

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, August 27, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Mosul battle redrawing map of region

Associated Press

QARQASHAH, Iraq — In the buildup to a long-awaited offensive on the city of Mosul, Kurdish forces are seizing new territory in northern Iraq that they say will become part of their autonomous region. The moves are further straining relations between the Kurds and the Baghdad government and Shiite militias, all ostensibly allies in the fight against the Islamic State group.

Just east of Mosul, Kurdish engineering teams on a recent day were laying down a 9.84-foot-wide, 65,617-foot-long trench and 6.56-foot-high berms, marking the new front line after recapturing the village of Qarqashah and neighboring hamlets from the Islamic State group earlier this month.

The new de facto borders established by the Kurdish fighters, or peshmerga, raise the potential for conflict between Iraq's Kurds and Arabs after any eventual defeat of the Islamic State group — just as in neighboring Syria, where Kurds have also dramatically expanded their zone of control.

"All the areas that have been liberated by the peshmerga forces, our (Kurdish) forces will stay there," said Falah Mustafa, the head of the Iraqi Kurdish region's foreign relations department, echoing statements by numerous officials.

Largely with the help of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, Kurdish forces have taken territory equivalent to around 50 percent of the size of their recognized autonomous zone.

Their first gain came just days after Islamic State militants took Mosul in the summer of 2014 and stormed down into central Iraq as the military collapsed. Kurdish forces seized the city of Kirkuk, which they have long claimed as their own.

Ostensibly, the move was to

protect the city from the Islamic State group, but Kurdish President Massoud Barzani quickly said the Kurds would keep it. From there, they continued pushing the Islamic State group out, capturing much of the surrounding province.

Since then, they have taken further territory in the nearby Ninevah province, where Mosul is located, with "shaping operations" ahead of an expected assault on the city. Much of it is territory with a large Kurdish community that the regional government has claimed for years — but not all, meaning the grabs are bringing in populations where some are wary of Kurdish domination.

Similarly, in neighboring Syria, long-oppressed Kurds have used the chaos of the civil war and fight against the Islamic State group to carve out a zone of control across the country's north.

The new clout of the main Syrian Kurdish fighting force, known as the YPG, has led to tensions with almost every player on the ground there, including Sunni Arab rebels and government forces. Turkey this week launched a major cross-border offensive, aimed mainly at limiting Kurdish expansion.

In Iraq, after the capture of the Qarqashah area, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi pointedly demanded a halt to the peshmerga advances.

But the Kurds refused. The Kurdish regional government's spokesman, Safeen Dizayee, said the peshmerga "will not stop their advances until all Kurdistan's territories in the Ninevah region are liberated." He added that they will not withdraw "from areas they are going to liberate in the future."

Al-Abadi seemed to soften his stance, saying all forces have the right to participate in the Mosul offensive. Still, he under-

lined that "Ninevah will stay unified." But Barzani in recent weeks has said a "new formula" is needed to administer the province, without elaborating.

Mustafa said the Kurds were acting because minority groups in Ninevah no longer trust the central government to ensure their safety after the rise of Shiite militias that have been accused of abuses in past anti-Islamic State group operations.

Both the peshmerga and the Shiite Arab militias have steadily grown more powerful as the United States and Iran have funneled weapons, training and money into Iraq to back the fight against the militant group.

Some 140 miles southeast of Mosul, deadly clashes broke out in April between Kurdish fighters and Shiite militias in the town of Tuz Khormato, home to Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shiite Turkmens.

Shiite fighters accuse the Kurdish forces of destroying homes belonging to the town's Turkmen residents. Kurdish forces in turn accuse the Shiite fighters of arbitrarily detaining Sunni Arab residents. Checkpoints and sandbag barriers carve up the town, separating the two sides.

Jassim Mohammed Jaafar, a Shiite Turkmen member of parliament from the Mosul area, said he worries a similar scenario will play out in parts of Ninevah after Mosul is retaken.

"The Kurds have forces to defend their areas. If we need forces to protect our areas, we will use the Popular Mobilization Forces," he said, referring to the state-backed organization under which the militias are grouped.

A spokesman for the Popular Mobilization Forces, Hashim al-Musawi, said "we have real concerns about the Kurdish forces." He cited reports that Kurds have deported Arab ci-

vilians from recaptured territory. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have published reports documenting such allegations.

Almost a year ago, Kurdish forces retook the northwestern region of Sinjar, dominated by the Yazidi religious minority, who were subjected to massacres and enslavement under Islamic State rule. Tens of thousands of Yazidis fled into the Kurdish region for protection.

Many Yazidis do not consider themselves Kurdish but rather a distinct ethnic minority, yet Kurdish politicians laid claim to Sinjar during the same press conference in which they declared it "liberated."

Shiite militiamen have also altered Iraq's demography after pushing the Islamic State group out of hundreds of villages in central Diyala and Salahuddin provinces and largely administering security in the areas they retook. While not backed by coalition airstrikes, Iranian advisers, weapons and funding have helped the militias outstrip Iraq's conventional armed forces.

Many of the mostly Sunni Iraqis who were displaced from those provinces by the violence say they don't feel safe returning with militias in control. Others have been prevented from returning due to strict so-called security checks.

Lukman Sharawani, commander of a small unit of Kurdish fighters stationed north of Mosul, explained that Ninevah — his home province — was once one of the most diverse parts of Iraq.

He pointed to allegations of looting, destruction and arbitrary detentions by Shiite militias after the Islamic State group was driven out of the western city of Fallujah this year.

"We don't want the same to happen here," he said.

ITT's financial troubles could hurt student vets

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

SAN ANTONIO — A loophole in government student-aid programs will prevent 12,500 student veterans from seeking lost benefits if a for-profit school is forced to close its doors, a veterans advocacy group said Friday.

The U.S. Department of Education announced last week that it placed ITT Technical Institute on heightened cash monitoring, which bars any new students from using federal aid at more than 130 nationwide campuses of ITT Technical Institute, a for-profit school beset by legal and financial problems.

The vocational school is a combination of brick-and-mortar and online campuses with 43,000 students.

The Department of Education has demanded \$153 million to be paid in 30 days to ensure the government can reimburse students and cover loan forgiveness in the event ITT goes out of business. The company already was required to pay \$94 million to the agency, according to corporate filings posted Thursday.

But a loophole in how GI Bill benefits are counted as federal aid means student veterans will not be able to recoup benefits even if civilian students see their debts forgiven, said James Schmeling, executive vice president of strategic engagement at Student Veterans of America, a national veterans advocacy group.

"I think student veterans at ITT should watch the next 30 days very closely," Schmeling said. "If they don't post the additional money, they may be at high risk of closing."

Officials for ITT could not be reached for comment Friday.

Government programs are in place to forgive loans listed under Title IV, which are federal student aid loans and grants, if students prove they were deceived by illegal or deceptive recruiting practices. But the Post-9/11 GI Bill is not counted under Title IV, Schmeling said,

which leaves veterans without recourse to reinstate benefits spent at the same schools.

Students attending ITT will not have their benefits interrupted, according to a message posted Thursday to the Department of Veterans Affairs' GI Bill Facebook page, adding caution flags to its GI Bill comparison tool pages for ITT schools about its financial issues.

ITT's corporate filings said the accrediting agency responsible for certifying their programs, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, characterizes ITT as out of compliance with regulations and "unlikely" to become compliant in the future.

The company has experienced chronic mismanagement of finances and has been the target of numerous state and federal investigations into its recruiting practices, according to the Wall Street Journal. Those ongoing problems have prompted the Department of Education to doubt ITT's viability, the paper reported Wednesday.

Inside Higher Education, a university-focused publication, reported in September that the company has been under tight scrutiny by the Education Department after it failed to reconcile federal aid accounts and lacked a written policy to address the issue, as well as accusations from the Securities and Exchange Commission that two executives concealed losses in its student loan programs.

Schmeling said he was concerned for student veterans already enrolled at ITT who now face complicated questions about the future of their education. Credits earned at ITT are not guaranteed to transfer to other schools, he said, making it more likely veterans will have to cover tuition out of pocket once their benefits are exhausted.

Student Veterans of America will provide assistance to concerned veterans attending ITT, Schmeling said, including recommendations to transfer to local community colleges or state universities.

'SOS' in sand leads to the rescue of 2

Associated Press

CHUUK STATE, Micronesia — The U.S. Coast Guard says two stranded mariners were rescued Friday after crews saw their "SOS" in the sand on an uninhabited island in Micronesia, Hawaii News Now reports.

A U.S. Navy aircraft crew spotted the pair on the beach and gave their location to the Coast Guard in Guam. Hawaii News Now says the two, who had no emergency equipment, were picked up and were taken

to a patrol boat.

The Coast Guard received a report about the pair's 18-foot vessel going missing on Aug. 19. Hawaii News Now says the two departed Weno Island on Aug. 17, and they were expected to arrive at their destination to Tamatam Island the next day.

Hawaii News Now said that on Wednesday, a ship noticed flashing lights from the uninhabited Chuuk State island where the two were later found. The U.S. Navy was alerted and spotted the survivors on the beach.

Sex-assault report against retired 4-star investigated

The Washington Post

The Air Force is investigating a sexual-assault report against a retired four-star general who was on active duty at the time of the alleged incident, service officials said Friday.

Details about the case are scant, but Col. Patrick Ryder, an Air Force spokesman, said the service will conduct a thorough investigation of Gen. Arthur J. Lichte, who retired as head of Air Mobility Command in 2009. Ryder declined to provide additional details, saying it would be inappropriate to do so.

"I can tell you that the Air Force takes all allegations of sexual assault or harassment very seriously," Ryder said in a statement. "We are committed to upholding the high standards and values of our service and ensuring an environment of dignity and respect, where sexual assault or harassment is not tolerated, and where there is clear accountability placed on all Airmen at every level."

Lichte could not immediately be reached for comment Friday evening. A voicemail and email left for him were not returned.

The case initially was reported by John Q. Public, an independent blog that focuses on the Air Force. The blog said it had obtained an internal Air Force document that described a complaint filed earlier this year by a female colonel that her commander had "used his power to coerce sexual contact" three times between April 2007 and April 2009. The report said the senior officer at one point led Air Mobility Command, which has headquarters at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., which is about 20 miles east of St. Louis.

If the Air Force moves forward with charges, it probably would become the most significant sexual-assault case involving a general in modern military history. A Pentagon report released in May said that the military had 6,083 reports of sexual assault in the fiscal year ending last October, representing a 1 percent decrease from the previous year. That figure included 5,240 reports by servicemembers and 804 in which the victims were civilians or otherwise were not in the military.

Former hostages: American brave amid torture in Syria

Associated Press

PRESCOTT, Ariz. — Former hostages say an Arizona woman slain by Islamic State militants remained steadfast in her Christian faith and stood up to her captors despite being tortured, raped and verbally abused.

Four ex-hostages who had shared cells with Kayla Mueller spoke publicly for the first time in an interview with ABC News set to air Friday.

Frida Saide of Sweden and Patricia Chavez of Peru and Belgium were among the women held with the Mueller, 26, for six weeks at an abandoned oil refinery in Syria in 2014. They said guards targeted Mueller more than other prisoners.

“They would scream at her, and they would, you know, blame her for everything that America has done in the world,” Saide said.

Mueller and her boyfriend were captured after both left a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Aleppo. Omar Alkhani was released 20 days later after

being beaten and interrogated.

Other hostages said Mueller of Prescott, Ariz., kept a positive outlook while sharing a 12-foot-by-12-foot room with brick walls and a single light bulb in which she could only tell if it was daytime if a bit of light appeared through a small vent.

Mueller sometimes entertained Saide and Chavez by doing impressions of the guards. Mueller also told them how she briefly cared for a 14-year-old Shiite girl and a woman while isolated for six months.

“She was amazing. She was a really strong girl,” Chavez said.

Prisoners said Mohammed Emwazi, also known as Jihadi John, led three other guards who paraded Mueller around the refinery in March 2014. One hostage, Daniel Rye Ottosen, a Danish freelance photographer, recalled Mueller daring to contradict a guard who said she had converted to Islam.

Mueller was held captive for 18 months. Her family confirmed her death in February 2015.

Blood banks told to test for Zika virus

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government told all U.S. blood banks Friday to start screening for Zika, a major expansion intended to protect the nation's blood supply from the mosquito-borne virus.

Previously, blood testing was mostly limited to parts of Florida and Puerto Rico, where Zika is spreading. Screening initially will extend to states along the Gulf Coast and a few others.

“There is still much uncertainty regarding the nature and extent of Zika virus transmission,” Dr. Peter Marks said in a Food and Drug Administration release. “At this time, the recommendation for testing the entire blood supply will help ensure that safe blood is available for all individuals who might need transfusion.”

Blood banks already test donations for HIV, hepatitis, West Nile and other blood-borne viruses. The Zika virus stays in the blood for about one week,

but is thought to remain in other bodily fluids longer.

While Zika is primarily spread through mosquito bites, there have been reports in Brazil of Zika transmission through transfusion. No such cases have been reported in the United States. One Zika-positive blood donation, though, was intercepted in Florida recently, Marks said Friday.

“The donation was identified while the blood bag was still in quarantine, before it was released,” Marks told reporters on a media call. “The system worked correctly.”

Zika also can be spread through sex, and Marks said that played into the decision to expand testing. Current evidence suggests that infected men can spread the virus for several months through sex, and women can transmit it for several weeks.

Adding to the challenge is that 4 out of 5 people infected never develop symptoms, such as fever, joint pain and rash.

\$400M cash payment to Iran has little precedent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A \$400 million cash delivery to Iran to repay a decades-old arbitration claim may be unprecedented in recent U.S. history, according to legal experts and diplomatic historians, raising further questions about a payment timed to help free four American prisoners in Iran.

The money was sent to Iran on Jan. 17, the same day Iran agreed to release the prisoners. The Obama administration claimed for months the events were separate, but recently acknowledged the cash was used as leverage until the Americans were allowed to leave Iran. Only then, did the U.S. allow a plane with euros, Swiss francs and other foreign currency loaded on pallets to

take off in the other direction for Tehran.

“There’s actually not anything particularly unusual about the mechanism for this transaction,” White House press secretary Josh Earnest said this week of the initial cash payment.

But diplomatic historians and lawyers with expertise in international arbitration struggled to find any similar examples.

Asked to recall a similar payment of the U.S. using cash or hard money to settle an international dispute, the office of the State Department historian couldn’t provide an example.

The acknowledgement that the prisoners and the payment were linked, and the unusual cash delivery, have fueled Republican claims that a “ransom”

was paid. At a news conference this month, President Barack Obama said cash was used because the U.S. and Iran don’t have a banking relationship after years of U.S. sanctions on Iran, making a check or wire transfer impossible.

The \$400 million was the principal owed by the U.S. on a 1970s Iranian account for buying U.S. military equipment. After Iran’s 1979 overthrow of the U.S.-backed shah and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran, the weapons were never delivered. Iran has wanted the money back plus interest ever since. Seven months ago, two sides put the matter to rest with a \$1.7 billion settlement.

Alan Henrikson, diplomatic history professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplo-

macy, Tufts University, found a precedent by reaching back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War.

The accord called for the United States to pay Mexico \$15 million, an amount worth about \$482 million in today’s money, he said. The payment was determined “in consideration of the extension acquired by the boundaries of the United States,” vague diplomatic wording designed to compensate Mexico for a massive loss of territory that included all of California and parts of seven other states. At the same time, the U.S. avoided any acceptance of national guilt.

“Ambiguity is often needed in diplomacy in order to achieve agreement,” Henrikson said.

Clinton email release to end after election

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Seven months after a federal judge ordered the State Department to begin releasing monthly batches of the detailed daily schedules showing meetings by Hillary Clinton during her time as secretary of state, the government told The Associated Press it won't finish the job before Election Day.

The department so far has released about half of the schedules. Its lawyers said in a phone conference with the AP's lawyers that the department now expects to release the last of the detailed schedules around Dec. 30, weeks before the next president is inaugurated.

The AP's lawyers late Friday formally asked the State Department to hasten that effort so that the department could provide all Clinton's minute-by-minute schedules by Oct. 15. The agency did not immediately respond.

The schedules drew new attention last week after the AP analyzed the ones released so far. The news agency found that more than half the people outside the government who met or spoke by telephone with Clinton while she was secretary of state had given money — either personally or through companies or groups — to the Clinton Foundation. The AP's analysis focused on people with private interests and excluded

her meetings or calls with U.S. federal employees or foreign government representatives.

The AP's reporting was based on official calendars covering Clinton's entire term plus the more-detailed daily schedules covering roughly half her time as secretary of state. The AP first asked for Clinton's calendars in 2010 and again in 2013. It then sued the State Department in federal court to obtain the detailed schedules, and the department so far has provided about half of them under court order.

Clinton has said the AP's analysis was flawed because it did not account fully for all meetings and phone calls during her entire term as secre-

tary. She also said the analysis should have included meetings with federal employees and foreign diplomats. The AP said it focused on her meetings with outsiders because those were more discretionary, as Clinton would normally meet with federal officials and foreign officials as part of her job.

Clinton said she met with people outside government regardless of whether they gave money or charitable commitments to her family's charity.

With the foundation drawing continued attention, Clinton promised Friday to put in place additional safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest with the charity should she win the White House.

Transgender bathroom win for UNC students, employee

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — A federal judge ruled Friday that two students and an employee must be allowed to use restrooms matching their gender identity at University of North Carolina campuses, and he said they have a strong chance of proving the state's bathroom-access measure violates federal law, a judicial rebuke that transgender rights advocates hailed as a victory.

U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder temporarily blocked the University of North Carolina from making the three plaintiffs follow the restroom provision of the so-called HB2 — or House Bill 2 — law as the larger case makes its way to trial in November. His final decision on the law won't come until after trial.

Passed in March, HB2 requires transgender people to use restrooms in schools and many public buildings that correspond to the sex on their birth certificates, rather than their gender identity.

It also excludes gender identity and sexual orientation from statewide antidiscrimination protections.

The state's Republican leaders argue the law is needed to protect privacy and safety by keeping men out of women's restrooms. Transgender residents challenging the law say restroom safety is protected by existing laws, while the North Carolina measure is harmful and discriminatory.

In Friday's ruling, Schroeder wrote that

the challengers "are likely to succeed" in their arguments that HB2 violates Title IX, a federal law prohibiting gender discrimination in educational institutions.

However, he said plaintiffs haven't shown they are likely to succeed on a claim that the law violates their constitutional equal protection rights, and he reserved judgment on another constitutional claim related to due process.

Rebuffing arguments by the law's defenders, Schroeder also noted that existing laws already protect people's privacy in restrooms.

"North Carolina's peeping and indecent exposure statutes continue to protect the privacy of citizens regardless of" the bathroom provision, Schroeder wrote, "and there is no indication that a sexual predator could successfully claim transgender status as a defense against prosecution under these statutes."

He said that while his injunction shouldn't pose any hardship to the state leaders seeking to defend the law, failing to block the restroom provision "would cause substantial hardship to the individual transgender Plaintiffs, disrupting their lives."

The plaintiffs challenging the law include a student at UNC's Greensboro campus, an employee at its Chapel Hill campus and a high school student at the state School of the Arts, which is also run by the university system.

Italy burying quake victims

Associated Press

ASCOLI PICENO, Italy — A young man wept over a little girl's white coffin, while a woman nearby gently stroked another small casket as Italians bid farewell Saturday to victims of the devastating earthquake that struck a mountainous region of central Italy Wednesday.

As Italians observed a day of national mourning, President Sergio Mattarella and Premier Matteo Renzi joined grieving family members for a state funeral for 35 of the 290 people killed in Wednesday's quake.

Mourners, many among them were injured, wept and held each other in a sweltering community gym in the town of Ascoli Piceno as the local bishop, Giovanni D'Ercole, urged them to rebuild their communities.

"Don't be afraid to cry out your suffering — I have seen a lot of this — but please do not lose courage," D'Ercole told them. "Only together can we rebuild our houses and our churches. Together, above all, we will be able to restore life to our communities."

Before the mass funeral, people hugged and cried as they bid their final farewells to loved ones in the gym, which was transformed into a makeshift chapel for the ceremony. Among the victims were two girls, Marisol Piermarini, 18 months, and Giulia Rinaldo, 9, whose younger sister survived against the odds beneath the rubble, still holding her dead sibling.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police hunting for bike-riding groper

PA PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia police are searching for a male bicyclist who gropes women.

The man has been involved in at least four sexual assaults, mostly in South Philadelphia.

In three of the incidents beginning in early August, police said the man touched the women inappropriately while passing by them on his bike.

In the latest incident on Aug. 13, he approached a woman who was exiting her car and touched her. He fled on foot when she began to scream.

Police released a video of one of the attacks, where a man can be seen on a mountain bike riding on a sidewalk and passing by a woman. He then reaches out with his right hand to touch her, and then pedals quickly away.

Firefighters getting bulletproof vests

SC NORTH CHARLESTON — Firefighters in North Charleston will soon have bulletproof vests to wear in situations where someone is shooting at law enforcement officers.

The city council on Thursday approved almost a quarter million dollars for the purchase. The city is buying more than 450 vests.

Officials said the vests can be worn on top of uniforms and can stop rounds from high-powered rifles like those used in recent shootings in Orlando, Fla.; Dallas and Baton Rouge, La.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has recommended firefighters go into active shooter incidents with law enforcement officers and should wear protective gear when they do.

Facebook 'like' gets man return trip to jail

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A Florida man is

back in jail after clicking "like" on a Facebook photo posted by a witness in a case against him.

The Sun Sentinel reported that West Palm Beach Judge Krista Marx revoked Paul Maida Jr.'s bond Wednesday, saying he violated a court order to avoid any contact with his ex-girlfriend Bianca Fichtel by liking a photo on her Facebook page.

Assistant State Attorney Laura Laurie said Fichtel is a key prosecution witness in the DUI manslaughter case against Maida, who is accused of leaving the scene of a crash that killed bicyclist George Morreale, 65.

Woman spills crickets and worms on subway

NY NEW YORK — New York City subway riders are likely to get bugged over a lot of things — but a recent incident was one for the books.

The New York Post said a woman trying to sell crickets and worms on the subway threw her cargo after a group of teens pushed her Wednesday evening. The woman began screaming and urinated on the floor of the subway car.

Rider Chris Calabrese said passengers had crickets on their arms; his girlfriend was crying.

Someone pulled the emergency brake, and the train halted on the Manhattan Bridge. The New York Post reported the train began moving after half an hour and was met by police at the next station. The woman was removed from the train and, according to the New York Daily News, was taken to a hospital for a mental evaluation.

Legislative candidate to campaign on horse

NE LINCOLN — A retired Army colonel who is running for a seat in the Nebraska legislature plans to campaign on horseback next month.

Tom Brewer is expected to lead a 500-mile ride across western Nebraska's 43rd legislative district from Sept. 3-22. Brewer is running against incumbent state Sen. Al Davis, a rancher and former volunteer firefighter from Hyannis. Both are Republicans in an officially nonpartisan race.

Brewer and other combat veterans are scheduled to visit 16 towns in the district. Brewer was the top vote-getter in Nebraska's May legislative primary, but will face Davis again in the Nov. 8 general election.

Prof uses beer to help teach chemistry class

ME PORTLAND — A chemistry professor in Portland is using beer to help teach students.

Lucille Benedict told the Portland Press Herald it can be challenging to keep students engaged in chemistry, so the University of Southern Maine professor began using beer as a testing medium.

Benedict oversees the school's new Quality Assurance/Quality Control and Research Laboratory. The lab has partnered with the Maine Brewers Guild to provide testing and training for brewers.

Students said the lab allows them to solve real-world problems.

Classes for brewers will focus on how a flawed brewing process can affect beer. Brewers can also send samples to the lab for testing.

Man survives spider, snake bites, lightning

FL LAKELAND — Lightning, a spider and now a snake. A central Florida man is proving to be a survivor.

In the last four years, Kyle Cook, 31, has been struck by lightning, bitten by a venomous spider and — most recently — attacked by an Eastern diamondback rattlesnake in his backyard.

His father, Mike Cook, calls

his son "a walking Murphy's law."

The younger Cook was almost finished mowing the yard on Aug. 11 when he heard a loud rattling sound. He saw the 5-foot snake about 3 feet away. As he moved back, he stepped on a stick. He said the noise provoked the snake, which struck him.

Flags to be reinstalled on some firetrucks

NY POUGHKEEPSIE — American flags will be reinstalled on some firetrucks in a New York town after an outcry that followed fire commissioners' orders to take them down.

Fire commissioners in the Arlington Fire District in Poughkeepsie had ordered the large flags removed from the back of three fire engines. The move was made over concerns about possible U.S. flag code violations and potential safety risks.

An agreement announced Thursday will allow smaller 2-by-3-foot American flags on three of the district's front-line engines, which are the firetrucks used most frequently.

Man strips, drives truck into airplane

NE OMAHA — Authorities said a man wearing only boxer shorts stole a pickup and drove it into a Southwest Airlines plane at an airport in Omaha, Neb., causing minor injuries to three people on board.

Eppley Airfield Police Chief Tim Conahan said an officer spotted the man outside the terminal Thursday evening, screaming that people were trying to kill him. When officers approached, the man ran, climbed a fence into the gate area, undressed and stole an airline pickup. He drove into the plane, which was headed to Denver, as passengers were boarding.

The man is in custody.

Southwest spokesman Chris Mainz said the plane's nose gear tires were flattened, so another plane flew the 113 passengers.

Cal pulls away from Hawaii Down Under

Associated Press

SYDNEY — After three seasons at Texas Tech, quarterback Davis Webb made quite an impression in his first game as a graduate transfer at California.

Webb threw four touchdown passes and ran for another score in a stellar debut for California, leading the Bears to a 51-31 win over Hawaii on Saturday in college football's season opener at Sydney's Olympic stadium.

Told he had 441 yards passing — 38-for-54, with no interceptions, Webb said dryly: "Yeah, it was OK. I'm just glad we got the victory. Hawaii threw a few blitzes at us and our offensive line played well."

Khalfani Muhammad had 94 yards rushing and one touchdown, and Chad Hansen had 14 receptions for 160 yards and two scores to help Cal win the game played Down Under as a tourism initiative and to increase awareness of "gridiron"

in the country.

"Phenomenal, I was energetic," Muhammad said of his 34-yard TD run in the second minute of the game. "My first one, and it's special, of course."

Webb said it was a "very good victory" in his first game with Cal, but praised Hansen, who clicked with his quarterback from early on.

"As soon as Davis showed up at Cal, we just had a connection," Hansen said. "I think being together, day in and day out, really helps that quarterback-wide receiver connection."

The teams provided plenty of early entertainment for unfamiliar fans, part of a crowd of 61,247 in the 83,500-seat stadium, scoring two touchdowns each by midway through the opening quarter.

But Webb, who replaced Jared Goff — the No. 1 overall NFL Draft pick by the Los Angeles Rams — helped move Cal into control in the second quarter.

Hawaii fumbled on a kick-

off following Matt Anderson's second field goal for Cal, and Webb's 34-yard pass to Hansen on the next play gave Cal a 27-14 lead.

"Too many mistakes and turnovers, and it cost us," said Nick Rolovich, a former Hawaii quarterback making his head coaching debut for the Rainbow Warriors.

Webb got into the act himself, rushing 3 yards off-tackle for another Cal touchdown and a 34-14 halftime lead.

Hawaii was led by wide receiver Marcus Kemp with four receptions for 73 yards and one TD. Ikaika Woolsey was 17-for-34 for 234 yards passing with one TD and one interception.

Hawaii was without three key players for unspecified disciplinary reasons. A Rainbow Warriors spokesman said just before the game began that safety Daniel Lewis Jr., linebacker Jerrol Garcia-Williams and tight end Metuisela Unga were not with the team Saturday.

Cal coach Sonny Dykes said it was a good starting point for the season.

"There is still plenty of work to be done, but overall we played a very good game and never let them get back into it," Dykes said.

He also praised Rolovich.

"I think that side is very well-coached," Dykes said. "They made a lot of adjustments as the game went on and challenged us. He (Rolovich) will get Hawaii going."

Rolovich might also go down as a good promoter of the sport Down Under. After losing the coin toss and being forced to kick, Hawaii tried an onside kick that the Bears were able to recover at midfield.

"I wanted to make sure Australian fans got to see an onside kick, and in my first game, too," Rolovich said, smiling. "But seriously, I hope it sends a message that we are going to play aggressively and won't back down."

Pair of Army sisters take aim at 2020 Tokyo Olympics

Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — The journey of Caroline and Winrose Karunde began in a small village in Nyeri, Kenya. It has continued through Texas, into Germany, and will soon proceed through Washington. In that light, Tokyo doesn't seem so far away to the two soldiers.

U.S. Army Sgt. Caroline Karunde, recently assigned to the Vilseck-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment, and her identical twin sister, Spc. Winrose Karunde, with the 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, in Baumholder, are Kenyan-born Army medics with grand aspirations. They hope to represent the United States in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, and they plan to help their struggling community in Kenya — the motivation that launched their running careers.

"When we grew up we wanted to be doctors or something to do with the health care profession so that one day we could go back and help people, because health care is not established back at home," Caroline said.

Higher education was a luxury the Karunde family couldn't afford, especially after the death of their father, John Karunde, soon after the twins graduated from high school. Caroline and Winrose knew that to get an education, they'd have to earn it on their own.

Kenya, Caroline pointed out, is known for having some of the best long-distance runners in the world, a fact consistently confirmed at the highest levels of competition. So they turned to running to catch the eye of university athletic recruiters.

"My only vehicle to get here — to get an education — was running," Caroline said. The sisters distinguished them-

selves early on. Texas Tech University crosscountry coach Jon Murray watched the Karundes compete and offered them a scholarship on the spot.

"I knew from there nothing could hold me back from furthering my education and achieving my dreams," Caroline said.

The twins enrolled at separate National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics schools to satisfy the remaining academic requirements to study and compete at NCAA institution Texas Tech. Weeks after leaving their home country, the twins reunited, this time as competitors, at a meet.

"We've been together so long, we grew up together, so being separated in a different country — that was different," Winrose said. "I needed somebody to be there for me, and she needed someone, so coming back together after two weeks was so

exciting," Winrose added.

In 2009, the twins were once again united, this time as teammates for the Texas Tech Red Raiders.

"When we were united in 2009, that was the best moment in my life, because I knew that I'm back with my family, my twin sister is here and we can do anything," Caroline said.

The sisters' dominant NAIA stints led to stellar careers at Texas Tech. Winrose was a 2010 NCAA qualifier in the 3,000-meter steeplechase and Caroline earned 2010 All-Big 12 honors in the 1,500 meter. They each graduated in 2012 with nursing degrees and began to ponder the next step in their journey. The military proved an attractive choice.

"You can give back to the community and at the same time you're serving in the military, they can pay for your education," Caroline said.

Jets treat troops to flag football game

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The New York Jets saluted the U.S. military by helping throw a green-and-white flag football game in Afghanistan.

Service members from the 10th Mountain Division, 518th Resolute Support Sustainment Brigade and the 25th Signal Battalion of the U.S. Army took the field Friday at Bagram Air Base with custom-made jerseys donated by the Jets.

The green game jerseys had “Resolute” sewn on the back, while the white ones sported “Support” as part of the New York-themed sports day at the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, which was dubbed “Mission Resolute Support.”

The military service members competed in an 8-on-8 game that included Col. Seung Paik, Lt. Col. Oscar Malave and Lt. Col. Cedric Gaskin. The Jets also provided footballs, coaching clipboards, kicking tees and awards for team MVPs.

After the game, Jets center Nick Mangold and wide receiver Eric Decker spoke to the participants via Skype.

“I wanted to personally thank them for their service and support abroad,” Mangold said in a statement issued by the team. “I admire and respect their sacrifice and dedication to service.”

The Bagram AFB Sports Day, attended by more than 100 service members, also included a baseball game, a volleyball match, a cornhole tournament, a three-point con-

test and a tailgate that included food and music. Blue Star Mothers of America, a nonprofit organization, also provided packages of snacks.

Steve Castleton, the Jets’ military liaison, approached the team last November about becoming involved in some way with the soldiers in Afghanistan. It started with the Jets planning to send them T-shirts to wear while playing pickup football. It eventually grew into an even bigger event.

“The idea was to do a football game where the soldiers can have a day where they did not have to worry about defending our freedom,” Castleton said in a statement. “They only had to worry about defending against the deep pass or a sweep to the outside.”

Roethlisberger sharp as Steelers roll past Saints

BY BRETT MARTEL

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Ben Roethlisberger has played only two series this preseason, which might be all he needs.

Roethlisberger torched New Orleans for 148 yards and two touchdowns while completing 12 of 17 passes in his first action this preseason, then got the rest of the game off while the Steelers rolled to a 27-14 victory on Friday night.

Roethlisberger, who sat out of the first two preseason games, opened by leading a 14-play, 76-yard drive on which he converted two third downs and found tight end Jesse James for a 5-yard score. His next series was highlighted by his 57-yard scoring pass down the left sideline to Antonio Brown, also playing for the first time this preseason.

Pittsburgh running back Le’Veon Bell also made his preseason debut, gaining 21 yards on three carries, but his lost fumble in the second quarter led to Drew Brees’ only TD pass. Brees’ strike went to Willie Snead, who made a difficult juggling catch as he landed on his back following a collision near the back of the end zone.

Saints quarterback Drew Brees had a difficult night behind a struggling offensive line. It didn’t help that starting left tackle Terron Armstead left unexpectedly in the first half. Brees completed 9 of 12 passes, but for only 78 yards. One of his better throws connected with newly acquired tight end Coby Fleener for 26 yards, but it was called back for holding on Armstead.

Patriots 19, Panthers 17: Tom Brady appeared to be in regular season form.

Unfortunately for visiting New England,

they may not see that form in a meaningful game until Oct. 9 when they face the Cleveland Browns since the three-time Super Bowl MVP will serve a four-game suspension to start the season.

Brady looked sharp in his preseason debut though, throwing a 33-yard touchdown pass to Chris Hogan in helping the Patriots to a 19-17 preseason win over the Carolina Panthers on Friday night.

Brady made a quick escape after the game and did not talk to reporters.

“We’ve moved ahead in a lot of areas, but we’re certainly not where we need to be,” Patriots coach Bill Belichick said. “I don’t think any player is, any coach is, I’m sure no team is at this point. We’re all making progress, which is good.”

While Brady was on the mark, league MVP Cam Newton struggled mightily in his most extensive playing time of the preseason. Newton was intercepted twice and the Panthers failed to get any points on his eight first-half possessions. Overall, the Panthers scored just three points in 10 Newton-led drives.

Packers 21, 49ers 10: Aaron Rodgers made the most of his only appearance of the preseason, throwing a touchdown pass to Randall Cobb in Green Bay’s victory over host San Francisco.

Colin Kaepernick did not fare as well as he looked extremely rusty in his first game action since last November. He completed 2 of 6 passes and generated one first down on three drives.

Buccaneers 30, Browns 13: Josh Gordon showed why Cleveland is so happy to have him back on the field.

The talented receiver with a history of suspensions for drug violations caught ev-

erything thrown his way in his preseason debut Friday night, scoring on a 43-yard reception and also hauling in another pass from Robert Griffin III for a 44-yard gain that led to a first-quarter field goal in a 30-13 loss to host Tampa Bay.

Jameis Winston threw for 259 yards and two touchdowns in one half of work for the Bucs, who achieved an objective of starting faster on offense than they did the previous two weeks.

Griffin completed 8 of 14 passes for 119 yards, one TD and no interceptions before being replaced by Josh McCown at the start of the third quarter. Gordon was only targeted twice and finished with 87 yards receiving, both his catches coming when he beat cornerback Brent Grimes, one of Tampa Bay’s key offseason acquisitions.

Redskins 21, Bills 16: In their first real chance to play together this preseason, Kirk Cousins and host Washington’s offensive starters showed plenty of rust and then progress in a win over Buffalo.

With the Bills (1-2) resting almost their entire starting defense, Cousins overcame a rough start to finish 12-for-23 for 188 yards, three touchdowns and an interception. Despite coming mostly against Buffalo’s second- and third-stringers, it was an important recovery for Cousins, who had thrown only five passes in the preseason.

Undrafted rookie running back Robert Kelley was the brightest spot for Washington (2-1). Kelley ran for 51 yards on 12 carries.

Bills starting quarterback Tyrod Taylor played only two series, by coach Rex Ryan’s design, going 2-for-5 for 11 yards before being replaced by E.J. Manuel, who was 21-for-39 for 221 yards and an interception.

Indians snap 3-game skid, rout Rangers

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Corey Kluber's second-half surge rolled on, and a trip home didn't help Texas left-hander Martin Perez.

The Cleveland right-hander pitched six strong innings to match a career best with his sixth straight victory and Abraham Almonte hit two run-scoring doubles, helping the Indians beat the Rangers 12-1 on Friday night in a matchup of division leaders.

The Indians (73-54) snapped a three-game losing streak, which had tied a season high, and pulled within a game of the Rangers (75-54) for the best record in the American League a night after losing 9-0 to Texas ace Cole Hamels.

Adrian Beltre hit a solo homer in the sixth for the AL West-leading Rangers, but Kluber (14-8) struck out the other three hitters in his final inning to finish with seven strikeouts. The 2014 AL Cy Young winner

has a 1.75 ERA during a winning streak that covers nine starts — eight since the All-Star break.

"I don't think there's one magic thing that I can put my finger on," said Kluber, who also won six straight in his Cy Young season. "Just a matter of going out there and trying to be consistent. Hope that allows me to be in a good spot when it's my turn."

Almonte drove in four runs in his first multi-RBI game of the season, including a two-run double past diving center fielder Ian Desmond in left-center to give the AL Central leaders a 6-0 lead in the sixth.

Jason Kipnis opened the scoring with an RBI double in the third against Perez (8-10), who lost at home for the first time since May 13 and dropped to 1-6 with a 6.30 ERA over his past 10 starts.

Perez, who is 1-8 with a 6.23 ERA on the road, dropped to 7-2 at home after winning six straight decisions in Arlington.

He gave up 10 hits and six runs in 5²/₃ innings.

"You don't have to get frustrated over four or five games," Perez said. "That's how you learn. Just come back tomorrow and work tomorrow. Forget this game."

Roberto Perez, Cleveland's No. 9 hitter with a .104 average coming in, had four singles and three RBIs.

Texas designated hitter Carlos Beltran went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts, extending his career-worst slump to 0-for-32.

Any way you can

Cleveland's Brandon Guyer scored four runs and was hit by a pitch twice, pushing his majors-leading total to 27. Guyer, who came to the Indians at the trading deadline from Tampa Bay, was plunked an AL-high 24 times last year with the Rays. "The first one squared him up; he didn't flinch," manager Terry Francona said. "I guess you get hit that many times, you get used to it."

Short hops

The Indians stopped a three-game losing streak for the seventh time this season. ... Almonte and Carlos Santana had three hits apiece, and Almonte matched his career high in RBIs. He had four against the Los Angeles Angels last August. ... Cleveland relievers Bryan Shaw, Cody Allen and Zach McCallister combined for six strikeouts over the final three innings, giving Cleveland 13 for the game. McCallister struck out the side in the ninth.

DWI arrest

Texas reliever Jeremy Jeffress wasn't with the team Friday after his overnight arrest on a drunken driving charge in Dallas. The 28-year-old righty was placed on the restricted list, but general manager Jon Daniels expected him back with the Rangers on Saturday. Lefty reliever Dario Alvarez was recalled from Triple-A Round Rock and allowed three runs in 1²/₃ innings.

Flores' grand slam helps Mets get past Phillies

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Wilmer Flores launched a grand slam, Asdrubal Cabrera homered from both sides of the plate and even Bartolo Colon had two helpful hits while pitching the New York Mets to a 9-4 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies on Friday night.

Jose Reyes and Cabrera opened the Mets' half of the first inning with consecutive home runs, only the second time the franchise has accomplished the feat. Trying to make a significant move in the crowded NL wild-card race, New York (65-63) opened a 10-game homestand by winning for the fifth time in its past six.

The 43-year-old Colon (12-7) carried a two-hitter into the eighth inning. He also lashed two sharp hits that delighted the crowd, a leadoff double in the fifth and a line-drive single in the sixth.

The pudgy pitcher scored both times, first ahead of Flores' third career slam and then in front of Cabrera's second homer of the night. The switch-hitting shortstop became the first Mets player to go deep from both sides in one game since Carlos Beltran at Colorado on May 12, 2011.

Tigers 4, Angels 2: Justin Verlander pitched into the eighth inning and Justin Upton homered for the fourth time in five games to lead Detroit past visiting Los Angeles.

Mariners 3, White Sox 1: Chris Sale struck out 14 but got outpitched by Felix Hernandez and the opposing bullpen, and Seattle beat host Chicago to end a three-game skid.

Nationals 8, Rockies 5: Jayson Werth and Daniel Murphy hit solo homers and drove in two runs each, and Gio Gonzalez earned his 100th career victory in Washington's win over visiting Colorado.

Astros 5, Rays 4: Carlos Correa and Evan Gattis hit back-to-back homers in the ninth inning to lift host Houston past Tampa Bay.

Royals 6, Red Sox 3: Eric Hosmer and Alex Gordon homered, and Ian Kennedy allowed one run through five innings and visiting Kansas City beat Boston.

Cardinals 3, Athletics 1: Jedd Gyorko homered and Luke Weaver pitched six strong innings to earn his first major league win as host St. Louis beat Oakland.

Yankees 14, Orioles 4: Rookie Gary

Sanchez homered for the eighth time in nine games and drove in four runs to help New York beat visiting Baltimore.

Blue Jays 15, Twins 8: Russell Martin and Justin Smoak each homered and drove in five runs and Toronto handed visiting Minnesota its eighth straight loss.

Pirates 5, Brewers 3: Jordy Mercer's first career grand slam capped a five-run sixth inning that started with two errors by Milwaukee third baseman Jonathan Villar, and Pittsburgh held on to win at home.

Diamondbacks 4, Reds 3 (11): Host Arizona's Brandon Drury scored the winning run on a wild pitch with two outs in the 11th inning.

Cubs 6, Dodgers 4 (10): Kris Bryant hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the 10th inning to go with an earlier solo shot to lift visiting Chicago in the series opener between NL division leaders.

Marlins 7, Padres 6: Chris Johnson's run-scoring ground-rule double with two outs in the bottom of the ninth gave Miami a win over visiting San Diego.

Giants 7, Braves 0: Jeff Samardzija and two relievers combined on a seven-hitter for host San Francisco.