

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, August 31, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

N. Korea upgrading security at launch site

BY AARON KIDD

Stars and Stripes

Security has been tightened at North Korea's Sohae satellite-launching station — changes that a U.S. think tank says could indicate the site might soon be occupied by space-agency scientists, engineers, technicians and the military.

Sohae, near Tongchang-ri in the communist country's hilly northwest, was used in February to successfully launch a long-range rocket that put a satellite into orbit, though critics say the real purpose was to test ballistic-missile technology banned by the United Nations.

Recent satellite images show the site's security perimeters have been extended in recent years, according to an analysis by 38 North, a website run by Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced Interna-

tional Studies that monitors North Korean activities.

What once consisted of simple patrol paths atop surrounding hills now includes fences and new guard positions, the website said. Coastal areas have been connected to existing coastal-defense patrol roads.

"Today, the outer security perimeter is [about 17 miles] long, encompassing [nearly 11 square miles] and 12 villages," 38 North said. "The inner security perimeter is [about 12 miles] long, encompassing [nearly 6 square miles] and the Sohae launch facility proper."

The security upgrades, while likely tied to the site's long-term construction plan, could also "reflect a growing North Korean concern of intelligence collection by foreign governments using defectors from the area or outside agents to infiltrate and collect information,"

the analysis said.

February's launch from Sohae — along with the North's fourth underground nuclear test a month earlier — led to a U.S.-South Korean agreement to station a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system, known as THAAD, on the peninsula.

On Friday, the U.N. Security Council called recent North Korean ballistic-missile launches, including one fired from a submarine last week, "grave violations" of its ban on all ballistic-missile activity, The Associated Press reported.

The council also urged its member states to "redouble their efforts" in implementing harsher sanctions against Pyongyang that were imposed in the spring.

The latest launch came days after the U.S. and South Korea started annual Ulchi Freedom

Guardian war games seen by the North as a rehearsal for invasion.

Work is also continuing at the North's Punggye-ri underground nuclear test site, particularly at the north portal where the North claimed to have detonated a hydrogen bomb in January, 38 North reported last month.

Satellite images from August show a large canopy erected south of a support building that blocks overhead observation near the test tunnel's entrance, the website said. Supplies, equipment and vehicles spotted near the portal in images from July were no longer present.

"The purpose of the activity as well as of an object located on the tailings pile to the east of the North Portal is unclear," the analysis said.

Islamic State says key strategist killed; Russia, US cite strikes

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The Islamic State group's spokesman and chief strategist, who laid out the blueprint for the extremist group's attacks against the West, has been killed while overseeing operations in northern Syria, the group has announced.

The Islamic State-run Aamaq news agency said Abu Mohammed al-Adnani was "martyred while surveying the operations to repel the military campaigns in Aleppo." It did not provide any further details on when or how he died.

A later statement issued by the Islamic State group in Aleppo province vowed to avenge his death. Both statements were released late Tuesday evening.

Russia's Defense Minis-

try said on Wednesday that its airstrike killed al-Adnani. In a statement, the Defense Ministry said its intelligence had confirmed that a Russian airstrike in Aleppo province had killed 40 Islamic State militants, including the group's spokesman.

However, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said Tuesday that a U.S. airstrike targeted al-Adnani in the Syrian city of al-Bab, which is northeast of the city of Aleppo, the provincial capital. He said the U.S. was "still assessing the results of the strike."

The Sunni militant group did not say who it blamed for the airstrike.

Al-Adnani's death is a major blow to the extremist group, which has been on the retreat

in Syria and Iraq.

Al-Adnani, whose real name is Taha Sobhi Falaha, persistently called for attacks against the West, which paid off in bloody notoriety with the Nov. 13 coordinated attacks in Paris that hit a concert hall, a stadium and restaurants and bars, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded.

He was a Syrian who was born in the northern province of Idlib and is believed to have been in his late 30s. He crossed the border and joined al-Qaida in Iraq, a precursor to the Islamic State group, after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

In late June 2014, he formally declared the establishment of a caliphate, or Islamic state, stretching across parts of Syria and Iraq, under the leadership

of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and demanded allegiance from Muslims worldwide.

A powerful orator, he went on to become the voice of the Islamic State. He released numerous audio files online in which he delivered fiery sermons urging followers to kill civilians in nations that supported the U.S.-led coalition against the group.

Earlier this year, he called for massive attacks during Ramadan — a call that translated into the bloodiest Muslim holy month in recent memory. Followers of the Islamic State carried out attacks on several continents, including the Orlando shooting, the Nice truck attack in France and a massive suicide bombing in downtown Baghdad.

John Edwards offers to aid GIs' tsunami nuclear fallout lawsuit

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Former Sen. John Edwards has pledged to support hundreds of U.S. sailors, Marines and airmen who say they were sickened by radioactive fallout from the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant.

U.S. forces participated in relief efforts after a magnitude-9.0 earthquake triggered a tsunami that battered swaths of northeastern Japan, including the plant.

Edwards — the 2004 Democratic nominee for vice president who ran for president that year and in 2008 — has offered his “legal and personal assistance” to the plaintiffs after hearing about their lawsuit against the Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, according to a statement from the plaintiffs’ attorneys.

The lawsuit against TEPCO and several other co-defendants, including General Electric, EBASCO, Toshiba Corp. and Hitachi, is scheduled to proceed to trial pending appeals.

Oral arguments in the appeals case are due to begin Thursday in the 9th Circuit Federal Court in Pasadena, Calif. The plaintiffs’ lawyers don’t expect a ruling before November.

The plaintiffs maintain that TEPCO lied about the risk of radiation exposure, luring American forces closer to the affected areas and lulling others at bases across Japan into disregarding safety measures. The other defendants are accused of making faulty parts for reactors that contributed to Fukushima’s meltdown in March 2011.

The plaintiffs allege they have developed cancers, ulcers,

uterine bleeding and thyroid issues as a result of radiation exposure. The U.S. government has said the radiation levels servicemembers encountered were too low to cause any maladies.

Edwards is now a partner at Edwards Kirby, a Raleigh law firm specializing in personal injury, economic justice and property rights. He could not be immediately reached for comment.

News of Edwards’ support comes just months after another ex-politician, former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, pledged his support after meeting with several of the plaintiffs during a visit to the United States.

In July, he called on his countrymen to donate to a fund for the plaintiffs, saying “it is not the kind of issue we can dismiss with just sympathy,” according to the Asahi Shimbun.

104 US airstrikes hit Libya in past month

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — In the past month, the U.S. military has launched more than 100 airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Libya. On Monday, U.S. Africa Command conducted five strikes against various militant fighting positions in the Libyan coastal city of Sirte, bringing the number of strikes in August to 104, AFRICOM said in a statement.

The campaign, dubbed Operating Odyssey Lighting, aims to assist forces aligned with the Libyan Government of National Accord, who are in the midst of an offensive to push Islamic State fighters from their stronghold in Sirte.

“U.S. precision airstrikes have enabled GNA-aligned forces to advance and retake key areas of the city from the grasp of the Islamic State,” Lt. Cmdr. Anthony Falvo, an AFRICOM spokesman, said Wednesday.

As a result, the U.S. airstrikes working with Libyan ground forces have curtailed the Islamic State group’s ability to use heavy weapons and vehicle-borne roadside bombs, Falvo said.

AFRICOM declined to speculate on how long the campaign might continue.

On Aug. 1, AFRICOM began its operation, which has mainly involved airstrikes by jets operating from the USS Wasp positioned off the Libyan coast, as well as occasional assaults from Marine attack helicopters providing close air support to Libyan ground forces. Since the fall of Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, Libya has been roiled by fighting among rival rebel groups and government forces, all vying for control of the country. The Islamic State group has sought to take advantage of the chaos and resulting security vacuum.

McDonald urges quick budget move

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Ahead of Congress returning from summer recess, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald is urging lawmakers to fulfill the VA’s fiscal 2017 budget request and pass legislation reforming an “archaic” benefits appeals process.

In a letter sent Tuesday to leaders of the House and Senate committees on veterans affairs — and again while addressing the American Legion national convention Wednesday — McDonald said the VA is at a “critical” point in its transformation plan, which can’t progress without acts of Congress.

“We have an opportunity to look back at 2016 as the year

that turned the corner for veterans,” McDonald told a crowd at the American Legion convention in Cincinnati. “There are some things we can’t do without the help of Congress.”

President Barack Obama’s budget includes \$182.3 billion for the department in fiscal 2017. Senate appropriators have pushed a budget bill meeting the full request, but McDonald was critical Wednesday of House appropriators’ proposal to trim \$1.5 billion from it.

Both spending bills have been stalled for months, and lawmakers will be faced with passing a stop-gap budget measure before a new fiscal year starts in October. McDonald warned that type of temporary funding “shortchanges veterans.”

McDonald also asked for

urgency on several other measures, including reform of the benefits appeals process. The VA has heard from thousands of veterans that the process to claim disability benefits and appeal rejections is complicated and lengthy.

According to VA data, it took an average of three years to process claims resolved in fiscal 2015. The appeals process took an average of five years for the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

With changes outlined in the VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2016, McDonald promised that in five years’ time, a system could be in place to resolve appeals within one year after they’re filed. The measure was introduced in May and hasn’t moved forward.

Apology, vow to stay from Maine governor

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine — Republican Gov. Paul LePage said Wednesday he intends to seek “spiritual guidance” in hopes of quieting a controversy he created when he left an obscene message on a Democratic lawmaker’s voicemail and then said he wished he could challenge him to a duel and point a gun at him.

LePage apologized to state Rep. Drew Gattine personally and later blamed the media for fueling the fight. He also denied claims by some legislators that he was struggling with addiction or mental health issues.

“I’m not an alcoholic. I’m not a drug addict. I don’t have

mental issues,” LePage told reporters. “What I have is a backbone and I want to move Maine forward.”

In recent days, legislators have called for LePage to step down or get professional help after his remarks to Gattine and comments he made blaming blacks and Hispanics for Maine’s heroin epidemic. LePage, who’s Roman Catholic, responded Wednesday by saying he wouldn’t resign and instead intended to seek “spiritual guidance.” He did not elaborate on what that involved.

His wife said in a statement to the media that the family believed God would help them through the situation.

“We have always been a fam-

ily of faith and we recognize that the grace and guidance from God can make us stronger in life,” first lady Ann LePage said.

Last week, the governor left a foul-mouthed voicemail message for Gattine that said in part, “I am after you,” and then he told reporters he wished he could go back in time and challenge Gattine to a duel and point a gun “right between his eyes.” LePage said he was angry because Gattine called him a racist, something Gattine denied.

The governor initially stood by his statements, saying they were warranted because Gattine had called him “the absolute worst, most vile thing.” But on Tuesday he apologized,

saying his behavior was “unacceptable.” He met with Gattine face-to-face on Wednesday. Gattine said later that despite the apology, he still thinks LePage should resign.

While apologizing for his rant on Gattine, there was no apology from the governor for comments that started the controversy.

LePage blamed out-of-state blacks and Hispanics for fueling Maine’s heroin epidemic. He said he keeps photos of drug dealers arrested in the state in a binder and said it shows 90 percent of them “are black and Hispanic people from Waterbury, Conn.; the Bronx; and Brooklyn.”

Obama commutes 111 more sentences

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama cut short on Tuesday the sentences of 111 federal inmates in another round of commutations for those convicted of nonviolent drug offenses.

Obama has long called for phasing out strict sentences for drug convictions, arguing they lead to excessive punishment and incarceration rates unseen in other developed countries.

White House Counsel Neil Eggleston said the commutations underscored the president’s commitment to using his authority to give deserving individuals a second chance. He said Obama has granted 673 commutations, more than the previous 10 presidents combined. More than a third of the recipients had life sentences.

Eggleston said the relief points to the need for Congress to take up criminal justice reform.

Trump is going to Mexico, meet with its leader before giving immigration speech

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Donald Trump is making a quick trip to Mexico on Wednesday, meeting with the president of a nation he derided at the start of his White House campaign as a source of rapists and criminals coming to the U.S.

The trip, a politically risky move with just 10 weeks until Election Day, comes just hours before Trump delivers a highly anticipated speech on illegal immigration. That’s been a defining issue of his presidential campaign, but also one on which he’s appeared to waver in recent days.

While he’s accepting an invitation from President Enrique Pena Nieto to visit, Trump will nevertheless arrive in a country where he is widely despised. Protests are expected, and both a former Mexican president and first lady bluntly told the billionaire New Yorker that, despite Pena Nieto’s hospitality, he’s not welcome.

“We don’t like him. We don’t want him. We reject his visit,” former Mexican President Vicente Fox told CNN, calling the trip a “political stunt.” Added

former first lady Margarita Zavala on Twitter: “We Mexicans have dignity, and we reject your hate speech.”

After saying during his Republican primary campaign he would use a “deportation force” to expel all of the estimated 11 million people living in the United States illegally, Trump suggested last week he could soften that stance. He is under pressure to clarify just where he stands in a speech that’s been rescheduled several times as he and his staff have sent conflicting messages on the issue.

“The American people are going to see more clearly that there’s one candidate in this race who’s prepared to take the steps necessary to end the flood of illegal immigration,” Trump’s running mate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, said Wednesday on CNN.

The buildup to the speech was abruptly interrupted Tuesday night by the news that Trump would make the visit, accepting on short notice an invitation offered last week by Pena Nieto. The newspaper El Universal wrote in an editorial

that Trump “caught Mexican diplomats off guard.”

Trump’s only previous overseas trip as a presidential candidate came earlier this summer when he flew to Scotland for a few days for the reopening of one of his golf resorts.

Trump has promised, if elected, to deport millions of immigrants who are in the United States illegally, force Mexico to build a huge wall to secure the nearly 2,000-mile border and renegotiate the NAFTA trade agreement to make it more favorable to the United States. Pena Nieto has condemned Trump’s language and compared him to Adolf Hitler.

Pence argued that Trump’s decision to quickly accept the invitation and head to Mexico City was a sign of strong leadership.

“It would have been very easy to say, ‘Let’s get together, let’s talk for days and days and figure out how to make this happen,’” Pence said. “Donald Trump is someone that says, ‘We got an invitation. We got an opportunity. Let’s drop what we’re doing.’”

1st US commercial flight to Cuba in 55 years takes off

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The first commercial flight between the United States and Cuba in more than a half-century flew from Fort Lauderdale to the central city of Santa Clara on Wednesday morning, re-establishing regular air service severed at the height of the Cold War.

JetBlue Flight 387 took off at 9:45 a.m. EDT for a 72-minute journey that will open a new era of U.S.-Cuba travel, with about 300 flights a week connecting the U.S. with an island cut off from most Americans by the 55-year-old trade embargo on Cuba and formal ban on U.S. citizens engaging in tourism on the island.

“Seeing the American airlines landing routinely around the island will drive a sense of openness, integration and normality. That has a huge psychological impact,” said Richard Feinberg, author of the new book “Open for Business: Building the New Cuban Economy.”

The restart of commercial travel between the two countries is one of the most important steps in President Barack Obama’s 2-year-old policy of normalizing relations with the island.

Historians disagree on the exact date of the last commercial flight but it appears to have been after Cuba banned incoming flights during the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Secretary of State John Kerry said on Twitter that the last commercial flight was in 1961.

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, JetBlue CEO Robin Hayes and a specially selected five-member crew of Cuban-Americans were on board the 150-seat Airbus A320.

“It’s a positive step and a concrete contribution to the process of improving relations between the two countries,” Cuba’s vice minister of transportation, Eduardo Rodriguez, told journalists Monday.

U.S. travel to Cuba is on track to triple this year to more than 300,000 visitors in the wake of the 2014 declaration of detente.

Cuba’s cash-starved centrally planned economy has been bolstered by the boom in U.S. visitors, along with hundreds of thousands of travelers from other nations hoping to see Cuba before more Americans arrive.

Commercial flights are expected to significantly increase the number of American visitors, although it’s not clear by how much. Many of the air routes are currently used by expensive charter flights that are largely expected to go out of business with the advent of regularly scheduled service from the U.S.

Flooding from typhoon kills 11 in northern Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — Heavy rain from Typhoon Lionrock flooded towns across Japan’s north and left at least 11 people dead, most of them elderly residents at a nursing home who could not escape rising floodwaters, officials said Wednesday.

The home in the town of Iwaizumi, which had only the ground floor, included people suffering from dementia who were in their 80s and 90s. Police discovered nine bodies there Wednesday while checking another facility in the inundated neighborhood.

As floodwaters rapidly rose on Tuesday night, all 85 elderly residents and staff at a three-story facility next door were rescued uninjured after evacuating to the top floor, said Iwate prefectural official Reiko Ouchi.

A caretaker at that facility notified the town office about their evacuation to the third floor, noting that the nine residents next door were stuck, NHK TV reported.

Ouchi said officials are looking into if and how town officials responded to the call. An evacuation order was not issued.

Hiroaki Sato, a senior official at the company that runs the nursing homes, said floodwater poured into the compound in a matter of 10 minutes, making it impossible for the nine elderly residents to escape. The water was chest-high Tuesday evening.

Despite earlier warnings of the approaching typhoon, only one of the eight staff was on overnight duty, Sato told Kyodo News, adding that a telephone line was cut off due to flooding and she could not reach police or firefighters.

“An overnight staff attended the residents, but in the end they all died, including

one in (her) arms,” Sato told nationally televised NHK news. “I’m so sorry we could not help any of the nine residents,” he said, as he bowed deeply in apology, his teary voice trembling.

The identities of the victims and other details, including the whereabouts of their caretakers, were not immediately known, said Takehiro Hayashijiri, a prefecture disaster management division.

Authorities found two more bodies in Iwate — one in the same town and the second in another town of Kuji, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Footage on NHK showed the nursing home partially buried in mud, surrounded by debris apparently washed down in the swollen river. A car by the home was turned upside down.

Farther north, on the island of Hokkaido, at least two rivers broke through their banks.

The disaster management agency said at least one person went missing in a car that went down with a bridge torn away by the flood.

Authorities in the town of Minamifurano reported hundreds of people trapped in houses and shelters by flooding from the Sorachi river, the agency said. Hundreds of others were also trapped in buildings and isolated in several towns in Iwate.

Typhoon Lionrock made landfall Tuesday evening near the city of Ofunato, 310 miles northeast of Tokyo on the Pacific coast, and crossed the main island of Honshu before heading out to the Sea of Japan.

Japan seeks record defense funding

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan’s Defense Ministry is seeking a record-high \$51 billion budget for the 2017 fiscal year to bolster missile defense capability amid an escalating North Korean threat and to better protect disputed islands also claimed by China in the East China Sea.

If approved by parliament, the budget request submitted Wednesday would be the fifth annual increase under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who ended a decade of defense budget cuts after taking office in late 2012. Military spending would rise 2.3 percent for the fiscal year beginning

April 1.

Japan is particularly concerned about North Korea’s recent nuclear and missile development, saying it has increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula and poses a threat to regional and global security.

The budget request includes:

■\$1 billion to upgrade a dozen of Japan’s PAC-3 surface-to-air missile defense systems to increase range and accuracy for deployment in 2020.

■\$140 million to acquire next-generation missile interceptors jointly developed by Japan and the U.S., and to upgrade the capabilities of the destroyers that would carry them.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officer pleads not guilty to charges

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles police officer pleaded not guilty to a number of misdemeanor charges, including theft of a police radio.

The Los Angeles Times reported that prosecutors charged Jessica Guzzetti, 27, in July with stealing a Los Angeles Police Department radio in 2013, improperly searching a Department of Justice database in 2014 and not paying for a baby stroller in 2015.

Jackie Robnett said Guzzetti and her boyfriend offered to pay by check for her stroller, which was listed on Craigslist. Robnett said Guzzetti's check didn't go through, but she later declined to pay or return the stroller.

Poll: Top mayor pick a disgraced lawmaker

VA RICHMOND — A new poll shows a flamboyant former Virginia lawmaker who pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor in a sex scandal involving a 17-year-old girl is the front-runner in the race to be Richmond's next mayor.

According to a new poll from Christopher Newport University, Joseph Morrissey leads a crowded field and has the support of 28 percent of the city's voters.

Morrissey spent his days at the General Assembly and his nights at a county jail after his conviction for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He later married the woman, and they have two children.

The poll of 600 Richmond registered voters was conducted Aug. 18-24 by the Wason Center for Public Policy at

CNU and has a margin of error of 4.9 percent.

No candidates for 250 municipal positions

MN ST. PAUL — Dozens of Minnesota city councils, township board and mayoral elections are without candidates this year.

Minnesota Public Radio analyzed candidate filings and found more than 250 instances in which no one is seeking the job.

A few of the undesired spots are in places with 1,000 or more residents, but most affected cities have tiny populations.

League of Minnesota Cities executive director David Unmacht said he hasn't studied the municipal ballot vacancies closely enough to declare this year's number a lapse or a trend. But he said each city tends to have a different explanation for its lack of candidates.

Goat helps Clydesdale escape from his pen

CA SANTA CRUZ — A dwarf billy goat gave new meaning to the word "scapegoat" when he busted out a surprisingly slippery Clydesdale that went on the lam in California for several days.

The nearly 1-ton horse, named Budweiser, who goes by "Buddy," was safely wrangled back into his pen Sunday in the Santa Cruz Mountains on California's Central Coast.

The goat, named Lancelot, knows how to butt open the stable gate and did just that on Aug. 24, letting his best friend escape, owner Tamara Schmitz told the Santa Cruz Sentinel newspaper.

Another Clydesdale, Harry, also fled and was nabbed in a meadow the next day.

A pair of searchers on horseback finally found Buddy hiding amid manzanita shrubs Sunday.

Headstones banned due to vandalism

CO PALISADE — The western Colorado town of Palisade has banned headstones at some plots in the municipal cemetery due to concerns about vandalism.

The Daily Sentinel of Grand Junction reported that Palisade's Board of Trustees has made more than 1,000 grave spaces off-limits to standing headstones. Memorials will be limited to flat grave markers.

Palisade Public Works Director Frank Watt asked trustees to limit some sections of the Palisade Municipal Cemetery to flat markers only, saying the standing memorials or monuments are hard for maintenance and attract vandalism.

Charges after gun fired near school

VT BARTON — Police in Barton arrested a homeless man accused of firing a gun, drawing a large police response in an area close to a school with students inside.

Max Pickle, 30, was charged with unlawful trespass and reckless endangerment after he allegedly fired a .45-caliber handgun during an argument on Lincoln Avenue on Monday.

Officials at nearby Barton Academy and Graded School were asked to keep children inside as a precaution. No injuries were reported.

Police said Pickle is homeless and has been staying in an abandoned property without the homeowner's consent.

Pickle also could face charges of unlawful discharge. He's being held at Northern State Correctional Facility and will undergo a mental health screening.

Bodies to be exhumed for new development

NV RENO — A number of longtime Reno families are upset as the city's oldest cemetery has announced plans to exhume and move more than 800 of the oldest bodies on the property.

The owner of Hillside Cemetery has posted plans to disinter the bodies to clear the land for potential development, though no specific development proposals have been made public.

The announcement drew immediate outcry as the cemetery dates to the 1800s and holds the remains of Reno's founders. Its last grave was dug in 1959.

Meeting for online sale leads to robbery

DE DOVER — Dover police said a man robbed two people at gunpoint after he arranged to meet them to sell them a phone.

The robbery occurred Monday evening in front of an apartment building. Police allege in a news release that William Loper, 24, pointed a gun at two people who had arranged to meet him, and he demanded their property. Police allege the victims gave cash, watches and a cellphone to Loper, who then ran away.

Loper is wanted on charges including first-degree robbery and possession of a deadly weapon during a felony.

From wire reports

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College running backs reclaim value

Associated Press

The diminished role of the running back in college football was greatly exaggerated.

In some respects, the position is as strong as ever.

Alabama's Derrick Henry became the first running back to win the Heisman Trophy since 2009 last year and was one of five players to run for 1,800 yards as rushing averages nationwide surged to record levels. Henry has moved on to the NFL, but three 1,800-yard rushers are back this season: LSU's Leonard Fournette, Stanford's Christian McCaffrey and Oregon's Royce Freeman.

The surge in star power at the position flies in the face of the conventional wisdom that college football has become a quarterback-dominated game.

"The running game, I wouldn't say it had gotten lost necessarily, because there have been a lot of good runners," Stanford coach David Shaw said. "But the emphasis has been on the spread passing attacks. But really good spread teams always have a good back. It's good to see in college football, guys turn around and hand it to a runner and be

physical. I think those guys are fun to watch — and we have a pretty special one, too."

The notion that a running back's value was fading gained credence when no players at that position were drafted in the first round in either 2013 or 2014. Quarterbacks won the Heisman eight times in a nine-year stretch from 2006-14, the exception being Alabama running back Mark Ingram in 2009.

"People have definitely advised me to pick another position," said Tennessee's Jalen Hurd, who's a bit taller than the average running back at 6-foot-4. "I've got people all the time just looking at me like, 'Dude, are you sure you want to be a running back?' But that's my position."

Hurd stayed in the backfield and enters his junior season just 891 yards shy of Travis Henry's school rushing record.

The emergence of Fournette, Hurd and Georgia's Nick Chubb, who is recovering from a knee injury that sidelined him for the second half of the 2015 season, has helped the Southeastern Conference maintain its elite status during a stretch when it has struggled to pro-

duce top quarterbacks.

"I think definitely if it didn't change last year, the running back value is going to change this year," Hurd said.

This running back resurgence goes well beyond the SEC and stretches from coast to coast.

The Atlantic Coast Conference returns three players who ran for more than 1,400 yards last season — Florida State's Dalvin Cook, Clemson's Wayne Gallman and North Carolina's Elijah Hood. The league also welcomes back 2014 ACC player of the year James Conner of Pittsburgh after his successful fight with cancer.

On the West Coast, the Pac-12 has the Heisman Trophy runner-up in McCaffrey as well as Freeman.

"There are a lot of good-looking running backs out there," said Dave Warner, Michigan State's co-offensive coordinator/running backs coach.

"In the NFL, they're not as premium anymore because they don't last very long," Warner added. "(In) college, they last with us."

Many of those running backs are competitive enough to keep tabs on one another.

"I watch all of those guys," Cook said. "Fournette, McCaffrey. ... Chubb will come back 100 percent. Jalen. Royce. I watch all of those guys. Great backs. (I) take little lessons from their game, try to tweak my game a little bit because all of those guys have different running styles. You can't ever stop learning, no matter what."

Defenses haven't quite learned how to slow them down.

Football Bowl Subdivision teams averaged 178.3 yards rushing per game last season, the most since 1980. That's at least partly due to the increased number of snaps that have come from the rise in up-tempo offenses.

But teams also are running more effectively than before. FBS schools averaged a record 4.5 yards per carry last season.

"I think it's a byproduct of spread offenses," Tennessee coach Butch Jones said. "I think it's the byproduct of play-action passes and all the run-pass options that offenses are doing now where a quarterback has three or four options on a run play in every single play."

Healthy Romine should have Air Force in contention

Associated Press

Air Force overcame a season-ending injury to its quarterback last season and still reached the Mountain West title game.

Now quarterback Nate Romine is making his way back from tearing up his knee and there is every reason to believe the Falcons, with an experienced defense and plenty of playmakers returning on offense, will be in contention for another division title.

Romine was lost in the second game of last season to two torn ligaments in his right knee. Without him, it took a few games for Air Force's triple-option offense to get back up to speed. But once it did the Fal-

cons rolled to a six-game winning streak.

The Falcons started pre-season practice still learning just how far Romine has to go to be the player he was before the injury.

"You can tell things are slowing down for him," offensive coordinator Mike Thiessen told The Gazette of Colorado Springs. "You can tell he's got all the pieces, that he's managing everybody, taking charge of getting us going tempo-wise. He's got command of what's going on on offense."

Romine has eight career starts.

The Falcons don't throw it a lot, but coach Troy Calhoun's

triple-option likes to incorporate a good dose of play-action passes and shots down field. Romine has the passing skills to make that part of the game more of a threat for Air Force.

Season opener

The Falcons ease into the season against FCS Abilene Christian on Sept. 3, which should be helpful as Air Force works Romine back into playing shape. Week 2 is a home game against Georgia State and then an early off week.

Up front

The unit that needs the most retooling is the offense, where

Air Force lost three starters, including two all-conference players. The Falcons led the conference in yards per play last season at 6.40. The only thing likely to stand in the way of a similar showing in 2016 is the development of the line.

Key games

After the break, the Falcons get cranking with a road trip to Utah State, always a Mountain Division contender, and a home game against Navy. Air Force's division title hopes figure to be settled in November with home games against Colorado State (Nov. 12) and Boise State (Nov. 25).

Navy's Smith has big void to fill

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — To no one's surprise, the very first question asked of Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo at media day involved replacing quarterback Keenan Reynolds.

Reynolds was a rare four-year starter who set a slew of school and NCAA records running Navy's triple-option offense. A sixth-round draft pick of the Baltimore Ravens, Reynolds is currently trying to make it in the NFL as a slot receiver and returner.

Senior Tago Smith has the unenviable task of replacing one of the best football players in the storied history of the Naval Academy. Perhaps only John Cartwright, who succeeded Hall of Famer Roger Staubach as Navy's starting quarterback in 1965, would understand what Smith is going through.

Smith, a product of Fay-

etteville, Ga., has played in 18 games with two starts during his career. In 2014, when Reynolds could not go against Texas State due to a knee injury, Smith rushed for 117 yards and two touchdowns and threw for a pair of TDs. Smith started again later that season versus Virginia Military Institute and accounted for 106 yards and two touchdowns in a convincing victory.

Reynolds was healthy throughout the 2015 season, so Smith mostly saw time toward the end of games that had already been decided. The exception came against Notre Dame, when Smith was thrust into action after Reynolds left the game to get X-rays on his knee.

Smith promptly led Navy on two touchdown drives to close the first half, showing superb command of the option attack.

Key games

As always, Air Force and Army are the most important games. Navy must sweep its service academy rivals in order to capture the coveted Commander-in-Chief's Trophy for the 11th time since 2003.

The matchup with the Falcons, which always comes in early October, has often been a barometer for the Midshipmen. This year's contest will be held in Colorado Springs, where Navy fell in 2010 and 2014. Navy is seeking a 15th straight victory over archrival Army.

October matchups two weeks apart against Houston and Memphis figure to determine whether Navy wins the West Division and earns a berth in the American Athletic Conference championship game.

Prediction

Navy has posted winning

records in 12 of the last 13 seasons and figures to do so again in 2016. The game against Notre Dame is set for Jacksonville, Fla., on Nov. 5. It would be a surprise if Navy did not continue its service academy dominance and reclaim the CIC Trophy for the second straight season. An 8-4 regular season record seems about right for the Mids. The Midshipmen are contractually obligated to appear in the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl in Fort Worth, Texas, if eligible.

Season opener

Championship Subdivision member Fordham visits Annapolis on Sept. 3. Fordham finished second in the Patriot League in 2015. The Rams boast a dynamic running back in Chase Edmonds, who rushed for 1,648 yards and 20 touchdowns a year ago.

Some veterans tweet support for protest

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Colin Kaepernick's protest of the national anthem is apparently winning support from some military veterans on Twitter.

The San Francisco 49ers quarterback sparked controversy during the preseason by sitting instead of standing during the "Star-Spangled Banner." Kaepernick said he's protesting what he describes as oppression of minorities in the United States. Some who have criticized the protest said it was insulting to veterans.

Some who identified themselves as veterans tweeted pictures of themselves in uniform and messages of support under the hashtag VeteransForKaepernick. One said he served to protect freedoms, not a song. Another said protesting is every American's right.

From The Associated Press

Vikings' QB out for season

Associated Press

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. — Minnesota Vikings quarterback Teddy Bridgewater is expected to miss at least the next season while recovering from a dislocated left knee and torn anterior cruciate ligament after a freak practice injury on Tuesday.

Bridgewater was taken by ambulance to a hospital after crumpling to the turf during practice, and the team announced hours later that his knee also had "other structural damage" that will need to be repaired in a surgery that will be scheduled in the coming days. But the team did say he had no nerve or arterial damage and it expects a full recovery after a "significant" rehabilitation.

"Teddy has already displayed the attitude needed to overcome this injury and attack his rehab," said Eric Sugarman, the director of sports medicine

and head athletic trainer for the Vikings.

Bridgewater suffered a non-contact knee injury while dropping back to pass, and it was so jolting that coach Mike Zimmer immediately ended practice. Players were visibly distraught as they left the field, some hurling expletives into the air and others kneeling in prayer for one of the team's most popular players.

It was a somber scene for a shaken franchise, one that reported to training camp with designs on a Super Bowl run.

"Sometimes the worst things happen to the best (people)," Vikings receiver Jarius Wright tweeted. "God has a plan."

About 2½ hours after the injury, Zimmer tried to straddle the line between expressing concern for a beloved teammate and keeping the rest of his team from losing focus and confidence.

"I'm not going to let this team

feel sorry for itself," Zimmer said before the full details of the injury were known. "We're going to grieve today and be upset about it. It's more about our feelings for Teddy and him as a person and getting better than it is about anything else. Teddy's a great kid and he'll be back as soon as he possibly can if it is real bad. But we're going to keep fighting."

There is little behind Bridgewater on the depth chart. Shaun Hill is the primary backup, but he's 36 years old and has played only sparingly over the last five years. Taylor Heinicke, last year's No. 3 quarterback, has been out all preseason with an injury, and undrafted rookie Joel Stave has struggled mightily at times during practices.

"We're not going to stick our heads in the sand. We're going to figure out a way," Zimmer said. "Everybody can count us out if they want, but I think that'd be the wrong thing to do."

Amid lawsuit, Bouchard exits US Open

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eugenie Bouchard wrung her hands at her post-match news conference. She rubbed her lower lip. She squeezed her left arm.

While her body language screamed discomfort Tuesday, when the main topic of discussion was Bouchard's ongoing lawsuit against the U.S. Open rather than her first-round loss, her words were measured. The once rising star answered every question.

A year ago at Flushing Meadows, Bouchard got a concussion from a fall at the facility and withdrew before playing in the fourth round, and then missed most of the rest of the season. She filed suit against the U.S. Tennis Association in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn in October, and that case is still pending, putting the 2014 Wimbledon runner-up in the odd position of competing this week at an event whose organizers she is suing.

"If I sit down and think about it, yeah,

it's definitely a strange situation. But it's something that's so far in the back of my mind. I don't think about it on a daily basis, at all. I have people, lawyers, working on that side of it," Bouchard said. "So it's really not something I think about much at all. Obviously, being here, it's crossed my mind. But besides that, I mean, it has nothing to do with my day-to-day life."

Her 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 exit against 72nd-ranked Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic, a player who only once has been as far as the third round at a major tournament, was filled with 46 unforced errors by Bouchard, who also was treated for blisters on her feet. It represented the latest early loss for a 22-year-old Canadian who reached three Grand Slam semifinals two years ago — and none since.

In other first-round action on Day 2 at the year's last Grand Slam tournament, Serena Williams started her bid for a record-breaking 23rd major title by showing

zero signs of trouble from a right shoulder she's said was sore, hitting 12 aces in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Ekaterina Makarova. Also under the lights: Andy Murray got off to a similarly easy beginning to his attempt to become the fourth man in the Open era to reach all four Grand Slam finals in a single season.

The 2012 champion at Flushing Meadows and seeded No. 2 this year, Murray beat Lukas Rosol 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

Earlier, Williams' sister Venus got through a tougher-than-expected 6-2, 5-7, 6-4 win against Kateryna Kozlova.

There were various upsets around the grounds during the afternoon, including 19-year-old American Jared Donaldson's 4-6, 7-5, 6-4, 6-0 elimination of 12th-seeded David Goffin, and a loss by No. 29 Sam Querrey. Three seeded women departed, including former No. 1 and 2008 French Open champion Ana Ivanovic.

Wieters' home run leads Orioles over Jays

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Baltimore Orioles manager Buck Showalter considered taking Matt Wieters out of the game after the catcher took a hard foul ball off his mask in the fifth inning.

That proved to be a game-changing decision.

Wieters hit a go-ahead, two-run homer off Jason Grilli in the eighth to lead the Orioles to a 5-3 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays on Tuesday night.

Baltimore pulled within three games of the first-place Blue Jays, who had a four-game winning streak snapped. After losing the opener 5-1, the Orioles were looking to gain more ground in the series finale Wednesday.

"It's a big game," Wieters said. "We're going to be playing a lot of teams in the division, so there are going to be a lot of big games. I think the key is to be able to enjoy this one and move on tomorrow. We've got to come back and win another one tomorrow."

Michael Saunders drilled a two-run shot off Orioles starter Ubaldo Jimenez that tied the

game 3-3 in the seventh.

In the eighth, Jonathan Schoop walked and Wieters homered off Grilli (4-2), his 12th of the season.

"Matt took a ball right in the kisser tonight and I've seen a lot of people come out of the game," Showalter said. "We would have taken him out of the game, mostly because he took one in the same place last night."

Brad Brach (8-2) picked up the win with 1¹/₃ scoreless innings. Zach Britton got his league-leading 39th save.

Rangers 8, Mariners 7: Rougned Odor quickly atoned for his baserunning blunders with a big blast for host Texas.

Odor, thrown out on the bases twice after hits, ended it with a two-run homer.

Yankees 5, Royals 4 (10): Jacoby Ellsbury drove in the go-ahead run with two outs in the 10th inning, and New York hung tough after blowing a four-run lead for a win over host Kansas City.

Diamondbacks 4, Giants 3: Zack Greinke threw six solid innings to continue his mastery of San Francisco and visiting

Arizona beat Johnny Cueto and the Giants.

Mets 7, Marlins 4: Curtis Granderson came off the bench and homered twice, powering host New York to the victory.

By taking the first two games of the four-game series, New York (68-64) moved ahead of slumping Miami for second place in the NL East.

Nationals 3, Phillies 2: Max Scherzer struck out 11 in eight innings, helping Washington to the road win.

Scherzer (15-7) allowed two runs and three hits. Mark Melancon pitched a scoreless ninth for his 37th save.

Cubs 3, Pirates 0: Kyle Hendricks threw seven dominant innings to lower the majors' best ERA to 2.09 and Anthony Rizzo homered in visiting Chicago's 21st victory in August.

Indians 5, Twins 4: Francisco Lindor drove in the go-ahead run in the fifth inning and host Cleveland extended Minnesota's losing streak to 12 games.

Tigers 8, White Sox 4: Ian Kinsler homered and drove in four runs, helping host Detroit rally for the win.

Cardinals 2, Brewers 1 (10): Zach Duke stranded the bases loaded with a strikeout in the 10th after Randal Grichuk hit an RBI single in the top half of the inning, lifting St. Louis to the road win.

Seung Hwan Oh (4-2) pitched out of a jam in the ninth to get the win.

Astros 3, Athletics 1: Collin McHugh threw six scoreless innings for host Houston, and Colby Rasmus and Evan Gattis homered.

Rays 4, Red Sox 3: Evan Longoria broke a tie with a solo homer in the eighth inning, clearing Fenway Park's "Green Monster" and rallying Tampa Bay to the victory.

Braves 7, Padres 3: Julio Teheran won for the first time in 10 starts, and Atlanta rookie Dansby Swanson drove in three runs to help the Braves top visiting San Diego.

Angels 4, Reds 2: C.J. Cron hit two home runs to help host Los Angeles beat Cincinnati.

Mike Trout went 3-for-4 with two doubles and scored on Cron's home run in the first and on Andrelton Simmons' bloop single in the eighth.