through Aug. 5 at the Springfield Art Museum.

O'Neill created the Kewpie character in 1909 in her studio near Branson, and the illustrations appeared in a women's magazine. A German factory made the first dolls in 1912, and they quickly became a global sensation.

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Plenty of QBs available in NFL Draft

Associated Press

DENVER — We've been hearing it for months: The 2018 NFL Draft is all about the quarterback.

The quarterback conundrum is more like it.

"You can go around a room and probably get four or five different opinions on how they should be stacked."

That's a quote from John Elway, Denver Broncos general manager and headliner of the pre-eminent 1983 QB class that featured six first-round selections and produced three Hall of Famers.

There's no consensus top QB this year like there was with Andrew Luck or Cam Newton a few years ago. Each member of this year's "Big Four" — USC's Sam Darnold, Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield, Wyoming's Josh Allen and UCLA's Josh Rosen — can find his name atop somebody's mock draft this week and almost certainly first on somebody's draft board Thursday night.

What this year's quarterback crop lacks in clarity it makes up for in complexity.

Louisville's Lamar Jackson, Oklahoma State's Mason Rudolph and Senior Bowl star Kyle Lauletta of Richmond are also hopeful they'll hear Roger Goodell call their names early. Throw in Washington State's Luke Falk, and maybe it's one of these "Little Four" quarterbacks who might ultimately end up as the gem of this year's draft.

Sort of like sixth-rounder Tom Brady in 2000 or third-rounder Russell Wilson in 2012.

Should six quarterbacks go in the first round, as many suspect, it would tie the '83 standard when Elway, Todd Blackledge, Jim Kelly, Tony Eason, Ken O'Brien and Dan Marino were selected. Elway, Kelly and Marino wound up in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

If quarterbacks go 1-2-3, it would match 1999's group in which Tim Couch, Donovan McNabb and Akili Smith were the first three players off the

board a year before Brady went 199th.

There's no clear-cut, surefire top pick quarterback in this year's draft because all of the prime prospects have at least one key drawback.

So, all of those owners, GMs, scouts and coaches scratching their heads for months will soon be crossing their fingers if they bypass Saquon Barkley, Bradley Chubb, Quenton Nelson, Denzel Ward, Minkah Fitzpatrick, Derwin James and Tremaine Edmunds to dive into the deep quarterback class, which could make or break a franchise's fortunes.

Every year, quarterbacks rise to the top of the draft, pushing value down the board to teams who already have theirs. Fifty-six quarterbacks have been drafted in the first round since 1996, the last draft featuring no first-round QBs.

"This quarterback draft, like every draft, drives the top end of this thing," NFL Network analyst Mike Mayock said. "I'm always amazed — and maybe I shouldn't be — but last year, three of the top 12 picks were quarterbacks and all three were trade-ups on draft night. The year before, the Rams went all the way up to one to go get (Jared) Goff. The Eagles went from 13 to eight to two to go get Carson Wentz. It's a quarterback-driven league. I think it's going to be a crazy eight, 10, 12 picks, so many permutations of the quarterback conversation."

Underscoring the importance of the so-called franchise quarterback, the Texans averaged 35 points a game with Deshaun Watson last season and 13 without him; the San Francisco 49ers went from 17 points a game to 29 under Jimmy Garoppolo, who won all five of his starts.

A look at the top quarterbacks in 2018 and the hazards that accompany the hype:

Sam Darnold, USC: Ball security.

Darnold threw 22 interceptions and had 20 fumbles in his two seasons with the Trojans.

"The No. 1 priority of a quar-

terback is to protect the football. I'm aware of that, and I'm aware how much I turn the ball over and that it's not OK," Darnold said. "I've been addressing it this offseason. I've been working on keeping two hands (on the ball) in the pocket at all times. The only time I let go of the ball is to throw it. That's something I've really been working on — and also keeping it tight whenever I tuck it and run."

Josh Allen, Wyoming: Accuracy.

The rocket-armed Allen hopes his spectacular combine showing and pro day performance showed teams that his 56 percent completion rate at Wyoming shouldn't scare them away.

"I'm extremely confident in myself," Allen said, "and we're working on it and there's no doubt in my mind we'll figure it out."

Baker Mayfield, Oklahoma: Undersized.

Mayfield is a shade over 6 foot, and that's usually a deal breaker in the first round.

"Height doesn't matter," Mayfield declared at the NFL combine. "You see guys like Tyrod Taylor, Drew Brees, Russell Wilson, they've proven that it doesn't matter. If you want to say anything else, I've got three years of tape you can watch. I think I had fewer batted balls at the line of scrimmage than any other guy here — and I'm pretty sure I'm the shortest guy, too."

Josh Rosen, UCLA: Durability.

A shoulder injury limited Rosen to six games last season, and he's had concussions. Furthermore, he's had to answer questions about his dedication to the sport. Many have wondered whether the strong-armed, free-spirited QB is the next Aaron Rodgers, a cerebral pick-you-apart passer, or the next Colin Kaepernick, who will ultimately focus more on social issues than football, especially if he can't stay healthy.

"I love football with all of my heart and soul," Rosen insisted.

"If I didn't, I just don't think I [would've] been able to make it through the grind of college."

Lamar Jackson, Louisville: Mechanics.

Bill Polian suggested Jackson's off-the-charts athleticism might make him more valuable as a wide receiver, but Jackson dismissed that notion: "No, sir, I'm a quarterback."

And a darn good one, Mayock insisted.

"He's the most exciting athlete in the draft," Mayock said. "I think somebody in the first round is going to make a philosophical and schematic commitment to this kid and change what they do offensively."

Mason Rudolph, Oklahoma State: Mobility.

Mayock said for a 6-foot-5, 240-pound quarterback, Rudolph has "fairly average arm talent" and too often can't escape the big hit, which could make him the next great college quarterback to get steamrolled in the pros.

"In today's NFL, you've got to have some escapability, some ability to buy some extra time," Mayock said. "I think he struggles with that a little bit. When he's got time with clear feet and clear vision, he can drive the ball, and I think he's the best deep ball touch and accuracy thrower in this draft. So I'm very bullish on this kid. I like the kid."

Kyle Lauletta, Richmond: Health.

Winning offensive MVP honors at the Senior Bowl should squelch concerns about his college competition and working through four offensive coordinators with the Spiders. He also sees a silver lining in his torn ACL before his senior season, when he had to sit out spring ball.

"Mental reps are huge. It sounds cliché but when you're in the NFL, if you're a backup or not the No. 1 guy, you've got to get better and you've got to improve somehow. So learning from those who are taking the reps and putting yourself (mentally) in that position, that's what I did," Lauletta said.

76ers win series for first time since 2012

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kevin Hart laughed as he tried to floss dance with a kid as they were both egged on by rapper Meek Mill. Philadelphia Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie awkwardly waved his arms around the way any 60-something-year-old man would attempting to look hip next to star entertainers.

This postseason potpourri of comic, ex-con and champion unfolded on the sideline of another 76ers romp.

Mill, the Philadelphia-born rapper released from prison only hours earlier, snagged the Game 5 headlines.

Ben Simmons, Joel Embiid and the rest of the Sixers stole the show.

Embiid and Simmons shined again in front of Mill, and the

dominant duo ushered the nightmares-into-dreams Process of the Philadelphia 76ers into the second round with a 104-91 win over the Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

The 76ers, winners of 10 games just two seasons ago, are in the second round of the Eastern Conference playoffs for the first time since 2012. The Sixers won the series 4-1 and turned the Wells Fargo Center into the wildest house party in the city.

“I’ve been waiting for this moment,” Embiid said.

Embiid had 19 points and 12 rebounds, Simmons had 14 points and 10 boards, and the entire team was energized by Mill’s surprise appearance. Mill made a dramatic return hours after Pennsylvania’s highest court ordered him

freed while he appeals decade-old gun and drug convictions.

They await the winner of Milwaukee-Boston. The Celtics lead the series 3-2.

The Sixers are the latest team to sweep up the city in a sports euphoria that hasn’t died down since the Eagles beat the New England Patriots to win the Super Bowl.

Look around the arena, and the champs were all around.

Lurie was in the house and so were a handful of Eagles. The national champion Villanova Wildcats were feted during the game. The Wildcats posed with Mill in the locker room and then stopped for selfies on the way to the court for a brief celebration. The city has already thrown two championship parades this year — the 76ers have played like a team that

could add one more.

“We all got a taste of it with the Eagles, we all got a taste of it with Villanova’s tremendous win,” coach Brett Brown said. “You feel it with the city from afar.”

He added: “Everybody is excited to be a part of, what I think, is playing out to be a cool story.”

Embiid, who came to personify the Process, had his second consecutive double-double and tallied 56 points, 31 rebounds and nine blocks in just three playoff games. Embiid again played in a black mask to guard a face injury, and he’ll have plenty of time to rest and recover with the other Eastern Conference playoff series expected to stretch into the weekend.

NBA playoffs roundup

After finishing off Spurs, Warriors face Pelicans

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Kevin Durant drove coast-to-coast just before halftime for a monster two-handed slam.

Klay Thompson swished a turnaround fadeaway as the halftime buzzer sounded and scurried for the tunnel hands raised high in triumph. Stephen Curry, in street clothes, hopped up and down on his injured left knee celebrating wildly with his Splash Brother.

Draymond Green pounded the glass at every chance for another spectacular rebounding night.

The defending champions are back, all right. They are rolling. And Curry could be close to putting on a uniform again.

“I hope, but I’m not going to expect it because I don’t want to get my hopes up and not have them fulfilled,” Thompson said. “If he doesn’t play, we’re prepared. If he does play, hallelujah.”

Golden State has endured

barely a blip so far, losing only Game 4 of its first-round series against San Antonio before closing out the Spurs with Tuesday night’s 99-91 victory.

The Warriors will open the best-of-seven Western Conference semifinals against New Orleans in Saturday’s Game 1 at Oracle Arena. Former Warriors top assistant Alvin Gentry coaches the Pelicans.

“Well, fortunately, Alvin Gentry really doesn’t know what he’s doing,” coach Steve Kerr cracked. “That’s a joke.”

For weeks ahead of the playoffs, the Warriors hardly looked like the super team that dominated through last year’s postseason. Yet Kerr and his players insisted all along they would find another level and groove when the stage got bigger in April — and they were spot on in those sentiments.

The defense has been stellar.

And the Warriors could be at full strength again soon, with Curry ready to lead the show once he’s healthy from a sprained medial collateral

ligament.

The three other All-Stars and a cast of reliable role players have handled things beautifully without him.

“We’re a championship team. We know what type of defense we need to play,” Green said. “I think throughout the regular season, you want to get there every night, but it’s just not realistic, especially coming off a championship.”

Celtics 92, Bucks 87: Al Horford had 22 points and 14 rebounds, Marcus Smart made an impact in his first game since mid-March and host Boston beat Milwaukee to take a 3-2 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Smart came off the bench and had nine points, five rebounds, four assists and three blocks in his first game since undergoing right thumb surgery. He played 25 minutes wearing a protective splint and had a key assist late from the bottom of a scrum beneath three Milwaukee players.

Terry Rozier added 16 points

and five assists for Boston. The home team has won all five games in the first-round series, and Game 6 is Thursday in Milwaukee.

Khris Middleton led the Bucks with 23 points, Jabari Parker added 17 points and eight rebounds, and Giannis Antetokounmpo had a series-low 16 points with 10 rebounds and nine assists.

The Celtics led by 16 before Milwaukee rallied to make it 74-70 with 7:33 left. Middleton scored later and was fouled to get Milwaukee within 84-79, but he failed to complete the three-point play.

A few possessions later, Smart managed to squeeze out a pass to Horford with three Bucks draped over him, and Horford easily dropped in a layup to make it 86-79 with 28.1 seconds left.

Milwaukee got within 87-84 after a layup by Eric Bledsoe, but the Celtics hit enough free throws the rest of the way to secure the win.

Panel: NCAA should end one-and-done

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Commission on College Basketball sharply directed the NCAA to take control of the sport, calling for sweeping reforms to separate pro and college tracks, permit players to return to school after going undrafted by the NBA and ban cheating coaches for life.

The independent commission, led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, released a detailed 60-page report Wednesday, seven months after the group was formed by the NCAA in response to a federal corruption investigation that rocked college basketball. Ten people, including some assistant coaches, have been charged in a bribery and kickback scheme, and high-profile programs such as Arizona, Louisville and Kansas have been tied to possible NCAA violations.

“The members of this commission come from a wide variety of backgrounds but the one thing that they share in common is that they believe the college basketball enterprise is worth saving,” Rice told The Associated Press on Tuesday night before addressing NCAA leaders Wednesday. “We believe there’s a lot of work to do in that regard. That the state of the game is not very strong.

“We had to be bold in our recommendations,” she said.

It’s not yet clear how the governing body would pay for some of the proposals, and some of the panel’s key recommendations would require cooperation from the NBA, its players union and USA Basketball.

The commission offered harsh assessments of toothless NCAA enforcement, as well as the shady summer basketball circuit that includes AAU leagues and brings together agents, apparel companies and coaches looking to profit on teenage prodigies. It called the environment surrounding college basketball “a toxic mix of perverse incentives to cheat,” and said responsibility for the current mess goes all the way up to university presidents.

The group recommended the NCAA have more involvement with players before they get to college and less involvement with enforcement. It also acknowledged the NCAA will need help to make some changes and defended its amateurism model, saying paying players a salary isn’t the answer.

Rice presented the commission’s report to the NCAA’s Board of Governors and Division I Board of Directors at the association’s headquarters Wednesday. She called the crisis in college basketball “first and foremost a problem of failed accountability

and lax responsibility.”

The two groups of university presidents planned to meet after Rice’s presentation to consider adopting the commission’s recommendations. If adopted, the hard work of turning the recommendations into NCAA legislation begins.

The commission emphasized the need for elite players to have more options when choosing between college and professional basketball, and to separate the two tracks.

The commission called for the NBA and its players association to change rules requiring players to be at least 19 years old and a year removed from graduating high school to be draft eligible. The one-and-done rule was implemented in 2006, despite the success of straight-from-high-school stars such as LeBron James, Kobe Bryant and Kevin Garnett.

The commission recommended harsher penalties for rule-breakers and that the NCAA outsource the investigation and adjudication of the most serious infractions cases.

Level I violations would be punishable with up to a five-year postseason ban and the forfeiture of all postseason revenue for the time of the ban. That could be worth tens of millions to major conference schools.

MLB roundup

Granderson HR gives grieving Toronto lift

Associated Press

TORONTO — Curtis Granderson hit a walk-off homer in the 10th inning to give the Toronto Blue Jays a 4-3 win over Boston on Tuesday night and hand the Red Sox their season-worst third straight defeat.

Boston (17-5) still owns the best record in the majors.

Granderson’s third home run of the season came off Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel (0-1), a towering solo blast off the facing of the third deck in right field. He went 3 for 5 with three RBIs in the Blue Jays’ first game since a deadly van attack in Toronto a day earlier. The victims of the attack, which killed 10 and injured 14, were honored along with first responders before the game.

Reds 9, Braves 7 (12): Tyler Mahle lost his no-hit bid

on Freddie Freeman’s homer in the seventh inning, and host Cincinnati blew a big late lead before Scooter Gennett connected in the 12th.

Yankees 8, Twins 3: Didi Gregorius had another big game at Yankee Stadium with a two-run homer and three RBIs, and Gary Sanchez homered twice to help CC Sabathia and New York romp.

Cubs 10, Indians 3: Kyle Schwarber hit two solo home runs and Chicago defeated host Cleveland in the first meeting between the teams since their classic 2016 World Series.

Mariners 1, White Sox 0: Marco Gonzales and four relievers combined on a five-hitter, Mitch Haniger singled home the only run for visiting Seattle.

At 5-15, the rebuilding White Sox are off to their worst start

since the 1950 season.

Diamondbacks 8, Phillies 4: Alex Avila homered among his three hits and drove in two runs, and Robbie Ray struck out 11 while pitching into the fifth inning for host Arizona.

Athletics 3, Rangers 2: Jed Lowrie hit a tiebreaking double in the seventh inning, and visiting Oakland tagged Texas’ Cole Hamels with his fourth loss before the end of April for the first time in the left-hander’s career.

Angels 8, Astros 7: Mike Trout hit his major league-leading 10th homer and Los Angeles overcame another shaky start by Shohei Ohtani to beat Houston, tying a team record with its 11th straight road win.

Mets 6, Cardinals 5 (10): Jay Bruce hit a tiebreaking homer in the 10th inning, Yoenis Cespedes launched a majes-

tic, three-run shot and visiting New York rallied.

Giants 4, Nationals 3: Mac Williamson homered for the second straight game, hitting a tiebreaking shot in the sixth inning to lead host San Francisco past Washington.

Marlins 3, Dodgers 2: Cameron Maybin doubled home the go-ahead run in the ninth inning and Miami edged host Los Angeles, snapping its season-high five-game skid.

Rockies 8, Padres 0: Trevor Story hit the second grand slam of his career, and Kyle Freeland scattered three hits over seven sharp innings for host Colorado.

Brewers 5, Royals 2: Lorenzo Cain homered while reaching base four times in his return to Kauffman Stadium.